

Maxim Usage in Marital Conversations: A Study of Batak Couple Dynamics in the Movie 'Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap'

Putri Rizki Syafrayani¹, Riska Ayunda²

^{1,2}English Applied Linguistics Postgraduate Program, Universitas Negeri Medan
email: prizkisyafrayani@gmail.com (correspondence email)

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the application and violation of Grice's maxims in marital conversations between Batak couples as depicted in the film "Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap." Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research focused on dialogues between the central characters, Bapak Domu and Mamak Domu, to investigate how cultural norms and gender roles shape communication dynamics within Batak society. The findings indicated that the maxim of quantity was most frequently adhered to, suggesting that the couple generally provided appropriate information. However, it was also the most commonly violated maxim, often due to emotional tensions or strategic interactions. The analysis revealed distinct communication patterns, with male speakers more likely to withhold information while female speakers adhered more closely to conversational norms, particularly in emotionally charged situations. This study contributes to understanding how cultural values influence marital communication and highlights the significance of maxim violations in navigating relational complexities. By exploring the interplay between culture, gender, and pragmatics, the research offers valuable insights into the evolving nature of marital dynamics in contemporary Batak society.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics, as a branch of linguistics, focuses on how context influences the interpretation of meaning in conversation. It goes beyond the literal meanings of words, exploring how speakers and listeners understand implicit messages and social cues. Grice's Cooperative Principle, which is central to pragmatics, posits that effective communication relies on speakers adhering to certain conversational maxims: Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. These maxims ensure that participants provide the right amount of information, speak truthfully, stay relevant, and are clear and orderly in their expressions (Grice, 1975). However, in real-life conversations, these maxims are often flouted or violated, providing insight into the relational dynamics, power structures, or cultural values of the interlocutors (Levinson, 1983).

In the context of marital communication, especially within different cultural settings, adherence to or violation of these maxims can provide insight into how couples negotiate their relationships. Batak society, a well-established ethnic group in North Sumatra, Indonesia, has a

unique communication style shaped by cultural values that emphasize hierarchy, respect, and familial obligations (Siahaan, 2012). In Batak marriages, the communication dynamic often reflects traditional gender roles, where the husband is regarded as the decision-maker, and the wife is expected to maintain harmony and show respect (Silalahi, 2020). This cultural framework may influence how Batak couples interact during conversations, particularly when it comes to sharing information (Quantity), being direct or indirect (Quality), and addressing relevant topics (Relation).

Given these cultural nuances, analyzing how Batak couples communicate can reveal much about their relational dynamics. In particular, movies like 'Ngeri Ngeri Sedap' offer a rich source of data for examining communication patterns. This movie, which portrays a Batak family, provides a realistic depiction of the interactions between a married couple, making it an ideal subject for pragmatic analysis. Analyzing the use of Gricean maxims in the couple's conversations allows us to understand how communication is shaped by cultural values and traditional gender roles (Lumban Gaol, 2018).

While there have been numerous studies on pragmatics and Grice's maxims, much of this research has focused on Western contexts, leaving a gap in the exploration of conversational analysis in non-Western, particularly Indonesian, cultures (Sitorus & Widayati, 2018). Previous studies, such as Pramudita's (2021) article, "Representations of Batak Culture in Indonesian Movies: A Critical Analysis of Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap," provide critical insights into Batak communication styles. This study highlights that Batak couples often adhere to the maxim of quantity by sharing information concisely, reflecting a cultural preference for brevity. They value honesty but may withhold some truths to maintain harmony, selectively adhering to the maxim of quality. Topics are often culturally relevant, adhering to the maxim of relation, while communication tends to be indirect yet clear, in line with the maxim of manner.

Another related study, "The Cultural Identity of the Characters in the Movie Scenario Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap," examines marital dynamics as reflections of cultural identity. The study emphasizes the tension between traditional and modern values within marital relationships, portraying how couples navigate familial obligations alongside personal aspirations. These dynamics further illustrate how adherence to and deviations from Gricean maxims are shaped by cultural influences and relational contexts.

This research aims to extend the discussion by focusing specifically on the conversational patterns of a Batak couple in *Ngeri Ngeri Sedap*. Through an analysis of their dialogue, this study examines the frequency and context of maxim adherence and violations, identifying which maxims are most frequently used or flouted and under what circumstances. By doing so, it sheds light on the interplay between communication styles, cultural norms, and relational dynamics within Batak marital contexts.

II. METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the application and violation of Gricean maxims in the marital conversations between the Batak couple in the movie 'Ngeri Ngeri Sedap.' According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is appropriate for exploring complex, context-specific phenomena, such as language use within cultural settings. This approach allows the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the pragmatic elements of communication by examining the context in which conversations occur. This research employed a case study approach to focus on a specific set of conversations between the couple. A case study is defined by Yin (2018) as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. Since this research focuses on the communication dynamics within a particular cultural and relational context, the case study approach is ideal for providing detailed insights into how Gricean maxims are applied.

Data Source

The primary data for this study consisted of dialogues from the movie *Ngeri Ngeri Sedap*, particularly focusing on the conversations between the married Batak couple, Domu's Father (Bapak Domu) and Domu's Mother (Mamak Domu). The dialogues were translated into English from the original Indonesian and Batak languages. As the movie reflects Batak family life, it serves as a culturally relevant source that portrays communication patterns shaped by Batak norms and values (Gaol, 2018).

The secondary data for this research included prior studies, journal articles, and books that discuss Batak culture, communication styles, and Gricean maxims, such as works by Siahaan (2012) and Silalahi (2020). These sources provided a theoretical framework and cultural context to support the analysis of the dialogues in the movie.

The selection of the movie as the primary data is scientifically justified for several reasons. First, *Ngeri Ngeri Sedap* offers an authentic portrayal of Batak family dynamics and marital interactions, making it a valuable source for examining culturally embedded communication patterns. Second, movies are increasingly recognized in linguistic and cultural studies as a medium that encapsulates real-life language use within a structured narrative (Pramudita, 2021). This narrative approach enables the study of conversational maxims in specific social and cultural contexts. Third, the movie's focus on a traditional Batak family aligns with the objectives of this research, which seeks to understand the interplay between cultural norms and communication styles in Batak marital relationships.

However, it should be noted that the English translations of the dialogues may not fully capture the nuances of the original language due to cultural differences and potential limitations in the translator's understanding of Batak customs and linguistic intricacies. These challenges are acknowledged as part of the analysis to ensure the interpretations remain as culturally accurate as possible.

Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

Data were collected by transcribing relevant scenes from the movie *Ngeri Ngeri Sedap*. Transcription, a key technique in qualitative research, provides a foundation for detailed language analysis (Kowal & O'Connell, 2014). The study focused on conversations between Domu's Father and Domu's Mother, particularly those highlighting significant relational dynamics such as conflicts, negotiations, and everyday exchanges. The process began with reducing the data by identifying and selecting scenes where the couple's conversations reflected important relational dynamics, narrowing down the vast amount of dialogue to those most pertinent to the research focus. The selected scenes were then transcribed into written form, incorporating both verbal interactions and non-verbal cues where applicable to capture pragmatic meaning. After transcription, the data were systematically analyzed to identify patterns in the usage of Grice's maxims, including instances of adherence, violation, or flouting. Pragmatic analysis, guided by Grice's Cooperative Principle and its conversational maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner (Grice, 1975), was instrumental in examining the intended meanings behind utterances within specific social contexts (Levinson, 1983). Conversations were segmented into individual utterances, each analyzed for their adherence to or violation of the maxims. These utterances were further examined in relation to their situational context, such as conflicts, routines, or decision-making, to uncover patterns in maxim usage.

To validate the analysis and enhance credibility, triangulation was employed, involving cross-checking the findings with similar research on pragmatic analysis in other cultural contexts and consulting experts in pragmatics and Batak culture to ensure cultural accuracy. The study

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Sedap'. (Putri Rizki Syafrayani)*

utilized transcription tools for manually transcribing English-translated dialogues and relied on an analytical framework based on Grice's maxims to examine the data. By integrating these methods and tools, the study ensured a systematic approach to understanding the communication dynamics of Batak marital discourse.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The analysis of the conversations between the Batak couple in the movie *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap* reveals a complex interplay of Grice's maxims, which reflects the unique dynamics of marital communication within a traditional Batak setting. The dialogue between the husband and wife characters often highlights how these maxims are adhered to or violated depending on the situational context. By categorizing the utterances based on the types of maxims—Quantity, Quality, Relevance, and Manner—the study identifies distinct patterns that unveil the couple's communication strategies. These patterns also shed light on the deeper cultural and relational aspects of their marriage, which are influenced by traditional values and gender roles. The following tables provide an overview of the frequency and percentage distribution of each maxim and their violations in the couple's conversations.

Table 1. Types of Maxim in the Character's Utterances from 'Ngeri-nger Sedap' Movie

No	Types of Maxim	Frequency	Percentage
1	Maxim of Quantity	20	44.44%
2	Maxim of Quality	19	42.22%
3	Maxim of Relevance	16	35.56%
4	Maxim of Manner	0	0%
Total		45	100%

Table 2. Types of Violation in the Character's Utterances from 'Ngeri-nger Sedap' Movie

No	Types of Maxim	Frequency	Percentage
1	Maxim of Quantity	31	69.57%
2	Maxim of Quality	7	15.91%
3	Maxim of Relevance	3	6.82%
4	Maxim of Manner	1	2.27%
Total		42	100%

The analysis shows that the Maxim of Quantity was the most commonly observed type in the couple's discourse, appearing in 44.44% of their utterances. This suggests that the characters often provided just the right amount of information during their interactions. Following closely was the Maxim of Quality, which appeared in 42.22% of the dialogues, reflecting a general adherence to truthfulness, although occasional deviations pointed to underlying conflicts or misunderstandings. The Maxim of Relevance, at 35.56%, further indicated that the characters generally maintained topical coherence. In contrast, the Maxim of Manner was not observed at all in the conversations, likely due to the straightforward nature of their communication.

However, violations were prevalent, with the Maxim of Quantity being the most frequently violated, accounting for 69.57% of the instances. This suggests that both characters frequently provided either too much or too little information. Violations of the Maxim of Quality, at 15.91%, occurred mainly in scenarios requiring strategic deception, while violations of the Maxim of Relevance, at 6.82%, were often used for comedic or dramatic effects. Only a single instance of the Maxim of Manner being violated was identified, indicating a general tendency toward clear communication.

Discussion

The findings from the analysis of the Batak couple's discourse in the movie *Ngeri-nger Sedap* shed light on how Grice's maxims are both applied and violated, revealing nuanced communication patterns that align with both gender roles and cultural dynamics within the Batak community. The characters' dialogues reflect distinct strategies in adherence to and violation of the maxims, contributing to the tension, humor, and relational complexity observed in the film.

A. Maxim Usage by Male and Female Speakers

The study revealed interesting distinctions in the use of Grice's maxims between male and female speakers. The male character, Bapak, tends to violate the maxim of Quantity more frequently, as he often provides either too much or too little information, potentially to avoid confrontation or conceal his true intentions. For instance, in the exchange where Bapak suggests that they should "pretend to fight," he provides minimal information, flouting the maxim by not giving the full explanation of his plan's potential consequences. This aligns with research on how male speakers in traditional societies may often withhold information to maintain control or avoid emotional engagement (Holmes, 2006).

Conversely, Mamak adheres more closely to the maxim of Quantity in her day-to-day interactions but violates it when she becomes emotionally overwhelmed, as seen when she expresses frustration during an argument. This aligns with studies on female communication patterns, where women are often more likely to adhere to cooperative conversational norms but may violate them when expressing emotions or addressing relational grievances (Tannen, 1990).

These patterns are consistent with research showing that in many traditional cultures, men often dominate discussions by controlling the flow of information, while women, despite generally adhering to conversational maxims, may provide more information than necessary in emotionally charged contexts (Holmes, 2006).

B. Gender Roles and Communication in Batak Culture

The distinctions in how the maxims are used between the male and female characters can be better understood through the lens of Batak culture. The Batak people, like many traditional Indonesian ethnic groups, are patriarchal, with men often occupying the role of decision-makers within the household. The portrayal of Bapak as someone who withholds information or avoids direct confrontation mirrors this cultural norm. As researchers such as Siahaan (2016) have noted, Batak men are typically expected to assert control and maintain authority in familial discussions, often resulting in more indirect communication strategies that violate conversational norms to preserve their status.

In contrast, women in Batak society, while expected to respect male authority, often take on the role of emotional caretakers, which is reflected in Mamak's adherence to the maxim of Quantity, particularly in emotionally charged situations. Women are often seen as the mediators within the family, which can explain why Mamak provides more information during arguments, attempting to address the emotional undercurrents that Bapak overlooks (Simanjuntak, 2018). This aligns with broader studies on gendered communication, which suggest that women, in their role as emotional caregivers, often provide more context or elaborate more in conversations to maintain relational harmony (Holmes, 2006).

C. Application of Maxims in the Dialogue

The adherence to and violation of Grice's maxims in the Batak couple's dialogue not only reflects their individual communication styles but also provides insight into how marital dynamics unfold in this cultural context. The high frequency of the maxim of Quantity being observed (44.44%) suggests that the couple generally strives to provide the right amount of

information during their discussions. However, the fact that the violation of Quantity is also the most prevalent (69.57%) highlights the tension between maintaining proper communication and the emotional strain within their relationship.

The violation of the maxim of Quality (15.91%), as seen in Bapak and Mamak's decision to "pretend to fight" to manipulate their children, reflects the complexity of their relationship. This calculated flouting of the truth aligns with Thomas's (1995) theory that speakers may violate conversational norms to achieve specific goals, in this case, getting their children to stay. The violation becomes a pragmatic tool for the couple, underscoring how adherence to maxims can shift based on relational goals and strategic communication.

D. Explanation of Maxim Violations

The violations of Grice's maxims in the dialogue provide valuable insight into the characters' intentions and the emotional landscape of their relationship. The most frequent violation—Quantity—often occurs when one of the characters, typically Mamak, becomes emotionally overwhelmed. According to Tannen (1990), this is consistent with how women, when emotionally engaged, may violate the maxim of Quantity by providing more information than necessary in order to express deeper feelings or grievances. For instance, when Mamak lists her grievances about Bapak's behavior, she goes beyond what is required in the conversation, highlighting her emotional frustration and the imbalance in their relationship.

Similarly, the violation of the maxim of Quality, particularly when the couple pretends to fight, reflects a strategic decision to deceive their children for a larger purpose. As noted by Levinson (2000), violations of Quality can often serve a strategic function, allowing speakers to achieve unstated goals. This use of deception aligns with the idea that the couple's violation of the maxim is not simply a breakdown in communication, but rather a deliberate strategy to manipulate the situation.

Finally, the violation of the maxim of Relevance (6.82%) is often employed for comedic effect, such as when Bapak and Mamak engage in irrelevant banter during serious discussions. According to Attardo (1994), violations of relevance are frequently used in humor to create incongruity, which is evident in these exchanges. This flouting of Relevance creates moments of lightness in otherwise tense conversations, serving to balance the emotional tone of their interactions.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

The analysis of the dialogue between the Batak couple in the movie *Ngeri-nger Sedap* reveals significant insights into how Grice's maxims are applied and violated within a traditional Batak marital context. The Maxim of Quantity emerges as the most commonly followed, reflecting a balanced exchange of information, but it is also the most frequently violated, often due to emotional tension or strategic communication. This indicates that while the couple strives for cooperative communication, the complexities of their relationship and cultural expectations lead to intentional and unintentional maxim violations.

The distinctions in maxim usage between male and female speakers align with traditional gender roles in Batak culture. Men, represented by Bapak, often control the flow of information, leading to violations that help maintain authority or avoid emotional confrontation. Meanwhile, women, represented by Mamak, tend to adhere more closely to conversational norms but may violate them during emotionally charged interactions, a reflection of their role as emotional mediators in the family.

The violations of maxims—especially those of Quantity, Quality, and Relevance—provide deeper understanding of the couple's relational strategies. While violations of the maxim of Quality, such as their decision to deceive their children, serve specific goals, others, like the violation of Relevance, add humor and reduce tension in their interactions. Overall, the findings

emphasize the role of culture and gender in shaping communication dynamics, as well as the strategic use of maxim violations in managing both emotional and relational aspects of conversations.

Suggestions

Based on the findings, further research on maxim violations in other cultural contexts would be beneficial. Expanding the study to include different ethnic groups in Indonesia could provide a broader perspective on how culture shapes communication strategies and relational dynamics. Additionally, a more focused analysis of gender communication is suggested, especially in Batak society, where traditional roles seem to influence the use of conversational maxims. Understanding these gendered communication patterns could offer deeper insights into power dynamics and emotional exchanges within relationships.

Moreover, pragmatic training in interpersonal communication could be valuable, particularly in conflict resolution or relational management contexts. By understanding how adherence to or violation of Grice's maxims impacts communication, individuals can improve their relational strategies and reduce misunderstandings. Finally, exploring how maxim violations are portrayed in modern media, such as films, could reveal how cultural, gender, and relational themes are reflected and shaped by media representations. This approach could contribute significantly to both communication studies and media analysis.

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