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Bachelor's thesis

**GRICEAN COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE IN TV SHOWS (BASED ON THE
TV SERIES "THE OFFICE")**



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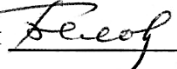
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Протокол засідання кафедри англійської філології

та міжкультурної комунікації

Протокол № 12 від 19.05.2026

Зав. кафедри  д. філол. н., проф. Алла БСЛОВА

KYIV – 2026

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ABSTRACT

Zahorui K. O. Gricean Cooperative Principle in TV shows (based on the TV series “*The Office*”)

This bachelor’s thesis explores the role of Grice’s Cooperative Principle (CP) and its non-observance in TV discourse, with a focus on how conversational norms are mirrored in media discourse. The relevance of the research lies in the growing interest in the relationship between natural communication and its representation on screen, as well as in understanding how non-observance of conversational maxims contributes to the creation of entertainment. The object of the study is the CP and the conversational maxims, while the subject is the language means of maxim non-observance and its use. The aim of the research is to identify instances of non-observance in “The Office” and to analyse their practical functions. To achieve this aim, several objectives were set for the study: examining the theoretical foundations of the CP and its presence in media discourse, as well as identifying and classifying instances of maxim breaches in the selected material, determining their usage purpose, and analysing language means of flouting and violation. The novelty of the study lies in its analysis of maxim non-observance as an essential part of TV storytelling. Chapter 1 outlines the theoretical background, including Grice’s CP, maxims, scientific discussion of Grice’s theory, types of non-observance, and its relevance to TV shows. Chapter 2 presents an analysis of the place of the CP in TV discourse on the basis of “The Office”. The results show what language means create breaches, and how they are used for communicative purposes. Different types of maxim non-observance fulfil distinct communicative functions, such as self-image construction, enhancing one’s position in the social hierarchy, and creating mockery and humour. The study concludes that CP non-observance is a structurally significant feature of TV dialogue and demonstrates the applicability of the CP as a framework for analysing both natural and scripted communication.

Keywords: Cooperative Principle, implicature, maxim non-observance, maxim flouting, maxim violation, pragmatics, TV discourse.

АНОТАЦІЯ

Загоруй К. О. Принцип кооперації Грайса в телешоу (на матеріалі серіалу “Офіс”)

У бакалаврській роботі досліджується роль принципу кооперації Грайса та його недотримання у телевізійному дискурсі з акцентом на те, як норми спілкування відображені у медійному середовищі. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена інтересом до взаємозв'язку між природною комунікацією та її відображенням на екрані, а також потребою розуміння того, як недотримання розмовних максим сприяє створенню розважального контенту. Об'єктом дослідження є принцип кооперації і розмовні максими, а предметом – мовні засоби недотримання максим та їх використання. Метою роботи є виявлення випадків недотримання максим у серіалі “Офіс” та аналіз його функцій. Для досягнення цієї мети було поставлено такі завдання: дослідити теоретичні засади принципу та його прояв у медійному дискурсі, а також виявити та класифікувати випадки порушення максим в обраному матеріалі, визначити їхню комунікативну мету і проаналізувати мовні засоби порушень. Наукова новизна дослідження полягає в аналізі недотримання максим як невід'ємної частини телевізійного сторітелінгу. У Розділі 1 викладено теоретичні засади дослідження, зокрема принцип кооперації, максими, наукову дискусію навколо теорії Грайса, типи недотримання максим та їх значення для телешоу. У Розділі 2 представлено аналіз функціонування принципу кооперації у телевізійному дискурсі на матеріалі серіалу “Офіс”. Результати дослідження демонструють, які мовні засоби спричиняють порушення та як вони використовуються для досягнення комунікативних цілей. Різні типи недотримання максим виконують різні комунікативні функції, такі як формування образу себе, підвищення власного положення в соціальній ієрархії, глузування і гумор. Дослідження встановило, що недотримання принципу кооперації є структурно значущою ознакою телевізійного діалогу, та демонструє доцільність застосування

принципу кооперації як ефективного інструмента аналізу як природної, так і сценарної комунікації.

Ключові слова: принцип кооперації, імплікатура, недотримання максим, експлуатація максим, порушення максим, прагматика, телевізійний дискурс.

INTRODUCTION

Human communication, despite being a fundamental part of our lives, was not always central in language studies. Historically, linguists were mainly focused on the formal structures of language, such as phonology and syntax, while the properties of raw human communication in context remained unaddressed. Hence, the field underwent a significant development with the emergence of pragmatics, which now studies the functional use of language, communicative intention, and implicit meaning.

Alongside Austin and Searle [Austin 1962; Searle 1969, 1979], one of the key figures in this shift was Paul Grice, who introduced the Cooperative Principle and conversational maxims describing the internal guidelines of rational communication [Grice 1968, 1975, 1989]. Grice's pragmatic theory has been further discussed by scholars such as Lakoff [Lakoff 1973], Horn [Horn 1984], Leech [Leech 1983], Raskin [Raskin 1985], Brown [Brown and Levinson 1987], Levinson [Brown and Levinson 1987; Levinson 2000], Attardo [Attardo 1990], Sperber, and Wilson [Sperber and Wilson 1996], as well as other contributors including Thomas [Thomas 1995], Cruse [Cruse 2000], Kotthoff [Kotthoff 2006], Holtsova [Гольцова 2017; Holtsova 2020], Kravchenko [Kravchenko 2017], Mazepova [Мазепова 2020], and other scholars.

While the Cooperative Principle is traditionally used in relation to real-life communicative interactions, its observance and non-observance also have an important place in the study of TV shows, as it provides a way to analyse how TV dialogue reflects everyday communication and how it helps create entertainment. The application of Grice's model to the analysis of TV and other types of discourse has been explored by a number of researchers, including Andresen [Andresen 2014], Lööf [Lööf 2018], Khamarshekh [Хамаршех 2020], Maulin and Sembodo [Maulin and Sembodo 2022], Balazh [Балаж 2023], Wang [Wang 2023], Chen [Chen 2024], Nafi, Yuliasri, Pratama [Nafi et al. 2025], and many others.

The **relevance** of this study lies in the need to analyse how everyday communication and its creative use are reflected in TV discourse, as well as in the need to understand why maxim non-observance has a prominent role in TV show dialogue.

The **aim** of this research is to identify instances of maxim non-observance in selected TV series and to investigate their pragmatic functions. In particular, the study aims to determine how frequently conversational maxims are disregarded, what language means are used, and for what communicative and narrative purposes such deviations occur.

The following **objectives** have been formulated for the study:

1. to examine the theoretical foundations of the Cooperative Principle, its scientific context, and the concept of implicature, to define and describe the four maxim categories and the various types of maxim non-observance;
2. to examine the theoretical works investigating the functional role of maxim non-observance within the context of TV discourse;
3. to identify and categorise instances of maxim non-observance in the selected TV series;
4. to analyse the extent to which the Cooperative Principle is observed in the selected material, to analyse the language means through which the Cooperative Principle is breached and implicatures are generated, and to determine the purposes for which conversational maxims are not followed.

The **object** of this research is the Cooperative Principle and the conversational maxims.

The **subject** is language means of maxim non-observance, the creation of implicature and their functions within the context of TV discourse.

The **research material** comprises the first season of the American mockumentary sitcom “The Office”, released in 2005. The season contains six 22-minute episodes (approximately 130 minutes in total) that present the daily life of the employees working within a branch of the fictional Dunder Mifflin Paper Company in Scranton, Pennsylvania. The TV series went on to have 8 more seasons, with the final episode airing in 2013. The show was based on the British sitcom of the same name; the American version initially followed a similar script but later developed independently starting from the second episode of the first season, changing the narrative, character development, and the overall tone of the series. The research

material also includes web sources with the episode scripts, which were used to verify the dialogue.

The **research methods** include the following:

- descriptive method;
- pragmatic and discourse analysis;
- contextual analysis;
- quantitative method;
- qualitative method.

The **novelty** of this research is in its comprehensive approach to analysing the Cooperative Principle and maxim non-fulfilment as a structurally necessary feature of television storytelling.

The **practical value** of the research lies in its potential to provide a methodology for analysing the non-literal layer of communication in TV discourse. The findings may be useful for further studies in pragmatics, TV discourse analysis, and media linguistics, as well as for studying interpretation of implicit meaning.

The thesis consists of an introduction, two chapters, conclusions, a list of references, and appendices. The first chapter focuses on the theoretical background of the Cooperative Principle and maxim non-observance, while the second chapter is devoted to the analysis of the selected TV material.

CHAPTER 1. GRICEAN COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE

1.1. Implicatures and the Cooperative Principle

Any kind of human communication is governed by certain sets of rules and principles. Looking at the surface level of sentence structure, the grammar laws and lexical meanings of words and phrases can be seen at play. However, when taking into account the environment of an actual utterance, the cooperation principles become instrumental, as they regulate how the conversation is conducted and interpreted.

The origin of the cooperation principles lies in the philosopher of language Grice's theory of implicatures and their place within discourse, which he outlines in his 1975 essay "Logic and Conversation" – one of the most influential works in pragmatics of the previous century. The scholar's main aim was to differentiate the act of "saying" from the act of "meaning", to show the logic and rationality in the way the conversations flow, as well as to find the subconscious mechanisms behind the process of creating and recognising implicit meaning [Davies 2000, pp. 1–7, 14–16]. By first distinguishing between what the speaker says and what they implicate, he later introduced the term **implicature** (the act of "implying") and **implicatum** ("what is implied") into the field of pragmatic studies, which are evident when speakers communicate more than what is literally said [Grice 1968, p. 225; Grice 1975, p. 44]. Specifically, implicature is a phenomenon connected with either linguistic or situational context of the discourse and is defined as what is implied, suggested, and meant in an utterance [Grice 1975, pp. 43–45, 50]. Overall, implicatures are an essential part of our everyday communication system [Kroeger 2019, p. 141].

Grice's work was a part of the shifting focus towards the functional use of language in context and towards utterance meaning that "goes beyond what is actually said and what does not contribute to the truth-conditional content of an utterance" [Irmer 2011, p. 14]. Prior to and alongside Grice's developments, Austin and Searle established that language is not just a tool for making statements and expressing facts, but that it is also used to "do" things [Austin 1962; Searle 1969; Searle 1979]. Austin's theory of speech acts argued that not all utterances had truth value, thus dividing

utterances into *constatives*, such that can be either true or false, and *performatives*, which lack this quality and instead “perform” an action [Austin 1962, pp. 1–11]. He introduced the distinction between the locutionary act (the literal meaning of the grammatical utterance and its form), the illocutionary act (the communicative purpose, such as promising or commanding), and the perlocutionary act (the intended or actual effect on the listener) [Austin 1962, pp. 94–119]. Building on Austin’s foundation, his student Searle systematised and further developed the theory of speech acts, including the creation of the taxonomy of speech acts [Searle 1969; Searle 1979, pp. 1–57]. One of the things Searle observed was indirect speech acts, e.g. when a speaker performs one illocutionary act (like making a request) by way of performing another (like asking a question), communicating more than what was actually said, such as when “*Can you reach the salt?*” functions not as a question about ability, but as a polite command [Searle 1979, p. 173]. Indirect speech acts rely on the “mutually shared background information, both linguistic and nonlinguistic, together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer” [Searle 1979, pp. 31–32]. Together with Grice, the scholars are considered to be theorists of communication-intention [Strawson 1970, p. 5; Miller 2007, p. 248], whose position was that the speaker’s meaning or intention was “the central concept in communication” [Davies 2000, p. 11].

As for the classification of implicatures, Grice splits them into two distinct types – **conventional** and **conversational** (or **non-conventional**) [Grice 1975 p. 43–45]. The former type involves inferences that are attached to and triggered by the socially-fixed meanings of particular words and expressions, and so they do not depend on the situational context, e.g. *but* (as in “*A but B*”, which is mainly used to denote “a contrastive relationship between the meaning of the clauses which it separates” [Davies 2000, p. 16]) or *even* (as in “*Even Bart passed the test*”, which implies that “Bart was among the least likely to pass the test”, by indicating a situation that is contrary to expectation [Kroeger 2019, p. 149]). On the other hand, **conversational implicatures** occur when there is a gap between the meaning of the actual words uttered and the speaker’s intended meaning. The conversational context is imperative

here because the listener must infer the meaning by taking into account the circumstances of the discourse. An example of this is the exchange below, where instead of giving a direct negative reply, the speaker B answers as follows:

A: *Can you tell me where the post office is?*

B: *I'm a stranger here myself* [Kroeger 2019, p. 140].

The hearer relies on certain information to, as Grice puts it, “work out” and “grasp intuitively” an implicature: the conventional meaning of the words, the Cooperative Principle and its maxims, the context (linguistic, or that of the utterance), and the shared background knowledge between participants [Grice 1975, p. 50]. Additionally, all of these data points should be available to both participants, and they both have to be aware of this shared information. Thus, the speaker A assumes that the speaker is still following the cooperation principles, and since what was said is clearly insufficient or irrelevant, the speaker A works out that the speaker B does not know where the post office is either.

From the point of view of pragmatics, conversational implicatures seem to be of greater research importance due to their connection with the actual context, which, according to Paltridge, is “crucial to understanding and interpreting the meaning of what is being said” in both written and spoken discourse [Paltridge 2012, p. 39]. Conversational implicatures are the result of the discourse participant following the general conversational rules aimed at excluding the “conversationally unsuitable” responses according to the communicative purpose(s) or direction, and the stage of the conversation [Grice 1975, p. 45]. Grice terms these cooperative efforts to fulfil the conversational objective and carry out a rational conversation **the Cooperative Principle**. Its initial breach is directly responsible for the emergence of the conversational implicature [Балаж 2023, p. 21].

The Cooperative Principle (CP) is predicated on the assumption that participants in a conversation will make their contribution “such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange”, and people naturally assume that a special set of these rules or maxims guides the conversation and the way to interpret the message [Grice 1975, p. 45]. Therefore, the

main aim of this principle is to facilitate mutual understanding between the parties. However, the CP is still observed even if the interlocutors start to argue – they might seem “uncooperative” in the word’s unusual sense, but from the perspective of the Principle, they contribute in an appropriate and coherent way that aligns with the purpose of the conversation [Lööf 2018, p. 2].

In order to provide the structure for how cooperation works in practice, Grice proposed a number of maxim categories – *Quantity*, *Quality*, *Relation*, and *Manner* [Grice 1975, pp. 45–47]. Notably, the principles that fall under these categories are not rigid conversational laws, but are instead regarded as flexible guidelines that one should follow to the best of one’s ability [Cruse 2000, p. 357] or as “default settings” of the conversation with participants’ mutual awareness of them [Horn 2008, p. 8]. In addition, a speaker’s contribution may still constitute rational even if the principles are disregarded, on condition that the implied meaning stays in accordance with the CP maxims, as will be discussed in the chapter concerning non-observance.

1.2. Conversational maxims

The CP comprises four categories, each with its own conversational maxims that describe the specific criteria a speaker’s contribution should meet to be considered rational and cooperative.

The category of Quantity relates to the amount of information a speaker presents during an exchange. Grice provides the following two maxims that are related to this category:

- “make your contribution as informative as is required”, according to the purpose or direction of the conversation, as providing too little information may leave the listener unable to identify the speaker’s intended meaning;
- “do not make your contribution more informative than is required” [Grice 1975, pp. 45–46].

Notably, Grice mentions that the importance of the second maxim may be put into question. On the one hand, a speaker’s turn that is too informative may just be considered a waste of time, instead of a violation of the CP; on the other hand, it might

be argued that too much information results in confusion or distraction, perhaps even leading the listener to search for a hidden reason behind the excessive detail. Overall, maxims of the Quantity category can be summarised as the following: provide the right amount of information, neither too much nor too little.

The category of Quality concerns the truthfulness of a contribution, containing one main guiding maxim “try to make your contribution one that is true” and two clarifying submaxims:

- “do not say what you believe to be false”;
- “do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence” [Grice 1975, p. 46].

If a speaker is assumed to be following the Maxim of Quality, the listener takes their words as factual and genuine. This maxim is paramount as it forms the basis of trust in communication and, as Grice puts it, “other maxims come into operation only on the assumption that this maxim of Quality is satisfied” [Grice 1975, p. 46]. Consequently, when this maxim is not observed, the entire conversational dynamic of the interlocutors’ interaction shifts.

The category of Relation focuses on the relevance of the utterance, and it urges the speaker to make their contributions relevant to the purpose and matter at hand, as well as the current stage of the discourse. Grice emphasises that what is “relevant” can change continuously as the conversation progresses [Grice 1975, p. 46]. Listeners use the assumption of relevance to decode seemingly disconnected statements; if a speaker changes the subject, the listener will try to find a logical bridge between the old and new topics. If a speaker flouts this maxim, for instance, by making an observation that is deliberately irrelevant to the topic at hand, it may signal that they wish to change the subject or avoid a specific discussion [Thomas 1995, p. 70].

The category of Manner, generally regarded as less important than the previous three categories [Cruse 2000, p. 357], relates to how clearly the information is expressed and how easily it is understood – the goal is to be “perspicuous”. It includes four submaxims:

- “avoid obscurity of expression”, so one should not use language that the listener cannot understand;

- “avoid ambiguity”, so that the number of equally possible interpretations is minimised;
- “be brief”, avoid unnecessary “prolixity” or wordiness;
- “be orderly”, so that the information is presented in a logical sequence, e.g., chronological order [Grice 1975, p. 46].

Failure to follow the maxims of Manner often results in confusion or, in many cases, an implicature that the speaker is trying to hide something or exert social power through complex language. Additionally, a person might use obscure language to convey a message to one person in a way that a third party does not understand the content [Grice 1975, p. 55].

Grice emphasises that the conversational maxims are not culturally bound and that they are intrinsic to human coexistence and social interaction. Nevertheless, some linguists have questioned whether the cooperation principles are universally applicable to every culture; notably, different cultures can regard the maxims differently and assign different degrees of importance to them [Cruse 2000, pp. 357–358; Мазепова 2020]. Therefore, some maxims will be followed more closely than others, e.g., in some cultures it is more socially appropriate to violate the maxim of Quality in order to give at least some amount of information, even fictitious, as giving none would seem tactless and hurt the other’s feelings [Cruse 2000, p. 358; Paltridge 2012, p. 47]. The cultural differences are especially salient when one starts to consider the Politeness Principle, discussed further.

1.3. Other views on the Cooperative Principle and its maxims

Despite its foundational status in pragmatics, Grice’s model has been subject to various critiques and reworkings, primarily concerning complementary rules, as well as the ambiguity and potential redundancy of the original four maxims [Horn 1984; Lakoff 1973; Leech 1983; Levinson 2000; Sperber & Wilson 1996]. This has led to the development of several theories, the most relevant of which will be presented in this subsection.

Neo-Gricean theories, such as those formulated by Horn and Levinson, attempted to condense the maxims into fewer, more economical principles. Horn proposed a two-maxim system: the Q-Principle (“make your contribution sufficient”; “say as much as you can”), which replaces Grice’s first maxim of Quantity, and the R-Principle (“make your contribution necessary”; “say no more than you must”), which replaces the maxims of Relation, Manner, and the second maxim of Quantity [Horn 1984, p. 13]. The category of Quality was left out because it was considered a foundational prerequisite for conversation rather than a principle that operates exactly on the same level as the others, as Grice himself mentioned in his seminal work that the importance of this category may seem higher [Grice 1975, pp. 46–47]. Later, Levinson proposed a different model: he kept the Q-Principle, and added I-Principle (Informativeness) and M-Principle (Manner) [Levinson 2000, pp. 76, 114, 136–137]. The former one meant achieving communicative goals by saying as little as necessary, and the latter one suggested that marked or unusual linguistic forms describe marked or non-prototypical situations, meaning that if something is said in an abnormal way, it indicates an abnormal situation.

Some scholars, such as Sperber and Wilson, went further: they reimagined the CP as Relevance Theory to simplify and refine Grice’s approach. Their model moved away from the separate maxims, viewing them as redundant and proposing instead that all communicative phenomena could be explained by a single cognitive principle – the Principle of Relevance [Sperber and Wilson 1996, pp. 31–38, 155–163].

Sperber and Wilson argued that human cognition is inherently “geared to the maximisation of relevance”, which they defined as a balance between two factors: cognitive effects (the more a piece of information adds, strengthens, weakens, or cancels existing information in a context, the greater its relevance) and processing effort (the less effort a hearer must expend to recover these effects, the more relevant the utterance is) [Sperber and Wilson 1996, pp. 153, 123–132]. They argue that human communication is not guided by a social “contract” of cooperation, but by a biological drive to extract the maximum amount of information for the least amount of mental effort. According to their theory, every act of communication carries an implicit

guarantee of its own optimal relevance, meaning that the speaker believes the utterance is worth the hearer's effort to process.

While some linguists focused on the maxims of the original CP, Lakoff was one of the first scholars to study politeness within pragmatics [Lakoff 1973]. She proposed two basic rules of Pragmatic Competence, which later got to be known as the Politeness Principle (PP): “be clear” and “be polite”; the “be polite” rule also included three components: don't impose, give the receiver options, and make them feel good [Lakoff 1973, p. 296–298]. Lakoff identified that the clarity of the utterance and the politeness of expressing it often conflict: when the goal is to convey the informational content of a message, clarity takes priority, but when the social status of the interlocutor is more important, politeness prevails.

In an effort to provide a more detailed account of how social goals influence conversational interactions, Leech developed another complementary scheme. He argued that while the CP explains how we communicate information effectively, it cannot fully account for implicatures related to politeness [Leech 1983, p. 79–84]. The PP is designed to “minimize the expression of impolite beliefs” [Leech 1983, p. 81]. The principle is intended to maintain harmonious social relations and mitigate the effect of belittling messages that reality may force one to convey [Cruse 2000, p. 361–362]. The linguist developed a set of six principles that govern polite interaction: tact, generosity, praise, modesty, agreement, sympathy, and consideration maxims [Leech 1983, pp. 107–110, 131–139]. Leech also introduced two additional principles, outside the PP, to explain more complex forms of non-literal communication, which included irony (being “superficially ‘nice’ but ultimately insincere” and “an apparently friendly way of being offensive”) and banter (“an offensive way of being friendly”) [Leech 1983, pp. 82–83, 144, 144–145].

Similarly to conversational maxims, politeness maxims have different weight depending on the cultural environment, insofar as some cultures have completely distinct sets of principles due to their values. For instance, according to Mazepova, the Persian politeness system is more emotional, pays more attention, and expresses more empathy towards the interlocutor in comparison to the English PP [Мазепова 2020].

The Persian PP contains one Manner supermaxim with submaxims of Deference, Humility, and Cordiality. Additionally, even different speech communities within one culture may have dissimilar politeness rules [Brinton and Brinton 2010, p. 350].

Overall, the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle seem to often come into conflict, as the requirements for efficient information exchange frequently clash with the social necessity of maintaining harmony and “face” [Paltridge 2012, p. 51]. Leech states that the PP can often take priority over the CP within the process of communication and that it is the exact thing that underlies the assumption that “our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place” [Leech 1984, p. 82]. Meanwhile, some scholars oppose Leech’s PP: as maintained by Brown and Levinson, creating more maxims for every language regularity is redundant and that politeness is implicated from the CP; thus, they argue that the PP is not required, and instead they propose a simpler model based on “the mutual awareness of ‘face’ sensitivity” [Brown and Levinson 1987, pp. 3–7, 5].

1.4. Non-observance of conversational maxims

The conversation participants are generally assumed to be following the CP. When a speaker’s contribution does not appear to adhere to the conversational maxims, the hearer attempts to preserve the assumption of cooperation by inferring an unstated meaning or implicatum [Grice 1975]. However, there are instances when the CP maxims are broken by the conversation participants, for one reason or another. As maintained by Crystal, the everyday experience shows that we do not always strictly follow the CP, although “we do seem to tacitly recognize their role as a perspective or orientation within which actual utterances can be judged” and that “we instinctively look for ways to make sense of what has been said” despite the non-observance [Crystal 2001, p. 49].

Grice identifies four primary ways a speaker can disregard the maxims [Grice 1975, p. 49]:

1. **Violation** happens when a speaker quietly and inconspicuously violates a maxim, so that the interlocutor does not notice the breach, and it is usually done

with the intent to mislead them. For instance, a mother might tell a child that she is going on a holiday, while in reality she needs the time to decide whether she wants a divorce [Paltridge 2012, p. 47].

2. **Opting out** is the conversation participant's explicit demonstration that they are unwilling to cooperate in the way a particular maxim requires. The speaker may opt out due to private, ethical, or legal reasons [Paltridge 2012, p. 47], usually "to avoid generating a false implicature or appearing uncooperative" [Thomas 1995, p. 74].
3. **Clash** occurs when a speaker is unable to fulfil one maxim without violating another, e.g. providing less information than required (violations of the first maxim of Quantity) because they lack the evidence to say more (adherence to the second maxim of Quality).
4. **Flouting** is a type of maxim non-fulfillment considered to be the most significant source of conversational implicature, which in this case results in **exploiting** a maxim. Kravchenko asserts that flouting "can serve ... as the pragmatic trigger of the illocutionary force" [Kravchenko 2017, p. 64]. A flout specifically takes place when a speaker blatantly fails to fulfil a maxim not with the goal of misleading the listener, but instead to bring something to the hearer's attention and to prompt them to look for implied meaning. Grice states that even if the speaker flouts a maxim, the CP is still "observed on the level of what is implicated" [Grice 1975, p. 52].

Other scholars have added two more types of maxim breaching:

5. **Infringement** takes place when a speaker fails to observe a maxim and at the same time has nothing to imply, nor are they trying to deceive the other interlocutor. This generally happens with young children or non-native speakers learning the language who do not have the linguistic capacity to answer in the expected or appropriate way [Paltridge 2012, p. 47].
6. Another additional type is **suspending**, which is when a conversation participant does not fully commit to a maxim on account of their cultural conventions, e.g. a speaker of Navajo background will not mention the name of a deceased person,

even if they knew them very well, thus suspending the maxim of Quantity. Still, this would seem cooperative by the members of the same culture [Thomas 1995, p. 76–77].

An important distinction should be made between conversational implicatures that stem from flouting and **standard implicatures**. While both aim for “a sincere communication” in comparison to violation, Cruse states that a standard implicature arises when no maxim is clearly breached, and the hearer performs a simple, straightforward inference to preserve the assumption of cooperation [Cruse 2000, pp. 358–359]. He illustrates this with the following dialogue example:

A: *I've run out of petrol.*

B: *There's a garage just round the corner.*

The speaker A would then assume that the speaker B is following the maxim of Relation and in this way implicates that the garage sells petrol.

Flouting, on the other hand, is a procedure by which a maxim is exploited through a deliberate failure to fulfil it [Grice 1975, pp. 49–56]. Unlike the garage example, where the speaker appears to be following the principles directly, flouting occurs when the speaker makes it obvious to the hearer that a maxim is being disregarded to signal that the literal meaning is not the intended one. For instance, if a speaker says “*X is a fine friend*” about someone who has betrayed them, they are saying something they believe to be false [Grice 1975, p. 53]. Because the falsity and pretence are obvious to all parties, the hearer infers that the speaker actually believes the opposite. In this case, the implicature generates such additional meanings as **irony** and **sarcasm**, which are primarily achieved by *flouting the Maxim of Quality*. Within his framework, Grice argues that irony is “intimately connected with the expression of a feeling, attitude, or evaluation” and that the action of using irony is “intended to reflect a hostile or derogatory judgment or a feeling such as indignation or contempt” [Grice 1989, pp. 53–54].

Quality maxim exploitation can also be used to create special emphasis and other additional meanings, such as rhetorical effects of *metaphor*, *meiosis*, and *hyperbole*. Grice states that **metaphors** “involve a categorical falsity” at the literal level, such as

when saying “*You are the cream in my coffee*”, and the hearer recognises that the speaker is attributing some features of the substance to the subject based on their resemblance [Grice 1975, p. 53]. A clear example of metaphor use is a post from Sternenko’s news blog: “*In the majority of cases, the air defence soldiers shot down russian culture*” [Балаж 2023, p. 22, translated by the author], in which russian culture is equated to missiles. **Hyperbole** and **meiosis** occur when the statement clearly does not reflect reality, as it is obvious that an utterance is either an exaggeration or an understatement done for a certain effect [Grice 1975, p. 53]. Furthermore, some other tropes and figures of speech can be explained by CP breach. For example, Davis explains how simple figures (*litotes*, *metonymy*, *synecdoche*) and complex figures (*ironic metaphor*, *ironic litotes*, *meiotic metonymy*, which have one figure of speech imbedded within another) involve conversational implicatures and Grice’s maxims [Davis 2016, pp. 59–62].

Holtsova argues that some literary devices – namely *antithesis*, *antiphrasis*, *oxymoron*, *metaphor*, and *euphemism* – often flout and violate several maxims at the same time [Гольцова 2017]. According to her research, oxymoron disregards the maxims of Quality and Manner, metaphor disregards the maxims of Quality and Quantity, while antithesis, antiphrasis, and euphemism do so with all three categories. The remaining category of Relation is violated depending on the context in which they are used. Similes were also mentioned to violate the maxims of Quantity, Quality, and Manner if used ironically [Holtsova 2020]. However, it should be emphasised that Holtsova views metaphors and other stylistic devices discussed not as conversational (as Grice classifies metaphors, hyperboles, and meiosis) but as conventional implicatures. This is due to the fact that they can be understood outside the discourse context on condition that the recipient has the background knowledge necessary, although Grice postulates that only conversational implicatures can breach the cooperation principles [Grice 1975].

Having examined the flouting of Quality, it is necessary to consider the exploitation of the other three categories. If the speaker provides too much or too little information, *flouting the maxim of Quantity*, it forces the hearer to infer why the

required amount of detail was withheld or exceeded, e.g. a professor writing a job recommendation that only acknowledges a student's attendance and command of English implicates that the student is not suitable for the job [Grice 1975, pp. 52–53]. Moreover, Grice mentions that tautologies like “*War is war*” provide no new information at the literal level, but *exploit the maxim of Quantity* to implicate that certain properties are innate or unavoidable.

As for *the maxim of Relation*, a speaker might make an irrelevant remark to change the subject, for instance, to imply that the other interlocutor’s previous utterance was a faux pas [Grice 1975, p. 54] or to show reluctance to participate in the discussion of a particular topic [Thomas 1995, p. 70].

Finally, the speaker may use obscure, ambiguous, or wordy language even when a more brief expression is possible, e.g. a reviewer who writes that a performer “*produced a series of sounds that corresponded closely with the score*” instead of simply saying the person “sang” flouts *the maxim of Manner*, specifically brevity, to implicate that the performance was mediocre [Grice 1975, pp. 55–56]. A speaker may also be deliberately obscure in the presence of a third party (like a child when the parents are talking) to communicate something to one listener while ensuring the other does not understand it [Grice 1975, p. 55], e.g. if someone said “*post-prandial concoctions involving supercooled oxide of hydrogen*” [Cruse 2000, p. 361] to mean “some very cold water after a meal”.

1.5. Maxim non-observance as a means of creating humour, drama, and characterisation

In television shows, scriptwriters and producers use maxim non-observance as mechanisms for telling a captivating story, as its main purpose is to create *humour, conflict, drama, and characterisation* [Andresen 2014; Attardo 1990; Kotthoff 2005; Löf 2018; Maulin and Sembodo 2022], provided that this tool is applied appropriately. If real people and fictional characters were perfectly cooperative and rational on television, the conversations and the following situations would be productive, but certainly not entertaining. The same is true for both scripted and

unscripted TV shows, despite the fact that the latter might be seen as more authentic in terms of CP adherence and non-observance. Ultimately, both are a reflection of human communication. The similarity between the regular and TV discourse is supported by the fact that the particular reasons for maxim non-observance, just as in everyday real-life interactions, vary in similar ways – from wishing to lighten the mood with humour to concealing information and manipulation. Nevertheless, this paper will focus specifically on the scripted variety.

A common reason for failing to observe maxims is to create a **humorous effect** between what is said and what is meant [Kotthoff 2005]. For instance, Kotthoff provides the following example of an exchange between Speaker A and Speaker B:

A: *Your nagging goes right in one ear and out the other.*

B: *That's because there is nothing between to stop it* [Kotthoff 2005, p. 274].

Moreover, she asserts that the CP is a potent framework for the analysis of humour in general, as it provides the default settings for how meaning is generated, allowing one to track the specific paths for inference that lead from literal speech to humorous effect.

Verbal humour is primarily achieved through flouting and violation, and jokes are one of the ways humour can manifest. As stated by Attardo, a large number of jokes have at least one of the maxims breached, with all maxims being viable sources of comedic effect, not just the category of Quality, which is used for irony [Attardo 1990, pp. 355–356]. For example, when one asks “*Excuse me, do you know what time it is?*” and the other person simply replies “*Yes*”, the maxim of Quantity is violated. The process of understanding a joke typically consists of a “first reading”, where the hearer identifies a maxim breach, followed by a “second reading”, which forces the hearer to backtrack and reinterpret the utterance in a new way termed the “non-bona-fide” mode [Attardo 1990, p. 357; Raskin 1984, p. 103]. While humour depends on this humorous violation and subversion of the maxims, humorous texts are, in fact, used cooperatively. A joke seems uncooperative until it reaches the punchline, and thus the creation of humour involves deceiving the hearer and exploiting their initial expectations [Attardo 1990].

Attardo emphasises that the effectiveness of a joke often hinges on two factors: implicit information and unexpectedness [Attardo 1990, pp. 358–359]. Some part of the information must always remain hidden – the hearer should infer the punchline through their own cognitive efforts, otherwise the joke loses its humorous effect. This, however, results in the violation of the category of Quantity. As for the second aspect, surprise can be attained if the joke follows a linear order: the “second script” should only be introduced once the first layer has been established, and the punchline should occur finally. On the whole, unexpectancy seems to be a large part of humour in general, not just in jokes, stemming from the fact that abrupt, spontaneous, unnecessary, exaggerated, overly dramatic, or absurd responses that flout the conversational maxims disrupt the expected conversation trajectory [Nafi et al. 2025]. As demonstrated by Nafi, Yuliasri, and Pratama, the following types of humour can occur based on the category of the violated maxim:

- Quality: banter, irony, hyperbole, teasing, puns, putdown, self-deprecating humour, anecdote;
- Quantity: irony, hyperbole, puns;
- Relation: banter, retort, self-deprecating humour, anecdote;
- Manner: retort, teasing, putdown [Nafi et al. 2025, p. 33].

On TV shows, scriptwriters often make their characters fail to observe the maxims precisely to achieve a comedic effect. This can be illustrated by one of the examples that Wang presents in the analysis of the CP violation in the sitcom “Friends”, when the character Chandler violates the maxim of Relation:

Rachel: *Hey, Chandler. Monica just broke my seashell lamp.*

Chandler: *I’m gonna die alone!*

Rachel: *Okay, you win* [Wang 2023, p. 8].

Chandler is bothered by the fact that he will likely die alone because the lifestyle he leads is similar to that of the recently deceased lonely neighbour. This instigates a funny scene as the other characters do not have the same background knowledge as the audience, i.e. what Chandler is currently worrying about, making his sudden, unrelated to the previous utterance remark hilarious. In response, Rachel ironically

comments on that, seemingly “resigning” to the fact that her problem is not as severe. Wang concludes that characters disregard maxims for various reasons: to “say something against their true feelings”, “change the topic”, “avoid embarrassment”, and express something “in an ambiguous way with the purposes of exaggerating, lying, protecting others’ feelings, or simply being ironic or sarcastic to poke fun at each other”, with each one of these motives having the potential to create comical scenes [Wang 2023, p. 8, 11]. Based on Chen’s research paper of another sitcom “Man with a Plan”, one can also add hiding true thoughts, proving something, conforming to the expectations of others, strengthening the persuasion, and emphasizing personal views to the list of possible reasons [Chen 2024].

Maxim non-observance is also frequently used to establish and reinforce unique **character traits**: the frequency and the kind of maxim non-observance in the speech of TV show characters can tell the audience about their personality and demonstrate their characteristics, tendencies, and relationships [Andresen 2014]. Therefore, by choosing which maxims a character routinely fails and manages to observe, writers create a shorthand for character tropes and archetypes that the audience can easily recognise.

Research by Andresen and Lööf has correlated specific character traits with distinct patterns of maxim non-observance [Andresen 2014; Lööf 2018]. For instance, an awkward or a narrow-minded character may violate the maxim of Relation, which leads to embarrassing, uncomfortable situations and tension. Narcissistic and boastful characters will violate the maxim of Quantity, where they either provide excessive information about themselves or omit what others need; they might also disregard the maxim of Relation by redirecting the conversation to themselves. Characters that tend to manipulate others will do so by violating the maxim of Quality, demonstrating their deceptiveness or strategic thinking. It must be noted that implicatures that arise from flouts are also a significant source of influence and manipulation, e.g. when attempting to establish authority over someone in political discourse [Хамаршиг 2020]. Dominant characters flout maxims of Quality and Quantity more frequently to maintain their role as the group leader or to regulate the behaviour of others and give

unsolicited advice, functioning as a “parent” to the group. A character whose main trait is being sarcastic would often make comments that are either ambiguous or clearly untrue, which implies some hidden remark or insult, flouting the maxims of Manner. Insulting was also observed to have been done by means of flouting the maxims of Quality and Quantity. In addition, a complete lack of or rare maxim non-observance can hint at specific personality traits as well [Andresen 2014; Lööf 2018].

The last major reason for maxim non-observance on TV shows and in other media is that it creates **drama and conflict** that make the plot progress, along with making it an engaging narrative [Maulin and Sembodo 2022]. Scriptwriters use maxim violations to build suspense by allowing characters to deceive, avoid suspicion, and conceal their identities, plans, criminal activities, or evidence against them. For example, Maulin and Sembodo highlight this in the series “You”, the main character routinely violates the maxim of Quality by lying to investigators and partners to hide his true nature. Violation of the maxim of Relation is also employed to divert attention from dangerous truths, e.g. the main character confesses to a lesser crime – stealing the interlocutor’s laptop – specifically to stop the other character from questioning him about the murder [Maulin and Sembodo 2022]. Beyond high-stakes thrillers, TV series like “The Flash” use these violations to protect secret identities, while “Sherlock” characters violate maxims to conceal facts, confuse others, or create a specific impression [Annas 2018, as cited in Maulin and Sembodo 2022, p. 54; Ramadhan 2017, as cited in Maulin and Sembodo 2022, p. 54]. Characters may lie to protect themselves or others from trouble, e.g. when Dwight from the sitcom “The Office” gives a false name to the police while trying to frame a co-worker, or to gain strategic advantage, e.g. when he lies to Michael about having a dentist appointment when he is actually secretly meeting the CEO to steal Michael’s job [Lööf 2018, pp. 11–12] .

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER 1

The first chapter of this paper has examined the theoretical foundations of the Cooperative Principle (CP) and implicatures, the CP’s role in pragmatics, the maxims

that comprise it, and the failure to observe them, as well as other linguists' views on the CP and the place of maxim non-observance within the context of TV shows. The analysis concludes that Grice's CP, defined as the default assumption for rational discourse that allows participants to interpret utterances as purposeful and meaningful, has a central role in the pragmatic research of both natural and scripted communication. The CP is organised around four maxim categories – Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner – which provide guidelines for being informative, truthful, evidential, relevant, clear, brief, and orderly in one's contributions to the talk exchange.

Grice demonstrated that communication is not limited to the literal semantic content of an utterance, thus introducing the concept of implicature to explain the gap between what is said and what is meant. He presents two types of implicature – conventional and conversational, the latter being a major subject of subsequent studies in pragmatics. The philosopher asserted that conversational implicatures arise mainly from the breach of the conversational maxims, particularly from flouting. The analysis shows that in total there are six types of maxim non-observance: violation, opting out, clash, flouting, with the addition of infringement and suspension by other linguists. The most common and the most researched are violation and flouting. Flouting is a noteworthy conversational tool as it can create irony, sarcasm, metaphor, hyperbole, meiosis, and other additional meanings.

Furthermore, the chapter explored the preceding and contemporary developments in pragmatics, i.e. Austin's theory of speech acts and Searle's classification of speech acts, along with other scholars' subsequent criticisms and additions to Grice's model. Alternative and complementary approaches include neo-Gricean revisions, Relevance Theory, and the Politeness Principle, which point out the limitations of the CP. Nevertheless, Grice's CP remains a foundational framework for understanding what drives utterances to be the way they occur and how implicit meaning is constructed and interpreted.

Finally, this chapter considered the maxim non-observance as an integral element of TV show structure. TV series scriptwriters and participants on TV programs often

disregard conversational maxims to create engagement. In the context of TV dialogue, these pragmatic breaches function as a primary means for:

- creating humour by disrupting conversational expectations and forcing a reinterpretation of utterances;
- developing characterisation by establishing unique personality traits and archetypes based on a character's patterns of uncooperative speech;
- generating drama, conflict, and suspense by violation of the maxims to build conflict and drive the narrative forward.

CHAPTER 2. MAXIM NON-OBSERVANCE IN “THE OFFICE”

2.1. “The Office” show specificity: a hybrid of sitcom and mockumentary

In order to understand and contextualise “The Office” as a TV show phenomenon, it is necessary to outline the diversity of TV programme genres. Modern television production includes a wide range of formats: drama, soap opera, comedy, popular entertainment, children’s television, news, documentary, “variety”, sport, advertising, cartoons, etc. [Fulton et al. 2006, p. 125]. Each type is characterised by its own narrative conventions and stylistic features. At the same time, each one has multiple subgenres, some of which are situated at the intersection of multiple genres. For instance, drama encompasses single plays, westerns, action series, police series, hospital dramas, science fiction, drama-documentaries, mini-series, costume dramas, teen series, and post-modern dramas. Comedy includes sketch comedies, sitcoms, and adult animation. The documentary genre contains observational documentaries, docusoaps, reality TV, and educational programming. Populist debates, quiz shows, celebrity talk shows, confessional talk shows, sports shows, music shows, daytime TV, and advertising are classified as popular entertainment [Creeber 2001, pp. 7–8].

“The Office” can be classified as a situation comedy – a genre, which Merriam-Webster dictionary defines as “a television series that involves a continuing cast of characters in a succession of comedic circumstances” [Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2026]. Situational comedies, or sitcoms, typically focus on recurring characters placed in familiar settings, where humour arises from everyday interactions, misunderstandings, and interpersonal conflicts. These features make sitcoms particularly suitable for pragmatic analysis, as they rely heavily on dialogue and social dynamics.

However, “The Office” differs from traditional examples of the sitcom genre because it also demonstrated features typical of a mockumentary, which is a fictional, scripted work presented in the style of a documentary, hence “mocking” and mimicking it [Гончарук et al. 2022]. This is evident by comparing the style of this series with the criteria compiled by Honcharuk, Levchenko, and Tsimokh. Namely,

“The Office” is filmed on handheld cameras and in realistic locations with natural lighting; it includes “talking head” interviews and voice-over segments; the actors often improvise, adding remarks, expressions, or reactions that were not foreseen by the script; the characters portrayed directly look at or address the “in-universe” camera, breaking the fourth wall. Moreover, unlike conventional sitcoms that often employ audience laughter and staged humour, the show adopts a more subtle and realistic comedic style, while simultaneously retaining hesitations, repetitions, and interruptions in dialogue to mirror real-life speech [Гончарук et al. 2022]. In addition to its genre characteristics, “The Office” was selected as the object of analysis due to its status as one of the most influential and widely recognised examples of the mockumentary sitcom fusion. Its popularity and cultural impact make it a representative case for examining the CP in contemporary TV discourse.

The humour in “The Office” is largely derived from awkward social situations, inappropriate remarks, irony, implicatures, violations of conversational norms, etc. This makes the series especially relevant for analysing the CP because a lot of the humour, in addition to drama, is achieved through the deliberate flouting or violation of conversational maxims. On the whole, the mockumentary format creates an illusion of authenticity and spontaneity, making the interactions between characters appear natural and resembling real-life communication despite the existence of a script.

2.2. Distribution and language means of maxim non-observance in “The Office”

The quantitative analysis of the first season of “The Office” reveals a high frequency of non-observance of Grice’s CP, confirming that it is a central mechanism of humour, character construction, and drama in the series. A total of 723 instances of maxim non-observance were identified across the six episodes. Due to the fact that many utterances in the show simultaneously disregard several conversational maxims, the overlaps between maxims were counted as separate instances to accurately reflect each maxim category. It should be noted, however, that the quantitative results presented here are to some extent subjective and should be interpreted as approximate

rather than absolute. While effort was made to apply consistent criteria throughout the analysis, the results inevitably reflect the analyst's perspective and therefore involve a degree of subjectivity. Nevertheless, such cases do not significantly affect the overall trends observed.

Before conducting an indepth analysis of the CP on "The Office", an approximation of the percentage of relative screentime spent talking by each character has been done, which was based on the number of words uttered by a singular individual. The purpose of collecting this data was to determine who the analysis should focus on and then to compare this distribution with the relative frequency of maxim flouting and violation.

The chart (see Appendix 1) points attention to four main characters, i.e. Michael Scott (about 50%), Dwight Schrute (about 14%), Jim Halpert (about 14%), and Pam Beesly (about 7%), who accordingly are in the centre of the plot of the series. These characters occupy specific positions within the office hierarchy: Michael serves as the regional manager of the branch, Dwight as a salesperson and assistant to the regional manager, Jim as a salesperson, and Pam as the receptionist. The share of dialogue of other characters has been less than 3%, amounting to about 15% total.

As for the distribution of CP non-observance across characters, Michael accounts for 477 cases (66%), followed by Jim with 97 cases (13.4%), Dwight with 91 cases (12.6%), Pam with 24 cases (3.3%), and other characters collectively contributing 34 cases (4.7%) (see Appendix 2, Appendix 3). When compared to the approximate proportion of dialogue attributed to each character, it becomes evident that maxim non-observance is not evenly distributed relative to speech quantity.

Maxim non-observance in the series is realised through particular language means, such as rhetorical devices, register, and terms. The characters systematically rely on hyperbole, metaphor, irony, allusion, repetition, ellipsis, etc. in order to flout or violate conversational maxims and generate implicatures. Their use forms patterns that correspond to communicative intentions.

2.2.1. Flouting and violating the maxims as a means of self-image construction

In “The Office”, flouting and violating Grice’s maxims frequently function as a language means for self-image construction. While the CP states that the interlocutors aim to contribute to a productive and mutually beneficial exchange, in practice speakers often use conversation as a method to present themselves in a better light or in a particular way that they want the others to see them. A prominent example of this tendency in the series is Michael Scott, who uses numerous communicative strategies to shape how he is perceived by others.

A general overview of Michael’s CP non-observance shows that the maxim of Quality is violated or flouted by him most frequently (166 instances), followed by Relation (145), Manner (123), and Quantity (43) (see Appendix 3). This indicates that Michael’s communication is particularly marked by exaggeration, lies, and long-winded speech, as well as frequent irrelevance and lack of clarity. The lower number of Quantity-related cases suggests that the issue usually lies in what, when, and how he expresses his thoughts, rather than in how much he expresses. While he produces approximately half of the dialogue in the series, he is responsible for two-thirds of all CP non-observance.

From the very beginning of the series, Michael is shown to regularly use **allusion** as a means to connect with his coworkers through their shared cultural environment. Michael’s use of allusion seems to involve flouting the maxim of Relation as the content of the speaker’s reference is superficially irrelevant to the immediate conversational goals. In some cases, it may also involve flouting the maxim of Quality, as the comparison does not mean to accurately reflect the actual state of affairs. For example, in the opening scene of the first episode “Pilot”, in a simple work-related interaction with his employee Jim, Michael makes an obscure cultural allusion to a show he likes – the 1970s TV series “Kung Fu”, which is not relevant to the purposes of professional communication and their exchange, and also does not accurately reflect their employer-employee workplace dynamic: *“How are things at the library? ... So you’ve come to the master for guidance? Is this what you’re saying, grasshopper?”*

[S1E1, 00:36–00:45]. By employing an allusion and a **metaphor** in the lexical item “grasshopper”, he attempts to impose a master-apprentice relationship, identical to that of the character in “Kung Fu”. While the intended effect is to construct an image of mentorship and wisdom, the success of this implicature depends on the interlocutor’s ability to calculate the implicature through background knowledge. Since Jim does not meaningfully respond to the reference and just continues the conversation staying close to the original topic, it is unclear whether the allusion is recognised. Therefore, it is possible that the maxim of Relation is not flouted but violated from Jim’s perspective, and the particular wording might be interpreted as another example of Michael’s strange behaviour.

This pattern of using **allusions** becomes a recurring feature of Michael’s speech. Throughout the season, he repeatedly inserts unnecessary, often outdated references to popular culture in an attempt to appear witty, knowledgeable, relatable, or entertaining. For example, he compares employees’ reluctance to participate in a basketball game to the behaviour of the “*dwarf from The Lord of the Rings*” [S1E5, 05:34], while also employing a **simile** that flouts Quality. Here and in the further in-text citations of the illustrative material, S refers to the season of the show and E to the episode, while the number following each letter indicates the season or episode number. A situation similar to the previous example can be observed when he describes a conversation between Pam and a vendor as the “*Divine Secrets of the Ya Ya Sisterhood*” [S1E6, 11:00], alluding to a piece of media of the same name and using a **metaphor** due to the loose similarities between the group from the film and the two women. These references often fail to contribute meaningfully to the conversation, while simultaneously creating confusion or awkwardness, thus they additionally violate the category of Manner by being ambiguous. Importantly, they reflect Michael’s self-perception as a humorous and charismatic leader, despite the fact that others do not see him that way. Some other examples of him using allusion include the mentioning of “The Three Stooges” comedy group [S1E1, 07:39], “Six-Million Dollar Man” [S1E1, 10:03], “Whose Line Is It Anyway?” game show [S1E3, 12:30], and “Star Trek” series [S1E4, 03:11], etc.

While trying to create a humorous effect, Michael often makes inappropriate or insensitive remarks, such as in the line, “*Come on, Olympics of suffering right here. Slavery versus the Holocaust. Come on*” [S1E2, 16:30], where he wants to encourage his employees to put more effort into a made-up exercise, where each person has to guess what ethnicity they have been assigned by talking to others, or when he says to the vendor, “*Ah, Katy. Wow. Look at you. You are, uh you’re like the new and improved Pam. Pam 6.0*” [S1E6, 02:25], in front of everyone. In the first example, the phrase “*Olympics of suffering*” is a **metaphor** that draws a parallel between the sporting event and historical atrocities, while comparing a mundane workplace diversity exercise to “*Slavery versus the Holocaust*” is a **hyperbole**. Both flout the maxim of Quality and are **allusions** to real sporting and historical events. In the next example, a **simile** “*You’re like the new and improved Pam*” compares the two to intensify the characteristic of Katy being a “replacement” for Pam and to flatter her. At the same time, “*Pam 6.0*” is a **metaphor** transferring qualities of software versions unto a human being. Moreover, Michael sometimes uses forced humour, such as when he says “*Me no get an agenda*” [S1E1, 04:40] during a professional, serious meeting, utilising an improper **informal register** and flouting the maxim of Manner. These socially unacceptable or contextually inappropriate comments that also violate the maxim of Relation create discomfort and tension, adding to the cringe comedy of the show – “the type of humour that makes you laugh at things that are very embarrassing” [Cambridge Dictionary 2026].

Another common strategy of Michael’s speech is exaggeration through **hyperbole**, which results in numerous flouts and violations of the maxim of Quality. He often uses it to position himself as more competent, professional, and respected by his employees than he actually is. For example, Michael regularly overstates his own abilities, importance, or achievements as he not only employs a rhetorical device, but also states something for which he lacks clear evidence, as in the situation when he claims, “*I think I’m a role model here. I think I garner people’s respect*” [S1E1, 10:34]. The quote also contains **anaphora** in “*I think*”, which he uses to emphasise his self-

perceived status, and by doing so, he violates the maxim of Manner by being overly verbose.

Similarly, he uses both **hyperbole** and **anaphora**, as well as an **extended metaphor** and **parallelism** in the following line: “*The most sacred thing I do is care and provide for my workers, my family. I give them money. I give them food. ... I heal them. Today, I am in charge of picking a great new health care plan. ... Does that make me their doctor? ... Yes, in a way. Yeah, like a specialist*” [S1E3, 00:57–01:31]. In this example, he exaggerates his impact by calling his job “*the most sacred thing*” he does, and metaphorically equates his workers to “*family*”, himself to a “*doctor*” or “*specialist*”, flouting the maxims of Quality; he repeats “*I give*” and uses the parallel construction “*I + verb + them ...*” and therefore flouts the maxim of Manner by not being brief for the same emphatic effect as in the previous example.

Another prominent instance of Michael using both **hyperbole** and **metaphor** can be found in episode 5 “The Basketball” when Michael says the following about his mental state while playing the game: “*Who am I? Am I Michael Scott? I don’t know... I might just be a basketball machine. What’s Dunder Mifflin? I’ve never heard of it*” [S1E5, 14:45–14:53]. Michael metaphorically calls himself a “*basketball machine*” while also greatly exaggerating his basketball prowess. Moreover, **irony** and **rhetorical questions** are used for dramatic and humorous effect: he playfully pretends not to know who he is and what company he works for, which results in the flouting of the maxim of Quality in the case of the former, and the flouting the maxim of Manner in the case of the latter.

Additional examples of **metaphor** and **hyperbole** occur when Michael describes selecting a low-cost healthcare plan as a “*suicide mission*” [S1E3, 02:27] and refers to his office as “*my kingdom, as far as the eye can see*” [S1E1, 01:43]. He also characterises Pam as an “*information superhighway*” [S1E3, 00:43] and addresses an interlocutor in a phone conversation as “*a gentleman and a scholar*” [S1E1, 01:09], while also jokingly referring to his employees as “*slaves*” [S1E6, 12:42]. Similarly, he claims that he “*wish[es] every day was Diversity Day*” [S1E2, 03:40] and remarks that, if he were allergic to dairy, he would “*kill myself*” [S1E4, 14:01].

As for the category of Quantity, **ellipsis** is one of the possible language means of Michael's self-presentation, which produces a breach. In episode 2 "Diversity Day", the following exchange happens:

Michael: *But what some of you might not know is that I am also part Native American Indian.*

Oscar: *What part Native American?*

Michael: *Two fifteenths.*

Oscar: *Two fifteenths, that fraction doesn't make any sense.*

Michael: *Well, you know what, it's kind of hard for me to talk about it. Their suffering* [S1E2, 14:03–14:18].

Michael, intending to construct a particular image of himself, tries to assert his supposed Native American heritage, which is in turn immediately questioned by his coworker Oscar. In response, Michael only says, "*Two fifteens*", omitting the subject, verb, and the rest of the noun phrase, violating the maxim of Manner and Quantity by giving insufficient and unclear information. Moreover, Michael most likely lies about his ethnic background and tries to avoid further explanations by vaguely mentioning the "suffering" through a cataphoric reference ("*it*") to avoid further questioning. Another way Michael flouts the category of Quantity is by means of **enumeration**, e.g. he says that he has created a workplace atmosphere in which he is "*a friend first, and a boss second... probably, uh, an entertainer third*" [S1E1, 17:48–17:58]. Describing himself as a "friend first" and an "entertainer third" is an exaggeration of his personal impact and an inaccurate reranking of professional priorities.

Michael Scott is also known for using **idiom**-like phrases, although they are not conventional idioms and are, in fact, his own creations. He tries to purposely flout the maxim of Manner by using an idiom to sound profound and wise. However, he fails to realise that the phrases he utters do not exist in the English phraseological inventory, and instead the result is a violation of Manner, as well as Relation, e.g. "*The hand strikes and gives a flower*" [S1E5, 02:07] and "*Blessed be those who sit and wait*" [S1E5, 08:38].

Overall, Michael's communication style is characterised by frequent violations and flouts of multiple maxims, and his contributions are the primary source of both comedic tension and social discomfort within the narrative. His failure to adhere to conversational maxims generates awkwardness, misunderstanding, and humour, while also characterising him as an incompetent and unprofessional, yet self-confident, manager. The CP non-observance is linked to his personality traits, such as overconfidence, lack of self-awareness, and desire for approval.

2.2.2. Flouting the maxims as a means to enhance one's position in the social hierarchy

In "The Office", flouting Grice's maxims also functions as a linguistic means of negotiating and reinforcing one's position within a social hierarchy. Speakers may strategically depart from the CP in order to assert authority, display competence, or establish superiority over others. In this respect, Dwight Schrute is a particularly illustrative case, as his speech is consistently oriented towards advancement in the workplace hierarchy and the demonstration of superiority.

An overview of Dwight's CP non-observance demonstrates that his most frequent deviations occur in Relation (33 instances) and Quality (32), followed by Manner (17) and Quantity (9) (see Appendix 3). His communication reflects his rigidity, literal-mindedness, competitiveness, and an inflated sense of authority. In contrast to Michael, whose non-observance often stems from a desire to entertain or gain approval, Dwight's violations and flouts are typically motivated by the commitment to his own understanding of efficiency and hierarchy, as well as by the commitment to attain personal superiority. His speech is characterised by bluntness, overconfidence, and a tendency to prioritise his own logic over conversational appropriateness.

One of the central strategies Dwight employs is the use of **hyperbole**, **repetition**, and **metaphor**. For instance, in the episode "Healthcare", when justifying his harsh healthcare plan choice as a way to show his control over the other employees, although temporary, he states: *"What did I do? I did my job. I slashed benefits to the bone. I saved this company money. Was I too harsh? Maybe. ... In the wild, there is no health care. In the wild, health care is, 'Ow, I hurt my leg. I can't run. A lion eats me, and*

I'm dead. ' Well, I'm not dead. I'm the lion. You're dead" [S1E3, 04:55–05:21]. In this example, he describes workplace insurance decisions through a “natural selection” **extended metaphor** by identifying himself as a “lion”, thereby flouting the maxim of Quality and projecting a specific self-image of dominance and status superiority over his employees by positioning himself at the top of a constructed hierarchy. He relies on **hyperbole** to emphasise the extent of his professional actions by saying that he has cut healthcare benefits “to the bone”. By using **parallelism** (“*I did... I slashed... I saved...*”), **antithesis** (“*I'm .../You're ...*”), and **anaphora** (“*In the wild...*”), he flouts the maxims of Quantity and intensifies the metaphor further. The **rhetorical questions** “*What did I do?*” and “*Was I too harsh?*” are used to create a specific emphatic effect, resulting in the flouting of the maxim of Manner, as they make the utterance unnecessarily longer. All these communicative strategies enable Dwight to brag about his actions, abilities, and personal qualities.

Similarly, Dwight claims superiority over human biology, which reflects his belief in his exceptionality. In the same episode, he talks about not needing health insurance and states the following: “*Don't need it. Never been sick. Perfect immune system. ... I don't need them [antibodies]. Superior genes. ... And superior brain power. Through concentration, I can raise and lower my cholesterol at will*” [S1E3, 07:11–7:26]. The most prominent device here is **hyperbole** as he insists that he has an exceptional immune system, genes, and cognitive abilities. These claims are obviously false, and so they flout the maxim of Quality. To emphasise his point, he also employs **ellipsis** and **enumeration**, listing his exaggerated characteristics in rapid succession and flouting the maxim of Quantity from the perspectives of both overinformativeness and underinformativeness. Moreover, Dwight uses scientific **terms** to support his claims, such as “immune system”, “antibodies”, and “cholesterol”, which creates an appearance of validity despite lacking real evidence.

When Dwight is dissatisfied with some of his colleagues' lack of cooperation with his unreasonable demands, he remarks in the “talking-head” interview that “*The employees went crazy, I got no help from corporate*” [S1E3, 16:58], utterly exaggerating their non-compliance through **hyperbole** and flouting the maxim of

Quality. Later, he says, “*I have tried to treat you all as adults, but obviously I am the only adult here*” [S1E3, 17:17], which again flouts the maxim of Quality by means of **hyperbole** and **irony** and creates a conversational implicature that they are acting immature.

In one of the scenes, Dwight uses a **pun** to exploit the intentional ambiguity of the word “guns”, flouting the maxim of Manner. He abruptly asks Jim, “*Did you get your tickets?*”, and when Jim expresses confusion, Dwight clarifies, “*The gun show*” [S1E4, 05:22], and kisses his bicep, shifting the interaction into self-praise unrelated to Jim’s initial understanding. By first asking about “tickets”, Dwight creates a certain expectation for how the conversation will progress and triggers the common meaning of “guns”, only to later turn it around to its slang meaning “muscular arms” in the punchline of the joke. Another time, Dwight leverages ambiguity to assert his own worldview, as can be observed during the diversity training session:

Mr Brown: *Now, this is a simple acronym. H.E.R.O. ... All you need are honesty, empathy, respect and open-mindedness.*

Dwight: *Excuse me, I’m sorry, but that’s not all it takes to be a hero.*

Mr Brown: *Oh, great. Well, what is a hero to you?*

Dwight: *A hero kills people, people that wish him harm. ... A hero is part-human and part-supernatural. A hero is born out of a childhood trauma, or out of a disaster that must be avenged.*

Mr Brown: *Ok, you’re thinking of a superhero.*

Dwight: *We all have a hero in our heart* [S1E2, 07:37–08:14].

First of all, Dwight employs extreme **hyperbole** to describe his version of a hero, which results in the flouting of the maxim of Quality: he claims that a hero is “*part-human and part-supernatural*” born out of a “*childhood trauma*” or “*disaster that must be avenged*”, which, while technically correct, is irrelevant to their actual conversation and violates the maxim of Relation. This is a clear attempt to disregard Mr Brown’s everyday definition of a hero in favour of Dwight’s definition of a “person with superhuman qualities” found in popular culture. To give his statements argumentative weight, Dwight uses **anaphora** and **enumeration**: he repeatedly says “*A hero ...*” and

provides a list of requirements for his idea of “heroism”, flouting the maxim of Quantity. In addition, Dwight’s final statement, which contains a **metaphor** about everyone having a hero in their heart, serves as a final attempt to win the argument. Such instances demonstrate Dwight’s tendency to prioritise his own beliefs and views over shared communicative goals.

2.2.3. Flouting the maxims as an element of mockery and humour

In “The Office”, maxim non-observance also functions as a means of producing mockery and humour. Unlike cases of self-presentation or hierarchical positioning, it is primarily oriented towards creating comical situations through strategic violations and implicatures caused by flouting. Within this context of the series, Jim Halpert and Pam Beesly’s speech is representative of such a use.

Jim’s CP non-observance frequency indicates that the maxim of Quality is flouted most often (58 instances), followed by Quantity (15), Relation (14), and Manner (10) (see Appendix 3). These cases generally serve humorous, ironic, or social purposes. His communication style is characterised by sarcasm, understatement, and sometimes exaggeration, reflecting his role as a socially aware and observant comedic straight man who frequently comments on the absurd actions of his colleagues. By contrast, Pam’s CP non-observance is considerably lower (24 instances overall), with Quality (13) likewise being the most frequent category and other categories being barely breached – Quantity (4), Relation (3), and Manner (4) (see Appendix 3). When she does deviate from the maxims, it is typically subtle and contextually motivated, often in the form of sarcasm or evasiveness. While both characters employ similar pragmatic mechanisms, Pam’s usage is more restrained and context-dependent, reflecting a more cooperative communicative style.

One of the primary rhetorical devices behind humour in their speech is **irony**, which involves stating the opposite of what is meant and flouting the maxim of Quality (which explains the high degree of non-observance in this category). Rather than intending to deceive, something literally untrue is stated in order to convey an implied meaning. For example, when Michael enthusiastically greets him with “*Whassup!*”, which is an outdated cultural allusion to a Budweiser beer commercial, Jim responds,

“Whassup! I still love that after seven years” [S1E1, 03:35], clearly implying the opposite.

Similarly, Pam employs **irony**, as in her disapproving response *“That’s nice, Dwight”* [S1E2, 16:49] to Dwight’s attempt at being funny but ultimately insensitive in inventing a rhyme *“Shalom. I’d like to apply for a loan”* [S1E2, 16:45], during the “Diversity Day” episode. When Jim successfully pulls a prank on Dwight, she says to Jim, *“You’re horrible”* [S1E6, 10:49], while clearly being untruthful. Additionally, when Jim asks whether she has seen the reality TV show “Trading Spouses”, Pam replies, *“No. I have a life”* [S1E3, 02:50], indirectly expressing through **sarcasm** that she does not spend her free time on such entertainment and thus making an implicature that watching it is a waste of one’s time.

Jim’s use of **sarcasm** is particularly evident in his interactions with Dwight, where it often functions as a tool of mockery and belittlement. In episode 1, Jim pranks Dwight by putting his stapler into Jell-O. Afterwards Jim “apologises” by saying *“I’m sorry, because I have always been your biggest fan”* [S1E1, 15:25], thereby utilising not only **sarcasm**, but also a **pun** to emphasise the lack of genuine regret and explicitly flouting the maxims of Quality, Relation, and Manner by substituting “fan” with “flan”. When Michael tasks Dwight with deciding who should work on Saturday, Dwight immediately chooses Jim, to which he responds: *“God, this is so sad. This is the smallest amount of power I’ve ever seen go to someone’s head”* [S1E5, 02:56], which contains **sarcasm** and **hyperbole** in “so sad” and “smallest amount” to imply how inconsequential Dwight’s retaliation really is. Additionally, another instance of Jim using a **pun** happens when he writes on a coworker’s birthday card, *“Meredith, I heard you’re turning 46, but, come on, you’re an accountant. Just fudge the numbers”* [S1E4, 06:54], where “numbers” can refer to both her age and financial data in accounting.

In the episode “Healthcare”, Jim and Pam partake in the collaborative pranking of Dwight by inventing absurd medical conditions for the health questionnaire survey. First, Jim jokingly says to Pam with **irony** not to *“write Ebola or mad cow disease”* because he is *“suffering from both”* [S1E3, 11:15]. Pam recognises the irony and also

participates in the chain of playful humour, stating that she is inventing new diseases. She then asks him what one would call a condition involving “*teeth turn[ing] to liquid*” [S1E3, 11:25], to which Jim responds with a made-up name “*spontaneous dental hydroplosion*” that purposefully uses lexicon found in the field of medicine, i.e. “spontaneous” and “dental”, and combines the prefix “hydro-” with a clipped form of the word “explosion” to create a pseudo-scientific medical **term** and a **nonce word**. Once Dwight lists the invented diseases, attempting to reprimand the employees who have written down non-existent illnesses, Jim asks Pam about one of her ideas regarding “killer nanorobots”. Pam adds further to the inside joke by saying that “*It’s an epidemic*” [S1E3, 13:26], using **irony** and **hyperbole**. All these utterances rely on shared contextual knowledge and are intended to be recognised as non-literal, thus constituting flouts of the category of Quality.

Hyperbole is often used by Jim to generate implicature. For instance, when reflecting on his career prospects, he states: “*If this were my career, I’d have to throw myself in front of a train*” [S1E3, 03:56], clearly exaggerating for rhetorical effect and implying that he is profoundly dissatisfied with his job. When discussing Michael’s charity donation, he remarks, “*God, I can’t even calculate what you’re gonna have to give*” [S1E4, 15:21], which creates the conversational implicature that Michael has made a serious mistake by writing down \$25, as it was not a one-time donation, but a children’s walk-a-thon, where the amount is paid per mile. These examples demonstrate that Jim’s non-observance of Quality serves expressive and evaluative functions.

Although less frequent, Jim’s flouting of the maxim of Quantity occurs when he provides more information than required through **enumeration**, often as part of a joke or social strategy. For example, when asked by a group of coworkers about his “type”, he responds with an extended and clearly disingenuous list with **irony** and **epiphora** of “moms”: “*Moms, primarily. Yep. Soccer moms. Single moms. NASCAR moms. Any type of moms, really*” [S1E6, 07:45], offering excessive and irrelevant detail to avoid answering the question sincerely. When Kevin, one of the employees, replies, “*Stay*

away from my mom”, Jim jokingly says, *“Too late, Kev”* [S1E6, 07:55], flouting the maxim of Quality again.

Repetition is usually used in cases when Jim wants to deliberately deceive Dwight through fabricated narratives. For instance, when Jim tells Pam about his fake alliance with Dwight in the episode “Alliance”, and Dwight confronts him about this, Jim tries to reassure him by repeatedly saying “no”: *“Oh no, no, no. Dwight, no. I’m using her. For the alliance”* [S1E4, 06:15]. In the same episode, Jim fabricates scenarios about other employees plotting and forming alliances in order to create a sense of urgency and make the situation more amusing. He says that, *“Tensions were high in the kitchen”* [S1E4, 07:52], while the audience knows that the only thing the colleagues discussed was their food, thus Jim uses **hyperbole**. Jim then tells Dwight that their coworkers want to get rid of them, and Dwight asks why they would do it. Jim reinforces the lie by appealing to Dwight’s ego through **repetition**: *“Because we’re strong, Dwight. Because we’re strong”* [S1E4, 08:40].

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER 2

The analysis of the first season of “The Office” TV series demonstrates that non-observance of the Cooperative Principle (CP) is a characteristic feature of the show’s dialogue. “The Office” acts as a good ground for pragmatic analysis as it combines the genres of sitcom and mockumentary, the latter involving a dialogue style characteristic of spontaneous, real-life speech due to the actors’ improvisation and uncut hesitations, repetitions, and interruptions.

A total of 723 instances of maxim non-observance were identified across six episodes. These instances are distributed as follows:

- Michael Scott accounts for 477 cases (Quality: 166; Relation: 145; Manner: 123; Quantity: 43);
- Dwight Schrute for 91 (Relation: 33; Quality: 32; Manner: 17; Quantity: 9);
- Jim Halpert for 97 (Quality: 58; Quantity: 15; Relation: 14; Manner: 10);
- Pam Beesly for 24 (Quality: 13; Quantity: 4; Relation: 3; Manner: 4);

- all other characters collectively for 34 cases (see Appendix 2, Appendix 3).

When compared with their respective shares of dialogue (see Appendix 1), these numbers show that CP non-observance reflects certain peculiarities of the characters' communicative styles. The maxim breaches are realised through different forms of language means, including tropes, figures of speech, register, terms, and nonce words and phrases.

First, flouting and violating are employed as a means of constructing the desired self-image and to present oneself in a more favourable light, which was exemplified by the character of Michael Scott, who wants to be simultaneously perceived as a good and competent boss, entertainer, and mentor. This, however, often results in over-the-top exaggeration, inappropriate remarks, and failed attempts at humour. He mainly flouts and violates the maxim of Quality through: 1) hyperbole, for the purpose of positioning himself as a competent, respected, and professional boss; 2) metaphor, to impose specific social roles and emphasise his personal importance; 3) simile, to flatter others or intensify personal characteristics; 4) irony, for dramatic and humorous effect. The maxim of Relation is chiefly breached by cultural allusions, which are used in an attempt to connect with others and to be seen as witty, relatable, and "in the loop". Michael does not observe the maxim of Manner in the case of: 1) anaphora and parallelism, to emphasise his status and role and to create an emphatic effect; 2) informal register, to appear funny; 3) rhetorical questions, for dramatic and humorous effect; 4) made-up idioms, to sound profound. The maxim of Quantity is flouted via ellipsis to avoid additional questioning and via enumeration to strengthen self-perceived roles.

Flouting as a means of enhancing one's position in the social hierarchy is primarily observed in the communicative behaviour of the character of Dwight Schrute and his use of language to assert power in the context of the workplace. The maxim of Quality includes: 1) metaphor, to project dominance and status superiority; 2) hyperbole, to show control over employees and to emphasise personal exceptionality; 3) irony, to insult others; 4) scientific terms, to give a false appearance of validity. In the case of flouting the maxim of Manner, Dwight uses rhetorical questions to brag

about his actions, as well as puns to boast about personal qualities. The maxim of Quantity is breached by means of: 1) parallelism, antithesis, and anaphora to intensify metaphors of dominance and add argumentative weight to personal views; 2) enumeration, to list exaggerated characteristics; 3) ellipsis, to make his arguments quick and to show that he does not even need to explain himself. Despite the high count of Relation non-observance, it is usually caused not through the use of a specific rhetorical device, but by the bluntness and literal-mindedness of the character.

Finally, maxim flouting was analysed as an element of mockery and humour, specifically how it is used by the characters of Jim Halpert and Pam Beesly to support interpersonal dynamics, create comical situations, and provide social commentary. The maxim of Quality is the most breached category due to: 1) irony, which is used to convey disapproval or to mock colleagues indirectly; 2) sarcasm, for mockery, belittlement, and commenting on the unprofessionalism of others; 3) hyperbole, to express dissatisfaction, to highlight the mistakes of others, and to fabricate narratives. The maxim of Quantity breaches are mostly caused by: 1) enumeration, to avoid answering a personal question sincerely; 2) repetition and epiphora, to deceive and manipulate. The maxim of Manner is mostly disregarded through: 1) puns and wordplay, which show a lack of regret and make fun of someone; 2) pseudo-scientific terms and nonce words, to facilitate pranking and mock someone. The category of Relation is often flouted or violated conjointly with the other mentioned language means, which is also true for Michael and Dwight's cases.

In conclusion, non-observance of conversational maxims and its language means in "The Office" performs multiple pragmatic functions, such as self-presentation, hierarchical positioning, mockery, and humour creation. Different characters exhibit different patterns of CP non-observance that correspond to their communicative goals, personality traits, social position, and roles in the narrative. The results of this practical analysis therefore confirm that the CP is effective for understanding the implicit mechanisms in TV discourse.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The bachelor's thesis focused on the analysis of the TV show phenomenon from the perspective of pragmatics. The main aim was to investigate the Gricean Cooperative Principle (CP), the features of its non-observance, and its use in the context of TV discourse based on the material of the series "The Office".

The first chapter examined the theoretical foundations of the CP, i.e. the scientific prerequisites and the theory itself, as well as the other linguists' viewpoints and further developments of Grice's model, which became one of the most discussed topics in pragmatics. It was determined that Grice first introduced the concept of implicature – the act of implying information that lies outside the literal meaning of an utterance – which he divided into conventional, which are triggered by fixed word meanings, and conversational, which are dependent on the context of the discourse. His theory was established during the shift towards studying how human communication is actually used. This coincided with the emergence of the speech act theory by Austin and Searle, who argued that language can be used as a tool for performing actions. To explain how listeners decode the implied meanings, Grice then proposed the CP as the basic assumption that participants in a conversation make contributions that are cooperative, rational, and align with the common purpose of the exchange.

The CP consists of four categories of maxims, which act as conversational guidelines, and can be summarised as follows: Quantity (provide the right amount of information), Quality (be truthful), Relation (be relevant), and Manner (avoid obscurity and ambiguity, be brief and orderly). Based on the way the conversational maxims of these categories are not followed, their non-observance is categorised into violating, opting out, clash, flouting, infringement, and suspending. The most important of these are violations, used to deceive the interlocutor, and flouting, used to imply something. The chapter also dwells upon the scientific discussion around Grice's theory, particularly the neo-Gricean views of Levinson and Horn, the principle of relevance of Sperber and Wilson, as well as the principle of politeness of Lakoff and Leech.

The research into the language material reveals that maxim flouting and violation become scriptwriting tools for creating humour, forming the identity of characters, and developing the plot, and thus constituting a structurally necessary feature of TV storytelling. The humour involves disrupting expectations through jokes and absurd responses to create comical effects, which is usually achieved through maxim non-observance. The characterisation is attained by patterns of maxim breaches, habitually performed by characters to help establish unique personality traits and archetypes. Drama is built on maxim violations, which create suspense and drive the narrative forward by allowing characters to deceive, conceal information, or create conflict.

The pragmatic analysis of the first season of “The Office” focuses on the characters’ systemic disregard of conversational maxims and the language means as the source of their non-observance. The show was chosen due to its genre specifics of a sitcom-mockumentary hybrid and its cultural significance. A total of 723 instances of maxim non-observance were identified across six episodes of “The Office”, confirming its central position in the series. The distribution of these instances differs notably: Michael Scott accounted for 477 cases (66%), Jim Halpert for 97 (13.4%), Dwight Schrute for 91 (12.6%), Pam Beesly for 24 (3.3%), and all other characters collectively for 34 cases (4.7%) (see Appendix 2, Appendix 3). The distribution difference compared to the verbal output per character (see Appendix 1) demonstrates that maxim non-observance is closely tied to character building and narrative roles.

The reasons for maxim deviations were categorised into three major groups of pragmatic functions – self-image construction, enhancing one’s position in the social hierarchy, and creating mockery and humour – with each section analysing the dialogue of the characters who are the most representative of the purpose type. The findings demonstrate that the maxim non-observance of these characters is connected with specific language means, such as rhetorical figures, register, terminology, and nonce constructions.

Michael Scott primarily exploits maxim breaches to construct a favourable self-image and gain approval. He uses allusion, metaphor, simile, hyperbole, irony, informal register, and made-up idioms to project a self-image of a wise mentor,

professional leader, and witty entertainer. He often employs anaphora and parallelism to emphasise his perceived status, and he uses ellipsis or enumeration to avoid difficult questions or show what he prioritises in terms of his workplace roles.

Dwight Schrute exploits the maxims to assert dominance and reinforce personal superiority. Dwight uses extended metaphors, hyperbole, irony, scientific terminology, rhetorical questions, puns, parallelism, antithesis, anaphora, enumeration, and ellipsis to give false validity to claims of exceptionality or to shift professional interactions into moments of self-praise. His breaches are often a byproduct of his literal-mindedness and commitment to his own logic over conversational appropriateness.

Jim Halpert and Pam Beesly employ maxim non-observance for ironic statements, pranking, and social commentary. Their primary tools are irony, sarcasm, hyperbole, and puns, which are used to convey disapproval and mock others, as well as pseudo-scientific terms and nonce words, which help facilitate collaborative pranks. Additionally, enumeration, repetition, and epiphora are used to avoid answering and to deceive other employees.

The study concludes that the deliberate disregard of the CP is a structurally necessary feature of TV shows, allowing for the creation of comedy, character development, and the presentation of character goals, personality traits, social position, and roles in the narrative. The CP is a highly effective framework for examining conversational maxims and the implicit layer of meaning in both natural and fictional discourse. Beyond its immediate application to “The Office” series, the methodology used in the thesis might be used as a framework for future studies in media linguistics and pragmatics.

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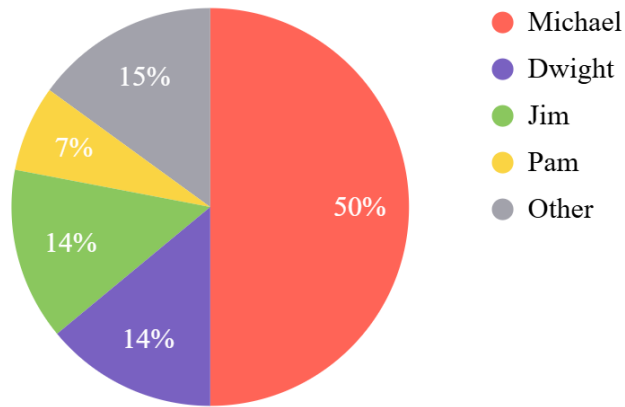
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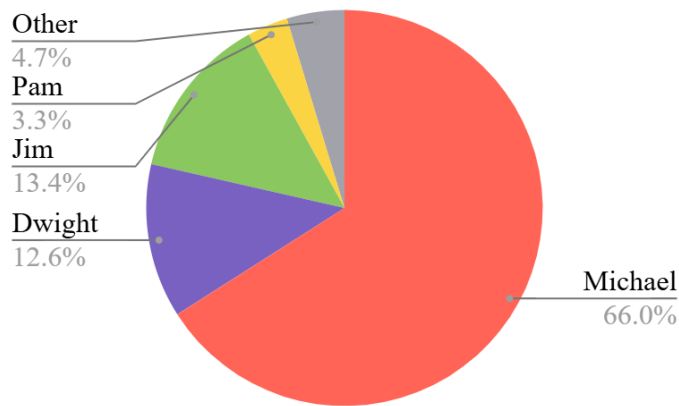
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Distribution of verbal output by character.



Appendix 2. Distribution of CP non-observance by character.



Appendix 3. Distribution of maxim flouts and violations across characters.

