



# **An Examination of Grice's Maxims in the Horror Novel Five Nights at Freddy's by Scott Cawthon**

Made Cahyana<sup>1</sup>, Nur Ayomi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Sastra Inggris, Universitas Mahasaraswati, Denpasar, Bali

Corresponding E-Mail: [dcahyana00@gmail.com](mailto:dcahyana00@gmail.com), [putu.nur.a@unmas.ac.id](mailto:putu.nur.a@unmas.ac.id)

Received: 2025-08-26 Accepted: 2025-09-09

DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v13i2.7890

## **Abstract**

Communication is a fundamental aspect of human interaction, and its effectiveness depends greatly on the cooperation between speakers. One influential framework for analysing this cooperation is Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975), which consists of four conversational maxims: quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. This article aims to identify the types of cooperative maxims as proposed by Grice (1975) found in the horror novel *Five Nights at Freddy's: Fazbear Frights #2 Fetch* by Scott Cawthon. The horror genre is particularly relevant for this analysis because it relies heavily in dialogue to build suspense, ambiguity, and psychological tension, making the application of conversational maxims especially significant. The objective of this study is to identify and classify the types of cooperative maxims, namely quantity, quality, relevance, and manner, that are used in the dialogues between characters. The research applies a descriptive qualitative method, with data collected through observation and note taking techniques, focusing on the dialogue between characters. The analysis revealed that the most frequently used type of maxim is the maxim of quantity (22 occurrences), followed by the maxim of quality (13), relevance (9), and manner (8). These findings indicate that the characters in the novel generally cooperate in communication by providing sufficient, truthful, relevant, and clear information. This research highlights how cooperative maxims are applied in fictional texts, contributing to effective communication and narrative coherence within the horror genre. In addition to narrative cohesion, the results of this study also suggest broader implications for literary and linguistic studies, demonstrating how pragmatic principles can serve as tools for understanding character dynamics, thematic construction, and stylistic strategies in fiction.

**Keywords:** *cooperative principle; dialogue; horror fiction; maxim types; pragmatics*

## **Introduction**

Human interaction relies heavily on communication as a primary means to exchange ideas and information. Within linguistics, the field of pragmatics focuses on how language is interpreted in relation to its social and situational context. Rather than concentrating only on structural aspects, pragmatics seeks to explain how meaning is shaped and understood when language is used in real communication settings (Birner, 2013). To understand this process, Grice (1975) proposed the Cooperative Principle, which requires participants in a conversation to contribute appropriately according to the context and purpose of interaction. This principle is realized through four maxims: quantity, quality, relevance, and manner.

The relevance of Grice's framework becomes particularly significant when applied to literary texts, especially in the horror genre. Horror narratives often depend on tension that arises not only from explicit descriptions but also from the manipulation of what is said and left unsaid. Ambiguity, indirectness, and sudden violations of conversational expectations are stylistic choices that heighten suspense. This, analyzing dialogues in horror fiction through the lens of Grice's maxims provides valuable insight into how communication strategies function as tools for building fear, uncertainty, and psychological intensity.

In addition to Grice's framework, other pragmatic theories also make important contributions to understanding communication. Leech (1983), for instance, proposed the Politeness Principle, which complements Grice by emphasizing the role of social harmony through six maxims of politeness. Similarly, Levinson (1983) developed a comprehensive framework that highlights deixis, implicature, presupposition, speech acts, and conversational structure. These theories collectively demonstrate that pragmatics is not only about the efficient transfer of information but also about how meaning is negotiated and interpreted in different contexts. In literary analysis, Leech's and Levinson's perspectives provide tools to examine how writers create character relationships, manage ambiguity, or delay meaning to shape narrative effects.

Previous research has shown the versatility of Grice's maxims in various contexts. Jannah (2017) analyzed maxims in *Beauty and the Beast* and its pedagogical implications; Cahyani & Budiati (2022) examined maxim violations in *The Secret Garden*; Fitrianti & Husnah (2019) highlighted their role in early childhood communication; Widiastri (2019) investigated maxim use in classroom discourse; while Rasheed (2025) explored dialogue in *The Old Man and the Sea*. More recently, Oktaviabri & Degaf (2023) revealed the operation of cooperative principles in EFL classrooms. These studies consistently confirm that conversational maxims can illuminate patterns of interaction, but few have explored their application in horror fiction.

This study, which applies Grice's Cooperative Principles to Scott Cawthon's horror novel *Five Nights at Freddy's: Fazbear Frights #2 Fetch*. Unlike previous works, this study emphasizes how these principles operate in a genre that relies on tension and ambiguity. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following questions: What types of Gricean maxims appear in the characters conversations in *Five Nights at Freddy's: Fazbear Frights #2 Fetch*? What types of maxims are most prevalent, and what are their implications for the communication patterns between the characters? How does adherence to maxims contribute to the credibility and smooth flow of the story? This study not only investigates the linguistic structure of dialogues in *Fazbear Frights #2 Fetch* but also highlights how pragmatic strategies contribute to the construction of horror fiction. By bridging pragmatic theory and literary analysis, the research underscores the value of maxims as both communicative and stylistic devices.

## Method

This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach to investigate the use of cooperative maxims in *Five Nights at Freddy's: Fazbear Frights #2 Fetch* (2020). The novel, which consists of approximately 250 pages, was chosen due to its reliance on character dialogues that frequently illustrate principles of communication within the horror genre. In qualitative inquiry, data sources can include texts, observations, or audio-visual records (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, the data were derived from the textual dialogues of the novel.

The sampling technique applied was purposive sampling. Only dialogues containing explicit or implicit interaction between characters were selected, while purely descriptive or narrative passages were excluded. From the full text, conversations that potentially reflected Grice's maxims adherence were systematically highlighted. To ensure completeness, data collection continued until saturation was reached, meaning no new maxim-related patterns emerged in the later stages of reading.

The data collection technique was non-participant observation, which involves systematically recording phenomena without direct involvement from the researcher (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The researcher carefully read the text, highlighted conversational exchanges, and identified instances where maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relevance, and Manner appeared. Each dialogue was documented and categorized according to Grice's (1975) classification.

The primary instrument of the research was a coding framework designed to classify utterances into maxim types and to describe how they functioned in context. The coding framework included three analytical categories: (1) identification of the maxim type, (2) interpretation of its communicative function within the dialogue, and (3) relation of its role to narrative development, such as character interaction. To enhance reliability, the coding process was cross-

validated by a second ratter familiar with pragmatic theory. Contextual interpretation was central to the analysis, meaning that utterances were not evaluated in isolation but examined alongside preceding and following dialogue, as well as their role in the larger narrative. This ensured that the classification of maxim use considered pragmatic appropriateness within the story's horror setting.

Ethical considerations in this study were minimal since the data were drawn from a published literary work. However, due acknowledgment of the author and publisher has been maintained throughout the research, ensuring respect for intellectual property.

The analysis process involved three stages: (1) identifying the maxim type, (2) note taking, and (3) interpreting its communicative function in the dialogue. The analysis was conducted manually without computational tools, which ensured direct linguistic interpretation but also presented limitations. Manual analysis may be subject to researcher bias and may overlook subtle patterns that could be detected with software-assisted corpus tools. Nevertheless, the emphasis on qualitative depth allowed for a nuanced understanding of dialogue in its literary context.

## Results

This result of this analysis is in the form of maxims consisting of maxims of quantity, maxims of quality, maxims of relevance, maxims of manner in the Five Night Freddy's novel. The following table summarizes the information:

Table 1. The types of maxim in Five Night at Freddy's by Scott Cawthon

No	Types	Frequency	Percentage
1	The Maxim of Quantity	22	42.3 %
2	The Maxim of Quality	13	25.0 %
3	The Maxim of Relevance	9	17.3 %
4	The Maxim of Manner	8	15.4 %
	Total	52	100 %



According to the above classification, among the four different types of maxims used in the dialogue of characters, it is evident that the Maxim of Quantity is the most frequently observed (42.3%). This is followed by the Maxim of Quality (25.0%), the Maxim of Relevance (17.3%), and the Maxim of Manner (15.4%). In addition to the quantitative data, examples of each maxim type were identified in the dialogues:

1. Maxim of Quantity: Cyril's statement "Look at this. I think it's the instructions" provides just enough information to guide Greg's response without unnecessary elaboration.
2. Maxim of Quality: Hadi's cautious answer "Fetch looks like he's older than my dad, but smartphones haven't been around that long" reflects truthfulness supported by observation.
3. Maxim of Relevance: Cyril's affirmation "Yeah, this was a great idea" directly follows Greg's suggestion, keeping the conversation on topic.
4. Maxim of Manner: Hadi's clear explanation "He was a polygraph expert who started doing experiments with plants in the 1960s" shows clarity and order in conveying information.

Patterns in maxim distribution were also observed across different parts of the novel. The Maxim of Quantity and Quality appear more frequently, where characters are introduced and explore new settings. Meanwhile, Maximum Relevance and Manner appear less frequently, especially during tense or frightening situations. Character, based analysis also revealed that Greg and Cyril tended to produce utterances aligned with the Maxim of Quantity, often providing enough information to move the story forward. In contrast, Hadi's dialogue more frequently demonstrated adherence to the Maxim of Quality, reflecting his cautious and rational personality. Violations of Relevance and Manner were often tied to moments of fear or uncertainty, highlighting how conversational patterns mirrored psychological states.

Despite these findings, the process of categorization presented certain limitations. Some utterances could arguably belong to more than one maxim type, creating potential overlap in classification. Moreover, manual categorization may reflect subjective interpretation despite efforts to ensure reliability.

## Discussion

The discussion is further elaborated in Table 1. Each example is analyzed thoroughly with reference to Grice's cooperative principles (1975), which include the maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. This analysis was conducted to identify how conversations between characters construct meaning through adherence to these maxims. Pragmatically, the discourse relationship between clauses is determined based on the extent to which utterances fulfill

cooperative principles. Thus, cooperative principles serve as a theoretical framework for interpreting communication patterns in the research data.

### **1. The Maxim of Quantity**

The principle of maxim of quantity demands that speakers provide enough information not too little and not too much in order to achieve effective communication.

#### **Data 1:**

Cyril : "Look at this." Cyril was, surprisingly, now interested in the counter. He picked up a small booklet inside a plastic sheath. "I think it's the instructions."  
Greg : "Let me see." Greg plucked the booklet from Cyril's grasp.  
Cyril : "Hey," Cyril squeaked.

(Cawthon, 2020:7)

#### **Analysis of data 1:**

In the conversation between Cyril and Greg, who are a pair of friends exploring an abandoned pizzeria and discovering Fetch. The dialogue between Cyril and Greg, Grice's maxim of Quantity is clearly observed through Cyril's utterance, "Look at this. I think it's the instructions." According to Grice, this maxim requires speakers (1) to provide as much information as is needed (2) and not more information than required. Cyril's contribution directly satisfies these conditions: by identifying the booklet and briefly stating its possible function, he provides sufficient information for Greg to understand its relevance without being left confused or misled, while also avoiding unnecessary elaboration or speculation that could burden the conversation.

The context of the script reinforces this adherence, as Cyril, who had earlier been portrayed as hesitant and fearful shifts his attention to the counter and succinctly draws Greg's focus to the booklet. His concise statement becomes the trigger for Greg's immediate response, "Let me see," demonstrating that the information given was adequate to move the dialogue forward naturally. Moreover, Cyril does not overstep the maxim by attempting to explain the entire content of the booklet or making assumptions beyond what he observed; instead, he limits his input to what is directly relevant. This exchange illustrates cooperative communication: Cyril's efficient contribution allows Greg to engage with the object himself, maintaining the natural flow of discovery.

Integrated with the earlier analysis, it becomes evident that Cyril's adherence to the maxim of Quantity not only reflects cooperative efficiency but also contributes to the progression of the narrative by guiding attention toward an important plot element (the instructions for Fetch). Therefore, the dialogue between Cyril and Greg exemplifies Grice's principle that communication is most

effective when speakers balance informativeness with conciseness. This maxim provides the foundation for communication, and its frequent occurrence indicates that characters in *Fetch* often rely on direct, informative exchanges to move the plot forward.

## 2. *The Maxim of Quality*

The maxim of Quality requires speakers to only convey what they believe to be true and supported by adequate evidence. In other words, they should avoid fabricating information or making claims without evidence (Grice, 1975).

### Data 2:

Putting Fetch back on the counter, he pulled the booklet from the plastic and scanned through the instructions. Hadi read over his shoulder. Cyril stuck his head between Greg's chest and the booklet, forcing Greg to hold the booklet farther out so they could all read together. Fetch, the instructions explained, was an animatronic dog designed to sync up with your phone and retrieve information and other things for you.

Greg : "Think it still works?" "How long has this place been empty?"

Hadi : "*Fetch looks like he's older than my dad, but smartphones haven't been around that long.*" Hadi shrugged.

(Cawthon, 2020:8)

### Analysis of data 2:

In this conversation, Greg asks whether Fetch might still work and how long the pizzeria has been abandoned, to which Hadi responds, "Fetch looks like he's older than my dad, but smartphones haven't been around that long." His utterance reflects Grice's maxim of Quality because it is based on observable facts rather than speculation, showing adherence to truthfulness and avoiding fabrication. By grounding his answer in a comparison with his father's age and the history of smartphones, Hadi provides a cautious and rational response that maintains the credibility of the dialogue.

Narratively, this realistic statement helps preserve the horror atmosphere, as it emphasizes uncertainty and what remains unknown about Fetch, thereby increasing suspense while simultaneously portraying Hadi as a rational and trustworthy character. This reflects how adherence to Quality enhances the believability of the horror narrative. Interestingly, this aligns with findings by Rasheed (2025), who emphasized that truth-based dialogue in *The Old Man and the Sea* strengthened narrative credibility, though in *Fetch* the truth serves more to heighten mystery rather than resolve it.

### 3. *The Maxim of Relevance*

The Maxim of Relevance requires that every contribution to a conversation be connected to the topic at hand and not stray into unrelated matters (Grice, 1975). When speakers maintain relevance, interactions feel coherent and purposeful. On the other hand, if responses are off-topic, conversations can become confusing or even misleading. In *Fetch*, an example of this maxim can be seen in a simple yet meaningful exchange between characters.

#### Data 3:

Greg : "Let's go check out the old pizzeria,"

Cyril : *"Yeah, this was a great idea."* Cyril mimicked Greg's suggestion.

(Cawthon, 2020:2)

#### Analysis of data 3:

In this conversation, Greg suggests visiting the old pizzeria and Cyril immediately replies, "Yeah, this was a great idea," directly affirming Greg's statement. Cyril's response reflects adherence to Grice's maxim of Relevance because it stays on topic and supports the flow of conversation rather than diverting it elsewhere. By echoing Greg's suggestion, Cyril not only shows attentiveness and agreement but also contributes to the natural progression of the dialogue. In terms of narrative function, this brief but relevant response strengthens the sense of cooperation between characters and helps build momentum toward their exploration of the eerie setting, an essential step in creating suspense within the horror genre.

#### Data 4:

Cyril : "Do we have plan?" Cyril asked when they move out into the hallway.

Greg : *"I think we should start by finding Fetch"* Greg noticed all three of them were breathing fast.

(Cawthon, 2020:46)

#### Analysis of data 4:

In this conversation, Cyril asks, "Do we have plan?" as the group moves into the hallway, and Greg immediately responds, "I think we should start by finding Fetch." Greg's reply reflects adherence to Grice's maxim of Relevance because it directly addresses Cyril's question and contributes meaningfully to their current situation. Rather than diverting the topic or giving unrelated information, Greg provides a clear suggestion that aligns with the group's objective, thereby maintaining the flow of dialogue. In terms of narrative function, this exchange illustrates the characters' cooperative efforts in organizing their next steps, while also heightening the tension of their search. By staying focused on the task, the dialogue sustains the suspenseful atmosphere and reinforces the characters'



shared determination to confront the mysterious circumstances surrounding Fetch. The dominance of relevant responses highlights cooperative tendencies, but also reveals moments where characters deliberately avoid relevance under pressure, which contradicts Cahyani & Budiati's (2022) study in *The Secret Garden*, where irrelevance often stems from unintentional and playful communication rather than fear.

#### 4. *The Maxim of Manner*

The Maxim of Manner emphasizes that speakers should communicate in a clear, orderly manner, free from ambiguity (Grice, 1975). The purpose of this principle is to ensure that messages can be easily understood by listeners without causing unnecessary confusion. In narratives such as *Fetch*, where tension and uncertainty are already high due to the horror atmosphere, clarity in some conversations becomes crucial to keep the story accessible to readers.

##### Data 5:

Greg : "Have you heard of Cleve Backster?" Greg asked pretty sure they had not

Hadi : "*He was polygraph expert who started doing experiments with plants in the 1960s*" Hadi knows it.

(Cawthon, 2020:35)

##### Analysis of data 5:

In this conversation, sGreg asks if his friends know Cleve Backster, and Hadi replies clearly, "He was a polygraph expert who started doing experiments with plants in the 1960s." The utterance adheres to Grice's maxim of Manner because it is concise, orderly, and free of ambiguity, allowing both Greg and the reader to quickly grasp the information. This clarity contrasts with the otherwise tense and uncertain atmosphere of the story, showing how moments of straightforward communication can ground the narrative. At the same time, by providing just enough detail without confusion, Hadi's statement reinforces his role as a rational character while balancing the suspense of the horror context with a moment of comprehension for the audience.

##### Data 6:

Gerg : "What happened?"

Cyrl : "*I don't know. It took a lot of time to even find what I found. I just found a reference to it on a message board for people who like to explore abandoned places.*"

(Cawthon, 2020:47)

### **Analysis of data 6:**

In this conversation, Greg asks, "What happened?" and Cyril replies, "I don't know. It took a lot of time to even find what I found. I just found a reference to it on a message board for people who like to explore abandoned places." Cyril's response adheres to Grice's maxim of Manner because it is presented in a clear, sequential way that avoids ambiguity. He first admits his uncertainty, then explains the difficulty of his search, and finally specifies where he found the information. This orderly structure makes his answer easy for Greg and the reader to follow, even within the mysterious context. In terms of narrative function, Cyril's straightforward explanation provides clarity in an otherwise tense and uncertain situation, helping to maintain the flow of dialogue while balancing the suspense with a moment of comprehension.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the analysis, this study examines the use of Grice's Cooperative Principles in the dialogues of *Five Nights at Freddy's: Fazbear Frights #2 Fetch* by Scott Cawthon, focusing specifically on the application of the four conversational maxims: Quantity, Quality, Relevance, and Manner. The findings show that the Quantity maxim is the most frequently applied, followed by the Quality maxim, while the Relevance and Manner maxims are applied less frequently. This pattern reflects the communication style in the novel, where characters often provide adequate and honest information to maintain credibility, while at the same time leaving certain aspects vague or ambiguous to preserve the horror atmosphere.

More broadly, these results highlight the pragmatic strategies used in fictional dialogue. The Maxim of Quantity shows how characters balance the amount of information provided, forming efficient, plot-based exchanges. The Maxim of Quality emphasizes the importance of honesty and reliability, which builds trust between characters and readers, even when the overall narrative conceals a larger mystery. The Relevance Principle shows how the coherence of dialogue is maintained, ensuring that conversations remain focused on the events at hand. Finally, the Manner Principle reveals how clarity and directness serve to reduce confusion, although in some cases ambiguity is deliberately introduced to heighten tension.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce Grice's assertion that effective communication depends on cooperation between participants. However, in a literary context, adherence to the principles is not merely about communicative efficiency but also a stylistic and narrative device. In *Fetch*, the author uses these principles to balance clarity and ambiguity, thereby heightening tension and deepening the psychological impact of the horror genre.

In conclusion, the application of Cooperative Principles in fictional narratives such as *Five Nights at Freddy's* demonstrates that pragmatic analysis provides valuable insights into character interactions and narrative construction. This study

not only contributes to our understanding of how language functions in everyday communication, but also illustrates its role as a powerful tool in literature. Future research could expand this study by comparing the use of maxims across different genres of fiction, or by exploring how readers interpret violations of maxims in relation to tension and character development. Such studies would further reveal the dynamic interaction between pragmatics and literary creativity, strengthening the bridge between linguistic theory and literary analysis.

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