

# Investigating the Application of Negotiating the Clash between Maxims to the Yemeni Dialect

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Received: November 13, 2015    Accepted: Dec. 13, 2015    Published: December 18, 2015

doi:10.5296/ijl.v7i6.8746    URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v7i6.8746>

## Abstract

This research aims at investigating Gricean Theory of Conversational Implicature and its application to the Arabic language. Semi-structured interviews with 15 participants who speak the Yemeni dialect were recorded for the purpose of investigating such a theory. There were four Ph.D. candidates, four M.A. candidates and seven B.A. candidates. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, translated, interpreted and then analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The analysis focused on negotiating the clash between maxims. The findings revealed that Gricean Theory of Conversational Implicature can be applied to Arabic language, particularly the Yemeni dialect. The analysis, furthermore, showed that there were instances of clashes between the maxims of Quantity and Quality and this indicated that the participants intended to speak true regardless of giving adequate information.

**Keywords:** Conversational Implicature, Maxims of speech, Clashing between maxims, Arabic language, Yemeni dialect

## 1. Introduction

Basically, languages have emerged for the sake of communication. We need to communicate with one another and convey our messages by means of speaking/uttering some understandable signs. The relation between us, as speakers, and those signs is what pragmatics is concerned with.

As a branch of philosophy of language, pragmatics has drawn the attention of many linguists and has been defined differently by many scholars. For instance, Thomas (2014) defines it as the "meaning in use or meaning in context" (p.1) whereas Montague (1970, p.1) defines pragmatics as a science that is concerned with indexical expressions. For Katz and Fodor (1963, p.177) pragmatics is defined as a theory that is related to the disambiguation of sentences by the contexts in which they were uttered. Trask (2007, p.226) defines pragmatics as the branch of linguistics that is concerned with studying how utterances communicate meaning in a context.

Among the most influential pragmatic theories that has captured the attention of the researcher is Gricean Theory of Conversational Implicature. Grice makes a clear-cut distinction between what is said and what is meant. With reference to this theory, an empirical study is going to be presented for the purpose of investigating the application of this theory to Arabic language, particularly the Yemeni dialect.

### *1.1 Gricean Theory of Conversational Implicature*

Davies (2010, p.25) points out that an implicature can be defined as the difference between what the words in an utterance mean according to the rules of semantics and grammar, and what the speaker's intended meaning is. Hadi (2013, p. 69) also highlights that Gricean Theory of Implicature is considered to be his most influential contribution to linguistics in which he describes communication as conforming to what he calls the Cooperative Principle and claims that we as speakers are trying to cooperate to produce meaningful conversations.

### *1.2 Gricean Cooperative Principle and the Maxims of Conversation*

Generally, Trask (2007, p.56) highlights the fact that Gricean Cooperative Principle is a successful attempt at explaining how speakers communicate meanings. Therefore, it seems that there was a need to investigate how our words get implicated other than said. That is why Grice has proposed his Theory of Conversational Implicature.

Grice subdivided his Cooperative Principle into nine maxims of conversation which were meant to explain how implicatures get conveyed. Then he classified these nine maxims into four categories: Quality, Quantity, Relation and Manner. They are used, according to Bach (2006, p.5), to explain the relation between utterances and what is understood from them. Bach (2006, p.6) also claims that we, as listeners, assume that the speaker is being cooperative by speaking truthfully, informatively, relevantly and appropriately. If an utterance appears not to conform to any of these presumptions, we look for another way of taking it so that it makes sense.

Trask (2007, p.57) asserts that Gricean Cooperative Principle plays a crucial role in

governing conversational exchanges by assuming that people in a conversation usually cooperate with one another.

In his article "Logic and Conversation" (1975), Grice makes a very general distinction between what is said by a speaker and what he means or implicates and he provides us with the definition of Cooperative Principle: "make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (p.45). Therefore, Grice's logic of conversation is based on the idea that contributors to a conversation are rational agents; that is, that they obey a general principle of rationality known as the cooperative principle.

Under the Cooperative Principle, there are four maxims and below each maxim, there are some other sub-maxims (1975, Pp.45-46):

#### I. The maxim of Quantity

- Make your contribution as informative as is required.
- Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

#### II. The maxim of Quality

- Do not say what you believe to be false.
- Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

#### III. The maxim of Relation

- Make your contributions relevant.

#### IV. The maxim of Manner

- Avoid ambiguity.
- Avoid obscurity of expression.
- Be brief
- Be orderly.

Grice supported the Cooperative Principle with four conversation maxims and he identifies four ways in which discourse participants may break or fail to fulfill maxims in a conversation: flouting, violating, clashing and opting out. (Lindblom, 2001, p.1603).

In this research the focus is going to be on how maxims are clashed. This occurs when one is unable to observe one maxim without violating another. In other words, this occurs when a participant is not able to be as informative as is required without violating the maxim that requires having adequate evidence for what one says. This clash happens between the maxims of Quantity and Quality as it is shown in the following example:

A: Where does C live?

B: Somewhere in the south of France

In the above example we can observe a violation of Quantity (B's answer is less informative than required) in order to preserve Quality ("Don't say what you lack evidence for"). Therefore, the implicature lies in B's answer which means that the speaker does not know where C lives. (Grice 1975).

Therefore, the investigation is going to be applied to Arabic language, particularly the Yemeni dialect and this is going to be the prime objective of this research.

### *1.3 An Overview of Yemeni Arabic*

According to Al-Qaderi (2015, p. 25), the term Arabic is used to refer to the standard form of the language used in all the Arab world. It is regarded as a sacred language among Muslims since it is the language through which the Qur'an is believed to have been exposed. It has various dialects which seem to be interrelated but obviously different in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. What may be surprising is that illiterate people from different parts of the Arab world may not understand one another, although each of them is speaking a version of Arabic language. For instance, a speaker who speaks the Yemeni Arabic finds it hard to understand the Tunisian speakers in spite of speaking the same mother tongue; namely, Arabic.

Generally, within each language there are various dialects and each dialect has got its own characteristics that make it up independent of other languages. Yemeni Arabic, as one of the Arabic dialects, is considered to be one of the Arabic varieties spoken in Yemen. It has got several dialects each with its own vocabulary and phonology. Some of the most important dialects are Sana'ani, Adeni, Ibbi, Ta'zzi, Tihami and Hadhrami. The most noticeable difference lies in the distinction between the dialect of the northern part of Yemen and that of the southern part of Yemen (Al-Qaderi, 2015, p. 31).

## **2. Method**

After an intensive reading of various research approaches, the author has found that the most appropriate research approach that would achieve the aim of the study was the qualitative approach. This approach seems to be appropriate since it requires individual interviews, focus groups, observations, a review of existing literature, or a number of these. This idea is also highlighted by Hancock and Algozzine's (2006) following statement:

The individual interviews and focus groups inherent in qualitative research may slow one's research efforts if access to individuals is difficult. It is also worth mentioning that in qualitative research, the goal is to understand the situation under investigation primarily from the participants' and not the researchers' perspective. (p.7)

Within this approach, the author will focus on a case study in which semi-structured interviews were designed to investigate the study participants' responses. The semi-structured questions and the consent form were translated into the participants' mother tongue (Arabic). The data were then transcribed and translated from Arabic into English.

After being analyzed qualitatively, a quantitative approach is going to be taken on. In other words, all the collected data that were analyzed qualitatively is going to be analyzed quantitatively by means of presenting some tables and figures.

### *2.1 Participants*

This study was conducted in Warsaw city in Poland. All the chosen participants were

interviewed individually in the dormitories wherein they live.

The participants of this study were classified into three groups. First consists of Ph.D. candidates (n = 4), second of M.A. candidates (n = 4), and the third and the last one was composed of undergraduate candidates (n = 7).

The Ph.D. candidates were selected and classified as the first group of the study participants. They were four candidates who are currently enrolled at the University of Warsaw, Poland. They were given these labels: *Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, and Participant 4*.

The M.A. candidates were classified as the second group of the study participants. They were also four candidates who are currently enrolled at the University of Warsaw, Poland. They were given these labels: *Participant 5, Participant 6, Participant 7, and Participant 8*.

The undergraduate candidates were classified as the third and the final group of the study participants. They were seven candidates who are currently enrolled at the University of Warsaw, Poland. They were given the following labels: *Participant 9, Participant 10, Participant 11, Participant 12, Participant 13, Participant 14 and Participant 15*.

## 2.2 Data-collection Instruments

Data-collection instruments in qualitative research are various. One of these instruments is interviewing. Interviews are considered a very effective instrument for expressing ideas, beliefs, knowledge, etc. Seidman (2006) states that "...interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p.10). Therefore, fifteen semi-structured interviews have been designed for the three groups. Each group had its own questions. The questions used differ from one group to another because they were not of the same educational level and age. There are, on the other hand, some similar questions which were used to get some personal information. These general questions were used to break the ice before moving to the more specific ones.

## 2.3 Data-collection Procedures

When the interview questions were ready, the author tested the audio-recording tool in order to make sure that it was picking up the sounds clearly and could record for a long time. After that, the participants were contacted by phone and they agreed to be interviewed. After making appointments with the interviewees, the author went to their dormitories wherein they live. A consent form was prepared to introduce the study and to inform the interviewees how they could participate in the study. The consent form was personally given to them before the interviews and was taken back signed. The Arabic language (Yemeni dialect) was used during the interviews. Each interview lasted for about fifteen minutes.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

The participants were given pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity. The transcripts were organized and separated in separate files to make the analysis process easier. Each participant was given a separate file. These files encompassed all the data needed to be analyzed. After printing all the fifteen files in both languages, they were given to another

researcher in order to check the translation. This was very important since it led to accuracy and reliability. After receiving the feedback, the author made all the necessary changes and started examining the whole translated data closely in order to select the most important extracts that can be used to investigate the Gricean Theory of Conversational Implicature.

After transcribing and translating the data, the author started going through the transcripts intensively many times that resulted in marking and segmenting the most important utterances/extracts that might answer the questions of the study.

These classifications were coded by giving them some letters that refer to the whole words. For instance, the author used CMs as a code for Clashing between maxims. Next, the number of clashing each maxim in each interview was identified.

To cut the long story short, the data are presented with further interpretation (qualitatively) and tables and figures (quantitatively) in the following section.

### 3. Results and Discussion

This section presents a qualitative and quantitative of the analysis of the data collected from the study participants. The first subsection presents an interpretational analysis that is concerned with Negotiating the Clash between Maxims. The author has selected five illustrative examples to be analyzed pragmatically. They were first given in Arabic. Then an English translation was given to them as well. The second subsection takes on a quantitative approach.

#### 3.1 Qualitative Analysis

##### 3.1.1 Negotiating the Clash between Maxims

Clashing between maxims means that a maxim is sacrificed for the sake of observing another maxim. In other words, the participant may not be able to observe a maxim without violating another maxim. The participant is not able to be as informative as is required without violating the maxim that requires having adequate evidence for what one says.

#### Example (1): (source in Arabic)

اين درست الماجستير والباكالوريوس وايش كان تخصصك؟  
في جامعة صنعاء.

#### Example (1): (translated into English)

*Interviewer: Where did you get your M.A. and B.A., which major?*

*Participant 2: At Sana'a University.*

In this example, it is obvious that there was a clash between the maxims of Quantity and Quality. The maxim of Quantity was violated for the sake of observing the maxim of Quality. The interviewer asked the participant about the place of studying his M.A. and B.A. programs and about his major. The answer was "at Sana'a University". Here the maxim of Quantity was sacrificed/violated since the participant did not provide more information about the faculty and the department he was enrolled at and also the major he was specializing in. Instead, he focused on observing the maxim of Quality by giving the right answer.

**Example (2): (source in Arabic)**

ناوي ترجع اليمن؟  
لا.. ناوي اشوف لي عمل في أي دولة خليجية .. اما السعودية او قطر.

**Example (2): (translated into English)**

*Interviewer: Are you planning to go back home?*

*Participant 4: No, I am planning to search for a job in any gulf country, either KSA or Qatar.*

In this example, the interviewer asked the participant whether he is planning to go back home after finishing his study in Poland. It seems that the participant's answer included a clash between the maxims of Quantity and Quality. In other words, saying "I am planning to search for a job in any gulf country, either KSA or Qatar" means that the participant is violating the maxim of Quantity by not providing informative answer for the sake of observing the maxim of Quality by providing true information. By saying so, the participant is not sure which gulf country he is planning to go to work in and at the same time we cannot assume that what he had said is not true.

**Example (3): (source in Arabic)**

كيف قضيت اجازة الكريسمس؟  
قضيته في اليمن.

**Example (3): (translated into English)**

*Interviewer: How did you spend your Christmas break?*

*Participant 1: I spent it in Yemen.*

Similarly, in this example there was a clash between the maxims of Quantity and Quality. The interviewer asked the participant how he spent his Christmas break and not where he spent it. The answer "I spent it in Yemen" proves that the maxim of Quality is observed by saying such true information. However, the maxim of Quantity seems to be violated because the answer was not informative enough. The participant's answer just involved the place where he spent his Christmas break but not how he spent it there.

**Example (4): (source in Arabic)**

ايش رايك بأوضاع اليمن حاليا؟  
زي النفط.

**Example (4): (translated into English)**

*Interviewer: What do you think of the current situation in Yemen?*

*Participant 9: It is terribly bad.*

In this example, there was also a clash between the maxims of Quantity and Quality. The interviewer asked the participant's opinion about the current situation in Yemen. Her answer "[t]erribly bad" indicates that the maxim of Quality was observed since the situation in

Yemen is really terribly bad, whereas the maxim of Quantity was sacrificed/violated since the answer was less informative.

**Example (5): (source in Arabic)**

ايش ناوي تسوي في اجازة الأستر؟  
يعتمد على البحث.

**Example (5): (translated into English)**

*Interviewer: What are you planning to do in the Easter time?*

*Participant 6: It depends on the research.*

Moreover, this example indicates that there was a clash between the maxims of Quantity and Quality. The interviewer asked the participant about his plans of spending the Easter time. His answer "[i]t depends on the research" means that the participant violated the maxim of Quantity in order to observe the maxim of Quality. In other words, by saying so the participant implicates that he does not want to give the right answer or he is not sure whether he would be able to go somewhere because of his being busy with the research he is conducting. At the same time, the answer was not informative enough.

Last but not least, after discussing the analysis of the data of this study qualitatively, the following subsection is going to present the main findings of this study quantitatively in detail.

*3.2 Quantitative Analysis*

*3.2.1 Negotiating the Clash between Maxims*

Clashing between maxims means that one maxim is violated whereas the other is observed. In other words, the participant will have to be violating the maxim of Quantity, for instance, for the sake of observing the maxim of Quality. The following table presents how the participants of this study were negotiating the clash between maxims:

Table 1. Number of Maxims Clashing in Each Interview

<i>Interviews</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Quality/Quantity</i>	1	1	1	4	3	1	2	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	20
<i>Total</i>	1	1	1	4	3	1	2	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	20

The table above shows that there was a clash between the maxims of Quantity and Quality. The total number of maxim clashing in each interview was 20 times. This indicates that some participants of the study intended to violate the maxim of Quantity by providing less information in order to observe the maxim of Quality by providing true and proven information. Below is a figure that illustrates fully how the maxims of Quantity and Quality clashed.

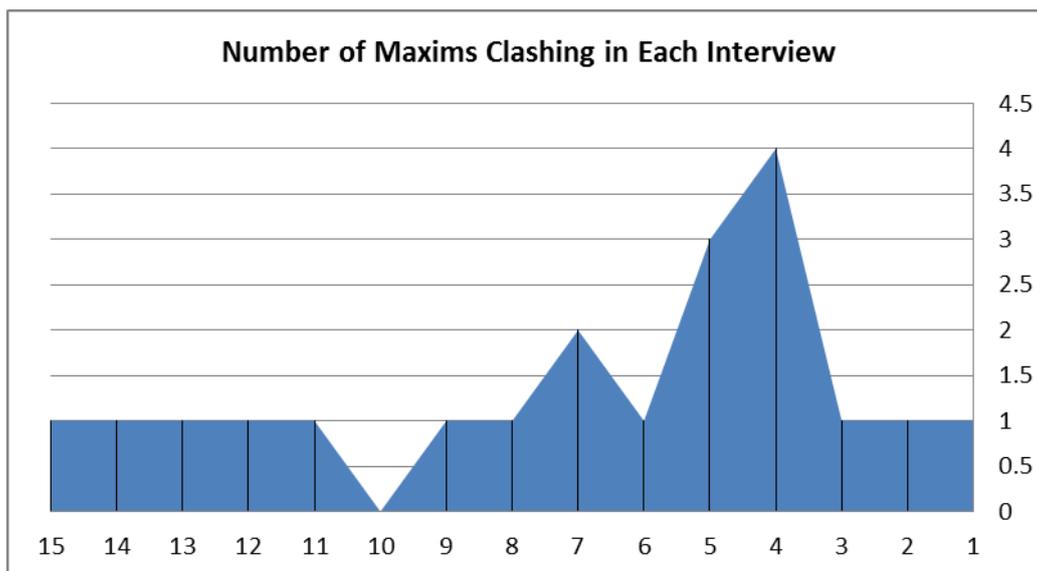


Figure 1. Number of Maxim Clashing in Each Interview

The figure above shows that there were instances of maxims clashing in each interview except the interview number ten. It is also illustrated that the maximum number of maxim clashing was 4, with the greatest number of such clashing in interview number 4. In the fifth interview there were 3 clashes, whereas in the seventh interview there were only 2 instances. In the remaining interviews (apart from the tenth) there was only 1 maxim clashing. This indicates that some of the participants of the study were trying to observe the maxim of Quality by providing the speaker with true and proven information without realizing that they were violating the maxim of Quantity by providing less informative answers.

#### 4. Conclusion

This research attempted to investigate Gricean Theory of Conversational Implicature and its application to Arabic language. The data were collected from 15 Yemeni participants who had different academic levels and different dialectal backgrounds and gathered through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were transcribed, translated, organized and interpreted. The analysis showed that there were instances of clashes between the maxims of Quantity and Quality. This indicated that the participants intended to speak true regardless of giving adequate information.

#### Acknowledgement

This paper is part of my MA thesis that I accomplished at the Dept. of Applied Linguistics, University of Warsaw and directed by Prof. Dr. Agata Klimczak-Pawlak. All words of thanks in all languages cannot express my sincere appreciation to her and all the participants of this study. Needless to say, many thanks go to the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful and related comments. I will be most grateful to them forever and a day.

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## Appendices

### A. Interview Questions for Ph.D. Candidates

- 1- Please tell me your name.
- 2- Please tell me how old you are.
- 3- Please tell me where you are from.
- 4- Please tell me about your marital status.
- 5- Please tell me how many languages you speak?
- 6- Where do you study?
- 7- What do you study?

- 8- What program are you enrolled in?
- 9- I wonder if you please let me know how you got the scholarship.
- 10- What is the title of your thesis?
- 11- What are the difficulties you encountered while writing your thesis?
- 12- Have you got any publications?
- 13- How long have you been in Poland?
- 14- What do you think of Poland?
- 15- What do you think of the Polish language?
- 16- What do you think of the Polish culture?
- 17- When are you supposed to finish your studies?
- 18- Are you planning to go back home?
- 19- Are you planning to be an academic?
- 20- Are you willing to stay in Poland in case you find a work?
- 21- Where did you get your B.A. and M.A., which major?
- 22- Based on your experience, what is the difference between studying in Yemen and Poland?
- 23- What do you think of the current situation in Yemen?
- 24- What are the reasons that cause all the current problems in Yemen?
- 25- Where do you live nowadays?
- 26- How do you find your accommodation?
- 27- How did you spend your Christmas break?
- 28- What are you planning to do in the Easter time?
- 29- What do you think of this year's winter compared to the previous years'?
- 30- How much money do you have in your bank account?

*B. Interview Questions for M.A. Candidates*

- 1- Please tell me your name.
- 2- Please let me know how old you are.
- 3- Please tell me where you are from.
- 4- Please tell me about your marital status.
- 5- Please tell me how many languages you speak?
- 6- Where do you study?
- 7- What do you study?
- 8- What program are you enrolled in?
- 9- How did you get the scholarship?
- 10- What is the title of your dissertation?
- 11- What are the difficulties you encountered while writing your dissertation?
- 12- How long have you been in Poland?
- 13- What do you think of Poland?
- 14- What do you think of the Polish language?
- 15- What do you think of the Polish culture?
- 16- When are you supposed to finish your studies?
- 17- Are you planning to go back home?

- 18- Are you planning to pursue your Ph.D. program?
- 19- Are you willing to stay in Poland in case you find a work?
- 20- Where did you get your B.A.?
- 21- Based on your experience, what is the difference between studying in Yemen and Poland?
- 22- How many courses did you take in the first semester?
- 23- What do you think of the current situation in Yemen?
- 24- What are the reasons that cause all the current problems in Yemen?
- 25- Where do you live nowadays?
- 26- How do you find your accommodation?
- 27- How did you spend your Christmas break?
- 28- What are you planning to do in the Easter time?
- 29- What do you think of this year's winter compared to the previous years'?
- 30- When are you planning to get married?
- 31- Based on your own perspective, what are the characteristics you prefer to be in your would-be wife/husband?
- 32- How much money do you have in your bank account?

*C. Interview Questions for Undergraduate Candidates*

- 1- Please tell me your name.
- 2- Please let me know how old you are.
- 3- Please tell me where you are from.
- 4- Please tell me how many languages you speak?
- 5- Where do you study?
- 6- What do you study?
- 7- What program are you enrolled in?
- 8- How did you get the scholarship?
- 9- What did you study in Yemen?
- 10- How long have you been in Poland?
- 11- What do you think of Poland?
- 12- What do you think of the Polish language?
- 13- What do you think of the Polish culture?
- 14- When are you supposed to finish your studies?
- 15- Are you planning to go back home?
- 16- Are you planning to pursue your higher studies?
- 17- Are you willing to stay in Poland in case you find a work?
- 18- Based on your experience, what is the difference between studying in Yemen and Poland?
- 19- How many courses did you take in the first semester?
- 20- What do you think of the current situation in Yemen?
- 21- What are the reasons that cause all the current problems in Yemen?
- 22- Where do you live nowadays?
- 23- How do you find your accommodation?

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- 24- How did you spend your Christmas break?
  - 25- Did you find a difference between celebrating here and in Yemen?
  - 26- What are you planning to do in the Easter time?
  - 27- What do you think of this year's winter compared to the previous years'?
  - 28- When are you planning to get married?
  - 29- Are you planning to marry a Polish girl?
  - 30- Based on your own perspective, what are the characteristics you prefer to be in your would-be wife/husband?
  - 31- How much money do you have in your bank account?

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