

# **VIOLATING MAXIMS IN PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE BETWEEN PRESIDENT OBAMA AND REPUBLICAN NOMINEE MITT ROMNEY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study deals with the types of maxims violation in Presidential Debate between President Obama and Republican Nominee Mitt Romney on October 3, 2012. The objectives of study are to describe the violated maxim, to derive the dominant violated maxim and to reason for the use of dominant violated maxims in presidential debate. The data is the transcript of the presidential debate and taken from the internet. This research is conducted by using descriptive qualitative design. It is found that there are 65 utterances violated by the candidates. The results of data analysis show the total numbers are: maxim violation of quantity (67.69%), quality (23.07%), relevance (6.16%), and manner (3.08%). The most dominant type of maxim violation is quantity because the candidates give the information as much as possible to clear up and ensure the listener(s) that one of them is the best choice to be the next American president.

**Keyword** : *Gricean Maxims, cooperative principle, violating maxims*

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# **INTRODUCTION**

## **The Background of The Study**

Language is an important part of our lives, without using language we could not understand each other because language is used to communicate and convey meaning from one person to the others.

Semantics and pragmatics are discussed about language meaning. Semantics is a study of real meaning in language. However, not all the meanings of a language are explicit or have real meaning; some of them are implicit. Pragmatics is a study of contextual (implicit) meaning. Contextual meaning can be defined as what people mean in a particular context and how the context influences what is said (Yule, 1996:3). It means that the meaning of a language cannot be predicted directly by using linguistics knowledge alone but we have to connect it with the external world while communicating.

Communication itself is divided into two i.e. written and spoken. A spoken language is a language that we mostly use in daily communication, which must consist of speaker(s) and listener(s). The speaker(s) and listener(s) who are involved in a conversation are cooperating each other (Yule, 1996:35). The speaker(s) and the listener(s) are said to have fulfilled the Cooperative Principle which is known as the rules of communication when they manage to achieve a successful and ideal conversation.

Language is used in many aspects of communication activity. One of them is language of politics. Language of politics can be defined as the language of power, which leads to the decision-making. It covers battle cry, verdict and sentence, statute, ordinance and rule oath of office, controversial news, comment, and debate (Lasswell, 1965:8).

Debate is one of types of public speaking; it is a discussion between two sides with different views. A debate which is done by a politician is called as a political debate. The politicians have the different way of speaking, they tend to use the long-winded language and it is not straight to the point sometimes. Their language must show that they have a great power and an ability to control people.

The democratic politics now allow people to choose their leaders. There are a lot of ways that government does so that people can know well the candidate's of leadership in the coming period, one of them is to hold a presidential debate. When responding the questions which are asked by a moderator, the candidates will probably not respond directly to the subject matter because the public is watching every word they say. However those kinds of things can be said as breaking the rule of communication or the other word we say it as a "violating maxims".

There are some reasons why people tend to violate maxims or break the rule of communication i.e. they may hide the truth, save face, satisfy the hearer, cheer the hearer, build someone's belief, and convince the hearer (Christoffersen in Tupan and Natalia, 2008: 66-67).

This research has also been done by Batubara (2010), she has written a thesis which had a title "A Study of Maxim Violations in the Utterances of President Candidates in President Debate 2009" which discussed about the violation maxim which were done by the president candidates and described the implication of the dominant maxim which are violated in their utterances in President Debate 2009. Besides that, Zebua (2010) has written a thesis which had a title "Maxim Violation in Humors in Reader's Digest" which discussed about the types of maxim which were violated in order to achieve humorous purpose by giving unexpected and surprised effects to the readers of Reader's Digest online magazine.

Politics is crucial. This research is aimed to find out the violating maxim which is done by the candidates in first presidential debate in Denver, America. By doing this research, it is expected that the public especially the Indonesian youths to understand how the politicians speak because it is important for youths to be introduced to the real politics so that in the future, this nation will not be easily fooled by all the nice words uttered by the politicians while campaigning.

This research is done to get the answer of the questions: (1) what kinds of maxims are violated in presidential debate between President Obama and Republican Nominee Mitt Romney, (2) how maxims are violated in presidential debate between President Obama and Republican Nominee Mitt Romney, and (3) why it is dominantly violated in the presidential debate between President Obama and Republican Nominee Mitt Romney.

There are four types of maxims according to Grice (1975), there are maxims of: (1) quality that means “be truthful”, (2) quantity that means “be informative”, (3) relevance that means “be relevant”, and (4) manner that means “be perspicuous”.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study is conducted by using descriptive qualitative design but it does not intend to find out a new theory but to describe why the certain types of maxims are used in this presidential debate. Arikunto states that the research design is flexible with the steps and previous unpredictable results, and then it can be known clearly and firmly after the research accomplished (Arikunto, 2006:13)

### **Subject**

The sources of data were from the script of the presidential debate between President Obama and Republican Nominee Mitt Romney moderated by Jim Lehrer on October 3, 2012 in Denver which was taken from the internet and limited to the dialogs which contain the violation of maxims.

### **Data Collection**

Documentary technique is used to collect the data of this study. Documentary technique means reading all references, studying, and analyzing some references related to the study. In this case, the data of supporting information on various sources are taken from the dialogs between the moderator, President Obama, and Mitt Romney in presidential debate which has been transcribed into written language.

### **The Technique for Analyzing Data**

The data was analyzed by descriptive technique that finds the material about conversational maxims in the presidential debate between President Obama and Republican Nominee Mitt Romney, by the following techniques.

Firstly, reading the script of presidential debate between President Obama and Republican Nominee Mitt Romney that consists of violating maxims. Secondly, classifying the data into each type of maxims, then analyzing the data which have been identified and converting the occurrences into the percentage. After that, deriving the dominant of violating maxims in presidential debate between President Obama and Republican Nominee Mitt Romney and finally finding the reason(s) why the dominant violating maxims can be occurred in presidential debate between President Obama and Republican Nominee Mitt Romney.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Qualitative Method**

After collecting the data, the data were analyzed based on the steps. After analyzing the data, it was found that there were 65 utterances of the two president candidates violated maxims. Here are some data of the president candidates' utterances which violates maxims.

#### *Maxim Violation of Quality*

The candidates may violate maxim of quality because they say anything they say to be false and lack adequate evidence or tell a lie which was mostly done consciously to hide the truth, make a joke or satire the interlocutor. It could be an irony, metaphor, or sarcasm. There are 15 utterances which violated maxim of quality in the presidential debate. Here is the example.

“And congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your anniversary. I'm sure this was the most romantic place you could imagine here — here with me, so I — (laughter) — congratulations.” (See Appendix A p.46)

Mr. Romney violated maxim of quality because he made a joke and mocked Mr. Obama at the same time. The day when the presidential debate was held was Mr. Obama's anniversary. He made an ironical utterance by saying that the place where they had for presidential debate was the most romantic place to celebrate Mr. Obama's anniversary. What he had in his mind was actually that this was not the most romantic

place for Mr. Obama to celebrate his anniversary with him in Magness Arena at the University of Denver to have a presidential debate for the next general election.

### *Maxim Violation of Quantity*

The candidates may violate maxim of quality because they talk too much, too short and not to the point. In this case, in political world, we can say that there are so many politicians do this. The case is just the same as what the researcher found in the presidential debate. They did it to blur the information or to make the information clearly to be understood or to deliver their ideas politely. There were 44 utterances which violated maxim of quantity done by the two president candidates. Here is the example.

“..... I think we've got to invest in education and training. I think it's important for us to develop new sources of energy here in America, that we change our tax code to make sure that we're helping small businesses and companies that are investing here in the United States, that we take some of the money that we're saving as we wind down two wars to rebuild America and that we reduce our deficit in a balanced way that allows us to make these critical investments..... ”

Mr. Obama violated maxim of quantity because he talked too much so the contribution be more informative than is required. The moderator asked him about how he would go about creating new jobs in America in order to maintain the prosperity of American people. His main ideas were to invest in education and training, develop new sources of energy, and ensure the tax code that will help the small businesses and companies, and also to rebuild America and to reduce deficits. However, instead of saying everything straight to the point, he chose to add some more information more than it was required in order to clear up and deliver the information politely.

### *Maxim Violation of Relevance*

The candidates may violate maxim of quality because they make a conversation unmatched with the topic because they may hide and avoid talking about something or make a fun. There are 4 utterances which maxim of relevance is violated by the two president candidates. Here is the example.

“Well, we've had this discussion before.”

Mr. Obama violated maxim of relevance because he made a conversation unmatched with the topic which has been asked by the moderator. He was asked about the idea about how to reduce the deficit, but he did not answer the question appropriately because he might be misunderstood with the question which was given by the moderator so that it made the conversation irrelevant.

*Maxim Violation of Manner*

The candidates may violate maxim of manner because they make obscurity of expression, unnecessary ambiguity, and exaggerates thing. This may happen because the candidates try to trick the listener(s) or viewer(s) or even try to save their face. There are 2 utterances which is violated by Mr. Romney. Here is the example.

“In some places, yes, in other places, no.”

Mr. Romney violates maxim of manner by making an obscurity statement and unnecessary ambiguity so the listeners might not easily to understand his point. He should give a clear statement so that the listener(s) or viewer(s) could understand his point.

**Findings**

After analyzing the data and determining the categories of maxim violated by president candidates and their occurrences in the Presidential Debate between President Obama and Republican Nominee Mitt Romney on October 3, 2012 in Denver. The findings are presented as in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. The Types of Maxim Violated by the Two President Candidates**

Violation to Maxim of	President Candidates		Number	Percentage
	Barack Obama	Mitt Romney		
Quality	7	8	15	23.07
Quantity	21	23	44	67.69
Relevance	2	2	4	6.16
Manner	0	2	2	3.08
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 show that the two president candidates violate almost all types of maxims. They dominantly violate maxim of quantity (44 utterances, 67.69%), because the two president candidates give some extra information to response the moderator's question, it violates maxim of quantity to give the contribution more informative than is required. Then it is followed by maxim violation of quality (15 utterances, 23.07%), relevance (4 utterances, 6.16%), and manner (2 utterances, 3.08%).

Violating maxim of quantity has functions to blur the information or to make the information clearly to be understood or to deliver their ideas politely. However in this case, they do it for the latter purpose. The reason is to ensure the listeners that one of them is the best choice to be the next American president.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **Conclusions**

After analyzing the data, it can be concluded that: Firstly, there are four kinds of maxims which are violated by the two president candidates in the presidential debate on October 3, 2012 in Denver i.e. maxim of quality, quantity, relevance, and manner in responding the questions given by the moderator. It is caused by some factors such as the president candidates give some extra information more than it is required, use the sarcastic utterances to satire the opponent, say the utterances which have lack of evidences, make conversation unmatched with the topic, and say an obscurity of expression and unnecessary ambiguity.

Secondly, the maxim which is dominantly violated in the presidential debate is maxim of quantity (44 utterances, 67.69%) because the two president candidates talk too much by giving some extra information and make the contribution more informative than it is required, then it is followed by maxim violation of quality (15 utterances, 23.07%), relevance (4 utterances, 6.16%), and manner (2 utterances, 3.08%).

Thirdly, the reason that they dominantly violate maxim of quantity is to clear up the information which they deliver in presidential debate in order to give the information as much as possible to ensure the listener(s) or viewer(s) that one of them is the best choice to be the next American president.



## Suggestions

Some suggestions are: firstly, it should be better for the president candidates to give the contribution as informative as it is required so that the explanation is not going too far away from the questions given by a moderator and they will not violate the maxim or break the rule of communication.

Secondly, for the reader who is attracted on linguistics field can do a research further which has a connection with the conversational implicature especially on cooperative principle in so many different contexts such as a movie, radio program, literary work, and many others since there are so many ways of communication in our lives which is interesting to discover.

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