

# Beyond The Words: Flouting Maxims in the Dynamics Of EFL Classroom Talk

Maria Olga Jelimun<sup>1</sup>

{nimaria721@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>}

Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng, Indonesia<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** This study aims to analyze the types and underlying reasons for flouting maxims employed by the lecturers and the students during English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom interactions. The analysis focuses on utterances produced between lecturers and students as well as among students. This research adopts a descriptive qualitative design. The participants consist of students from the English Language Education Study Program at Unika St. Paulus Ruteng, specifically class 2024A. Data were collected through classroom observations and audio recordings. The findings reveal three types of flouting maxims: (1) maxim of quantity, (2) maxim of quality, and (3) maxim of relevance. A total of twelve instances were identified, consisting of eight cases (66.66%) of quantity, two cases (16.67%) of quality, and two cases (16.67%) of relevance. No instances of the maxim of manner were found. The reasons behind the flouting include efforts to ensure comprehension, avoid misunderstanding, difficulty in hearing questions, and uncertainty in responding. These findings indicate that both lecturers and students flout conversational maxims for pedagogical and communicative purposes within EFL classroom interaction.

**Keywords:** Flouting Maxim, EFL Classroom, Pragmatics, Classroom Interaction.

## 1 Introduction

The concept of flouting maxims stems from the field of pragmatics, a branch of linguistics that examines how meaning is constructed and interpreted in communicative interactions. Flouting maxims refers to a deliberate deviation from Grice's Cooperative Principle, where speakers intentionally break conversational maxims not to deceive, but to imply additional meaning beyond the literal interpretation. Instead of violating maxims to mislead, speakers flout maxims to encourage listeners to interpret implied meanings, making the communication richer and more nuanced [1]. This act of flouting invites listeners to look deeper into utterances and derive implied meanings through contextual understanding, a process known as conversational implicature.

For conversational implicature to be successful, both speakers and listeners must share a mutual understanding of context, roles, and situational expectations [2]. When a maxim is flouted, the audience is not confused or misled; instead, they infer extra meaning, demonstrating a shared pragmatic awareness. However, if participants lack such pragmatic competence, communication breakdowns may occur. Grice's cooperative principle emphasizes that successful communication relies on collaboration between speakers and listeners, where

contributions are expected to be relevant, informative, truthful, and clear [3] . Therefore, the way maxims are observed or flouted plays a crucial role in maintaining communicative effectiveness.

In educational settings, especially in language classrooms, communication between teachers and students is essential in shaping understanding and learning outcomes. Classroom interaction involves the exchange of ideas, questions, explanations, and feedback [4]. Teachers modify their language to help students comprehend lessons, while students respond to demonstrate understanding and negotiate meaning. Classroom communication is not solely verbal; non-verbal cues such as gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact are equally important in conveying meaning and maintaining rapport [5]. Interaction, therefore, has both verbal and non-verbal dimensions and contributes not only to learning but also to social and interpersonal development in classroom contexts [6] [7]

Within EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms, understanding how communication unfolds becomes vital because students are still developing their linguistic and pragmatic skills. Flouting maxims naturally occurs during classroom communication when messages are misunderstood, when students provide excessive information, or when teachers give indirect feedback. Research suggests that flouting maxims in EFL classrooms supports communicative competence, encourages deeper interpretation, and enhances student engagement when used appropriately [8]. Conversely, excessive or unintended flouting of maxims may cause confusion, misunderstanding, and reduced teaching effectiveness [9]. This highlights the need to examine how and why flouting maxims occurs in academic settings to ensure effective knowledge transfer and communication.

Existing studies on flouting maxims have primarily focused on media discourse and entertainment settings, such as talk shows, movies, and political interviews. For example, [10] observed flouting maxims in a talk show, finding quantity and manner maxim violations most frequent. Similarly, [11] analyzed Trump's interview utterances and reported quantity maxim flouting as dominant, suggesting intentional elaboration for emphasis and persuasive function. [12] examined flouting maxims in a movie, identifying the manner maxim as most frequently flouted. These studies share a common focus: they examine flouting maxims in entertainment media and public discourse, but do not explore flouting in educational settings nor analyse the reasons behind these pragmatic choices beyond situational context.

Despite a growing body of pragmatic research, there is limited empirical investigation into flouting of maxims in EFL classrooms, particularly at the university level. Most previous studies concentrate on media interactions, scripted dialogues, or political speech. These contexts differ significantly from academic learning situations, where communicative goals involve explanation, clarification, participation, and feedback. Additionally, existing literature tends to describe types of maxim flouting but lacks deeper analysis of why speakers choose to flout maxims in educational communication [12].

Therefore, the current study addresses this gap by examining both the types and the reasons for flouting maxims in university-level EFL classroom interactions. This focus provides a more natural and educationally relevant exploration of pragmatic behaviour, offering insight into how teachers and students manage communication, negotiate meaning, and interpret messages in real teaching settings. The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to understand

maxim flouting not merely as linguistic deviation, but as a pedagogical phenomenon connected to comprehension, teaching strategies, and student response patterns.

Analysing flouting maxims in university EFL settings contributes to pragmatic theory by expanding its application to academic discourse. It also benefits teaching practice by identifying communicative strategies that support or hinder learning. If teachers frequently flout maxims unintentionally, students may struggle to grasp instructional meaning. Conversely, intentional flouting, such as giving hints rather than direct answers, may foster critical thinking and inferential skills [13].

Furthermore, examining student utterances helps reveal their pragmatic awareness and linguistic competence [14]. When students provide overly detailed responses or unexpected answers, this may reflect misunderstanding, eagerness to display knowledge, or lack of pragmatic refinement. Understanding these motivations enriches knowledge about learner language development and communication patterns in EFL learning environments.

In summary, this study fills an important research gap by shifting attention from entertainment-based maxim flouting to authentic educational communication, exploring not only the presence of flouted maxims but also the pedagogical reasons behind them. The findings are expected to contribute to pragmatic theory, provide practical insights for EFL educators, and improve communication effectiveness in university language classrooms. By analysing this phenomenon, the research promotes a deeper understanding of how linguistic meaning is negotiated and how classroom interaction supports language learning through cooperative and strategic communication.

## **2 Research Method and Material**

This research adopts a qualitative approach, as its primary aim is to capture and interpret natural classroom interactions through observation of real teaching and learning activities. Qualitative inquiry emphasizes generating descriptive, context-based data derived from observable behavior and authentic verbal expressions, thereby requiring an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under scrutiny. Qualitative research prioritizes the exploration of concepts, ideas, and processes as they emerge within natural settings [15]. In line with this principle, the present study investigates instances of flouting conversational maxims within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom interaction, particularly during the instructional process, prompting the selection of a descriptive qualitative design. The participants in this study consist of students enrolled in the English Language Education Study Program at Unika St. Paulus Ruteng, specifically class 2024A. The determination of this class was carried out in consultation with an English lecturer to ensure that the selected group demonstrated active classroom engagement, particularly in spoken English practice. Second-year students were chosen based on established characteristics relevant to the research focus and professional recommendation from the lecturer, ensuring that the target group exhibited strong participation in English communication, including asking and responding to questions and demonstrating dynamic interaction with peers and the lecturer. Such conditions were deemed optimal for observing the occurrence of maxim flouting in authentic classroom discourse. Data collection followed several procedures: selecting a class with robust interaction, observing classroom dynamics, recording verbal exchanges, documenting utterances that exhibited maxim flouting using observation sheets,

listening to audio recordings multiple times, identifying utterances that aligned with the types and motivations for maxim flouting, and finally cross-checking the notes against the recorded data for accuracy. The primary instrument employed was an observation sheet designed to document linguistic functions and categorize instances of maxim flouting according to pragmatic indicators. This instrument facilitated systematic identification of the flouting strategies used by both the lecturer and students during classroom interaction. For data analysis, the study applied Miles and Huberman's framework [16] which comprises three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involved selecting relevant utterances and organizing them based on the observed categories; data display entailed presenting the organized data in a structured manner for interpretation; and the final stage encompassed drawing meaningful conclusions and validating them to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the findings.

### 3 Result

There are three types of flouting maxim, namely: flouting maxim of quantity, flouting maxim of quantity, and flouting maxim of relevance. In addition, the data on the flouting of the maxim was taken from classroom observations. The types of the flouting maxim are displayed in the following table:

**Table 1.** Types of Floating Maxim.

No.	Type of Maxim	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1	Maxim of Quantity	8	66.66
2	Maxim of Quality	2	16.67
3	Maxim of Relevance	2	16.67
<b>Total</b>		<b>12</b>	<b>100</b>

The table presents the distribution of flouted conversational maxims identified in the classroom interactions. The findings show that the Maxim of Quantity was flouted most frequently, accounting for 8 occurrences (66.66%), indicating a strong tendency among lecturers and students to provide either excessive or insufficient information during instructional discourse. In contrast, the Maxims of Quality and Relevance were flouted less frequently, each occurring 2 times (16.67%). These results suggest that deviations in classroom communication were predominantly related to information load rather than accuracy or topical relevance, highlighting the pedagogical nature of elaboration and clarification in EFL classroom interaction.

### 4 Discussion

Effective classroom communication relies heavily on adherence to pragmatic principles that ensure clarity, cooperation, and mutual understanding between interlocutors. Drawing on Grice's in [16] Cooperative Principle, this study examined how lecturers and students in an EFL classroom context adhered to or flouted conversational maxims during instructional

interaction. The analysis revealed that participants frequently deviated from these maxims, resulting in various instances of maxim flouting. Such deviations, however, do not necessarily indicate communicative failure; rather, they may reflect the dynamic and pedagogically purposeful nature of classroom discourse. In EFL contexts, where learners are simultaneously developing linguistic and pragmatic competence, flouting conversational maxims can serve as a strategic means of maintaining interactional flow, expressing politeness, or compensating for linguistic uncertainty. The following discussion elaborates on the types of maxim flouting identified in the data specifically the Maxims of Quantity, Quality, and Relevance and interprets their occurrence in relation to existing research and theoretical frameworks.

#### **4.1 Flouting of the Maxim of Quantity**

The findings indicate that violations of the Maxim of Quantity occurred most frequently during lecturer -student interactions. This maxim is considered flouted when speakers provide either insufficient or excessive information beyond what is pragmatically required to achieve communicative efficiency. In this study, the Maxim of Quantity represented the highest proportion of flouting, accounting for 8 instances (66.66%). This observation aligns with [17] findings, which similarly revealed that both teachers and students tend to produce utterances that either exceed or fall short of the expected informational load in classroom interaction.

An illustrative exchange can be seen below:

Lecturer: Is it a new word for you?

Student: Actually not a new one, but we forgot it.

In this instance, the student provides additional information beyond the lecturer's inquiry, elaborating that the word is familiar but temporarily forgotten. Instead of a brief affirmative or negative answer, the student's response demonstrates engagement and an attempt to maintain a positive rapport with the lecturer. This supports [10] argument that the provision of additional information can foster mutual understanding and enhance communicative rapport. While such elaboration technically constitutes a flouting of the maxim, it functions pedagogically by promoting conversational continuity and rapport building. According to [18] adherence to the Maxim of Quantity requires speakers to provide information that is neither more nor less than necessary. However, in instructional settings, deviation from this principle can serve pragmatic and interpersonal functions. Minimizing unnecessary elaboration may contribute to clearer instructional discourse, yet in classroom contexts, such flouting can also indicate active participation and communicative confidence.

#### **4.2 Flouting of the Maxim of Quality**

Flouting of the Maxim of Quality was identified in 2 instances (14.28%), where students provided information that was inaccurate or unsupported by sufficient evidence. This maxim is breached when speakers, knowingly or unknowingly, present information that does not correspond to reality [3] The current finding corroborates a study, which reported that EFL students sometimes produce incorrect answers due to limited content knowledge or misunderstanding, even though they believe their responses are correct [19]

Example:

Lecturer: What are the types of cohesion devices?

Student: Synonym.

Lecturer: Are you sure?

The student's response demonstrates an inaccurate understanding of the concept, as a synonym is not classified as a cohesion device. The lecturer's follow-up question highlights the lack of truthfulness or accuracy in the initial response. Such instances may arise from limited linguistic competence, low confidence, or misinterpretation of the question. This aligns with [13] assertion that flouting the Maxim of Quality often results from unintentional inaccuracies rather than deliberate deception.

Interestingly, [11] found no instances of this maxim being violated in political discourse, indicating that the occurrence of quality flouting is context-dependent. In educational discourse, such violations may reflect the cognitive process of hypothesis testing among learners. As Grice emphasizes, speakers should avoid providing information without adequate evidence. Thus, promoting awareness of content accuracy and evidence-based communication can enhance students' pragmatic competence and academic accountability [20]

#### **4.3 Flouting of the Maxim of Relevance**

Flouting of the Maxim of Relevance also appeared in the data, accounting for 2 instances (14.28%). This maxim is considered flouted when interlocutors' contributions are not pertinent to the preceding discourse, thereby disrupting the conversational flow. The finding is supported by the previous research that claims irrelevant responses often emerge when speakers fail to interpret the conversational context appropriately [21]

Example:

Lecturer: What is morphology?

Student: Bruder.

The student's response here is entirely irrelevant to the lecturer's academic question, suggesting inattentiveness or misunderstanding. Such off-topic responses may stem from lapses in comprehension or from momentary distraction. This observation is consistent with the previous research's explanation that flouting of relevance commonly arises when participants fail to process contextual cues [22]Grice emphasized that maintaining relevance is crucial for cooperative communication; thus, encouraging active listening and contextual awareness among students may reduce the frequency of such pragmatic deviations.

Overall, the analysis revealed three types of maxim flouting: Quantity, Quality, and Relevance with the Maxim of Quantity being the most frequently violated. No instances of the Maxim of Manner were observed. These findings underscore that pragmatic deviations in EFL classroom discourse are shaped by cognitive, linguistic, and interactional factors. Rather than representing communicative breakdowns, many of these flouting served pedagogical and interpersonal purposes, such as maintaining politeness, managing uncertainty, or sustaining engagement.

In sum, the study highlights the integral role of pragmatic competence in shaping effective classroom communication. Understanding how and why students flout conversational maxims offers valuable insights into EFL pedagogy, suggesting that teachers can use such pragmatic phenomena as opportunities to foster communicative awareness, promote linguistic accuracy, and enhance interactional fluency in language learning environments.

## 5 Conclusion

The objectives of this study were to identify the types and reasons for the flouting of conversational maxims used by lecturers and students during classroom interactions in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context. The findings revealed that the phenomenon of flouting maxims occurs within the communicative exchanges of EFL classrooms, particularly in the English Language Education Program at UNIKA St. Paulus Ruteng. Specifically, three types of flouting maxims were identified: the maxim of quantity, the maxim of quality, and the maxim of relevance. The maxim of quantity was the most frequently flouted, occurring eight times (66.66%), followed by the maxim of quality and the maxim of relevance, each occurring twice (14.28%). Notably, no instances of the flouting of the maxim of manner were found throughout the data.

These findings suggest that both lecturers and students sometimes intentionally provide more or less information than required, offer statements lacking truthfulness or relevance, or deviate from the expected level of informativeness to achieve certain communicative goals. Such deviations are often employed to express emphasis, maintain politeness, clarify meaning, or engage the interlocutor more effectively. The occurrence of these flouting indicates that pragmatic competence understanding how language operates beyond literal meanings plays an essential role in EFL classroom communication.

In conclusion, the study confirms the applicability of Grice's Cooperative Principle and its maxims in analysing classroom discourse. The presence of flouting maxims demonstrates that EFL interactions are not purely transactional but also social and pragmatic in nature. Recognizing these pragmatic behaviours is crucial for improving classroom communication, fostering better mutual understanding, and developing learners' pragmatic awareness. Future research may expand this investigation by including more varied classroom settings and larger participant groups to provide broader insights into the pragmatic aspects of EFL learning.

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