

# **THE VIOLATION OF COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE DONE BY JONI MITCHELL IN THE ELTON JOHN'S INTERVIEW**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study is aim to identify the violation of cooperative principle done by Joni Mitchell in the interview with Elton John on his show, Rocket Hour. The violation of cooperative principles occurs when speaker intentionally or unintentionally do not obey the rule of the four maxims. The four maxims are maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of relevance, and maxim of manner. The data is taken from the transcription of the interview done by Joni Mitchell in an Elton John show called Rocket Hour in which occurred in 2022. The result reveals that out of the four maxims, Joni Mitchell violated maxims of quantity the most throughout the interview with 3 data, while the other maxims had only been violated once each.

**Keywords: Cooperative Principles, Maxim violation, Joni Mitchell, Elton John**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Being a social creature, human will seek interaction with one another. Therefore, to make those interactions happen, human develop a way to communicate our need of interacting with another fellow human being – and that is through a language. Whether it is done verbally or non-verbally, with language people can interact and communicate their needs to one another. Because of that, language serves as the primary medium to express ideas and concepts, convey emotions, share humors, provide information, issue commands, and exert influence (Gunawan & Prihandini, 2023; Juanda, 2024). After all, language expression is a definite freedom that all language speakers have (Juanda, 2020). As people interact with one another, then a conversation will bound to happen. But, for the conversation to run smoothly and effectively, the speaker and the listener need to be cooperative. That mean, there have to be mutual understanding between them in the conversation.

However, sometimes people cannot or would not be cooperative when communicating with others which can lead to miscommunication. Thus, in the theory of cooperative principle they sre violating the maxims. The violation of maxims is the conditions in which the speakers do not fulfil or obey the four maxims (further explanation of it in the theoretical review). One of such examples

of the violation of these maxims can be found in the interview of Joni Mitchell with Elton John on his Apple Music Show, Rocket Hour in 2022.

Joni Mitchell and Elton John were both legends and are highly influential in the western music scene. Joni Mitchell is considered a role model for a lot of singer/songwriter and has enjoyed a renewed interest of her artistic endeavours for the last couple of years. Since 2021, she had received several prestigious awards in US. She received Kennedy Centre of Honors in 2021, Grammy award in 2022 and was the recipient of the 2023 Gershwin Prize. Meanwhile, Elton John is one of the most popular music artists who have sold more than 300 million records worldwide as well as a fellow recipient of Kennedy Centre of Honors (back in 2004) and Gershwin Prize (in 2024) and also, he had won multiple Grammys too throughout his career.

Thus, when the two legends collide for an interview, anticipation were high, and the receptions were fairly good. But the researcher cannot help but noticed of what can be assumed as the effect of her aneurysm that almost took her life in 2015 (Callahan 2024) and the subsequence absent from the public eye. She stumbled her words, make incoherent speech, and irrelevant answer to what was question to her. Therefore, the researcher analysed that she had violated the cooperative principles and it motivates the researcher to write this article.

## **DATA SOURCE**

The data used in this research came from an interview between Joni Mitchell and Elton John on the latter Apple Music's show called Rocket Hour. The interview was posted or aired in 2022 during her renewed popularity in the west. The researcher used a transcription by Sam Stone that was posted on jonimitchell.com. The steps in collecting the data are as follow:

- 1) Re-watching the interview again on YouTube as it also was released on Apple Music official YouTube channel.
- 2) After that, looking for the transcription of the interview.
- 3) Once the transcription was obtained, the researcher would start observing and analysing every utterance said by Joni Mitchell in the interview using the theory of cooperative principle.
- 4) If the researcher found an instance of Joni Mitchell violating the four maxims in the said interview, the researcher would then write them down.
- 5) Lastly, if there are no more instances, the researcher would sort the data by its maxims.

## **METHODS**

In this study, the researcher uses descriptive qualitative as a research method. According to Creswell, the qualitative research entails a number of significant activities, including the formulation of questions and processes, the collection of particular data from participants, the inductive analysis of data ranging from specific to broad themes, and the interpretation of the significance of the data (Fadhila & Juanda, 2023). The data used here came from a transcription of an interview between Joni Mitchell and Elton John as a host. Researcher then analyse each utterance made by Joni Mitchell by using theory of cooperative principle to find instances of Joni Mitchell violated the four maxims to

be used as data. After the data was obtained, the researcher would discuss them in a descriptive manner.

## THEORETICAL REVIEW

In the pragmatics field, how people can be cooperative in the conversation was explain in the theory of cooperative principles. The theory was proposed by H. Paul Grice in 1975, in which he believed that in order to communicate effectively, speaker and listener must cooperate with each other and have to abide by some principles (Grice cited by Jiaosheng Qiu, 2019). Those principles can be categorized into four maxims. They are maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of relevance, and maxim of manner (Cutting cited by Esterani Zebua et al, 2017).

**First**, maxim of quantity means that the speaker should be as informative as the discourse required and should not give either too much information or too little information. **Second**, maxim of quality is related to the truth of the information being provided where it should be what you think is true and should be based on the adequate evidence. **Third**, maxim of relevance related to the relevancy of information provided with the topic discussed. **The last maxim** is maxim of manner in which related to the proper way information is provided where obscurity, ambiguity and unnecessary prolixity should be avoided and have to be in orderly manner (Grice cited by Dong and Huang, 2019).

Grice in Ge Xu (2022) believe that all of the aforementioned maxims must be observed when communicating with one another. In addition, when both parties (speaker and listener) communicate what they mean in a straightforward and true manner there will be no implication in their communication, thus there will be no misunderstand.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Violation of quantity maxims

#### Data 1

*Elton: Okay! We're going to start the program with "Carey". That's from the album Blue. "Carey".*

*That was written about someone you knew, right?*

*Joni: Yeah, in Matala.*

*Elton: Who was It written about?*

*Joni: I came to Matala because everywhere I was in Athens we'd be walking down the street -- with the girl that I was traveling with -- and they would say to us, "Sheepy sheepy, Matala, Matala!" Which I found out meant, "Hippie, hippie, go to Matala. That's where the hippies are." So, we went to Matala and we were standing at the ocean's edge looking out towards Turkey. And Penelope, the girl I was traveling with, was talking about her namesake, Penelope in Ulysses, you know? Like, the story of the woman whose husband is away, and she's surrounded by suitors and she's weaving a tapestry. And they keep saying, "When will you tell us who you choose?" And she said, "When I finish my tapestry." And every night she'd tear out everything that she did during the day, right?*

*So, we're telling this story when suddenly boom! There's this huge explosion. I turned around and I saw this redheaded character all in white -- it's like a white turban with red hair sticking out, and a white, kind of Ghandi-esque kind of costume -- blow out of a restaurant. He was the cook there, he lit the stove and it blew up!*

*(Elton laughs)*

*Joni: And that was how I met Carey Raditz. (Joni laughs)*

In this conversation, Elton asked about who the song “Carey” (from her *Blue* album) is written about. Joni could have just said, “I was in Matala with my friend when suddenly *boom!*....” (she can continue from there on), but instead of saying that, she rambles about the backstory that was a little bit too long and far back. Even when the story was connected and somewhat relevant, she doesn’t really have to give a reason why she was in Matala and what kind of story that her friend, Penelope, told her before her eventual meeting with Cary Raditz whom the song, Carey, was written about. By doing that, the researcher argued that she has violated maxim of quantity due to her excessiveness in answering the question in which she gave more information than necessary.

## Data 2

*Elton: What is this song about?*

*Joni: "Amelia"? Oh!*

*Elton: Amelia Earhart?*

*Joni: Yeah, I was driving across country. I had driven across with a couple of fellas and their car broke down on the way to San Francisco, so I bought a secondhand Mercedes and we continued the journey. So I had to drive it back. I was driving back alone so it was my solo flight. I didn't have a driver's license and so I was staying behind truckers because they signal when cops are ahead, you know? They flick their lights. And on that journey, I wrote most of the songs on that album. And that one...*

*Elton: From Hejira, yeah?*

*Joni: ...it was an homage to Amelia and her solo flight. You know, like, I just identified with her solo flight and my solo drive.*

The similar thing happens with this one as it did with the previous example. Elton would ask about someone who inspired the song (here, it was a song called “Amelia”, in which inspired by a famous female aviator, Amelia Earhart whom she admired) and Joni Mitchell would go on a little backstory about what landed her to write the song instead of just answer the question directly. Again, the story itself was still relevant, but there is some information that would be just fine if it was not included, especially the one about her did not have a license and have to stayed behind truckers. Again, Joni Mitchell has violated the maxim of quantity by bringing up too much information or backstory into her answer.

**Data 3**

*Elton: And it's Edith Piaf and Les Compagnons de la Chanson. And she was totally an amazing artist. Very tiny. There've been shows about her. She just had so much inside of her as a small person.*

*Joni: Mmm-hmm.*

*Elton: Is that what attracted you to her? The passion about her voice?*

*Joni: Well, I went to a birthday party [at] Helen LaFraneer's house. And she lived in a shanty a couple of blocks away from our house on the outskirts of town. And it was all covered in metal billboards, you know? It was a real, genuine shanty. You know, my mother didn't want me to go because I was a sickly child and she thought that I would pick up some infection going there, you know? But I went and the mother, Mrs. LaFraneer, was a frail, little woman with a sweater held together with a safety pin and pink around her eyes. It was something wrong with her. And there was a long table that was made of a door lying on saw horses and I got the seat where the doorknob was...*

*(Elton laughs)*

*Joni: ...because I put my elbow on the table and it went through the hole. And in the kitchen, I heard this men's choir and then I heard this voice come bubbling up from the bottom of it, like... And I never heard anything so amazing. I said to Mrs. LaFraneer, "Who was that?" And she said, "Oh, that's the Little Sparrow." And I remember thinking, "You look like a little sparrow yourself." You know? She was a tiny, little French woman. That's how I first heard Edith Piaf and this song, which amazed me as an eight-year-old.*

As with the two previous data, Joni Mitchell once again violating maxims of quantity by answering with too much information from what being asked. Here, Joni tells a backstory of where her seed of admiration for Edith Piaf first planted (which started all the way back into her childhood), instead of just simply answering what attracted her to Edith Piaf (here, it can be infer that it was her voice that attracted little Joni Mitchell). Once again, by giving out extra information to the discourse, the researcher argued that Joni Mitchell has violated maxims of quantity.

**2. Violation of quality maxim****Data 4**

*Elton: It's extraordinary how good it is. And you didn't have much rehearsal, did you?*

*Joni: Didn't have any.*

*Elton: No?*

*Joni: No, we just winged it.*

In this dialogue, Elton was talking about Newport Folk Festival 2022 where Joni was performing alongside Brandie Carlile, Lucius and many more. Here, Joni Mitchell claimed to not doing any rehearsal when Elton asked that “[she] didn’t have much rehearsal” when actually there is an informal rehearsal the day before she was about to perform and was filmed for CBS coverage (and which Joni was also interview). It was either slip of mind due to her age, or Joni never think about

that informal rehearsal as rehearsal, but whatever the reason is the researcher argued that she has violated the quality maxims as there is an adequate evidence of her rehearsing (Sam Stone, 2022). Maxim of quality requires the speaker to speaking the truth based on the adequate evidence.

### 3. Violation of relevance maxim

#### Data 5

*Elton: Yeah, women were kind of ornaments in those days.*

*Joni: Yeah, even the way... Look at the way women dress at the Grammys now.*

*Elton: Yeah.*

*Joni: I mean, I remember when it was kind of starting, when Norman [Seeff] took some pictures of Linda Ronstadt in her underwear and Carly Simon, you know? And, I thought, "Oh, God! Do we gotta do this?" So I just decided to just be naked on my record. (Joni laughs) Get it over with.*

After the very vague talk about rap and pop songs in the 90s that were Joni quoted “aggressively dangerous to women,” Elton made a comment about how women were portrayed as an ornament in those days (specifically in the 90s). But Joni responded with a remark about how women dress in Grammys now (21<sup>st</sup> century) and even made unrelated remark about how she decided to be naked on her own record way back in the 70s (Joni was photographed naked from the back for the gatefold of her album, *For the Roses*, in 1972). For that, the researcher think that Joni Mitchell was violating maxim of relevance by bringing topic that was not relevance to what was being asked. Maxim of relevance requires the speaker to say something or provide information that is relevance to the topic being discussed (and from what can be understood from the data above, Joni Mitchell does not say something relevant to the topic).

### 4. Violation of manner maxim

#### Data 6

*Elton: We're going to go back to you now, and that's song called "Sex Kills"...*

*Joni: Mmm-hmm.*

*Elton: ...which is from the album Turbulent Indigo from 1994. So, we're moving up, away from the '70s and the '80s, into the latter part of your recordings. According to Rolling Stone, Joni Mitchell surveyed every '90s America and painted a picture that now seems un-depressingly prophetic. She said at the time, "I've never been a feminist, but we haven't had pop songs up until recently that were so aggressively dangerous to women." What did you mean by that?*

*Joni: "Aggressively dangerous to women"? Oh, well, you know...*

*Elton: People saying... rap music with "My hoes" and stuff like that?*

*Joni: Yeah, "hoes and booty," you know? (Joni laughs)*

In the conversation above, the researcher argued that Joni Mitchell was violating the maxim of manners. Her answers were very ambiguous. Joni only answers with “Yeah” and “you know” and leave it to the listener (Elton) to decipher what she means by that. Maxim of manners itself requires the speaker to talk in a way that avoided obscurity, ambiguity, and unnecessary prolixity. Thus, with

answering the question vaguely, Joni Mitchell has violated the maxim of manners as talking that way could potentially create a misunderstanding. It seems that Joni avoiding the question due to its sensitive nature and that kind of make Elton a little bit flustered by her reaction.

## CONCLUSION

From the interview with Elton John on his Rocket Hour show, we find that Joni Mitchell has violated all the four maxims. With maxim of quantity have been violated the most with 3 data, while the other maxims have only been violated once for each maxim. On all of the 3 data of her violated maxim of quantity, the reason for it was because she gives out too much information or backstory on how she came across these people in her life. On how she violated maxim of quality is because she did not acknowledge the rehearsal (albeit informal one) she did before performing at Newport Folk Festival. She gave out irrelevant answer to the question asked, so therefore she also violated the maxim of relevance and lastly, she gave out an ambiguous answer and seemingly avoiding the question, therefore she violated maxim of manner.

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