



Flouting the Cooperative Principle in BoJack Horseman: A Reflection of the Main Character

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Abstract

This study investigates how conversational maxims are flouted by the main character in Episode 1 of Season 1 of the adult animated series BoJack Horseman, and how such flouting contributes to character development and narrative function. Grounded in Grice's Cooperative Principle, the analysis adopts qualitative content analysis supported by frequency counts to identify types and strategies of maxim flouting. The findings show that BoJack most frequently flouts the maxims of Relation and Quality through topic shifting, sarcasm, and hyperbole. These strategies function pragmatically to avoid accountability, express self-defense and denial, and generate humor while advancing the narrative. By linking maxim flouting to character psychology rather than merely describing occurrences, the study contributes to pragmatic analysis of characterization in adult animated series.

Keywords: *Cooperative Principle; BoJack Horseman; Conversational Maxims, Flouting maxims; Narrative themes.*

Introduction

Human interaction essentially depends on effective communication, where spoken language functions as a primary tool. However, communication is not solely about the words used, it also relies on unspoken cultural norms and expectations that guide conversational behavior. These implicit norms, termed conversational maxims were first formalized by Grice (1975) under the Cooperative Principle, which includes four key maxims: Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. These maxims ensure that speakers contribute meaningfully, truthfully, relevantly, and clearly in conversations, reducing ambiguity and misunderstanding (Lakoff, 1997).

Despite their intended function, these maxims are frequently flouted, either deliberately or unintentionally. In other word, the speaker wishes to prompt the hearer to look for a meaning which is different from the expressed meaning. (Thomas,

1995). Such strategies are common in real-life communication and are often used to convey sarcasm, irony, humor, or criticism, leading to rich pragmatic meaning. Understanding these flouting's is essential for deeper insight into how people construct and interpret meaning in interaction.

Several studies have examined the flouting of the conversational maxims. The first study was done by Ali (2022), entitled "The Analysis of Floating Maxim on Isran Noor in Mata Najwa Talk Show". the study found that Noor frequently violated maxims of relevance, quantity, quality, and manner, with relevance being the most common violation. The next research was done by Nela (2024), entitled "Types of Flouting Maxim In "Me Before You" Movie". The research showed that in the film Me Before You, there are 16 flouting maxims. The next research was written by Nastiti (2024), entitled "Flouting Maxim Produced by Lay Zhang in I Heart Radio Interview: A Pragmatic Analysis".

This research analyzed instances of maxim flouting in the dialogue between Ellie (host) and Lay (artist) during observed interview. Another study was done by Kabanga (2022), entitled "Extensive Flouting of Maxim Quantity in Media RRI of Jayapura". This study examines the linguistic features used by Papuan people to communicate ideas within the TOB-CER program broadcast on RRI. The last research was done by Kurniawan (2023), entitled "Flouting Relevance Maxim Benefits of Hillary Clinton's President Candidate Debate on 2016". This research analyzes the communicative benefits of Hillary Clinton's use of relevance maxim flouting during the 2016 U.S. presidential candidate debate.

While the above studies demonstrate the applicability of Grice's theory across various communicative settings, such as politic, film, movie, and interview. They generally focus on formal discourse pr conventional cinematic narratives. There is a noticeable lack of research that explores how flouting the maxims contributes to characterization in adult animated series, which often feature layered dialogues, satire and complex emotional tones. Specifically, there is a lack of research that examine s how flouting the conversational maxims contributes to character development in adult animated series.

While many studies identify the types of maxims that are flouted, few explore how these flouting reflect or shape a character's personality, motivates, or relationships within narrative. In these cases of BoJack Horseman, a series known for its psychologically complex protagonist and nuanced dialogue.

Based on the identified gap, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What types of Gricean maxims are flouted in the first episode of BoJack Horseman season 1?
2. What pragmatic functions do these flouting serve in the development of BoJack's character and the narrative?

The objective of this study is to categorize and analyze instances of maxim flouting in the first episode, shedding light on how these violations contribute to character development, humor, storytelling. The novelty of this research lies in its application of pragmatic theory to adult animated series *BoJack Horseman*, analyzing how the flouting of conversational maxims enriches the narrative and shapes audience perception of character identity and social critique.

Method

This study investigates the strategic use of conversational maxim flouting in *BoJack Horseman* Series in the first episode of season 1. The study focuses on analyzing utterances from the main character in an animated series through the lens of Grice's Cooperative Principle. It aims to explore how flouting the conversational maxims—Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner, functions as a strategic tool for character development and narrative progression. *BoJack* was chosen as the subject of the study due to his complex personality and frequent use of indirect, sarcastic, and often self-deprecating language, which offers rich material for pragmatic analysis. His interaction with other characters such as Todd and Princess Carolyn provide various conversational contexts in which maxim flouting occurs.

The data was collected through a multi-step process of transcription, observation, and selection. First, the episode was watched multiple times to gain contextual understanding and ensure the accuracy of the transcript, which was cross-checked with available subtitles. Discrepancies were manually corrected to faithfully capture *BoJack*'s spoken language. Next, *BoJack*'s utterances were examined to identify instances of maxim flouting, focusing on both verbal and non-verbal cues such as tone, pauses, and facial expressions. Utterances that showed signs of indirectness, exaggeration, sarcasm, or ambiguity. These were then filtered through rigorous criteria to ensure that only utterances with clear evidence of maxim flouting, supported by context, were selected. Finally, the utterances were classified according to the type of maxim flouted and the communicative strategy used, aligning each with the character's emotional state or narrative function.

This research employs a qualitative descriptive method, supported by quantitative analysis. The qualitative analysis involved interpreting the pragmatic meaning behind each utterance and identifying how the flouting behavior contributes to *BoJack*'s characterization and the thematic content of the episode. Content analysis is one of the qualitative approaches which enables the researcher to study human behavior through indirect way such as analyzing their communication in written content (Hamidah, 2022). Quantitative analysis was applied by counting and tabulating the frequency of each type of maxim flouting to identify patterns in *BoJack*'s communication. The findings were organized in tables that show the type of flouted maxim, the context of the utterances, the implied meaning, and the communicative impact on both other characters and the audience. This dual approach allows the study to highlight both the strategic use and narrative significance of *BoJack*'s language.

Results

The result showed that BoJack the main character in the series flout all types of cooperative principle’s maxims along with each reason. The researcher presents the data in the tables and the frequency of each type in order to offer more specific information about the occurrence of the data in the film.

Table 1. Types of flouting maxim found in The BoJack Season 1 Eps. 1

Types Of Flouting Maxims	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Quantity	1	8.33%
Quality	4	33.33%
Relation	5	41.67%
Manner	2	16.67%
Total	12	100%

Analysis of BoJack Horseman season 1, episode 1 reveals 12 instances of flouted conversational maxims, with Flouting Maxim of Relation (41.67%) being the most frequent, indicating frequent topic shift and digressions. Flouting Maxim of Quality (33.33%) was also significant, suggesting instances of false or exaggerated statements, contributing to the character’s satirical tone. Less frequent were Flouting Maxim of Manner (16.67%) and Flouting Maxim of Quantity (8.33%). Suggesting that while present, these communication styles were less central than the prevalent use of irrelevant conversation and misleading statements.

Table 2. The strategies of flouting maxim found in The BoJack Season 1 Eps. 1

Types of Flouting Maxim	Strategies of Flouting Maxim	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Flouting Maxim of Quantity	Giving too much information	1	8.33%
Flouting Maxim of Quality	Hyperbole	2	16.67%
	Sarcasm	2	16.67%
Flouting Maxim of Relation	Changing the Topic	4	33.33%
	Giving Irrelevant Answer	1	8.33%
Flouting Maxim of Manner	Giving ambiguous information	1	8.33%
	Being not Brief	1	8.33%
Total		12	100%

The following section discusses the findings presented above, categorizing the types and strategies of maxim flouting within their detailed contexts.

Discussion

Flouting Maxim of Quantity

Data 1



Picture 1

Todd : "Are you drunk?"

BoJack : "**Todd, I weigh over 1,200 pounds. It takes a lot of beer to get me drunk**" (06.01)

The context of this dialogue shows that Todd suspects BoJack is drunk. However, BoJack, instead of answering the question directly, provides a long and convoluted answer. The maxim of quantity is flouted when people convey less or more information about their utterance (Erdayani, 2022). This illustrates BoJack's tendency to avoid direct questions and offer twisted responses, even when a simple and direct answer would be more appropriate.

His lengthy response can be interpreted as an attempt to avoid admitting that he is drunk. BoJack's answer flouts the maxim of quantity because he provides more information than necessary to answer Todd's question. Todd's question, "Are you drunk?", requires a simple answer: yes or no. Instead, BoJack gives an unnecessarily long explanation about his weight and the amount of beer it takes to get him drunk. He provides too much information than it's required, thus flouting Grice's cooperative principle which emphasizes on relevant information but not too much.

Flouting Maxim of Quality

Data 2



Picture 2

Doctor : “Well, you just had another anxiety attack.

BoJack : “And Entertainment Weekly said I wasn't consistent. **Really, not even a pity laugh? I did almost die.** (18.35)

Todd : “Ha”.

That excerpt from BoJack illustrates flouting of the maxim of quality, specially through hyperbole. BoJack’s statement, “I did almost die,” is clearly an exaggeration. He is no literally near death, but uses hyperbole to emphasize his distress and garner the relatively minor anxiety attack. The humor comes from the difference between his over-the-top words and the less serious reality. The humorous situation in conversation happens when there is an incongruity between what is required and what is provided by the speaker and interlocutors (Maulida, 2022). It shows how he’s self-absorbed and struggles to express his true emotions. The joke is that being overly dramatic, and the lack of sympathy makes the situation even funnier.

Data 3



Picture 3

BoJack : “Todd, on my grave, I want it to say that I was born in 1975.”

Todd : “No one's gonna believe....”

BoJack : “Damn it, **can't you respect a dying man's wish?**” (16.40)

In this dialogue, BoJack talks to Todd and expresses a rather unusual request, he wants to be written on his gravestone that he was born on 1975, even though that is not factually accurate. Todd, understandably hesitant, responds by pointing out that no one would actually believe that. In response, BoJack dramatically declares, “Damn it, can't you respect a dying man's wish?” While the line is delivered with emotional intensity, the reality is that BoJack is not dying at all.

This moment is a clear example of him flouting the maxim of quality. The maxim of quality specifically requires that speakers contribute information they believe to be true and for which they have adequate evidence. BoJack's statement flouts this maxim, not because he is misinformed or confused, but because he is deliberately choosing to exaggerate in theatrical and manipulative way. He knows very well that he is not dying, yet he adopts the persona of a dying man to dramatize the situation and gain emotional leverage over Todd.

This conscious bending of the truth is not intended to deceive in the traditional sense, but rather to create a particular emotional effect, to pressure Todd into complying with his request without further questioning. Todd, like the audience, recognizes that BoJack's words should not be taken literally, which means the implicature of the statement lies not in its literal truth but in its intended emotional impact. By flouting the maxim in this way, BoJack is not being dishonest, he is using language strategically, drawing on exaggeration and irony to influence the interaction. This kind of behavior is characteristic of BoJack's complex personality throughout the series, where moments of vulnerability are often undercut by performative dramatics, revealing a man who both craves sincerity and deflects it with theatricality.

Data 4



Picture 4

BoJack : “First of all, we're not roommates. You are my houseguest”.

Todd : “Well, we don't need to put labels on things.”

BoJack : **“You sleep on my couch, and you don't pay rent. I've had tapeworms that were less parasitic”.** (03.23)

In this data, BoJack's use the strategy of sarcasm to flouts the maxim of quality by making a statement that is not meant to be taken literally. Grice (1975) states the statement “Do not say what you believe to be false and do not say anything which has lack adequate evidence”. It means that a speaker is forbidden to lie. It will make a hearer to believe untruth information and develops a misunderstanding in the future, so that a speaker should give sufficient evidence to support truthful information (Hamidah, 2022). When BoJack says, “I've had tapeworms that were less parasitic,” he is clearly not asserting that Todd is literally a tapeworm.

Instead, he is using this sarcasm to illustrate how burdensome he finds Todd's presence to be. This comparison serves to convey his frustration and annoyance in a humorous yet painful way. The humor arises from the absurdity of the comparison, making it entertaining for audience, while the underlying message reflects BoJack's feelings of being overwhelmed by Todd's lack of contribution and independence. By using sarcasm, BoJack can express his annoyance without directly confronting Todd, which adds a layer of complexity to their interaction.

Data 5



Picture 5

Mr. Peanutbutter : “Mr Peanutbutter and BoJack Horseman in the same room. What is this, a crossover episode?”

BoJack : **“You know, that gets funnier every time.”** (08.50)

Mr. Peanutbutter: “You're being sarcastic, but I think it does actually get funnier every time.”

The dialogue between Mr. Peanutbutter and BoJack in this scene is a clear example of flouting the maxim of quality through the use of sarcasm. When Mr. Peanutbutter cheerfully says “Mr Peanutbutter and BoJack Horseman in the same room. What is this, a crossover episode?” he is making a self-aware, meta joke that references the common television trope of crossover episodes. BoJack, known for his cynical and sarcastic personality, his respond “You know, that gets funnier every

time.”

It sounds like a compliment at first, but his tone and expression and the context make it clear that he does not actually find the joke funny. In fact, he likely finds it repetitive and annoying. By saying something that he does not believe to be true. BoJack is intentionally flouting the maxim of quality, which states that speakers should not say what they believe to be false. This is characteristic of sarcasm, a rhetorical strategy in which the literal meaning of a statement differs from the speaker’s actual intended meaning. BoJack’s sarcastic remark functions as a way to express frustration or criticism indirectly, cloaked in what appears to be praise. Mr. Peanutbutter’s response “You’re being sarcastic, but I think it does actually get funnier every time.”, shows that he recognizes BoJack’s sarcasm.

Flouting Maxim of Relation

Data 6



Picture 6

Charlie : “You’re telling me that you’re drunk right now”

BoJack : **“Is it just me, or am I nailing this interview? I kind of feel like I’m nailing it.”** (01.07)

This dialogue takes place in an interview between BoJack Horseman, an actor going through a tough time in his life, and an interviewer. BoJack’s statement “I am nailing this interview” occurs in the context of him being drunk, but he doesn’t want to admit it. A speaker flouts the maxim of relation when they become non relevant but they have reason behind it and it is usually because they have something to hide or they say something indirectly (Pratiwi, 2023).

In this situation, he does not provide a relevant response to the actual state of affairs, which is that he is in no condition to be interviewed. Instead, he says something that contradicts reality. This shows that BoJack is flouting the maxim of relation because his statement is not appropriate to the context and does not address the main issue, which is his condition of being drunk. By using that sentence, BoJack indirectly implies (implicature) that he wants to divert attention from the sensitive

topic, his drunken state and create a false impression that everything is going well.

The statement “I am nailing this interview” is also the form of irony, as the reality is quite the opposite, he is not ‘handling the interview well’. Irony is the use of language that conveys a meaning contrary to its literal meaning, with the aim of conveying a different message by implication and creating a humorous effect or conveying a more complex message (Cutting, 2002). The implicature of this utterance is BoJack’s attempt to hide or cover up his intoxication by pretending to be confident and in control. This can be seen as a form of denial or self-defense mechanism. Thus, through this utterance, BoJack not only conveys irony but also implies an intention to divert his conversation partner’s focus in order to conceal the actual reality.

Data 7



Picture 7

Pinky : “You don’t have anything?”

BoJack : **“Hey you got your electricity back. Good for you.”**

In this scene, Pinky (the editor at Penguin Publishing) is speaking to BoJack about the progress of his writing. At this point in the series, Penguin Publishing is in serious financial trouble. The company is on the verge of bankruptcy due to the string of poor business decisions, one of which includes spending \$20 million on marketing a failed young adult franchise called *The Swamp Monster of Malibu*.

This investment turned out to be a massive financial loss, and now the company is relying on BoJack’s book as a last hope to recover. When Pinky, clearly stressed and desperate, asks “You don’t have anything?” expecting an update on manuscript, BoJack avoids the question entirely. Instead, he responds with “Hey, you got your electricity back. Good for you.” Rather than addressing the issue at hand, the book he was supposed to be working on, BoJack shifts the topic to something completely unrelated and trivial. In this dialogue, BoJack clearly flouts the maxim of relation.

It is the condition when there is something irrelevant to answering the previous conversation (Yustika, 2022). When Pinky poses a serious and direct question related to the progress of the book, BoJack responds with a completely irrelevant comment. He does not address the issue, avoids the questions, and shifts

the focus of the conversation to something that has nothing to do with the company's crisis or his responsibilities. This kind of changing the topic is a common strategy used to avoid uncomfortable situations or conversations. BoJack's response is not due to a misunderstanding, it is a deliberate evasion. By choosing a talk about something insignificant, he avoids having to confront the fact that he has not made progress on the book, and that his inaction is affecting other people's lives and careers. His comment about the electricity is not only irrelevant but also shows a lack empathy for Pinky's distress.

Data 8



Picture 8

Todd : “Do you just take those DVDs with you everywhere you go?”

BoJack : “**Linus walked around with a blanket. No one gave him shit for it.**”
(17.15)

In this context, BoJack, Todd, and Princess Carolyn are at the hospital after BoJack experienced a panic attack. Despite the stressful situation, BoJack plays a DVD of one of his movies, seemingly as a comfort or escape mechanism. Todd, intrigued and seeking understand BoJack's behavior, asks the questions: “Do you go with those DVDs with you everywhere you go?” However, instead of answering a straightforward and pertinent response, BoJack replies, “Linus walked around with a blanket. No one gave him shit for it.”

This statement flouts the maxim of relation because the answer provided is not directly related to the question posed. Todd's questions concern the rationale behind BoJack's habit of carrying DVDs, yet BoJack offers an unrelated analogy that fails to explicitly address the question. BoJack's response can be interpreted as a subtle form of self-defense. He aims to convey that his habit of carrying DVDs is perfectly normal in his view, and he resents being judged for it. By drawing a parallel to Linus (the Peanuts character always carrying his security blanket).

BoJack attempts to express that possessing peculiar habits is not inherently unusual or wrong, but rather a personal characteristic. In essence, he implicitly communicates: “I have habits that might seem odd, but that is not wrong. Do not judged me.” Consequently, BoJack's response can be called flouts the maxim of relation, as he shifts the focus away from the central question by providing

information that lacks direct relevance.

Flouting Maxim of Manner

Data 9



Picture 9

Charlie : “Well, let's talk about real life. What have you been doing since the show's cancellation 18 years ago?”

BoJack : **“That's a great question, Charlie. I, uh Uh, I Um”** (02.11)

The dialogue takes place during an interview between BoJack Horseman, an actor who was once famous for the TV series "Horsin' Around," and Charlie, the interviewer. The interview takes place eighteen years after the cancellation of the series. Charlie attempts to explore BoJack's life and experiences following his period of fame, inquiring about his activities and lifestyle since the show's conclusion. However, BoJack displays discomfort and reluctance to discuss his past with honesty and transparency. This is apparent in his hesitant and ambiguous responses. When questioned, BoJack responds with “That's a great question, Charlie. I, uh, I, um.” This respond flouts the maxim of manner, as his delivery is unclear, disorganized, and riddled with uncertainty.

The inclusion of discourse markers such as ‘uh,’ ‘uh,’ and ‘um’ signifies a lack of clarity and precision in conveying information. BoJack's hesitation and stammering indicate an unwillingness to answer the question directly. This can be interpreted as an expression of shame, guilt, or even an awareness that he has not achieved anything meaningful since the show Horsin' Around ended. He avoids discussing his past because he perceives himself as a failure, and he prefers ambiguity to confronting the painful truth. Therefore, BoJack's response in this situation not only represents a flouting of the maxim of manner but also reveals a psychological state characterized by regret a dissatisfaction with his own life.

Conclusion

This study shows that maxim flouting in *BoJack Horseman* is a systematic pragmatic strategy that contributes to character development and narrative meaning. *BoJack* predominantly flouts the maxims of Relation and Quality to evade accountability, express emotional conflict, and generate humor. By integrating conversational implicature with character analysis, the study extends pragmatic research beyond descriptive classification to interpretive explanation. Limitations include the focus on a single episode and character; future research may expand the scope to comparative analyses across episodes or characters to further explore pragmatic variation in adult animation.

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