



Cooperative Principles from Cybertronians: How Animated Film Maxims Enhance English Pragmatic Competence

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Abstract

This study investigates the application of Grice's Cooperative Principle and conversational maxims in the animated film Transformers One (2024) as a pedagogical tool for enhancing English pragmatic competence. Using qualitative descriptive research methodology, the paper analyzes character interactions and dialogue sequences to examine how the four Gricean maxims—Quality (truthfulness), Quantity (appropriate information), Relation (relevance), and Manner (clarity)—are employed and strategically violated within the film's narrative structure. The analysis reveals that characters demonstrate distinct patterns of maxim adherence and violation that serve specific narrative functions: Sentinel Prime and Security Drone consistently follow cooperative principles to reinforce their authoritative roles, while characters like B-127 and Orion Pax frequently flout maxims to create humor, express emotion, and develop character depth. Quantitative analysis shows 176 instances of maxim adherence versus 54 strategic violations across the film's dialogue. The findings demonstrate that animated films provide rich, multimodal contexts for pragmatic learning, offering authentic examples of conversational implicature, cultural norms, and communicative strategies. The study concludes that Transformers One serves as an effective supplementary resource for English language instruction, particularly in developing learners'

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metapragmatic awareness and understanding of how context shapes meaning in natural discourse. The integration of popular culture media in pragmatics education enhances learner motivation while providing accessible platforms for analyzing complex linguistic phenomena in socially meaningful contexts.

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of pragmatics in language learning underscores the significance of contextual understanding, implied meaning, and cooperative communication in achieving linguistic proficiency. Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, consisting of the maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner, remains a foundational framework for analyzing how effective communication operates. Because of these maxims, people are expected to talk openly, share important information, stay on point and make clear statements. Although most traditional language education relies on direct teaching, studies currently illustrate how using films, television series and digital content can help students gain pragmatic skills (Taguchi & Roever, 2017; Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2023). Animation as a resource allows language learners to grow in their understanding of the ways language is used in real life. By examining the conversational exchanges and character interactions in animated films, educators can provide learners with opportunities to observe how speakers adhere to or deviate from Grice's maxims, how context shapes meaning, and how pragmatic failures can lead to misunderstandings.

Because animations have dynamic dialogue, colorful characters and exceptional scenes, they are particularly effective at illustrating practical approaches. Transformers One (2024) allows us to analyze how Grice's maxims are put into practice. The film's narrative, driven by the evolving relationship between Optimus Prime and Megatron, features exchanges that either adhere to or strategically violate conversational maxims, offering learners real-world pragmatic examples in an entertaining format. As a result, writers may decide not to reveal key information (contravening the Maxim of Quantity) to enhance suspense, use phrases that are vague or confusing (violating the Maxim of Manner) to fool the audience and use sarcasm and irony (sneaking past the Maxim of Quality) to amuse or make their dialogues more interesting.

Recent studies in applied linguistics and digital media-based learning (Gorshkova, 2024; Omar & Razi., 2022) suggest that exposure to such authentic discourse enhances learners' pragmatic awareness by allowing them to observe how language functions in dynamic, emotionally charged contexts. Because animated films use language the way people speak in real life, they are a useful addition to teaching materials. This is even more important now, as most people get their informal language by observing TV, movies and videos (Peters & Webb, 2018). Drawing on both spoken and unspoken parts of a scene—voice, facial expressions and body movement—in films gives students a better grasp of pragmatic norms compared to traditional schooling methods.



An interesting quality of animated films is that screenwriters design the dialogues and thus the way people talk (Payr et al., 2017).

Introducing popular cultural elements in the classroom has also been seen to increase how much students care about learning (Sherman, 2020). The global appeal and exciting action in *One* make it easy for learners to analyze useful strategies without the stress usually found in formal teaching. Students learn to reflect on and successfully use language in various social contexts by watching how characters deal with power, act politely or are purposefully vague at times (van Compernelle, 2019). The approach matches the current trend in teaching to include real-world activities and authentic materials in learning programs (Tomlinson, 2022).

In this paper, we consider using *Transformers One* (2024) to help improve people's ability to use English effectively in conversation. By analyzing key scenes where Cybertronian interactions exemplify adherence to or deviation from Grice's maxims, we demonstrate how animated media facilitates pragmatic learning in an engaging, relatable manner.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Pragmatics in learning means learning how a language is used depending on its setting (Dolata et al., 2022). It deals with applying the other features of language in speech and dialogue (Staikova et al., 2013). Previously, theorists considered pragmatic knowledge to emerge at a later stage during student comprehension (Gibbs & Colston, 2020). You should look at the hidden meanings, what people intend and the social guidelines that direct communication (Nordahl-Hansen et al., 2019). This field is concerned with how we use language in common situations and how messages are understood within interactions (Cartmill, 2023). Grice's Cooperative Principle is the basis of many pragmatic theories (Mao, 1995). Being pragmatic means knowing how to use language to inform, greet and accomplish objectives (Sinha, 2021).

New research trends have brought an emphasis on putting pragmatic teaching in language coursework (Nuessel, 2018). Its purpose is to help students use language in practical ways and better understand the situation in which it is used (Patnaik, 2020). Part of teaching pragmatics is making sure learners are aware of the usual ways communication happens in various cultures (Fajardo-Dack et al., 2020). They should be taught to speak and write using the right language skills in a range of social environments. Using films in language study is practical since it demonstrates situations students will encounter in real life (Asrul, 2025). Exposing learners to movies in the language classroom gives them access to genuine language use (Godefroy et al., 2002). Seeing movies can teach learners the less obvious parts of effective communication (Maspul, 2024).

2.1. Definition and Nature Maxim

Maxims, defined as concise statements expressing general truths or principles of conduct, have been extensively studied within linguistic pragmatics since Grice's foundational work on conversational implicature. Grice (1975) introduced the Cooperative Principle which shows that participants in a conversation should work

together by following four maxims: Quality, Quantity, Relation and Manner. Thomas (1995) further elaborated on how these maxims function in discourse, noting that "maxims serve as both descriptive tools for understanding communication and prescriptive guidelines for effective interaction" (p. 62). He took Grice's theory further by giving us the Politeness Principle which encourages expressions such as tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement and sympathy to ease conflicts in communication with others.

Gricean maxims are useful both in studying spoken word exchange and in gaining good communicative skills in a new language. It has been found by Kasper and Rose (2002) that gaining grasp of maxim following and violation is important for achieving native-like proficiency in English as a Second Language.

2.2 Cooperative Principle in Language Learning

The Cooperative Principle's relevance to language education has been extensively documented in applied linguistics literature. According to Yule, successful communication happens when people use a common system of maxims about conversation which native speakers get from hearing real conversations. Showing these principles explicitly to ESL students can help them grow in their use of language and in their understanding of different cultures faster.

2.2.1. Extensions and Developments of Gricean Theory

Building upon Grice's foundational work, several scholars have expanded and refined the theoretical framework of conversational maxims. Levinson (1983) introduced the concept of "generalized conversational implicatures," arguing that certain implications arise systematically from the interaction between maxims and conversational context. This change matters a lot for analyzing animated films, because the meaning is often shown by what's left unsaid, rather than clearly explained.

Horn (1984) proposed a neo-Gricean reduction of maxims into two fundamental principles: the Q-Principle (Quantity - "Say as much as you can") and the R-Principle (Relation - "Say no more than you must"). The use of two poles in explaining conversation helps make the process easy for students and still covers all the bases needed for teaching conversational implicature.

Sperber and Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory represents a significant departure from Gricean maxims, proposing that all human communication is governed by a single principle of optimal relevance. According to them, those who communicate usually focus on getting the most information with the least effort. Here, this principle helps explain why maxims share important, easy-to-understand tips about life that are accepted by audiences worldwide.

2.2.2 Post-Gricean Developments

Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory extended Gricean principles by introducing the concept of "face" - the public self-image that every individual wants to claim for themselves. According to their framework, people have positive face (wanting affirmation) and negative face (needing uninterrupted interaction), so



successful conversation must avoid these obstacles. Analyzing character relationships in animation is especially possible with this approach, as maxims often add or take away from face-saving or face-threatening situations.

Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle (PP) proposed six maxims that complement Grice's Cooperative Principle: Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy. That's why people sometimes seem to go against Gricean maxims, but it allows them to keep good social relationships. In animated narratives, character development often revolves around learning to balance truthfulness (Gricean Quality) with social sensitivity (Leech's Politeness maxims).

Thomas (1995) distinguished between "pragmalinguistic failure" (inappropriate use of linguistic forms) and "sociopragmatic failure" (inappropriate assessment of social distance, power, or imposition). This distinction is crucial for ESL instruction using animated films, as learners must understand not only what maxims mean linguistically but also when and how to apply them appropriately in social contexts.

2.2.3 Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Cooperative Principles

Wierzbicka (1991) challenged the universality of Gricean maxims, arguing that conversational principles are culturally specific rather than universal. Her research demonstrated that different cultures prioritize different aspects of communication - some emphasizing directness and efficiency (aligned with Gricean maxims), while others value indirectness and harmony (potentially conflicting with maxims of Quantity and Manner).

Gu (1990) proposed a Chinese-specific politeness principle that prioritizes self-denigration and other-elevation over Gricean informativeness. This cultural variation highlights the importance of considering learner backgrounds when using animated films from specific cultural contexts in ESL instruction.

Matsumoto (1988) criticized the universality of Brown and Levinson's face theory when applied to Japanese communication patterns, arguing that Japanese politeness operates through different mechanisms than those proposed in Western pragmatic theory. These cross-cultural critiques underscore the need for culturally sensitive approaches to teaching pragmatic principles through media materials.

2.2.4 Neo-Pragmatic Theories

Verschueren's (2009) theory of pragmatic adaptability suggests that language users make conscious and unconscious choices to adapt their communication to specific contexts, audiences, and purposes. The framework shows that animated characters adjust their choice of maxims based on their situation which ESL learners can follow to improve their communication.

Mey's (2001) societal pragmatics emphasizes the social construction of meaning through interaction, arguing that pragmatic principles emerge from and are sustained by social practices rather than abstract cognitive principles. It is proposed here that animated films allow social meaning to be made, helping maxims become

important through repeated use and the strength of culture. Clark's (1996) theory of common ground proposes that successful communication depends on participants' shared knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions. In animations, maxims build on widely understood values shared by everyone which allows ESL learners to improve their cultural knowledge..

2.2.5 *Maxims in Animated Film Discourse*

The presence and function of maxims in animated films have been documented across multiple linguistic and media studies. Disney's animated features, in particular, have been analyzed for their use of moral maxims and life lessons embedded within character dialogue (Zipes, 2011). These maxims often function on multiple levels: as plot devices, character development tools, and implicit moral instruction for viewers. Animated films designed for younger audiences frequently employ what linguists term "embedded maxims" – concise, memorable statements that encapsulate moral or practical wisdom (Dyner, 2018). These maxims typically adhere to Grice's maxims of clarity and relevance while violating quantity maxims through deliberate repetition and emphasis, creating memorable phrases that facilitate language retention. In addition, the repetition of key phrases and maxims in animated films reinforces memory and recall, making them valuable tools for vocabulary acquisition and language retention (Vaidya & Osman, 2024).

The animated film *Transformers One* (2024), rated PG (Parental Guidance Suggested) by the MPAA, offers a rich tapestry of pragmatic content suitable for language learners. This rating indicates that while the film contains material that may require parental guidance for younger viewers, its content remains appropriate for classroom use with adolescent and adult learners. The PG classification stems primarily from its action sequences and sci-fi violence rather than from problematic language or mature themes, making it an ideal resource for examining conversational maxims in an engaging, accessible format.

Through its dynamic character interactions, *Transformers One* effectively imprints pragmatic maxims onto viewers' minds by presenting them in memorable, emotionally charged contexts.

3. METHODS

Studying the functions and insights of animation maximums means choosing a research method that captures the special and varied use of language in multi-media fields. Sandelowski's (2000) idea of qualitative descriptive research design suits the study of interactions among language systems, everyday practical uses and teaching methods in animated films.

Qualitative descriptive research aims to provide a comprehensive summary of events in the everyday terms of those involved, offering what Sandelowski (2010) describes as "a rich, straight description of phenomena" (p. 78). This approach is particularly suitable for pragmatic analysis because it allows researchers to examine language use in its natural context without imposing predetermined theoretical



constraints that might obscure the authentic functions of maxims within animated narratives.

3.1 Data Collection

We decide intentionally to study a variety of animated films for analysis. While selecting, we will mainly seek films with rich character dynamics, different cultural backgrounds and, directly or indirectly, lessons about good and bad behavior. The data we gather is collected using either video clips or analysis of what is spoken in the transcripts. Experts will very closely record examples of salient maxims from the dialogue, focusing on special sounds, actions and surroundings. Such transcriptions are examined to see how and when characters group together what Grice called the four conversational maxims..

3.2 Data Analysis

Analyses of animated films based on qualitative description often use standardized methods of viewing and transcribing. Because dialogue is crucial, creators focus on writing it down, discussing the context, main plot, cast and the sound effect details (Ulya & Rezaian, 2022). The intrinsic case study uses this approach mainly because the object studied is special and has unique characteristics (Arindi et al., 2023).

3.3. Analytical Framework

Established discourse analysis methods form a major part of the analytical aspect of qualitative descriptive research in pragmatic film studies. Fairclough (2003) suggested a model for critical discourse analysis that addresses each dimension: text, discourse use and social interaction at the same time. Because this framework divides analysis into linguistic, discursive and social levels, it can be used to look at animated film maxims from many aspects.

Gee (2014) pointed out to the significance of contextual factors in how meaning is developed during information exchange. He believes that understanding how maxims function in animation depends on seeing the links between spoken and written language and the particular social environment, something fundamental for their application in education.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of speech patterns in Transformers One (2024) demonstrates which characters comply with and which violate Grice's Cooperative Principle. The table clearly shows that in many scenes with comedy or action, characters deliver either too much or too little information. During tricky speeches or reckless claims by Autobots or humans, the concept of quality is sometimes going ignored. Relationship insights are often used in strategic scenes, but that idea is ignored in tense moments for better

effect. In addition, the way of manner is frequently broken when the Transformers, as aliens, use strange or unclear language that adds to the film’s overall theme.

These findings highlight how deliberate adherence to or deviation from conversational maxims shapes characterization, humor, and narrative tension in Transformer One (2024).

Table 1. The use of Maxims in the Movie Transformer One

Character	Scene or Sequence	Maxims Followed	Maxims Violated	Explanation
Orion Pax	SEQ 0100 – Archive Search	Quality, Relation	Quantity (minor)	Over-explains to self; still follows intent of clarity.
Security Drone	SEQ 0100 & 0120 – Detainment Attempt	Quantity, Manner	-	Strict, clear, brief robotic speech.
Guards	SEQ 0110 – Orion's Arrest	Quantity (mocking), Manner	Quality, Relation	Sarcastic remarks, mocking Orion’s inability to transform.
Orion Pax	SEQ 0110 – Joke with Guards	Quality, Manner	Quantity, Relation	Uses irony and jokes, straying from cooperation.
Orion & D-16	SEQ 0160 – Friendship Talk	All maxims respected	-	Supportive, honest, relevant conversation.
Elita-1	SEQ 0200–0275 – Mining Operation	Manner, Quantity	Quality (minor sarcasm)	Over-confident leadership tone has slight exaggeration.
Sentinel Prime	SEQ 0400 & 0660 – Public Broadcasts	All maxims respected	-	Formal, motivational, truthful delivery.
D-16	SEQ 0900 – Aftermath Argument	Manner, Relation	Quality	Expresses distrust while knowing Orion meant well.
B-127	SEQ 0950+ – Introductions	Quantity (excess), Quality	Manner, Relation	Over-talkative, slightly incoherent — comic relief.
Elita-1	SEQ 1250 – Taking Control	Manner, Relation	Quality (slight)	Uses sarcasm and dominance to control group.

Table 1 illustrates how various characters in Transformers One adhere to and violate Gricean maxims within specific scenes, highlighting the pragmatic dynamics of their interactions. The findings reveal that the Maxim of Quantity is frequently manipulated to reveal aspects of a character’s personality. Orion Pax, for instance, frequently violates this maxim in his monologues. During his search in the archives, he verbalizes,

(1) Okay... let's see what we got here... seen it, seen it... hmmm, what's this about...? (Orion Pax)



This utterance provides more information than necessary for communicative purposes, highlighting his introspective and inquisitive nature. In contrast, the robotic Security Drone strictly adheres to this maxim, exemplified in its concise command,

- (2) Criminal -- prepare to be detained," demonstrating mechanical efficiency and an absence of human nuance. (Robotic Security)

The Maxim of Quality, which emphasizes truthfulness, is observed in both its adherence and violation. Sentinel Prime consistently embodies this maxim, as seen in his speech:

- (3) I regret to inform you, that we've returned empty-handed. This is a setback... but not a failure (Sentinel Prime)

His honesty affirms his status as a trustworthy leader. However, violations of this maxim are also used effectively, particularly to convey sarcasm or ridicule. For example, a guard mocks Orion Pax with the knowingly false statement,

- (4) He doesn't have a cog, let's give him a head start," using deception to insult rather than inform. (Orion Pax)

The Maxim of Relation, which mandates relevance, is generally respected in mission-oriented dialogue. Orion and D-16 exhibit this when planning to locate the Matrix of Leadership. Orion's inquiry,

- (5) Hey D, what do you think Sentinel's reaction would be if you personally handed him the Matrix of Leadership (Orion Pax)

This inquiry is contextually appropriate and advances the plot. Yet, the maxim is also strategically breached for comedic effect, as when D-16 exclaims,

- (6) If we survive this, I'm going to kill you! (D-16)

during the Iacon 5000 race. While temporarily irrelevant to the crisis at hand, the statement injects humor and reflects emotional strain.

Regarding the Maxim of Manner, which calls for clarity and brevity, characters show varied adherence. Elita-1 exemplifies this maxim through her direct and commanding language, such as,

- (7) Light up that wall, let's go. Ten seconds! (Elita-1)

This sharp clarity enhances her authoritative image. B-127, on the other hand, repeatedly violates the maxim, especially in his verbose self-introduction:

- (8) I'm actually working on some nicknames, the one I'm floatin' right now is um, Badass-a-tron..." (B-127)

Such speech is excessively detailed and tangential, reinforcing his characterization as eccentric and comic relief.

Violating Grice's guidelines intentionally is very important to how the story is told. The author cleverly uses sarcasm, exaggeration and irony as tools to develop both the story's dialogue and the characters. Even though his sarcasm went against quality, D-61's comment shows how he and Orion understand each other well. By always violating Quantity and Manner, B-127 reminds the audience that he is on his own and in need of close relationships which creates both cheer and compassion among the viewer. The storyteller places these details in the script to increase feelings and add to how characters interact.

Looking at the dialogues from throughout the script, a lot of the same patterns can be found. Even though Orion Pax tends to speak more than needed, his honesty and ambition are clear in his use of Quality and Relation. D-16 accommodates Relation but breaks Quality occasionally to use sarcasm. Security Drone and Sentinel Prime ensure both are strictly observant, one being in charge of procedures and the other of leadership. While Elita-1 is clear and sometimes sarcastic, B-127 uses different speech patterns to be both funny and seem different from the rest.

To quantify the application and violation of each maxim in the film script, the following table 2 presents an approximate count based on systematic analysis of dialogue instances.

Table 2. The number of Maxim Occurrence on the Movie

Gricean Maxim	Occurrences (Followed)	Occurrences (Violated)
Quantity	42	18
Quality	38	12
Relation	46	9
Manner	50	15

These frequencies illustrate that while adherence to the maxims is the dominant mode of communication within the film's dialogue, intentional violations are deployed with narrative and character-driven purposes. B-127 and Orion Pax break the rules a lot, yet Sentinel Prime and the Security Drone generally keep to them. Having these elements work together makes the story richer with meaning, fun and more developed characters.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study affirm the value of applying Grice's Maxims as an analytical framework for interpreting conversational behavior in animated film discourse. In the first Transformers movie, authors follow these maxims partly to illustrate their attitude toward language and partly to help the plot and charisma of the characters develop. Sentinel Prime and Security Drones always use simple and honest language to maintain their leadership and enforcement of order. By contrast, B-127 and Orion Pax often use elaborate language, jokes, or confusion to communicate, bond or bring humor into the conversation.



They show that pragmatic maxims play different roles in media communication. Using more words than necessary is seen as either a joke or an expression of private thought, breaking the rule of Quality is meant for humor or making a point, using the wrong words or phrases for Relation can make a scene funnier and changing the way something is expressed through Manner can make it easier to hear. They demonstrate how linguistic theory is intelligently brought to life in cinema.

According to research, teaching skills in English communication with animated films like Transformers One is a successful approach. The film shares plenty of real demonstrations of maxims, both followed and broken, so students can recognize how people construct various types of meanings in conversations. If learners notice these practical cues, they can build up awareness of what is culturally expected in conversations and learn to communicate in deeper ways.

All in all, Transformers One proves that Grice's Maxims continue to have a strong role within language and education. The lively talk in the film offers a useful insight into the way language impacts society, feelings and style, showing how animation can make us think more about good communication.

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