

Teaching, Language, and Communication: A Shortcut to Learn English Culturally from Violated Maxims in Film *Project X*

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Abstract. *Teaching language means to teach the cultural context because language is not simply about communication, but it is also about the cultural heritage brought by it. Thus, selecting media to teach it becomes important and one of the medias is film. Film can represent the social situation and it can be also simulated the linguistics situation through dialogs and communications of the characters. In Gricean conception of communication, there is cooperation principle contains of maxims; qualitative, quantitative, relation and manner. However, it is mostly violated particularly by teenagers who prefer communicating in the purpose of being cool rather than meaningful as it is represented in the film Project X. Therefore, the problem that can be formulated is about; (1) what Gricean maxims are violated in the film Project X and (2) how communication in the violation of maxim becomes a way to learn English. The used method is qualitative using the dialogs inside of the film as the data. The result of the analysis indicates that violation of maxims does not simply show the lacks of cooperation principle, but it also shows the characteristics of the speakers and the hearers. The characteristics refer to the culture products shaped from the meaning behind the language. Thus, teaching English in the film, especially with the violation of maxims shows that communication is not about the formal, structural, and grammatical language, but socially and pragmatically function.*

Keywords: Teaching, Language, Communication, Cooperation Principle, Maxims, and Violation.

I. Introduction

Language has been importance because people need to communicate one another which ultimately shape the cultural products (from meanings). Thus, in the simple form to define it, language is understood as “ a system of signs that is seen as having itself a cultural value.”[1] However, the language is varying in the world because language in each place, space, and time, is different. It is how global language is a need and the selected language is English with all influences and historical background. Therefore, to keep communicating globally without burying the local or traditional culture, teaching English for the

Rooted in the notion, expressed here by Metz, that “ visual perception varies less throughout the world than languages do”[2], but it should be known that film images have been regularly and widely proclaimed a universal language by means, everyone can enjoy it without understanding *deeply* the language as what novel has worked. Most follow George Bluestone’s clarification for ordering them, by speaking that “ ... neither film nor novel is *pure*, because the film is suffused with temporal, the novel with spatial, effects, we should not forget the priority of each. For analytic purposes, our emphases will stand. Without visual images, there would be no film. Without language, there would be no novel. [3]

Here, it is obvious to see that the relation between film and the novel is a persistent tendency not only to see novels as “ words” and films as “ images, ” but to see films as though they have no words and novels as though they have no illustrations. At this point, the *word* becomes cinematic image and undermines the word itself. The difference is tightly slight although it was criticized by J. Dudley Andrew,

one of the most widely scholars of literary film adaptation, who wrote that there were “the absolutely different *semiotic* systems of film and language,”[4] it can be images draw words (sign and meaning) while words write visuals and this also shifts the cultural movement, from books (both textual and illustration) to films. Culturally speaking, it will be largely agreed that film potentially replaces the (illustrated) book. Philip James evaluates that illustrated fiction, once a source of rivalry between all the great publishing houses and the illustrator’s main occupation, has now given way to screen fiction. [5] This replacement cannot be abandoned because it is part of modernized civilization which is instant and *easy* (in an assumption reading is harder than watching), ultimately, the prominent position of film as part of modern life cannot be marginalized although some reject it. [6]

As it has been pertained, film as the representation of social life must consist of story (through conversation or narration [7]) and it accommodates the dialogs and conversations between and among the characters. In the conversation, between the speaker and hearer, there is such a “system” that constructs the communication to be an interaction. In pragmatics term, this is what is called as cooperative principle which describes how people interact with one another. As formulated by Paul Grice, who introduces it, he states “make your contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.”[8] What Grice implies in this narrow understanding, the principle is projected as an account of how people generally behave in conversation. Jeffries and McIntyre describe these Grice’s *maxims* as “encapsulating the assumptions that we prototypically hold when we engage in conversation. [9] Hearers and speakers must connect cooperatively and jointly receive one another to be understood in a certain way. Therefore, the cooperative principle designates how effective communication in conversation is accomplished in social situations.

Nevertheless, this cooperation cannot always work well by means some aspects are missed and it results misunderstanding. This usually occurs in teenagers who prefer to show their cool sides, style or jokes rather than the understanding to each other as it is mostly practiced in the film *Project X*. *Project X* is a 2012 American comedy film directed by Nima

Nourizadeh and produced by director Todd Phillips which narrates three boys, Thomas, Costa and Dex who plan to acquire popularity by holding a party but the plan rapidly increases out of their control to be a chaos. As usual teenage social interaction, those boys with their friends have some violations in the maxims of the cooperative principles and this seems to be the characteristics of teenagers’ communication to each other. This can be also presumed that the chaotic situation is from how they take most communications as the humorous jokes so that they throw stupid things for showing off.

Based on those all, it can be enhanced that the story of the film, about the juvenile delinquency which is full of splits in the cooperative principle in communication, is fit to be seen as a media to learn English culturally through the communication inside of it.

II. Theoretical Framework

To accommodate the problems to be solved, understanding Cooperative Principle and its maxims can be very crucial because this lead the significant answer in countering the proposed problem, in which it is encountered to its violation.

2.1 Cooperative Principle(s): Reading Four Maxims

The cooperative principle can simply be divided into four maxims which designate definite rational, rational, coherent or logical principles perceived by people who follow the cooperative principle; these principles enable effective communication. Simply to take, maxim is a way to explain the connection between utterances (speakers and hearers) and what is understood from them. Cooperative principles are compulsory required for those who want to avoid the logical understanding in a conversation, so that “in a conversation, logically a speaker and a hearer should have cooperation by using four maxims, i.e., maxim of *quality*, *quantity*, *relevance* and *manner* in order that one can understand what other means.”[10] Consequently, the utterances should not mislead to convey one of the maxims in its systematical principle accordingly to stop producing misunderstands.

Maxim of **Quality** is maxim which speakers are expected to the intended meaning without being exaggerated (overstated) and lessened, for example, a man says, “I’ll call you on Saturday.” Then the woman replies, “I shall

be there as far as I know, and the meantime have a word with sister if she is free. Right, bye-bye then honey.” Maxim of **Quantity** is to make the contribution as informative as required (for the current purposes of the exchange) quantitatively, for example, a man says, “I’ll call you on Saturday.” Then, the woman replies, “I will wait for your call on Saturday, sweetheart.” Maxim of **Relation** is maxim which speakers are assumed to utter something that is relevant to what has been uttered straightly, for example, a man says, “I’ll call you on Saturday.” Then the woman replies, “Well, it will be nice Saturday.” Maxim of **Manner** is maxim the speakers to avoid ambiguity, to be clear, and be logical in the interaction; it is not to what is said but, rather, to show what is said to be said, for example, a man says, “I’ll call you on Saturday.” Then the woman replies, “I am pretty sure that you will call me. [11]

This conversation is the violation of the quantity maxim, because the required an answer with complete information of the time such as “10 o’clock” or “12 o’clock”, and etc. [12] However, the violation of the maxims sometimes occurs when the hearer does not understand with the violated utterances. [13]

2.2 The Violation of Conventional Maxims

Granting Grice who says that the maxims are necessary, he also recognizes that in some circumstance people have to do the violation or flouting as he calls them intentionally or unintentionally.[14] The occurrences of the violation of maxim above distracts the communication as it results in misunderstanding, misinterpretation, or even misconception, especially when the hearers do not response to an implication or when the addressee fails to make an inference from the addressor’s intention.[15] Consequently, it may be assumed that the hearer should have similar repertoire of knowledge, or at least, similar perspective and context, with the speaker, so that the communication can stay in the form of cooperation principle. The knowledge includes both a set of rules for interpretation of linguistic items and the knowledge of the world, to which an addresser can imply or refer.

III. Method

The used method is qualitative while the source of the data is film entitled *Project X*, directed by Nima Nourizadeh, produced by Todd Phillips, screenplay by Matt Drake and Michael Bacall,

story by Michael Bacall, edited by Jeff Groth, distributed by Warner Bros Pictures, release on March 2, 2012 in United States, duration 88 minutes. The data are collected in the form of dialog (conversation) of the characters in the film, while the steps of analysis are;

1. Identifying the utterance that violates the maxims of quality, quantity, manner and relation.
2. Explaining the violation of the maxims in those utterances
3. Describing the impacts of those violations as related to the conflicts and the climax of the story; it is when there is Thomas’ mother, Thomas’s father and Thomas’s friend(s).
4. Describing the importance of teaching English as teaching cultural from the communication in this film.
5. Making the conclusion

IV. Discussion

This part is the most influential part to see that the problems can be answered rightly, moreover in the indication between the violation of the maxims and the use of the film *Project X* in teaching language through the communications which are violated.

4.1 The Violations of the Maxims in *Project X*

To start the discussion, it should be leaned on the beginning part of the story when the film starts with Costa is filmed by Dax visits to his friend Thomas’ home. He talks to Dax about “getting his dick wet” when the mother of Thomas’ suddenly appears in the kitchen asking what Costa is talking about. At this moment, there is a conversation which indicates the occurrence of the violation of the maxim.

Costa : Dax, my dick is gonna get so wet tonight.

Thomas’ mother : Excuse me.

Costa : Shit. Um, Mrs. Kub,

Thomas’ mother : I thought you guys left already. So, what's getting wet tonight?

(*Project X*, 00:01:03, 146 - 00:01:15, 917)

Costa is talking about his pervert thought, especially about the unspoken imagination of having party. However, Thomas’ mother appears and hears what Costa is talking about. In this context, Thomas’ mother does not know what Costa is talking about. This should be situated that

Thomas' mother will be off with the members of the family, except Thomas. In her mind, the only one knows about it is Thomas and the family, thus, she does not understand why Costa talks about something pervert because there is something misleading. It goes to be distracted when Costa, who is asked by Thomas' mother (what's getting wet tonight?), says that there is nothing will happen tonight.

After that, Costa quickly goes upstairs after hearing Thomas is in the bathroom, Costa rubs toothbrush on soap and pulls Thomas' curtain off. Thomas is shocked and pulled back, after that he takes toothbrush with soap tastes and yelling Costa as a jerk. Costa speaks about Thomas' birthday in the night, says that they have to make it as an epic so that they can get girls. Costa promises to take care of everything and he hesitates to make things too exaggerative as Costa dreams about. Then, his father calls him and lays the ground rules, Thomas can have a few people at the top but only a handful, no one enters his office, messes with the pool and touches his Mercedes Benz. At this moment, once Thomas replies his father rules and he violates it as it is excerpted below here.

Dad : And I know I don't need to tell you, but my car is off limits.

Thomas : Yeah, Dad, I know.

Dad : Good. Okay. The pool heater, don't touch it. And also, guys, do not go in my office, right?

(*Project X*, 00:03:10, 023 - 00:03:20, 667)

Principally speaking, Speakers who intentionally violate the maxims usually intend to utter something for their listener to understand their most important implication. In the case of the parental case as it occurs in Thomas' father and Thomas himself, Thomas' father will most likely to know that his son understands what he (as the speaker) is truly offering good things and asking a praise by receiving the response. Therefore, cooperation should be taking place when Thomas answers it (although in less quantity), but it is no longer on the correct level of cooperation principle.

After that, Thomas blow out his birthday candles and his mother gives him the key of a minivan as a gift. They drive to school and on the way, Thomas begins to panic about the party because Costa says that he requires parties to be large so that they can have popularity because Thomas, Costa and Dax are the dregs of society, thus they want to look like the popular students.

Thomas relents and says that the party should be only 50 people max but Costa ignores the demand and sends out a mass text about a party for everyone in the class. After that, Costa and Dax see Thomas heads to speak with her admired girl, Kirby who sits on the benches. Thomas informs about the party and Kirby says that she might attend and she also mentions that she has a gift for Thomas' birthday.

Kirby : They gave you the minivan?

Thomas : For my birthday, yes.

Kirby : Your parents give the worst gifts ever.

Thomas : Where's your present?

Kirby : You serious? You haven't gotten me a present in 10 years.

Thomas : So?

Kirby : But since I am a better friend than you, I did get you something.

Thomas : Oh.

Kirby : I'll bring it tonight. Hey, I have to go run. Happy birthday, loser.

Thomas : Ow.

(*Project X*, 00:10:01, 226 - 00:10:21, 963)

Thomas has a conversation with Kirby, first Kirby talks about the Thomas' gift from his parent, the minivan. However, Thomas answers it by saying for my birth day (in repeating the context meant by Kirby), then he says "Yes." Here is the violation of what Thomas replies in this maxim, it should be answered, "Yes, it (the minivan) is from my parent." Thomas seems to violate the manner maxim by saying "for my birthday" although he actually knows the context of what he talks to Kirby. To prove it, it will be very impossible for Thomas not knowing that it is his birthday while he is spreading the information that there will be a party of his birthday. Thus, there is violation of manner maxim. But, it also occurs when Kirby casts as the speaker of answering Thomas' question. Kirby is asked about her present to Thomas and at this moment, Kirby says, "You serious? You haven't gotten me a present in 10 years." She continuously says, "But since I am a better friend than you, I did get you something." And she ends it by saying, "I'll bring it tonight. Hey, I have to go run. Happy birthday, loser." These are the answer of a question, "Where is your present?" For what it can be assumed, what Kirby utters is very ambiguous and this is how the violation of manner maxim works.

After that, Thomas, Costa and J. B. (Thomas' friend), meet the security and out there, they have violation of maxim, as it is excerpted in this conversation below.

Costa : There he is. This is Everett and his boy Tyler. They're running security for the night.

Thomas : Are you serious? Are those nun chucks?

Costa : Yeah.

(Project X, 00:19:14,945 - 00:19:26,007)

The party began and people are drinking, dancing and having fun. It increases out of Thomas' control and then someone discovers Thomas' dog, Milo, is tied on a bunch of balloons. Thomas sees this and with the help of Kirby, Milo is pulled back. People massively enter the house and at this point, the "security", Everett brothers, is not able to keep people out of the house. Thomas tries to get people out but they just cheer him when he tries to say something. He tries to exiles them in assuming no one will mess up the house a lot. In a moment, some boys are doing something with Thomas' father's car, Thomas finally speaks to them.

Thomas : Hey, thanks. Would you guys mind getting off my dad's car? It's just he'll go crazy if anything happens to it.

Boy 1 : Oh, yeah, yeah.

Boy : All right.

(Project X, 00:28:15, 360 - 00:28:22, 243)

Here, Thomas finds himself knowing his father's car is "perturbed" by some guys, then he warns them to stop doing it. However, Thomas precisely receives incomplete answer as it is expressed by two boys who says, "Oh, yeah, yeah" and one another says, "All right." Thomas asks it, "Would you guys mind getting off my dad's car?" with additional reason of why he has to demand it, "It's just he'll go crazy if anything happens to it." By keep-sighting on this conversation, this accumulates the crucial assumption that Thomas receives less information for what he expects. The boys violate the quantity maxim as it has to be in cooperation principle. They lessen the information although Thomas still understands of the lack answer the boys have uttered.

4.1 Teaching Cultural English from the Violated Maxims in *Project X*

To address the issue, contextual learning is one of the more appropriate models to be applied

in relation to contextual English language teaching. Contextual learning is based on four educational pillars proclaimed by UNESCO, namely learning to do, learning to know, learning to be, learning to live together. *Learning to do* means that learning is sought to empower participants to be willing and able to enrich the learning experience. *Learning to know* is a learning process designed by intensifying the interaction with the environment both physical, social and cultural environments so that learners are able to build understanding and knowledge of the world around it. *Learning to be* is a learning process that students are expected to be able to build their knowledge and confidence. *Learning to live together* is that learning is directed more toward the effort to shape the personality to understand and recognize diversity so as to generate positive attitudes and behaviors in responding to differences or diversity.

The view of contextual teaching learning (CTL) model is very potential to be implemented in English learning because by giving English lessons with their own mediated culture, students will be able to understand and master both components the language and culture. CTL can be seen as an educational process aiming to motivate students to understand the meaning of learning materials by relating them to the context of their daily lives (personal, social and cultural context) so that students have the knowledge or skills that can be flexibly applied or transferred from One issue or context to another issue or context. By using the film as a medium of learning English, especially the film *Project X*, which incidentally is a film about juvenile delinquency, then this will be very familiar to learners to know the culture, and how teens lie to parents, how teens are very fond of using dirty words And how they are in a very open phase of sexuality which is certainly a very appropriate comparison for English learners in a cultural context, especially in terms of the language they use; Violation of maxims. Students will find it easier to make sentences with any formula

V. Conclusion

To say it obviously, it can be known that there are a lot of things can be stated involved in the violation of maxim and the characteristics of the speakers. As it has been shown before, Thomas and friends are still teenagers and the way they have communication to each other has a tendency to be short, simple, and humorous. Everything

seems to be taken as jokes so that is why, the serious thing taken as joke affect to the bad thing as it has been resulted in Thomas' party. Therefore, violations of maxim do not simply show the lacks of cooperation principle, but it also shows the characteristics of the speakers and the hearers as it is shown the film *Project X*.

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