

## FLOUTING MAXIMS IN *MY LIFE WITH THE WALTER BOYS* SERIES

**Bella Rosyidatul Masitoh Prasetyanto, Lisetyo Ariyanti**

English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Surabaya

E-mail: [bellarosyidatul.22037@mhs.unesa.ac.id](mailto:bellarosyidatul.22037@mhs.unesa.ac.id), [lisetyoariyanti@unesa.ac.id](mailto:lisetyoariyanti@unesa.ac.id)

**ABSTRAK.** Penelitian ini mengkaji cara Jackie Howard, tokoh dalam serial *My Life with the Walter Boys*, saat ia harus menyesuaikan diri dengan lingkungan sosial baru pasca kehilangan seluruh keluarganya dan harus pindah ke kediaman keluarga Walter. Data percakapan kemudian diteliti menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan mengaplikasikan kerangka kerja analisis data Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña (2014). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Jackie secara taktis melanggar keempat maksim Grice (1975); yaitu Kuantitas, Kualitas, Relevansi, dan Cara. Pelanggaran maksim tersebut dieksekusi melalui empat mekanisme linguistik spesifik: penggunaan respons minimal untuk membatasi informasi, penyusunan alasan logis yang dibuat-buat, penggunaan pengalihan abstrak untuk mengubah topik yang mengganggu, serta penggunaan ketidaklancaran berbicara sebagai instrumen penghentian percakapan. Lebih lanjut, analisis menunjukkan bahwa manuver pragmatik ini berfungsi sama seperti Teori Akomodasi Komunikasi (Giles, 2014) secara dominan sebagai strategi Divergensi. Jackie menggunakan rentetan pelanggaran maksim ini sebagai tameng linguistik untuk menjaga jarak relasional, menolak asimilasi, dan mempertahankan otonomi emosionalnya di lingkungan baru, di samping penggunaan Konvergensi dan Pemeliharaan yang sangat selektif. Kesimpulannya, pelanggaran maksim dalam konteks ini bukanlah sebuah kegagalan komunikasi, melainkan alat taktis yang penuh perhitungan untuk mengelola batasan sosial.

**Kata kunci:** Flouting Maksim; Prinsip Kerja Sama; Teori Akomodasi Komunikasi; Serial TV *My Life With The Walter Boys*; Adaptasi sosial

**ABSTRACT.** This research examines Jackie Howard, character in *My Life with the Walter Boys* series, as she adjusts to a new social environment following the death of her family and the need to relocate to the Walter family household. The conversational data is analyzed using a descriptive qualitative method based on Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) analytical framework. The findings reveal that Jackie tactically flouts all four Gricean Maxims (1975); Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. These pragmatic flouting are executed through specific linguistic mechanisms: utilizing minimal responses to restrict information output, constructing fabricated logical pretexts, employing abstract deflections to shift intrusive topics, and using speech disfluencies as an emergency conversational brake. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that this systematic flouting functions as in Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT; Giles, 2014) predominantly as a Divergence strategy. Jackie weaponizes these linguistic maneuvers as a protective shield to maintain relational distance, resist forced assimilation, and preserve her emotional autonomy in her new environment, alongside highly selective use of Convergence and Maintenance. In conclusion, the non-observance of maxims in this context is not a communication failure but a calculated linguistic instrument for social boundary management.

**Keywords:** Flouting maxims; Cooperative Principles; Communication Accommodation Theory; *My Life with the Walter Boys* TV Series; Social Adaptation

### INTRODUCTION

Communication is not simply exchanging information, human communication is also considered as identity process and control from social relation. Fundamentally, the language we used should be meaningful in order to avoid any confusion between the speaker and the addressee (Indahwati, 2023). The sudden relocation into a whole new setting involves deep social and relational adjustment. When people are

suddenly pulled out from their usual lifestyle, they have to learn to modify their behavioral norms and values of the society in order to establish the process of interpersonal communication and make the process of moving more than just an adjustment in location (Iba et al., 2024). This communication became more difficult for an adolescent who is in a chaotic situation because it might be emotionally dangerous and socially embarrassing. Branje et al (2021) stated that

## FLOUTING MAXIMS IN *MY LIFE WITH THE WALTER BOYS* SERIES

Bella Rosyidatul Masitoh Prasetyanto, Lisetyo Ariyanti

at the same time adolescents experience various emotional and personal changes through social interaction, exploration, and commitment within relational contexts. Therefore, to maintain their boundaries and adjustments people frequently use indirect ways of communication to employ implicit meaning for their survival in new environments.

In 1975, the concept of Cooperative Principle was introduced by Herbert Paul Grice as the fundamental concept in pragmatics (Cutting, 2002). Ikawati (2022) states, this cooperative maxim helps speakers to communicate and to reach goals of conversation. Then flouting maxims, where the speaker intentionally breaks four conversational maxims quantity, quality, relations and manner as a pragmatics tool to produce conversational implicature which the interlocutor might infer the unstated meaning. Imran et al. (2024) stated that the purpose of maxim flouting is to create other meaning and allow to capture the social and emotional intent of characters, including the expression of sarcasm, politeness, humor, and multi-faceted emotions.

Communication is not simply exchanging information, human communication is also considered as identity process and control from social relation. In this study Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) frameworks are used to understand how social distance is managed in interaction. As stated by Mseer (2025), individuals shift their communicational behavior in order to adapt to the social norms of whom they are interacting with. This study intentionally applies CAT at its foundational level approaches convergence, divergence, and maintenance to ensure this study is rooted to pragmatic phenomena which portrayed implicature that reflects adaptation or distancing to their communication.

This phenomenon is vividly portrayed on *My Life With The Walter Boys* TV Series. Following the sudden loss of her parents and her sister in a car accident, Jackie was forced to navigate the necessity to socially adapt in a new place while still grieving for her family. The sudden relocation from a highly structured urban lifestyle in New York, she has moved to rural Colorado to live with her late mother's best friend Catherine. Jackie heavily relies on conversational implicature to endure the interaction since a direct communication can be too emotionally draining during this intense grief and out of respect for her new guardian. Thus, this series serves as a realistic representation that demonstrates the function of indirect meaning as a tool for adaptation.

Previous study on Gricean maxims frequently isolate flouting as an independent linguistic phenomenon used to generate specific contextual effects, such as humor (Anyelina & Firmawan, 2022) or the reinforcement of societal hierarchies (Imran et al., 2024). Conversely, research anchored in Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) emphasizes the relational outcomes of linguistic adjustments. For example, Mseer (2025) illustrates how individuals pragmatically modify their linguistic complexity and tone to surmount communication barriers and establish community trust. Abdelnasser (2023) emphasizes that these linguistic shifts, specifically convergence and divergence, are influenced by underlying power dynamics, which either emphasize social similarities or assert cultural boundaries. Synthesizing these two perspectives uncovers a critical theoretical intersection: the structural violation of conversational maxims can serve as the precise mechanism through which accommodation strategies are executed. However, previous studies have largely overlooked this intersection, treating the two concepts independently. By merging these frameworks, this study posits that flouting maxims is not merely a conversational absurdity, but a deliberate strategy that is employed to establish personal autonomy and manage social distance in new environments.

This study analyses the first season of *My Life with the Walter Boys* (2023), focusing on the protagonist Jackie Howard's utterances during an unexpected social relocation. The study examines her dialogues with any individual throughout the series, considering as the exchanges flouts Gricean maxims to generate conversational implications. In an unfamiliar setting, dependence on harsh or literal phrases may often lead to social discord or misinterpretations. Consequently, the implicit meanings in her discourse function as essential bargaining strategies. In interactions with peers or new environments, these implicit messages enable her to cautiously assess social dynamics, safeguard personal boundaries, or discreetly foster camaraderie. Specifically, this study asks two main research questions: (1) how does Jackie Howard flout Gricean maxims to generate conversational implicatures, and (2) how do these implicit meanings function to regulate social distance in an unfamiliar setting? Ultimately, this study illustrates how indirect language serves as an effective mechanism for regulating social distance.

#### **FLOUTING MAXIMS IN MY LIFE WITH THE WALTER BOYS SERIES**

Bella Rosyidatul Masitoh Prasetyanto, Lisetyo Arianti

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the pragmatic phenomena embedded within conversational interactions. A qualitative design is highly suitable for this research as it facilitates an in-depth exploration of linguistic nuances, implied meanings, and contextual influences rather than focusing on numerical frequencies. The primary data source for this study is the first season of the television series *My Life with the Walter Boys* (2023). The specific data consist of conversational utterances produced by the protagonist, Jackie Howard, during her interactions with various characters in her new environment that contain implicature.

The data collection process was conducted systematically using observational and transcription techniques. Initially, all ten episodes of the first season were subjected to close and repeated viewings to thoroughly comprehend the conversational contexts, relational dynamics, and situational backgrounds of each scene. During this phase, dialogues involving the protagonist were carefully transcribed. Subsequently, a purposive sampling technique was applied to filter the transcribed data. The study exclusively selected utterances where the protagonist intentionally flouted at least one of Grice's four conversational maxims (Quantity, Quality, Relation, or Manner) to generate an implicature. Conversations that relied purely on direct, literal meanings were excluded, ensuring the data strictly represented indirect communicative strategies.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section elaborates on the results of the analysis in this study. The findings and discussion are systematically structured to directly respond to the three research objectives. To provide a comprehensive and logical examination of Jackie Howard's communicative behavior, this section is divided into three primary subsections: the categorization of the way Jackie executes to flout maxims, and the interpretation of these mechanisms into communication accommodation strategies.

### 4.1 The Identification of Flouting Conversational Maxims

The analysis of the 49 identified utterances reveals that Jackie does not experience communicative failure; rather, she actively violates the cooperative principle to negotiate interactional boundaries in a new social environment. The distribution of the flouted maxims demonstrates a deliberate structural pattern, such as the following:

#### a. Flouting Maxim Quantity

The use of Flouting Maxim Quantity can be seen on Episode 2-*Live a Little* start at minutes 07:50, for context the conversation takes place at school between Jackie and Miss Jacobs. Jackie, accustomed to a highly rigorous academic environment in New York, had previously requested to take on more challenging courses to maintain her academic profile. Unable to fulfill the exact request, Miss Jacobs accommodates her by offering an alternative: a volunteer position on the student council, which strictly requires the council president's approval. The transcribed conversation can be seen below:

Miss Jacobs: "You have a free period this afternoon?"

Jackie: "Yes."

Miss Jacobs: "Great. Well, I just found out there's an opening for a volunteer on the student council. Room 1620. Two o'clock. You need the president of the council to approve it. I'm sure that won't be difficult."

Jackie: "Okay. Thanks, Miss Jacobs."

In this exchange, Jackie provides excessively brief and transactional answers "Yes" and "Okay. Thanks", Jackie flouts the maxim of quantity through a minimal response strategy offering significantly less conversational contribution than required. In a cooperative exchange with a supportive authority figure, a proportionate level of elaboration is pragmatically expected. The implicature generated by this flouting is that while she accepts the academic opportunity, she intentionally cuts off any potential for interpersonal dialogue or small talk. Her restricted response subtly implies that her engagement with the counselor remains strictly professional and objective.

### b. Flouting Maxim Quality

The use of Flouting Maxim Quality can be seen on Episode 5-*Thanks Giving* starts at minutes 08:36, for context the conversation occurs during preparations for a highly communal family tradition. An authority figure issues a collective, time-bound directive intended to gather the entire household. Rather than complying with the communal schedule, Jackie preemptively evades the shared event by citing uncertain external obligations. The transcribed conversation can be seen below:

Catherine: *"Are you going too?"*

Jackie: *"Where?"*

Alex: *"Skylar's dad's doing a talk on the real history of Thanksgiving."*

Jackie: *"I can't. I'm doing food-drive deliveries."*

Catherine: *"Well, I'm gonna need you all home by 2:00."*

Jackie: *"I'm not sure how long deliveries will take, so don't wait for me 'cause I can grab leftovers when I get home."*

In this exchange, Jackie says *"I can't. I'm doing food-drive deliveries,"* and then doubles down with *"I'm not sure how long deliveries will take,"* she is actively constructing a false narrative. Which means that Jackie flouts the maxim of quality by deliberately providing an untrue statement regarding her external schedule. When Catherine issues a directive for a familial gathering, a cooperative response requires factual transparency. Instead, Jackie exaggerates a scheduling conflict, using the food-drive deliveries as a false pretext and a pragmatic shield. By contributing information she knows to be false to evade the event, she generates the implicature of a definitive rejection of familial integration. Her verbal maneuver implies a deliberate avoidance of the domestic tradition, effectively concealing her reluctance to bond behind a constructed narrative of being too busy with charity work.

### c. Flouting Maxim Manner

The use of Flouting Maxim manners can be seen on Episode 1-*Welcome to Colorado* start at minute 12:24, for context the following discussion occurs between Catherine Howard and Jackie regarding Jackie's arrival in Colorado. Through this interaction,

Catherine attempted to establish connection with Jackie in order to assist her in adjusting to her new surroundings. Catherine's attention was drawn to Jackie's face, which reminded her of Jackie's mother. The transcribed conversation can be seen below:

Catherine: *"You're so much like her."*

Jackie: *"Everyone says that. Lucy looks... Um... Lucy... looked more like Dad."*

In this exchange, Jackie delivers a clear and orderly thought, she starts in the present tense *"Lucy looks..."* halts her speech with a hesitation filler *"Um...."*, and then actively repairs the sentence to shift into the past tense *"Lucy... looked..."* Which means that Jackie flouts the maxim of manner through a combination of hesitation and self-correction (speech repair). When Catherine makes a personal statement intended to build solidarity, a cooperative response should be clear, brief, and orderly. Instead, Jackie's response is structurally disrupted. By struggling to form the sentence and correcting her grammar from present to past tense, she generates a powerful implicature: she is still actively processing the trauma of her family's death. The disorderly delivery implies that accepting her sister's passing is still a jarring, emotionally difficult reality for her to articulate smoothly.

### d. Flouting Maxim Relation

The use of Flouting Maxim Relation can be seen on Episodes 4 Nineteen start at minute 41:50, for context the conversation takes place during a casual social interaction where Jackie and Cole are hanging out and discussing the game Truth or Dare. The relaxed and informal nature of the game acts as a conversational catalyst. Within this casual setting, Cole gently asks about Jackie's late sister, the transcribed conversation can be seen below:

Cole: *"What was she like?"*

Jackie: *"Clever, Cool, Funny, beautiful, Fearless. Everybody loved her."*

Cole: *"Sounds just like you."*

Jackie: *"She would have been... 19... In a couple of years, I'll be older than she ever was. It is just a number, though. Right? It's just a number."*

In this exchange, when Cole provides the first pair part by offering a direct compliment, a cooperative conversation pragmatically expects a second pair part in the form of an acknowledgment, acceptance, or denial. However, Jackie completely ignores Cole's statement and continues talking about her sister's age. Instead, Jackie's response "*She would have been... 19...*" is entirely disconnected from Cole's compliment. She leaves his statement hanging and abruptly shifts the topic back to her sister's age and her own mortality. Jackie flouts the maxim of manner through a combination of hesitation and self-correction (speech repair). Jackie flouts the maxim of manner through an adjacency pair mismatch and a topic shift. Since her response does not address the preceding utterance at all, her contribution is propositionally irrelevant to the immediate conversational context. However, unlike her previous defensive topic shifts, the implicature generated here is not an attempt to evade the interaction. Rather, she is profoundly immersed in relational disclosure by flouting the maxim in this specific manner, she demonstrates a high focus on sharing a vulnerable personal reality, prioritizing deep emotional storytelling over standard social pleasantries.

In summary, this study reveals that Jackie Howard deliberately flouts all four Gricean maxims as her primary tactical tools to control conversational boundaries. Rather than committing mere communication errors, she executes these pragmatic violations through specific linguistic mechanisms: utilizing minimal responses to restrict information output, constructing fabricated logical pretexts to escape interactions, employing abstract deflections to shift intrusive topics, and using speech disfluencies as an emergency conversational brake.

#### 4.2 Establishing Interactional Boundaries Through the Flouting Maxims

To observe the character's relational adjustment, all 49 identified flouting maxims were cross-analyzed with Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) strategies. The comprehensive distribution of these strategies is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Distribution of Flouting Maxims to CAT**

| Flouting Maxim | Divergence | Convergence | Maintenance |
|----------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| Quality        | 13         | 3           | 0           |
| Quantity       | 14         | 5           | 1           |
| Relation       | 1          | 1           | 0           |
| Manner         | 9          | 2           | 0           |

As presented in Table 1, the cross-analysis reveals a striking dominance of Divergence which heavily outweighs Convergence and Maintenance. The strong correlation between the flouted maxims and the accommodation strategies reveals the core mechanism of the character's social adaptation.

##### a. Divergence

Divergence is established as the primary strategy in Jackie's adaptation process. In this study, divergence serves as the primary adaptation strategy. As detailed in the table, this divergence is heavily driven by the flouting of the maxims of Quantity by utilizing information withholding and Quality by utilizing sarcastic or untrue statements, followed by Relation by topic shifting to intentionally emphasize the communicative and emotional differences between herself and her interlocutors. She employs this strategy not out of malice, but as a defense mechanism to maintain social distance, express her discomfort, and rigidly negotiate her autonomous space in a foreign environment. The high frequency of divergence proves that Jackie does not passively assimilate into her new reality; instead, she weaponizes conversational violations to protect her personal boundaries.

##### b. Convergence

In this study convergence strategy shows that Jackie is utilized tactically rather than genuinely. Unlike divergence, when the character employs convergence, she flouts the cooperative principle to momentarily accommodate the interlocutor's needs or to diffuse immediate tension. For example, providing an overly expanded utterance (flouting quantity) not to build a wall, but to show basic solidarity and establish brief alliances without fully surrendering her boundaries. This strategy is typically employed to facilitate brief, necessary alliances, diffuse immediate

conflicts, or show basic solidarity when the situation demands it. However, the significantly lower frequency of convergence indicates that affiliation is a secondary priority compared to boundary maintenance.

### c. Maintenance

Maintenance is the least utilized strategy, appearing only once through the flouting of the maxim of Quantity. This indicates that Jackie rarely insists on passively maintaining a rigid, pre-existing communicative style regardless of the interlocutor. Instead of passively maintaining her old conversational habits Jackie's adaptation process is highly active on shifting dynamically between pushing people away (Divergence) or, less frequently, accommodating them (Convergence) based on the immediate relational pressure she faces.

In summary, the data clearly demonstrates that social adaptation in a high-pressure environment does not necessitate a linear progression toward complete assimilation. By predominantly employing divergence through flouting maxims, the character effectively navigates her new reality while maintaining her personal autonomy.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the pragmatic analysis, this study concludes that the flouting of conversational maxims by Jackie Howard is not a communicative failure, but rather a deliberate, structural linguistic strategy to negotiate interactional boundaries in her new environment. Specifically, flouting the maxims of Quantity and Quality function as her primary tactics and relational shields to regulate social distance through information withholding, utterance expansion, and the use of sarcasm. The flouting of the maxim of Relation is utilized exclusively to evade sensitive topics that threaten her private domain, while the flouting of the maxim of Manner is largely avoided to ensure that the fundamental clarity of social interaction is maintained.

From the perspective of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), the social function of these flouted maxims is overwhelmingly dominated by the strategy of Divergence, which significantly outweighs Convergence and Maintenance. The strong correlation between flouting maxims and divergence

proves that rather than attempting to affiliate, assimilate, or please her interlocutors, the main character consistently manipulates conversational rules to create emotional distance and assert her autonomous space. Convergence is only employed occasionally as a tactical maneuver to facilitate brief, necessary alliances.

Overall, the integration of flouting maxims and CAT in this study demonstrates that social adaptation in a high-pressure environment does not necessitate a linear progression toward complete assimilation. The character dynamically constructs, adjusts, and defends her communicative boundaries. The flouting of conversational rules represents more than mere non-cooperation; it functions as a potent relational instrument to maintain personal identity and autonomy in the face of overwhelming social pressure. Based on the findings, several suggestions are proposed for future researchers interested in pragmatic analysis and Communication Accommodation Theory.

## REFERENCES

- Abdelnasser, H. S. (2023). Exploring the Application and Effectiveness of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) in Community Service: A Case study of the Happiness Makers Team at Deraya University. *المجلة العلمية لكلية الآداب-جامعة أسيوط*, 0(0), 0–0. <https://doi.org/10.21608/aakj.2023.220107.1499>
- Anyelina, M., & Firmawan, H. (2023). An analysis on flouting maxim in Hotel Transylvania. *JEdu: Journal of English Education*, 3(3), 202–207. <https://doi.org/10.30998/jedu.v3i3.9122>
- Branje, S., de Moor, E. L., Spitzer, J., & Becht, A. I. (2021). Dynamics of identity development in adolescence: A decade in review. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 31(4), 908–927. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12678>
- Cutting, J. (2002). *Pragmatics and discourse: a resource book for students*. Psychology Press.
- Dragojevic, M., Gasiorek, J., & Giles, H. (2016). Accommodative strategies as core of the theory. In *Communication Accommodation Theory* (pp. 36–59). Cambridge University Press. Retrieved June 15, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781316226537.003>
- Dragojevic, M., Gasiorek, J., & Giles, H. (2016).

- Accommodative strategies as core of the theory. In *Communication Accommodation Theory* (pp. 36–59). Cambridge University Press. Retrieved June 15, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781316226537.003>
- Iba, L., Larisu, Z., Irwanto, I., & Joko, J. (2024). The role of communication in social change: promoting societal transformation. *MSJ: Majority Science Journal*, 2(4), 47–57. <https://doi.org/10.61942/msj.v2i4.244>
- Ikawati, L. (2022). An analysis of the flouting of conversational maxims by grice on ‘A clean, well-lighted place’ short story. *J-Lalite: Journal of English Studies*, 3(1), 46. <https://doi.org/10.20884/1.jes.2022.3.1.5733>
- Imran, U., Batool, Z., & Wajahat, F. (2024). A pragmatic analysis of the lexical choices used in divorce scenes of Pakistani TV dramas. *Journal of Asian Development Studies*, 13(4), 871–885. <https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2024.13.4.70>
- Indahwati, Y. D. (2023). Deixis Analysis of the Song Lyrics of The Tale of Jenny and Screech Trilogy by Ren. *Language Horizon: Journal of Language Studies*, 11(2), 58–65. <https://doi.org/10.26740/lh.v11n2.p58-65>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis*. SAGE.
- Mseer, I. N. (2025). Communication Accommodation Theory; for Understanding Cultural Communication Dynamics. *Journal of Digital Media and Artificial Intelligence An International Journal*, 2(1), 27–33.
- Setyoko, R. S., & Ariyanti, L. (2026). THE ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS OF GENDER ISSUES IN BRIDGERTON TV SERIES ON NETFLIX (2020 & 2022) . *Language Horizon: Journal of Language Studies*, 14(2), 24–35. Retrieved from <https://ejournal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/language-horizon/article/view/81196>
- Sidabutar, N. I., Manurung, L. W., & Simarmata, R. O. (2023). Flouting and violation grice’s theory of cooperative principle maxim in podcast dedy corbuzier scene widi viera-cinta laura. *Jurnal Bima : Pusat Publikasi Ilmu Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 1(4), 42–69. <https://doi.org/10.61132/bima.v1i4.279>