

## **VIOLATION OF MAXIM OF CONVERSATION IN THE SERIAL COMICS ENTITLED *DILBERT***

**Redi Pustaka**

Catholic University of Widya Mandala Madiun

### *Abstract*

This writing discusses violation of maxims of conversation in the serial comics entitled *Dilbert*. The comics themselves are short and daily comics which present the conversation among the employees in a company. In addition, the events which happen in the comics were actually taken from Scott Adam's personal experiences. The research focuses on the kinds of violation of maxim of conversation and the purpose of the violation. Generally, this research is included in descriptive study. In this research, the procedures done are collecting, classifying, and analyzing the data. The entire data of this research were taken from serial comics entitled *Dilbert* written by Scott Adam. Then, the unit of analysis of this research is the whole conversations which represent violation of maxim of conversation. Furthermore, total sampling was applied to obtain the required samples. Consequently, the researcher had to analyze the sample one by one. To analyze the data, the researcher used referential equivalent method to classify the kind of violated maxim of conversation and pragmatic equivalent method to reveal the purposes of it. Based on the analysis, the highest violation of maxim of conversation is in the violation of maxim of manner by 36 data. Furthermore, violation of maxim of quality is in the lowest position by 5 data only. Meanwhile, the writer discovers that representative dominates the purpose of the characters in violating the maxims of conversation by 37 amounts of data. Then, the smallest purpose is declarations by 5 samples.

***Keywords: pragmatics, maxim of conversation, violation, dan purpose of violation of maxim of conversation***

### **A. Introduction**

Pragmatics is the study of relation between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding (Levinson 1983:21). Based on Levinson's opinion, a conversation depends not only on the speaker, the one who tries to deliver a message, but also on the hearer, who draws a conclusion from the implication of the utterance, depending on the context in which it occurs.

This study focuses on violation of maxim of conversation which has strong correlation with pragmatics. As an international language, English also exists in entertainment field. Furthermore, comics are one kind of direct influence of English in entertainment. However, this phenomenon sometimes makes some readers confused in interpreting and understanding the implied meaning within the conversation in the comic because the comic book often provides indirect responses of previous utterances.

The purpose of the research is to describe the kinds of violation of maxim of conversation in Scott Adam's *Dilbert* and to decide the purposes of violation of maxim of conversation in the comics.

### **B. Research Method**

This study applies descriptive research. The data are taken from serial comics entitled *Dilbert*. To describe the kinds of violation of maxim of conversation, the writer uses referential equivalent method. According to Djajasudarma, referential equivalent method is a method to analyze the data based on the extra-linguistic factors (1993:58). In order to understand the

purpose of the characters in violating the maxim of conversation, the writer applies pragmatic equivalent method to explain the real intention of *Dilbert's* author. Djajasudarma states that pragmatic equivalent method refers to the institutional setting in which a piece of language occurs and embraces not only the subject-matter in hand but also the whole activity of the speaker of participant in setting (1993:60). In other words, the writer ought to know the external background of the conversation such as educational background, local culture, individual degree of perception and daily habitual in order to catch whole ideas of the contents.

## C. Discussion

This research discusses the kinds of violation of maxim of conversation and the purposes of it.

### 1.1 Violation of Maxim

There are four kinds of violation of maxim of conversation in *Dilbert*. They are violation of maxim of quality, quantity, relevance and manner.

#### 1.1.1 Violation of Maxim of Quality

The essence of maxim quality is that speakers have to deliver statements or utterances with proper evidence or based on the factual agreement. This is an example which illustrates the violation of maxim of quality.

(1/ MQ/ R) Carol : *I rescheduled the pre-meeting*  
 Dilbert : *Now the pre-meeting is after the meeting*  
 Carol : *I'll schedule some time for me to pre-care*

The conversation violates maxim of quality since Dilbert says "*Now the pre-meeting is after the meeting*". Generally, people disagree to that statement because Dilbert's utterance reverses people's most common logic which always relates the word "*pre*" in the initial position before another. Therefore, most people do not accept his statement in any situation.

#### 1.1.2 Violation of Maxim of Quantity

Principally, maxim of quantity is a maxim which demands speakers to utter such statements or opinions toward hearers in the proper amount. In addition, Grice states that we have to make our contribution as informative as it is required for the current purposes of the exchange and do not make our contribution more informative than it is required (1983:101) In order to make it clearer, we can take a look at the conversation below.

(7/MQN/R) Alice : *I estimated the hours it would take to do an excellent job for all the projects you've assigned. That would be fifty hours a day. So, I recalculated for "adequate" results. That would be forty hours per day. Well, to make a long story short, let's skip down to "Complete fiduciary misconduct"*  
 Manager : *Blah blahblahblahlah.*

The conversation violates maxim of quantity since Alice gives unwanted additional information which makes the manager cover his ears, in order to avoid from hearing Alice's unnecessary explanations. This is the reason which makes the conversation violate maxim of quantity since Alice does not control herself from telling unimportant additional statements.

### 1.1.3 Violation of Maxim of Relevance

Generally, maxim of relevance is a part of maxim of conversation which focuses on the correlation between speakers' statement and listeners' response. One of the examples of the violation shows as follow.

- (18/MR/DR) *Manager : all employees must fill out this form.*  
*Dilbert :(reading the form) employee election to not rescind the opposite action of declining the reverse inclination to not discontinue employment with the company.*  
*(asking) you're trying to trick us into quitting, aren't you?*  
*Manager : use ink.*

In this conversation, the manager violates maxim of relevance since he does not provide relevant and adequate response for Dilbert's question. While Dilbert tries to confirm about the content of the form, the pointy-haired manager only says to use ink toward Dilbert.

### 1.1.4 Violation of Maxim of Manner

In case of maxim of manner, speakers must have enough knowledge and capability to explain certain things in the right order to avoid ambiguous and obscure statement.

- (48/ MM/DR) *Wally : How do you like being a manager Alice?*  
*Alice :Do me a big favour, sneak into my house tonight and smother me with a pillow.*  
*Dilbert: I think she was kidding.*  
*Wally : I'll see if she puts up a struggle*

Based on the example, Alice definitely violates maxim of manner since she does not provide and deliver clear explanation about her own utterance which creates different interpretation between Wally and Dilbert. According to Dilbert, Alice is kidding with her statement. Meanwhile, Wally considers that Alice is really serious with her words.

## 1.2 The Purposes of Violation of Maxims of Conversation

In order to reveal and explain the hidden purpose of the characters, the writer considers speech acts approach as the solution. Principally, there are five functions of speech acts which consist of expressive, representatives, commissive, declarations and directives. Furthermore, readers can take a look at the following illustrations to understand the purposes.

### 1.2.1 Expressive

Expressive is a kind of speech act which stresses on the human's psychological condition. In many cases, statements which come out from speakers and listeners often appear because of their own internal feeling. In addition, variations of human's expression may be in the form of thanking, apologizing, anger, welcoming, congratulating, pain, sorrow, likes, dislikes and etc. In order to get clear perception about expressive, readers can observe the conversation between Dilbert and Dogbert.

(10/MQN/E) *Dilbert: I'm going to work like a regular guy even though I just made a fortune in the stock market. That's because I still want to be a useful and contributing member of society. And of course, the workplace is the second most satisfying place to gloat.*  
*Dogbert: Are you done here yet?*

Based on the example, Dogbert's statement shows that he is angry toward Dilbert for making him listening to all Dilbert's flat and boring excuses. Since anger is part of human feeling, so that this conversation represents the expressive aspect

### 1.2.2 Representative

Representative means someone's statements and utterances which refer to subjective belief. In addition, listeners may agree with speakers' statement, while others may deny it. Commonly, representative is in the form of statement of fact, assertion, conclusion, and description. This is a conversation between Dogbert and Dilbert which illustrates the role of representative in such dialogues.

(66/MM/R) *Dogbert : and now I will give you my impression of a dog in space.*  
*Dilbert : (see Dogbert's expression)*  
*Dogbert : **Physical humor is a lost art.***  
*Dilbert : **Let me know if you find it.***

In the conversation, Dogbert believes that the trend of physical humor degrade from time to time. Then, Dogbert expresses his personal believe by mentioning "***physical humour is a lost art***". Thus, the conversation fulfills the act of representative.

### 1.2.3 Commissive

Generally, commissive is a speech act category which describes speakers' commitment about their future action. In other words, commissive is the act of promising particular things toward someone. The following conversation gives readers proper understanding related to commissive

(79/MM/C) *Salesman : I recommend our "churn 'n burn" family of mutual funds. We'll turn your worthless equity into valuable brokerage fees in just three days!*  
*Dilbert : Is it risky?*  
*Salesman : **Are you kidding?! We have actual brochures!***

In this conversation, an insurance salesman convinces Dilbert to buy one of the products. Then, the salesman adds that his insurance company dare to guarantee that they are able to change Dilbert's worthless property into prosperous asset. Through salesman's last utterance, we also see that the salesman promises to give secured guarantee for his product. Therefore, the conversation illustrates aspect of commissive.

### 1.2.4 Declarations

Basically, declarations describe speakers' influential statement. Thus, it has great capabilities of changing particular things in certain times and certain places. The example between Dilbert and Manager give a proper illustration about declarations.

(71/MM/D) *Manager* : ***Work harder or I'll have you put in the "box"***  
*Dilbert* : *Really? I thought I was already in the box. Is the box bigger than my cubicle?*  
*Manager* : *(grumble) these people are totally unmanageable*

In the example, the manager talks and warns Dilbert to work properly. If he fails to fulfil the company's requirement, Dilbert can not improve his current position. Based on the previous conversation, it is obvious that the manager wants to emphasize his important role and position among the low ranked employees. Therefore, he dares to utter such influential policies which affect the career of the employees. This is the consideration which makes the conversation reflect the declarations.

### 1.2.5 Directives

Principally, directive is a speech act which tells someone to do something. In addition, the expressions of directive are in the form of direct command, order, request, and even suggestion. Moreover, the following conversation guides us to know and understand the aspect of directive a lot clearer.

(45/MR/DR) *Dilbert* : *Why should I fill out this form? it would take an hour and it doesn't even apply to me.*  
*Carol* : *I don't make the rules. I just apply them with a helpless and defeated attitude.*  
*Dilbert* : ***you're doing an excellent job.***  
*Carol* : ***Seven more hours until quitting time.***

Based on the conversation especially Carol's last statement, we can see that it contains an obvious direct command toward Dilbert. Besides, Carol's statement also contains the unavoidable consequences of refusing to fill out the given form. Therefore, the conversation fulfils the aspect of directive.

## D. Conclusion

The goal of the research is to figure out the kinds and purposes of violation of maxim of conversation. Principally, the characters of Scott Adam's *Dilbert* violate maxim of conversation under particular situations. Meanwhile, there are five purposes of violation of maxim of conversation inside the comic. In addition, each purpose appears under the influence of characters' motives.

Based on the analysis, the highest violation of maxims of conversation is in the violation of maxim of manner by 36 data. Furthermore, violation of maxim of quality is in the lowest position by 5 data only. Meanwhile, the writer discovers that representative dominates the purpose of the characters in violating the maxims of conversation by 37 amounts of data. Then, the smallest purpose is declarations by 5 examples.

Moreover, this research is useful to enrich and develop the knowledge of maxim of conversation and pragmatics in general. Hence, readers are able to identify the aspects of maxim of conversation in the actual use. Besides, this research may motivate other researchers to conduct further researches about maxim of conversation which lead to whole new things of current topic.

**E. Bibliography**

- Djajasudarma, T. Fatimah. 1993. *Metode Linguistik: Ancangan Metode Penelitian dan Kajian*. Bandung: PT. Eresco, pp. 58-60.
- Levinson, Stephen C. 1983. *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 21, 101-102.
- Yule, George. 1996. *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.