



A Study of Grice's Cooperative Principle and Its Violation in The Wooden Horse by Elham Fallah and The Dead Are on Their Way by Natasha Amiri

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Abstract

The present article, adopting a pragmatic semantic approach and drawing upon Grice's Cooperative Principle, examines the manner in which the four maxims of this theory (quantity, quality, relation, and manner) are observed and violated in two novels: *The Wooden Horse* by Elham Fallah and *The Dead Are on Their Way* by Natasha Amiri. The research method is both quantitative and qualitative, based on content analysis of the characters' utterances in the two works. The findings indicate that violations of Gricean maxims in these novels acquire specific functions in narrative construction, characterization, and reader reception. In *The Wooden Horse*, the violation of maxims is predominantly carried out by male characters, whereas in *The Dead Are on Their Way*, it is mainly performed by female characters occupying positions of power. The results further demonstrate that the maxim of quantity is violated more frequently than the other maxims in both works. This frequent violation contributes to heightened suspense, the creation of ambiguity, gradual plot development, and the portrayal of characters' reluctance to convey complete and explicit information. In *The Wooden Horse*, this maxim is more often violated by male characters, while in *The Dead Are on Their Way*, it is violated almost equally by both women and men. The maxim of quality, identified as the second most frequently violated maxim, reflects an atmosphere of social anxiety, deception, and rumor-spreading in both novels, thereby intensifying emotional tension and magnifying character traits. The violation of the maxim of relation generates psychological

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tension in readers, reinforces the dominance of powerful characters, implies indirect humiliation, and represents gender-based conflicts. The maxim of manner is violated more often by men in *The Wooden Horse* and primarily by women in *The Dead Are on Their Way*. Such violations contribute to the depiction of a mysterious atmosphere, the indirect expression of cultural norms, and the representation of characters' psychological disintegration.

Keywords: Grice's *Cooperative Principle*, *Pragmatic semantics*, *language pragmatics*, the novel *The Wooden Horse*, the novel *The Dead Are on Their Way*.

1. Introduction

In linguistic studies, particularly in semantics and discourse analysis, the ways in which meaning is conveyed through language have long been a central concern. One of the key theories in this field is Grice's Cooperative Principle, proposed in the 1970s, which suggests that effective communication is based on an implicit assumption of cooperation between speaker and hearer. Grice introduced four conversational maxims—quantity, quality, relation, and manner—which together form the foundation of successful verbal interaction.

However, these maxims are not always strictly observed. Their violation, whether deliberate or implicit, often generates additional layers of meaning such as irony, criticism, or implicature. For this reason, the study of maxim violation plays an important role in pragmatic and discourse analysis. In literary texts, especially novels, dialogue serves not only to advance the plot but also to construct characters, represent power relations, and express ideological positions. Contemporary Persian novels, shaped by specific social and cultural contexts, frequently contain dialogues that move beyond surface meaning. In this regard, *The Wooden Horse* by Elham Fallah and *The Dead Are on Their Way* by Natasha Amiri provide suitable material for examining how violations of Grice's maxims function within fictional discourse. This study applies Grice's framework to analyze how the four maxims are observed or violated in the dialogues of these two novels. It investigates which maxims are most frequently violated, which characters tend to violate them, and how these violations contribute to implicit meanings and the representation of gender and power. Ultimately, the analysis aims to show how maxim violation serves as a strategy for conveying social critique and articulating women's experiences in contemporary Persian fiction.

2. Literature Review

To date, no independent study has been conducted on Elham Fallah's *The Wooden Horse* or Natasha Amiri's *The Dead Are on Their Way* from the perspective of Grice's Cooperative Principle. Most existing research has examined the application or violation of Gricean maxims in literary and non-literary texts.

For instance, Khalaj-Abadi Farahani (2021), in a study entitled "*An Analysis of Grice's Cooperative Principle and Its Violation in the Play Pahlavan Akbar Dies by Bahram Beyzaie*," concludes that the positive characters in the play generally adhere to Grice's maxims, whereas the negative characters repeatedly violate them—particularly the maxim of quality—by resorting to falsehoods in pursuit of personal interests.

Kheirabadi (2013), in "*The Role of Violating Grice's Maxims in the Creation of a New Generation of Iranian Jokes*," argues that the linguistic structure of jokes circulating in Iranian cyberspace—often referred to as "P-N-P" jokes—relies heavily on the violation of the maxims of quantity and relation, thereby generating humorous effects. Similarly, Meghdari et al. (2017), in their article "*An Analysis of a New Generation of Friendly Jokes Known as 'Agha ma... Shoma...' within the Framework of Grice's Conversational Maxims*," conclude that in many such jokes, the violation of the Cooperative Principle—particularly the maxims of quality and relation—creates comic situations.

Keshavardoust (2013), in "*An Examination of Grice's Maxims in the Story of Siavash in the Shahnameh*," reports that the maxim of manner is violated more frequently than the other maxims in the narrative corpus of the Siavash story. Likewise, Habibollahi et al. (2016), in "*Differences in Interpretation of Similar Verses in the Holy Qur'an Based on Violations of Grice's Cooperative Principle*," conclude that the maxim of manner emphasizes brevity, orderliness, and the avoidance of ambiguity. They further observe that in numerous instances, the Qur'an deliberately departs from these principles in order to convey implicit meanings such as emphasis, metaphor, and irony.

Dadkhah and Mahmoudi Bakhtiari (2011), in their article "*The Reflection of Feminism through the Function of Grice's Cooperative Principle in the Play Salar-e Zanan*,"* argue that the playwright, through the cognitive rules of language, successfully portrays power-seeking characters in various situations. Azizi (2010), in "*The Role of Language in Interrogation Based on Grice's Cooperative Principle*," finds that various linguistic components—including dialect, sociolect,

women's speech style (both spoken and written), and other linguistic principles—can significantly influence the interrogation process.

Ne'matzadeh and Mahdizadeh (2016), in "*The Degree of Employing Grice's Maxims in the Essays of Eighth-Grade Students*," conclude that students most frequently observe the maxim of quantity, followed respectively by the maxims of relation and manner.

Sarami and Gheyyuri (2017), in "*The Role of Violating Grice's Maxims in the Construction of Caricature-Style Aphorisms (Karikalmātūr)*," conclude that when a writer deliberately creates ambiguity and double entendre in such texts, the maxim of relation is intentionally violated, since the reader cannot easily evaluate the appropriateness or accuracy of the information presented.

Zabelizadeh et al. (2012), in "*Grice's Cooperative Principle in News Texts: An Examination of Implicatures in Two Similar News Reports*," demonstrate that, in analyzing two news reports from the BBC website, particular attention is drawn to the linguistic forms employed to convey meaning and to the strategic manipulation of those forms.

Finally, Momeni and Azizi (2015), in "*The Role of Topic Shifting and the Violation of Grice's Maxims by the Accused during Interrogations: A Case Study of Greater Tehran Police Department*," conclude that in interrogation contexts, suspects frequently violate the Cooperative Principle—most often through breaching the maxim of relation by shifting the topic of conversation.

3. Methodology

This study seeks to provide a critical analysis of two contemporary novels through the framework of linguistic pragmatics. By employing discourse analysis, it becomes possible to conduct a detailed linguistic examination of the text and to explore the use of language within social interactions. Discourse analysis enables the systematic investigation of how meaning is constructed, negotiated, and shaped within specific socio-cultural contexts.

Drawing upon the tools of pragmatics—which is concerned with the study of meaning in context and the analysis of speakers' intentions in their utterances—this research focuses on how speakers organize their discourse in relation to the addressee, spatial and temporal conditions, and the broader situational context. Pragmatic analysis thus entails attention to contextual factors and to the ways in which meaning extends beyond the literal content of utterances.

Methodologically, the study adopts a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach. On the qualitative level, selected utterances from

both novels are examined in depth in order to identify instances of adherence to or violation of Grice's Cooperative Principle and to interpret their discursive and ideological implications. On the quantitative level, the frequency of violations of each maxim (quantity, quality, relation, and manner) is calculated and compared across the two texts in order to identify patterns and differences.

Each of the two novels reflects particular forms of social and cultural interaction situated within distinct temporal contexts. In both works, the authors project specific worldviews and conceptual categorizations through the utterances of their characters. By applying Grice's theoretical framework to the analysis of these utterances, this study systematically examines how the Cooperative Principle operates and how its violation functions as a meaningful narrative and discursive strategy within each text.

4. Results

In *The Wooden Horse*, violations of Grice's maxims are primarily committed by male characters, especially with respect to quantity, quality, and relation. By withholding information, providing unreliable statements, and offering irrelevant responses, men reinforce their dominance and place women in a weakened communicative position. This pattern evokes a patriarchal and repressive social structure in which women are denied active participation in dialogue.

In contrast, *The Dead Are on Their Way* presents a shift in this dynamic. Maxim violations are more evenly distributed, and in some cases—particularly the maxim of manner—women violate them more frequently than men. Here, women emerge as active agents who strategically use ambiguity and indirectness to assert power and shape the narrative. In both novels, the maxim of quantity is most frequently violated, creating suspense and ambiguity. However, its function differs: in Fallah's novel, it reinforces male authority, while in Amiri's work, it serves as a tool of female agency. Similar contrasts appear in the violations of quality, relation, and manner, reflecting differing representations of gender and power. Overall, maxim violations function as deliberate narrative strategies that reveal hidden social tensions and shifting power structures—depicting women's suppression in one novel and their empowerment in the other.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of violations of Grice's Cooperative Principle in *The Wooden Horse* and *The Dead Are on Their Way* demonstrates that such

linguistic departures do not signify a failure of communication; rather, they function as deliberate and effective narrative strategies that contribute to characterization, plot development, and the shaping of readers' interpretations.

In *The Wooden Horse*, male characters, occupying positions of power, repeatedly violate the maxims of quantity and relation by evading clear and transparent responses. As a result, readers are led to infer implicit meanings related to patriarchy, domination, and the marginalization of women within communicative interactions. By disregarding the maxim of quantity, male characters withhold essential information necessary for a full understanding of the situation, thereby reinforcing suspense and ambiguity in the narrative. This strategy contributes to the portrayal of men as domineering, opaque, and at times humiliating figures, while women are positioned as confused, powerless, and excluded from meaningful participation in dialogue.

Conversely, in *The Dead Are on Their Way*, women in positions of authority also violate Grice's maxims. In this novel, women are not merely victims of discourse; they occasionally emerge as agents of power, strategy, and control. Through violations of the maxims of manner and quality, they create an atmosphere of mystery, semantic ambiguity, and concealment, reflecting a transformed social structure in which women actively participate in power dynamics. Meanwhile, male characters—within the sensitive political and social climate of the narrative—often avoid explicit speech and resort to indirect responses, thereby contributing to further violations of the Cooperative Principle.

The narrative consequences of these violations are evident in both works. The increase of suspense, the slowing down of plot progression, the foregrounding of characters' inner states, and the construction of an atmosphere of distrust and social insecurity are among the effects of violating the maxims of quantity and quality. Violations of the maxim of relation—through topic shifts and irrelevant responses—generate psychological tension in readers and highlight the dominance of stronger characters. Similarly, violations of the maxim of manner, through indirect, ambiguous, and complex expressions, intensify the atmosphere of anxiety, doubt, and uncertainty.

From the perspective of characterization, the violation of Grice's maxims in Fallah's novel reinforces the image of powerful men and disempowered women, whereas in Amiri's novel such violations signal a transformation in women's social position, as they themselves become agents of authority. Consequently, the two narratives present

significantly different representations of gender and power, shaped precisely through these communicative deviations.

Semantically, the motivations behind the violations of Grice's maxims differ in the two novels. In *The Wooden Horse*, violations primarily stem from concealment, evasion, humiliation, and reliance on masculine gender stereotypes. In contrast, in *The Dead Are on Their Way*, such violations—while still involving concealment and evasion—also reflect women's efforts to attain power, assert visibility, and exercise dominance. Readers therefore derive distinct interpretations from the two texts: one depicting a traditional patriarchal society, and the other portraying a social context in which women actively participate in power relations.

An important observation is that in both works, the violation of Grice's maxims generates implicature and enhances the interpretive openness of the text. In other words, it is precisely through these violations that deeper semantic layers are constructed, guiding readers toward social, psychological, and gender-based critiques embedded within the narratives. Without such strategic departures from cooperative norms, the novels might have remained confined to more superficial levels of meaning. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the violation of Grice's Cooperative Principle should not be viewed as a negative or erroneous aspect of narration; rather, it constitutes one of the principal artistic techniques employed by both authors to construct implicit meanings, achieve deeper characterization, and convey the social and gendered atmosphere of their works.

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