

Exploring Cooperative Principles in Plastic Surgery Podcast Conversations

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how Grice's Cooperative Principle and Leech's Politeness Principle function in unscripted podcast dialogues on the topic of plastic surgery. While these pragmatic frameworks have been widely applied in analyzing spoken interaction, their application in informal digital contexts such as podcasts remains underexplored. Using a descriptive qualitative method, this research analyzes transcripts from two YouTube podcast episodes: *Megan Fox: My Plastic Surgery Story* by *Call Her Daddy* and *Why We Became Plastic Surgeons* by *Dr. CalvertTV*. The findings reveal that speakers generally adhere to the maxims of quality, quantity, relation, and manner, while also applying politeness strategies including tact, modesty, and agreement. However, instances of flouting were also observed, often serving rhetorical purposes such as humor, emphasis, or the negotiation of sensitive topics. The study concludes that both Gricean and Leechian principles remain relevant in analyzing digital communication. Podcast discourse provides valuable insight into how meaning, relational alignment, and conversational coherence are co-constructed in real-time, shaped by both linguistic choices and social context.

Keywords: *Conversation Analysis; Cooperative Principles; Spoken Interaction*

A. Introduction

Conversation analysis is an interdisciplinary field rooted in sociology, linguistics, anthropology, and communication studies (Neville & Rendle-Short, 2009). It focuses on the structure, organization, and function of spoken interaction, particularly in everyday contexts. This approach provides a systematic framework for examining how meaning is created, negotiated, and interpreted through language use in social interactions (Sari et al., 2021). By analyzing naturally occurring conversations, researchers can uncover the underlying mechanisms and implicit rules that govern how people take turns, organize sequences of talk, and manage interpersonal dynamics.

In linguistics, conversation analysis plays a critical role in understanding the intricate patterns of verbal exchange. It examines not only the content of speech but also the processes through which speakers coordinate meaning, manage transitions, and

respond to one another (Tyas & Pratama, 2022). This methodological approach is particularly valuable in uncovering the dynamics of communication that are often overlooked in scripted or formal interactions. Through detailed observation of speech features, such as pauses, intonation, overlaps, and gestures, conversation analysts reveal how participants collaboratively construct coherence and meaning in real-time interaction (Afrilesa & Magria, 2024).

Key concepts in conversation analysis include turn-taking, sequence organization, adjacency pairs, non-verbal behavior, and contextual factors (Nurhayati et al., 2020). Turn-taking refers to the rules and cues that govern how speakers alternate during conversation, including how they signal when to speak, interrupt, or yield the floor. Sequence organization explores the order and connection between utterances, especially how actions like requests, responses, or clarifications unfold in logical and socially meaningful ways. Adjacency pairs, such as greetings and responses or questions and answers, highlight the predictability and interdependence of certain utterance types in interaction. While the field primarily emphasizes verbal communication, it also acknowledges the role of non-verbal cues like gestures, facial expressions, and body language, which complement and reinforce spoken messages (Kruzic et al., 2020; Pang et al., 2024). Finally, contextual factors such as speaker roles, relationships, setting, and cultural norms are essential in shaping how conversations are initiated, interpreted, and sustained (Wynn et al., 2024).

Several studies have examined the application of Grice's Cooperative Principle in various media, particularly in films and animated movies. For instance, Safitri and Ambalegin (2022) investigated conversational maxims in *Back to the Outback*, identifying 32 instances where characters observed Gricean maxims, with the maxim of manner being the most dominant and the maxim of quality the least observed. Similarly, Napitupulu and Ambalegin (2022) analyzed the *Zootopia* movie and found that the maxim of quantity appeared most frequently, while the maxim of manner was least employed. Mahfudz & Nurlaila (2022) explored maxims in *The Heat* and noted a balance between observance and flouting, especially regarding the maxim of relation, which was often violated by the main character for humorous or confrontational effect. Utomo and Ambalegin (2023), studying *Up*, highlighted how age differences between

characters influenced the way cooperative principles were maintained, with the maxim of manner emerging as the most frequently used. Another study by Samosir and Ambalegin (2022) on *Paper Towns* revealed that maxims of quantity and relation were most prevalent, with fewer examples of manner and quality. Although these studies have effectively applied Gricean pragmatics to analyze spoken interactions in films, most have focused on scripted, fictional narratives in cinematic formats. Few studies have explored how cooperative principles function in unscripted, real-life media such as podcasts, especially on sensitive or identity-related topics such as plastic surgery. The current study addresses this gap by analyzing podcast dialogues, where natural, spontaneous speech patterns more closely mirror real-life communication.

This study seeks to fill that gap by investigating the application of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle in podcast dialogues centered on the topic of plastic surgery. Through a descriptive qualitative approach and the application of conversation analysis, this research examines how participants navigate politeness, manage turn-taking, and maintain conversational coherence in a public yet informal setting. The selected data from two YouTube podcasts offer a rich resource for analyzing how speakers construct meaning, negotiate face, and engage audiences while discussing both professional insights and personal experiences. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of spoken interaction in digital communication and to highlight the continued relevance of conversational frameworks in analyzing contemporary discourse

B. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative research method to explore how the Cooperative Principle functions in spoken interaction within podcast dialogues. This method was used to describe and interpret conversational data by focusing on language use in context. The data were taken from two YouTube videos: "Megan Fox: My Plastic Surgery Story" by *Call Her Daddy*, uploaded on March 20th, 2024, and "Why We Became Plastic Surgeons" by *Dr. CalvertTV*, uploaded on December 24th, 2022. These videos were selected because they contain spontaneous and unscripted dialogue involving personal and professional narratives. The videos were accessed, downloaded, and transcribed manually to ensure accurate representation of the verbal exchanges,

including features such as pauses, overlaps, and informal language that are relevant to conversational analysis.

The data were analyzed using Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) and Leech's Politeness Principle (1983), two foundational frameworks in pragmatics. Grice's theory provided the basis for examining how speakers adhere to or flout the conversational maxims, while Leech's Politeness Principle offered a complementary lens through its maxims. These principles were applied to identify how politeness and cooperative strategies were maintained, negotiated, or violated throughout the interactions. To analyze the data, the pragmatic identity method was used to interpret utterances in relation to their communicative intent and social function, while the matching technique was employed to align the findings with the theoretical concepts. The analysis explored how speakers managed relevance, turn-taking, and interpersonal dynamics in real-time, providing insight into the pragmatic structure of digital spoken discourse.

C. Research Finding and Discussion

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of two podcast dialogues using Grice's Cooperative Principle and Leech's Politeness Principle. The interviews, "Megan Fox: My Plastic Surgery Story" by *Call Her Daddy* and "Why We Became Plastic Surgeons" by *Dr. CalvertTV*, provide a rich context for examining how conversational maxims function in unscripted, digitally mediated communication. The analysis is divided into several sub-sections, each addressing a specific maxim or principle. Detailed examples from both interviews are used to illustrate how meaning, clarity, politeness, and appropriateness are negotiated in real-time spoken interaction.

1. Maxim of Quality

The maxim of quality emphasizes the importance of truthfulness and accuracy. Speakers are expected to make contributions that are honest, based on evidence, and free from intentional falsehoods. In podcast settings where public scrutiny is inevitable, adherence to this maxim enhances credibility and trust. In the *Call Her Daddy* episode, Megan Fox addresses public criticism related to her appearance. She states:

"Some of my favorite comments are from women... 'holy shit, that is a particularly cruel thing to say, who is this person?'"

This utterance demonstrates a commitment to honesty by directly confronting the online bullying she has experienced. Rather than avoiding or deflecting criticism, Fox openly shares her emotional reactions. Her tone is reflective rather than defensive, which signals sincerity. This transparency exemplifies the maxim of quality, as she chooses to reveal personal truths without exaggeration or distortion.

Dr. Calvert, in his video, recalls a specific moment in his surgical training:

“We peeled skin graft off a bowel and we looped big, huge 28-gauge wires around the ribs... I just thought this is so cool.”

This detailed account is evidence-based and emotionally grounded, highlighting how a moment of technical engagement inspired a lifelong career. The specificity of the description (“28-gauge wires,” “skin graft off a bowel”) reinforces the factual nature of the account. The use of sensory and technical language underlines the speaker’s expertise and authenticity. Moreover, Dr. Calvert discusses complex medical procedures with both precision and enthusiasm, maintaining factual integrity throughout. His transparent narrative encourages the audience to trust his authority, thus fulfilling the expectation of the quality maxim.

The maxim of quality is not only satisfied by direct statements but also by indirect inferences supported by the context. Megan Fox’s narrative does not rely on vague generalizations or emotionally manipulative rhetoric. Instead, she contextualizes her statements with real examples, including the kind of harsh comments she has received. Even when quoting others, her intention is to highlight real issues, not to sensationalize. This aligns with Grice’s original expectation that contributions to a conversation must not only be true but made with the sincere intention of being helpful.

Furthermore, both interviewees show an awareness of the implications of dishonesty in public discourse. Their insistence on accuracy reinforces their reliability as speakers and situates them as credible narrators of personal and professional experience. For instance, when Dr. Calvert recounts the complexity of procedures like craniofacial surgery and rhinoplasty, his calm, precise language demonstrates an unwavering commitment to factual communication. This presentation of verifiable

experiences provides the listener with a sense of intellectual and emotional clarity.

2. Maxim of Quantity

The maxim of quantity requires speakers to provide the right amount of information: neither too little nor too much. In both podcast episodes, speakers strategically balance detail and brevity, offering complete yet concise contributions. In *Call Her Daddy*, Megan Fox asserts:

“Okay, so, I’m just gonna go through all the things that I’ve done because I feel like there is this stigma and I’m not gonna win.”

By explicitly announcing her intention to list procedures, she provides the audience with a structured, transparent response to rumors. She avoids vagueness and gives just enough information to fulfill the audience's curiosity while challenging public narratives. This strategic detail contributes to the clarity and credibility of her message, aligning with the maxim of quantity.

Dr. Millicent, co-hosting with Dr. Calvert, shares:

“I’m feeling pretty festive... this is the first year that I have gotten all of my Christmas shopping done in the first week of December.”

This seemingly casual remark contributes appropriately to the conversation's tone and provides context for her mood without overwhelming the listener with irrelevant information. It offers a moment of levity and personal connection while staying within the scope of conversational norms. The utterance exemplifies the maxim of quantity because it is informative, concise, and situationally appropriate. The speakers in both interviews also use anecdotal elaboration as a strategy to meet listener expectations for context. For example, when Megan Fox describes the scrutiny she faces, she does not merely say “people judge me.” Instead, she says:

“Some of my favorite comments are from women... ‘That is a particularly cruel thing to say, who is this person?’”

By quoting these comments, she provides concrete, vivid illustrations. These examples ensure that her response is not only emotionally impactful but also sufficiently informative. Similarly, Dr. Calvert enhances the listener's understanding by elaborating on the emotional and technical details of his training. He does not merely say that surgery is fascinating, but he also explains why, through specific experiences. This contributes not only to content richness but also listener engagement, showing how the maxim of quantity operates in podcast formats where audience retention depends on detailed storytelling. In both conversations, there is a conscious effort to avoid over-explaining. Neither interviewee rambles nor diverges into irrelevant areas. Instead, they rely on intuitive pacing and contextual adaptation. This mastery of quantity maxim is essential in podcast communication, where time, attention span, and thematic focus must be maintained.

3. Maxim of Relation

The maxim of relation, also known as relevance, demands that speakers provide information that is pertinent to the ongoing topic. Adherence to this maxim ensures that conversations are coherent and meaningful. In both interviews, the speakers demonstrate an awareness of relevance by connecting personal narratives to broader themes that resonate with the audience. For example, Megan Fox discusses her personal experiences with beauty standards and directly relates them to public perceptions and social discourse. She states:

“Someone like Kylie has been very transparent. That is not helping her.”

This statement is not a random observation. Rather, it draws a connection between her own situation and that of another celebrity, thereby extending the conversation from the personal to the cultural level. Her remarks underscore how public transparency about cosmetic surgery can still lead to criticism, pointing out the contradictions in how society treats women in the spotlight. This relevance heightens the impact of her narrative and helps the audience reflect on larger societal norms. Similarly, Dr. Calvert begins his discussion with a clear thematic statement:

“We are going to talk about why we love plastic surgery, why we love doing what we do.”

This declarative sentence orients the audience and sets expectations. All subsequent anecdotes and reflections remain closely tied to this opening line. Whether describing his early fascination with surgery or discussing the fulfillment he finds in transforming patients’ lives, his contributions maintain thematic focus. Even when humor or personal moments enter the dialogue, they are framed in such a way that they reinforce the topic rather than distract from it. Overall, the maxim of relation is thoroughly respected in these podcasts. The speakers do not indulge in tangents or irrelevant anecdotes. Each story, observation, or reflection serves the broader communicative goals of the conversation, whether that be to educate, share experience, or provoke thought. By grounding individual contributions in the shared topic, the speakers ensure that their discourse remains coherent, purposeful, and engaging.

4. Maxim of Manner

The maxim of manner calls for clarity, brevity, and orderliness in speech. It requires that speakers avoid ambiguity and express themselves in ways that are easy for listeners to understand. In the podcast format, where intonation, pacing, and tone replace visual cues, adherence to this maxim becomes even more essential. Throughout both interviews, speakers express themselves with remarkable clarity. Megan Fox, in discussing her experiences, structures her comments around logical sequences and rhetorical questions. For instance:

“Can we just talk about the plastic surgery since we’re on this? Let’s talk.”

This rhetorical prompt marks a clear transition in the conversation. It signals to listeners that she is shifting the focus explicitly, and the repetition underscores her readiness and transparency. There is no ambiguity in her intention, and her speech avoids overly complex or evasive phrasing. Dr. Calvert likewise employs accessible language despite discussing highly technical medical procedures. He translates jargon into layman’s terms or uses analogies that make his work relatable. For example:

“We looped big, huge 28-gauge wires around the ribs... I was just like this is so cool.”

The technical detail (“28-gauge wires”) adds authenticity, while the subsequent reaction (“so cool”) adds enthusiasm and emotional clarity. The combination creates a balanced tone that is informative yet comprehensible. In addition, conversational fillers and affirmations support the interaction by guiding the flow and signaling mutual engagement. These cues contribute to orderly discourse by confirming understanding and encouraging continuity. Moreover, the speakers avoid unnecessary repetition or digressive commentary. Their transitions between topics are smooth, and they respect turn-taking conventions. These elements enhance the intelligibility of the dialogue and model effective communication in an informal yet public setting. The adherence to the maxim of manner not only enhances listener comprehension but also promotes a sense of professionalism and mutual respect. Clarity of speech, particularly on sensitive or complex topics like cosmetic surgery, helps prevent misunderstanding and fosters trust between the speaker and the audience.

5. Politeness Principle

The politeness principle, as proposed by Geoffrey Leech, functions as a supplement to Grice’s maxims by emphasizing the social aspects of interaction. It consists of several maxims including tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. These maxims guide speakers in maintaining harmony, minimizing conflict, and showing respect. In the podcast interviews, the speakers consistently apply politeness strategies to preserve rapport, especially when addressing sensitive topics like self-image, surgical choices, and workplace power dynamics.

Megan Fox uses politeness to navigate emotionally charged content. She avoids direct confrontation and instead speaks reflectively about criticism she receives. Her use of expressions such as, *“Some of my favorite comments are from women...”* introduces sarcasm with a light tone rather than aggression. She softens the impact of her critique and redirects attention toward societal issues rather than individuals. This is an example of the tact maxim, where offense is minimized while still allowing space for self-

expression. Likewise, Dr. Calvert and his co-host Dr. Millicent demonstrate politeness in their collaborative tone. They consistently affirm each other's statements using encouraging responses such as:

"That is very impressive."

"That's pretty cool."

These affirmations perform the approbation maxim—they praise and elevate the interlocutor. Rather than interrupt or compete, both speakers show generosity in turn-taking and support. This helps reinforce their mutual respect and professional camaraderie, making the interview both informative and pleasant to follow.

6. Maxim of Appropriateness

The maxim of appropriateness refers to the ability of speakers to adjust their language, tone, and content according to context, setting, and audience. In podcasts, where the audience may include laypeople, experts, critics, and supporters, appropriateness becomes essential for engagement and clarity. In *Call Her Daddy*, Megan Fox speaks candidly about personal topics while remaining conscious of her audience. Before delving into her cosmetic history, she asks:

"Can we just talk about the plastic surgery since we're on this? Let's talk."

This introduction is conversational yet tactful. She acknowledges the sensitivity of the topic and invites the audience to engage with her voluntarily. By framing it this way, she reduces discomfort and signals that the content is being shared openly but not defensively. Similarly, Dr. Calvert discusses medical procedures without resorting to graphic or inaccessible language. Although he includes details such as "28-gauge wires" or "rhinoplasties," he balances this with relatable commentary and light humor. This dual approach maintains professionalism while ensuring lay audiences remain comfortable and informed.

D. Conclusion

This study of podcast interviews revealed that effective spoken interaction in digital media relies on both Grice's Cooperative Principle and Leech's Politeness Principle. The speakers demonstrated adherence to conversational maxims, such as quality, quantity, relation, and manner, while also using politeness strategies to maintain rapport, manage sensitive topics, and navigate complex social dynamics. Through truthful, relevant, and clearly expressed contributions, supported by affirmations, hedging, and emotional tone, the participants built trust and sustained engagement. These patterns reflect a high level of pragmatic awareness, especially in emotionally charged or identity-related discussions such as plastic surgery or office politics. Future research could explore a wider variety of podcast genres or include multimodal analysis of video content to further investigate how visual cues, tone, and gesture interact with linguistic principles in shaping audience perception and conversational effectiveness.

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