

## FIXING A COMMON ERROR ON THE SO-CALLED PAUL HERBERT GRICE'S MAXIMS

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### ABSTRACT

*Many publications in international journals misunderstood Grice's statements through his maxims. This wrong understanding is what I call common error. The aim of this article is to point out and fix this common error and to draw the readers' attention to the truth about Paul Herbert Grice's statements. The research question is "do Grice's maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner exist?" To answer this question correctly, this article collects researchers' writings and analyzes in contents by referring to what Grice wrote. The analysis shows that researchers confuse what Grice calls categories with what he calls maxims.*

**Keywords:** *Categories, maxims, quantity, quality, manner, supermaxim, sub-maxim, specific maxim, and Grice's maxims.*

### RESUME

*Beaucoup de publications dans des revues internationales ont mal interprété les déclarations de Grice à travers ses maximes. J'appelle cette mauvaise interprétation « une erreur commune ». Le but de cet article est de signaler cette erreur de compréhension commune et d'attirer l'attention des lecteurs sur la vérité au sujet des déclarations de Paul Herbert Grice. La question de la recherche est : « est ce que les maximes de quantité, qualité, relation et manière de Grice existent? » Pour répondre correctement à cette question, cet article part de quelques écrits des chercheurs et analyse leurs contenus en se référant aux écrits de Grice. Cette analyse montre que les chercheurs confondent ce que Grice appelle catégorie d'avec ce qu'il appelle maximes.*

**Mots-clés :** *Catégories, maximes, quantité, qualité, manière, super maximes, sous-maximes, maximes spécifiques et maximes de Grice.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Errors are misleading and they are often due to ignorance. This article fixes the common error that researchers made about *the four Grice's maxims*. It analyzes the contents of articles collected in order to answer the question: "*do Grice's maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner exist?*".

## 2. BACKGROUND

In 1975 Hurbert Paul Grice published an article entitled 'Logic and Conversation' that focused on implicature and emphasized the 'Cooperative Principle'. Grice explained that by what he called '*categories*' under which fall different maxims. Grice's initial (1975: 45-46) reads:

We might then formulate a rough general principle which participants will be expected (*ceteris paribus*) to observe, namely: Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. One might label this the COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE

On the assumption that some such general principle as this is acceptable, one may perhaps distinguish four categories under one or another of which will fall certain more specific maxims and submaxims, the following of which will, in general, yield results in accordance with the Cooperative Principle. Echoing Kant, I call these categories Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. The category of QUANTITY relates to the quantity of information to be provided, and under it fall the following maxims:

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

The second maxim is disputable; it might be said that to be over informative is not a transgression of the CP but merely a waste of time...

Under the category of QUALITY falls a supermaxim - "Try to make your contribution one that is true' - and two more specific maxims:

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. DO not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Under the category of RELATION I place a single maxim, namely, 'Be relevant.' Though the maxim itself is terse, its formulation

conceals a number of problems that exercise me a good deal: questions about what different kinds and focuses of relevance there may be, how these shift in the course of a talk exchange, how to allow for the fact that subjects of conversation are legitimately changed, and so on. I find the treatment of such questions exceedingly difficult, and I hope to revert to them in a later work. Finally, under the category of MANNER, which I Understand as relating not (like the previous categories) to what is said but, rather, to HOW' what is said is to be said, I include the supermaxim- 'Be perspicuous' - and various maxims such as:

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly.

The point that this article is making is that *Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner* are categories as Grice says, not maxims. Grice's original paper did not refer to those as maxims the way some scholars and researchers write *maxims of quantity, maxims of quality, maxims of relation, and maxims of manner*, but rather as categories.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 3.1. Aristotle's Categories

Aristotle referred to four categories: *substance, quantity, quality, and relatives*. Sanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2021) explains them as follows:

- Substance
  - Immobile Substances – Unmoved Mover(s)
  - Mobile Substances – Body
    - Eternal Mobile Substances – Heavens
    - Destructible Mobile Substances – Sublunary bodies
      - ✓ Unensouled Destructible Mobile Substances – Elements
      - ✓ Ensouled Destructible Mobile Substances – Living things
        - Incapable of Perception – Plants
        - Capable of Perception – Animals
          - Irrational – Non-Human Animals
          - Rational – Humans
- Quantity
  - Continuous Quantities
    - line
    - surface
    - body

- time
- place
- Discrete Quantities
  - number
  - speech
- Quality
  - Habits and Dispositions
  - Natural Capabilities and Incapabilities
  - Affective Qualities and Affections
  - Shape
- *Relatives*

“Things are called ‘relative’ if *as such* they are said to be of something else or to be somehow referred to something else”.

Apart from Aristotle’s categories, let us turn to Kant’s categories that Grice echoed.

### 3.2. Kant’s Categories

In Sanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2022), Kant’s categories are presented as follows:

- Quantity
  - Unity
  - Plurality
  - Totality
- Quality
  - Reality
  - Negation
  - Limitation
- Relation
  - Inherence and Subsistence (substance and accident)
  - Causality and Dependence (cause and effect)
  - Community (reciprocity)
- Modality
  - Possibility
  - Existence
  - Necessity

With respect to Kant’s categories, Grice has used the term *manner* as the fourth category, whereas Kant has used *modality*. Furthermore, it is clear to

notice that under each category that Grice mentions fall the maxims which are not what Kant enumerates under his categories.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

Some articles are collected in which Grice's categories are called maxims, such as:

- **"The Violation of Cooperative Principle and Four Maxims in Iranian Psychological Consultation" by Sobhani and Saghebi (2014: 92)**

*Four Conversational Maxims (Gricean Maxims)*

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

*Maxim of Quantity: Say as much as but no more than is necessary.*

*Maxim of Relation: Be relevant.*

*Maxim of Manner: Be Clear. Avoid ambiguity. Be brief. Be orderly*

Sobhani and Saghebi do not pay attention to what Grice calls *categories* and maxims. For Grice, *quality, quantity, relation, and manner* are **categories** whereas the maxims (specific maxims, supermaxims, and sub-maxims) are *do not say what you believe to be false or that for which you lack evidence, say as much as but no more than is necessary, be relevant, and be clear, avoid ambiguity, be brief, and be orderly*. These maxims fall under the categories (quantity, quality, relation, and manner).

- **"A pragmatic study of the cooperative principle and grice's maxims in lois lowry's the giver" by Al-Saedi (2013: 25 - 27)**

*All the Grice's maxims can be flouted as follow:*

*Flouting the maxim of Quality. This maxim can be flouted for differ net purposes; irony, metaphor, understatement (meiosis), overstatement (hyperbole) or rhetorical questions.*

*Flouting the maxim of Quantity: it means that the conversation can be either less or more informative.*

*Flouting the Relation maxim: This maxim can be flouted to change a subject and the conversation cannot be continued.*

*Flouting the Manner maxim: the communicators try to exploit the maxim by being not brief, orderly, etc.*

Here again, Al-Saedi does not distinguish categories from maxims. He combines both categories and maxims to one label called **Grice's maxims**.

- **“Grice's Maxims” by Betti (2021:2)**

*“Grice outlined four key categories, or maxims, of conversation – quantity, quality, relation, and manner – under which there are more specific maxims and sub-maxims. (Grandy, and Warner. 2005 (Okanda, et al. 2015; Betti, Igaab & Al-Ghizzi, 2018: 261).”*

Betti does not make any difference between **categories** and **maxims**. For him, categories are maxims, and maxims are categories.

- **“Grice and Kant on Maxims and Categories” by Bülow and Schamberger “ (2022: 712)**

*“The maxims of Quality would be perfectly fulfilled if speakers limited themselves to trivial or unfalsifiable utterances such as “a grandmother is a grandmother” or “I do exist”*

Bülow and Schamberger forget or ignore that Grice did not say “maxims of quality”, but instead he mentioned the term “category”.

- **“Grice’s Maxims and How You Can Use Them in Your Fiction” Brotzel (2020)**

*Grice developed this principle into a series of four maxims that speakers generally expect each other to observe:*

**Quality:** *Do not deceive, and do not say things for which you lack evidence*

**Quantity:** *Offer just the right amount of information; no more or less than is required for the current purpose*

**Relation (Relevance):** *Says things that are relevant*

**Manner:** *Be clear, orderly, brief, unambiguous*

Brotzel does not realize that what he calls **maxims**, Grice calls that **categories**. This is to say that the term *maxim* is used instead of the term *category*.

- **“Clyne’s Revisions of Grice’s Maxims” UKEssays (2018)**

*The four Grice’s Maxims,*

- *Maxim of quality: defined as “As speaker we have to tell the truth or something that is provable by adequate evidence”*
- *Maxim of quality: defined as “We have to be as informative as required, we should not say more or less”*
- *Maxim of Relation: defined as “Our response has to be relevant to the topic of discussion”.*
- *Maxim of Manner: “We have to avoid ambiguity or obscurity; we should be direct and straightforward” (Grice, 1975).*

In UKEssays, they interpret the Grice's categories as *maxims* although they refer to the Grice 1975 where Grice himself distinguishes categories from maxims.

Considering the texts mentioned above, the result of this analysis is that there is a **common error** in understanding Grice's categories. This common error is the confusion between **categories** and **maxims**. In other words, researchers call categories '*Grice's maxims*'.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Many people do not pay any attention to what Grice wrote. Quite a lot of people have been misled by previous researchers and scholars who did not make any difference between categories and maxims. And since their texts are taught in colleges and universities, many lecturers and students have misunderstood the difference between categories and maxims. The suggestion is that this common error should be fixed by using the expression **Grice's categories and maxims** instead of *Grice's maxims*.

## CONCLUSION

The main research problem raised in this article was the common error noticed in many publications in international journals about the so-called Paul Herbert Grice's maxims. The aim was to point out this common error so as to fix it and draw the readers and researchers' attention to what should be known about Grice's statements. The research question was: "*do Grice's maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner exist?*". Although one might be quickly attempted to answer by "yes", the analysis of the researchers and scholars' articles showed there is a common error by using the term maxims instead of categories. Thus, the answer to the question posed is that **maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner** do not exist. Instead, people should call them **categories of quantity, quality, relation, and manner**. The maxims, supermaxims, and specific maxims fall under these categories.

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