

MAXIM VIOLATIONS IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF *RUMSPRINGA: AN AMISH IN BERLIN*

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Abstract

This study shows on purpose violations of conversational maxims and their implied meanings in the Netflix film *Rumspringa: An Amish in Berlin* (2022) through a pragmatic and cross-cultural. The film shows Jacob, a young Amish man, going through Rumspringa in Berlin. The cultural differences Jacob sees show the various ways of communicating, values, and perspectives between the Amish way of life and modern city living. This study aims to identify the types of maxim violations and explain their pragmatic functions within the intercultural setting of the film. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method. In order to analyze data that were obtained from selected dialogues in the film using Grice's Cooperative Principle framework (1975). The findings reveal that maxim of relevance, which is the sole maxim violated in the data, is employed as a strategy to communicate deeper meanings, express cultural identity, create humor, and subtly critique society. The study contributes to pragmatic and intercultural communication research by illustrating how media discourse reflects complex cultural negotiations through linguistic and multimodal implicature.

Keywords: *cross-cultural communication; Grice's maxims; maxim violation; pragmatic analysis; Rumspringa.*

1. Introduction

In a globalized world, cross-cultural communication is becoming increasingly important because of how people interact, derive meaning, and develop understanding within and across social settings. With the increase in the global interconnectedness of societies via migration, technology, and the media, communication is multifaceted and involves different people and cultures with their unique values, beliefs, and normative linguistic approaches. While communicative effectiveness does require a common language, the absence of shared social and cultural frameworks governing meaning may disrupt communicative rationality. Where communicators are situated within different cultural frameworks, potential cultural norms are likely to conflict. Pragmatic breakdowns involving the violation of conversational maxims may result. This highlights the social nature of language beyond the simple exchange of information. It stems from a complex interplay of cultural norms, social identity, and ideology.

Films use dialogue, visuals, and other nonverbal cues to convey messages. As cultural products and modes of communication, films also use interactivity to engage the audience. Take, for instance, conversations involving a few people. Although meanings in

conversations might be overt, a lot of the time they are left unsaid. Typically, a speaker does not, in a direct or straightforward way, put across what they are intending to say. In this regard, the pragmatic theory is crucial (Yule, 2020). Yule (2020) defines pragmatics as a branch of linguistics that investigates the way in which meaning is generated and comprehended within a social context. This field considers factors such as the relationship between speakers, the purpose of communication, and the context of the conversation. Pragmatic studies are primarily concerned with the phenomenon of conversational implicature, which is a form of meaning that is not explicitly stated but is ascertained by the context of the conversation and the situation (Yule, 2020).

Grice's idea from 1975 about Conversational Implicature, which introduced the Cooperative Principle, is a key concept in understanding how people talk to each other. Grice (1975) defines conversational implicature as the cooperative principle, which comprises four conversational maxims: quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. The maxim of quantity requires speakers to provide just enough information but not too much; when less or more is given, that usually serves to indicate hidden meaning. The maxim of quality invites speakers to be truthful, not to say what they lack evidence for; when violated deliberately, it usually carries irony or sarcasm. The maxim of relevance demands utterances to be contextually related in a certain way to the speech act; flouting it could signal evasion, humour, or even criticism. Lastly, the maxim of manner demands clarity and brevity, without ambiguity or disorder; speakers may flout it to attain politeness or to be indirect. When speakers intentionally break these rules, they create extra meanings that listeners have to work out on their own. These hidden meanings, known as conversational implicatures, allow people to express feelings, jokes, or criticism without saying it outright. This also demonstrates that the conversational maxims are not rigid rules, but flexible principles that speakers manipulate strategically. People usually understand conventional implicature, which is when a word or phrase's implied meaning is linked to its precise meaning and doesn't depend on its context. Conversational implicature, on the other hand, comes from shared assumptions, the cooperative principle in interaction, and the situational context. This means that it depends a lot on interpretation and prior knowledge (Grice, 1975).

Yule (2020) claims that implied meanings in conversations come not just from how words are used but also from the situation, shared beliefs, and what the people involved already know. Studies by Osman, Subaiah, and Mohammed (2022), along with Elsheikh and Mohammed (2022), show that breaking conversational rules often happens in everyday talks. This can help send unspoken messages, manage social interactions, or reduce disagreements. Research based on movies (Akmal & Yana, 2020; Khairunas et al., 2020; Hidayati & Mahmud, 2022; Efizahane & Afriana, 2022) shows that the violation of maxims—particularly those regarding relevance and quantity—often serves to create comedy, highlight identity, or offer nuanced social commentary. Igwedibia (2018) and Indarti (2024) argue that in cross-cultural contexts pragmatic awareness is required to ensure the correct understanding of nonliteral meanings. According to the literature, conversational implicature and maxim violations are pragmatic strategies affecting social contact and acting as important devices for cultural representation, especially in audiovisual media. This suggests that films provide a rich environment for examining how maximum flouting shapes meaning.

Film uses a range of nonverbal features as multimodal text, including facial expressions, speech intonation, body language, and other visual aspects. This enhances the way in which implicatures are conveyed throughout character conversation. According to

the study done by Simaremare and Cendana (2021), conversational maxim violations in the movie *Mulan* (2020) are used to convey emotional messages, sarcasm, and social tension. The study of implicit information in movies helps one to understand the importance of intercultural communication and social engagement. An interesting example of practical cross-cultural contact is the movie *Rumspringa: An Amish in Berlin* (Heinrich Nika, Oskar Minkler, & Mira, 2022). The movie tells the story of a young man from the Amish culture, a traditional religious group in Pennsylvania, United States, who visits Berlin, Germany. According to Amish custom, the Rumspringa period is when kids get the opportunity to see the outside world, including drinking alcohol, dancing, and having sex, before deciding on whether to stay in Berlin or go back to their home (Basham, 2019). The cultural battle between the Amish community's conventional beliefs and the German contemporary lifestyle creates a sophisticated dynamic of communication that demands variations in interpretation and transmission of meaning. Society demands variations in the interpretation and transmission of meaning. This shows that the cross-cultural study of conversational implicatures makes this film a suitable topic.

The importance of differences in the application and understanding of implicatures is heightened in the context of cross-cultural communication. Indarti (2024) argues that a range of social conventions, cultural expectations, and value systems shape how intercultural contact is understood. One civilization could view what could be seen as a breach of a maxim as inappropriate or even disgusting in another. However, previous studies have mostly focused on interpersonal relationships, persuasion, or comedy, while very few have examined how maxim violations operate specifically within a distinctly cross-cultural setting such as Amish–German interaction. This contrast highlights a research gap that this study aims to address. Most previous studies have focused either on interpersonal connections (Sari & Litbagay, 2019), persuasive approaches (Hidayati & Mahmud, 2022), or comedic scenarios (Cristina & Afriana, 2021). Thus, the goals of this study are to investigate the form and function of language using Grice's (1975) theoretical framework and the cross-cultural pragmatic approach of conversational implicatures in the film *Rumspringa: An Amish in Berlin* (2022).

Theoretically, this study aids the development of pragmatic research focusing on cross-cultural communication and media. Investigating how implicit meanings are produced by conversational means, this study should help us to better understand communication differences in worldwide media, implicatures and audience understanding of these messages from many cultural origins. Therefore, the objective of this study is to identify and analyze the types of maxim violations in the film *Rumspringa: An Amish in Berlin* (2022) and to explain how these violations reflect cross-cultural communication patterns.

2. Literature Review

Many investigations into written and spoken language have employed Grice's (1975) theory of implicature and the Cooperative Principle. Many academics, including Yule (2020), Osman, Subaiah & Mohammed (2022), and Elsheikh and Mohammed (2022), have noted that verbal implicature sometimes occurs. Deliberate breaking of rules by speakers enables them to convey implicit meaning, maintain social contacts, or attain practical objectives.

Research on films also indicates that breaking the rules can be a way to make audiences laugh, develop characters, and challenge societal expectations. Akmal and Yana in 2020 examined the movie *Kingdom of Heaven*, Khairunas and others in 2020 explored *Beauty and the Beast*, and Efizahane and Afriana in 2022 investigated *Doctor Strange in the*

Multiverse of Madness. These investigations found that a common technique for creating hidden meanings was to disregard the typical rules about relevance and quantity. Similarly, Indarti in 2024 highlighted how important it is to use multiple methods in understanding cultural communication by demonstrating how spoken words and visual signals come together to create implied meanings.

Although not many studies explore cross-cultural communication in film, particularly when ancient and new values conflict, these works demonstrate the need for pragmatic analysis in media speech. Looking at maximum infractions in the film *Rumspringa: An Amish in Berlin* (2022), this study builds on this body of knowledge by contrasting Berlin's contemporary city life is contrasted against Amish values. Previous searches have mostly focused on Western or worldwide blockbusters. On the other hand, this research looks at how implicature operates in cross-cultural meetings, especially on how norm-breaking can be utilized as a technique of negotiating identity, expressing cultural differences, and bridging value gaps.

3. Research Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative research method employing a pragmatic approach based on Grice's (1975) Conversational Implicature Theory. This approach was applied to uncover and look closely at the hidden meanings in the dialogue of the movie *Rumspringa: An Amish in Berlin* (Heinrich Nika, Oskar Minkler, & Mira, 2022), especially regarding how different cultures communicate, showing the clash between two unique sets of beliefs. Qualitative research is about exploring and understanding, which helps researchers grasp the importance of unspoken messages that can be understood through the setting, the way people talk to each other, and the cultural contexts of those engaged in the conversation.

A practical way of looking at things is needed for this research because pragmatics looks at how language is structured and how it's used in everyday talk and social situations. Yule (2020) explains that pragmatics is a part of linguistics that studies how language signals connect to how people understand each other based on the situation. To put it differently, pragmatics explore how what the speaker wants to say, how the listener understands it, and how people interact with each other affect the meaning of what is communicated. The film is treated as a multimodal text, where both verbal and nonverbal elements (intonation, facial expressions, gestures) are analyzed to interpret the intended meaning.

Interpretation of conversational implicature relies on the surrounding circumstances, the nature of the scenario, and the social connections between the characters. Conversational implicature is the subject of this research. When people from different cultures communicate with one another, it's not uncommon for their answers to seem meaningless, unclear, or even symbolic due to cultural differences in values and communication expectations. This is an example of implicature. The intentional (by sarcasm, comedy, or irony) or unconscious (as a result of cultural misunderstandings) transgressions of maxims shown in several cinema scenes are intriguing to examine from a practical perspective.

The primary data source is the Netflix film *Rumspringa: An Amish in Berlin* (2022). The data consist of conversational transcripts containing instances of maxim flouting, supported by detailed descriptions of the visual and situational contexts of the scenes. When gathering information, all important nonverbal signals, like body language, how someone talks, and their facial expressions, were noted down to make sure we understood the hidden

meanings correctly. After that, researchers take note of, copy, and transcribe pertinent statements, particularly those that suggest transgressions of Grice's maxims. The information was examined in three steps using Grice's model from 1975. The first step, data selection, was about finding conversations that intentionally broke the rules of good talk. The second step, pragmatic analysis, looked at the Cooperative Principle to figure out what the words really meant and what they suggested. The third step, contextual interpretation, linked the meanings we figured out with the differences in culture between the Amish and characters from Berlin, showing how breaking the conversation rules helps shape identity and connect different cultural values.

To make sure the information is trustworthy, we kept the data accurate and dependable by using different methods to check our understanding. We compared all conversation notes with the German online dictionary *duden.de* to make sure the language was correct. Also, we checked each hidden meaning against the situation and how it fits into the context, making sure that our findings were based on solid language and cultural facts. The study is more likely to be true because it uses linguistic analysis, cultural context, and multimodal observation to show how conversational flouting is used as a cultural and practical strategy in the movie.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the analytical findings on how characters flout conversational maxims—specifically the maxim of relevance in the movie *Rumspringa: An Amish in Berlin* (2022), using Grice's idea from 1975 about how people imply things in conversation. The analysis of how the characters ignore the relevance maxim to convey hidden messages while interacting between the Amish community and the culture of Berlin. Instead of retelling the film's plot, the discussion interprets how each instance of flouting functions pragmatically, like how they reveal beliefs, personal identities, and cultural values, and how they make the film humorous and critical of society. This part not only discusses the differences in global communication but also explains how language helps to create meaning, highlight conflicts in values, and build connections between cultures.

4.1 Flouting the Maxim of Relevance for Revealing Ideology, Identity, and Cultural Values

Taxi Driver: Geld haben wir? (Do we have money?)

Jacob: Ich bin Amish. My people believe that money itself has no value.

(I am Amish. My people believe that money itself has no value.)



Rumspringa: An Amish in Berlin (05:22)

The main character, Jacob, talks to a taxi driver in Berlin. In this situation, the taxi driver asks a direct question known as an *Entscheidungsfragesatz* (closed question), with the question *Geld haben wir?* Which literally means 'Do we have money?' and implicitly demands a 'yes' or 'no' answer. On this topic, Jacob didn't answer exactly. Instead, he said something philosophical: *Ich bin Amish. My people believe that money itself has no value.* This respondent's answer was clearly different from what would normally be expected in a

business setting. Jacob didn't answer the question of whether he had money; instead, he used this chance to show how his community's values work.

According to Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature, Jacob's response is a flouting of the maxim of relevance. He purposefully did this in this instance to guide his interlocutor to a more profoundly suggested interpretation. It appears that Jacob purposefully avoided providing a straight response in this instance in order to express the values of the Amish people, who reject consumerism and maintain that money has no inherent worth. The implications that result from Jacob's response are unusual, as the sentence does not make clear what it means. Only those who comprehend the underlying ideological and cultural background will be able to comprehend them. Furthermore, Jacob's words demonstrate a different understanding of the worth of money. It also illustrates how a person from a different culture searches for his identity and life values in the context of a recently established social structure. This demonstrates that maxim violation is not only a communication mistake but also a communication tactic to express ideology, identity, and cultural values.

Freja: *Jacob, Ich glaube, Alf könnte eher was von dir lernen als andersherum.* (Jacob, I think Alf could learn more from you than the other way around.)

Jacob: *Das ist schön. Alf, wir Amish helfen jedem gern.* (That's great. Alf, we Amish are happy to help everyone.)



Rumspringa - An Amish in Berlin (12:37)

Freja talks with Jacob. Their talk seems simple, but it has a deep meaning that has to do with how different cultures have different values and ways of looking at life. Freja tells, *Jacob, Ich glaube, Alf könnte eher was von dir lernen als andersherum* 'I think Alf could learn more from you than from the other way around.' For the most part, this sounds like a compliment, but it really means something else: Jacob's way of life is thought to have more important values than Alf's. Freja was talking about Jacob's character. Jacob is from the Amish community, which is known for living a simple, organised life and sticking to moral and religious rules. By saying that Alf can learn from Jacob, Freja is comparing Alf's way of life—which is like modern Berlin society, which is free, consumerist, and individualistic. There are times when Freja hints that Alf could learn from some things about Jacob's life, even though she doesn't say it directly. Jacob then said, *Das ist schön. Alf, wir Amish helfen jedem gern* 'That's great. Alf, we Amish are happy to help everyone.' Jacob's answer didn't immediately respond to Freja's analogy; instead, it confirmed the good ideals that his community holds dear. Jacob helped to keep the good image of his community by saying that the Amish are delighted to help anyone.

Grice's (1975) conversational implicature theory framework says that Freja's comment breaks the flouting of the maxim of relevance by not following a rule. This happens because Freja does not say that Alf's way of life is pointless or that Jacob is morally better. To get her point across, she instead uses hints and omissions. This violation is planned because it lets moral lessons or criticisms of society get across without directly confronting

people. In cross-cultural communication, this scene shows that breaking the rule of relevance can be used not only to send hidden meanings but also to be polite, keep social ties alive, and send political messages in that way. In the movie, this method is used to both tell the story of Jacob and Freja's relationship and show the themes of conflict and harmony that can happen when people with different values interact.

Ina: *Ist es eine Sünde, wenn man sich verliebt?* (Is it a sin to fall in love?)

Jacob: *Wir sind nur ein einziges Mal verliebt. Wir bleiben ein Leben lang beieinander.* (We only fall in love once. We stay together for the rest of our lives.)



Rumspringa - An Amish in Berlin (51:29)

Ina talked about her first love; she asked Jacob if he had ever been in love. Ina asks *Ist es eine Sünde, wenn man sich verliebt?* 'Is it a sin to fall in love?' It was clear that this question had deep religious and moral meanings for Ina, who thought that the Amish might have strict rules or even bans on having relationships before marriage. When asked this question, Jacob replied, *Wir sind nur ein einziges Mal verliebt. Wir bleiben ein Leben lang beieinander* 'We only fall in love once. We stay together for the rest of our lives.' It sounds like this answer is philosophical and full of cultural worth. Instead, he changes the subject from religious morals to the Amish belief that love is a commitment that lasts a lifetime. According to Grice's (1975) framework of conversational implicature, Jacob's response can be categorized as flouting of the maxim of relevance.

This is broken when someone answers a question in a way that doesn't directly answer the questioner, but still makes sense when looked at in the context of culture and society. In this case, Jacob didn't answer the question of whether falling in love is a mistake. Instead, he talked about how his community sees love as a lifelong promise that must be kept. People who know about the Amish way of life can figure out that falling in love is not a mistake, but something very holy that is bound by strong morals. This scene shows how the movie breaks rules to make talks between different cultures more meaningful. Characters not only give information about facts, but they also teach cultural and moral values in a subtle way through flouting. People who watch this exchange can learn about how different cultural and moral backgrounds can affect how people answer the same question, even in private and sensitive situations.

4.2 Flouting the Maxim of Relevance for Humor and Social Critique

Jacob: *Ich bin auch Amish.* (I'm Amish too.)

Alf: *Bitte?* (What?)

Jacob: *Ich bin auf Rumspringa. Du auch, oder?* (I'm on Rumspringa. You too, right?)

Alf: *Äh, nee, ich bin auf Bier.* (Uh, no, I'm going to drink beer.)



Rumspringa - An Amish in Berlin (07:39)

Jacob is strolling around the city when he spots Alf sporting a white shirt, hat, and beard, which are all typical of the Amish people's distinctive dress. Jacob boldly declares, *Ich bin auch Amish*, 'I'm Amish too', based on this outward impression, before adding, *Ich bin auf Rumspringa. Du auch, oder?* 'I'm on Rumspringa. You too, right?' In addition to reflecting Jacob's presumption that Alf and he have similar cultural backgrounds, this statement attempts to forge a bond through common cultural experiences. However, Alf's answer was nothing like what Jacob thought it would be. Alf answered, *Äh, nee, ich bin auf Bier*, 'I'm going to drink beer.' This sentence seems to be similar to Jacob's in terms of structure, but it has nothing to do with meaning. Alf didn't say whether he was Amish or Rumspringa. Instead, he answered with a reference to something that many Berliners do: drinking beer. This is a normal part of life in Berlin and has nothing to do with religious groups or customs.

Alf's response can be classified as flouting of the maxim of relevance, according to Grice's theory of conversational implicature (1975). This violation occurs when the speaker intentionally communicates a response that is unrelated to the context of the conversation. In this context, Alf does not explicitly respond to Jacob's inquiry regarding whether he is also undergoing Rumspringa; rather, he responds with a statement that completely alters the meaning. This flouting is not a communication error; rather, it is a deliberate linguistic strategy that aims to achieve a specific effect, in this case, a comical effect and an expression of disinterest in the cultural topic being discussed. The language used by Alf in the conversation can be interpreted in different ways. It could be seen as a rejection of Jacob's offer of cultural identification. On the other hand, it could be seen as an act of silliness or dishonesty on Alf's part to deal with awkward social situations. So, this scene shows that breaking a maxim isn't just a way to say something without saying it directly; it's also a way to make people laugh, show how two different cultures are at odds with each other, and show how they relate to each other. The pragmatic method, especially Grice's theory, gives us a good way to think about how movies show hidden meanings in everyday conversations that seem silly but have important cultural and social meanings.

Bo: *Hat er sie geknattert?* (Did he sleep with her?)

Alf: *Ja, Mann!* (Yes, man!)

Bo: *Oh Mann, ey, selbst der Amish.* (Oh man, even the Amish.)

Alf: *Selbst der Amish, Alter!* (Even the Amish, dude!)



Rumspringa - An Amish in Berlin (1:13:22)

This scene was important because it went against the very strict morals of the Amish society, which thinks that having sex outside of marriage is a very bad thing to do. Bo asks *Hat er sie geknattert?* 'Did he sleep with her?' is a question that uses German slang and a sexual tone to find out about a relationship. Alf's answer: *Ja, Mann!* 'Yes, man!', which proved Bo's hunch. Bo's response, *Oh Mann, ey, selbst der Amish* 'Oh man, even the Amish!' made his shock even stronger, and Alf repeated it right away, *Selbst der Amish, Alter!* 'Even the Amish, dude!' This repetition serves to make them even more shocked and to show how impressed or amazed they are by Jacob's bravery or sin. When it comes to how things are said, this talk is interesting because it not only shares facts but also makes moral and cultural judgments. Bo's question isn't just a request for proof; it also has a tone of surprise and puts the focus on how strange the act is, since Jacob is an Amish man. Bo thinks it's strange that an Amish young man had sex with someone other than his wife. This goes against what most people think about the Amish society.

Within the framework of Grice's conversational implicature theory (1975), this conversation can be categorized as flouting of the maxim of relevance. According to the principle of relevance, what you say in a talk should be related to the topic and point of the interaction. But Bo and Alf's answers are more about how shocked they are than about giving useful answers or reasons for what happened. Instead of just talking about the facts, they focus on the moral and cultural aspects of Jacob's deeds. This violation is done on purpose, and it creates an unusual implication: that people find Jacob's actions shocking because he comes from a group that believes sexual behavior should be limited.

5. Conclusion

This research looked at how the maxims are broken in *Rumspringa: An Amish in Berlin* (2022) by applying Grice's (1975) ideas about conversation, especially focusing on the maxim of relevance. The findings indicate that the ways the film breaks these rules are not merely mistakes in communication; they are also deliberate methods that carry more significant cultural, ideological, and humorous meanings. Characters, particularly Jacob, utilize ostensibly indirect or irrelevant comments to convey Amish beliefs, emphasize cultural identity, and navigate disparities in their interactions with Berlin culture. Sometimes, not following typical rules of conversation can help to make people laugh or ease awkward situations. This makes the story better and helps everyone understand different cultures more easily.

This research is new because it demonstrates how violations of conversation rules, often viewed as simple errors, can actually help create understanding in different cultures through movie discussions. The study reveals that the hidden meanings in these conversations reflect cultural beliefs and social messages, allowing audiences to notice both the differences in ideas and the chance for connection between different cultural

backgrounds. This bolsters the assertion that pragmatic phenomena cannot be comprehensively grasped without consideration of cultural and ideological contexts.

This study makes two important contributions. Theoretically, it contributes to the study of pragmatics by contextualizing maxim violations within a cross-cultural cinematic framework, illustrating the functioning of implicature beyond quotidian discourse. In practice, it underscores the educational efficacy of cinema in imparting international pragmatics, especially in cultivating learners' awareness of latent meanings and cultural subtleties.

Future study could expand this approach by exploring maxim violations across various film genres or in multilingual environments, as well as by examining audience reaction to gain a deeper understanding of how cultural backgrounds affect the interpretation of implicatures. These directions would enhance our comprehension of the functioning of pragmatic tactics as both communicative and cultural resources.

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