

Maxim Violation in A Dementia Sufferer: A Case Study of the Main Character in “The Father” Movie

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Abstract. Dementia is a clinical condition in which a progressive decline in mental intellectual (cognitive function) occurs. An example of a dementia sufferer can be found in the movie “The Father” by Florian Zeller. The characters face challenges when communicating with the dementia sufferer. This research is aimed at analyzing the maxims violated by the character with dementia in the movie, by applying the Grice’s framework (1975). In this study, the researchers used a qualitative descriptive method to observe and analyze the data. The findings reveal that Anthony, the main character who has dementia, violated maxims of relation, quantity, quality, and manner. Maxim of relation is mostly violated by Anthony since he has a scattered memory and makes people around him confused because what he said did not make sense. Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that a person with dementia still has the linguistic knowledge, but his pragmatic skill becomes impaired.

Keywords: dementia; maxims of conversation; maxim violation

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Dementia refers the loss of memory, language, problem-solving, and other cognitive abilities that interfere with daily life. It is a clinical condition in which a progressive decline in mental intellectual or cognitive function occurs. Some symptoms of dementia include anxiety, irritability, depression, hallucination, and sleep changes (Cerejeira, Lagarto, & Mukaetova-Ladinska, 2012).

A case of a dementia sufferer is one depicted in the movie “The Father” by Florian Zeller. The main character in the movie, Anthony, is an old man who used to be an engineer. However, in his late age, he was diagnosed with dementia. At first, he feels like he can handle everything on his own, but his daughter, Anne, is very worried about him. Anne decided to hire a carer, because she cannot look after for his father 24/7 but his father did not like it when she hired a carer for him. The worst case she has experienced is sometimes, his father does not recognize her. Anthony sees Anne as another person, which means he does not know her.

When people communicate, there are principles or rules that need to be fulfilled by the speakers. According to Grice (1975) cooperative principle is one of the ways to make a successful conversation. These cooperative principles consist of four types of maxim, namely Maxim of Quality, Maxim of Quantity, Maxim of Relation, and Maxim of Manner (Grice in Yule, 1996). When a speaker does not fulfill the maxims, the speaker is said to violate the maxim.

Maxim violations can also be observed in “The Father” movie. Therefore, in this paper, the researchers would like to discuss the maxim violation in relation with the dementia patient in the movie “The Father” by Florian Zeller. This research will focus on analyzing the utterance of the main character, Anthony.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Pragmatics is an important branch of language as a term for practical contexts. According to Yule (2006), pragmatics is the knowledge of interpreting the meaning conveyed by the speaker to the listener or reader. Pragmatics also deals with the relation between linguistic forms (language use) and the users (humans) of those forms. Furthermore, Levinson (2000) said that pragmatics is the knowledge of language that studies the context and relationships of language.

The use of language for expression is expected to obey the maxim of the cooperative principle. According to Grice (1975), this is required for communication so as to run well and effectively. Grice also states Cooperative Principle is to make the conversation contribute to what is required at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which the speakers are engaged. The cooperative principle of conversation is elaborated in four sub-principles, called maxims. There are four types of maxims introduced by Grice (1975):

1. Maxim of Quantity. It means that the speakers have to provide the information as informative as required. Do not talk too much or add unnecessary things in conversation.
2. Maxim of Quality: When the speakers have a conversation with others, they cannot tell a lie about what they are talking about or they will violate the maxim of quality.
3. Maxim of Relation: This kind of thing makes the speakers have to be relevant when you they talking with other people. The answers have to make sense with the question.
4. Maxim of Manner: In a condition when the speakers have a conversation with others, they have to avoid ambiguity. If that so, the speakers will not violate the maxim of manners.

Some previous studies have been done by several researchers. Pradani & Sembodo (2020) did a study about the violation of conversational maxims in the movie series “Divergent”. This research found out that from the total of 100 maxim violations, 11 are maxim of quality violations, 22 maxim of quantity violations, 43 maxim of relevance violations, and 24 maxim of manner violations. Arbain et al (2023) analyzed violation of maxims in an animated film. This study also determined their root causes, not only by looking from the movie bases but also by examining the geographical and demographic boundaries, thus knowing how the conversation is used in animated movies. As a result, from 51 maxim violations that are found, 21 utterances violate maxim of quality, 16 violate the maxim of quantity, 7 utterances violate maxim of manner, and 6 utterances violate maxim of relevance. Illa and Maolidah (2019) analyzed of speech disorders and dementia in a film using psycholinguistic approach. The data were collected from the movie “A Moment to Remember” (from the Korean movie “*Nae Meorisogui Jiuge*”). The result shows that there is a similarity between the theory and the movie from dementia diseases. For instance, short term memory loss and frequent forgetting conversations or appointments. Marta and Setyaningsih (2023) did a study about maxim violation in the TED talk interview with Elon Musk. The research found 34 maxim violations in the interview, consisting of 15 maxim of quantity violations, 9 maxim of manner violations, 6 maxim of relation violations, and 4 maxim of manner violations.

Based on those previous studies, a research on maxims violated by a person with dementia has not been conducted. Therefore, this research attempts to fill in the gap of the previous studies mentioned above.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this paper, the researchers used a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the data. According to Sukmadinata (2006), descriptive qualitative is a type of research for describing the phenomena that existed, from both natural phenomena and man-made phenomena. The data in the form of movie transcript were downloaded from <https://deadline.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/thefather-screenplay.pdf>. The utterances in the movie were then coded. After that, the utterances that contain maxim violations were identified. The next step, the utterances that have been identified were categorized and explained. Last, the conclusion was drawn based on the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The focus of observation in this paper is to analyze the maxim violation from the main character in the movie “The Father”. By using Grice’s theory, the maxim violation would be discussed. The researcher found four kinds of maxim violation in this movie in the utterances spoken by the main character, Anthony.

Result

Table 1 presents the result of the analysis.

Table 1 Maxims Violated by Anthony

Maxim Violation	Number	%
Relation	21	41.17
Quantity	15	29.41
Manner	12	23.52
Quality	3	5.88
Total	51	100

Based on Table 1, there are 51 total of maxim violations in the movie “The Father”. In that movie, 21 (41.17%) utterances can be classified as violation of maxim of relation, followed by the violation of maxim of quantity that amounts to 15 (29.41%). Then, the third one is the violation of maxim manner, with 12 utterances (29.41%). The next one, maxim of quality violations were found in 3 utterances (5.88%). Here are some examples from the utterances of Anthony.

Discussion

1. Violation of Maxim of Relation

Violation of maxim of relation occurs when Anthony does not give responses that are related to other people’s utterances. The examples are as follows:

Excerpt 1

897. WOMAN : Did you sleep well?

898. ANTHONY : What am I doing here?

(Scene 66 Hospital Room)

In the first excerpt, the woman asks Anthony if he can sleep, but he answers it with an irrelevant answer. At this time, Anthony as a dementia father violates the maxim of relation. His answer is unrelated to the question, because he answered by asking why he is in the hospital room.

Excerpt 2

165. WOMAN : Dad?

166. ANTHONY : I... What is this nonsense?

(Scene 14A Corridor)

In this conversation, that woman, who is Anthony's daughter, has just come back from shopping, and Anthony is so confused because he feels that the woman is not her daughter, like her face is not her daughter's face, and he does not recognize her. In this scene, he seems lost and gloomy. That utterance violates the maxim of relation, because he answers her question with irrelevant answers, that is, by asking her question instead.

Excerpt 3

855. ANNE : But, Dad... what are you talking about? Say hello to Laura.

856. ANTHONY : There's something that doesn't make sense about this. It doesn't make sense!

(Scene 62 Kitchen)

Anthony feels that 'Laura' is a different person that he met now. What he knows about Laura is not the person that is standing in front of him right now. From Anne's utterance, she says that to say hello to Laura. However, Anthony, answers it with his own confusion about his situation, which is unrelated to the question. That is why he violates the maxim of relation.

2. Maxim of Quantity

Maxim of quantity is violated when Anthony does not give sufficient responses. The following excerpts are the examples.

Excerpt 4

302. ANTHONY : The next stage will be to send me away I don't know where... Obviously, it'll be a much more efficient way of getting hold of my flat.

303. ANNE : Dad...

304. ANTHONY : But it's not going to happen that way. I may as well tell you. I have no intention of leaving any time soon. No, you heard me. I intend to outlive you. Both of you. Yes. Well, I don't know about you... But my daughter, yes. I shall make a point of it. I'm going to inherit from her. Not the other way round. The day of her funeral, I shall give a little speech to remind everyone how heartless and manipulative she was.

(Scene 27 Living Room)

In this utterance Anthony gives too much information. Suddenly, he gets mad and upset with Anne (Anthony's daughter) maybe because Anne hired a carer for him. He thinks that he can handle everything by himself and because he does not need a carer. Because of that, he gets mad at her. For that case, he violates the maxim of quantity, because he talks too much and does not provide important information.

Excerpt 5

121. ANTHONY : She's met a Frenchman.

122. MAN : I don't think so, Anthony.

123. ANTHONY : Yes, she has. She told me the other day. I'm not an idiot. She told me she was moving. To go and live with him. I even remember telling her it was a stupid idea because, you know, they don't even speak English. You don't know about this?

(Scene 12 Dining Room)

In this utterance, Anthony is garrulous, he tells that man the thing that is only in his head, it is not based on the fact. He starts to get delusional about that nonsense. The man is so upset but has to hold back his anger because he knows Anthony's condition. In this case, Anthony violates the maxim of quantity, because Anthony gives too much information and talks about something that is not important.

Excerpt 6

969. ANTHONY : My mother gave it to me. I imagine. Did you know her?

970. WOMAN : Who?

971. ANTHONY : My mother.

972. WOMAN : No.

973. ANTHONY : She was so... She had very big eyes. It was... I can see her face now. I hope she'll come and see me sometimes. Mummy. Do you think? You were saying she might come occasionally for the weekend...

(Scene 66pt5 Hospital Room)

In this utterance, Anthony mumbles something that the woman does not understand. Anthony starts to hallucinate about his mom. He thinks that his mom occasionally visits him. Anthony violates the maxim of quantity because he says many things as he hallucinates and it is too much.

3. Maxim of Manner

Maxim of manner is violated when Anthony make person who he has talking to feel confused about what he said. The examples are as follow:

Excerpt 7

ANTHONY : I feel as if... I feel as if I'm losing all my leaves, one after another.

WOMAN : Your leaves? What are you talking about?

(Scene 66 Hospital Room)

Anthony tries to express his feelings. He explains to the woman who is the nurse at the hospital that he was taken care of. In this utterance, Anthony violates the maxim of manners, because he makes the nurse confused with his word "leaves". His utterance causes multiple interpretations that are difficult to be understood by the nurse.

Excerpt 8

186. ANTHONY : What? Well, then, who's he?

187. WOMAN : Who?

188. ANTHONY : Are you doing this on purpose? I'm talking about... him. Who just left with the chicken.

(Scene 14b Living Room)

Anthony seems confused with the thing that just happened. From what he sees, he remembers that the woman brought a chicken for dinner, but eventually, that memory already passed, so he was confused about what just happened. He makes that woman confused too, therefore, he violates the maxim of manner.

Excerpt 9

189. WOMAN : The chicken? What are you on about, Dad?

190. ANTHONY : Right here, just a minute ago. Did you not hand over a chicken to someone?

191. ANTHONY : The chicken! A minute ago you were holding a chicken, were you not? A chicken. A CHICKEN!

(Scene 14b Living Room)

Anthony feels angry because he thinks that woman is playing around with him. From his point of view, the woman brought the chicken and passed it to her husband. He saw it. However, everything that just happened is in his memory. He makes the woman confused about what he said about the chicken. Therefore, Anthony violates the maxim of manner.

4. Violation of Maxim of Quality

Maxim of quality is violated when Anthony not being truthful to his interlocutors,

Excerpt 10

4. ANNE : So? What happened?

5. ANTHONY : Nothing.

(Scene 4 Office Day)

Anthony lies to Anne so he will not get in trouble. Anthony sees Anne's face and it looks like she is angry. Anthony remembers what he did until his daughter got mad. Therefore, Anthony lies to Anne by pretending that he knows nothing.

Excerpt 11

6. ANNE : Tell me.

7. ANTHONY : I just did. Nothing happened.

(Scene 4 Office Day)

Anthony still does not want to get in trouble, so he lies to Anne. Even though Anne knows what happened, Anne wants Anthony to be honest with her. Anne just had someone on the phone, Anthony's career, and she cried because Anthony called her a little bitch. This is because Anthony does not need anyone to help him.

The analysis has revealed that Anthony, the main character in "The Father" movie who has dementia, violated the four maxims in his conversation with his daughter and other people. Maxim of relation is mostly violated by Anthony since his memory scattered due to the dementia, and this makes people around him confused because what he said did not make sense. From the analysis, it can be implied that Anthony still has the linguistic knowledge because he is able to speak with other people. However, the dementia causes his pragmatic skill to become impaired.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is to find out the maxims violated by the main character violation of the movie "The Father". Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that there are 51 maxims violated by Anthony. These include maxim of relation, maxim of quantity, maxim of manners, and maxim of quality violations. Maxim of relation is mostly violated by Anthony, because he has a scattered memory. This makes people around him become confused, because he said things that did not make sense. Furthermore, dementia not only makes other people around confused when talking to him, but he also confused himself because all of the scenes in his memory are in puzzled pieces which never fit. This study also concludes that a person with dementia still has the linguistic knowledge, but his pragmatic skill becomes impaired.

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