



## Article

# Non-Observance of Gricean Maxims as a Literary Strategy in Short Fiction: A Discourse-Pragmatic Analysis of O. Henry and W. Somerset Maugham

Yokubjonova Ibodatxon Ulugbek Kizi<sup>1</sup>, Mukhayyo Fayzullaeva<sup>2</sup>, Satullaeva Nargiza Jalgasbaevna<sup>3</sup>, Najimov Amanlik Shamshetdinovich<sup>4</sup>, Sodiqova Nargiza Baxodir qizi<sup>5</sup>, Sodikova Shokhistakhon Bakhodir qizi<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Master's student, English Education Department, Kimyo International University, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

<sup>2</sup>Linguistics and English Literature Department, Faculty of Journalism, Uzbekistan State University of World Languages, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

<sup>3</sup>English Language and Literature Department, Foreign Languages Faculty, Karakalpak state university, Nukus, Uzbekistan

<sup>4</sup>Social Sciences Department, Chimbay Faculty, Karakalpak State University, Nukus, Uzbekistan

<sup>5</sup>Department of Applied Aspects of the English Language, Faculty of English Philology, Uzbekistan State World Languages University, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

<sup>6</sup>Department of Translation Studies, Linguistics and International Journalism, Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

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## CORRESPONDENCE

\*E-mail: [ibodatortikova@gmail.com](mailto:ibodatortikova@gmail.com)

## A B S T R A C T

Meaning in discourse is frequently conveyed indirectly; conversational maxims are rarely followed strictly, serving instead as tools for speakers to generate implied meaning. In literary discourse, particularly within the semantically dense genre of short fiction, the non-observance of these maxims operates not as a communicative failure but as an intentional artistic strategy to shape characterisation and narrative depth. Building on this background, this study investigates how the non-observance of Gricean conversational maxims functions as a literary strategy in selected English short stories by O. Henry and W. Somerset Maugham. Drawing on Grice's Cooperative Principle, the analysis examines how deviations from the maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner generate nonconventional implicatures that extend beyond the literal content. The study focuses on four stories: *The Girl and the Habit* and *An Unfinished Story* by O. Henry, alongside *The Happy Couple* and *The Promise* by W. Somerset Maugham. Employing a qualitative discourse-pragmatic methodology, representative instances of maxim non-observance are identified and interpreted regarding their narrative context and linguistic form. The findings demonstrate that maxim non-observance functions as a vital resource for creating irony, humour, characterisation, emotional reserve, and social commentary. Comparative analysis reveals distinct stylistic applications: O. Henry frequently employs overt exaggeration, verbal play, and socially dynamic exchanges, while Maugham utilizes understatement, ambiguity, and controlled indirection to convey psychological tension and moral complexity. Ultimately, the article concludes that Gricean pragmatics offers a highly effective framework for literary analysis, elucidating how fictional dialogue constructs layered, interpretively rich meanings. Furthermore, this framework provides a practical pedagogical tool, enabling students to explicitly connect pragmatic principles to the interpretation of character motivation and narrative structure in their analytical writing.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Human communication is rarely a straightforward exchange of literal meanings; rather, it is a complex process in which speakers frequently imply significantly more than they explicitly state (Risdiyanto, 2016; Sinha, 2021; Zhang, 2023). This discrepancy between what is explicitly expressed and the intended meaning by the speaker is referred to as implicature (Betti & Khalaf, 2021). This interplay between expressed meaning vs. implied thoughts is a fundamental area of pragmatic linguistics, especially in the genre of literary texts, where writers are known to exploit these differences for narrative depth and layered nuance (Rzayeva, 2023).

The Cooperative Principle by H.P. Grice, which consists of four maxims, namely Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner, lays down a basic principle for such implied meanings during the conversation level (Grice 1975; Hamdi, 2024). Although early uses of this framework centred on the observance of these maxims, later work has considered more closely when conversational maxims are instead non-observed (and flouted), yielding a wider range of implicatures (Hamza & Nordin, 2024). This strategic non-observance urges the consumers to derive the interpretations between these hidden messages, more than just simply reading what was said in each utterance and getting perceived as what he/she wants to pass (Yeboah, 2021).

This perspective is in accordance with reviews asserting that this type of nonconventional implicature abounds in everyday communication and different kinds of literary genres (Musa et al., 2022; Nemesi, 2025). In fact, grasping the implications of these pragmatic pragmatics states is essential for interpreting what's going on in a conversation or in prose, as fiction authors consistently do not hesitate to break these rules and use them as artistic devices (Rabab'ah et al., 2024). Breaking these maxims is a crucial tool for characterisation and thematic depth...in the world of literature. To do this, authors regularly use the strategy of "flouting" where a character overtly violates one of the maxims not to lie, but instead to invite readers to look beyond the words and see a deeper meaning or "implicature" (Chetwynd, 2016; Hamdi, 2024; Meteab, 2026; Nanda, 2019). This conscious deviation from conversational norms,

then, is calculated to produce degrees of non-literal meaning that are salvageable by contextual inference (Sinha, 2021; Bojić et al., 2023). This recognition highlights the contextual nature of conversational implicature, where meaning is likely to differ based on the conversational setting, participants involved, and topics discussed (Liliyan et al., 2023).

Hence, violating Grice's Cooperative Principle often generates conversational implicatures that can provide deeper layers of understanding towards characters' intentions, personalities, and their reflection on a work's theme (Cheng, 2025; Gong, 2023). Thus, exploring these violations of particular maxim types occurring within a fictional dialogue can reveal subtle nuances of irony/humour or dramatic tension that enhance the reader's understanding of the events in the narratives (Bojić et al., 2023; Damanik & Hanidar, 2021). Additionally, conversational implicatures are calculable (Grice, 1975); this implies that the audience can work out what the speaker intended to convey through a process of elimination based on context, assuming that she adhered to the Cooperative Principle and has thus breached an apparent maxim (Voltolini, 2021).

Recent scholarship has looked more and more at implicature in literary texts. As an example, we can mention Risdiyanto's study on Oscar Wilde's "The Happy Prince", how conversational implicatures resulting from the flouting of Grice's maxims reveal characters' submergent moral and emotional aspects (Risdiyanto, 2016). Likewise, Hamdi traces the use of maxim flouting in "The Star-Gazer" by Ali Douagi as a direct means through which irony and comedic effect are achieved in dialogues within short stories (Hamdi, 2024). Likewise, according to a study regarding Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," 54% of dialogues involved flouting Gricean maxims — the maxim of relation prevailing at 40.74%, communicating themes of loneliness and existential "nothingness" (Ikawati, 2022). The insights gleaned from the canonical short stories also corroborate the artistic value of the maxim of non-observance in literary pragmatics (Hamza & Nordin, 2024; Nemesi, 2025). By intentionally violating Gricean rules, writers are not simply making stylistic choices: they are leveraging a narrative device to inscribe implicit truths regarding the human condition or the world at large into their texts (Voltolini 2021). This is consistent with the

view that cognitive mechanisms for processing implicatures are universal, while the required linguistic, conceptual, encyclopedic and contextual knowledge for their generation and understanding may vary (widely), especially in terms of linguistic and cultural contexts (Almansour, 2024; Bouton, 1988; Kecskés, 2021; Onipede & Olofin, 2025; Younis & Dhannoon, 2025).

However, there still needs to be more research on the function of implicature in different genres of literature and media and across languages and cultures, despite some studies exploring the analysis of implicature in literary works. The void in this body of scholarship points to a need for more full-bodied studies on how conversational implicature plays out across different types of writing, perhaps particularly when it comes to short story writing, where suggestively implied meanings may hold strong narrative weight within constraints on explicit exposition. To go further, the present study endeavours to systematically investigate conversational implicatures emerging from maxim flouts in a body of contemporary short fiction, in order to provide a more concrete understanding of pragmatic devices utilised in modern literature. Hence, this study aims to record not only the cases of maxim flouting but also to characterise their given pragmatic effects and how these contribute to character development, thematic influences and reader attraction in respective books.

This study aims at classifying cases of flouting, violating and infringing Gricean maxims from the selected texts and reasoning about such indirect meanings. In so doing, this research adds to the fields of stylistics and literary pragmatics by offering a systematic approach that helps decipher character interactions. Moreover, it provides students and researchers with an understanding of how pragmatic deviations operate not just as communicative failures but constitute a delicate web of sophisticated literary devices that add considerable depth to the reader's perception of the text.

## II. METHODS

### *Study Design*

The research applied a qualitative discourse-pragmatic methodology to explore how indirect meaning is created in works of fiction. The methodology is based heavily on Grice's Cooperative

Principle, drawing from his four conversational maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner in its analysis of both dialogue and narration in literature. The study does not treat the Cooperative Principle as a hard-and-fast set of rules; rather, it takes an interpretive approach that is open to the deliberately constructed and pragmatically stratified dimensions of literary discourse. As fictional speech is often created to have symbolic, emotional, or rhetorical import rather than be a direct addition in dialogue, the study takes "maxim non-observance" as an umbrella term. This includes the blatantly flouting of maxims, where one can only be non-literal and invite interpretive inference, and hidden violations. This contextually oriented qualitative method parallels more recent developments in literary-pragmatic analysis; it focuses not on simply identifying deviations within the language, but rather unpacking their discursive function and interpretive effect within the narrative.

### *Data Collections*

The data collection process for this study is rooted in the theoretical framework of Grice's Cooperative Principle, specifically focusing on how utterances depart from the four conversational maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. To gather the data, a close reading was conducted on four purposively selected English short stories: O. Henry's *The Girl and the Habit* and *An Unfinished Story*, alongside W. Somerset Maugham's *The Happy Couple* and *The Promise*. These texts were chosen as a suitable corpus because they are rich in dialogic and narratorial passages that rely heavily on indirect communication, making them highly effective for examining pragmatic strategies in fiction.

The close reading focused on identifying passages and utterances that exhibited features such as over-elaboration, under-information, exaggeration, metaphor, marked topic shifts, ambiguity and ironic expression; these were treated as potential indicators of maxim non-observance. Instead of relying on random sampling, these excerpts were strategically selected based on two main factors: the prevalence of a pattern of non-observance in the story and the narrative significance of the passages. Excerpts were prioritised if they occurred at key moments in the narrative or contributed substantially to the development of character, plot and creating implied

meaning. This flexible methodology enabled the general principle of “maxim non-observance” to take centre stage and be applied broadly, such that both overtly defying as well as covertly breaching its corresponding clause was covered under the rule.

### *Data Analysis*

After collecting the data, a structured three-step qualitative procedure was used to analyse each example. The first step was to identify the specific Gricean maxim that had not been observed in the utterance. Second, the utterance’s linguistic characteristics were evaluated based on the pragmatic framework discussed in Once representative data had been collated, each excerpt was analysed using a systematic three-phase qualitative analytical process. First, the researcher identified which particular Gricean maxim was relevant for understanding the non-observance of the utterance. Second, we analysed the linguistic features of the utterance using the pragmatic framework of Relevance Theory by Sperber and Wilson (1995) to identify phenomena such as hyperbole, understatement, or over-elaboration (Wilson & Sperber, 2006). Ultimately, the pragmatic meaning was interpreted in the context of a more extensive narrative. In large part, this final step required identifying the resulting implicature and writing in detail about how that conversational deviance operated to develop character, emotion, irony or plot further into the narrative arc, to analyse aspects like hyperbole, metaphor, understatement and ambiguity. Lastly, the dependent meaning was ascribed in the context of narrative. Finally, the last step of identification was followed by an exploratory discussion that assessed how the implications derived contributed to characterisation in the story, irony, emotional portrayal, and, ultimately, the progression of the narrative.

After obtaining the representative data, each excerpt was analysed through a structured three-step qualitative analysis process. First, the researcher identified which Gricean maxim was being violated by the utterance. Second, using the explanatory pragma-linguistic principles presented by Sperber and Wilson (2006), linguistic features such as hyperbole, understatement, and over-elaboration were analysed in relation to the utterance. Finally, its pragmatic meaning was determined in relation to

the larger narrative. This final stage meant naming the implicature that arises and then spelling out how this breaks with conversational convention to enrich characterisation, heighten the emotional register of a narrative, or shape the ironies inherent in the story.

### **III. RESULTS**

The analysis indicates that maxim non-observance is a recurrent feature of the selected stories and more than just instances of communicative failure; it was an intentional narrative device. In “The Girl and the Habit,” an O. Henry short story, for example, the narrator describes Miss Merriam as “duchess of dollars and devoirs, countess of compliments and coin,” clearly provoking the Quality maxim to build up her profile through ludicrous titles that impart humour by being excessive while raising her status. In a similar vein, the judge in Maugham’s “The Happy Couple” exposes his ideological make-up when he suddenly moves from personal observation to grandiose generalisation regarding women’s independence by changing communicative relevance. The Maxim of Quantity appears most commonly (as other pragmatic analyses of media discourse have shown) in the examples examined. Realistically, the non-observance of Relation and Manner adds to indirectness, ambiguity and psychological tension. In each story, these pragmatic violations work to produce implicature and characterisation, as well as to frame the reader’s understanding of the narrative, consistent with recent claims that Gricean maxims are flexible and interconnected.

Table 1 presents an overview of the 18 data points considered in the analysis of selected short stories by O. Henry, and W. Somerset Maugham. It classifies every occurrence to which the author deviated from conversational maxims according to its textual appearance, whether it was an overt flout or a hidden violation of one of Grice’s maxims (Quantity, Quality, Relation, or Manner), and what pragmatic effect this had on the text. As the table demonstrates, these divergences are not communicative failures; rather, they are purposeful literary strategies that create implicature, extend characterisation, and shape how readers engage with the text. Not only that, but the summary sets out all the differences between the stylistic methods of each author: whereas O. Henry often uses Quality and Quantity to create humor and a comic

**Table 1: Summary of Maxim Non-Observance Findings**

Author	Story	Data Focus	Maxim	Type	Pragmatic Function
O. Henry	The Girl and the Habit	Data 1	Quality	Flouting/ Exaggeration	Humorous admiration / Elevating status
O. Henry	The Girl and the Habit	Data 2	Quality	Flouting/Metaphor	Interpretive framing / Praise
O. Henry	The Girl and the Habit	Data 3	Quantity / Quality	Non-observance	Emotional division / Ambition
O. Henry	The Girl and the Habit	Data 4	Relation	Flouting	Collapse of social illusion
O. Henry	An Unfinished Story	Data 5	Quantity	Non-observance	Expressive / Social imagination
O. Henry	An Unfinished Story	Data 6	Quantity	Non-observance	Longing / Class aspiration
O. Henry	An Unfinished Story	Data 7	Quality	Violation	Self-protection / Concealment
O. Henry	An Unfinished Story	Data 8	Quantity	Non-observance	Defensive / Reasserting dignity
O. Henry	An Unfinished Story	Data 9	Quality	Flouting	Emotional release
W.S. Maugham	The Happy Couple	Data 10	Quality	Non-observance	Characterization / Detachment
W.S. Maugham	The Happy Couple	Data 11	Quality	Flouting	Ideological self-positioning
W.S. Maugham	The Happy Couple	Data 12	Relation	Non-observance	Expositional / Fixed beliefs
W.S. Maugham	The Happy Couple	Data 13	Quantity	Non-observance	Interpretive framing
W.S. Maugham	The Happy Couple	Data 14	Manner	Non-observance	Withholding / Tension
W.S. Maugham	The Promise	Data 15	Quality	Flouting	Concealment via understatement
W.S. Maugham	The Promise	Data 16	Manner	Non-observance	Distancing
W.S. Maugham	The Promise	Data 17	Relation	Non-observance	Memorial framing
W.S. Maugham	The Promise	Data 18	Quantity	Non-observance	Revelation

social commentary on human nature, his stories' tendency towards exaggeration stands in contrast to Maugham's use of Manner, Relation, and Quantity to produce indirectness and ambiguity or tension through psychological few details delivered.

### Maxim Non-Observance in *The Girl and the Habit*

#### Data 1

*"She is duchess of dollars and devoirs, countess of compliments and coin, leading lady of love and luncheon."*

Data 1 uses the highly stylised phrase to describe Miss Merriam: "She is duchess of dollars and devoirs, countess of compliments and coin, leading lady of love and luncheon." In context, this use of hyperbolic figurative language can be seen neither as decoration nor as a failure of communication, but rather as fulfilling a specific pragmatic function. By blatantly violating the principle of Quality with non-literal descriptions, the narrator assumes a common knowledge in the literary world that the point of these exaggerations is not to deceive. Rather, this flagrant non-referentiality is an explicit strategy, a rhetorical trick implicitly used to express the narrator's attitude and conceptual frame. From this perspective, the narrator's communicative intention is to elevate her position at the restaurant and establish her as a figure of peculiar allure and social significance. The context analysis ultimately

reveals how O. Henry employs this pragmatic digression to manipulate the reader's reading and create a playful narrative tone whilst generating a sense of "humorous admiration" that elevates an ordinary cashier into what she describes as a "symbolic centre of attention".

#### Data 2

*"She is duchess of dollars and devoirs, countess of compliments and coin, leading lady of love and luncheon. Perhaps the brass-bound inaccessibility multiplies her charms—anyhow, she is a shirt-waisted angel."*

In O. Henry's *The Girl and the Habit*, the narrator's prolonged depiction of Miss Merriam as a "shirt-waisted angel" whose "brass-bound inaccessibility multiplies her charms" serves as an elaborate expostulation flouting the maxim of Quality. Set in the physical confines of a restaurant, the narrator employs these blatant hyperbolic and metaphorical phrases not to mislead, but rather as a tactical convenience. As more recent scholarship emphasises, this metaphorical language is not just for show; it allows the speaker to allude to attitudes, judgments and framing of concepts indirectly. By transcending literal description, this flagrant non-literality generates the implicature that the barrier dividing her from customers strengthens the cashier's appeal. Its pragmatic effect is to do more than laud the subject. It offers an interpretive frame that guides you to envision

her as a hybrid of the mundane and the exalted. And the sensibly retrospective breach is a literary effect that gracefully engages humour, admiration, and various forms of symbolic characterisation.

#### Data 3

*I'm on the a la carte to wear brown duds and goggles in a whiz wagon, or marry a duke at least. .... You owe me nine-sixty-two and a half for the week. Cut out the half if it hurts you, Hinkle.*"

In O. Henry's *The Girl and the Habit*, Miss Merriam's spontaneous litany to a restaurateur of her forthcoming adoption and prospects in general amounts simply to flouting the maxim of Quantity, together with violating Quality by way of patent hyperbole like her absurd hope to "marry a duke". Contextually situated at her departure from her familiar workplace, this excessive speech is thus not a communicative failure but a deliberate pragmatic strategy. Such verbal approximations and tropes have important expressive and social functions, allowing the speaker to communicate something about complex internal states rather than simply convey information. By giving much more detail than is strictly necessary to establish the context of her social situation and then cycling quickly through states of excitement, fantasy, regret, affection and mundane affairs of money to produce the pragmatic "deviation." This creates an implicature that she has a strong conflict between being attracted to elevated views of the lifestyle and an attachment to her familiar world. Its practical purpose is to illustrate this emotional schism and social striving. In the end, this surplus of language culminates in a stunning literary hit that encapsulates not only her class aspirations but also her emotional ambivalence in a single socially kinetic exchange.

#### Data 4

*"Cut that joshing out," she said, coolly and briskly. "Who do you think you are talking to? Your check, please. Oh, Lordy!—"*

In O. Henry's *The Girl and the Habit*, Miss Merriam replies to an Earl's smooth compliment with crisp, inappropriate cashier-lingo (as in "Your check, please") that violates the maxim of Relation. Contextually, the Earl's compliment is highbrow, and her habitual workplace response is obviously ill-fitting with the elevated setting we find ourselves in here. This purposeful pragmatic violation creates the implicature that her former,

working-class identity lingers under her recent social change. Its practical purpose is humour and revelation. And in the end, this abrupt turn of conversation produces a great literary effect: the instant collapse of the veneer of refinement, and evidence that language holds onto social memory even as a character's status in life changes.

#### **Maxim Non-Observance in *An Unfinished Story***

#### Data 5

*"You never did!" exclaimed Sadie admiringly. "Well, ain't you the lucky one? Piggy's an awful swell; and he always takes a girl to swell places."*

In O. Henry's *An Unfinished Story*, the socially dynamic exchange in which Sadie reacts to her friend's upcoming date by exclaiming, "Piggy's an awful swell; and he always takes a girl to swell places," operates as a clear non-observance of the maxim of Quantity. Situated within a background of poverty and economic constraints, Sadie's lively response is not a communicative failure but rather a deliberate pragmatic strategy. Instead of merely expressing basic surprise at the news, she goes far beyond what is conversationally needed for a simple reaction by adding unnecessary evaluative comments about Piggy and his typical habits. This perfectly illustrates O. Henry's broader stylistic tendency to employ "verbal over-expansion," in which characters say more than the situation strictly requires to allow underlying social desires and class aspirations to manifest in their dialogue. Through her repeated use of the word "swell," Sadie elevates the dinner invitation, suggesting that it is not just a meal, but an event of immense social and symbolic importance. This pragmatic deviation generates the powerful implicature that Piggy represents essential access to the luxury and status that the girls otherwise completely lack. Consequently, the pragmatic function of this verbal excess is highly expressive, serving to reveal the profound depth of the girls' shared social imagination. Ultimately, this non-observance of Quantity results in a poignant literary effect, demonstrating how the harsh realities of poverty dramatically enlarge the emotional meaning and symbolic weight of otherwise small social opportunities.

#### Data 6

*Piggy's an awful swell; and he always takes a girl to swell places. He took Blanche up to the Hoffman House one evening, where they have swell music, and you see a lot of swells."*

In Data 6, the extended conversational exchange in which Sadie excitedly details Piggy's past dates, noting "took Blanche up to the Hoffman House one evening, where they have swell music, and you see a lot of swells", operates as a clear and intensified case of Quantity non-observance. Contextually situated within a background of severe material limitation, Sadie goes far beyond what is conversationally necessary to simply acknowledge the date. Instead, she adds unnecessary anecdotal detail about Piggy's past behavior and elaborates excessively on the glamorous setting itself. Rather than being a communicative failure, this deliberate verbal over-expansion is a hallmark pragmatic strategy used by O. Henry to allow underlying social desires to surface in compressed dialogue. By intensifying her response with these excessive, repetitive details about "swells," this pragmatic deviation generates the powerful implicature that places like the Hoffman House exist in the girls' minds as almost magical spaces of refinement. Its pragmatic function is highly expressive, serving to directly highlight her intense longing, deep fascination with social prestige, and class aspiration. Ultimately, this deliberate linguistic excess results in a poignant literary effect by drawing a sharp contrast between the character's verbal richness and her actual material limitation. It effectively demonstrates how profound social desires and class aspirations fundamentally shape their ordinary, everyday dialogue.

#### Data 7

*"Tell him I can't go," she said dully. "Tell him I'm sick, or something. Tell him I'm not going out."*

In Data 7 the heartbreaking moment when Dulcie tells someone to offer an excuse, saying "Tell him I can't go... Tell him I'm sick, or something. Tell him I'm not going out," constitutes a separate breach of the Maxim of Quality. Set in the middle of a period of deep internal anguish, Dulcie proposes this trite cover story because her physical ailment is indeed contrived; she aims to hide an entirely different reason for rejecting Piggy. But rather than working purely as a successful deception, this utterance acts as a pragmatic strategy within the narrative. So by adding the ambiguous and deferential "or something," Dulcie is actively undermining her own lie, making that which she's saying into an emotionally unstable utterance. This knowing deviation from the practical leads strongly to the implication that this is not the true cause for

her refusing a man, and it can't easily be uttered. So, pragmatically, the purpose of this Quality violation is deep self-defence; Dulcie is trying to prevent an awful and painful explanation by hiding behind a thin and transparent lie, covering up a great deal of inner turmoil. In the end, this choice of diction has a powerfully grand poetic impact. In this unsteady rationale, O. Henry exposes the figure's formidable vulnerability rather than her agency; his technique cleverly displays how intense emotional unrest may break through in glimpses of that very volatility in a casual conversation.

#### Data 8

*"The horrid, impudent thing!" she said aloud. "And I never gave him a word or a look to make him think it!"*

In Data 8, the emotionally charged moment where Dulcie reacts to an invitation by exclaiming aloud, "The horrid, impudent thing! ... And I never gave him a word or a look to make him think it!" operates as a distinct failure to observe the maxim of Quantity. Contextually situated within a narrative heavily defined by the harsh realities of poverty and economic vulnerability, Dulcie's reaction is not merely a statement of fact but a deliberate pragmatic strategy characterised by intense emotional overstatement. By responding with wording that is significantly stronger than the situation seemingly requires, this deliberate verbal excess signals that Piggy's invitation has deeply wounded her sense of personal dignity. This pragmatic deviation generates a powerful implicature: she does not experience the invitation as a simple or harmless gesture of attention, but rather as a profound form of disrespect. Consequently, the pragmatic function of her overstatement is fiercely defensive, allowing her to actively reassert her innocence and establish a strict moral distance between herself and the situation. Ultimately, this failure to observe the maxim of Quantity results in a masterful literary effect. Rather than presenting a simple communicative exchange, O. Henry turns what appears to be a brief emotional outburst into a poignant revelation of the character's profound pride, deep-seated insecurity, and the highly fragile boundaries of her self-respect when forced to navigate life under severe economic constraints.

#### Data 9

*"Don't eat it if you don't want to," said Dulcie. "And don't put on so many airs and scold so with your eyes. I wonder if you'd be so superior and snippy if you had to live on six dollars a week."*

In Data 9, the achingly touching moment in which Dulcie speaks directly to a portrait of General Kitchener and says “Don’t eat it if you don’t want to ... And don’t put on so many airs and scold so with your eyes” functions as an unambiguous violation of the maxim of Quality. Contextually framed by her bleak, impoverished surroundings, Dulcie addresses the inanimate image as if it were a sentient being with judgment. This non-literality is a pragmatic move, not an outright deception nor a communication failure, made clear in the protest stage prior to the crowd work. This pragmatic implausibility generates the strong implicature. The portrait conveys her grim internal moral outrage, which she cannot freely voice due to its impracticality and the implications for social sanction. Therefore, the pragmatic function of this Quality flouting can be the release of pent-up emotion and the act of self-justification. This is a safe space for him to externalise his conscience, his frustration, and the emotional blows of having to “live on six dollars a week”. In the end, however, this deliberate linguistic choice creates such a masterful literary effect that adds another layer of humour and pathos to the story. And while there is something faintly comic about the act of scolding a picture, it most poignantly exposes her profound loneliness and grinding poverty, not to mention the desperate psychological strain that such an effort took, to just try and maintain her dignity in the teeth of a brutal world.

### Maxim Non-Observance in *The Happy Couple*

#### Data 10

*... I sentence him to a punishment he richly deserves; and when the court rises, I put the case out of my head. Nobody but a sentimental fool would do anything else.”*

Data 10 shows the chilling conversational exchange in which the judge discusses sending a man to the gallows, stating he puts “the case out of my head” and that “nobody but a sentimental fool would do anything else”, operates as a striking example of Quality-related non-observance. Contextually situated within a morally serious discussion about life and death, the judge responds with absolute calm, complete self-assurance, and an unsettling level of moral closure rather than acknowledging the emotional gravity of his actions. As a deliberate pragmatic strategy, his language goes far beyond simply answering the question; instead, he uses this excessive certainty to construct a stern,

impenetrable self-image in which compassion is actively framed as a weakness. This pragmatic deviation generates the powerful implicature that he fundamentally defines himself through rational control and severe emotional detachment. Consequently, the primary pragmatic function of this non-observance is deep characterization. Ultimately, this deliberate linguistic choice results in a quietly disturbing literary effect. Rather than relying on explicit authorial judgment, Maugham brilliantly allows the reader to infer the judge’s profound hardness directly through his own words, demonstrating how absolute verbal confidence can be used to completely suppress moral complexity.

#### Data 11

*“I have never understood,” he said, “how people presumably civilised can indulge in a habit that is not only barbarous but disgusting.”*

In Data 11, the conversational moment where the judge dismissively says of a habit, “I have never understood... how people presumably civilised can indulge in a habit that is not only barbarous but disgusting”, breaks clearly with the maxim of Quality. In its contextual setting, the judge deploys evaluative exaggeration by using phraseology that is clearly more exaggerated than the issue brought in front of the court. Instead of an accidental communicative error, this clear pragmatic rupture prolongs a subjective preference to the ultimate moral judgement. In using such extreme language, for example, calling someone “barbarous” or “disgusting,” he does not indicate a mere dislike, but tries through words to classify people in a rigid classification of civility and vulgarity. This generates a strong implicature that the speaker’s own judgment is neither flexible nor qualified. Ideological self-positioning is thus the pragmatic function of this verbal surplus. Hence, this careful refusal of critical engagement has an incisive and literary effect. Maugham adeptly employs the lexical surplus to reveal both the insularity of the speaker’s temperamental register and his hidden intolerance while keeping up a surface veneer of restrained and civilised tone with the judge.

#### Data 12

*‘She always says nobody asked her.’ ‘Stuff and nonsense! Women ought to marry. Too many of these women about who want their independence. I have no patience with them.’”*

The conversational exchange in which the judge says what he did about a certain woman

and then suddenly cries out, ‘Stuff and nonsense! Women ought to marry. Too many of these women who want their independence,’ is a clear violation of the maxim of Relation. Framed within an informal digression surveying why this person is still unmarried, the judge completely abdicates the substance of the issue. Rather than responding to the specific allegation or context of one person, he generalises it into a wider ideological point about women and social independence. For this brisk and new malleability of communicative relevance, where a subjectively true statement suddenly becomes an immutable societal law, this is not some failure of dialogue. This is clearly conversational malfeasance by design. This shift in language creates the unmistakable implication that the judge regards people solely through the prism of his rigid, hardened beliefs and sees them as no more than real, nuanced individuals. Especially, the pragmatics of this non-observance is expositional; his profoundly ingrained point of view emerges actively from the shape and flow of his absent satisfaction. Ultimately, this conscious use of language produces a deeply enlightening literary effect. Maugham cleverly uses the fluid conversation as a vehicle to demonstrate how the pervasiveness of his speaking character’s judgment and unyielding ideological premise thoroughly commandeers your thinking, exposing core bigotries by way of his incapacity to remain logically relevant regarding the subject matter within which he surreptitiously dwells.

#### Data 13

“*There’s something rather sweet about them,*’ she answered. *‘What?’ ‘They love one another. And they adore the baby.’*”

Data 13 is the conversational exchange in which Miss Gray first states, “There’s something rather sweet about them,” and then only adds to the sentiment with “They love one another. And they love the baby,” as an understandable response to a direct question, which is an overt violation of the maxim of Quantity. She conveys less information than is required in conversation by making an initial, incomplete evaluative statement. This initial vagueness is followed not so much by simple communicative failure as by a delayed clarification, which is instead deployed as a pragmatic strategy. This pragmatic deviation creates the very strong implicature that it is her feelings and her intuition which determine her judgment, not facts. It shows that she perceives the couple mostly emotionally,

only then choosing the exact details that might confirm her first, instinctive interpretation. Thus, the primary pragmatic function that this act of non-observance serves is not just reporting, but rather interpretive framing. This use of language is, in retrospect, intentional and ultimately pays off in a literary sense: Maugham takes this banal statement of feeling purposefully flimsy and uses it to set up the broader concerns in his story about illusion, projection, and the gulf between what we are outwardly showing our audience versus who we actually are underneath all that.

#### Data 14

“‘I wonder why he fainted,’ Miss Gray was saying. ‘All the windows are open, and it’s not particularly hot today.’ ‘**I wonder,**’ said the judge.”

The brief yet highly charged conversational exchange where Miss Gray wonders why a man fainted, and the judge simply responds, “I wonder”. Data 14 presents serves as a prime illustration of non-observance of the maxim of Manner via deliberate obscurity. Contextually situated within a moment of mystery, the judge’s answer is hypershort and deliberately avoids expounding its own meaning, creating an interpretive gap rather than a transparent contribution to conversation. It nicely demonstrates Maugham’s more general stylistic strategy of creating pragmatic energy not by profligacy but by pressure, in which characters compress, elide or suppress information. Because of such compressed and unspecific phrasing, this pragmatic deviation creates the strong implicature that the judge in fact knows or suspects much more than what he is willing to tell. So, the first pragmatic action that non-observance achieves is a kind of withholding; rather than attempting to explain what’s happening or propose a helpful theory of meaning, he chooses not to give meaning at all. In the end, this careful choice of language creates a masterstroke of literary effect, enabling Maugham to say so little and create so much narrative tension, while at the same time implying an entire world laden with hidden knowledge directly beneath the surface calm.

#### **Maxim Non-Observance in *The Promise***

#### Data 15

“‘Robert Canton is a stuffy old thing. I very much doubt if he’d let Barbara marry Peter if I divorced him. And for me, you know, **it isn’t of the smallest consequence: one divorce more or less...**’”

In Data 15, the narrator discusses her marriage as if it were “of the smallest consequence: one divorce more or less,” a clear violation of the maxim of Quality. Contextually situated in a discussion of the dissolution of a marriage, a life-crucial and irrevocably painful event, the narrator adopts this minimising formulation that ought clearly not to withstand literal scrutiny. Instead of simply being an error of communication, this statement is a highly conscious and effective pragmatic move. When it calls the divorce a mundane, trivial event, this pragmatically unusual move creates the strong implicature that, in being as light as possible about what is an overwhelming emotional pressure on narrators of this kind. Hence, the pragmatic significance of this restraint is shrouded amid verbal dominance. Instead of naming her pain or vulnerability directly, she disguises it completely under an elegant and socially distant phrase. This ironic linguistic finding, in turn, creates a strikingly murmurous literary effect that is also very much in keeping with the overall Maughamian style. As the line about her calmness suggests, its strength comes from how that placidity seems more fiercely defensive than sincere. By such an outrageous understatement, Maugham brings out in effect the violent emotional strain and mental tension lying beneath a perfectly restrained, polite exterior.

#### Data 16

*“Oh, I must, you know. One must behave like a gentleman.”*

Data 16 contains a single, brief but important interaction about a conversation where one person says Ah, yes, must, you know. One must act like a gentleman,” is an illustrative instance of violation of the principle of Manner. In context, the speaker actively replaces his emotional truth with an abstract, rigid code of conduct rather than state what he truly feels. Because this formulation is, by intention, official, generic and socially mediated, it operates not as a verbal gaffe but as an exacting pragmatic manoeuvre. This pragmatic deviation conveys a strong implicature that the intimate self is being intentionally avoided, and that the tone of voice will be consistent in maintaining strict role-based dignity. The result is an intensely emotional distance as the only pragmatic use of this ignorance: the character is effectively turning his intimate suffering into a completely abstract principle of behaviour. In the end, this conscious use of language creates a superbly literary effect which embodies one of Maugham’s principal

narrative strategies. He uses intense emotional pressure to become visible through severe restraint and indirection, beautifully. As Maugham movingly shows by this not following of the maxim of Manner, social formulas can stiffen and corrode the speaker. These strictures work in a double-edged sword manner. They both protect and imprison the individual. At the same time, they expose considerable psychological tension lurking under an exterior of coolness and politeness.

#### Data 17

*“To tell you the truth, that’s why I’m lunching here today. It was at this table that he proposed to me; we were dining together, you know, and I was sitting just where I am now.”*

In Data 17, the poignant conversational moment where the speaker reveals, “To tell you the truth, that’s why I’m lunching here today. It was at this table that he proposed to me; we were dining together, you know, and I was sitting just where I am now,” operates as a subtle but highly significant non-observance of the maxim of Relation. Contextually, specifying the exact table is not strictly necessary for the immediate, practical topic under discussion. However, rather than functioning as a conversational misstep or random irrelevancy, this shift away from the present topic serves as a deliberate pragmatic strategy. The speaker introduces this highly specific physical detail because the location itself carries profound symbolic relevance. By deliberately recalling the exact site of the original marriage proposal, this pragmatic deviation generates the powerful implicature that deep-seated memory actively governs the present conversation. The speaker is quietly connecting her current emotional crisis directly back to the emotional beginning of the relationship. Consequently, the primary pragmatic function of this non-observance is “memorial framing”. Ultimately, this deliberate linguistic choice results in a masterful literary effect. Maugham uses this subtle breach of conversational relevance to grant the scene immense psychological depth without ever resorting to overt sentimentality. By allowing memory to enter the dialogue so quietly and indirectly, he masterfully ensures that the underlying emotional effect becomes significantly stronger than if the character had stated her feelings plainly.

#### Data 18

*“The nuisance is that I’m just as much in love with him now as I was then.”*

Data 18 shows the striking conversational moment where the speaker finally confesses, “The nuisance is that I’m just as much in love with him now as I was then,” functions uniquely within the framework of Gricean maxims. Rather than a traditional non-observance, this utterance operates as a powerful reversal of earlier withholding, connecting deeply to the maxim of Quantity. Contextually, this sudden confession gains its intense force precisely because it arrives only after the character has engaged in a sustained pattern of restraint, minimization, and tightly controlled phrasing. Instead of being a standard conversational contribution, the pragmatic weight of this statement relies entirely on its delayed timing. By finally providing the central, raw emotional fact that had previously remained completely indirect, the speaker breaks through her own prior concealment. The primary implicature here is generated by this precise timing—the sentence matters so profoundly because it abruptly shatters the carefully constructed facade of emotional detachment she had previously maintained. Consequently, the overarching pragmatic function of this utterance is a profound revelation. Ultimately, this sudden shift results in a breathtaking literary effect, creating one of the strongest and most poignant moments in the narrative. Maugham brilliantly demonstrates how stark directness becomes intensely dramatic precisely when it follows a long period of sustained indirection. By utilizing this structural contrast, he powerfully illustrates that delayed clarity and sudden, painful honesty can carry far more emotional power and psychological impact than open, direct speech offered from the very beginning.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that maxim non-observance functions as a purposeful, significant literary device in the chosen short stories and not a failure of communication. Deviations from Gricean maxims, most notably the maxims of Quantity and Quality, are evident yet harnessed in sharply contrasting manners depending on authorial style. But across the O. Henry oeuvre, non-observance tends to manifest as over-exaggeration, comical overstating, figurative filigreed-ness and verbal expansion hogging. His language turns social situations into dynamic verbal performances that lay bare class aspirations, embarrassment and comic irony. In contrast, W. Somerset Maugham,

revels in understatement, ambiguity, restraint and garbled phrasing. As such, Maugham works intense pragmatic force through “verbal pressure” and withholding rather than verbal abundance, thereby revealing deep moral tension and hidden attachments. Although the forms of non-observance that fall under Relation and Manner are more up to interpretation, they lead to highly potent realisation moments in an interpretative activity as you parse how caught up various ideologies, unprocessed dreams, or feelings can leave people in their everyday contexts through abrupt topic-switching and implausible uses of vagueness.

These results thus reinforce the core perspective that indirectness tends to outweigh more than directness in terms of interpretive value across literary discourse (Al-Gailany, et al., 2025; Fletcher & Monterosso, 2016; Guo, 2017; Khafaga et al., 2023). Notably, our findings are consistent with recent pragmatic scholarship (Al-Hindawi & Saffah, 2019; Sousa, 2017) that argues for an expressive, social and defining rather than a simply conversational role for maxim non-observance. By considering that fictions are frequently overtly symbolic or emotionally displaced rather than solely deceptive, furthermore, this work finds resonance with that literature which calls for a less rigid distinction between overt flouting and concealed violation (Carston, 2016; Godoy & Ferreira, 2014; Locher et al., 2023; Wilson & Sperber, 2002). One overarching implication of this work is that the mere principle or concept of “maxim non-observance” is incredibly effective and possibly more valuable to literary interpretation than a narrow, analytic concentration on just “violations.” It showcases how the same pragmatic tools can yield radically different literary results depending on an author’s stylistic template. Hence, Gricean pragmatics provides a flexible, robust toolkit for students and researchers to dee(d)le on how dialogue in fictional narratives creates indirect, multi-layered meanings around character motivations (Khafaga et al., 2023; Locher et al., 2023; Merzah & Abbas, 2020; Voltolini, 2021).

The results further the development of literary pragmatics by showing that Gricean conversational maxims operate as intentional artistic resources for building irony, characterization and social critique, rather than simple communicative failures. Theoretically, the work establishes a flexible, context-sensitive “maxim non-observance”

approach as far more useful and insightful for literary analysis than a rigid or restricted focus on maxim “violations.” It shows that the same pragmatic controlling mechanisms can produce widely divergent stylistic outcomes depending on an author’s design, such as O. Henry’s comic hyperbole vs. Maugham’s psychological sobriety. From the perspectives of both its practical application and pedagogical potential, the study offers a reliable and flexible analytical framework that is ready-made to be employed by students and early career researchers. Using this Gricean approach, students can methodically recognize how meaning specific to the fictional dialogue is created in indirect yet interpretively rich ways. This allows them to write stronger coursework and essays by making clear links between linguistic theory and the practical interpretation of literature, unearthing deeper levels of character motivation and narrative structure.

The deliberately limited scope is a limitation of this study. The analysis is limited to a minuscule corpus of four short stories by just two authors, O. Henry and W. Somerset Maugham. Although this digestible corpus size was chosen to permit a disciplined, qualitative close reading, it is limited by scope only to early twentieth-century English short fiction. Consequently, the results may not adequately reflect the pragmatic mechanisms at work in diverse genres, social eras, or wider literary landscapes. To build on these findings, further research should apply this context-sensitive Gricean framework to a larger and more representative corpus of short fiction, investigating other literary traditions and historical periods. Linguistic approaches to the study of narrative styles could also be enhanced by comparative research on dialogue and narration in different literary genres where pragmatic strategies are applied at a different level as well. We encourage students and young researchers to apply this framework to the texts of their own choosing, using it for the discovery of implied connotations and for pursuing original avenues of research in new literary settings.

## V. CONCLUSION

In short, this study shows that violations of the Gricean maxims in the examined short fiction are not merely conversational ineptifications but constitute intentional and significant narrative techniques. The study reveals that the Quality and

Quantity maxims were the most noticeably non-observed, although it varied starkly according to authorial style; O. Henry regularly employs a non-observance mode to fashion hyperbole, jocular hyperbolism and socially vigorous exchanges, while W. Somerset Maugham draws on understatement, lateral thinking and vagueness to build a controlled conversation. These findings primarily imply that literary talk is not a domain in which Gricean analysis can be applied to all texts and in all contexts, because we must consider the strategic non-observation of maxims through which authors aim to dislodge, amplify, or suppress meaning for readers to then recover. Thus, this framework can show students how to write better coursework by explicitly linking how these pragmatic principles reveal more profound narrative structure and character motivation. A significant caveat of this work, however, is its intentionally narrow focus, concentrating on a small and manipulable corpus: four short stories from two early twentieth-century authors. Future studies should scale the context-sensitive Gricean model from this study up to a larger and more diverse corpus of short fiction, follow a comparative route across genres, and foster nascent researchers to independently employ this framework for original research paths in new literary contexts.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

We have read and followed the ethical requirements for publication in *Jurnal Arbitrer* and the current work does not involve human subjects, animal experiments, or any data collected from social media platforms.

## CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

**Yokubjonova Ibodatxon Ulugbek Kizi:** data collection, analyzing data, draft article, revision.

**Mukhayyo Fayzullaeva:** methodology, research idea, data analysis. draft review.

**Satullaeva Nargiza Jalgasbaevna:** methodology, data analysis, proofreading, draft article.

**Najimov Amanlik Shamshetdinovich:** data analysis, proofreading, revision.

**Sodiqova Nargiza Baxodir qizi:** references, data collection, manuscript preparation, layouting.

**Sodikova Shokhistakhon Bakhodir qizi:** data analysis, proofreading, revision.

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**DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTERESTS**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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