

**Observing the Maxim of Quality: Examining an Autistic Doctor's
Conversations in an American Television Series, *The Good Doctor***

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Abstract

Studies of Autism Spectrum Disorder have focused exclusively on how the Gricean Maxims are violated in persons with autism. Investigators typically draw the plausible conclusion that individuals with ASD are deficient in pragmatic ability and theory of mind, communicating in patterns that deviate from the norm. A few studies have investigated how autistic people observe the Maxim of Quality when examining communication difficulties of individuals with ASD. This study thus examines conversations involving Shaun—the main character with ASD in "*The Good Doctor*"—and his observance of the Maxim of Quality. Data came from the eighteen episodes of Season One. Results show that the Maxim of Quality is a dominant feature of the communication patterns of individuals with ASD. Shaun's observance of the Maxim of Quality has four distinctive features, in that he: (1) responds without concern for the listener's face, (2) asks inappropriate questions, (3) asks lengthy questions, and (4) interrupts.

Keyword: Gricean Maxim¹, observing the Quality Maxim², communication difficulty³, Autism Spectrum Disorder⁴

Grice (1975, p. 45) described what he called the "Cooperative Principle" (CP), which defines the governing principle by which people may conduct mutual, cooperative conversations. The CP is embodied in the four "Gricean Maxims": (1) the Maxim of Quality ("be truthful"), (2) the Maxim of Quantity, ("provide as much information as required"), (3) the Maxim of Relation, ("be relevant") and (4) the Maxim of Manner, ("avoid unnecessary ambiguity"). When

observed, these maxims help each partner achieve their purpose in the conversation. People may follow, or fail to follow, the maxims, which Grice (1989) refers to as “observance” or “non-observance” (p. 26). “Non-observance” of a maxim means to violate, opt out of, infringe on, or flout that maxim. Many researchers have focused on the deliberation violation of a maxim (Li, 2016; Purnami & Adiwijaya, 2021; Safitri et al., 2014), that is, when speakers intentionally fail to apply a maxim in order to cause misunderstanding or to achieve some other end (Khosravizadeh & Sadehvandi, 2011).

Researchers study the CP not only as it functions in daily conversation, but also in media and entertainment. Recent studies have examined CP in the media (Kipya et al., 2019; Kuang & Zhao, 2017; Marlisa & Hidayat, 2020), often using the dialogue between characters in films and television. These types of media are popular partly due to their unpredictable storylines and few ratings restrictions. According to Rojas-Lamoren et al. (2021), a television series is a set of episodes broadcast at regular intervals, with a long pause between each set of episodes. The episode group encompasses a typical story. Past research has investigated the CP as it is observed, or not observed, by characters in various television series (Giriyani & Efransyah, 2020; Sapalakkai, 2018; Sommai, 2013). However, only a small amount of research has focused on one particular maxim (Khosravizadeh & Sadehvandi, 2011) performed, in this case, by a character playing the role of an autistic doctor.

The Good Doctor is an American medical drama series based on the 2013 South Korean series of the same title. The American series premiered in 2017 and was produced by ABC Studios and Sony Pictures Television. The eighteen episodes in season one tell the story of Dr. Shaun Murphy, a young surgeon diagnosed with autism and savant syndrome. He relocates from a small town to join a surgical unit at St. Bonaventure Hospital in San Jose, California. Dr. Murphy has an extraordinary gift for saving lives, although his colleagues and patients are sometimes displeased and challenged by him. Because of his uncommon autism traits, he has difficulty communicating with colleagues and patients. Below are the posters advertising the first season of the series.



Figure 1: *The Good Doctor Season One*

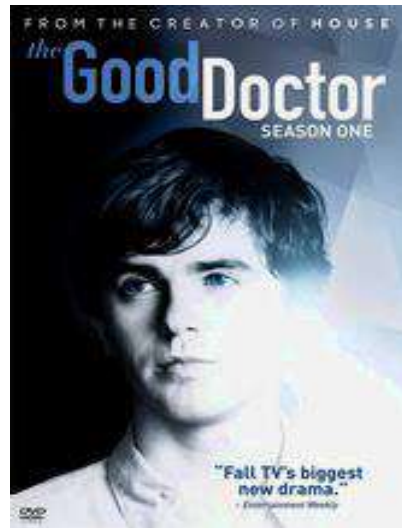


Figure 2: *Shaun*

This research examines Dr. Shaun Murphy, who is the main character of the series, in order to illustrate the communication patterns of a person with ASD. Because he has little grasp of pragmatic ability and theory of mind, his strict observance of the Maxim of Quality lacks nuance and empathy. The examples taken from *The Good Doctor* reflect how even if individuals with ASD observe one maxim, they may violate others.

Literature Review

Grice's Cooperative Principle

Grice (1975) defines the process of the Cooperative Principle as the listener's engagement with utterances in order to have successful conversations. Its process, according to Grice (1975, p. 45), is to "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." In short, the CP explains how people use language to communicate. Grice (1975, p. 45) explained that this principle refers to "the amount of information provided in conversation as the speaker and the listener cooperate." Meanwhile, Lindblom (2006) stated that the CP is a set of generally accepted rules that contribute to ordinary conversation. The principle states that, to avoid misunderstanding and to achieve successful communication, the listener interprets the speaker's utterances by assuming the speaker is being cooperative. Grice (1989), aware of the limited use of the CP, explained that a conversational exchange has at least three attributes: (1) the participants have a common intermediate aim, meaning that each participant should identify himself with the other's passing conversational interests, even in an over-the-wall chat, (2) the participants' contributions

dovetail, and are mutually dependent, that is, participants should have effectively agreed on each other's ideas during their conversation, and (3) the participants understand that, all things being equal, the transactions should continue in the appropriate style until both parties agree to terminate them, meaning that a participant does not leave, or begin doing something else, during a conversation.

The maxims assume that the speaker and listener seek effective communication. Sometimes the speaker implies a certain meaning without stating it explicitly. This is referred to as “conversational implicature,” in which the speaker directs the listener away from the surface to a hidden meaning, a method of communication which relies on a shared understanding of context.

Maxim of Quality

Grice divided the CP into four maxims: (1) the Maxim of Quality, (2) the Maxim of Quantity, (3) the Maxim of Relation, and (4) the Maxim of Manner. This study focuses on the Maxim of Quality, defines it, and shows how it is observed or not observed. The Maxim of Quality refers to the effort to be truthful (Zhou, 2009), and consists of two sub-maxims: (1) do not say what you believe to be false, and (2) do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. Table 1 shows the Maxim of Quality as explained by Grice.

Table 1: *Description of the Maxim of Quality*

Maxim of Quality	<p>“I expect your contributions to be genuine and not spurious. If I need sugar as an ingredient in the cake you are assisting me to make, I do not expect you to hand me salt; if I need a spoon, I do not expect a trick spoon made of rubber.”</p> <p>(Grice, 1975, p. 47)</p>
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Observing the Maxim of Quality

Partners in conversation are expected to be truthful and provide accurate information in order to facilitate effective communication. The following shows how people observe the Maxim of Quality by telling the truth:

Teacher: How about adverbial phrase?

Student: I don't know.

(Safitri et al., 2014, p. 4)

In this example, the student observed the Maxim of Quality by admitting, despite the potentially negative consequences, that he did not know the answer. But the Maxim of Quality is not always observed (Li, 2016). For example, the speaker may mislead the listener by lying, failing to provide sufficient

information, or simply refusing to continue the conversation. This is referred to as “non-observance” of the maxim. Non-observance occurs when one or all of the maxims are breached (Siregar, 2016). Grice (1975, p. 49) distinguished four kinds of non-observance: (1) “flouting a maxim,” (2) “violating a maxim,” (3) “opting out of a maxim,” and (4) “infringing a maxim.” Asada et al. (2022) administered the Conversational Violations Test (CVT) to children with ASD to examine how they violated the maxims. The research showed that pragmatic language ability among children with ASD is impaired, although it does improve with age. The focus of this paper is on how observance of the Maxim of Quality can result in non-observance of other maxims.

According to Grice (1975, p. 49), “the observance of the CP and the maxims is rational.” However, people may fail to observe or fulfill the maxims, either because they are incapable of speaking clearly, or because they are being untruthful (Álvaro, 2011). Dörnyei (2005) explained that non-observance of maxims is sometimes used intentionally to be humorous, or to avoid an awkward or uncomfortable situation. The next section reviews the non-observance of the Maxim of Quality.

Flouting the Maxim of Quality

A speaker flouts a maxim when his or her content blatantly fails to observe that maxim (Thomas, 1995). The purpose is to make the listener believe something said by the speaker. Cutting (2002, as cited in Noertjahjo et al., 2017, p. 194) explained that flouting takes place when a speaker fails to observe the maxim but expects the listener to recognize the implied meaning. The following extract shows how a speaker can flout the Maxim of Quality.

A: What is your name?

B: I’m the Queen of Sheba.

(Dwi E.S., 2015, p. 248)

In this example, B’s statement flouts the Maxim of Quality because what they say is not true, presumably because they do not want to give their actual name. If A were to interpret the answer literally, A would interpret “Queen of Sheba” to mean “B is named Sheba,” or “B is a member of a Royal Family.”

Violating the Maxim of Quality

In contrast to flouting the Maxim of Quality, Thomas (1995) explained that a speaker violates the maxim when they intend to mislead the listener. Grice (1975, p. 49) also said that “a speaker may subtly violate the maxim in order to mislead or deceive the listener.” According to Cutting, speakers may violate the maxim in order to deceive the listener by letting them know the surface meaning

of an utterance (Cutting, 2002). The following shows how a speaker violates the Maxim of Quality.

Mother: Did you study all day long?

Son (who has been playing all day long): Yes, I've been studying till now!
(Khosravizadeh & Sadehvandi, 2011, p. 122)

In this example, the son violated the Maxim of Quality because he meant to deceive his mother in order to avoid an undesirable consequence, such as being forced to study all day or receiving a punishment.

Opting out of the Maxim of Quality

Opting out of the maxim refers to a speaker's unwillingness to cooperate in the way the maxim requires (Grice, 1975). According to Thomas (1995, p. 74), "opting out of the maxim occurs frequently in public life." The following is an example of opting out of the Maxim of Quality:

Arthur: What is it?

Jack: I know a lot about silhouettes, and I think this shape is a witch.
(Utami, 2021, p. 24)

This dialogue is between Arthur and Jack, a prince who was cursed and turned into a dwarf. When they returned home one day, they discovered traces of a broomstick and the shadowy outline of someone lurking around their home. Arthur asked a question, and Jack answered truthfully, "I think this shape is a witch." It is common knowledge that a witch or wizard often rides a broomstick; therefore, Jack chose to answer "a witch." His answer implies that his interpretation of the shadow was subjective and could be incorrect. In fact, the silhouette Jack mentioned belonged to Snow White, who stole a broomstick from the witch Regina and flew out of the castle to their house.

Infringing the Maxim of Quality

According to Saradifa (2020) infringing a maxim could be due to a disability, or to drunkenness, nervousness, or excitement. Thomas (1995) explained that a maxim may be infringed because the speaker, a child or a foreign learner, has an imperfect command of the language. The speaker's performance may also be impaired due to a cognitive or speech impairment. Here is an example of how a speaker may infringe the Maxim of Quality due to a disability:

A: Did you meet him at the market?

B: Uh...No. Ah yeah maybe. I...I...don't know sorry.
(Saradifa, 2020, p. 3)

In this example, B's response contains an unintentional repetition, perhaps due to a performance impairment or to nervous excitement.

Face Theory

Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 61) proposed the concept of face as “the mutually granted public image held by participants in a communicative event.” Adult members of a society all have a public self-image, and the rational ability to maintain and improve it. The notion of face was first introduced by Goffman (1967, as cited in Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61), who said that “face can be gained or improved, that it has emotional significance, and requires ongoing attention during social interactions.” Brown and Levinson (1987) believe that speakers seek (1) positive face, that is, a self-image that is approved of by those with whom they interact, and (2) negative face, which refers to preserving personal autonomy by avoiding situations that may restrict freedom or limit personal decisions. According to Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 61), positive face is the hope of each member that what they want others will also want. They wish their actions to be approved of or accepted by another participant in the exchange. Negative face, on the other hand, is the desire that actions be unhindered by others (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 62). Though the concept of face is universal, its specific manifestations may vary across cultures, as some acts are more face-threatening in one culture than in another (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Conlan (2005) defined face-threatening speech acts as those that may impose on another's face, and politeness is one strategy used to mitigate potential face-threat in order to maintain harmonious relationships. Take, for example, “Aster. I'm sorry. It was just supposed to be one letter. I never meant to hurt you” (Cahyaningrum et al., 2022, p. 148). Here, the speaker threatens her own positive face with an apology. The speaker asked Aster for forgiveness. Individuals with ASD, on the other hand, will never be able to mitigate the threats of such an apology (van Trigt et al., 2023). The distinction is that people with ASD may appear to threaten their hearer's face rather than their own face. In other words, while interacting with others, it is difficult for individuals with ASD to consider face. Since the concept of face does not apply to them, their communication patterns will differ from those of people without ASD. Simply put, what Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 61) refer to as “competent adult members of a society” may not include individuals with ASD.

Pragmatic Abilities in People with ASD

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), also known as autism, is characterized by difficulties in communication and social interaction, including a limited set of repeated behaviors (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, as cited in Asada et al., 2022). According to Villiers et al. (2007, as cited in Aprilidya, 2017, p. 404), the distinctive characteristics of individuals with ASD can be observed in three categories: (1) behavior, including hypersensitivities, excellent rote memory, and odd posture; (2) social or interaction skills, including lack of shared attention, poor eye contact, and failure with false belief tasks; and (3) communication skills, including lack of spontaneous functional speech, violations of conversational maxims, and speech that lacks relevance to the hearer.

Pragmatic skills are part of social communication skills (Baron-Cohen, 1988). Bates (1976, as cited in Baron-Cohen, 1988) defined pragmatics as “using speech and gesture in a communicative way, appropriate to the social context” (p. 379). The key factors in the diagnosis of ASD include difficulties in communication or speech, different communication codes, stereotyping, and a lack of awareness. All of these contribute to poor outcomes for people with ASD. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, as cited in Asada et al., 2022). Poor verbal and nonverbal communication are other key features of people with autism (Noens & van Berckelaer-Onnes, 2004, p. 199). Language development in children with ASD will be delayed or even reversed. Furthermore, the range and complexity of pre-linguistic communication behaviors, including eye contact, gestures, or facial expressions, are limited. Bryson (1996, as cited in Noens & van Berckelaer-Onnes, 2004, pp. 197–199), explained that individuals with ASD do not develop enough speech to meet their daily communication needs. Those with ASD struggle with four types of language difficulties: (1) lack of verbal abilities, including failure to develop verbal communication skills in his or her life; (2) early language delays (the first words of children with ASD are uttered, on average, at 38 months); (3) atypical features of language production, including echolalia and jargon; and (4) impairments in high-level discourse and pragmatic abilities, including conversational turn-taking or failing to consider Grice’s conversational maxim when responding (Eigsti et al., 2007, p. 1007).

Research has shown that people with ASD have significant communication difficulties. Cunningham (1968, as cited in Baron-Cohen, 1988, p. 385), found that autistic children made far fewer spontaneous remarks, and thought that autism may simply be slow or retarded development. Autistic children may not be able to spontaneously process or express information, or put themselves in the shoes of the hearer, which demonstrates a lack of empathy (Cunningham, 1968, as cited in Baron-Cohen, 1988, p. 385). Moreover, autistic children ask embarrassing questions without realizing it. Langdell (1980, as cited in Baron-Cohen, 1988, p. 386), noted this tendency in autistic children. They do

not intend to be rude or insensitive, but simply do not understand the rules of appropriate conversation.

Baltaxe (1977, as cited in Baron-Cohen, 1988, p. 385) also noted that people with autism are not intentionally rude, but rather lack an understanding of socially acceptable conversation. They may speak bluntly or impolitely without realizing it, violating the conversational postulates of acceptability and politeness. Furthermore, Ball (1978, as cited in Baron-Cohen, 1988, p. 386), explained that autistic children violate Grice's Cooperative Principle without communicative intent, and appear not to understand pragmatic presuppositions. People with ASD, for example, may violate the Maxim of Quality by failing to provide a precise and relevant answer to a question. This failure to understand or follow the rules can lead to misunderstanding and miscommunication.

Tomblin (1982, as cited in Baron-Cohen, 1988, p. 387) suggested that the communication style of autistic children is different from that of children with typical development. Autistic children ask questions primarily to initiate and continue conversations and frequently ask questions for which they already have the answer. They may not understand questions as a means of gathering information, which may be attributed to their difficulty with social interaction. Children with ASD may also struggle with turn-taking in conversations and often interrupt (Tomblin, 1982, as cited in Baron-Cohen, 1988, p. 387). Fay and Schuler (1980, as cited in Baron-Cohen, 1988, p. 387) also observed that autistic children struggle with speaker-hearer roles, and often interrupt or visibly struggle to wait their turn to speak. Moreover, individuals with autism may struggle to understand language or to participate effectively in unfamiliar surroundings, as at social gatherings. Noens and van Berckelaer-Onnes (2004) explained that those with autism are more likely to respond to the routine within the situational context than to the speech itself. This can lead to difficulties in social interaction and communication.

The Theory of Mind (ToM)

Premack and Woodruff (1978, as cited in Baron-Cohen et al., 1985) described the theory of mind (ToM) as the ability to attribute mental states to oneself and to others. Baron-Cohen (1985, p. 39) described the concept of the theory of mind (ToM) as "the ability to attribute independent mental states to oneself and others in order to explain and predict behavior." Individuals with ASD may lack any sign of having a theory of mind, or, according to Baron-Cohen (1988), may have the lowest level of theory of mind. As a result, they have no ability to understand, for example, what another person thinks about a third person (p. 11). Nosal (2016) supported the theory of mind that children with ASD lack the ability to perceive ideas from a point of view other than their own. Furthermore, people with ASD may be unable to understand the thoughts or feelings of others, or to realize that others have their own opinions and point of

view. As a result, they have difficulties comprehending the attitudes and feelings of others (Nosal, 2016). A distinguishing trait of people with ASD is a lack of empathy. They cannot put themselves in someone else's shoes. Figure 3 gives Nosal's (2016) description of those lacking ToM:

Figure 3: *Traits of ASD Individuals Lacking Theory of Mind*

Theory of Mind
Having difficulty inferring other's intentions
Having difficulty comprehending the viewpoints of others
Having difficulty focusing attention on other social norms
Having difficulty comprehending emotions
Having an inability to comprehend what others are thinking or feeling

Note. The characteristics of those with ASD who lack theory of mind. From *Theory of Mind; Challenges & Treatment Within Aspergers & Autism Spectrum* (Nosal, 2016, p. 357)

According to Frith and Happé (1994, p. 99), people with ASD who are unable to take listeners' thoughts and feelings into account, are impaired in the following ways: (1) they can focus on their own behavior but not on shared interests; (2) they can provide information, but do not consider the needs of the listener, so they leave out details and relevant facts; (3) they can use terms for emotions and desires but not for cognitive states, meaning they respond emotionally, not rationally; and (4) they can use gestures to modify behavior but not to alter thoughts and feelings. As an example of (4), they may use gestures to convey discomfort rather than explanation or argument. In addition, Baixauli-Fortea et al. (2017) found that the pragmatic skills in children with ASD were poor. These children struggle to initiate a conversation, contribute new or relevant information, and account for context. They often resort to gestures and facial expressions rather than speech.

Research Methodology

Source of the Data

The data for this research were collected from conversations involving the character, Dr. Shaun Murphy, as he observed the Maxim of Quality in the television series *The Good Doctor*. Ninety-five percent of the scenes take place in

a hospital, and all eighteen episodes of season one were the data source for this study. The eighteen episodes lasted 1,548 minutes or 25.8 hours in total. This series aired on ABC Television in 2017, but the data were collected via Netflix so the researchers could pause and replay the series as necessary to properly collect and transcribe the data. Although Shaun's conversations were scripted, this form of data collection had many advantages, one of which is that the researchers were able to analyze the spoken language of a fictional doctor with autism.

Data Collection

There were two steps in the data collection procedure. The researchers, together with a research assistant, began collecting data by watching season one on Netflix. In the course of two weeks, we watched the entire season twice, up to three episodes per day. On the first screening, the researchers and the research assistant noted points at which Shaun observed the Maxim of Quality. On the second screening, we extracted the conversations and placed them in a separate file. To systematize the process, we used a template to record the data.

Data Analysis

Using Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and focusing on the Maxim of Quality, the data were categorized according to the topics and conversational characteristics typical of autistic people (Baron-Cohen, 1988; Frith & Happé, 1994; Noens & van Berckelaer-Onnes, 2004). Within these conceptual frameworks, the researchers were able to identify the communication patterns of the character with ASD in regard to the face concept, pragmatic ability, and theory of mind.

Results and Discussion

Out of the eighteen episodes, there were fifty-seven conversations in which Shaun observed the Maxim of Quality. The fifty-seven conversations had four distinctive features based on communication difficulties in people with ASD: (1) responding without concern for the listener's face wants, (2) asking inappropriate questions, (3) asking long questions to ascertain facts, and (4) interrupting others.

Responding without Concern for the Listener's Face Wants

Out of fifty-seven conversations in which Shaun observed the Maxim of Quality, he responded to his conversation partners forty-seven times. When asked a question, Shaun usually responded immediately to his interlocutor, but when initiating conversation, Shaun would pause and consider what to say. Extract 1 is an example of Shaun explaining to his interlocutor in a straightforward way.

Extract 1

Episode 3 (Oliver) Time: 13:19–13:39

[At SF Municipal Hospital]

Claire: So, how do you know about the weather? Is it some kind of gift?

[Laughs] Come on, I got to know. What, Shaun Murphy is Zeus¹.

Shaun: ***I watch The Weather Channel.***

In this conversation, Claire and Shaun discuss how Shaun knew that the weather was terrible, and that they could not go back to the hospital by helicopter. Claire wondered if Shaun had a special gift for forecasting the weather and compared him to Zeus¹. Shaun admitted that he knew the weather because he watched The Weather Channel. Shaun told Claire what he believed to be true, and thus observed the Maxim of Quality by admitting that he had no talent for predicting the weather. According to De Marchena and Eigsti (2016), adolescents with ASD struggle to share complex knowledge and do not understand indirect communication. Claire used a figure of speech, but Shaun can only answer as if she had spoken literally.

According to Noens and van Berckelaer-Onnes (2004), people with autism do not usually respond according to the speech itself, but according to the context or situation. It is Shaun's conversational style to consistently respond to his interlocutors. He is able to give information consistent with the preceding dialog, but his response might not sound logical. According to Frith and Happé (1994), people with autism give information but do not consider the needs of listeners with respect to content, some of which can be impolite or unacceptable. In Extract 2, Shaun responds to an interlocutor:

Extract 2

Episode 2 (Mount Rushmore), Time: 22:06–23:36

[At San Jose St. Bonaventure Hospital]

Shaun: Let me see the other test orders. I'll tell you which ones are most important and you can do them in that order. I'll be honest and fair.

Carly: That is not the way that it works. Now go wait your turn.

Shaun: ***If you don't do Dr. Melendez's test right now, I will throw a rock through your window.***

Carly: Well, I wouldn't want that. Go have a seat. Your results will be ready in 15 minutes.

In this conversation, Shaun received an order from Dr. Melendez to retrieve lab results. Carly, a lab technician, said that many test orders were being

¹Zeus is the king of the Greek pantheon. He is the god of the sky, weather, law and order, destiny, and fate in ancient Greek mythology. (Theoi Project, n.d.)

processed and Shaun had to wait. He did not want to wait for a long time, however, and observed the Maxim of Quality by saying, “If you don’t do Dr. Melendez’s test right now, I will throw a rock through your window.” Shaun replied with a threat she did not expect or want to hear, especially given his position and age. Shaun implied that he needed the test results immediately. He observed the Maxim of Quality by saying he would throw a rock through the lab window, so Carly complied with his wishes. Sometimes, Shaun observes the Maxim of Quality by saying something unexpected and impolite. Extract 3 also shows Shaun speaking in a straightforward way, which the listener might consider rude.

Extract 3

Episode 2 (Mount Rushmore) Time: 32:33–32:50

[At Martine’s house]

Martine’s Parent: Call us in the morning.

Shaun: *Okay. She may not be alive in the morning.*

Martine’s Parent: Does your boss know you’re here?

Shaun: No, I think he’d be upset with me for being here.

Here, Shaun talked with Martine’s parents about their daughter’s condition. The parents thought their daughter was only pretending to be sick. Shaun visited their house late at night because he knew their daughter was in a coma. He told Martine’s parents the truth, that if their daughter did not get immediate treatment, she might be dead by morning. Shaun observed the Maxim of Quality in this conversation, because he told the parents a truth of which he was confident. People with autism may make fewer remarks when giving spontaneous information, according to Cunningham (1968, as cited in Baron-Cohen, 1988, p. 385), because it is difficult for them to process and express information. Martine’s parents expected that Shaun would agree to their request and called them in the morning, but his response went beyond what they had expected. Moreover, Langdell (1980, as cited in Baron-Cohen, 1988, p. 386) stated that people with ASD do not intend to be rude. Shaun informs Martine’s parents that their daughter may die, and that Shaun wishes to treat Martine before anything horrible happens. Furthermore, “people with ASD may appear to threaten the hearer’s face rather than their own” (Cahyaningrum et al., 2022, p. 148). In Extract 4 Shaun speaks in a way that is harmful to the listener’s positive face.

Extract 4

Episode 1 (Burnt Food) Time: 22:10–22:28

[At San Jose St. Bonaventure Hospital]

Claire: Hey. You’re new to town, right?

Shaun: Yes.

Claire: Well, I'm sure you have a lot of questions.

Shaun: *No*.

Claire: Uh.... You got to be curious about the place, about the people.

Shaun: Dr. Glassman gave me a map of the hospital, and I got a map of San Jose online.

Claire: Okay. Great.

Here Claire tried to become friends with Shaun by offering to help him adjust to his new city. Shaun, however, had no curiosity about the city, so he avoided the issue and observed the Maxim of Quality by replying to her very briefly because he did not want to discuss the topic. Even though the topic is general and non-medical, his answer is harmful to Claire's positive face. Furthermore, Shaun shows that he lacks theory of mind. According to Nosal (2016), people with ASD have difficulty inferring the intentions of others. Claire asked Shaun a question because he was a newcomer and she wanted to make friends with him, but he did not understand her intentions. Shaun frequently observes the Maxim of Quality when he interrupts conversation and blurts out his observations. In Extract 5, Shaun interrupts his interlocutor:

Extract 5

Episode 4 (Pipes) Time: 19:35–20:00

[At Lea's car]

Lea: I'm horrible at directions, too. Every time I exit a BART station, I walk like three blocks before I realize I'm going the wrong direction. You're lucky I actually made it to the gym. I like to go when it's not crowded, but it's so hard to motivate after work. Half the time I end up not

—
Shaun: *You stink*.

Lea: I know. I'm disgusting.

In this conversation, Shaun and Lea were on the way back to their apartment because Shaun got off at the wrong bus stop. Lea happened to drive past and picked him up. In an attempt to create a friendly atmosphere, she started telling a story. But Shaun's comment about her body odor is harmful to Lea's positive face and causes her to lose confidence. It is obvious in the scene that she is aware of this problem, and does not want to discuss it. Generally, people do not speak truthfully to others, especially to women, about their body odor. Moreover, Shaun's comment appears to be rude because of his word choices. According to Baltaxe (1977, as cited in Baron-Cohen, 1988, p. 385), people with ASD do not intend to be rude, but lack an understanding of what is acceptable in conversation. Lea was complaining about her inability to remember directions, but Shaun chose

words to cut through the conversation, telling her that she smells bad. The listener may move on to another topic if the current one appears uninteresting. Shaun did the same thing, but his wording is inappropriate in this context.

Asking Inappropriate Questions

One feature of Shaun's conversation is speaking the truth about things he is curious about. He frequently initiates such conversations by asking specific questions that elicit a definite response, although his questions are not always appropriate and sometimes make his conversation partner uncomfortable. According to Langdell (1980, as cited in Baron-Cohen, 1988, p. 386), individuals with autism tend to ask embarrassing questions, and do not realize such questions deviate from the norm. Extract 6 contains one of Shaun's inappropriate questions.

Extract 6

Episode 15 (Heartfelt), Time: 33:28–33:53

[At San Jose St. Bonaventure Hospital]

Jessica: Glad to see you're treating yourself. You deserve it.

Shaun: ***How much did your dress cost?***

Jessica: I don't remember. And just so you know, that's not the best question for an event like this.

Shaun: Why not?

Jessica: I don't know. It just isn't.

Shaun: Okay.

Shaun attends a hospital charity event where everyone is dressed up in expensive gowns and suits. During the event, he meets Jessica, the hospital's in-house attorney. In this excerpt, Jessica expressed her delight at seeing him, because their colleagues had predicted that Shaun would not attend the charity event. Instead of responding to her remark, however, Shaun asked Jessica about what particularly interested him, the cost of her dress. His suit was expensive and he wanted to compare, but his question could damage Jessica's negative face. Many would find this question, from a young man with a high-status position, inappropriate or impolite. In addition, Shaun frequently observes the Maxim of Quality when discussing a third party, freely expressing his thoughts and opinions, as illustrated in Extract 7.

Extract 7

Episode 10 (Sacrifice) Time: 00:55–01:16

[At San Jose St. Bonaventure Hospital]

Dr. Andrew: E-sports.

Jared: Video games?

Dr. Andrew: He's one of the best in the world. Last year, he won enough prize money to buy his mom a beach house in Monterey. Paid cash.

Shaun: *Is he considered a very important person because he's an athlete or because he has a lot of money?*

Dr. Melendez & Dr. Andrew: Both.

Shaun: Mm.

In this conversation, Shaun, Dr. Andrew, Dr. Melendez, and Jared discussed a VIP patient named Bobby. While Dr. Andrew explained why Bobby was a VIP, Shaun interrupted by asking whether it was due to his wealth or celebrity status. Shaun posed this question to enhance his confidence, despite the fact that he already knew the answer. According to Tomblin (1982, as cited in Baron-Cohen, 1988, p. 387), people with ASD may use questions to continue a conversation. Shaun asks why Bobby is considered a VIP patient, but the answer from Dr. Melendez and Dr. Andrew comes as no surprise to him.

Asking Long Questions to Find Out Facts

Shaun's long questions are an aspect of his observance of the Maxim of Quality. Shaun is linguistically capable of producing long sentences, but his questions suggest that he is angling for a specific answer. Most of the time, it was inappropriate. According to Tomblin (1982, as cited in Baron-Cohen, 1988, p. 387), individuals with autism often ask questions to which they already know the answer, and do not seem to understand that less direct questions can be effective. In Extract 8, Shaun asks an explicit but rather long question.

Extract 8

Episode 1 (Burnt Food) Time: 34:13–34:28

[At San Jose St. Bonaventure Hospital]

Shaun: I do have one question

Claire: Yeah?

Shaun: *Why were you rude to me when we first met, then nicer to me the second time we met, and now you want to be my friend? Which time was it that you were pretending?*

Claire has treated Shaun differently on two previous occasions, and Shaun wants to know why she treated him differently when they met, and to find out what was real and what was fake.

Interrupting Others

When Shaun observes the Maxim of Quality, he often interrupts. He does not wait for the other person to finish. Whenever he wants to say something, he speaks out immediately, and does not care if he interrupts others. According to Fay and Schuler (1980, as cited in Baron-Cohen, 1988, p. 387), individuals with autism often interrupt and do not know when to begin or to pause a conversation.

Extract 9 presents an example of Shaun interrupting his colleagues in conversation.

Extract 9

Episode 6 (Not Fake) Time: 00:30–00:40

[At San Jose St. Bonaventure Hospital]

Farrar: Thank you, Dr. Kalu.

Jared: You're welcome. It's a special blend. I roast the beans myself.

Shaun: *Smells like leather.*

Jared: Then none for you, Murphy.

Shaun's colleagues are discussing the coffee Jared made for the emergency room nurses. Shaun interrupts with an observation about the coffee's smell. The implication is that Shaun does not know there are a variety of coffee aromas, or how to describe them, so he spoke plainly and truthfully about his perception. This, however, is in strong contrast to the usual descriptions of the smell of coffee, so the remark threatens Jared's positive face. Jared's response is not surprising.

Conclusion

Shaun observes the Maxim of Quality by telling the truth from his point of view, especially when responding to others. Shaun typically responds to rather than initiates conversations, and usually does so immediately and without hesitation. Shaun often asks inappropriate or excessively long questions and often interrupts his conversational partners. Shaun's responses seem to him logical, but he does not care if his responses are offensive. Shaun creates awkward interactions when he affects the positive face of his interlocutors. In other words, Shaun tells the truth in a straightforward and uncomplicated way, suggesting a lack of pragmatic knowledge. Simply said, he knows how to be accurate and truthful, but not appropriate.

The study shows that Shaun, an individual with ASD, is an incompetent adult. His conversational abilities are limited. He struggles to share complex knowledge, offers straightforward responses lacking nuance or social awareness, and cannot deduce the intentions of his conversational partners. People with ASD have difficulty processing and expressing accurate information in context. They struggle to process information or express themselves in a social context. Therefore, his communication is meant to express his knowledge rather than build solidarity. Shaun's speech reflects a lack of theory of mind, in that he struggles to understand the thoughts, emotions, and intentions of others. Shaun uses inappropriate language in a social context because he does not know how his words will be perceived. Shaun's responses occasionally show a disregard for his interlocutor's positive face. He provides factual responses that surprise his

conversation partners, so his responses make people uncomfortable. Although adults with typical development have sensitivity to the concept of face, Shaun's sensitivity is significantly reduced due to his ASD condition. Furthermore, Shaun's inappropriate use of language in context reflects a lack of basic skills, which makes it difficult for him to share complex knowledge. Furthermore, Shaun lacks empathy, which is typical of people with ASD. This can make it difficult for him to give support or solace in conversation.

Recommendations

Researchers interested in using Grice's Cooperative Principle to analyze *The Good Doctor* might improve on this study by watching the entire series for more examples of Shaun's observance of the Maxim of Quality. Researchers may also study Shaun's observance of other conversational maxims, or use the same data set but focus on how Shaun violates, flouts, or opts out of the Maxim of Quality. These additions will help better understand Shaun's character and his difficulties in communication. Further research on the show could compare those conversations on medical topics with those on non-medical topics by observing Grice's Cooperative Principle in other media in the same setting. Furthermore, there are many films in which the main characters are people with ASD. Further research could be conducted to observe the conversational maxims in other media to investigate whether the notion of face, the pragmatic ability, and the theory of mind of the main characters with ASD appearing on diverse media genres different from one another.

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