CHAPTER V

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5.1 Introduction

The present research deals with study of the violation of the conversational maxims of the selected plays of Oscar Wilde. The plays selected for the purpose of data collection and analyses of the violation of conversational maxims are *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (1892), *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), and *An Ideal Husband* (1895). The researcher has made an in-depth analysis of the dialogues / utterances collected as data. The findings of the study are stated below.

5.2 Findings

- Language can be used precisely or in a more expanded form according to what the intention of the speaker is.
- Language is context bound, and in a given context the violation of certain maxims of Cooperative Principle would put more emphasis on the thought the speaker wants to convey to the hearer.
- The use of language in accordance with the context is very essential for a successful communication. However, the maxims of conversation are violated to have a greater effect on communication.

5.2.1 Findings from the Maxim of Quality

Maxim of Quality is violated in two ways, namely- quietly and unostentatiously, and deliberately to give implicature.
Maxim of Quality is violated to achieve the following intentions:

i) One could tell what one believes to be false to avoid giving information as Mr. Dumby avoids giving information about Mrs. Erlynne to Lady Plymdale (in example 5 of *Lady Windermere’s Fan*) and as Jack does not provide information to Algernon about Cecily (in example 1 of *The Importance of Being Earnest*).

ii) To avoid following instructions by telling a lie as Algernon does by not following the instructions of his aunt, Lady Bracknell, to dine with Mary Faquhar in example 2 of *The Importance of Being Earnest* by telling a lie.

iii) To avoid persuasion as in example 3 of *The Importance of Being Earnest* by way of giving false information as Algernon uses the strategy to avoid any further persuasion from her (Lady Bracknell) to attend Mary Farquhar’s dinner.

iv) One could tell what one believes to be false to not reveal the truth as in examples 4, 12, and 13 of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and in examples 4 and 5 in *An Ideal Husband*.

v) To hide the truth from the listener one could tell what one believes to be false as in examples 5, 7, 8, and 14 of *The Importance of Being Earnest* and in example 6 of *An Ideal Husband*.

vi) Speakers violate the maxim of quality by way of talking without evidence and by telling lie to get rid of a situation as
in example 6 of *The Importance of Being Earnest* and example 8 of *An Ideal Husband*, respectively.

vii) The maxim of quality is also violated to make listener(s) believe on the lie that one told by telling another lie as in examples 9, 10, 11, 18, and 19 of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and also to talk without evidence to achieve the same effect as in example 2 of *Lady Windermere’s Fan*.

viii) To express the feeling of victory or happiness as in example 1 of *An Ideal Husband* and in example 15 of *The importance of Being Earnest*.

ix) One could express one’s romantic imaginations by telling what one believes to be false as Cecily does in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (examples 16 and 17).

x) To hide the real fact and save someone from a terrible situation as Mrs. Erlynne violates by telling what she believes to be false in *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (examples 8, 9, and 10).

xi) One could even violate the maxim by talking without evidence to blame someone as Lady Windermere blames Mrs. Erlynne in *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (examples 6 and 7).

xii) A strategic violation of the Quality maxim is also attempted to mislead someone about one’s emotional state as Lord Goring misleads his father about his emotional state (in example 2 of *An Ideal Husband*.)
xiii) Maxim of Quality is also violated to avoid a serious conversation, although the speaker can be interested in non-serious conversation, as in example 3 of *An Ideal Husband*, Lord Goring does to avoid serious conversation with his father, Lord Caversham.

xiv) An act of threatening can be imposed on the listener by way of violating the maxim of Quality (example 7, *An Ideal Husband*) as Mrs. Cheveley does to threaten Lord Goring.

xv) The maxim of Quality is also violated to avoid a particular topic of disinterest and to mislead the hearer, in example 9 of *An Ideal Husband*, Lord Goring uses the strategy against his father, Lord Caversham.

xvi) To show or to express one’s disapproval about something a speaker uses the strategy of violating the maxim of Quality as, in example 3 of *Lady Windermere Fan*, Lady Windermere does not approve of her husband’s visits to Mrs. Erlynne.

5.2.2 Findings from the Maxim of Quantity

The maxim of Quantity is violated to get the following intentions of the speakers fulfilled:

i) To provide information that has not been sought for, as in example 1 of *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, Lady Windermere does to inform Lord Darlington about her birthday.

ii) To employ indirect speech act to perform the act of proposing as, in example 2 of *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, Lord Darlington does to implicate his love to Lady Windermere.
iii) To clearly state what one wants to convey thinking that the listener would not have got what is to be conveyed as, in example 3 of *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, Lady Windermere does to make her meaning clear to Lord Darlington.

iv) To provide more information to prove one’s point as, in example 4 of *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, Lord Darlington violates it to prove his character to the Duchess of Berwick.

v) Disbelieve could be expressed by adding additional information as in example 5 of *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, Lady Windermere expresses her disbelief of the utterance of the Duchess of Berwick.

vi) One could make a speech act of indirect warning by providing more information as in example 6 of *Lady Windermere’s Fan* and examples 6 and 12 of *An Ideal Husband*.

vii) To convince the listener as in example 9 of *Lady Windermere Fan* and example 7 of *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

viii) The characters present their philosophies of life by providing more information as in example 11 of *Lady Windermere’s Fan* and in examples 1 and 2 of *An Ideal Husband*.

ix) To emphasise what one says as in example 8 of *The Importance of Being Earnest* and in example 8 of *An Ideal Husband*.

x) The maxim of Quantity is violated to perform the act of indirect praise or to impress as in example 1 of *The Importance of Being Earnest* and in example 10 of *Lady Windermere’s Fan*. 
xi) On some occasions the strategic violation of quantity maxim is attempted to provide before hand or advance information so as to avoid any wrong interpretation as in example 2 of *The Importance of Being Earnest* and in example 12 of *Lady Windermere’s Fan.*

xii) Speakers provide additional information to be sarcastic in their meaning as is seen in example 5 of *The Importance of Being Earnest* and in example 3 of *An Ideal Husband.*

xiii) The act of complaining could also be intended by way of violating the maxim of quantity as, in example 3 of *The Importance of Being Earnest,* Gwendolen complains Jack about his lack of experience in proposing.

xiv) Violation of Quantity maxim leads to tautological utterances as, in example 6 of *The Importance of Being Earnest,* Jack sounds when Gwendolen asks him if his real name is John.

xv) Suggestions are provided by way of violating the maxim of quantity as, in example 5 of *An Ideal Husband,* Sir Robert Chiltern does to suggest Mrs. Cheveley not to invest in the Argentine Canal scheme.

xvi) Additional information is also provided by violating the maxim of quantity to make the listener cautious as, in example 10 of *An Ideal Husband,* Mrs. Cheveley is cautioned by Lord Goring.

xvii) In order to regret a past act and to provide implicature for help employing Indirect Speech Act the speaker violates the
maxim of quantity as, in example 11 of *An Ideal Husband*, Sir Robert Chiltern does to get help from his friend Lord Goring.

### 5.2.3 Findings from the Maxim of Relation

The maxim of Relation, is though less violated, serves some basic purpose of the speakers intention to violate the maxim by being non relevant to the immediate context of the conversation. The major intentions fulfilled by the violation of maxim of relation are:

i) To present one’s philosophy of life as in examples 1 and 5 of *The Importance of Being Earnest*; and as in example 4 of *Lady Windermere’s Fan*.

ii) The seriousness of an utterance or topic of conversation is avoided or overlooked by being irrelevant to the immediate context of the conversation, as in example 2 of *The Importance of Being Earnest* and as in examples 3, 4, and 5 of *An Ideal Husband*.

iii) The violation of the maxim of relation also presents the flickering thoughts of the speaker as it expresses Cecily’s thoughts in example 3 of *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

iv) Speakers could also provide affirmative replies by way of employing indirect speech act as in example 5 of *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, and in example 6 of *An Ideal Husband*.

v) Dr. Chasuble raises objection to the question put forward to him about Miss Prism. He objects by being irrelevant to the immediate context of the utterance in example 6 of *The
Importance of Being Earnest. The violation of the maxim is also attempted to object to a certain point.

vi) One could even opt not to answer a question or to reject the question by being irrelevant as, in example 2 of Lady Windermere’s Fan, Lord Windermere does to avoid the question of Lord Augustus.

vii) Maxim of relation is also violated for the purpose of providing more information and to express one’s own feelings, as in example 1 of Lady Windermere Fan, Lord Darlington does to provide information on Lord Windermere’s frequent visits to Mrs. Erlynne.

viii) Sometimes it becomes necessary to violate the maxim of relation in order to provide a hint as, in example 3 of Lady Windermere’s Fan, Lord Windermere provides hint to Mrs. Erlynne about any unbecoming situation and that his attempt to make her a party of society is not an easy one.

ix) To provide unsought information it becomes necessary to violate the maxim of relation as, in example 1 of An Ideal Husband, Mrs. Marchmont provides unsought information to Lady Basildon.

x) To pass an ironical comment the speaker violates the maxim of relation as, in example 2 of An Ideal Husband, Lord Caversham does to comment ironically on Miss Mabel’s lack of practical knowledge of the world.

xi) By violating the maxim of relation strategically a speaker could also show his/her disinterestedness in a particular topic
of conversation and he/she could opt out of the conversation as in example 7 of An Ideal Husband.

5.2.4 Findings from the Maxim of Manner

The maxim of manner is violated to have the following ends achieved by the speaker’s:

i) The speakers are ambiguous in their utterances to avoid appropriate reply as in examples 3 and 5 of An ideal Husband, and example 5 of The Importance of Being Earnest.

They also achieve the same end by being obscure in their utterances as in example 1 of The Importance of Being Earnest.

ii) To praise someone one could violated the maxim of manner by not being brief as in examples 2 and 12 of An ideal Husband, and as in example 2 of Lady Windermere’s Fan; again, the same end could be achieved by being ambiguous as in example 4 of Lady Windermere’s Fan.

iii) One could warn the listener by being obscure as in example 6 of An Ideal Husband; again one could also warn by being not brief in the utterance uttered as in example 3 of Lady Windermere’s Fan.

iv) The act of convincing the listener could be done by not being brief in the contribution of communication as in example 9 of An Ideal Husband, and as in example 1 of Lady Windermere’s Fan.
v) Characters also present their philosophy of life and world by violating the maxim of manner as in example 3 of *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

vi) To not to express one’s view the speaker could go ambiguous as Miss Mabel does in example 1 of *An Ideal Husband*.

vii) Speakers could violate the maxim by not being brief in order to support one’s view as, in example 4 of *An Ideal Husband*, Mrs. Cheveley does to support her views on politics.

viii) To show off the feeling of being triumph speakers go on violating the maxim by not being brief as Mrs. Cheveley does in example 7 of *An Ideal Husband*.

ix) To avoid or to show disinterestedness in a particular topic of conversation the speaker can go obscure as Lord Goring does in example 10 of *An Ideal Husband*.

x) If a speaker wants to provide unsought information to the listener then he/she could violate the maxim by not being brief as the Duchess of Berwick does in example 5 of *Lady Windermere’s Fan*.

xi) The talk exchange could not be in order if the speaker continues shifting the topic of conversation as Gwendolen does in example 2 of *Importance of Being Earnest*.

xii) Curiosity of the listener could easily be aroused by being obscure in expression as in example 6 of *Importance of Being Earnest*, Dr. Chasuble’s curiosity has been aroused by Jack by his obscure expression- ‘my brother’.
xiii) The act of denial seems to be a difficult task in a polite conversation, so the speaker violates the maxim by not being brief as Cecily does in example 7 of *The Importance of Being Earnest.*

xiv) Personal imaginations, of which the listener does not share any background knowledge, could be presented by way of having obscurity of expression as in example 8 of *The Importance of Being Earnest.*
The following chart presents the violation of the conversational maxims according to the number of times each maxim is violated.

Figure 1
Violation of the Conversational Maxims
The chart given below presents the play-wise violation of the Conversational Maxims:

![Figure 2: Play-wise Violation of the Conversational Maxims](image)

5.2.5 Philosophy of Oscar Wilde

Oscar Wilde is famous for his wit and wisdom and the philosophies that he presents through his language in his literary works. The selected plays also contain numerous examples of Wilde’s philosophy. The
philosophy has been presented through the mouth piece of the characters in the play. To present the philosophy of Wilde the characters violate the conversational maxims. Some of the examples of Wilde’s philosophies through violation of conversational maxims are:

i) The example 1 of violation of Quantity maxim in chapter III presents Wilde philosophy of being educated at party’s by which one can ‘put almost on a level with the commercial classes’.

ii) Mrs. Erlynne voices the philosophy of Wilde about the importance of saying something and about modern life when she violates the maxim of quantity (in example 11 of *Lady Windermere’s Fan*) and utters ‘when men give up saying what is charming, they give up thinking what is charming’, and ‘In modern life margin is everything’ respectively.

iii) Miss Prism, who is a symbol of education, is interested in presenting her philosophies about world. In chapter IV, example 1 of the violation of Relation maxim she tells that ‘People who live entirely for pleasure usually are’ unmarried.

iv) In example 4 of Chapter IV while analyzing the maxim of relation it is found that Cecil Graham voices Wilde’s philosophy of wicked women and good women when he utters ‘Wicked women bother one. Good women bore one. That is the only difference between them.’

v) Algernon of *The Importance of Being Earnest* (in Chapter IV, example 3) while violating the maxim of manner states that
‘All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That’s his.’

5.2.6 Male and Female Characters and the Degree of Violation of Conversational Maxims

The study of violation of conversational maxims have made the researcher to note that the violation of the maxims do differ along with the difference in gender. It is found in the study that the violations of the conversational maxims differ in degree in regard to the male and female characters of the plays. From the point of view of the violations by different genders it is observed that:

i) The **maxim of Quality** is mostly violated by the male characters. Among the characters of the plays selected for the purpose of study, Jack and Algernon (from *The Importance of Being Earnest*) violate the maxim mostly. Secondly the maxim is violated by Lord Goring and by Mr. Dumby.

Jack and Algernon violate the maxims mostly by telling what they believe to be false. Wilde has created both the characters to tell lies to become ‘Earnest’. Earnest is an invented brother of Jack and to deal with the truth of Earnest, Jack frequently has to lie. Whereas Algernon has to maintain the health of Bunbury, an imaginary friend of Algernon, by adopting the policy of telling lies.

Both Jack and Algernon have to utter more lies to save the previous lie they have told to someone. Algernon, in fact, has
to lie more when he goes disguised as the invented brother of Jack to the Manor house.

Lord Goring seems to be in serious communication on a few occasions. His character is of a person who lies a lot, so much that Miss Mabel is of the view that she ‘never believe(s) a single word’ (p. 95) that Lord Goring tells her. The view of Miss Mabel about Lord Goring’s habit of lying is supported by his father Lord Caversham when he tells her that she is ‘quite right … as far as he is concerned’ (p. 95).

The female characters violate the maxim on fewer occasions than the males. Among them Mrs. Cheveley (from An Ideal Husband) makes use of false statements mostly to fulfill her fraudulent intentions about the Argentine Canal scheme.

Of the other female characters, Duchess of Berwick violates the maxim to make believe Lady Windermere about what she tells about her husband.

Lady Windermere violates to express disbelieve and disapproval.

Mrs. Erlynne needs to lie to save her daughter’s marriage.

Cecily lies to express the romantic imaginations of her youthful dreams.

ii) The maxim of Quantity is the second highest maxim in terms of violation of the four categories of conversational maxims in the selected plays of Wilde.
Quantity maxim is mostly violated by the females of the selected plays.

Lady Windermere violates the maxim to a maximum number of times.

Mrs. Cheveley violates the maxim to gain her fraudulent aims.

Among the male characters Robert Chiltern violates the maxim either to emphasize a point or to make indirect statements, whereas Lord Goring makes other cautious, warns of a situation or shows his disinterestedness in a conversation.

iii) The **maxim of Relation** is the least violated of the maxims. The males generally show more courage to go for irrelevant utterances. Among them, Lord Goring is mostly irrelevant when he is not interested in a conversation.

Sir Robert Chiltern is irrelevant only under the emotional fear of getting his married life ruined.

The female characters very rarely violate the maxim of relation. Among them Cecily and Gwendolen on some occasion, under the emotion of love and romantic imaginations, do go irrelevant in their communication.

iv) The **maxim of manner** is mostly violated by the females of the selected plays. Among them Cecily, who lives under the
influence of romantic imaginations, violates the maxim mostly.

The Duchess of Berwick also violates the maxim a good number of times generally avoiding being brief in her utterances.

Among the males, it is less violated than females as very few of them go for obscure, non-orderly and not brief utterances. Lord Goring becomes obscure in his expression to show disinterestedness in a topic of conversation.

A figure presenting the violation of the four categories of the maxim, by male and female characters would show the degree of violation of the maxims more distinctly.

![Figure 3](image)

**Figure 3**

Violation of the Conversational Maxims by Male and Female Characters
5.3 Contribution of the Study

An act of communication or conversation is generally meant to be performed by adhering to the maxims of conversation. But the maxims of conversation are generally not followed strictly and thus there arises the violation of conversational maxims. The violation of the maxims plays a vital role in communication in real life situation and also in a literary piece of writing, particularly drama.

The present study would have various contributions to the field of pragmatics and to the whole process of communication. It would enable the audience and also the readers’ of Wilde to interpret the plays with a much better understanding of the utterances. It would develop among the readers a sense of interpreting texts with the help of pragmatics, particularly the theory of Cooperative Principle. It would establish the vital importance of the conversational maxims and their violation in a process of conversation. It would also help in the further development of the theory by presenting newer meanings out of the data selected for the purpose of study.

5.4 Pedagogical Implications

The study would also be of pedagogical help to the English language teacher who could provide the learner’s with knowledge of importance of conversational maxims, and the change of meaning due to its violation, apart from teaching only traditional grammar. It would develop better understanding of the techniques of conversation. A language teacher should shift his teaching from conventional language classes to a context based study of the language so that the learners should have knowledge of language use based on context.
5.5 Scope for Further Studies

The present research is a study of violation of conversational maxims following the definition, categories, and model of H. P. Grice. The researcher has thoroughly analysed and has drawn interesting interpretations of the selected plays of Wilde. The researcher has limited her study on the violation of the conversational maxim modeled on Grice. There is a scope for more research in the field of conversational maxims which could be modeled on Grice by selecting other plays by other authors or even by selecting fictional pieces of writing. The selected plays could also be studied by applying other theories of pragmatics like that of the theory of speech acts, indirect speech acts, turn-taking, etc.