

A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF MAXIM FLOUTING PERFORMED BY SOLOMON NORTHUP IN *12 YEARS A SLAVE* MOVIE

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Abstract

This research is a pragmatic study of maxim flouting in *12 Years a Slave* movie. It is aimed at analyzing the types of, strategies of, and reasons for maxim flouting performed by Solomon Northup. This research was qualitative-quantitative research, which used both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The results of the research reveal three important findings. First, there are four types of maxim flouting performed by Northup, which include quantity, quality, relevance, and manner maxim flouting. Second, there are five strategies of maxim flouting applied by Northup, which include tautology, overstatement, understatement, metaphor, and irony. Third, there are four reasons that lead Solomon Northup to flout the maxims, which include competitive, collaborative, convivial, and conflictive reasons. In terms of types, quantity maxim flouting has the highest rank. In terms of strategy, overstatement is the most frequently used. Of the four reasons for maxim flouting, conflictive reason is the most dominant.

Keywords: *Pragmatics, Maxim Flouting, Solomon Northup, 12 Years a Slave*

INTRODUCTION

Language cannot be separated from human life since it is a means of communication. It is used for many purposes, such as for socializing, expressing feeling, sharing knowledge and ideas, and others. Pragmatics is one of the studies to analyze language and its use. It is the study of meaning (Yule, 1996: 3). It studies the utterance of a speaker in a conversation, the meaning of the speaker, and also the meaning interpreted by the listener.

Grice (in Wardaugh, 2006: 293) states that conversation is a cooperative activity. In a conversation, to gain the purpose explained above, there are some rules that should be followed by the participants of the conversation. That is Cooperative Principle.

Grice (1975: 45) explains that Cooperative Principle leads the participants to make a contribution as is required in a conversation. Cooperative Principle is elaborated in four sub-principles or maxims. The four maxims are maxim of quantity, quality,

relevance, and manner. However, related to this, there are possibilities that it is observed or non-observed by the speaker.

Maxim flouting is one of the forms of non-observed Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975: 49). That is when the speaker of a conversation intentionally breaks the maxims to convey hidden meanings. In his definition, Thomas (1995: 65) explains that maxim flouting means intentionally failing to follow the maxims of Cooperative Principle without any intention to deceive or make a misunderstanding.

Maxim flouting is divided into the same number of the maxims of Cooperative Principle. It is Grice's theory that is used as the basic notion. Therefore, there are four types of maxim flouting; they are quantity maxim flouting, quality maxim flouting, relevance maxim flouting, and manner maxim flouting.

Quantity maxim flouting means that the speakers of a conversation fail to fulfill the maxim of quantity which includes whether the speakers are not as informative as is required or

more informative than is required. On the other hand, when a speaker flouts maxim of quality, the speaker fails to fulfill the maxim of quality; a maxim that requires the speaker to make a contribution that is true, that is not saying what is believed to be false and not saying that for which the speaker lacks of adequate evidence. Then, relevance maxim flouting means that the speakers of a conversation fail to be relevant in communicating. Finally, manner maxim flouting happens when there are some ambiguities in a conversation.

In terms of strategy, maxim flouting can be done in many various ways. In his book, Grundy (2000:76) states that rhetorical strategies which include figures of speech may be considered flouting the maxims of Cooperative Principle. Here, rhetorical strategies are the means of maxim flouting. These strategies include tautology, metaphor, overstatement, understatement, rhetorical question, and irony.

According to Grundy (2000:127), tautology is an expression used frequently to express a complex meaning in an easier way. Then, according to Leech (1983: 145), overstatement is a case where a speaker describes something stronger than the actual state of affairs. The opposite of overstatement is understatement (Leech, 1983: 145). It describes something weaker than the actual state of affairs. Next, Levinson (1983: 148) defines metaphor as the use of an expression in which there is a relationship between 'metaphorical' expression and 'literal' expression. Then, rhetorical question is a rhetorical strategy in which a question is used to make a statement, not to get an answer. Lastly,

irony is a figure of speech which suggests a different meaning than is said.

Dealing with reasons for maxim flouting, as Leech and Thomas remark via Mey (2001: 78), people can flout or intentionally break one of conversational maxims to lead the listener to find a hidden meaning. In his book, Leech (1983: 104) explains some illocutionary functions of saying something with some hidden meanings in order to act politely in front of the others. These illocutionary functions becomes the reasons for maxim flouting, they are competitive, convivial, collaborative, and conflictive.

Competitive reason relates to the illocutionary goal that competes with the social goal as in ordering, asking, demanding, and begging (Leech, 1983: 104). Convivial is a reason for maxim flouting where an illocutionary goal coincides with the social goal as in offering, inviting, greeting, thanking, and congratulating (Leech, 1983: 104). Collaborative happens when an illocutionary goal is indifferent to the social goal. There are asserting, reporting, announcing, and instructing in this reason (Leech, 1983: 104). Then, the last reason is conflictive reason. It is a reason where the illocutionary goal of a conversation conflicts with the social goal as in threatening, accusing, cursing, reprimanding, and others (Leech, 1983: 104).

12 Years a Slave is a 2013 historical drama movie about slavery. It is an adaptation of the memoir of Solomon Northup, a black freeman who is kidnapped and forced to be a slave. It is a story of Solomon Northup living as a slave for 12 years, from 1841 to 1853. This movie is based on a true story. Therefore, the researcher is interested in analyzing this movie as the research object.

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Downe-Wamboldt says (via Wahyuni, 2012: 122), content analysis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon.

This research has three objectives. First, this research is aimed at identifying the types of maxim flouting performed by Solomon Northup in *12 Years a Slave* movie. Then, it is aimed at documenting the strategies that are used by Solomon Northup. Finally, seeking out the reasons for maxim flouting performed by Solomon Northup in *12 Years a Slave* movie.

RESEARCH METHODS

In conducting this research, the researcher used both qualitative and quantitative approaches. As the qualitative approach played more important roles in the research, the type of study was qualitative-quantitative research. According to Holloway (in Wahyuni, 2012: 2), qualitative research is a form of social inquiry focusing on the interpretation of experience and the world by people. Besides, Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009: 7) explain that quantitative research describes the phenomena under study numerically.

In this research, there are two kinds of instruments that are used. First, the researcher became the primary instrument of the research. Lincoln and Guba (in Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009: 188) argue that human is the best instrument for qualitative inquiry. In addition, a data sheet was used as the secondary instrument of the research.

The data in this research were in the form of utterances uttered by Solomon Northup that were containing maxim flouting taken from *12 Years a Slave* script written by John Ridley. The technique of data collection used in this research was note taking. On the other hand, content analysis was applied in the data analysis. As

To deal with the trustworthiness of data, the researcher of this research applied triangulation method, i.e. the cross-validation of qualitative analysis (Wiersma, 2009: 287). Two kinds of triangulation used in this research are investigator triangulation and theory triangulation. Here, the researcher conducted the triangulation of the data with two students having the same major as the researcher in English Language and Literature Study Program. Besides, each single set of data was interpreted by using three different theories related to maxim flouting. Those theories were the theory of Grice, Grundy, and Leech.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that Solomon Northup, the main character in *12 Years a Slave* movie, indeed flouts the maxims of Cooperative Principle. His life as a slave for 12 years has affected the form of his maxim flouting.

In terms of type of maxim flouting, the researcher found that Solomon Northup performs four types of maxim flouting; quantity, quality, relevance, and manner maxim flouting. Of the four maxim flouting, the most dominant maxim flouting uttered by Northup is quantity maxim flouting. In general, quantity maxim flouting is frequently used to convince another participant of the conversation. Then, well under quantity maxim flouting, there is quality maxim flouting. The third rank in the occurrences of maxim flouting is manner maxim flouting and the last is relevance maxim flouting.

Dealing with the strategies of maxim flouting, the researcher found that Solomon Northup applies five strategies: tautology, overstatement, understatement, metaphor, and irony. The most dominant strategy used in the maxim flouting is overstatement. Northup states an exaggeration and gives more information than is required. This strategy is used to convince the others and sometimes show his anger about something. Then, this strategy is followed orderly by understatement, tautology, irony, and metaphor.

With regard to the reasons for maxim flouting, the researcher found four reasons that lead Northup to flout the maxims of Cooperative Principle: competitive, collaborative, convivial, and conflictive reason. Competitive is the most dominant reason to flout the maxims. The use of this reason is arising from the fact that Northup is a freeman forced to be a slave. Then, following this reason, competitive reason is ranked second. Convivial and collaborative are in the third rank with the same frequencies.

The Types of Maxim Flouting in *12 Years a Slave* Movie

Becoming the most dominant maxim flouting performed by Solomon Northup is *quantity maxim flouting*. Here, Northup fails to fulfill the maxim of quantity which requires the speaker to give enough information to the hearer and to be as informative as is required. In some exchanges, Northup gives too much information and in some others, he gives too little information to flout the maxim of quantity. The example is taken from the following dialog.

It is when Northup is at Parker's store, and then he greets another visitor.

- Northup : If we could discuss the price...
 Parker : Forgive me, Mrs. Northup. A customer waits. Welcome, sir.
 Northup : (to a customer) **Shop well, but mind your wallet.**
 Parker : Ignore the gentleman's nonsense. Now, may I interest you in a new cravat? Pure silk by way of the—
 (Datum QN/02/OS/CV)

Northup is actually saying his utterance to Jasper, someone who comes to the store right after him. He greets Jasper casually and use some jokes. However, the one who responds to him is Mr. Parker, the shop's owner. Jasper does not have a chance to respond to him. Here, Northup has been more informative than is required. To greet Jasper, 'Shop well' should be enough as a greeting between two people who do not know each other before. Adding 'mind your wallet' is that makes him flout maxim of quantity. 'Mind your wallet' is an expression that is not really needed in his greeting. He breaks the maxim in which making a more informative contribution than is required is forbidden.

Quality maxim flouting in *12 Years a Slave* movie is ranked second. It flouts the maxim that requires a speaker to make contribution that is reliable, state what is true according to him, and say that has adequate evidence. An example of this maxim flouting is presented below.

It is when Northup is still a free man. Anne and Northup are talking about Anne's trip to Sandy Hill.

- Northup : I won't stay idle
 Anne : Darling, it's good money.
 Northup : **If only I didn't have to share your cooking with other people.**
 Anne : You don't.
 (Datum QL/01/OS/CM)

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does not intend to lead a misunderstanding, he flouts the maxim, not violates the maxim.

At the time, Northup states his final statement as above. He is deliberately saying something that lacks adequate evidence. Here, the matter of sharing cooking sounds bigger than the fact. He actually tries to say that the money is good as long as it is used correctly. Besides, he asks Anne to be loyal to him as in the case she will cook only for Northup. In this case, the maxim flouting belongs to quality maxim flouting since Northup does not make a reliable contribution and lack of adequate facts.

Manner maxim flouting ranks as the third dominant maxim flouting happened in *12 Years a Slave* movie. In this maxim flouting, Northup fails to fulfill the maxim of manner that requires him to be clear, brief, and orderly in stating his utterances. An example is as follows.

The conversation is between a slave and a master. Northup is the slave and Mistress Shaw is the master.

Mistress Shaw : Nothin' Epps desire come outta concern.
Northup : **I meant no disrespect.**
Mistress Shaw : He ain't heard you.
Northup : I meant no disrespect to you, Mistress.

(Datum MN/04/US/CL)

Here, Northup and Mistress Shaw talk about Master Epps, Northup's master. In the middle of talking, Northup flouts maxim of manner. His statement is difficult to understand so Mistress Shaw misunderstands it. Since Northup breaks the maxim of manner which requires him to be perspicuous and avoid obscurity, he flouts maxim of manner. Again, he uses an ineffective sentence. Instead of saying "I meant no disrespect," he may say it clearly that he respects Mistress Shaw so there is no misunderstanding between them. Since Northup

Relevance maxim flouting breaks the maxim of relevance. Based on Grice's theory, a maxim flouting is classified into relevance maxim flouting if a speaker does not give relevant response in an exchange. An example is taken from the conversation between Northup and Randall, a kid in the slave's prison. It is specifically after Northup is forced to be a slave.

The conversation happens when Northup and Randall are cleaning their body to prepare for the sale of slaves. Then, Randall, the kid, is yammering on his mother.

Randall : Do you know when my Mama will come?
Radburn : Hush him up!
Randall : Mama ..! Mama! Is she going to come?
Northup : **Quiet, please.**

(Datum RL/04/OS/CV)

In this conversation, Northup's sentence belongs to relevance maxim flouting. Northup does not give a relevant answer to the question. Here, Randall asks for her mother but Northup does not answer it. On the other hand, he states an utterance with a different subject. To observe maxim of relevance, instead of giving his response as above, he should answer Randall's question first. He may answer it by saying "I don't know" then saying what he wants to say. Again, since he breaks the maxim which requires him to be relevant, he has flouted maxim of relevance in this exchange.

The Strategies of Maxim Flouting in *12 Years a Slave* Movie

By using hyperbole or merely giving too much information, Northup flouts the maxims by

using *overstatement* as the strategy. This strategy becomes the most dominant strategy used for maxim flouting. The example of the use of this strategy is provided below.

It is a dialog after Northup has become a slave. He works on Turner's plantation for a moment.

Judge Turner : Platt is it? Have you cultivated
cane previously?
Northup : No, sir, I have not.
Judge Turner : You take to it quite naturally.
Are you educated?
Northup : **Niggers are hired to work,
not to read and write.**
(Datum RL/07/OS/CM)

In this exchange, Judge Turner gets the feeling that Northup is educated. To answer Judge Turner's question, Northup intentionally breaks maxim of relevance. Here, overstatement takes place as a strategy of maxim flouting. Northup states a thing that is not required. He gives more information than is required in the exchange. In this case, what Northup intends to do is to avoid Judge Turner's question so he is not caught that he is educated. If then Judge Turner still knows the truth, Northup tries cueing him to keep it as a secret.

Basically, the required answer should be a yes or no since it is a yes/no question. Stating the general truth is not a way to observe the maxim. It is just a way to flout maxim of relevance so Northup can deliver his hidden message. By being more informative, Northup has applied overstatement as the strategy of this maxim flouting.

Understatement is also used by Northup to flout the maxims of Cooperative Principle. This strategy includes litotes and giving less information. The example is as follows.

The conversation is between Northup and Anne, his wife. Northup is in a disappointment.

Northup : (comically forlorn) **Three weeks.
Two days.**
Anne : It is the custom. I wonder what
you'll do without me?
Northup : I won't stay idle.
Anne : Darling, it's good money.
(Datum MN/02/US/CF)

As the beginning of a conversation, Northup's statement is rather difficult to understand. It is obscure since Northup just mentions 'three weeks two days' without any definite subject or predicate. The topic of his talking becomes unclear since he suddenly talks that way. Fortunately, Anne knows well about her husband's intended meaning. Therefore, the conversation can go smoothly.

In this exchange, Northup flouts maxim of manner. The used strategy is understatement. Here, the understatement is when Northup becomes less informative than is required. Then, this leads his expression to an obscurity. Northup may observe the maxim of manner by adding a sentence that leads the speaker to a definite subject. "It is too long for a trip. Three weeks and two days," may be an example of being clear in this conversation.

Tautology is the next strategies used by Northup to do maxim flouting. It is a strategy in which an expression is used frequently to explain a complex meaning in an easier way. Besides, it usually expresses one meaning whose idea is always true. The example is taken from the conversation between Northup and a sheriff.

It is when finally Northup gets a chance to gain his freedom after 12 years. He is asked some questions by the sheriff related to his previous life.

Northup : I have a wife and two children.
 Sheriff : What were your children's names?
 Northup : Margaret and Alonzo.
 Sheriff : And your wife's name before her marriage?
 Northup : Anne Hampton. **I am who I say.**
 (Datum QN/35/TL/CM)

In this exchange, maxim of quantity is flouted by Northup since he gives more information than is required. This maxim is flouted by tautology. The tautology is the second statement, *I am who I say*. It is unnecessary information that breaks the maxim. Here, the form of tautology is a conventional form, as in *war is war*, *boys will be boys*, and *enough is enough*. Northup repeats the same subject in his statement.

The meaning of the tautology is that he is Northup for sure. Asking another question is not needed because he will be able to answer all of it correctly. The tautology is used to convince the sheriff that he is really Northup and he does not lie about it.

Irony is another strategy that may be used to flout the maxims of Cooperative Principle. It is a type of speech which suggests a different meaning from what is said by the speaker. An example is provided below.

It is a conversation between Celeste and Northup. It is at a time when Northup begins to reveal his true identity to Celeste since he wants to request a thing. However, Celeste refuses to help.

Celeste : My freedom been nothin' but a daydream. So was Celeste's thoughts of slaves conjoinin' in the bayou.
 Northup : **Better the loneliness.** You have been free most of the summer.

Return now and your master will make example of you.
 Celeste : It is lonely dwellin' waiting for others who won't never come.
 Northup : Go north. Make your way by night...
 (Datum QL/15/IR/CM)

Here, it is an irony to say that being alone is better. Living in the world, this expression seems certainly absurd. Taking a look at Northup, he misses his family and hopes to back to his family as soon as possible. Then, his statement makes his contribution unreliable. Therefore, he flouts maxim of quality by irony in this exchange. It can be seen that actually Northup tries to convince Celeste.

Finally, *metaphor* is the last strategy of maxim flouting performed by Northup. The example of using a metaphor to flout maxim of quality is taken from the time when Northup argues with Eliza, that is when Northup has lived as a slave.

The situation is that Eliza is crying over her children continuously. She is separated from her children in the sale. Northup tries to calm her down, but then, Eliza gets annoyed.

Eliza : It's all I have to keeps my loss present.
 Northup : You let yourself be overcome by sorrow. You will drown in it.
 Eliza : Have you stopped crying for your children? You make no sounds, but will you ever let them go in your heart?
 Northup : **...They are as my flesh...**
 (Datum QL/07/MT/CM)

The statement of Northup in this conversation is a metaphor. He describes how important his children for him as his flesh. Of course, his children are not his real flesh. However, both his children and his flesh are important for Northup. Here, he flouts maxim of

quality by saying something that lacks adequate fact. Since his contribution is not one that is true, the metaphor makes him break the maxim of quality.

In this exchange, the metaphorical expression of *flesh* changes the literal expression of *children*. Therefore, metaphor is indeed used as the strategy of maxim flouting, in this case is quality maxim flouting.

The Reasons for Maxim Flouting in *12 Years a Slave* Movie

The most dominant reason for Northup in maxim flouting is *conflictive* reason. It is a reason in which the illocutionary goal conflicts with the social goal. The example is as follows.

It is a Northup's conversation with Burch, the guard of prison in which he is imprisoned. It is a start when Northup is forced being a slave. He is imprisoned in a lightless room, his hands are cuffed and his legs in irons.

Burch : Well, my boy, how yah feel now?
 Northup : **I am Solomon Northup. I am a free man; a resident of Saratoga, New York. The residence also of my wife and children who are equally free. I have papers. You have no right whatsoever to detain me—**
 Burch : Yah not any—
 Northup : And I promise you - I promise— upon my liberation I will have satisfaction for this wrong.
 (Datum RL/03/OS/CF)

In the dialog above, Northup flouts maxim of quantity since he knows the circumstances well. He gives too much information than is required in his utterance. His aim is to defend himself against injustice. It becomes his illocutionary goal then.

To fight for his freedom, Northup reprimands Burch for treating him as a slave. This is his effort to gain the illocutionary goal. On the other hand, the social goal is to accept his fate of being a slave. Here, Northup's strong refusal leads him to flout maxim of quantity. It happens since Northup cannot accept what is being the social goal at that time. His statement of maxim flouting in this exchange is such a reprimanding and also threatening to Burch. After all, conflictive reason causes the maxim flouting.

The second reason that leads Northup for maxim flouting is *competitive* reason. As its name, this reason indicates a competition between the illocutionary goal and the social goal. The example is provided as in the following.

Eliza gets annoyed working without her children. She is crying continuously. When Northup tries to calm her down, she blames Northup for caring about Master Ford.

Eliza : Then who is distressed? Do I upset the Mistress and the Master? Do you care less for my loss than their well being?
 Northup : **Master Ford is a decent man.**
 Eliza : He is a slaver.
 Northup : Under the circumstances--
 (Datum QN/18/US/CM)

In this exchange, Northup flouts maxim of quantity since he does not give the required information. Answering Eliza's question, Northup just responds to it shortly. This maxim flouting happens since Northup has different opinion from Eliza's. The illocutionary goal of Northup is to clear his name. He tries to stop Eliza from blaming him as he believes that his opinion is not wrong. On the other hand, the social goal is to be considerate with others. Here, his illocutionary goal competes with the social

goal. Saying the statement above, Northup tries to win his illocutionary goal by using maxim flouting. His intention is to ask or beg Eliza to stop being miserable and to be stronger.

Then, the third reason is *convivial* reason. Although Northup tries hard to get his freedom, he remains live as a good person. Even he is a slave; he gets along with the society he lives in. Therefore, for some occasion, maxim flouting is lead by this reason. The use of this reason is presented in the following exchange.

Judge Turner gives Northup an order, but then Northup can keep the money for himself.

Judge Turner : You play the fiddle?
Northup : I do.
Judge Turner : Willard Yarney, a planter up the bayou, celebrates his anniversary in a three week's time. I will hold out your name to him. What you earn is yours to keep.
Northup : **Sir.**
(Datum QN/25/US/CV)

In this exchange, Northup has flouted maxim of quantity since he is confused about how to express his feeling. He breaks the maxim which requires him to make his contribution as informative as is required. For a slave, what Judge Turner does is incredible. Northup is so grateful for that. Because he is so grateful, an expression of thanking seems not enough. Even saying 'Thank you very much, sir' so many times cannot represent his gratitude. As a result, saying 'Sir' in a melancholic way is chosen to express that. It becomes more expressive with a deep look in the eyes. Here, a convivial reason arises a quantity maxim flouting. The fact that Northup tries to deliver his gratitude is convivial.

Finally, the last reason is *collaborative* reason. It is the reason in which the illocutionary

goal is indifferent to the social goal. The example is a conversation between Northup and Hamilton. The situation is that Northup agrees to join Hamilton's performance. Then, Hamilton makes sure about the need of letter to Northup's family.

Hamilton : No letter to post?
Northup : **No need. My return will coincide with my family's.**
Brown : We're off then.
(Datum QN/06/OS/CL)

In this exchange, Northup's illocutionary goal is to convince Hamilton that no letter is okay. Then, the social goal is just to answer the other's question properly. Here, the illocutionary goal may collaborate with the social goal to achieve something. Maxim flouting happens because of this opportunity. To convince Hamilton, Northup gives more information in regard to the letter. His answer becomes the means of convincing Hamilton. On the other words, the social goal supports the illocutionary goal. This state is what is called as collaborative reason leading to maxim flouting.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

With regard to the data analysis dealing with the types of maxim flouting, Solomon Northup performs four types of maxim flouting; quantity, quality, relevance, and manner maxim flouting.

Besides, in terms of strategy, Solomon Northup applies five strategies of maxim flouting in the movie; tautology, overstatement, understatement, metaphor, and irony. One strategy from rhetorical strategies that is not used by Solomon Northup is rhetorical question.

Lastly, dealing with the reasons for maxim flouting, there are four reasons that lead Solomon Northup to flout the maxims; competitive, collaborative, convivial, and conflictive reason.

Suggestions

Considering the results of the research, the researcher offers some suggestions. Firstly, the readers of this research are expected to have basic understanding about Cooperative Principle before reading this research. It is because maxim flouting becomes a part of it. In addition, for the other researchers, a further study relating maxim flouting and racism in *12 Years a Slave* movie is recommended. It is due to the fact that *12 Years a Slave* movie is well known for the topic of racism.

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