

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL LIVE DEBATES BETWEEN DONALD TRUMP AND JOE BIDEN: A CASE STUDY OF GRICE'S COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 27/3/2024	The paper presents the results of a study conducted with the aim of identifying the non-observance of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and finding out the underlying motives for this non-observance by two American presidential candidates namely Joe Biden, the Democratic nominee, and Donald Trump, the nominee of the Republican Party. The data were collected from two downloaded videos of the presidential debates in 2020, and were then categorized and analysed using Grice's Cooperative Principle. The findings show that both Biden and Trump did not observe all the maxims, in which the rate of violation is much higher than that of flouting, and Trump more frequently failed to adhere to the maxims than Biden. The maxims of quantity and relation were the most frequently broken, whilst the maxim of manner was the most frequently observed. In conclusion, Donald Trump and Joe Biden consistently failed to observe Grice's conversational maxims and took use of this non-observance to portray themselves favorably and the other unfavorably in an effort to gain the audience's support.
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PHÂN TÍCH CÁC CUỘC TRANH LUẬN TỔNG THỐNG TRỰC TIẾP GIỮA DONALD TRUMP VÀ JOE BIDEN: MỘT NGHIÊN CỨU ĐIỂN HÌNH VỀ NGUYÊN TẮC CỘNG TÁC HỘI THOẠI CỦA GRICE

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO	TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài: 27/3/2024	Bài báo trình bày kết quả của một nghiên cứu được thực hiện nhằm mục đích xác định việc không tuân thủ Nguyên lý cộng tác của Grice (1975) và tìm ra động cơ cho việc không tuân thủ này của hai ứng cử viên tổng thống Mỹ là Joe Biden, ứng cử viên Đảng Dân chủ và Donald Trump, ứng cử viên Đảng Cộng hòa. Dữ liệu được thu thập từ hai video tranh luận tổng thống vào năm 2020, được phân loại và phân tích dựa trên Nguyên lý cộng tác của Grice. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy cả Biden và Trump đều không tuân thủ tất cả các nguyên tắc, trong đó, tỷ lệ vi phạm cao hơn nhiều so với tỷ lệ coi thường, và Trump thường xuyên không tuân thủ các nguyên tắc hơn là Biden. Các nguyên tắc về lượng và quan hệ không được tuân thủ nhiều nhất, trong khi nguyên tắc về cách thức được tuân thủ thường xuyên nhất. Tóm lại, Donald Trump và Joe Biden liên tục không tuân theo các nguyên tắc hội thoại của Grice và lợi dụng sự không tuân thủ này để thể hiện bản thân một cách có lợi và đưa người kia vào thế bất lợi nhằm giành được sự đồng tình của khán giả.
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TỪ KHÓA

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1. Introduction

The presidential debate is part of a series of campaigns by presidential candidates to showcase their self-image and efforts to garner sympathy from potential voters. The American presidential debate is one of the most prominent political events in the world. As a superpower, the United States, as well as its president, has become the centre of global attention. This is understandable because as a number one country in the world, the political policies of an American president will have a great impact on many other countries, both their allies and their adversaries.

The U.S. presidential candidate's debate was broadcasted for the first time on television in 1960, among the young democratic senator John F. Kennedy and Republican vice president Richard Nixon. According to History.com [1], a reputable American television network, the Kennedy-Nixon debate had an enormous impact on American political history. The polls showed that half of the voters were influenced by the event and ushered in a new era that puts the public image and media exposure as one of the keys to a successful political campaign.

The hypothesis of this study refers to the belief that every presidential candidate has his own style and his own way of inviting the public to vote for him. This is why our objective is to draw on Grice's [2] Cooperative Principle (henceforth Grice's CP) to analyse the style adopted by the two candidates within the framework of a formal political debate. The 2020 presidential debates in the United States attracted the attention not only from the Americans but from the audience all over the world because of its interesting features. The topics addressed in the discussions are of public interest, and the candidates do not know the questions beforehand. Therefore, their responses are more useful to the public to learn more about them. Unlike the previous presidential elections, this was the competition of a typical political candidate and a typical business candidate.

There have been a number of studies investigating the use of Grice's maxims in conversation in general and other types of discourse in particular such as movies and interviews [3]-[6]. For example, Hossain [3] and Joyce [4] agreed that in real-life conversations, speakers often fail to observe Grice's maxims. This failure is realized in 5 different ways: flouting, violating, infringing, opting out, and suspending the maxims. They both argued that although Grice's theory had received much criticism, Grice's maxims still play important role in everyday conversations.

With regards to exploring Grice's maxims in political speeches and presidential debates, there have also been several studies [7]-[11]. For example, Al-Qaderi [7] stated that politicians often flout, either consciously or subconsciously, Grice's maxims in their speeches. When dealing with applying these maxims in presidential debates, Laila [8] worked on the 2019 Indonesian presidential debates. The author found out that the two maxims that were frequently violated were the maxim of relevance and the maxim of manner. On the other hand, the maxim of quality was mostly fulfilled by the Indonesian presidential candidates.

Khoirunisa and Indah [11] also conducted a study on how Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump made their argumentative statements during their debates in 2016. The results showed both similarities and differences between the two presidential candidates in terms of their formulation of their argumentative statements.

Having a closer look at the 2020 American presidential debates, a study by Nguyen and Sawalmeh [12] explored Donald Trump's strategies in his first presidential debate. However, the authors focused only on Trump's language and they investigated the issue from Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) rather than from Grice's CP. The authors discovered that Trump applied four strategies in his debate namely self-acclamation, describing opposing candidates through the verbal attack, self-rectification or image-enhancement through the defence against opposing candidates' blaming argument, and extra-vocalization.

However, studies exploring Trump's and Biden's presidential debates looking at both candidates' language are few. One of them is by Sarticka [13] which analysed critically the language used by these two candidates in the 2020 presidential debate. The results indicate that both the candidates

mock each other a lot by using sarcasm. Nonetheless, Sarticka's study did not look at the two candidates' argument from the perspective of Grice's CP, but from the perspective of CDA.

As can be seen, although some studies have been carried out on the Grice's CP in presidential debates, there is a lack of knowledge on the realisation of the conversational maxims and its functions in relation to the 2020 American presidential debates between Donald Trump and Joe Biden.

To bridge this gap, our study, the result of which is presented in this paper, aims at revealing the degree of the non-observance of Grice's CP by both Donald Trump and Joe Biden, and finding out the functions of those non-observances. The appropriateness of this case to the analysis stems from the observation that these two candidates, whether consciously or unconsciously, have repeatedly failed to follow Grice's CP. More specifically, the study was implemented to answer two research questions:

1. How did the two candidates, Donald Trump and Joe Biden, obey to observe Grice's CP?
2. What can be the pragmatic functions behind the nominees' non-observance of Grice's CP?

2. Research methodology

2.1. Research design

In conducting this study, we utilised a combination of descriptive qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse the realisation of Grice's CP in the debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden.

The qualitative strand was the main one and was used to give description of the non-observation of Grice's CP by each of the two presidential candidates. In qualitative research which involves explanation and interpretation, it can be said that the researcher plays an important role and is considered as the main research tool. Indeed, we play a major role in all processes from research design, data selection and collection, data analysis, interpretation and conclusions. Vanderstoep and Johnson [14] regard the researcher himself as an interpreter of the gathered texts.

The quantitative method was used as supplementary tool to analyze and make a comparison between the candidates in terms of their non-observance frequency.

2.2. Source of data and data analysis

This study revolves around two presidential debates of the United States presidential election of 2020 represented by the candidates of the two major political parties, Donald Trump - the Republican and Joe Biden - the Democratic. We collected the data from the official website of the "New York Times" [15]. Although there are a wide range of websites including the content and transcriptions of the debates, this website is highly reliable because it is the official website of the White House and is owned by the United States Government.

The debate includes three rounds. The first round took place on September 29, 2020. The second round, which was scheduled for 15 October 2020, was cancelled because the presidential candidate – who is also the contemporary President - Donald Trump, was tested positive for Covid-19 two days after the first round of the presidential candidates' debates. The final round of presidential debate was held on October 22, 2020. The presidential debates were divided over three different meetings, with about two weeks between them before the election on the 3rd of November 2020. Upon entering the debate, Biden had a significant and persistent lead in the polls. Biden's lead was reinforced by a lack of money in Trump's campaign, with Biden's campaign donations significantly improving.

The data analysis procedures in this investigation was carried out as follows:

- First, the raw data was identified and classified following Grice's cooperative principle: observance or non observance, types of flouting and violation of Grice's maxims, strategies, functions of the appliance.

- Second, the pursued data were carefully analysed to find out the answer for the research questions.

- The researchers discussed the outcome of the data and drew the conclusion based on the findings.

2.3. Analytical framework

The analysis of data was based on Grice's CP which includes 4 conversational maxims:

a. **Maxim of Quantity:** Make your contribution as informative as is required. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

b. **Maxim of Quality:** Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

c. **Maxim of Relation:** Be Relevant.

d. **Maxim of Manner:** Avoid obscurity of expression. Avoid ambiguity. Be Brief. Be orderly

In real-life conversations, however, people do not often follow one, two, three or all those four maxims. There are 5 types of non-observance of Grice's maxims.

a. **Violating:** Violating a maxim is the kind of non-observance by which the speaker misleads the hearer by quietly and unostentatiously break the maxim. S/he knows that the listener hardly knows the truth and only understands the superficial meanings of words [16].

b. **Flouting:** According to Thomas [17 p. 65], flouting a maxim is when "speaker blatantly fails to observe a maxim at the level of what is said, with deliberate intention on generating implicature". That is, the speaker fails to observe a maxim but has no intention of misleading or deceiving the hearer. S/he wants to draw the attention of the listener and expect him to recognise the implied meaning.

c. **Infringing:** According to Thomas [17, p. 74], a speaker infringes a maxim when s/he "has an imperfect command of language and with no intention of generating an implicature or deceiving". This action is often due to weak language proficiency, nervousness, drunkenness, or excitement.

d. **Opting out:** This action refers to the fact that a speaker does not want to cooperate in conversation so s/he shows unwillingness to continue the conversation [17, p.75].

e. **Suspending:** This disobedient action refers to the fact that there is no need to require the interlocutors to fulfill the maxims [17, p.76].

3. Results and discussion

The study reveals Grice's conversational maxims in "The 2020 presidential live debates between Donald Trump and Joe Biden" were not always complied. Through the process of data collection and analysis, the study has found that both Trump and Biden did not always follow the maxims. However, they both breached the maxims only in respects of violation and flouting. There were no cases where one of the candidates committed opting-out, infringing, or suspending a maxim.

3.1. Maxim violation

Both Trump and Biden frequently violated all the four conversational maxims.

3.1.1. Trump's violation

Trump's violation was committed in all the four maxims namely quantity, quality, relation, and manner.

In quantity maxim, he deliberately controlled conversations as he wished by ways of either providing too little or too much information. For example, when the moderator asked Trump to tell him exactly when a vaccine would be available, rather than focusing on answering the question, he roundabout said there had been some discussions with vaccine companies and repeatedly stressed that "it's a very political thing". With this answer, too little information was delivered. On the other hand, on some other occasions, he provided too much information. For example, instead of answering exactly the moment the vaccine was available, he said, "Well, we're going to deliver it right away. We have the military all setup. Logistically, they're all set up. We have our military that delivers soldiers and they can do 200,000 a day. They're going to be delivering" (Trump, Debate 1).

The second maxim – quality – was also violated frequently by Trump. He delivered many controversial talks in his contributions. For instance, Trump repeatedly asserted during the first debate that his administration's response to the coronavirus pandemic was exceptional, claiming that he took early action to impose travel restrictions from China, collaborated with states to acquire equipment like ventilators, and pushed for the development of therapies and vaccines. However, according to the Business Insider report, the president frequently downplayed the virus's severity in the beginning, when it could have been managed, and disregarded or refused recommendations from his top health professionals. Because of failing to provide enough convincing evidence to support these statements, he broke the quality maxim.

The maxim of relation, which requires the interlocutor to contribute properly relevant dialogue on his or her part, was also violated. During the debates, Trump quickly switched between the issues being addressed in the segment and any others he felt like discussing. For instance, when questioned about his race, Covid-management, the environment, or taxes, he shifted the conversation to one of his favorite subjects, such the economics or the healthcare system. Or when a question about the future was posed, he developed his argument by portraying a depressing picture of the Obama administration. This may have happened as a result of the fact that his opponent was a part of the Obama administration, which enabled him to portray Biden negatively.

Finally, the maxim of manner also received many instances of violation. Trump frequently lengthened out his response with repeated sentences which made the discussion center on the bushes and prevented the general audience from making a clear connection. For example, when the moderator Chris Wallace asked him to confirm where he thought Justice Barrett would take the court, he gave such a vague response:

Thank you very much, Chris. I will tell you very simply. We won the election. Elections have consequences. We have the Senate, we have the White House, and we have a phenomenal nominee respected by all. Top, top academic, good in every way. Good in every way. In fact, some of her biggest endorsers are very liberal people from Notre Dame and other places. So I think she's going to be fantastic. (Trump, Debate 1)

3.1.2. Biden's violation

Similar to Trump, Biden also committed a number of violation cases in all the four maxims.

With regards to the maxim of quantity, Biden often avoid answering difficult questions that threaten his image or could bring him to the brink of criticism. A clear example of Biden's violation of the quantity maxim in the first debate was in the race segment. The moderator - Chris - asked Biden if he believed there was a separate but unfair system for Black people in the US and what his solution to the injustice system (Debate 1, 2020). Although he answered "Yes" directly to the question, he then mentioned unnecessary information about cops and finding bad cops. Like many other answers, he added more details to involve Trump in the issue, and did not propose specific solutions.

Concerning quality maxim, although he had a somewhat more responsible attitude than Trump, it was evident that Biden did not always adhere to the quality maxim in all of his responses. In fact, he sometimes gave false information. For instance, during the first debate, Trump accused Biden of being responsible for the largest imbalance with China in history, and Biden replied:

He's done very little. His trade deals are the same way. He talks about these great trade deals. He talks about the art of the deal. China's perfected the art of the steel. We have a higher deficit with China now than we did before. We have the highest trade deficit. (Biden, Debate 2)

According to Business Insider [18], this is a false accusation. Furthermore, The New York Times reported that between 2018 and 2019, as a result of Mr. Trump's trade battle, the US's trade deficit with China "reduced sharply."

The maxim of relation was also violated by Biden. He skillfully directed the audience toward the information and debate that contributed to his establishment of his favorability. For example,

rather than addressing Trump's claims about his taking money from Russia, China, and Ukraine when he was vice president, he purposefully remarked of his late son Beau as follows:

And speaking of my son, the way you talk about the military, the way you talk about them being losers and being and just being suckers. My son was in Iraq. He spent a year there. He got the Brown Star. He got the Conspicuous Service Medal. He was not a loser. He was a Patriot and the people left behind there were heroes." (Biden, Debate 1).

By praising his late son, whom Trump alluded to receiving large sum of money from China, Biden could deceive listeners.

Finally, when it comes to the maxim of manner, Biden frequently gave clearer responses than Trump did by providing reasoning and evidence. However, his violation is unavoidable. In fact, when being asked repeatedly whether he would support the appointment of new justices to the Supreme Court, Biden gave a very vague answer:

Whatever position I take on that, that'll become the issue. The need for American citizens to speak up is the issue. Voting should be done. Voting has begun. Vote and express your opinions clearly to your senators. (Biden, Debate 1)

3.2. Maxim flouting

The two candidates not only violate the maxims, but also frequently flout them.

3.2.1. Trump's flouting

Firstly, Trump systematically disregarded the maxim of quantity. He mainly broke the rule in order to promote and protect his reputation. One typical example of the failure to observe Trump's quantity maxim was shown in the second debate when the moderator brought up the topic of climate change. Instead of giving sufficient information, he responded with abundance of unnecessary details, violating the quantity maxim:

I think a lot of things do, but I think to an extent, yes. I think to an extent, yes, but I also think we have to do better management of our forest. Every year I get the call. California's burning, California's burning. If that was cleaned, if that were, if you had forest management, good forest management, you wouldn't be getting those calls. In Europe, they live they're forest cities. They call forest cities. They maintain their forest. They manage their forest. (Trump, Debate 2)

Secondly, Trump sometimes exploited rhetorical structure of flouting quality maxim to gain his persuading goal. He used different rhetorical strategies such as irony, hyperbole, litotes, metaphor or rhetorical question. For instance, when debate got into the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, Biden criticized Trump by saying "more will die unless Trump gets smarter soon", and Trump responded by saying "Did you use the word smart? You graduated either the lowest or almost the lowest in your class. Don't ever use the word smart with me". In fact, Biden did not graduate as the lowest in his class and Trump had no proof for that. His statement was therefore unreliable.

Thirdly, Trump occasionally blatantly breached the relation maxim in order to create conversational implications into his responses. One of the most typical cases of Trump's flouting the relation maxim was his response to question about how to deal with health crisis at that time. While answering questions around covid 19, realizing that this was one of his unfavorable topics, Trump quickly brought up Swine Flu, H1-N1, which were irrelevant topic at that moment.

Finally, Trump repeatedly resorted to the manner maxim flouting as a key strategy for building and strengthening his image. A typical case was that of the first debate. When Trump was asked to give an opinion on why Obamacare was not good, he used tautology strategy in his responses. In this case, he flouted the manner maxim in order to imply that Obamacare really was not that good; it needed to be replaced by Trump's healthcare plan that would be better and, above all, cheaper:

Obamacare is no good. We made it better and I had a choice to make very early on. We took away the individual mandate. We guaranteed pre-existing conditions, but took away the individual mandate. Listen, this is the way it is. (Trump, Debate 1)

3.2.2. Biden's flouting

Biden sometimes flouted the maxim of quantity by providing more details than necessary. He frequently used this tactic to refute Trump's claims and defend his image. For instance, during the first debate, the moderator questioned Biden on why he opposed reopening the economy and schools, instead of simply answering because Trump did not have a plan, Biden willingly added many redundant details.

With regards to the maxim of quality, Biden did flout it as well. For instance, when being asked "Why should voters elect you President as opposed to president Trump", he used irony when saying that Trump is "Putin's puppy". This response flouted the maxim of quality because the information he provided is not true. Obviously, listeners understand that Trump was not literally Putin's pet.

Like Trump, Biden sometimes flouted the maxim of relation. He mostly flouted this maxim in his responses to Trump's accusations. He provided some irrelevant information to reinforce his arguments and comments and save his face in some cases. For example, in the second debate, when Trump accused him of taking money inappropriately from Burisma, he said: "My son like a lot of people at home had a drug problem. He's overtaking it. He's fixed it. He's worked on it. And I'm proud of him, I'm proud of my son." (Biden, Debate 2)

The maxim of manner was occasionally flouted as well. For example, when the moderator questioned him if he and his running mate contributed to the fear of using vaccines during the first debate, he ignored the manner maxim by offering a lengthy and unclear response as opposed to simply answering "yes" or "no": "No more than the question you just asked him. You pointed out he puts pressure and disagrees with his own scientists".

To compare the frequency of violating and flouting Grice's maxims by Donald Trump and Biden, we can look at figure 1. This figure shows the number of cases (vertical axis) where Trump and Biden did not follow the CP's conversational maxims. These cases of non-observance were counted based on their violation and flouting of the 4 maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner (horizontal axis).

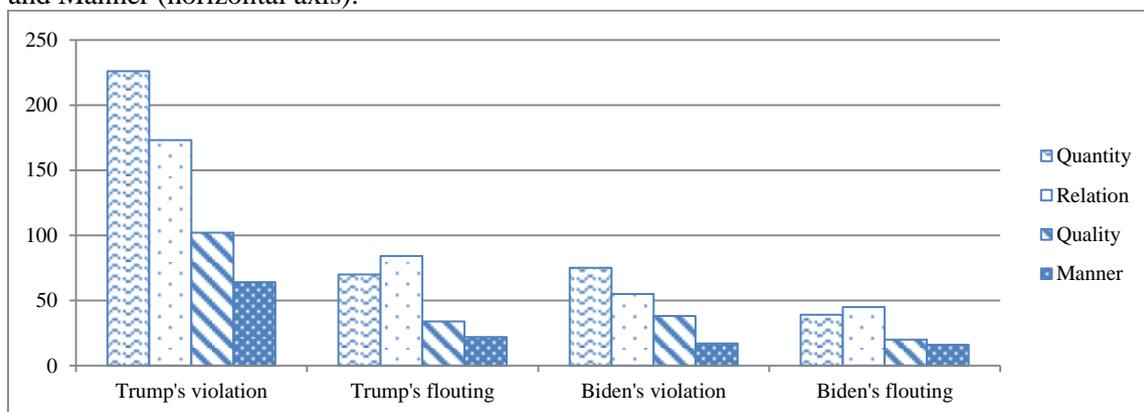


Figure 1. Trump and Biden's non-observance of Grice's maxims

In terms of violation, both Trump and Biden committed Grice's maxims violation in which Trump showed an average rate of non-observance higher than Biden. Violations also vary between the different maxims. The maxims violated most are those of quantity and relation. More than a quarter of Trump's responses were unrelated or little related to the concerned issues at the time.

When it comes to flouting, both Biden and Trump flouted the conversational maxims in the two debates with a quite similar percentage. Like violation, they flouted the maxim of relation and quantity the most. The quality maxim was the least flouted.

3.3. Discussion

During the debates, Grice's conversational maxims were broken by both Biden and Trump in an effort to trick or mislead the audience. Trump, as can be seen in figure 1, broke these rules more frequently than Biden did. They both boasted of having the traits or positions and sound policies that would enable them to strengthen or make America great again. They attacked one another without hesitation, often breaking the maxims, notably with regard to Trump. He intended to mislead the audience by diverting their attention away from the mentioned issue and forcing them to concentrate solely on Biden's responsibility and fault. On the other hand, Biden often cleverly avoided the difficult question on issues related to his involvement by deliberately adding information on praise to deceive listeners.

It is true that both Trump and Biden shared the same goal, they both sought to persuade as many listeners as they could in order to secure their support. They used typical strategies, such as acclaiming, attacking and defending, to try to increase their favorability. Benoit and Harthcock [19] believe that it is typical for both candidates to make every effort during a presidential debate to convince the audience of their favorability, which can be done through acclaiming, attacking and defending.

Through the way they spoke, they were able to convince listeners of their practical intelligence, moral integrity, and good will. When Biden and Trump ignored the Grice's maxims, they frequently received a large applaud from the listeners because they were able to connect to the audience's emotions. In turn, emotion would have the capacity to alter the listeners' assessments, making their arguments more logical and structurally sound.

4. Conclusion

According to the discussion and explanation above, both Trump and Biden violated more frequently than flouted Grice's conversational maxims. This could be the outcome of their desire to mislead the listeners in order to reinforce their own images while simultaneously downplaying the other's superiority. In other words, in order to win the approval of the audience, Biden and Trump took advantage of the disregard for Grice's maxims to depict themselves favorably and others unfavorably.

The force for politicians breaking Grice's cooperative maxims is their desire to deceive their audience into endorsing them. To make their case stronger and more convincing, they ignored Grice's conversational maxims. They try to create a bad impression of their opponent while emphasizing their own good merits for admirable qualities and achievements to create a good impression of themselves. Three actions - acclaiming, attacking and defending - are the main emphasis in their debates.

In conclusion, Grice [2] presents four conversational maxims that should be observed to make a conversation run smoothly and expectedly. However, people sometimes breach them to make personal linguistic effects. Donald Trump and Joe Biden are among those who exploited this strategy. In the presidential debates in 2020, they both violated and flouted the maxims to deceive or mislead the listeners. This resulted from their purposes of claiming, attacking, and defending in their discussions.

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