



## Violation of Maxim Quantity Found in “Amber Heard’s Testimonies During the Defamation Trials Against Johnny Depp”

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### Abstract

The focus of this research was on analyzing the violations of the maxim of quantity in “Amber Heard’s Testimonies during the Defamation Trial Against Johnny Depp.” The aim was to identify how the maxim of quantity was violated by Amber Heard and how it affected her testimonies. The data were collected by watching a video from the Law&Crime YouTube channel along with its transcript. The researcher noted and classified the violations based on their types, focusing on those related to the maxim of quantity. A descriptive qualitative method was used to analyze the data, supported by Grice’s Cooperative Principle theory. The findings showed that the maxim of quantity was frequently violated by Amber Heard on her testimonies. This happened because Amber Heard often gave too much unnecessary information in an effort to make her testimony more believable. However, giving too much information in court can actually reduce the credibility of a statement.

**Keywords:** *cooperative principle, defamation trials, maxim of quantity violation, testimonies*

### Abstrak

Fokus penelitian ini ada pada analisis pelanggaran maksim kuantitas dalam “Kesaksian Amber Heard selama Persidangan Pencemaran Nama Baik Melawan Johnny Depp.” Tujuannya adalah untuk mengidentifikasi bagaimana Amber Heard melanggar maksim kuantitas dan bagaimana hal itu mempengaruhi kesaksiannya. Data dikumpulkan dengan menonton video dari kanal YouTube Law&Crime beserta transkripnya. Peneliti mencatat dan mengklasifikasikan pelanggaran berdasarkan jenisnya, dengan fokus pada pelanggaran yang berkaitan dengan maksim kuantitas. Metode kualitatif deskriptif digunakan untuk menganalisis data, didukung oleh teori Prinsip Kerja Sama Grice. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa maksim kuantitas sering dilanggar oleh Amber Heard dalam kesaksiannya. Hal ini terjadi karena Amber Heard sering memberikan terlalu banyak informasi yang tidak perlu sebagai upaya untuk membuat kesaksiannya lebih dipercaya. Namun, memberikan terlalu informasi di pengadilan justru dapat mengurangi kredibilitas sebuah pernyataan.

**Kata kunci:** *prinsip kerja sama, persidangan pencemaran nama baik, pelanggaran maksim kuantitas, kesaksian*

## **Introduction**

Human is a social being whom required to interact to one another. One of the most important forms of human interaction is communication. Davis (1981), stated communication as a process of giving and taking information, ideas, thoughts, and anything in the minds of two or more people. In addition, it is also a form to express emotions and build relationships. Communication allows people to convey thoughts and understand each other.

Communication is very fundamental for human's life. It is because the main purpose of communication is to share information. The success of communication depends on how well the listener understands and responds to the message being shared. To improve this process, humans have continuously created tools and methods to make communication smoother and more effective. Out of all the tools ever created, language stands out as the most powerful and essential one. It allows people to connect, express themselves, and interact meaningfully in all areas of life.

Jakobson (1960) mentioned language as the facility of communication which were created to improving human interaction by sharing ideas and opinion. Language was created to help people simplifying the process of communication. Each language works with its own rules to help sharpen how the messages will be delivered and interpret. This is in line with the statement of Halliday (as cited in Liu, 2014), whom stated that each language has its own several components to produce the intended meaning. This is why language is the most useful tool for information exchange process.

Understanding language is important to be able to understand the purpose of communication. The usage of language determines how the conversation goes. It does more than just transmit the information, but it also frames how the messages are perceived. Moreover, it can also help creating an effective and successful information exchange process where the speaker and listener are on the same level of understanding. However, it is not an easy task to successfully hold an effective conversation in communication. Therefore, a theory called Cooperative Principle was proposed.

Grice (1975) first proposed his theory called Cooperative Principle back in 1975. In his theory, he mentioned that effective and clear communication can be achieved if both the speaker and listener play important roles. Grice (1975) also emphasized that speaker and listener have to work together to achieve mutual understanding and avoid miscommunication. The speaker is expected to provide the information properly and precisely so that the listener will be able to grab the message.

Grice's theory was based on conversational rules or in this case is called maxims. There are four maxims known as Gricean Maxims namely: the maxim of quantity, quality, relation, and manner. Maxim of quantity explains that the speaker is expected to share enough information required, neither more nor less. Maxim of quality means all the information shared have to be based on fact or truth. Maxim of relation expects the speaker to only give relevant information. Meanwhile, maxim of manner explains that the given information has to be clear and presented in order.

All of the four maxims proposed by Grice have important role in communication. These maxims act as guidelines to help speakers deliver their messages clearly and

effectively. When these maxims are followed, conversations become more informative, coherent, and easier to follow. As a result, the main goal of communication, which is to share and receive information, can be achieved smoothly. Therefore, both the interlocutors are more likely to understand the meaning of each other’s utterances without confusion or misunderstanding.

However, in reality, there are many people who do not follow these maxims when they are holding a conversation. It can be referred as the violation of maxim. Tupan & Natalia (2008) stated that when the speaker consciously and intentionally violates a certain maxim, then that's when the maxim violation occurs. These violations could lead to numerous unwanted results such as miscommunication, misunderstanding, conflict, and many other inefficiencies (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). In some cases, the violation may be done for specific purposes, such as hiding the truth or manipulating the listener.

In legal situation like a defamation trial, the phenomenon of violating the maxims were often occurred. It happened because the individuals involved like the suspects, witnesses, or even victims would like to protect their image or strengthen their position. They may intentionally control the amount of information they share on their testimonies. They might do it by providing either less or more information than needed (Dewi et al., 2023). As a result, maxim of quantity became the most violated maxim in courtroom exchanges. Violating the maxim of quantity in giving testimonies may be perceived as evasive, manipulative, or even untrustworthy then it can lead to adverse verdict. This phenomenon was the reason why this research focused on the violation of maxim quantity in a court setting, precisely in a defamation trial.

In order to achieve the aims of this research, several previous studies were chosen to become the guidelines for the researchers to complete this study. The first studies were from Novera et al. (2021) entitled *Maxim Flouting in Brooklyn Nine-Nine* and from by Febriyani & Rachmijati (2021) entitled *Analysis the Violation of Maxim in Vlog Jurnalrisa Episode “Tanyarisa #11 – Special Peter Cs.* Both studies used the theory of Grice to analyze the data which was found in a movie and a YouTube Vlog. As the result, the study of Novera et al. (2021) showed all maxims were violated in the movie of *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* because the speaker refused to state their mind indirectly meanwhile, the study of Febriyani & Rachmijati (2021) showed only three maxims were violated, which are quantity, relation, and manner with quantity being the most violated one. It is because they preferred to hide some information, give unclear response, be ambiguous in their utterances, and exaggerate their explanation.

The next studies conducted applied the theory of Leech about Politeness Principle. Hendayanti et al. (2022) conducted a study entitled *Violation of Politeness Maxims in Japanese and Indonesian Irony Utterances* focused on analyzing only the irony utterances from Japanese and Indonesian several youth genre movies, Revita et al. (2023) with a study entitled *Violation of Politeness Principles in the Social Media Youtube*, and the next study called *Violation of Politeness Principle On Students Speech In Multicultural Society: Sosiopragmatic Study* by Faruzi et al. (2020). All the studies above showed different results. Maxim of sympathy was violated the most in Japanese irony utterances, meanwhile it was approbation maxim for Indonesian. In the YouTube video, only four maxims were violated namely tact, generosity, approbation, and sympathy maxim, and the reason behind it was because the video was meant to

show anger and disappointment. Meanwhile, the tact maxim was mostly violated by the students in their speech because of non-linguistical factors like social distance between the speakers.

In the contrast to the five other studies, which focused on everyday conversations or scripted dialogues, this study looked at a legal trial as its main subject. It analyzed the testimonies of Amber Heard, who was the defendant in the defamation case brought by Johnny Depp in 2022. The study used Grice's theory, focusing on the maxim of quantity, which deals with giving the right amount of information, not too much or too little. It examined how Amber Heard sometimes gave too much detail, or not enough, and how this may have affected the clarity and credibility of her statements during the trial.

With the aim of seeing how the maxim quantity was violated in a legal proceeding like a trial, the defamation trials of Amber Heard against Johnny Depp were chosen as the data. It was selected because this particular defamation trial was one of the most viral cases in 2022, especially on social media. Amber Heard's testimony gained a lot of public attention, making it interesting to be analyzed. Moreover, defamation trials are not commonly used as a primary data for linguistic research, which adds a level of novelty and relevance to this study.

This study had a purpose to determine how frequently Amber Heard violated the maxim of quantity during her testimony in the defamation trial, and to examine how these violations may have influenced the perception of her credibility and, potentially, the outcome of the verdict. By focusing on instances where she provided either too little or too much information, the study aimed to explore the impact such communication patterns had within the formal and high-stakes context of a courtroom.

## **Method**

Descriptive qualitative method was the method used in this research. As stated by Creswell & Creswell (2018), the descriptive qualitative method helps uncover the hidden intentions behind what a person or a group says and aims to provide a thorough and naturalistic description of an event as it occurs in real life. In this study, the method was applied to identify and describe the violations of the maxim of quantity found in Amber Heard's testimonies during the defamation trial against Johnny Depp. The data were taken from a publicly available video uploaded by the Law & Crime Network YouTube channel titled "Amber Heard Testifies in Defamation Trial – Part One (Johnny Depp v. Amber Heard)," which has a runtime of 1 hour and 24 minutes and forms part of a complete playlist documenting the full trial. This video was chosen because it contains Amber Heard's full sworn testimony in one segment, making it an ideal and authentic source of natural spoken language for analyzing how she shared information in a legal context. The video also provided rich data because courtroom testimonies require precision, making any excess or lack of information highly noticeable and relevant for identifying violations of the maxim of quantity. Another reason to choose this video as a data was because this defamation trials became a viral

topic in 2022 and is one of the most popular trials in this decade. In order to collect the data, several steps were taken in this research: first, the video and its transcript were downloaded from YouTube; second, the researcher watched the video while reading the transcript simultaneously to fully understand the content and delivery; third, the researcher identified utterances where Amber Heard provided either more information than needed or less information than expected; and fourth, each identified utterance was noted and grouped according to the type of violation. For the data analysis, the researcher applied Cooperative Principle by Grice (1975) to classify and interpret the violations, focusing specifically on the maxim of quantity. The findings were then presented using both formal and informal techniques. Formally, the violated parts of the utterances were highlighted in bold to clearly mark the sections where the maxim of quantity was broken. Informally, narrative explanations were provided to discuss each violation. Zain stated that by providing both ways of showcasing the founded data would help making the data clear and easy to understand (Ambara & Utami, 2023). This combination allowed the researcher to point out key parts of the data while explaining the background to support the analysis.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Result**

This study indicated 34 findings of violated maxim of quantity conducted by Amber Heard on her first testimonies for defamation trial against Johnny Depp. The analysis shows that oversharing was the dominant violation, appearing in more than half of the total findings, while the remaining cases involved giving too little information in her testimony. It was found that at times, Amber Heard tended to provide unnecessary details and more information than required direct examination. Other times, she gave too little information, leaving parts of her story unclear. These violations may have influenced how the jurors and judges understood or believed her statements, which could have eventually affected the final outcome of the trial.

### **Discussion**

The discussion section provided a narrative explanation of the violations of the maxim of quantity found in first testimonies Amber Heard gave on the defamation trial against Johnny Depp. Each explanation includes the context of the situation, the specific part where the violation occurred, and how it affected the overall quality and credibility of her testimonies.

### Data 1

Lawyer : “And how do you feel about that?”

Amber Heard : *“I struggle to have the words. I struggle to find the words to describe how painful this is. This is horrible for me to sit here for weeks and relive everything. I hear people that I knew, some well, some not, my ex-husband, who's in my shared a life, speak about our lives and the way that they have. This is the most painful and difficult thing I've ever gone through. For sure.”* (01:46 – 02:21)

In this part, the lawyer asked Heard a simple and direct question following her explanation of why she was present in court: “*And how do you feel about that?*” This question came after she discussed the emotional burden of being sued by her ex-husband and sitting through the trial. It was meant to get a short and clear expression of her emotional state. However, Heard’s response extended far beyond what was necessary for that purpose. She replied with a long and emotionally intense statement.

This response violates maxim of quantity by Grice (1975), which advises speakers to be as informative as needed for the situation, but not to give more information than required as mentioned by Purba & Ayomi (2022). In this case, instead of providing her feelings about the lawsuit, Heard expanded her answer into a detailed narrative that included repeated phrases, emotional appeals, and references to the trial process. While her intention may have been to convey the depth of her suffering or to evoke sympathy, the result was an overextended answer that strayed from the original question. This kind of maxim violation can weaken the clarity and relevance of testimony in court and may raise concerns about the speaker’s intention, whether to inform, or to influence the audience emotionally.

### Data 2

Lawyer : “Let me just, since you talked about the breaking horses, can you just tell the jury what your role is in assisting your dad on that, and what is involved in breaking horses?”

Amber Heard : *“You just got to stay on, basically. I would help him. I was more of a crash test dummy, you know, when you train a horse. It's a wild animal. It doesn't necessarily like to be ridden. And there are people out there who aren't crazy enough, like my dad, to pick that as a profession, I guess. And he was really good with horses, and I was the son he never had, so it was my job to, you know, stay on.”* (04:48 – 05:40)

It was the situation where the lawyer asked Amber Heard a specific and factual question aimed at clarifying her past experience in assisting her father in breaking horses. The question was given to get information of her background which was related to the case later on. The expected answer was “*You just need to stay on, basically*” and maybe added some relatable information about her experiences in breaking horses. However, Heard added unimportant personal commentary and emotionally unneeded details. For instance, referring to herself as a “crash test dummy,” calling her father

“crazy enough,” and noting she was “the son he never had” went beyond what was needed to explain the task of helping train horses.

Her testimony violated maxim of quantity by Grice (1975) because she added unnecessary personalized story that might create an emotional or dramatic effect. This distracted the focus from the main purpose of the question. By providing more information than necessary, Heard shifted the focus from the factual required answer to the personal. She possibly did it in an attempt to appear relatable or to evoke sympathy from the judges and jurors. However, this kind of elaboration, especially in a legal setting can affect the clarity and reliability of her testimony. It might even suggest an intent to influence rather than simply inform. This could have a negative impact on the results of the trial, especially on the verdict.

### Data 3

Lawyer : “And what, if any, charitable work did you do when you were still young?”

Amber Heard : ***“It started off as a requirement for the school I went to and then I liked it so much. I think because it meant I wasn't at home and it was important to me it's just to not spend time at home and I really loved meeting people so I worked at the soup kitchen every morning before school during the school year for about four years. There were---I didn't go on weekends but on weekends I would do various things, worked at children's museums typically because it would work with younger volunteers and mostly soup kitchens, and things involving children. I worked with deaf kids for a while and yeah, I love it.”*** (08:36 – 09:34)

During the direct examination, Amber Heard’s lawyer gave her questions regarding her background. One of the given questions was about the types of volunteers work she had done in the past before she became an actress. The question of “and what, if any, charitable work did you do when you were still young?” only required a brief, factual answer about her past charitable work. She was expected to answer the question by saying “I worked at the soup kitchen, children's museums, with deaf kids for a while, and many other various things”. Instead, she gave an overly detailed, personal, and emotional account. In her answer, she included the reasons of why she liked volunteering and how it kept her away from home when it was unnecessary.

These personal motivations and repetitive statements went beyond what the question was about. Her answer became lengthy, unfocused, and included information irrelevant to the core question. This over-explanation distracted from the main point and did not contribute to a clear or efficient exchange of information. As a result, she provided much more than was necessary and had intention to convince the people to believe her, which clearly a sign of a full violation of the maxim of quantity (Suartini & Candra, 2023). Violating maxim of quantity could do her harm in a court setting as she might overwhelm the judges and jurors.

#### Data 4

Lawyer : “You worked with the deaf kids. What, if anything, did you do to learn to be able to work with them?”

Amber Heard : *“Well, I taught myself how to sign basic sign language, and then I pursued it. I audited a Translate course at the community college, **which I ended up going to, to get out of high school early later on.** But I would audit classes. **The teachers never wanted to kick the random 12-year-old out of their class, I suppose. So, I remarkably was able to audit, I think, the majority of two semesters. And that's also helped me learn.**”* (9.35 – 10.26)

In this situation, Amber Heard was asked about how she prepared herself to work with deaf children. The lawyer's question was straightforward, only seeking a brief answer about what steps she took to learn the necessary skills. A short and clear response, such as *“I taught myself basic sign language and took related classes and audit it for like two semesters”* would have been sufficient to answer the question and provide the information needed for the court. However, Amber provided a more detailed and personal account of her experience, mentioning not only her efforts to learn sign language but also her experiences auditing classes at a community college at a young age. She even strayed from original question by mentioning how a teacher could kick her out of their classroom.

Amber's response is an example of violating the maxim of quantity, as she provided more information than what was necessary to answer the question (Grice, 1975). Instead of giving a concise answer, she included unnecessary details, such as how the teachers didn't mind a random 12-year-old sitting in their classes and how she later attended the college to graduate early. These extra details did not contribute directly to answering the lawyer's question and instead made her answer longer and less focused. In a courtroom setting, this kind of over-explaining can make a witness appear as if they are trying to impress or gain sympathy, which may weaken how credible or trustworthy they seem to the jury. It could also distract the listeners from the main point and cause confusion

#### Data 5

Lawyer : “When you arrived in Hollywood, please tell the jury what you did to get moving, to get going.”

Amber Heard : *“I went to every audition, every casting, every meeting, every appointment that I could. I put myself out there. **I didn't have a car. Those were expensive. So, I took the bus around L.A. It was before smartphones. I had a Thomas Guide in my bag and a change of tank tops. Not that it mattered,** but I went to about ten auditions sometimes a day **and would change clothes if I needed to in the back of the bus I was taking.** And I just hustled from one audition to the other. And I got a bit part on one thing, and then I got a bit part on another thing. Eventually, my roles became more important or bigger, and it's been a slow progression since then. **I'm doing either tiny bit parts in bigger movies or doing larger roles in movies that no one would see. And I guess it still is kind of like that.**”* (11:49 – 13:01)



In the situation of direct examination, Amber Heard was given many questions about her previous life before becoming an actress. One of the most important phases in her life was when she moved to Los Angeles to pursue her career. The lawyer asked her to explain what did she do to keep going in her early time in Los Angeles. The question only needed a short and clear answer, like saying “*I just hustled from one audition to the other. And I got a bit part on one thing, and my roles became more important or bigger, and it's been a slow progression since then.*” However, she shared extra details like not having a car, using a Thomas Guide, changing clothes on the bus, and how it was before smartphones.

She gave too many unimportant details and information on her answer making it longer and more emotional than it needed to be. However, in a court, long-winded answers could be a problem because it felt like she was trying to impress, gain sympathy, or making people believe in her. Too much exaggerated testimonies could hurt how believable or trustworthy she seemed. It could also made all the jurors and judges confused when trying to understand her testimonies (Devi & Ningsih, 2025).

## Conclusion

This research examined the violations of the maxim of quantity committed by Amber Heard in her testimonies during the defamation trial against Johnny Depp. The analysis revealed that the maxim of quantity was frequently violated, with a total of 34 identified instances throughout her testimony. More than half of the violations were due to oversharing, and the others were caused by Amber giving less information than expected. These violations commonly occurred because Amber Heard tended to provide more information than what was required by the questions asked, often including additional personal narratives, emotional elaborations, or background stories that exceeded the amount of information necessary to give a clear and direct answer. This pattern of oversharing indicates that her communication strategy may have been influenced by certain intentions, such as attempting to gain sympathy from the audience, appealing for emotional support, or establishing a sense of trust and relatability with the judges and jurors. By adding unnecessary details, she appeared to shape her testimony in a way that emphasized her experiences and emotions, rather than focusing strictly on the factual elements expected in a courtroom setting. However, in a legal context, especially a high-profile defamation trial where accuracy, clarity, and precision are essential. Such violations of the maxim of quantity may have negative implications. Providing more information than required can create the impression that the speaker is avoiding direct answers, exaggerating certain points, or manipulating the narrative for personal advantage. This may unintentionally weaken the credibility of the testimony and reduce the court’s reliance on the statements delivered. In some cases, these excessive details can distract the listeners, shift attention away from the core issue, or even raise doubts about the honesty and reliability of the speaker. Ultimately, frequent violations of the maxim of quantity have the potential to influence how the court interprets the testimony, and in the worst circumstances, they may negatively affect the overall judgement or the final verdict reached by the legal authorities.

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