

DONALD TRUMP AND CONVERSATIONAL UNCOOPERATIVENESS IN INTERVIEWS. A CASE STUDY OF THE US PRESIDENT'S INTERVIEW WITH FOX NEWS

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Abstract

Communication is key to life. Communicating, though, does not come easy. To have an effective conversation with someone and convey the intended message, there are `rules` to follow. In politics, however, these rules do not seem to be followed nowadays by any of the world leaders. Wanting to send messages that fit their agendas, politicians often break the conversational maxims postulated by Grice. This study analyses one of the interviews President Donald Trump offered the TV Channel Fox News, after the European leaders went to the White House, in August 2025, applying the four maxims, according to Paul Grice (1989). The study shows that the US president does not often care about the questions he is being asked, as long as they do not benefit him, and he also ignores the comments that he thinks do not place him in a good position.

Keywords: pragmatics, maxims, Grice, Donald Trump, cooperative principle.

JEL Classification: Z13.

1. Introduction

A conversation between two or more people can be considered effective if the participants cooperate, meaning they respect a list of principles. The most well-known set of such principles for a conversation is the one postulated by Paul Grice, called the Cooperative Principle(1989), which presents 4 maxims that shall not be violated, ideally, for a conversation to be called „effective”. Paul Grice started the studies on cooperation in a conversation by trying to understand what is the relation between **saying** something and **meaning** something. Basically, what he was trying to observe is how participants of a conversation solve the implication process of some sentences, and what the `principles` are that could be applied to a conversation to make it easier to understand. These `principles` are called maxims:

- the quality maxim – is violated when the participants offer false information, use irony or sarcasm, unfit for the context of the communication;
- the quantity maxim – is violated when the participants are offering too much or too little information than required by the context;
- the relation maxim – is violated when the participants either change the topic of the conversation all of a sudden, do not answer the questions being asked, avoid some topics or even give false cause-and-effect relation information;

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- the manner maxim – violated when participants use exaggeration, an ambiguous language or expressions not fit for the conversation or the context.

According to Grice, the cooperative principle goes by the rule: "make your conversational contribution such as required, at the stage, at which it occurs by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged (1989: 26).

Even though, by having a look at these maxims, it seems that it is impossible to have a natural conversation without violating them, they are not presented by Grice as rules, but more as indicators of a good and effective conversation. There are people, however, who not only violate the maxims, but also provide mere examples of how a conversation shall not take place. Several researchers have studied Grice's set of maxims and have argued that actually conveying to them would be impossible, much like computational speaking (Garey & Johnson 1979 in Dale & Reiter 1995). Some have also linked the CP to *miscommunication avoidance*. For example, Bernsen *et al* suggests that "CP and the maxims, as a necessary side effect of improving understanding and enhancing communication, serve the purpose of preventing the need for clarification and repair metacommunication" (1996:225). However, this theory has been criticized, as it is considered that what the speaker might consider to be explicit to the hearer could not be interpreted as such, which means that if the speaker thinks he is not violating the maxim, that he is explicit, the outcome could be different. (Davies, 2000). Moreover, Davies says that the CP does not promise anyone that the conversation will be perfect if the maxims are respected, but it simply explains what is happening in a conversation.

President Donald Trump has often been criticized for not respecting the participants of a conversation, for not offering accurate information (to that end, some media outlets created fact-check articles about his statements), for talking too much about himself and his accomplishments in contexts unfit for that, or for exaggerating and interrupting other participants in the conversation. Even if these things are clear without necessarily applying the cooperative principle of Paul Grice, it is interesting to analyze his conversations, especially with the media that is supporting Donald Trump, in this case, Fox News, to see how actually false information is spread because, in a conversation wherein he violates all maxims, he is not once being confronted with the truth.

2. Methodology

I will analyze the interview President Donald Trump offered to Fox News reporters, Ainsley Earhardt and Lawrence Jones, a day after leaders of Europe and the EU went to the White House to meet the president and discuss the war in Ukraine. The TV interview was transcribed by Roll Call factbase. This is a qualitative research which only focuses on one interview, by identifying the violated maxims by President Donald Trump, to show how he only focuses on

complimenting his own so-called successes, which sometimes are based on false information.

3. Flouting the Gricean maxims

When it comes to Donald Trump, the flouting of the Gricean maxims could be related to his openness towards conversational dominance, which takes place not only in interviews, but also in conversations with other leaders of the world or officials, in general. Conversational dominance is projected mostly through interruptions, quantity of speaking and many questions being addressed in the conversation (Alafifi, 2021). To be able to identify whether one participant of the conversation is displaying conversational dominance, one must look at the asymmetry present in a conversation (idem). Even if the analyzed corpus is an interview, wherein normally the interviewed person talks more than the reporter, it can be observed, however, that the normal exchange between the participants does not take place, as President Donald Trump dominates the whole interview, talks about topics that are not related to the questions, and makes allegations with no proof.

3.1. The quantity maxim

President Donald Trump is the President who was happy and proud to say he held the longest speech in an address to Congress, in 2026, which lasted one hour and 39 minutes. If we look at what he said, however, we will realize everything could have been said in 30 minutes. The White House leader has previously, often, had interviews, speeches or conversations where he was accused of either talking too much about things that were not related to the conversation's topic or just reiterating false information spread in the media or on social media. Sometimes, he even acknowledged having said incorrect things. The maxim he most often violates is, though, the quantity maxim, as he offers too much information, most of the times, and too little times less information than required. However, what is noticed in the interview offered to Fox News is that sometimes this violation of the quantity maxim comes along with the violation of the relation and qualitative maxims, which means he is not only giving information more than it is required, but he also changes the topic and offers false information.

(1) **Earhardt:** It was -- it was such a sense of unity and, um, we all enjoyed watching it because America is on top and it was on your turf, on your terms. I know yesterday you talked about arranging a meeting to take place in two weeks between Putin and Zelenskyy. Is there an update there? And do you plan to attend?

Trump: No, I thought I'd do, uh, first let him -- Let them meet. You know, they haven't been exactly best friends. They haven't gotten along very well. And I called President Putin yesterday, and I do have a good relationship, but it, you know, *only matters if we get things done. Otherwise, I don't care about the*

relationship. I do have a good relationship with him, but I want to get things done. You know, I've gotten -- I've solved seven wars. We ended seven wars. I thought this would be one of the easier ones and this has turned out to be the toughest one. India, Pakistan, I mean, we -- These were big ones and, uh, also all big ones and some going for 31, 32 years, one for 35 years. The Congo, think of that, the Congo and Rwanda for 35 years, I got that one done. I got 'em all done, but this one is the one that is the most difficult and I thought it would be an easy one.

Trump: So I hope President Putin is gonna be good, and if he's not, it's gonna be a rough situation. And I hope, uh, that Zelenskyy -- President Zelenskyy will do what he has to do. He has -- he has to show some flexibility also. The thing is a mess. *This was started by Joe Biden. This was a war that should've never happened . Millions of people are dead, the country's blown to pieces, Ukraine. And it's a -- it's a shame. You know, my wife wrote -- Melania wrote that beautiful, uh, note to President Putin about children. The children are devastated, they're taken away from their homes, the whole thing. And this is a war that would've never, ever, ever happened if we had a president, a real president.*

As it can be noticed in (1), the answer President Trump gives to the reporter's question not only does not clearly answer the question, but it also gives too much information about topics that are not related to the conversation and are not even true. He violates the quantity maxim, but also the relation one – by changing the topic to the wars he solved – and the quality one – as many critics have said he did not actually solve those wars, as the fighting continues in some of the mentioned countries. Moreover, President Trump continues by talking about the former President of the United States, Joe Biden, even if the topic is not related to him. Throughout the conversation with the reporters, he always came back to criticizing Biden or Obama for the negative things happening in the United States or the world. At the end of the answer, again, he violates all three maxims at the same time.

These violations show that the President does not really care about the questions being asked, but only about the messages he wants to send to the American people, his voters, messages that help him justify his actions and his policies.

(2) **Jones:** It --

Trump: -- it's possible that he doesn't wanna make a deal. I always said, you know, you interviewed me, Lawrence, and I think Charlie also. *Do you know Lawrence, I hate to tell you, Charlie was about the first person -- [Laughter] -- in the world to endorse me. He endorsed me about a year before I ran. [Laughter] And that's why I always -- He called me this morning. "Sir, would you do an interview?" [Laughter] And unlike Biden, I don't need permission from my staff. Okay? You know -- [Laughter] -- and then only to be told that I'm not doing it. But Charlie endorsed me about a year before, I think. And he puts it up on his*

site. You know, it's still -- I checked this. It's still in his site. "I endorsed President Trump before he even ran." [Laughter] So I always like a guy --

Hurt: So --

Trump: -- like that, I must tell you, you know.

Hurt: [Laughs] Well, it's a lo --

Trump: Now Lawrence is gonna be a superstar --

Hurt: It's --

Trump: but he was a little later to the game [Laughs] you know --

In (2) as well, questioned about a possible peace deal between Ukraine and Russia, President Donald Trump first violates the relation maxim, by changing the topic all of a sudden and ignoring the question and then the quantity maxim by giving both reporters and the audience a lot of information not required or necessary. After noticing that, the reporters try to go back to the topic but their effort is stopped by the President, who continues to talk about something else and does not engage in the conversation.

(3) **Hurt:** Uh, but Mr. President, what kind of assurances do you feel like, uh, you have that, uh, going forward? Uh, and, you know, past th- -- this Trump administration, it won't be American boots on the ground defending that border.

Trump: Well, you have my assurance and I'm president and I'm, I'm just trying to stop people from being killed, Charlie. Look, they're losing from five to 7,000 people a week in that ridiculous war that should have never happened. If we had a normal pre- -- not even a great president. *If we had a normal president, that wouldn't have happened. But we had a, a guy that didn't have a clue.* And they're losing, think of it, five to 7,000 a week. So even these guys, they'll say, "Okay, let's meet next week." I said, "You can't meet next week. Next week, you're gonna have 7,000 more dead people. You can't do that. You gotta get this thing done." *One of the things at the table was one of the gentlemen who's a great guy, but he said, uh, I sa- -- I, I hope I didn't insult him. But we had a, a guy that didn't have a clue.* And they're losing, think of it, five to 7,000 a week. So even these guys, they'll say, "Okay, let's meet next week." I said, "You can't meet next week. Next week, you're gonna have 7,000 more dead people. You can't do that. You gotta get this thing done." *One of the things at the table was one of the gentlemen who's a great guy, but he said, uh, I sa- -- I, I hope I didn't insult him. We'll see what happens there.* And then if that works out, if it works out, then I'll go to the trilat and close it up.

Again in (3), the President violates both the relation and the quantity maxims as he is changing the topic in the middle of the conversation and starts commenting about the former president, Joe Biden, or he repeatedly mentions someone he met with who had a comment on the Ukraine-Russia deal. In this case, he violates the quantity maxim, because he offers information which was not required, but then he also violates the quality maxim because he is not very explicit about the identity of that person or the thing which could have insulted him.

(4) **Hurt:** So you stepped out of the Oval Office to make the call?

Trump: They had no communication. *They had no communication with the White House for year, as people died, years with Biden and -- and his people.* No communication. Putin told me years, it was years that he -- that he didn't speak to anybody from the White House. And it was a long time that he didn't speak to anybody from Europe. No, it's a fractured relationship. And when I came in, I always had, despite the Russia, Russia, Russia hoax, which truly was a very dangerous thing for our country. But despite that, I maintained a very good relationship. I mean, you saw that when he got off his plane, I got off my plane. There's a warmth there that you can't, you know -- There's a -- there's a decent feeling. And it's a good thing, not a bad thing. People would say, "Oh, that's such a terrible thing." It's not a terrible thing. You know what? We've got the most nuclear weapons in the world.

Hurt: Right.

Trump: And the most powerful. He's got second, okay.

Hurt: So can you describe for us how that happened? Did you just announce that you were gonna go into the ther room to make the phone call?

Trump: Yeah.

When asked if he got out of the Oval Office to call President Vladimir Putin – while the European leaders were in the office – President Trump does not answer with `yes` or `no` (4), but starts talking about the diplomatic relations between Russia and the USA, in the last couple of years. After this answer, the reporter feels the need to repeat the question as the first answer did not clarify that aspect.

3.2. The qualitative maxim

The qualitative maxim is the one that President Trump violates the most. He is known for exaggerating in his speeches or for using inflated numbers when it comes to the trade deals he makes, as he is also a former TV showman, and he knows that such things are attractive to the audience. However, lately, especially when it comes to the war in Ukraine, he has fallen for some information spread in the media by the Russian propaganda, as it was the moment he believed Ukraine had attacked one of Putin's residences, then acknowledged that he was wrong¹. In this interview in particular, he also shows he believes what President Vladimir Putin tells him about the supposed reasons Russia invaded Ukraine, even if there is no evidence for what he says.

¹ https://www.google.com/url?esrc=s&q=&rct=j&sa=U&url=https://www.euronews.com/2026/01/05/trump-says-ukraine-did-not-target-vladimir-putins-residence-in-novgorod-as-the-kremlin-cla&ved=2ahUKEwjuzp32t7OSAxEv4FHXxKEUsQFnoECAoQAg&usg=AOvVaw0wviX_2s6BJr9E9pmDIX-T

(5) **Jones:** You know –

Trump: And so there's, uh, there's great hostility and, uh, maybe rightfully so. *But one thing was NATO, they, they went in, they said, "We want you -- You know, we wanna get Crimea back."* This was at the beginning. Now Putin, in all fairness to him, he made a good deal. He got it from Obama, but they said, "We want it back." And that was not exactly well received, because it was like 12 years before. That's where Russia has its submarine base. And, you know, that's been there long before Putin, you know, they've been there for a long time, but long before Putin. And the other thing, uh, they said is, *"We want to be a member of NATO."* Well, both of those things are impossible because, again, long before Putin, it was a no-no by Russia or the Soviet Union or anything you wanna call it. Uh, sort of a similar thing as it gets larger, but, uh, very similar. But it was, it was always a no-no. You could not -- Russia said, "We don't want, uh, the so-called opponent or the enemy." Let's use that term. "We don't want 'em on our border." And they were right. They were okay. *And, yet, uh, they went in and they asked with the United States, they said, "Put us into NATO."* And everybody knew you can't, you just can't do that. *They, they would never have agreed to it. This is before Putin. This is long before Putin. This was a -- It was just a no-no. It was something that was never going to happen. So they asked for it and they shouldn't have asked for it, 'cause it was, you know, very insulting thing to --* Now, they could have asked for many other things, but the other thing they wanted to do is, is getting Crimea back. And, you know, that was given. Uh, they had built -- Uh, they, they were expanding everything and spending a lot of money, all *because Barack Hussein Obama gave it away and one of the dumbest real estate deals I've ever seen.*

In (5), it can clearly be observed how Donald Trump is reiterating the reasons Putin invoked when he attacked Ukraine: that Kyiv wanted to be part of NATO, something Moscow could not allow, because it felt threatened. However, there is no evidence to show that Ukraine wanted to be part of NATO before the 2022 invasion. Yet, Donald Trump violates the quality maxim and offers this information, even if it is not true. Then, he also accuses former President Barack Obama of having given away Crimea, yet everyone knows Crimea was occupied by the Russian troops through the so-called green soldiers². This is not only that Donald Trump cannot follow the principles of an effective conversation, but also how he is following his foreign policy while being also influenced by Russian propaganda. These violations of the Gricean maxims help us, then, to also have a deeper look into how the President thinks when it comes to the war in Ukraine,

² Early on 27 February 2014, Russian special forces began to occupy Crimea, wearing unmarked uniforms to hide their origin. They were referred to as "little green men". The soldiers had set out from the Russian base in Sevastopol and travelled to the capital Simferopol.

(6) **Trump:** Who would want that? I mean, if you were Russia, who would want to have your, your enemy, your opponent sitting on your line. You don't do that. So it was always thought that -- that, uh, Ukraine was, uh, sort of a buffer between Russia and the rest of Europe. And it was, it was a big wide buffer. ***Everything worked out well until Biden got involved, you know, when Biden gave them \$100 billion dollars right up front. I don't give them anything.*** You know, I don't know if you know it, but since I've been there, we -- we don't pay. First of all, I made a deal to take rare earth. ***That's the equivalent of much more than the 350 billion that Biden, uh, got away because I felt so foolish. It was so stupid what he did.*** And I was able to make a deal with Ukraine, and they were very nice. They have great rare earth among the best in the world, and we took much more than the 350 billion. And they -- they were great about it. So we got that, you know -- you know handled. But now we don't pay any money to Ukraine.

Also in (6), he uses the same amount of money used many times in his speeches about the aid the US gave Ukraine since the start of the large-scale war. However, many experts have said the amount is incorrect, as the US gave the Ukrainians less than 200 billion dollars³. Moreover, he contradicts himself in the exact same paragraph, first saying that the former president Joe Biden gave Kyiv 100 billion, then increasing the amount to 'more than 350 billion'. Of course, in this case, there are two possibilities: the president either does not know precisely the amount, or he is purposely using this big amount to influence the opinion of the American taxpayers and to also blame the European countries for not helping Ukraine too much. In the exact same paragraph, he violates the manner maxim, as he calls Joe Biden's decision to help Ukraine 'stupid'.

(7) **Trump:** No, I thought I'd do, uh, first let him -- Let them meet. You know, they haven't been exactly best friends. They haven't gotten along very well. And I called President Putin yesterday, and I do have a good relationship, but it, you know, only matters if we get things done. Otherwise, I don't care about the relationship. I do have a good relationship with him, but I want to get things done. You know, I've gotten -- ***I've solved seven wars. We ended seven wars.*** I thought this would be one of the easier ones and this has turned out to be the toughest one. ***India, Pakistan, I mean, we -- These were big ones and, uh, also all big ones and some going for 31, 32 years, one for 35 years. The Congo, think of that, the Congo and Rwanda for 35 years, I got that one done. I got 'em all done, but this one is the one that is the most difficult and I thought it would be an easy one.***

³ <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/fact-checking-trumps-claims-amount-us-aid-ukraine/story?id=119167409>

This statement regarding the wars he ended – the big 7 wars – is still being debated in the media. Apart from sometimes mistaking the names of the countries whose wars were solved⁴, the information itself is exaggerated and idealized as what he did was to propose a deal for Gaza (yet the war did not end, the truce is still violated and Israel still attacks targets in Gaza), to propose a deal for Congo and Rwanda (yet fighting is still taking place), to convince India and Pakistan to end the war, Armenia and Azerbaijan as well (tough this war ended long before that), propose a deal for Thailand and Cambodia (yet they still fought afterwards), for Iran and Israel things are still heated and anytime a war could break, and there was actually no war between Egypt and Ethiopia, only tense diplomatic relations he managed to temporarily cool down. So this statement is not just a violation of the quality maxim – and a relation maxim – but also an exaggeration he uses constantly to portray himself as a peacemaker, fit for the Nobel Prize.

3.3. *The manner maxim*

This is a maxim President Donald Trump constantly violates. In this interview, he violates this maxim by using insults when talking about former presidents or by using expression which are not proper for a President talking about wars and conflicts.

(8) And, uh, Crimea is the apple of, of Ukraine. I mean, it's so beautiful. And, uh, Obama gave it away. Nobody ever mentions that. If I ever did that, the fake news would be, uh, they would be writing about me day and night for years. He gave it away. He demanded they, that they let it go, and Russia came in and took it. ***Uh, just took it like from a candy from a baby.***

In (8), the president is talking about the invasion of Russia in Crimea, in 2014. However, for this context – a TV interview – and considering the positions (a President talking to reporters, while millions of people are watching) and the relation between them, it is an improper form of talking about an invasion which is not only illegal and violates international law, but it also consisted in victims and material damages on the Ukrainian side. Therefore, the President is violating the manner maxim. Furthermore, he violates the qualitative maxim as once again he accuses with no evidence President Obama of being involved in Russia's invasion of Crimea.

(9) **Earhardt:** -- in the room? What did the other leaders say about this?

Trump: Well, they understand. Look, they, ***everybody can play cute and this and that***, but, you know, Ukraine's gonna get their life back.

⁴ <https://www.politico.eu/article/european-leaders-mock-donald-trump-over-armenia-albania-mix-up/>

His elusive and ambiguous language continues (9) when he talks about the European leaders being at the White House. It is not, however, clear what he is trying to say; most likely, he is talking about the attitude of these leaders towards Ukraine and Russia. This is another example of a violation of the manner maxim.

(10) So I hope President Putin is gonna be good, **and if he's not, it's gonna be a rough situation**. And I hope, uh, that Zelenskyy -- President Zelenskyy will do what he has to do. He has -- he has to show some flexibility also. **The thing is a mess**.

In (10), the president uses an implicature which suggests a threat towards President Vladimir Putin, however does not give too much information on what could happen to him or the country he leads if he does not act as President Trump expects him to. Then, he uses improper language to talk about a war wherein tens of thousands of civilians have died, calling it, on TV, a 'mess'. Both expressions are examples of violations of the manner maxim.

(11) You know, I don't know if you know it, but since I've been there, we -- we don't pay. First of all, I made a deal to take rare earth. That's the equivalent of much more than the 350 billion that Biden, uh, got away because I felt so foolish. **It was so stupid what he did**. And I was able to make a deal with Ukraine, and they were very nice.

Calling someone or something 'stupid' is something that is not considered abnormal for President Donald Trump, but this is not how a conversation should normally take place, especially if one of the participants in the conversation is the President of a superpower, and he is also talking on TV. Yet, in the interview he gave Fox News (11) he called one of former President Biden's alleged actions 'stupid'. He is, however, not only violating the maxim manner, but also the qualitative one, because the information he gives before this comment is proved to be false.

3.4. The relation maxim

This maxim is one that the President violated since the start of the conversation with the reporters till the end. He is not only changing the topic in the middle of the conversation, but he is also interrupting or even ignoring some of the questions he is being asked. This is though an interview he gave to one of the TV channels that is supporting the President, which is why we do not see the reporters trying to actually get the President back on the topics they want to discuss. This attitude of the President proves he is constantly repeating some narratives (Biden and Obama blamed for most of the bad things happening to the country, USA is the best country in the world and he is the best President, as he often says), and to do so he takes advantage of TV interviews or speeches to

always come back to the topics he wants, ignoring the reporters, the questions or the context.

(12) -- it's possible that he doesn't wanna make a deal. I always said, ***you know, you interviewed me, Lawrence, and I think Charlie also. Do you know Lawrence, I hate to tell you, Charlie was about the first person -- [Laughter] -- in the world to endorse me. He endorsed me about a year before I ran. [Laughter] And that's why I always -- He called me this morning.***

In (12), the President starts talking about a possible peace deal between Russia and Ukraine, but then suddenly changes the topic and starts complimenting one of the reporters he is talking to. That is being done so he can show that not so many people supported him to become a president but those who did are now rewarded and remembered.

(13) Some people as missiles hit wrong spots or get lobbed into cities like Kiev and towns. But, uh, you know, when, if I can save 7,000 people a week from being killed, I think that's a pretty -- ***I want try and get to heaven, if possible. I, I'm hearing I'm not doing well. I hear --***

Jones: Did, did --

Trump: ***I'm really at the bottom of the totem pole.***

Jones: Did the fir --

Trump: ***But if I can get to heaven, this will be one of the reasons. Well, I think I saved a lot of lives with India, Pakistan.***

In (13), the topic is changed by President Trump from the war in Ukraine to how he deserved to go to heaven because he saved a lot of lives. Even if one of the reporters tries to return to the topic, the president continues to ignore him, using an implicature that suggests he is a peacemaker and thus eligible for heaven.

3. Conclusion

President Donald Trump, as shown in this analysis, often violates more than one maxim at once, as he changes the topic in the middle of the conversation, uses ambiguous language and insults, makes allegations with no proof, and also gives more information than required by the questions, most of the time to simply underline his successful political agenda. Even if the relation and quantitative maxims are violated by other politicians as well, when they are trying to send a message to their audiences, the violation of the manner maxim – especially through insults – and of the quantitative maxim – by presenting information

which was proved to be false – are characteristics that have defined, until now, the second term of President Donald Trump.

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