

The violation of the cooperative maxim in early childhood: A pragmatic case study

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the violation of the maxim of cooperation in early childhood conversation by means of a pragmatic case study, which is an important undertaking given the strong influence of the surrounding environment on children's language development. Previous studies have delved into this area, particularly with regard to children with special needs, but have not widely explored how such a violation emerges in the early childhood period. Here, we adopted a qualitative approach using a pragmatic case study design, and over seven months collected data by observing, listening to and recording the conversations of a 4-year-old boy. The results of this process were used as transcripts for conversation data. Specifically, we found that of the 40 conversation data items concerning the form of cooperative maxim violations, there were 13 (32.5%) conversation data items. These results indicate that children in the early childhood period already possess pragmatic abilities, as evidenced by the ability to answer questions relevantly, but are constrained by their ignorance in answering questions correctly, thereby leading many children to violate the maxim of manners.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Research on the violation of cooperative maxims in early childhood conversation using a pragmatic approach is an important undertaking, as children's language development is strongly influenced by a child's surrounding environment [1], [2]. While children's language development is influenced by environmental, social and genetic factors [3]. Fitriani [4] identified factors such as linguistic input, imitation, environment, language acquisition devices (LADs) and exposure as having an impact on children's speech. Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams [5] highlighted the importance of linguistic input during a child's formative years, which, in the point of Lenneberg's view [6] constitute a critical time of development. Additionally, Brown [7] argued that language learning is the result of practice, imitation, success feedback and habit formation.

In Indonesia, research dedicated to the topic of children's language has, for the most part, concentrated on violations of the cooperative maxim that are committed by adolescents or adults [8]–[10]. This has left the early childhood period largely untapped through a pragmatic lens, and those studies that do exist focus on language vis-à-vis children with special needs. The maxim violation of children with intellectual disabilities is generally the maxim of relevance, as they are likely to change topics often due to a lack of interest [11]. Furthermore, the language of children who is growing and developing without such challenges usually displays

a better pragmatic understanding than that of children with autism spectrum disorders [12]. This is because children with autism spectrum disorders often have difficulty communicating with others. Consequently, the way in which to understand pragmatics in early childhood for those who have normal growth and development will certainly be different from that for children with special needs.

Through language, children can express their ideas and their thoughts. Notably, those aged 3–4 years already have an ability to communicate, construct vocabularies and recognize symbols in preparation for learning to read, write and compose simple sentences in a complete structure [13]. Moreover, children who are 4 years of age or who are in the simple construction period are able to produce speech in the form of various sentences, which often appear as declarative sentences and rarely as imperative ones [14]. At 4 years of age, children can communicate in short dialogues involving simple contexts. In their interactions, especially when answering questions, these children already possess pragmatic abilities and can master speech acts—how to say something, ask something or demand something. However, it is possible for 4-year-olds to make speech deviations, where there is a discrepancy between one word spoken and its reference. Thus, the conversations of children aged 4 years (early age) constitute an interesting—and important—area of in-depth study. Paulus and Wörle [15] revealed that young children understand the use of language as a normal practice. Children, particularly, aged 3–5 years learn language through their exposure to other people using new words, either in a direct context or through hearing. They even can be selective to learn new words from whom to learn [16].

With the passage of time, the focus of pragmatic studies has shifted from an orientation towards meaning for some parts and intentions for others [17]. In this investigation, pragmatic studies were used to analyze conversations based on meaning and intent involving context. Such research is crucial, given that children's language development patterns are strongly influenced by a child's environment. Moreover, children's language in this era must have a different pattern than that of children of the same age but in different eras. Previous research on cooperative principles has not examined the conversations of children aged 4 years, especially in Indonesia. In fact, research related to children's language generally focuses on children's language acquisition [18]–[20].

Various research studies on the violation of the cooperative maxim have been conducted in the last few decades. Pellegrini, Brody, and Stoneman [21] examined the violation of maxims by 2-, 3-, and 4-year-old children in their conversations with adults familiar to them. Previous researchers [22], [23] indicated that children not only had to identify the maxims that are violated, but also the reasons for the speaker's intention in violating the maxims. Eskritt, Whalen, and Lee [24] researched the sensitivity of preschool children to three of Grice's maxims—the maxim of quality, the maxim of relevance and the maxim of quantity—and found that the children showed not only different responses to these three maxims but also developmental differences in their levels of performance. More recently, a study showed that children consistently identify violations of cooperative principles and that their performance improves with age [25]. It may be extrapolated that the violation of maxim performed by the children varies related to their ages and degree of development, and that they will be aware of their violation and better it with age. Other research also found that younger children demonstrated some knowledge of the maxims [24], [26], [27]. Under these circumstances, knowing the precise rules that children begin to comprehend earlier or later, as well as the age at which they start to do so, can help adults (teachers, researchers, parents, judges) better understand the characteristics of children's conversation and determine the best approaches to communicating with children [28].

All conversations in the previous studies were in English, which was the native language of the studies' participants. To fill this research gap, the current investigation focuses on the four cooperative maxims [29], within the particular context of Indonesia. This study gives theoretical contribution to Gricean pragmatic framework of maxim in Indonesian language. Practically, this study contributes to the language development of a child from the maxim's standpoint. Specifically, this study aims to examine the violation of the cooperative maxim in conversation and the factors that cause these violations. To address the research objectives, we posed the following research questions: i) What are the violations of the cooperative maxim in the conversations of a 4-year-old child?, ii) What are the factors that cause the violations of the maxim?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Grice's cooperative maxim

Children's acquisition and mastery of language is a process that occurs both naturally, when they learn their native language, and formally, when they learn in the classroom setting. Subsumed under the language acquisition process is the process of competence and performance [30]–[32]. The process of competence refers to the mastery of grammar that is acquired without realization. This process consists of: i) the understanding process, namely the ability to observe or perceive the sentences that are being heard, and ii) the process of producing sentences, namely the ability to issue or produce one's own sentences. These two abilities, when mastered, are what become children's linguistic abilities.

The process of acquiring and mastering a language by a child is extraordinary, and how it occurs is often difficult to prove. Various theories from different disciplines have been forwarded by language researchers, who have identified, for example, that the linguistic system has been mastered by children even without formal teaching. The development of children's communication actually starts at an early age, as crying during birth shows discomfort due to hunger. At 12 weeks of age, a simple dialogue pattern takes the form of vocalized responses. At the age of 2 months, babies begin to respond to their mother's communication, and at the age of 5 months, begin to imitate gestures and learn facial expressions. At the ages of 7–12 months, they begin to point at something in order to show their desire. At the age of 2 years, children acquire syntactic skills by assembling two words. At the age of 3–4 years, children are able to communicate in short dialogues by involving simple contexts appropriately [20]. Children's language development reaches the stage of mastery at the age of 17 years [33].

The cooperative maxim developed by Grice [29] is used as the theoretical basis in this study [34], [35]. Grice divides maxims into four types, namely the maxim of quantity, the maxim of quality, the maxim of relevance, and the maxim of manner. Grice's theory of meaning is interpreted as a communication theory that contains how communication can be achieved without going through conventional ways of conveying messages. Furthermore, Grice also developed the concept of implicature, which states that there are a set of deviant assumptions that serve as guidelines in conducting conversations. Based on this, basic considerations are formulated as an effective and efficient use of language in conversation to ensure that the goals can be achieved. Grice refers to the four maxims as the 'maxim of conversation' that underlies cooperation in using language. He also interprets conversational maxims as code of belief of rationality [36]. Within a Gricean framework, the appropriate level of a description can be identified. The Gricean maxim of quantity often known as the maxim of informativeness [29], states that one should anticipate speakers to give a detailed enough description to set an intended referent apart from other context-relevant items. Even in preschoolers, communication can break down when someone deviates from this expectation, such as when they use a more specific name than is necessary in the situation [28]. It can also cause the hearer to assume the speaker meant something other than what was actually intended [37].

Violations of the maxim of conversation would cause awkwardness and unnaturalness. This could be seen if the information provided feels redundant (violations of the maxim of quantity), not true (violations of the maxim of quality) or irrelevant (violations of the maxim of relevance). Although this awkwardness is usually used in humor [38], sometimes even ordinary communication does not follow these principles. Such is possible for several reasons, including providing information implicitly (implicature) and maintaining the face of the interlocutor (politeness). In a conversation, a speaker must have a certain intention when he or she says something. Violations of maxims occur when the speaker does not know the truth and only understands the surface meaning of the words. The speaker intentionally conveys information that is ineffective, irrelevant or with a meaning that the speaker does not think is wrong [11].

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The participant in this case study was a 4-year-old boy named Adam (pseudonym) who was raised by an educated family. Data collection was carried out via recording, listening and note-taking techniques. Data that was recorded, listened to and noted comprised speech or conversations in a dialogue between the authors and the participant. Paper and pen were used for observation and recording, and a recording device for listening and recording. Listening, documenting and recording were carried out from November 2021 to May 2022. The recordings were listened to, re-recorded and matched with the authors' notes. The results of listening, documenting and recording were used as transcripts for conversation data. The data analysis technique in this study used the pragmatic equivalent analysis method.

The instrument used in collecting research data was in the form of verbal data media. Verbal data media consists of various sentences such as news sentences, question sentences, and command sentences. The instrument was used as a tool for early childhood elicitation so that the necessary data could be collected. The table graphic was used as an instrument of data analysis in this study. The data analysis table was used to see the data reduction unit and data presentation. Through the data analysis table, researchers were able to easily interpret the data and its relationship with other aspects. Conclusions would be made based on the results of data interpretation.

The data analysis technique used in this study was constructed by adopting the qualitative data analysis technique developed by Miles and Huberman, namely the interactive model of analysis. The interactive model focuses on three components: data reduction, data presentation, and data interpretation [39]. Data reduction was carried out to reduce the data according to the research focus and to identify violations of the cooperative maxim. The preparation of this unit used sorting techniques and data analysis instruments in the form of tables. The presentation of the data was carried out by entering data into the designated format. It was intended that the data in the data reduction component would only be in the form of units that could be

seen as a whole, so that it was easier to examine the violation of maxims in the conversations of early childhood in Indonesia, which was the source of the data. Meanwhile, data interpretation was carried out by giving careful consideration to what the data indicated. Once the data are displayed, the data set can be considered as complete, making it easier for researchers to continue data analysis and interpretation. Researchers obtained meaning in each data item and in the relationship between the data items. Furthermore, the meanings of the results were examined in order to address the focus of the problem.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There were 40 conversations recorded using data collected over the course of seven months. Based on the results of classification and data analysis, children in early childhood already have the abilities to communicate and to use or apply the cooperative maxim in their conversations. Of the 40 conversation data items, there were violations of maxims in 13 conversations, or 32.5%, which included violations of the maxim of quantity, with 3 conversation data items; violations of the maxim of quality, with 4 conversation data items; a violation of the maxim of relevance, with 1 conversation data item; and violations in the maxim of manner, with 5 conversation data items. Thus, the violation of the maxim of quality had the highest tendency. The violation of maxims in early childhood relates to communication: children are sometimes able to answer questions relevantly, as evidenced by the fact that across 40 conversations, a violation of the maxim of relevance occurred only once, but such is constrained by the participant's inability to answer questions correctly as can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Maxim violation

4.1. Violation of the cooperative maxim

4.1.1. Violation of the maxim of quantity

As seen in Table 1, along the way, M (mother) and A (early child) always have discussions. On the way home, A expressed his desire to eat potatoes. M offered to make broccoli potatoes. A respond in English, “No, I don’t.” M offered another type of food and A responded back in English, “No I don’t.” M asked again why he didn’t want to and A answered in English, “I’m bored.” The violation of the maxim of quantity occurred because A did not provide information that was in accordance with the required conversational objectives.

Table 1. Violation of the maxim of quantity

Data	Interpretations
A: Potato vegetable. M: Mom will make you broccoli potatoes, okay. A: No, I don , No I don . M: Why no I don’t? Say yes I do, yes I do, please. A: No, I don , no I don , do yu lo, I want what I wanted earlier, Mom . M: Do you like carrot? A: No, I don, no I don. M: Why? Carrot is a healthy food! A: No, I don . M: Why, what’s wrong? A: I am bored .	A: Potato vegetable. M: Mom will make you broccoli potatoes, okay. A: No, I don’t, No I don’t. M: Why no I don’t? Say yes, I do, yes, I do, please. A: No, I don’t, no I don’t, do you know, I want what I wanted earlier, Mom . M: Do you like carrots? A: No. I don’t, no I don’t. M: Why? Carrot is a healthy food! A: No. I don’t. M: Why, what’s wrong? A: I am boring .

Note: The conversation took place in the car on the way home from school. M: mother; A: early child.

The conversation on Table 2 occurred when M (mother) and A (early child) were in the family room at 11.30 a.m. A expressed his desire to draw on the wall, but he knew that his mother would forbid it. His mother said that if A wants to color, A has to use a drawing book. However, A responded with the answer, “*I am bored.*” The conversation continued, and A said that he wanted to draw a potato. M answered ‘No’, but A insisted that it should be allowed. M said back that he was allowed and A changed the topic by saying, “*Mmm... these three not yet.*” From the conversation, the violation of the maxim of quantity occurred because A did not provide information that was in accordance with the required conversational objectives. When asked where to draw, A said “*I am bored.*” Then when his mother said, “*It is allowed if the owner permits it, but if the owner says no, then you can’t,*” and A answered, “*Mmmm..., these three not yet.*”

Table 2. Violation of the maxim of quantity

Data	Interpretations
M: Did I allow you? But you need to tell Mom first.	M: <i>Did I allow you? But you need to tell Mom first.</i>
A: Oh, Mom, I want to do it on the wall, but you said no.	A: Oh, Mom, I want to do it on the wall, but you said no.
M: Yes, it is not allowed, if Mas Abi wants to coloring, in the drawing book, right?	M: Yes, it is not allowed, if Mas Abi wants to coloring, in the drawing book, right?
A: I am bored.	A: I am bored.
M: Why is the drawing book bored. What do you want to draw? Do you want me to draw it for you?	M: Why is the drawing book bored. What do you want to draw? Do you want me to draw it for you?
A: I want to dlaw potato.	A: I want to draw potato.
M: What is the name of the potato?	M: What is the name of the potato?
A: Seasened potato.	A: Seasoned potato.
M: No, seasoned potato.	M: No, seasoned potato.
M: Did I allow you? But you need to tell Mom first.	M: Did I allow you? But you need to tell Mom first.
A: Seasoned potato, is it allowed Mom?	A: Seasoned potato, is it allowed Mom?
M: Ih, not allowed, you will be scolded	M: Ih, not allowed, you will be scolded.
A: Ih eh Mom, you were...	A: Ih eh Mom, you were...
M: It is allowed if the owner permits it, but if the owner says no, then you can't.	M: It is allowed if the owner permits it, but if the owner says no, then you can't.
A: Mmmm..., these three not yoot.	A: Mmmm..., these three not yet.

Note: The conversation occurred in the family room. M: mother; A: early child.

4.1.2. Violation of the maxim of quality

The conversation on Table 3 took place in the car on the way home from school around 10.30 a.m. M found out that A liked the ‘Shinbi Apartment’ movie, in which one of the stories was related to ghosts. M asked A if there were ghosts or not at the school. A answered by saying, “*Yes, there is. No, I saw it in Class 2.*” A’s answer indicates that a violation of the maxim of quality occurred because A did not answer and state the right thing. An answered with his imagination because it was influenced by his liking to watch ghost movies.

Table 3. Violation of the maxim of quality

Data	Interpretations
M: Eh, Mas Abim, Mom wants to ask, is there any ghost at school?	M: Eh, Mas Abim, Mom wants to ask, is there any ghost at school?
A: Yes, there is.	A: Yes, there is.
A: No, I saw it in Class 2.	A: No, I saw it in Class 2.
M: Which class?	M: Which class?
A: Class 2.	A: Class 2.
M: In Class 2? Where is the location of the class?	M: In Class 2? Where is the location of the class?
A: Ovar there.	A: Over there
M: Tell Mom later, where is the class when I visit the school, okay, is it scary?	M: Tell Mom later, where is the class when I visit the school, okay, is it scary?
A: Scaly.	A: Scary.

Note: The conversation took place in the car on the way home from school. Condition: A was in love with the ‘Shinbi Apartment’ movie

The conversation on Table 4 happened in the car on the way home from school. A few days earlier, A celebrated his birthday at school. On the way home, M asked whether A was happy or not to have a birthday at his school. An answered happily. However, when M asked, “*Then, what song did you sing? When you have a birthday, what song do you usually sing?*” A answered the Dino “*dinosaurus*” song. A violation of the maxim of quality occurred because A did not answer the right thing.

Table 4. Violation of the maxim of quality

Data	Interpretations
M: Yesterday Mas Abi had a birthday at school, right? Were you happy ?	M: Yesterday Mas Abi had a birthday at school, right? Were you happy ?
A: Happy .	A: Happy .
M: What did you do yesterday at school, Mas? Blow... What did you blow when you have a birthday? Blowing can...	M: What did you do yesterday at school, Mas? Blow... What did you blow when you have a birthday? Blowing can...
A: Blowing candle...	A: Blowing candle...
M: Then, what song did you sing? When you have a birthday, what song do you usually sing?	M: Then, what song did you sing? When you have a birthday, what song do you usually sing?
A: Dino song .	A: Dino song .
M: Why Dino song?	M: Why Dino song?
A: Happy birthday we...	A: Happy birthday we...
M: We say...	M: We say...

Note: The conversation took place in the car on the way home from school.

4.1.3. Violation of the maxim of relevance

The conversation on Table 5 ensued in the car on the way home from school. M asked when A was at school whether, “*Eh with whom did you play with other than Keka?*” M’s question was answered by A by asking another topic, “*Yes. what is this for, Mom?*” A’s answer does not match the question posed. A violation of the maxim of relevance occurred because A diverted to a different topic.

Table 5. Violation of the maxim of relevance

Data	Interpretations
M: Eh with whom did you play with other than Keka?	M: Eh with whom did you play with other than Keka?
A: Yes... what is this for, Mom?	A: Yes... what is this for, Mom?
M: What, what is that for?	M: What, what is that for?
A: Eh this is for animal.	A: Eh this is for animal.

Note: The conversation took place in the car on the way home from school.

4.1.4. Violation of the maxim of manner

The conversation on Table 6 took place on the way home from school. M asked A because he knew A was having fun playing with his friends in the complex to look for snails. When M asked how to take the snails, A did not answer M’s question. The child did not give clear information. The answer did not match the question posed. A chattered that the snail stinks and is poisonous and dangerous.

The conversation on Table 7 happened when M accompanied A before going to sleep. M asked if A likes sleeping at hotels, A answered ‘yes’ and said, ‘the one on the top’ (A meant that the hotel was high and had floors up to the top). The violation of the maxim of manner occurred because A did not provide clear and orderly information.

Table 6. Violation of the maxim of manner

Data	Interpretations
M: Bi, what did you use to take the snail? Were you not scared?	M: Bi, what did you use to take the snail? Were you not scared?
A: But you know, this is you know, because you know, it stinks, because you know it is poisonous you know, because some are dangerous and some are not.... (The child says what he wants to say).	A: But you know, this is you know, because you know, it stinks, because you know it is poisonous you know, because some are dangerous and some are not.... (The child says what he wants to say).

Note: The conversation took place in the housing complex, A likes to play by looking for snails with his friends. M: mother; A: early child.

Table 7. Violation of the maxim of manner

Data	Interpretations
M: Mas Abi, do you like to sleep at the hotel?	M: Mas Abi, do you like to sleep at the hotel?
A: Yees, the one on the top.	A: Yees, the one on the top.
M: Eh, where is Dad’s hotel?	M: Eh, where is Dad’s hotel?
A: In to plane.... yes, a high hotel.	A: In to plane.... yes, a high hotel.

Note: The conversation happened in the bedroom at 8 p.m. M: mother; A: early child.

This study aimed to explore the violation of maxims committed by a 4-year-old child and the factors behind these violations. There is disagreement in the literature as to when– and how– children follow cooperative principles. We explored breaches of conversation at an early age because it is at this stage that

children become active speakers and their language development is enhanced. According to the conversation data of early childhood analyzed in this study, the rate of the violation of the cooperative maxim was 32.5%. The violation of the maxim of manners had the highest tendency, while the violation of the maxim of relevance had the lowest. In the study of Surian [40] on children with autism found that all children, regardless of clinical status, had difficulty with the maxim of quantity (i.e., the recognition of redundancy in messages).

In contrast to study findings [11], the maxim violation of children with intellectual disabilities is generally the maxim of relevance. This shows that the violation of the maxim of relevance in early childhood is normally the minimum violation. On the other hand, the violation of the maxim of relevance in children with intellectual disabilities has the highest tendency to violate the maxim. These findings are almost similar to the research [24], which discovered that the appearance of children's response conversations using dolls is better, with 68% of children aged 3–5 years being able to choose a doll that suits the maxim of relevance. However, children aged 4–5 years can perform more accurately than children aged 3 years.

The factor causing the violation of the cooperative maxim in early childhood conversation is the discrepancy between a word spoken and its reference. This is because at that age, children are in the process of mastering language after the first language and are at least influenced by two aspects, namely physiological and psychological factors. Physiological factors include speech-producing organs such as the mouth and brain function, while psychological factors include the cognitive development of a child in the process of mastering his or her first language [41]. In addition, early childhood is characterized by a substantial amount of energy and a high sense of curiosity, so that sometimes the questions addressed to children in this age group are answered according to his or her thoughts.

In this study, early age children already possessed good communication skills. The questions addressed could be answered relevantly, but sometimes the answers were not quite right. According to the developmental research, children do not begin to engage in conscious inference until at least 5 or 6 years of age [22], [42]; hence, one would predict that the acquisition of cooperative principles would not occur until middle childhood. Skarakis-Doyle *et al.* [25] also assert that children can engage in the appropriate use of language in a social setting before they understand why they do it. A naturalistic study of young children's expressive language shows that even 2-year-olds have begun to observe conversational maxims and that their ability to do so increases during the preschool period [25].

To ensure that those in early childhood can communicate well without violating the cooperative maxim in conversation, they should be guided and trained to focus on the topic of conversation. Sharakis-Doyle *et al* [25] suggest the importance of early and consistent conversational interactions with parents, which may be an important influence on sensitivity to violation and adherence to maxims. This is consistent with Nelson, Plesa, and Henseler experiential framework [43]. In addition, the results also show that 4- and 5-year-olds can actually improve accuracy and consistency in identifying violations of maxims, which is probably the result of their more sophisticated language skills and greater social experience [25]. In his research, Mushi [44] also demonstrated the importance of the role of parents in children's language learning. In other words, the social experiences that children receive—such as in the school setting, the family environment and the home environment—can increase their language acquisition and improve their speaking skills due to their exposure to these environments. To develop children's concentration skills, they can be given, among others, fun games or activities that are time intensive and that require focus.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the study's findings and discussion of these results, we conclude that at an early age, a child is able to communicate with a fairly good language structure and already possesses pragmatic abilities. In addition, those in early childhood are also able to apply the cooperative maxim in their conversations and are able to identify the maxim naturally. The factors causing the violation of the maxims consist of: i) the existence of a situation that shows an excessive sense of desire in the child that is not in accordance with his or her will; ii) the child has misunderstood the information; iii) the child has not been able to answer questions; and iv) the child has not been sensitive to context/situation.

There are several limitations of this case study. First, the investigation's qualitative nature is subjective and only involves one child; thus, the results of the research cannot be generalized. Second, the cooperative maxim, besides the four maxims, also needs to be investigated. Although these four maxims are most often associated with the cooperative principle, the maxim of politeness is required and conventionally followed in a successful exchange of conversation; and, in line with the growth of a child's age, children's use of language will continue to develop and experience changes. Therefore, it is still necessary to conduct further studies related to the development of children's age and language acquisition using different theories or with different aspects, as seen from Philip Pettit's social norms.

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