



## The Types of Non-Observance Maxims Performed by the Main Character in Knives Out Movie

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### Abstract

The situation in which people involved in a conversation failed to obey the maxims is known as the non-observance maxims. This research focuses on finding the types of non-observance maxims performed by the main character during the conversation in the Knives Out movie. The theory from Grice (1975), supported by Thomas (1995), applied to find out the types of non-observance maxims. The data of this research were collected by using the document analysis method and analysed by combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The finding presents that there are three types of non-observance maxims performed by the main character in the Knives Out movie. It consists of flouting maxim of relevance (50%), violating maxim of quality (37,5%), and violating maxim of relevance (12,5%). The finding explains that the main character in the Knives Out movie tend to break the maxim by giving an irrelevant answer compared to the topic of discussion.

**Keywords:** *maxims, non-observance maxims, knives out, types*

### Abstrak

Situasi dimana orang-orang yang terlibat dalam sebuah percakapan gagal untuk menaati maksim-maksim dikenal dengan istilah maksim non-ketaatan. Penelitian ini berfokus dalam menemukan tipe-tipe maksim non-ketaatan yang dilakukan selama percakapan oleh karakter utama dalam film Knives Out. Teori dari Grice (1975), yang didukung oleh Thomas (1995), diterapkan untuk menemukan tipe-tipe maksim non-ketaatan tersebut. Data dari penelitian ini dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan metode analisis dokumen dan dianalisis dengan menggabungkan metode kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa ada tiga tipe maksim non-ketaatan yang dilakukan oleh karakter utama dalam film Knives Out. Tipe-tipe tersebut terdiri dari flouting maxim of relevance (50%), violating maxim of quality (37,5%), dan violating maxim of relevance (12,5%). Hasil penelitian ini menjelaskan bahwa karakter utama dalam film Knives Out cenderung melanggar maksim dengan memberikan jawaban yang berbeda dari topik diskusi.

**Kata kunci:** *maksim, maksim non-ketaatan, knives out, tipe-tipe*

### Introduction

Humans are essentially born as social creatures, which means they cannot live alone in this world. It indicates that interaction is fundamental in humans' life. Hence, in order to get along together, they have to interact with each other, and the common thing that they do is by having a conversation. Conversation is a joint activity in which two or more individuals perform linguistic forms and non-verbal gestures to

communicate interactively (Brennan, 2010). On the subject of Brennan's statement, conversation can be used to convey ideas from one to another.

On the other hand, in a conversation, sometimes misunderstandings arise due to the speaker not being able to convey the meaning to the listener, or the listener struggled to catch the meaning from the speaker. Furthermore, to be able to achieve successful communication, people have to obey the rules. The rules were proposed by Grice (1975) are known as Cooperative Principles. It prompts the participants of a conversation to be cooperative and effective at the same time during their conversation. The rules consist of four conversational maxims, which are maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of relevance, and maxim of manner.

In spite of these rules, there are certain conditions where people may break them, consciously or not, and that is known as non-observance maxims. Cutting (2002), added that the situation where people failed to observe the maxim is commonly known as non-observance maxims. People might have different background on why they chose not to observe the maxims.

As stated by Grice (1975), there are five main types of non-observance maxims, they are: flouting, violating, infringing, opting-out, and suspending. Flouting maxims happens when the speaker fails to fulfill the maxims because their utterance might has a different meaning than what is being said. Violating maxims are happened when the speaker breaks the maxims intending to mislead the hearer. Infringing maxims happens when the speaker fails to observe the maxims because of their imperfect performance of linguistic. Opting-out maxims is a case when the speaker unwilling to cooperate as the maxims urge. Suspending maxim is the situation where there is no expectation that the maxim should be reached which sometimes causes by cultural reasons.

Several previous studies have been reviewed as part of the process during the making of this study. Fadillah and Imperiani (2020), in their study entitled "*An Analysis of Non-Observance Maxims in Customs Protection*" found that during the conversation between the passengers and custom officers, the maxims were not observed 49 times. Flouting maxim of quantity became the most frequent types that performed by the passengers since they tend to provide too much and less information than it requires. Meanwhile, Wardana and Anayati (2018), in their study entitled "*Non Observance of Maxims in Indonesia Chick Literature with the Special Reference to Ika Natassa's Architecture of Love*", stated that the non-observance maxim has occurred in any kind of ways. It occurs 185 times, with flouting maxim of quantity yet again became the most dominant types. Moreover, non-observance maxims occur 55 times in a study entitled "*The Non-Observance of The Conversational Maxims: An Analysis of The Dialogues in Arthur Miller's The Crucible*", (Yuvike and Winiharti, 2009). It includes flouting maxim of quantity, quality, relation and manner, violating maxim of quality, and opting out maxim. Same as the two previous studies, flouting maxim of quantity appears as the most type that performed by the characters in *The Crucible*. Harared (2015) in his study entitled "*Non-Observance of the Maxims in Diary of a Wimpy Kid*", stated that based on his research, middle school students tend to perform the non-observance maxims for certain reason. There are two types of non-observance maxims found in his study, they are violating maxim of quality and flouting maxim of quantity. The last study is conducted by Hanifah (2013) entitled "*Non-Observance of Maxims in Facebook Conversation (A Case Study in English Education Department)*".

The types of non-observance maxims found in this study are flouting maxim, infringing maxim, and opting out maxim. Flouting maxim became the most dominant type performed by the students considering they tend to make the hearer look for the intended meaning of their utterances.

As stated by Hornby (2006:950), movie is a series of moving images with sound which tells a story that used to simulate experiences, hence it is make sense that the non-observance maxims not only happen in daily conversation but also in a movie, owing to the fact that a movie sometimes becomes a representation of humans' life. The movie that is chosen as the data is Knives Out movie. Knives Out is a mystery/thriller movie written and directed by Rian Johnson that was released in 2019. There is a lot of conversation happen between the main character and the others considering it involves bunches of investigations. Consequently, the possibility of non-observance maxims appearing in this movie is high.

## Method

The data used in this study were taken from the conversations that happened between the main character, which is Marta Cabrera, and the other characters in the Knives Out movie. Knives Out movie itself is a movie with mystery and thriller genre produced and directed by Rian Johnson and released in 2019. The story of this movie is about the death investigation of Harlan Thrombey, a famous mystery novelist and also a family patriarch. Considering this movie contains a lot of investigation, it means that there is also a lot of conversation that happens between the main character and the others, which suit the topic of the analysis.

This analysis only contains a total of 8 non-observance maxims data, which shows that the main character in the Knives Out movie did not break the maxims quite frequently. Out of the 8 data, there are only 3 types of non-observance maxims performed by the main character, and flouting maxim of relevance became the most dominant types. It means the main character constantly breaks the maxims by giving a response that does not have any correlation with the topic that is discussed during their conversation. Moreover, it also implies that the main character might mean more than what is uttered in her utterance.

The data were collected through the document analysis method, which is a method that analyzes documentary evidence and addresses specific research questions using a systematic process (Frey, 2010). The researcher applied this method by reading the script and doing a note-taking process while watching the movie. There are several steps that is done in collecting the data, first watching the movie to understand the story, second downloading the transcript directly from the director's website, and third start collecting the data by using method that is already explained before. During the process of collecting the data, the data that was found directly classified into their categories based on the theory from Grice (1975) and supported by Thomas (1995). Moreover, the data were analyzed by combining the qualitative and quantitative methods. The data is presented in both formal and informal presentations. For the formal presentation, the data is presented in the form of a table. Meanwhile, the informal presentation showed the explanation of the data using descriptive words.

## Result and Discussion

### Result

The finding of this research presents that the main character in *Knives Out* movie, which is Marta Cabrera, performed three different types of non-observance maxims, they are: flouting maxim of relevance, violating maxim of quality, and violating maxim of relevance. The data are presented in the table below:

Table 1. Data of Non-Observance Maxims Performed by the Main Character in *Knives Out* Movie

No	Data	Types of Non-Observance Maxims		
		Flouting Maxim of Relevance	Violating Maxim of Quality	Violating Maxim of Relevance
1.	<b>Ransom:</b> “So, look me in the eye and tell me what happened to my grandfather.” <b>Marta:</b> “ <b>You asshole.</b> ”	√		
2.	<b>Walt:</b> “Hey, how you doing?” <b>Marta:</b> “ <b>Walt, I want you to know that I didn’t know about any of this.</b> ”	√		
3.	<b>Blanc:</b> “I still think this a bad idea, but the family is assembled.” <b>Marta:</b> “ <b>I know where the tox report is.</b> ”	√		
4.	<b>Blanc:</b> “Miss Cabrera, was Harlan planning on cutting off Joni’s allowance?” <b>Marta:</b> “ <b>Oh my god.</b> ”	√		
5.	<b>Blanc:</b> “Is Richard having an affair?” <b>Marta:</b> “Richard? An affair?” <b>Blanc:</b> “A yes or no will do” <b>Marta:</b> “ <b>No.</b> ”		√	

6.	<b>Blanc:</b> “Did he ask you to drive when he saw me coming?” <b>Marta:</b> “Yes.”	√			
7.	<b>Ransom:</b> “Fran’s alive?” <b>Blanc:</b> “Oh yes. Fran, who will confirm this fairy story or something close to it. And will send you, Hugh, to jail.” <b>Marta:</b> “Yes. Thank you doctor, that’s great news, we’ll be there soon. (hang up the phone) <b>She’s okay. She’s ready to talk.</b> ”	√			
8.	<b>Blanc:</b> “Did he plan to fire Walter?” <b>Marta:</b> “ <b>Can I just wait inside? I feel like I shouldn’t be here.</b> ”			√	
	Total	4 (50%)	3 (37, 5%)	1 (12, 5%)	8 (100%)

As presented in the table, from the three types of non-observance maxims that were found, there are eight utterances found as data. These data were analyzed with reference to the theory proposed by Grice (1975) and supported by the theory from Thomas (1995). Moreover, the data immediately categorized into the types of non-observance maxims according to those two experts. All three types of non-observance maxims performed by the main character in Knives Out movie are presented in the following section:

### ***Discussion***

In this section, the selected examples of data are presented. The data is analysed based on the theory of non-observance maxims by Grice (1975) and supported by Thomas (1995). The data consist of three types of non-observance maxims, they are flouting maxim of relevance, violating maxim of quality, and violating maxim of relevance. The analysis of the data is as follow:

#### ***Flouting Maxim of Relevance***

According to Grice (1975), flouting maxim of relevance occurs when the speaker is giving unrelated respond to the topic that is being discussed. The speaker might expect the hearer to understand the meaning that is not stated in the utterance. Kroeger (2018:144), also stated that when the utterance of the speaker contains some

information that would not be expected to come during that situation, the speaker can be said to flout the maxim of relevance. Here are two data examples of flouting maxim of relevance found in *Knives Out* movie:

Data 1

Blanc : “I still think this a bad idea, but the family is assembled.”

Marta : “**I know where the tox report is.**”

(01:41:43)

The data above is the conversation between Benoit Blanc and the main character, Marta Cabrera, which took place in the Thrombey’s house just before Marta’s announcement regarding Harlan’s inheritance. At that time, Blanc tried to tell Marta that all members of the Thrombey family are already gathered so that Marta can start her announcement. However, Marta’s response to that statement from Blanc can be categorized as flouting maxim of relevance considering her response was irrelevant to the topic. By looking at the context of the conversation, Blanc was talking about the Thrombey family, yet, Marta out of nowhere responded by saying information regarding the toxicology report, which is unrelated to the topic.

If Marta intended to obey the maxim, then she would be giving a response about her intention regarding the announcement, instead, she told Blanc about the tox report because she just remembered some hints that given by Fran, the housekeeper. Hence Marta’s response in this conversation belongs to the flouting maxim of relevance. From Marta’s utterance, it can be assumed that she meant there might be a light path to the case because she knew where the tox report was, and it was vital in solving the Harlan’s death case.

Data 2

Blanc : “Miss Cabrera, was Harlan planning on cutting off Joni’s allowance?”

Marta : “**Oh my god.**”

(00:26:41)

The participants involved in the conversation above are Benoit Blanc and Marta Cabrera. The conversation itself took place on the terrace in the Thrombey’s house right after the detectives collecting the testimony from every family member. On that occasion, Blanc, who had just listened to the testimony from every family member of the Thrombey, tried to express his view about that. He thought that Marta knew everything about the family since she was very close to Harlan, hence he asked

that question to her. Then, Marta, who responded by saying “Oh my god.” can be said to flout the maxim of relevance since her response was not related to the topic that asked by Blanc.

By looking at the context of the conversation, Marta should have answered that question by saying everything that she knew regarding Harlan’s plan to cut off Joni’s allowance if she intended to obey the maxim. However, she rather said something that was irrelevant to the topic discussion while at the same time she about to throw up. That because she had a regurgitate reaction to the mistruth, which means that she about to tell something lie to the detective. From her utterance, and obviously her action, it can be assumed that Blanc’s thought was right, Harlan indeed planned to cut off Joni’s allowance.

#### *Violating Maxim of Quality*

As stated by Grice (1975:49), violating maxim of quality occurs when the speaker is liable to deceive by providing incorrect information or something that is untrue. Tupan and Natalia (2008:55) added that a speaker can be said to violate the maxim of quality when they are not being sincere and intended to give the hearer the wrong information so that the hearer will only understand the surface meaning of their utterance. The explanation of the selected example of the data can be seen as follow:

Data 3

Blanc : “Did he ask you to drive when he saw me coming?”

Marta : “**Yes.**”

(01:34:25)

The selected data above is the conversation between Benoit Blanc and Marta Cabrera, which took place in an alley after the car chase between the detectives with Marta and Ransom. The car chase happened after Blanc saw Marta’s car near the medical examiner’s office, who just got burned. After the car chase ended in an alley, the detectives then immediately arrested Ransom, which made Marta confused since she thought she was the one who caused Harlan’s death. Blanc, who intended to know what happened between Marta and Ransom, then asked the question above. However, Marta’s response to that question belongs to the violating maxim of quality since it consists of information that was not true, and she did that because she did not want Blanc to know about the reality.

The truth was Ransom never told Marta to drive after Blanc spotted their existence near the medical examiner’s office. It was Marta’s intention because she was

in a panic after seeing Blanc stared at her car. If Marta intended to obey the maxim, then she should have told Blanc that it was her intention to get away from the detectives. Instead, she chose to not being sincere and said something that was not the fact. Marta did that because she did not want Blanc to know that she was involved in Harlan's death case even though she was responsible for that.

Data 4

Ransom : "Fran's alive?"

Blanc : "Oh yes. Fran, who will confirm this fairy story or something close to it. And will send you, Hugh, to jail."

Marta : "Yes. Thank you doctor, that's great news, we'll be there soon. (Hang up the phone) **She's okay. She's ready to talk.**"

(01:58:38)

This conversation is between Ransom Drysdale, Detective Benoit Blanc, and Marta Cabrera, which happened at the end of the movie when they have found out that it was Ransom who sabotaged Harlan's death. At that time, Fran the housekeeper was the witness of the crime that Ransom committed, however, she was hospitalized after Ransom injecting morphine into her body. In the middle of the conversation, Marta got a call from the hospital, which gave an update about Fran's condition, then she told the news to everyone in that room. However, Marta can be said to violate the maxim of quality when she said, "She's okay. She's ready to talk." because it was the opposite news of what the hospital told her.

In other words, Marta told something untrue and intended to deceive the hearer, and she did that to trick Ransom into admitting every detail of the crime that he did. Luckily for her, it works, since in the end, Ransom finally got arrested. By looking at the context of the conversation, if Marta intended to observe the maxim, then she could have told the right news to the hearers, which is the fact that Fran has died. Instead, she preferred to violate the maxim of quality by providing some false information to the hearers that in the same room with her at that moment.

#### *Violating Maxim of Relevance*

According to Grice (1975:49), violating maxim of relevance occurs when the speaker gives an irrelevant response to the topic that is discussed because he/she intended to deceive the hearer. Thomas (1995) added that when a speaker violates the maxim of relevance, it means he/she had an intention to mislead the hearer by saying



something that is unrelated to the topic of discussion. The data example is explained below:

Data 5

Blanc : “Did he plan to fire Walter?”

Marta : “**Can I just wait inside? I feel like I shouldn’t be here.**”

(00:27:32)

The participants of the conversation above are Detective Benoit Blanc and Marta Cabrera. It happened just before the detectives collecting Marta’s testimony. Back then, Blanc was trying to reconnect every story that the family said during the investigation because he realized that some were lying to him. Hence, he wanted to know about Marta’s insight into the family. However, Marta’s answer to the question asked by Blanc belongs to the violating maxim of relevance because her response was not relevant to the topic. Blanc was asking about Harlan’s plan regarding Walter, instead, Marta answered by asking whether she could stay inside or not, which is obviously irrelevant to the question.

Marta gave such response because she wanted to deceive Blanc so he would not suspicious towards her because she was actually involved in Harlan’s death. If Blanc found out that she was actually involved, then she might get arrested considering all of the evidence could make Marta looks guilty. Moreover, if Marta gets arrested then the authorities might found out that her mother came to the USA undocumented, which will end up in her mother get deported. Hence, Marta was trying so hard to make herself as innocent as she could. In this situation, by looking at the context of the conversation, the maxim demands Marta to tell Blanc about her knowledge about Walter, but she chose not to do it, hence her utterance can be considered as violating maxim of relevance.

## Conclusion

As a result of the analysis that had been done, it was found that the main character in the Knives Out movie did not break the maxim quite frequently. There are only a total of eight data of non-observance maxims performed by Marta Cabrera, the main character in Knives Out movie, which divided into three types, they are: flouting maxim of relevance (50%), violating maxim of quality (37,5%), and violating maxim of relevance (12,5%). Out of the three types, flouting maxim of relevance became the most dominant type, which shows that the main character mostly uncomfortable with the topic of the discussion so that she needed to avoid it.

The result implies that the main character in the Knives Out movie did not observe the maxim by regularly giving a response that was obviously unrelated to the topic of the conversation. On some occasions, there might be something that can be

taken from the main character's utterance other than the conveyed meaning. That is possible because the main character, which is Marta Cabrera, had a huge part in the death case of Harlan Thrombey that was investigated by Benoit Blanc and the other police detectives.

Marta, as the main character, constantly acts as if she was clueless regarding Harlan's death, despite the fact that she knew everything about that. By giving a response that was irrelevant to the topic, it helps her to build an image of an innocent person, even though, in the end, she could not fool Blanc. Marta regularly flouted the maxim of relevance because she was avoiding talking about Harlan's death since, in fact, she knew everything that related to the incident. Hence, she did not want to be accused as the murderer, although she thought she was the one who was responsible for Harlan's death. As a matter of fact, in general, people tend to respond irrelevantly because they are avoiding a certain topic of discussion that they do not want to be involved with.

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