



## Flouting of Grice's maxims by Jordanian speakers in everyday communication

Othman Khalid Al-Shboul<sup>a 1</sup> 

<sup>a</sup>Jadara University, Irbid-Jordan

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### Abstract

The study utilizes Grice's (1975) conversational maxims (quality, quantity, relation, and manner) which make up the cooperative principle to investigate how and why Jordanians flout the maxims in their everyday conversations. There are many studies that examine speakers' non-observance of the conversational maxims in everyday conversations. However, this study aims to advance pragmatic theory by illuminating the new pragmatic strategies of Jordanian speakers' non-observance of maxims (flouting) and classifying them in accordance with these Grice's maxims for the purpose of developing a framework that can help researchers classify data into pragmatic strategies and linguistic forms based on flouting of these maxims and how this flouting functions. This study also aims to show how nonobservance constitutes an important factor in helping the addressee realize the intended meaning and maintain stronger relationships between Jordanian speakers as well. Furthermore, this study identifies the most prominent maxims that are flouted in such everyday conversations. Among the main findings is that Jordanian speakers flout maxims as an indication or hint for an implicature that the speaker makes for positive purposes that aim to maintain and strengthen social intimacy. Additionally, this study offers more in-depth explanations of the relationships between flouting's dimensions, drawing on micro, meso and macro concepts as one way to depict how implicature is made by the speaker and grasped by the hearer for securing social goals in Jordanian Arabic.

*Keywords:* cooperative principle; flouting; Grice's maxims; implicature; Jordanian speakers

## 1. Introduction

There are many techniques that people draw on in their social interactions. They employ such techniques for the purpose of making meaning. In this regard, people may prefer to make meaning that can be characterized as implicit rather than explicit. They prefer to make meaning in such a way in order to direct the hearer's attention to that meaning using different strategies or techniques (e.g. flouting of maxims). The hearer's role in turn is to grasp the intended meaning based on the relevant features that the hearer needs to select. Therefore, this paper investigates these techniques which are considered the speaker's non-observance of maxims.

This study explores the new linguistic strategies and their pragmatic functions in Jordanian Arabic Yasin, A. R., & Hussein, I. (2021). This non-observance (flouting) constitutes an important aspect/tool to help the hearer understands what is meant rather than what is said. According to Grice (1975), flouting occurs when a speaker does not follow the quantity, quality, manner and/or relation maxim in

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author

E-mail address: [o.alshboul@jadara.edu.jo](mailto:o.alshboul@jadara.edu.jo)

the normal course of a conversation among two or more people. The speaker intentionally skips a maxim for the sake of making an implicature that he/she wants the hearer to grasp.

The paper demonstrates that the hearer is able to infer the intended meaning (the conversational implicature). This is mainly attributed to the relevant features of context that the hearer selects according to the relevance theory which makes communication successful (Cutting, 2015). This involves shared knowledge between interlocutors and other contextual clues (e.g. setting and topic). These features are all very important for the hearer that he/she relies on to perceive the meaning or miscommunication is highly likely to occur.

Speakers generally do not follow these maxims due to the fact they prefer indirectness to directness strategies of linguistic communication. They often do not bide with these principles. Thus, they flout these maxims for a purpose, which is to direct the hearer to an implication. Flouting of maxims (quantity, quality, relation and manner) is justified to a large extent as long as pragmatic functions are achieved. Therefore, this flouting itself constitutes an important aspect of communication.

### *1.1. Literature Review*

Communication is an integral aspect of our social life. Many scholars (e.g. Grice, 1975 & Grice, 1989) therefore have studied communication and set up principles and rules upon which communication is judged effective and successful. However, some of these principles or rules may not be followed in every instance of people's communication as people communicate for different purposes and in different settings. Many studies (Kurniati & Hanidar, 2018; Ibrahim, Arifin & Setyowati, 2018; Puspasari & Ariyanti, 2019; Marlisa & Hidayat, 2020; Fallis, 2012; Yaqin & Shanmuganathan, 2018) were conducted to investigate speakers' observance and nonobservance of such principles or rules.

Grice (1975) set up four main maxims which serve as principles that rule successful communication (p.45-47). These maxims are:

1. Maxim of Quantity: a. Make your contribution as informative as is required. b. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
2. Maxim of Quality: a. Try to make your contribution one that is true. b. Do not say what you believe to be false. c. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
3. Maxim of Relation: Be relevant.
4. Maxim of Manner: a. Avoid obscurity of expression. b. Avoid ambiguity. c. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity). d. Be orderly.

These maxims together make up the Grice's cooperative principle: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice, 1989:26). According to Grice, this principle maintains that successful communication depends on to what extent the speaker is committed to this principle. However, successful communication is not necessarily secured by this criterion in many languages and dialects. For example, Yaqin & Shanmuganathan (2018) found that maxim's nonobservance can even secure clarity to the Sask dialects among speakers. This demonstrates that those maxims are not necessarily universal, due to the fact that the cultural background, language and topic play an important role in communication (Davies 2007, Simons 2017).

In the literature, this nonobservance is discussed under different categories- flouting, violation, infringing- based on the reason [why] the speaker doesn't observe or follow a maxim. In this regard, flouting occurs "when speakers.....expect hearers to appreciate the meaning implied" (Cutting, 2015, p.25), where they prompt hearers to a certain implicature to perceive (Cutting, p.25 & Thomas, 1995).

As for violating a maxim, speakers intentionally generate a misleading implicature, aiming to mislead the hearer (Cutting, 2015, p.25 & Thomas, 1995). For infringement, speakers' linguistic performance is imperfect in certain utterances.

Many Studies (e.g. Fallis 2012, Yaqin & Shanmuganathan, 2018, Cutting, 2015) found that flouting performs several pragmatic functions. That is, speakers flout a maxim to create a particular implicature. It can be defined as “a component of speaker meaning that constitutes an aspect of what is meant in a speaker's utterance without being part of what is said” (Horn, 2006, p.3). This implicature is delivered to the hearer through different pragmatic devices such as sarcasm, creating humor, exaggeration and among others. The hearers' role, in turn, is to realize the implicature behind the speakers' flouting “speakers implicate, hearers infer” (Horn, 2006, p.6). With regards to the occurrences of flouting of maxims in language, Manurung (2009) found that the maxim of quality is the most being flouted for the purpose of making jokes followed by the maxim of quantity for the sake of stressing something. The same finding by Sari and Musyahda (2016), with regards to the maxim of quality, they found that this maxim flouted for making humor and emphasizing information. Although flouting this maxim may show impoliteness in some cases (resulting in, for example, sarcasm and irony), it aims to maintain social intimacy. Impoliteness thus may function as politeness in everyday communication (Manfred, 1997).

What makes the hearer grasp the intended meaning is what is the most relevant to the situation (e.g. the hearer's inquiry). “There are potentially relevant inputs all around us, but we cannot attend to them all. What makes an input worth picking out from the mass of competing stimuli is not just that it is relevant, but that it is MORE relevant than any alternative input available to us at that time.” (Wilson & Sperber, 2006, p.609). So, the relevant inputs “activate an appropriate set of contextual assumptions and point you toward an intended conclusion” (Wilson & Sperber, 2006, p.611). They (Wilson and Sperber, 2006) also maintain that although the intended meaning goes beyond linguistic content of the utterance, “the decoded logical form of an utterance is an important clue to the speaker's intentions” (Wilson & Sperber, 2006, p.611). Many scholars (Lakoff and Turner, 1989) studied meaning in terms of intentions and how it is linked to linguistic form.

## 1.2. Research Questions

1. What are the pragmatic devices of speakers' flouting of maxims in Jordanian Arabic?
2. What are linguistic forms employed by Jordanians to flout the maxims?
3. What is the most and least flouted maxim in Jordanian Arabic?
4. Does gender affect the frequency of flouting of maxims?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Data Collection

The research is qualitative as the data collected from informal settings. The researcher tape-recorded conversations of 12 hours at different times and in different places for the participants over four weeks. The participants (four males and three females) were seven Jordanians (Bilal et al., 2018); with different ages ranging from 25 to 36-year-old (they speak Jordanian Arabic). In these conversations, they were talking about everyday topics related to their own lives. To obtain authentic data as much as possible, participants were not asked to talk about specific topics. They communicated in domestic settings where they usually interact. Consent was obtained to record their interactions.

### 2.2. Data Analysis

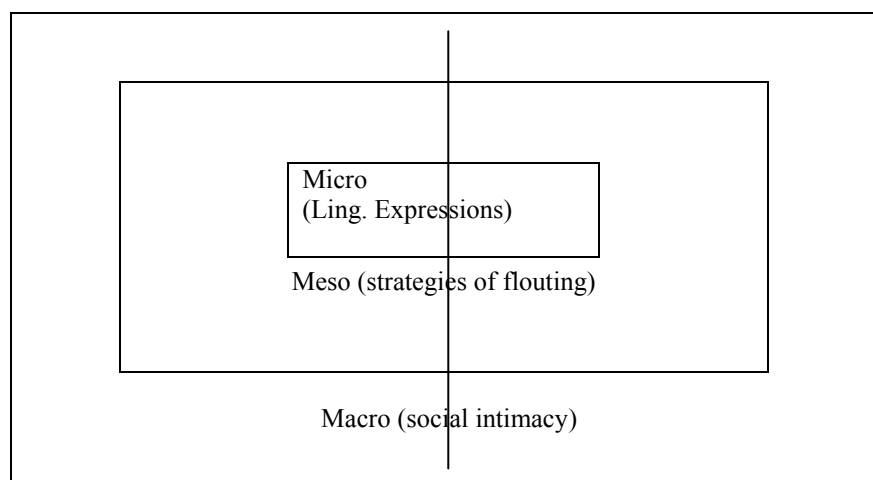
The researcher transcribed these conversations on paper and then identified the occurrences of flouting of the four maxims (quantity, quality, manner and relation). Guided by Paul Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle theory, the researcher classified these occurrences into groups based on which maxim (quality, quantity, relation, and manner) is being flouted and what pragmatic function does the flouting perform. These occurrences are classified for the purpose of associating these instances of flouting with these functions and linguistic means. The paper discussed some examples from the data which I translated into English, between two or more participants, talking about some everyday topics. The participants are of equal status. There are no big age gaps. The data analysis involves identification, classification and quantification of the data where quantitative findings back up the qualitative analysis.

### **3. Results**

Jordanian speakers flout the maxim of quantity, quality, relation, or manner for different purposes using different pragmatic strategies including sarcasm, exaggeration and topic-shifting. By flouting a maxim, the speaker directs the hearer's attention to an implicature that he/she makes, in an indirect way, assuming that the hearer is able to catch this implicature, based on the shared background between them. "The speaker implies a function different from the literal meaning of form" (Cutting, 2015, p.25).

Although the participants flout the maxims, the present study demonstrates that the addressee not only can grasp the intended meaning (get the speaker's implicature) created, based on the shared knowledge and clues, but also this flouting helps the speaker direct the addressee's attention to the implicit meaning (a particular message) that the speaker makes. The speaker believes that this message cannot be conveyed or realized unless he/she flouts a maxim. This demonstrates that flouting is an important aspect of language communication that helps speakers grasp the intended meaning in Jordanian Arabic. Besides, flouting of those maxims, despite seemingly impolite, can maintain social relationships or intimacy between speakers.

This study benefits from the micro, meso and macro concepts in the literature (e.g. Fairclough, 2015) to clarify the main dimensions of flouting (linguistic expressions, strategies of flouting and social intimacy) as one way to depict the relationship between how implicature is made by the speaker and grasped by the hearer for social goals in Jordanian Arabic. As figure 1 indicates, pragmatic strategies at the meso level mediate between form (linguistic expressions) at the micro level and goal (social intimacy) at the macro level. That is, the speaker formulates language, at the micro level in ways to produce a particular meaning at the meso level. This meaning aims to achieve social goals, including social intimacy at the macro level. Simply put, Speakers, therefore, through strategies of flouting, constructed by linguistic forms, prompt the hearer to a particular meaning. This meaning (the implicature) in turn aims at maintaining and strengthening social relationships between speakers. There is thus an overlap between these three levels.



**Figure 1.** Dimensions of flouting of maxims

Linguistic forms or expressions - micro level- are where language is prepared to make implicature. Pragmatic devices – meso level- are where implicature is made by the speaker and delivered to and inferred by the hearer. Social intimacy -macro level- is the social goal where it has impacts on people.

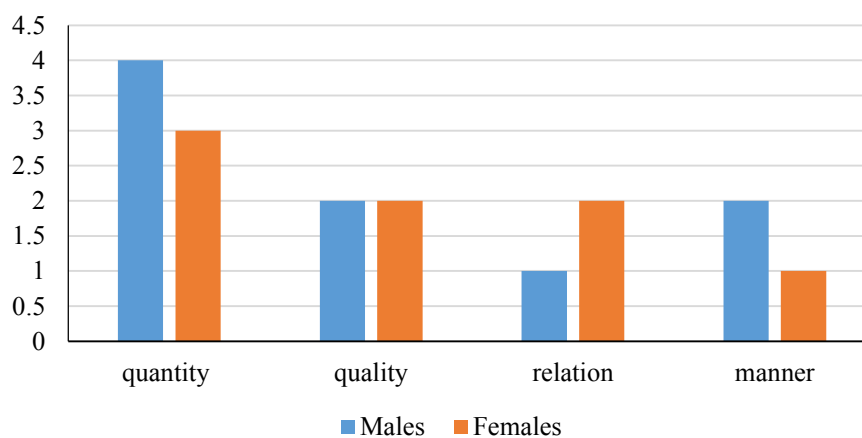
Table 1 below shows that flouting of quantity maxim is performed using linguistic redundancy strategy by which speakers offer justifications when flouting this maxim. Jordanians flout the maxim of quality by using different metaphorical expressions to exaggerate or to create humor. For the maxim of relation, Jordanians used questions -making strategy to flout this maxim so they distract and shift to another topic. As for the maxim of manner, Jordanian speakers used ambiguous expressions and indefinite lexical items (e.g. nothing serious and one day) as one way to refuse what is being asked.

**Table 1.** Flouting of Grice' Maxims: Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner

	Maxim	Frequency of occurrences of flouting	Proportion of flouting of maxims	Strategies of flouting	Linguistic forms
1	Quantity	14	33.3%	Justification	Linguistic Redundancy
2	Quality	13	30.0%	Sarcasm or Exaggeration (hyperbole)	Metaphorical expressions/exaggerating expressions
3	Relation	7	16.6%	Topic shifting Distraction	Questions
4	Manner	8	19.0%	Avoidance	Indefinite lexical items Using ambiguous expressions

The main findings of the study showed that there were forty-two occurrences of flouting (where the participants do not observe any of these four maxims). Twenty-three of these occurrences of flouting are made by male speakers. However, the female speakers flouted nineteen times. According to Figure 1, there are no big differences between the two genders in terms of the frequency of maxims flouted. This indicates that gender does not affect speakers' frequency and choices of flouting in Jordanian Arabic. Figure 2 also indicates that the maxim of quantity is the most common maxim being flouted. This is attributed to the type of setting where speakers communicate with one another. It is characterized by causality and informality, where people tend to speak more than required. In those

settings, the participants talk about everyday topics and the language they use is informal. Besides, they most times socially communicate in their spare time, talking about everyday topics. All of these factors lead them to say more than required resulting in flouting the maxim of quantity.



**Figure 2.** The proportion of occurrences of maxims' flouting by males and females

The maxim of quality is the second most flouted maxim. The high frequency of occurrences of the flouting of this quality maxim is attributed to the fact that Jordanian speakers prefer to deliver messages (implicature) indirectly to the hearer. They, therefore, through pragmatic devices of flouting, such as sarcasm, constructed by linguistic forms, prompt the hearer to a particular meaning. Then, the maxim of manner and relation in the third and fourth positions respectively.

#### 4. Discussion

This section discusses some examples of maxim's flouting extracted from the sample collected for this study from different settings. The participants mainly were communicating in the house and in the street. They all well know each other as they are all relatives and friends.

##### 4.1. Maxim of Quantity

Following this maxim, speakers should be as informative as is required. This means that he/she should provide information as necessary without redundancy.

In this example, speakers are neighbors. They have shops and they are communicating in front of their shops in the street.

A: mata bidak tru7 3albank (when will you go to the bank?)

B: Walla mithal mantih 3arif ilshughul fuwq raasi bas inshallh althnin eljay bikuun 3indi wagit akthar wi elwadhi3 ahsan. Wbaruu7 3 albank wba3mal il mu3amalih (As you know, I performed many tasks this week but next Monday I don't have much work so I can hopefully go")

A: laha darajih 3indkuw DaghiT shughul hai elayyaam (To this extent do you have work these days?)

Here in this example, speaker B flouts the maxim of quantity as he clearly provides more information than necessary to answer speaker A's question. Speaker B's answer is then characterized with linguistic redundancy. In the first expression, he flouts the maxim of quantity. He could have answered the speaker's A question in a more direct way, and hence in much fewer words. But he

resorted to this strategy as he is answering speaker A. Besides, speaker B uses this strategy on the basis that they are friends and relatives and are each is willing for making exchanges. Also, such exchanges occur at their spare time and thereby in informal settings, where more unrelated information is provided. “This explains the reason why interlocutors always gave more information than asked or required. The speakers feel that it would be curt and rude not to give or explain in full when someone enquires.” (Yaqin & Shanmuganathan, 2018, p.178). They further argue that “for these simple people, elaborating and giving lengthy responses mean being culturally and morally right and polite”. (Yaqin & Shanmuganathan, 2018, p.179). Accordingly, it would be argued that such redundancy is expected. It also helps maintain the conversation between these speakers, as speaker B gives speaker A more space/freedom to ask further questions regarding the topic (To this extent do you have work these days?).

Although the hearer might be provided with more information, he/ she is able to process the most relevant information to his/her enquiry. “What makes an input worth picking out from the mass of competing stimuli is not just that it is relevant, but it is MORE relevant than any alternative input available to us at that time.” (Sperber and Wilson, 2006, p.609). People, therefore, provide much information on the topic addressed that can be relevant to the topic one way or another. However, Specific information can be much more relevant than the remaining. This flouting (less relevant information) still constitutes an important role in helping the addressee understand the speaker’s point as it facilitates his/her realization of meaning.

On the other hand, when the speaker provides less information than necessary, miscommunication is expected between the speakers, as in the extract below. Thus, there is no sufficient cooperation between the speakers in the example below.

This example involves two speakers. A husband and his wife. They are talking about the food for lunch.

Speaker A: Ma fi da3iy asakhen this food (yesterday’s food in the refrigerator)

Speaker B: Leesh (Why)

Speaker A: 3ina Ta3aam bikfy ilyuum (We have a lot of food for today’s lunch)

Speaker B: Tammam heik (That’s Okay then)

Speaker A tells speaker B that there is no need to heat the food that they were supposed to have today. Speaker 2, however, didn’t catch the message implied (that they already have food from their neighbor): he might think they will have them without heating. So, he asked about the reason when asked why or he may ask for the reason since he didn’t get what the speaker (1) means. She followed that by stating the reason for why she didn’t want to heat the food.

#### 4.2. Maxim of Quality

This maxim focuses on the kind of information provided by the speaker that it should be true and evidential.

This example involves two speakers. They are relatives. Speaker A enquires about speaker B’s car light. It was broken and didn’t work efficiently.

Speaker A: Sal7it dhaw siyyara? (Have you fixed the car headlight)

Speaker B: Lisa ba3idny (Actually not yet)

Speaker A: Gabilniy if bitsali7ha. (Meet me if you fix it)

Speaker B: Ana 3indi Town shugil bid santeen maa bakhlsuh. (You know I have tons of work. I will not have finished it in two years now)

Speaker A: Mashallah Shagheel. (God bless you. You are a hard worker)

Speaker A, in the example above, flouts the quality maxim (meet me if you fix it), but he didn't intend to deceive or mislead the addressee (speaker B), but by this flouting, he prompts speaker B to look for, and recognize, the implied meaning which is different from, in addition to, the explicit meaning. That is to say, speaker A does not literally mean to ask speaker B to meet him after he fixes the headlight of his own car, but speaker A implicitly asks speaker B to go beyond this explicit meaning (meet me if you fix it), using sarcasm (by speaking sarcastically) in an attempt to direct the addressee's (speaker B) attention to a particular message, which is that speaker A believes that speaker B will never fix it. Speaker A believes that this message cannot be conveyed unless he flouts the quality maxim. In this respect, banter which is a form of sarcasm "expresses a negative sentiment and implies a positive one. It is intended to be an expression of friendship or intimacy" (Cutting, 2015, p. 26). Speaker B, also, in turn, flouts the maxim of quality, through using hyperbole device. That is, he exaggerates his excuse by pretending that he has tons of work that he cannot accomplish even in two years. By uttering that, speaker B wants to make a message that the delay of fixing the headlight is not a matter of being lazy, as speaker A implicates, but because he (speaker B) is so busy. The speaker B's flouting of the quality maxim also indicates that he successfully caught the speaker A's implicature.

#### 4.3. *Maxim of Manner*

This maxim of manner aims at avoiding obscurity and vagueness that a conversation might have. However, flouting this maxim in Jordan indexes an implicature that the speaker wants the hearer to infer.

Speakers in this example are close friends. Speaker A is in the Speaker B's house. Speaker A invites Speaker to visit him back soon.

Speaker A: Matta ra7 tzuruuna fi ilbeit (When are you going to visit us in my house?)

Speaker B: Sadiqny 7abib azuurkum (Believe me I would like to visit you)

Speaker A: Shuu raykum youm Jum3a? (What about visiting us this Friday)

Speaker B: Enshallah Xaliha 3a tayaseer (Hopefully one day I will visit you)

Speaker A: Tayeb keef shughlak ilyuum? (Okay, how is your work going?)

Speaker B doesn't give a direct or specific answer. Speaker B tries to deviate from the topic (setting up a time for a visit), flouting the maxim of manner, initiated by speaker B, by making a turn expressing his desire for this visit (believe me I would like to visit you). But, he deviated from the topic (the speaker A's question) by using ambiguous expressions (one day) when speaker A insisted on taking a more specific answer (what about visiting us this Friday?). Thus, speaker B gives an ambiguous answer (Hopefully one day I will visit you), flouting the maxim of manner.

Furthermore, in the example below speaker B flouts the maxim of manner by using indefinite lexical item:

In this example, speakers are relatives. They are cousins.

Speaker A: Maa khabaritny shuu Saar ma3ak wma3 Sami alusbuu3 ilmaadhi. Esh mushkultuh (You didn't tell me what happened with you and Sami last week. What is wrong with him?)

Speaker B: Maa fi ishy insa 7ata ana insit ilmushkilih bukraa mumkin nru7 ida bit7ib (B: (Nothing serious. Forget it. I even forgot the issue. We can go tomorrow If you like as we are still on vacation)



Speaker B seems unwilling to cooperate although he wants to maintain the conversation, but on a different topic, as he offers justifications of why he flouts the manner maxim (nothing serious. Forget it. I even forgot even the issue). He then swiftly initiates a new move (we can go tomorrow If you like as we are still on vacation), functioning as topic- shifting. This clearly indicates that speaker B does not want to appear uncooperative at all. But he thinks that speaker A asked about is something private, which Speaker B does not like to talk about with speaker A. Thus, speaker B presupposes that the hearer (speaker A) understood this implicature. Therefore, in flouting this maxim, he directs the addressee's attention to that what he (speaker B) is asked about is something private and that speaker B would like to keep it secret. This resulted in flouting this maxim.

#### 4.4. Maxim of Relation

Coordination is something important in communication. However, jumping to another topic in the normal course of communication is considered an important strategy which the speaker may resort to for the sake of changing the topic of the conversation for different purposes. For example, conveying a message that it is as a matter of privacy.

Speakers are friends and their friend Ahmad is sick. He has been at the hospital. Speaker A direct a question to speaker B as the example below shows:

Speaker A: *Matta bukra nruu7 nzuur Ahmed?* (What time are we going to visit Ahmad tomorrow?)

Speaker B: *Keef Saar ilaan?* (How is he now?)

Speaker makes a direct question asking speaker B what time they shall visit Ahmed tomorrow. Ahmed is their friend and relative who was sick and was at hospital. But speaker B flouts the maxim of relation by making a question about Ahmed (instead of replying to his speaker A's question). In this regard, he makes an implicature which is speaker B is not thinking of visiting Ahmed tomorrow, and speaker A perceives this implication. Thus, speaker B shifts the topic from when they should visit him to, by asking a question, about his current health. Thus, instead of replying to his question- by setting up a time to visit Ahmed, he makes a question about Ahmed but unrelated to the Speaker A's (specific) question which was about setting up a visit time.

## 5. Conclusion

The current study asserts that not following or observing these maxims does not mean at all that the speaker's contribution to a conversation is not successful and /or the speaker is not cooperative. Accordingly, the principle which I came up with in this study based on this study's findings is that regardless of what and how you contribute to a conversation, your successful contribution to a conversation depends on delivering the implied meaning to the hearer so that the hearer can grasp that meaning and the function is achieved.

Based on the data analysis, it can be argued that flouting is positive and can be classified as positive politeness. That is, interlocutors neglect a maxim to maintain and strengthen social intimacy. Flouting is thus positive in the sense that it minimizes the social distance between Jordanian speakers. It mitigates the negative- threatening- face that might arise throughout communication. Hence, nonobservance is justified. For example, linguistic redundancy despite being seen as not following the quantity maxim, its use is justified due to the pragmatic function it performs.

This study also maintains that the speaker's flouting of maxims constitutes an important factor in helping the addressee realize the speaker's intended meaning. This is because pragmatic devices as jokes or exaggeration and among others serve as hints for the hear that the speaker implicates and the hearer's role is to infer what these speakers implicate. Accordingly, this flouting occurs on purpose.

Flouting is, therefore, an integral aspect of communication in Jordanian communication for many purposes including maintaining social intimacy or harmony. Thus, politeness is not conflicted. In this study, the participants preferred indirectness to directness with the result that these maxims are flouted. This is attributed to informality which the conversations in this study are characterized with. Linguists (Cutting, 2015; Grice, 1975 & 1989) assert that relevant features of context (such as shared knowledge and background) play a key role in helping the addressee realize the intended meaning. This is what makes the speaker presupposes that the hearer is able to grasp that meaning. In the light of the findings of this study, this paper asserts that the greater relevance (through shared knowledge and background), the less effort that the hearer needs to make to grasp the speaker's implicature. The paper also concludes that the relevance is not negatively impacted by hyperbole (exaggeration). Conversely, hyperbole has an important function, that is, it serves as a hint to attract the hearer's attention to the implicature made by the speaker.

## 6. Recommendations

It is recommended that a contrastive study be conducted between speakers of different languages (e.g. English and Arabic) to examine the effect of culture and language on speakers' choices of flouting of Grice's maxims. This study also recommends conducting a larger study to investigate to what extent genders, age and educational level affect flouting and what strategies that each more frequently employ when flouting the maxims. Also, this study recommends conducting a statistical analysis to investigate if the gap between speakers of different backgrounds and genders are statistically significant or not. This study also recommends to analyze data collected from two different types of settings (informal and formal) to examine how maxims are flouted and if there is a significant difference in terms of flouting.

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#### **AUTHOR BIODATA**

**Othman Khalid Al-Shboul** holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics from university of Memphis, US. He has been teaching language and linguistics courses for about eight years at the university level, including writing, reading, translation, sociolinguistics, syntax, discourse analysis, conversation analysis and many others. He graduated in May 2020. He taught composition and discourse analysis at the university of Memphis in the United States. Now he is teaching in the Department of English and Translation at Jadara University in Jordan.