

## **An Analysis of Flouting Maxims in the Second American Presidential Debate**

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### **Abstract**

Language becomes the prior instrument in communicating ideas, feeling, or opinions. In real communication, those four maxims are not always being fulfilled by the speakers. When the speakers do not fulfil the maxim in the communication, means that they flout the maxim. There are many flouting maxims found in the real communication. Debate can be an interesting object for seeing that phenomenon. One of many famous debates is American presidential debate in 2008, especially the second part of the debate. In this occasion, there are many guests who had never voted in the election before. The aim of this study is to investigate the flouted utterances in the second American presidential debate and to answer the question about how the the two presidential candidates flouted the maxims. This study is conducted by using qualitative approach since the writers analyze about the flouted utterances in the second American presidential debate. The script is taken from the website [www.debates.org](http://www.debates.org). the two presidential candidates performed flouting maxim of quantity, flouting maxim of relevance, and flouting maxim of manner.

Key words: debate, flouting maxim, good communication

### **INTRODUCTION**

Language becomes an important thing for people as the part of the society because they need it in their communication. Crystal (1987) mentions seven functions of language; they are the expression of emotion, social interaction, the power of sound, the control of reality, the recording of the facts, the instrument of thought, and the expression of identity. Based on the functions above, it shows that people use language to express and show their emotion.

In communication, language becomes the prior instrument in communicating ideas, feeling, or opinions. People can communicate in written or spoken language. Crystal (1987) states that in written language, the language used is in well formed, good order and in a good grammatical because it can be revised if there are some mistakes there. On the other hand, spoken language tends to be less formal and does not concern with the grammatical order. In the spoken language, the speakers tend to be communicative rather than concern about the order of the utterances they produce.

There are two main parts in the communication process; those are the speakers and the hearers. In this case, the speakers will encode the message and the hearers will decode the message they receive. In maintaining good communication, the speakers and the hearers have to understand each other so that the communication will run very well.

Sometimes, what the speaker means is not being understood by the receiver or listener so that the message being sent is lost. It can be said that in the process of communication, the hearer should not only understand the speaker's utterances but also what the speaker intends to mean.

In linguistics, a good communication can be measured by applying cooperative principle that is proposed by Grice (1989). In this principle, there are four kinds of maxims that are applied; those are maxim of quality, maxim of quantity, maxim of relevance, and maxim of manner. So, if both the speaker and hearer fulfil this principle, the communication will run smoothly.

In real communication, those four maxims are not always being fulfilled by the speakers. When the speakers do not fulfil the maxim in the communication, means that they flout the maxim. Thomas (1995) says "when flouting a maxim, the speaker does not intend to mislead the hearer but wants the hearer to look for the conversational implicature, that is, the meaning of the utterance not directly stated in the words uttered. Therefore, when the speaker intentionally fails to observe a maxim the purpose may be to effectively communicate a message". When the speakers flout the maxim, it will create the implicature or intended meaning from the utterance. Because of that intended meaning, sometimes the hearer will misunderstand with the speakers' utterances. Grundy (2000) in his book *Doing Pragmatics* gives an example of implicature in the case of politeness:

Postmaster : It's a nice morning, isn't it?  
Peter : Not bad  
Postmaster : It'll be better at one o'clock

In this case, the context of the previous example is on Saturday morning and Peter went to the post office that had just opened. From that short conversation, it can be inferred that actually the postmaster asked him to go and come back again at one o'clock, but he did not say it directly. So, this short conversation contains implicature.

In communication, flouting maxim can be used as a way to maintain the relationship between the speaker and hearer since the utterance being used will be more polite if it is flouted. It means that the speakers can make communicative communication when they are flouting the maxims. Brown and Levinson (1987) state that politeness strategies are the ways to fill the positive and negative face of the hearer, the positive face that related to the human desire to be respected and well thought and negative face that relates to the human's desire to be free.

There are many flouting maxims found in the real communication. In this case, debate can be an interesting object for seeing that phenomenon. One of many famous debates is American presidential debate in 2008, especially the second part of the debate. In this occasion, there are many guests who had never voted in the election before. The aim of this study is to investigate the flouted utterances in the second American presidential debate and to answer the question about how the the two presidential candidates flouted the maxims. Besides, the writers also analyze the purposes of the flouted utterances in

their debate. In this study, the writers limit their study to analyze the flouted utterances of the second round of the debate.

## METHOD

This study is conducted by using qualitative approach since the writers analyze about the flouted utterances in the second American presidential debate. Then the result of the analysis would be in the form of description rather than in the form of number. Ary *et al.* (2002, p. 425) stated that “the qualitative research dealt with the data that was the description of the words rather than numbers or statistics; furthermore, it tried to arrive at a rich description of the reports, objects events, and processes”.

Since this study is using qualitative approach, the writers become the key instrument in collecting and analysing the data. The data were in the written form, so this research used content or document analysis. According to Ary *et al.* (2002, p.442), “Content or document analysis is a research method applied to written or visual materials for purpose of analysing specified characteristics of the materials. The materials analysed can be handbook, newspaper, speeches, etc”. Since the writers analysed the presidential debate which referred to the script, the suitable analysis used document analysis.

The data of this research are the flouted utterances of two American’s presidential candidates; they are Barack Obama and Mitt Romney. Then, the data source of this research is the script of second American presidential debate. The script is taken from the website [www.debates.org](http://www.debates.org)

There were three steps in collecting the data; they were:

1. Watching  
The writers watch the movie to comprehend the debate process and to listen directly to the utterances spoken by the two American presidential candidates.
2. Finding  
The writers find the movie script from [www.debates.org](http://www.debates.org). The writers need to read the movie script to understand fully about the utterances of the two American presidential candidates.
3. Highlighting  
The writers highlight the utterances which contained flouting maxims.

After the data were collected, the writers started to analyse the data for this research. Ary *et al.* (2002, p. 465) define data analysis as “a process whereby researchers systematically searched and arranged the data in order to increase their understanding of the data and to enable them to present what they learned to others”. Data analysis involves reducing and organizing the data, synthesizing, searching for significant patterns, and discovering what was important. These processes are summarized into three steps below:

1. Categorizing  
According to Ary *et al.* (2002, p. 465), the first thing to do in organizing was to reduce the data which was done through the process called *coding*. Wiersma (1995,

as quoted by Ary *et al*, 2002, p. 465) suggested that “organizing through coding was analogous to getting ready for a rummage sale: you sort of the stuff for sale into categories”. In the research, the data were categorized to the classification that has similar ideas, concepts, activities, themes, setting and soon represent category. In this research, the writers categorize the flouted utterances into four kinds of maxims, they are flouting maxim of quality, maxim of quantity, maxim of relevance and maxim of manner.

## 2. Summarizing

Ary *et al*. (2002, p. 467) state that “in summarizing step, the writer began to see what was in the data and examined all entries with the same code, and then emerged these categories into patterns by finding links and connections among categories”. In this process, the writers could further integrate the data and began to make statements about the relationship and themes in data.

## 3. Interpreting

Ary *et al*. (2002, p. 470) stated that in this step the writers go beyond the descriptive data extract the meaning and insight from the data. In this step, the writers analyze the purposes of the two presidential candidates when they flouted the maxims.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### A. Flouting of Maxim

In the American presidential debate, there are some flouting maxims that are done by both candidates, they are Barack Obama and Mitt Romney. The flouting maxims are as follows:

#### 1. Flouting Maxim of Manner

According to Yule (1996:37) the requirement of maxim of manner are avoiding obscurity of expression, avoiding ambiguity, avoiding unnecessary prolixity, being orderly. Sometimes in real life of communication especially debate, the maxim is not always obeyed. One the example is found in the American presidential debate.

#### Data 1

Speaker 1: *Mr. President, I voted for you in 2008. What have you done or accomplished to earn my vote in 2012? I'm not that optimistic as I was in 2012. Most things I need for everyday living are very expensive.*

Speaker 2: *Well, we've gone through a tough four years. There's no doubt about it. But four years ago, I told the American people and I told you I would cut taxes for middle class families. And I did. I told you I'd cut taxes for small businesses, and I have.*

*I said that I'd end the war in Iraq, and I did. I said we'd refocus attention on those who actually attacked us on 9/11, and we have gone after Al Qaeda's leadership like never before and Osama bin Laden is dead. I said that we would*

*put in place health care reform to make sure that insurance companies can't jerk you around and if you don't have health insurance, that you'd have a chance to get affordable insurance, and I have. I committed that I would rein in the excesses of Wall Street, and we passed the toughest Wall Street reforms since the 1930s. We've created five million jobs, and gone from 800 jobs a month being lost, and we are making progress. We saved an auto industry that was on the brink of collapse. Now, does that mean you're not struggling? Absolutely not. A lot of us are. And that's why the plan that I've put forward for manufacturing and education, and reducing our deficit in a sensible way, using the savings from ending wars, to rebuild America and putting people back to work. Making sure that we are controlling our own energy, but not only the energy of today, but also the energy of the future. All of those things will make a difference, so the point is the commitments I've made, I've kept. And those that I haven't been able to keep, it's not for lack of trying and we're going to get it done in a second term. But, you should pay attention to this campaign, because Governor Romney has made some commitments as well. And I suspect he'll keep those too. You know when members of the Republican Congress say, "We're going to sign a no tax pledge, so that we don't ask a dime for millionaires and billionaires to reduce our deficit so we can still invest in education, and helping kids go to college. He said, "Me too. When they said, "We're going to cut Planned Parenthood funding." He said, "Me too." When he said, "We're going to repeal Obama's care. First thing I'm going to do," despite the fact that it's the same health care plan that he passed in Massachusetts and is working well. He said, "Me too." That is not the kind of leadership that you need, but you should expect that those are promises he's going to keep. The choice in this election is going to be whose promises are going to be more likely to help you in your life? Make sure your kids can go to college. Make sure that you are getting a good paying job, making sure that Medicare and Social Security will be there for you.*

**Note:** Speaker 1:

Speaker 2: Barack Obama

In the data above, it can be seen that the speaker 1 asked his addressee about what he had done for the last four years during his period. The speaker 1 needed an answer about his addressee's efforts to manage the economic condition. He was supposed to answer it directly by mentioning what he had done to improve the economic condition so that the daily need price is not expensive. But, the speaker 2 answered that question by mentioning some other things that he had done, such as terrorism, health, education, and others. So, the answer of the question seems not really answer the question, because Obama just gave explanation about what he had done in last four year. Obama's answer is flouting the maxim of manner since he gave unnecessary prolixity which is not asked. By stating that

kind of answer, the writers indicated that Obama wanted to convince the society or voters to vote him by showing some big efforts that he had done during his period.

## 2. Flouting Maxim of Quantity

According to Yule (1996:37) the requirement of maxim quantity are first we should make our contribution as informative as is required. The second is we should not make our contribution more informative than is required. But, sometimes people flout the Maxim of Quantity by giving more information that is not required. It also happens in American presidential debate.

### Data 2:

Speaker 1: *Governor, let me ask the president something about what you just said. The governor says that he is not going to allow the top 5 percent, believe is what he said, to have a tax cut that it will all even out, that what he wants to do is give that tax cut to the middle class. Settled?*

Speaker 2: *No, it's not settled. Look, the cost of lowering rates for everybody across the board, 20 percent. Along with what he also wants to do in terms of eliminating the estate tax, along what he wants to do in terms of corporate, changes in the tax code, it costs about \$5 trillion. Governor Romney then also wants to spend \$2 trillion on additional military programs even though the military's not asking for them. That's \$7 trillion. He also wants to continue the Bush tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans. That's another trillion dollars -- that's \$8 trillion. Now, what he says is he's going to make sure that this doesn't add to the deficit and he's going to cut middle class taxes. But when he's asked, how are you going to do it, which deductions, which loopholes are you going to close? He can't tell you. The -- the fact that he only has to pay 14 percent on his taxes when a lot of you are paying much higher. He's already taken that off the board, capital gains are going to continue to be at a low rate so we -- we're not going to get money that way. We haven't heard from the governor any specifics beyond Big Bird and eliminating funding for Planned Parenthood in terms of how he pays for that. Now, Governor Romney was a very successful investor. If somebody came to you, Governor, with a plan that said, here, I want to spend \$7 or \$8 trillion, and then we're going to pay for it, but we can't tell you until maybe after the election how we're going to do it, you wouldn't take such a sketchy deal and neither should you, the American people, because the math doesn't add up. And -- and what's at stake here is one of two things, either Candy -- this blows up the deficit because keep in mind, this is just to pay for the additional spending that he's talking about, \$7 trillion - \$8 trillion before we even get to the deficit we already have. Or, alternatively, it's got to be paid for, not only by closing deductions for wealthy individual that -- that will pay for about 4 percent reduction in tax rates. You're going to be paying for it. You're going to*

*lose some deductions, and you can't buy the sales pitch. Nobody who's looked at it that's serious, actually believes it adds up.*

**Note:** Speaker 1: Moderator

Speaker 2: Barack Obama

Based on the data above, the context is that Romney had given the statement that if he became the president he wanted to cut the tax of middle class. After that, the moderator wanted to ask Obama's opinion related to this matter. So, the moderator asked about Obama's opinion about Governor's plan by saying "settled?" This kind of question needs to be answered by saying yes or no answer with a little explanation. It means that the moderator wanted his agreement. But, he answered it more than required by explaining the tax cases in very detail way, although what he supposed to answer is only "*No, it's not settled*". This kind of answer flouted the maxim of quantity because he gave more explanation more than was required. So, the writers assumed that Obama wanted to convince and assure his voters that cutting the tax for middle class is not suitable decision. Then, he also gave the solution that rather than cutting the tax, it would be much better for allocating the tax for middle class for improving the education. He was sure that the tax would give big benefits for the society.

### **3. The Flouting Maxim of Relevance**

According to Yule (1996:37) one should make conversational contribution such as is required and the conversational also should be relevant. Somehow, some people flout the maxim for some reasons. This also happens in the American debate presidential. One of the examples is as follows:

Speaker 1: *...vast array of who says -- what study says what, if it shouldn't add up. If somehow when you get in there, there isn't enough tax revenue coming in. If somehow the numbers don't add up, would you be willing to look again at a 20 percent?*

Speaker 2: *Well of course they add up. I -- I was -- I was someone who ran businesses for 25 years, and balanced the budget. I ran the Olympics and balanced the budget. I ran the -- the state of Massachusetts as a governor, to the extent any governor does, and balanced the budget all four years. When we're talking about math that doesn't add up, how about \$4 trillion of deficits over the last four years, \$5 trillion? That's math that doesn't add up. We have -- we have a president talking about someone's plan in a way that's completely foreign to what my real plan is. ROMNEY: And then we have his own record, which is we have four consecutive years where he said when he was running for office, he would cut the deficit in half. Instead he's doubled it. We've gone from \$10 trillion of national debt, to \$16 trillion of national debt. If the president were reelected, we'd go to almost \$20 trillion of national debt. This puts us on a road to Greece. I know what it takes to*

*balance budgets. I've done it my entire life. So for instance when he says, "Yours is a \$5 trillion cut." Well, no it's not. Because I'm offsetting some of the reductions with holding down some of the deductions.*

**Note:** Speaker 1: Mitt Romney

Speaker 2: Barack Obama

In the data above, the speaker 1 asked about his addressee's willingness to look again at tax policy if the tax did not comply with the annual tax revenue that must be achieved by the nation. In this case, the speaker 2 should answer the question by stating what he had to do for overcoming that kind of situation. But, the answer from Speaker 2 was not relevant with the question because he stated about the tax that would certainly added up. He also explained how to increase the tax revenue. This kind of answer was flouting the maxim of relevance since it did not answer the speaker 1's question. So, the writers concluded that actually the speaker 2 wanted to show that he was sure the tax revenue would increase, especially when he became the president of USA. This answer indicated that Speaker 2, in this case Obama try to persuade and assure his voters for voting him in the election.

## **B. The Puposos of Flouting Maxim**

### **1. Convincing Voters**

Actually, the main function of Presidential debate is to gain the vote from the voters. Therefore, the candidates of President have to give the best effort to promote themselves. as we know, a presidential debate plays important roles in changing the decision of voters. Southmayd (2012: 16) states that debate can assist undecided voters in making decisions, prevent possible partisan ship-jumpers from voting for the other party, cause increased turnout on Election Day and most basically, provide any and all voters with more information, regardless of whether they pick their candidate based partly or solely on the debate at all. Because of those important purposes, we can see that language skill especially language strategies can help the candidates to convince the voters. One of language skills that can be used is flouting the maxim.

In this case, the writers would like to describe the maxim of quantity flouted by the candidates. Based on the findings, both Obama and Romney often flouted the maxim of quantity. In general, they flout the maxim of quantity to show that both of them want to deliver their other design programs outside the design program asked by the moderator. In other words, presidential debate is good moment to present the candidate's programs eventhough their speech is limited by the time. Besides that, they flouted the maxim of quantity to convince the voters that they are good statesmen. It can be proven by the transcript below.

**QUESTION:** *Mr. President, Governor Romney, as a 20-year-old college student, all I hear from professors, neighbors and others is that when I graduate, I will have little chance to get employment. What can you say to reassure me, but more*



*importantly my parents, that I will be able to sufficiently support myself after I graduate?*

**ROMNEY:** *Thank you, Jeremy. I appreciate your -- your question, and thank you for being here this evening and to all of those from Nassau County that have come, thank you for your time. Thank you to Hofstra University and to Candy Crowley for organizing and leading this -- this event. Thank you, Mr. President, also for being part of this -- this debate*

From the transcript above, we can see that the question, actually, is about the Romney's conception of solving the unemployment. Nevertheless, he didn't deliver the conception directly, he greeted all of the audiences especially President Obama. He wanted to convince the voters that he is a good statesman so he hoped that his attitude can increase the vote in the election day.

On the other hand, President Obama also uses the same strategy to show that he is also a good statesman. It can be seen in the transcript below.

**CROWLEY:** *Mr. President? (similar question from the moderator)*

**OBAMA:** *Jeremy, first of all, your future is bright. And the fact that you're making an investment in higher education is critical. Not just to you, but to the entire nation. Now, the most important thing we can do is to make sure that we are creating jobs in this country. But not just jobs, good paying jobs. Ones that can support a family.*

When Obama was asked by the moderator, he didn't deliver the conception directly. He, firstly, admired the moderator and all americans. It has a purpose that he wants to convince the voters so the voters would elect Obama.

## **2. Covering Weaknesses**

Presidential debate is still believed as a powerful method in campaigning. Southmayd (2012) said that presidential debates are tools to reinforce old messages rather than convey new one. Some scholars argue the debates play an important role in the election process. Debates can assist undecided voters in making decisions, prevent possible partisan ship-jumpers from voting for the other party, cause increased turnout on Election Day and most basically, provide any and all voters with more information, regardless of whether they pick their candidate based partly or solely on the debate at all. But still, others point to studies that suggest the presidential debates have had very little effect on the ultimate election result; the candidate leading at the time surrounding the debate goes on to win.

Debate that is used in presidential debate usually has one moderator and president candidates. In the debate, they have question and answer section and section to give arguments about their rival weaknesses program. This also happens in the second American presidential debate. Nearly two full weeks after the first debate, CNN's Candy Crowley moderated the second in Hempstead, New York, at Hofstra University. This one was "town hall style," quite different from the first as it was attended by a group of

undecided voters, all of whom had come up with their own questions to ask of Obama and Romney. Crowley and her team selected the questions, which the voters themselves asked. Crowley provided some, but not much, direction beyond that. This debate was also much different than the ones that came before or after because the candidates were allowed to stand while giving responses, and move about the small stage, creating a far more hostile air. Because of that, the candidates (Obama and Romney) try to make the speeches, messages, or answers as perfect as possible. When they cannot answer the question they simply flout maxim of manner. For examples:

**ROMNEY:** *No, no. How much did you cut permits and licenses on federal land and federal waters?*

**OBAMA:** *Governor Romney, here's what we did. There were a whole bunch of oil companies.*

According to Yule (1996:37) the requirement of maxim of manner are avoiding obscurity of expression, avoiding ambiguity, avoiding unnecessary prolixity, being orderly. Sometimes in real life of communication especially debate, the maxim is not always obeyed. In the conversation above, Romney questioned how much licences and permits that Obama cut. Because, Romney believed that Obama did many cuttings of permits and licenses on federal in the last four years. But, Obama answered the question by saying *here's what we did, there were a whole bunch of oil companies*. That answer was actually little bit ambiguous. That answer showed that Obama admitted cutting the licenses and permits on federal land and federal waters. He did not want to show those cases since it would show his weakness during his presidential period. Then, to cover those weakness, he stated his answer ambiguously by saying *There were a whole bunch of oil companies*. In conveying people's belief somehow people need to give unnecessary prolixity and somehow ambiguous. So, it can cover their weaknesses by saying statement that is little bit ambiguous. By flouting the maxim of manner, they seems not really sure about the answer or they cannot answer the question but they still try to prove to the audience that they are capable by doing another thing.

### **3. Assuring Voters**

Nowadays, live debate become one of many ways used by the presidential candidate for showing their abilities and future programs when they are elected. Debate is also used for confining the audiences or voters for considering their choice in the election day. Southmayd (2012) stated that "Debates can assist undecided voters in making decisions, prevent possible partisan ship-jumpers from voting for the other party, cause increased turnout on Election Day and most basically, provide any and all voters with more information, regardless of whether they pick their candidate based partly or solely on the debate at all"

Generally, in the debate, the presidential candidates have their own ways for delivering their messages or they use different styles in confining the audiences. One of the example is as follows:

**ROMNEY:** *So how much did you cut (inaudible)?*

**OBAMA:** *Not true.*

In this question and answer, Romney asked about how much the tax that will be cut by Obama. Actually, Obama should answer that question by stating the number or amount of tax. But, he said “Not true”. In the case of cooperative principle proposed by Grice, this answer has flouted the maxim of relevance. Thomas (1995) stated that “Violations of maxim of relation, that is, cases where the maxim “be relevant” looks like it has been disregarded, but where what is said is correctly understood only by assuming that what is apparently irrelevant is in fact, relevant”

So, it can be concluded that the answer flouted the maxim of relevance since he did not give the answer which is relevant to the question. By stating that, it indicated that Obama wanted to confine his addressee and the audience. It means that he is sure that he won't cut the tax when he become the president. It seems like Obama wants to convince the audience that his policy will really run.

## CONCLUSION

From the analysis above, the writers concluded that the two presidential candidates were performing the flouting maxim in their utterances. They performed flouting maxim of quantity, flouting maxim of relevance, and flouting maxim of manner. So, this analysis proved that cooperative principle proposed by Grice were not always obeyed by the speakers in communication, especially in the debate. This is because in the real communication, sometimes the speakers sometimes should flout the maxim of their utterances to make the hearers understand about the message they sent.

In the analysis above, the most maxim being flouted is maxim of quantity. Then, it is followed by maxim of relevance, and maxim of manner. Unfortunately, the writers did not find the the flouting maxim in the second American presidential debate. Then, there are some purposes found in the debate, they are convincing the voters, covering the weakness, and assuring teh voters. From those purposes, it can be inferred that in the debate process the candidates tried so hard to convince and assure the voters for choosing them in the election. Besides, since everyone has always has mistakes, the candidates tries to cover their wekanesses by flouting some maxims.

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