

Flouting the Gricean Maxims in The Wild Robot (2024): A Pragmatic Analysis of Conversational Implicature in Animated Film Dialogue

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the flouting of Gricean conversational maxims in the animated film The Wild Robot (2024) and the conversational implicatures generated through such flouting. Grounded in Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and its four maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner, the study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design to analyze dialogue exchanges among the film's characters, particularly Roz, Fink, Brightbill, Thorn, and Vontra. Dialogue instances were identified, screened, and verified against the screenplay of The Wild Robot (2024) to ensure contextual accuracy, resulting in seventeen retained instances of maxim flouting. The findings indicate that the Maxim of Quality was flouted most frequently, accounting for nine instances (52.94%), followed by Relation with six instances (35.29%) and Quantity with two instances (11.76%). No instance of Manner flouting satisfied the inclusion criteria, a result treated as a legitimate descriptive finding rather than a shortcoming to be corrected. The flouted maxims were found to generate implicatures associated with sarcasm and irony, indirect emotional disclosure, redirection of sensitive questions, concealment of uncomfortable information, and protective concealment of danger. These findings are discussed in relation to previous Gricean studies of film dialogue, including analyses of Conclave (2024), Inside Out 2, and Thor: Ragnarok, situating The Wild Robot within existing pragmatic scholarship while addressing a specific gap in the literature: although the film has previously been examined through Systemic Functional Linguistics, its Gricean pragmatic dimension has received limited scholarly attention.

Keywords: Gricean maxims; conversational implicature; maxim flouting; cooperative principle; pragmatics

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INTRODUCTION

Human communication rarely depends on the literal meaning of words alone. Speakers routinely rely on shared context, background assumptions, and inferential reasoning to convey meanings that extend beyond, or sometimes directly contradict, the semantic content of what is said. This gap between sentence meaning and speaker meaning lies at the heart of pragmatics, the branch of linguistics concerned with meaning in context and with how listeners interpret utterances beyond their literal content (Yule, 1996). Meaning in interaction is shaped not only by what is explicitly stated but also by what is implied, presupposed, or left unsaid, and pragmatic theory offers a systematic account of how such implicit meaning is recovered by hearers (Thomas, 1995).

Central to this account is Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, which proposes that participants in a conversation implicitly cooperate with one another to make their contributions appropriate to the purpose and direction of the exchange in which they are engaged. Grice further specified four conversational maxims that operationalize this principle: Quality, which concerns truthfulness; Quantity, which concerns the appropriate amount of information; Relation, which concerns relevance; and Manner, which concerns clarity of expression. Speakers do not always observe these maxims strictly. When a speaker deliberately and overtly fails to observe a maxim, yet the hearer has reason to assume that the speaker remains fundamentally cooperative, the speaker is said to flout the maxim. This flouting generates a conversational implicature, an additional layer of meaning that the hearer must infer beyond the literal content of the utterance (Grice, 1975; Levinson, 1983; Thomas, 1995).

Maxim flouting is a useful device for meaning-making in constructed dialogue such as film. Because screenwriters compose dialogue deliberately, flouting is frequently employed to create humor, characterization, emotional nuance, irony, and dramatic tension, allowing audiences to infer character motivation, relationships, and emotional states that are not stated outright (Sitorus et al., 2025). Analyzing flouting in film dialogue therefore offers a useful window into how implicature operates in discourse that, while fictional, is carefully crafted to approximate naturalistic conversational exchange. Recent scholarship has applied Gricean analysis to a range of contemporary films, examining how flouting contributes to meaning-making in genres ranging from political drama to animated family films (Sitorus et al., 2025; Dayabhi & Candra, 2025; Devi & Ambalegin, 2022; Nernere, 2024).

The Wild Robot (2024) presents a particularly rich context for such analysis. The film follows Roz, a service robot stranded on a remote island, as she gradually adapts to her surroundings, forms an unlikely parental bond with an orphaned gosling named Brightbill, and navigates relationships with other island inhabitants, including the opportunistic fox Fink and the formidable bear Thorn. The narrative later introduces Vontra and the Universal Dynamics recovery unit, whose pursuit of Roz raises questions of loyalty, autonomy, and belonging. Because the film's central themes revolve around found family, concealment, self-protection, and emotional growth under difficult circumstances, its dialogue frequently relies on indirectness: characters withhold painful truths, redirect uncomfortable questions, and use irony or exaggeration to manage emotionally charged situations. These narrative conditions make the film a productive site for examining how conversational maxims are flouted and what implicatures such flouting generates.

Previous linguistic research identified during the literature review has examined *The Wild Robot* from other theoretical perspectives. Fitria et al. (2025), for instance, examined Roz's emotional growth through

a Systemic Functional Linguistics approach centered on the Mood system and Constructed Emotion theory, tracing how declarative, interrogative, and imperative structures reflect Roz's developing emotional life. This study demonstrates that the film has already attracted scholarly linguistic attention, and the present study does not claim otherwise. Meanwhile, film-based pragmatic studies employing Grice's framework have demonstrated the usefulness of maxim-flouting analysis for explaining indirect and non-literal meaning in cinematic dialogue more broadly (Sitorus et al., 2025; Dayabhi & Candra, 2025; Devi & Ambalegin, 2022). Within the literature identified for the present study, however, limited attention has been given to Gricean maxim flouting and the conversational implicatures generated by the characters in *The Wild Robot* (2024) specifically. This gap motivates the present study, which approaches the film's dialogue through a Gricean pragmatic lens rather than the systemic-functional approach used in prior work on the same film.

Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. What types of Gricean maxims are flouted by the characters in *The Wild Robot* (2024)?

RQ2. What conversational implicatures are generated through the flouting of these maxims?

RQ3. Which type of Gricean maxim is most frequently flouted in the selected conversations?

By answering these questions, this study aims to contribute a Gricean pragmatic reading of *The Wild Robot* that complements existing linguistic scholarship on the film and extends the growing body of research applying maxim-flouting analysis to contemporary animated cinema. The remainder of this article is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews the theoretical literature on pragmatics, conversational implicature, the Cooperative Principle, and maxim flouting, together with relevant previous studies; Section 3 outlines the descriptive qualitative research method; Section 4 presents and discusses the findings; and Section 5 concludes the article by answering the research questions and outlining limitations and directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the study of meaning as it is communicated by a speaker and interpreted by a listener, with particular attention to how context shapes what is understood beyond the literal content of an utterance (Yule, 1996). Unlike semantics, which is concerned primarily with the conventional, context-independent meaning of linguistic expressions, pragmatics investigates how speakers convey more than they literally say and how listeners draw on contextual knowledge, shared assumptions, and inferential reasoning to arrive at an intended interpretation (Levinson, 1983). Thomas (1995) further emphasizes that meaning in interaction is a dynamic, negotiated process in which speaker meaning and hearer interpretation are jointly constructed rather than simply transmitted. This distinction between literal, sentence-level meaning and speaker-intended meaning provides the theoretical foundation for examining how characters in film dialogue communicate implicit meaning through what is said, and, crucially, through what is deliberately left unsaid or stated in an unexpected way.

Conversational Implicature

Conversational implicature refers to the additional meaning that a hearer infers from an utterance

beyond its literal semantic content, based on the assumption that the speaker is behaving cooperatively within the conversation (Grice, 1975). Implicature is not part of what is literally said but arises from the interaction between the utterance, the context in which it is produced, and general conversational expectations. Levinson (1983) describes implicature as one of the central explanatory tools of pragmatics precisely because it accounts for cases in which speaker meaning diverges systematically from sentence meaning, yet listeners are nonetheless able to recover the intended interpretation reliably. In fictional dialogue, conversational implicature allows screenwriters to communicate emotional states, hidden motivations, or dramatic irony without relying on explicit exposition, requiring the audience to actively infer meaning from context, tone, and departure from expected conversational norms.

Cooperative Principle

Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle proposes that participants in a conversation implicitly operate under a shared assumption of cooperation, making their conversational contributions such as required, at the stage at which they occur, by the accepted purpose or direction of the exchange in which they are engaged. This principle does not require that speakers always state literal truths or provide maximal information; rather, it accounts for how conversation functions as a jointly managed, purposeful activity. Levinson (1983) situates the Cooperative Principle as the foundational assumption that allows conversational implicature to arise: because hearers assume speakers are being cooperative, an apparent violation of a conversational norm is not interpreted as a communicative breakdown but as a signal that additional, inferable meaning is intended. This assumption of underlying cooperation, even when a maxim is not observed on the surface, is essential to understanding flouting as a distinct pragmatic phenomenon rather than as a failure of communication.

Gricean Conversational Maxims

To operationalize the Cooperative Principle, Grice (1975) proposed four conversational maxims. The Maxim of Quality requires speakers to say only what they believe to be true and to avoid statements for which they lack adequate evidence. The Maxim of Quantity requires speakers to make their contribution as informative as required for the current purposes of the exchange, without providing more or less information than is necessary. The Maxim of Relation requires speakers to make their contributions relevant to the ongoing conversational exchange. The Maxim of Manner requires speakers to be clear, avoiding obscurity, ambiguity, unnecessary wordiness, and disorderliness in expression. Yule (1996) notes that these maxims describe not a set of rigid rules that speakers must follow, but a set of assumptions that hearers rely on when interpreting utterances; it is precisely because hearers expect these maxims to be observed that a speaker's departure from them becomes communicatively meaningful.

Maxim Flouting

Non-observance of the conversational maxims can occur in several ways, but flouting is distinguished from other forms of non-observance, such as violating, infringing, or opting out, by the fact that it is overt and recognizable to the hearer, and it does not indicate an intention to deceive or an inability to cooperate (Thomas, 1995). When a speaker flouts a maxim, the failure to observe it is blatant enough that the hearer can recognize it as deliberate, prompting the hearer to search for an implicated meaning that

reconciles the overt non-observance with the underlying assumption that the speaker remains cooperative (Grice, 1975). Flouting therefore functions as a communicative resource rather than a communicative failure: speakers exploit the maxims strategically to generate implicature, often for purposes such as irony, humor, tact, emotional indirection, or the softening of face-threatening information. This distinguishes flouting from covert violation, in which a speaker misleads the hearer without any signal that the maxim is being set aside; a violation of this kind is intended to go unnoticed and therefore does not generate an implicature in the Gricean sense (Grice, 1975; Thomas, 1995). Not every false or evasive statement in dialogue qualifies as flouting: the utterance must be interpretable, within its scene, as an overt and recognizable departure rather than as an attempt to deceive the hearer without detection. In film dialogue specifically, flouting allows writers to embed layered meaning into exchanges that appear, on the surface, to disregard conversational cooperation, while in fact relying on audience inference to construct richer characterization and dramatic effect (Sitorus et al., 2025).

Previous Studies

Several recent studies have applied Grice's framework to film dialogue, providing useful points of comparison for the present analysis. Sitorus et al. (2025) conducted a qualitative descriptive analysis of maxim flouting in the political drama *Conclave* (2024), examining seventy utterances and identifying instances across all four maxim categories. Their study found that the Maxim of Quality was the most frequently flouted category, at 44.29%, followed by Relation at 25.71%, Quantity at 22.86%, and Manner at 7.14%. This Quality-dominant pattern offers a direct comparator for the present study, which similarly finds Quality to be the most frequently flouted maxim.

Dayabhi and Candra (2025) focused specifically on the flouting of the Maxim of Relation in the animated film *Inside Out 2*, examining fifty-eight dialogue exchanges and identifying twenty-one cases of relevance flouting, eight of which were discussed in detail. Their analysis connected relevance flouting to hidden meaning, emotion regulation, and the negotiation of interpersonal relationships among the film's characters, a pattern that resonates closely with the Relation-flouting instances identified in the present study, many of which similarly involve characters redirecting sensitive questions toward emotionally significant, indirectly expressed meaning.

Devi and Ambalegin (2022) analyzed maxim flouting in *Thor: Ragnarok*, identifying seventeen instances of flouting distributed across the four maxims, with Quantity emerging as the most frequently flouted category, followed by Quality, Manner, and Relation. This finding stands in contrast to the Quality-dominant pattern identified both in the present study and in Sitorus et al. (2025), offering a useful point of contrast in the discussion of dominant maxim types across different films and genres.

Nernere (2024) examined maxim flouting and violation in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1*, using a qualitative descriptive method and reporting that non-observance of the maxims served humorous, dramatic, and deceptive narrative purposes, with Quantity, Relevance, and Quality discussed as particularly prominent categories. This study provides further support for the broader claim that Gricean maxim analysis is a productive framework across diverse film genres, from fantasy to animated family films.

Finally, as noted in the Introduction, Fitria et al. (2025) previously examined *The Wild Robot* through a Systemic Functional Linguistics lens, analyzing Roz's emotional development through the Mood

system and Constructed Emotion theory. While this study confirms that the film has already received linguistic scholarly attention, it does not address Gricean maxim flouting or conversational implicature, supporting the framework-based research gap that motivates the present study. Additional studies identified in the literature review, including analyses of maxim flouting in *UP!* (Gustary & Anggraini, 2021), *Ruby Sparks* (Lasiana & Mubarak, 2020), and *Pokémon: Detective Pikachu* (Setiawan & Haryani, 2020), further confirm the breadth of scholarly interest in Gricean approaches to animated and fantasy film dialogue, though their detailed numerical findings are not discussed here in the absence of full-text confirmation.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design, appropriate for examining a bounded scripted corpus rather than for testing statistical hypotheses or establishing generalizable claims across a population (Sitorus et al., 2025; Dayabhi & Candra, 2025). The object of analysis is the constructed film dialogue of *The Wild Robot* (2024), an animated film centered on the robot character Roz and her relationships with Brightbill, Fink, Thorn, and Vontra. The screenplay of *The Wild Robot* (2024) served as the primary source for verifying exact wording and scene context, ensuring that all analyzed dialogue accurately reflects the film as produced. The unit of analysis was a conversational utterance or short exchange whose interpretation depended on its immediate conversational and situational context.

Data consisted of conversational exchanges in which a character's utterance appeared to depart from one of Grice's (1975) four conversational maxims while remaining interpretable as a cooperative, meaningful communicative act. Candidate instances were identified through close reading of the dialogue, screened against the criteria for flouting outlined by Thomas (1995) that the non-observance of a maxim must be overt and recognizable, and must generate an inferable implicature rather than indicating deception, communicative failure, or a simple inability to communicate and subsequently verified against the screenplay to confirm speaker attribution and scene context. Instances that could be more plausibly explained by factors such as characterization, literal technical language, or stylistic word choice, rather than deliberate maxim flouting, were excluded during this screening process. This procedure yielded a final, retained dataset of seventeen instances of maxim flouting, distributed across three of the four maxim categories: Quality, Relation, and Quantity. No instance of Manner flouting satisfied the inclusion criteria after contextual examination; potential candidates involving unusual or technical wording were excluded when their interpretation could be explained more plausibly as characterization, literal technical language, or stylistic choice rather than deliberate maxim flouting. This absence is treated in the present study as a legitimate descriptive finding regarding the composition of the film's dialogue, rather than as a limitation of the analytical procedure.

Each retained instance was analyzed qualitatively using Grice's (1975) framework of the Cooperative Principle and conversational maxims, following the analytical categories of maxim type (Quality, Relation, or Quantity), the specific textual basis for classifying the utterance as flouting, and the conversational implicature generated by the utterance within its scene context. Frequency counts and percentages were calculated for descriptive purposes only, to characterize the relative distribution of maxim types within the dataset; consistent with the descriptive qualitative design, these figures are not intended to support statistical generalization beyond the seventeen purposively retained instances analyzed in this

study. The analysis does not involve human participants, interviews, surveys, or experimental procedures; all data are drawn exclusively from the film’s dialogue as verified against the screenplay.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Overall Findings

The analysis retained seventeen instances of maxim flouting across the dialogue of *The Wild Robot* (2024). These instances were distributed across three of Grice’s (1975) four conversational maxims, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Flouted Maxims in *The Wild Robot* (2024)

Maxim	Frequency	Percentage
Quality	9	52.94%
Relation	6	35.29%
Quantity	2	11.76%
Manner	0	0.00%
Total	17	100%

As shown in Table 1, the Maxim of Quality was flouted most frequently, accounting for slightly more than half of the retained instances. The Maxim of Relation was the second most frequently flouted category, while the Maxim of Quantity accounted for a smaller proportion of the dataset. No instance of Manner flouting was retained. This distribution directly answers RQ3, identifying Quality as the dominant maxim type in the selected conversations, and provides the empirical basis for the qualitative discussion that follows in relation to RQ1 and RQ2.

Table 2 presents a small set of representative instances drawn from the full seventeen-item dataset, selected to illustrate each of the three retained maxim categories before the detailed subsections below examine individual instances more closely.

Table 2. Representative Instances of Maxim Flouting in *The Wild Robot* (2024)

Data	Speaker	Utterance	Maxim Flouted	Conversational Implicature
1	Fink	“I’m a fox. I do foxy things. It’s in my nature.”	Relation	Predatory or opportunistic behavior is framed as instinctive rather than as an act requiring justification.
6	Thorn	“I know predators, and those are predators.”	Relation	The approaching robots are evaluated as dangerous pursuers rather than as Roz’s family.
7	Fink	“Your gosling, he isn’t exactly normal.”	Quantity	Brightbill is unusually vulnerable, with the full extent of the danger left unstated.
8	Roz	“It is, complicated.”	Quantity	The story behind Roz’s task is emotionally significant and not something Roz wishes to disclose to Vontra.

Data	Speaker	Utterance	Maxim Flouted	Conversational Implicature
9	Fink	“Are you kidding? Everything is working great.”	Quality	The situation is actually going badly; the exaggerated optimism functions ironically.
11	Brightbill	“Well I’m glad I could give you one.”	Quality	Brightbill is hurt and fears he was cared for as a task rather than as family.
16	Roz	“I left my transverse, adaptor thing, out there.”	Quality	Roz’s stated reason is fabricated; her real motive is to return to Brightbill.
17	Roz	“Nothing important.”	Quality	Roz conceals the seriousness of Vontra’s threat to avoid alarming Brightbill.

Flouting the Maxim of Quality

The Maxim of Quality, which requires speakers to say only what they believe to be true, was flouted in nine of the seventeen retained instances, making it the dominant category in the dataset. Flouting of this maxim in *The Wild Robot* frequently took the form of irony, sarcasm, exaggerated reassurance, or surface-level untruths that the surrounding dialogue explicitly frames as insincere, allowing characters to communicate emotional states indirectly rather than through direct statement. Not every false surface proposition in the dialogue was treated as flouting; classification depended on whether the incongruity between the literal statement and the surrounding scene was recoverable from the constructed dialogue and available narrative context, such that the hearer, and by extension the audience, could reasonably infer that the statement was not intended literally.

One clear example occurs when Roz observes that a plan is not working amid visibly chaotic circumstances, and Fink responds by asserting that everything is working great (Data 9). Fink’s overtly positive assessment directly conflicts with the observable state of the situation, and the mismatch is sufficiently blatant that it cannot be taken as a sincere report; rather, it is recognizable as ironic. The implicature generated is that the situation is, in fact, going badly, with Fink’s exaggerated optimism functioning simultaneously as humor and as a form of self-serving reassurance in a moment of difficulty.

A related pattern appears when Fink attempts to reassure Roz about the endangered gosling Brightbill’s survival, first asserting that he will not die, then immediately weakening this claim to “probably won’t die,” and finally to a still more hedged formulation acknowledging that death is merely “unlikely...just right now” (Data 10). The initial assertion, taken at face value, would satisfy the Maxim of Quality as a confident truth claim; however, its immediate and repeated retraction renders the original statement unsustainable as a sincere assertion of certainty. The progressive hedging itself becomes the locus of flouting, generating the implicature that Brightbill faces genuine danger and that Fink is unable to truthfully guarantee a positive outcome, even as he attempts to soften this reality for Roz.

Quality flouting is also used to convey hurt or resentment indirectly. When Brightbill realizes that Roz’s decision to raise him may have originated in her need for a programmed task rather than in genuine parental attachment, he responds with the statement that he is glad he could give her one (Data 11). Read literally, this expresses gladness; however, given the emotionally painful context, the statement functions

sarcastically, and its insincerity is recoverable from the surrounding scene. The implicature is that Brightbill feels hurt and fears that Roz's care for him may have been merely instrumental, rather than genuinely familial. A similar strategic use of insincerity for emotional self-protection appears later, when Roz withholds Vontra's threatening message from Brightbill by describing it as "nothing important" (Data 17), even though the surrounding context establishes the threat as serious. Here, the flouted maxim generates an implicature of concealment: Roz does not want Brightbill to worry or panic, and she deliberately downplays the danger to protect him emotionally, illustrating how Quality flouting in this film frequently serves a protective, rather than a purely comedic, function.

Quality flouting additionally appears in figurative and self-deprecating forms. Longneck's claim that geese are, at least, good conversationalists, immediately retracted with the admission that they are also boring (Data 12), constitutes a knowingly false initial assertion used for humorous self-deprecation, while his later description of Brightbill's heart as being bigger on the inside than the outside (Data 13) is not intended as a literal anatomical claim but as a figurative statement conveying inner courage and emotional strength that exceeds Brightbill's small physical stature. Both instances rely on the hearer's recognition that the literal statement is not to be taken as true, prompting an inferential search for the intended, non-literal meaning.

Taken together, these instances show that Quality flouting in *The Wild Robot* is not limited to comic irony but extends to emotionally significant functions, including protective concealment, figurative expression, and the indirect communication of hurt, sadness, or affection that characters are otherwise reluctant to state directly. These instances answer RQ1 by identifying Quality as a maxim type flouted for a range of distinct communicative purposes, and RQ2 by illustrating the specific implicatures such flouting generates within the film's central relationships.

Flouting the Maxim of Relation

The Maxim of Relation, which requires conversational contributions to be relevant to the ongoing exchange, was flouted in six of the seventeen retained instances. In *The Wild Robot*, Relation flouting typically occurs when a character avoids directly answering a question, instead redirecting the exchange toward a related but distinct topic that carries greater emotional or thematic significance, requiring the hearer to infer the connection between the literal response and the question actually posed.

A representative instance occurs early in the film, when Roz asks Fink why he stole her gosling and Fink responds only that he is a fox, that he does foxy things, and that it is in his nature (Data 1). Rather than offering a specific justification for the act itself, Fink shifts to a generalized claim about the essential nature of foxes. This response is not directly relevant to the specific question of motive, yet it remains interpretable: Fink implies that predatory or opportunistic behavior is inherent to being a fox and should be understood as instinctive, rather than as an act requiring moral justification.

A second instance illustrates how Relation flouting can function as evasion under pressure. When Roz, in a dangerous situation involving bees, asks Fink whether she should be concerned, he replies only that he cannot hear her (Data 2). This response does not engage with the substance of Roz's concern at all; instead, it functions as an evasive deflection while Fink continues to pursue his own interest in obtaining honey. The implicature is that Fink does not wish to address Roz's concern at that moment because his own

priority takes precedence, illustrating how flouting Relation can serve self-interested avoidance as much as emotional indirection.

Relation flouting is also used to convey emotionally significant self-disclosure. When Roz is questioned by Fink about breaking established rules, given that he had assumed she was bound to follow her programming strictly, she responds only that it is good to see a friend (Data 5). Rather than directly explaining or justifying her rule-breaking, Roz redirects the exchange toward her emotional connection with Fink, implying that friendship and emotional attachment have become significant enough to motivate behavior that departs from strict obedience to her original programming. This instance is thematically central to the film's broader narrative concerning Roz's emotional development and is consistent with the character-focused emotional trajectory examined by Fitria et al. (2025) from a different theoretical perspective.

A further instance, previously subject to independent verification against the screenplay, occurs when Fink asks whether the approaching Universal Dynamics robots are Roz's "parents," and Thorn responds only that he knows predators, and that those are predators (Data 6). Thorn's response does not engage with the literal question of family origin at all; instead, he evaluates the approaching robots strictly as threats. The implicature generated is that the robots should not be understood as family simply because they share Roz's origin, but rather as dangerous pursuers, reframing the entire exchange around the urgency of the danger rather than the question of kinship as originally posed.

Across these instances, Relation flouting in *The Wild Robot* consistently functions to redirect potentially uncomfortable, morally complex, or emotionally significant questions toward an implied meaning that the speaker finds more relevant to communicate, even where it is not relevant, in the strict Gricean sense, to the literal question asked. This pattern contributes to the answer to RQ1 by confirming Relation as a substantially represented maxim type, and to RQ2 by demonstrating implicatures oriented around avoidance, self-justification, and emotional connection.

Flouting the Maxim of Quantity

The Maxim of Quantity, which requires speakers to provide neither more nor less information than is required by the current conversational purpose, was flouted in the smallest number of instances in the dataset, occurring twice among the seventeen retained cases. Both instances involve the deliberate withholding of fuller information regarding emotionally sensitive or narratively significant matters.

In the first instance, Fink discusses Brightbill's medical condition with Roz, prefacing his remarks by noting that the situation may not take as long as Roz expects and that the gosling is "not exactly normal" (Data 7). Rather than stating the harsher underlying conclusion directly, Fink provides deliberately incomplete information, offering less explicit disclosure than the seriousness of the situation would otherwise call for. The resulting implicature is that Brightbill is unusually vulnerable and may not survive long enough to complete the developmental milestones Roz is working to help him achieve, with the withheld portion of the information left for Roz, and the audience, to infer.

In the second instance, when Vontra asks how Roz managed to secure a task on an island whose inhabitants could not originally communicate with her, Roz responds only that the situation is "complicated" (Data 8). This minimal response withholds a substantial explanation that the question would ordinarily require. The implicature generated is that the underlying story is lengthy, emotionally significant,

and not something Roz wishes to disclose fully to Vontra, an adversarial figure from whom Roz has reason to withhold personal and emotionally vulnerable information.

Although Quantity flouting accounts for a comparatively small proportion of the dataset, both instances share a common function: withholding fuller disclosure of emotionally difficult or narratively sensitive information from an interlocutor, whether to soften a harsh reality, as in Fink's case, or to protect emotionally significant experience from an unsympathetic listener, as in Roz's case. This function overlaps meaningfully with several of the concealment-oriented Quality-flouting instances discussed above, suggesting that under-informativeness and insincerity function as related, if analytically distinct, strategies for managing difficult information within the film's relationships.

Interpretation of Conversational Implicatures

Considered together, the implicatures generated by maxim flouting across the seventeen retained instances cluster into several recurring pragmatic functions, addressing RQ2 directly. First, several instances rely on sarcasm, irony, and humorous non-literal meaning, particularly among the Quality-flouting instances involving Fink's exaggerated reassurance, Brightbill's sarcastic gladness, and Longneck's self-deprecating humor (Data 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15). Second, a substantial cluster of instances functions to express emotional disclosure and interpersonal meaning indirectly, allowing characters, particularly Roz, Fink, and Brightbill, to communicate affection, hurt, or vulnerability without stating these feelings explicitly (Data 4, 5, 11, 14, 15). Third, several instances function to conceal, soften, or withhold uncomfortable information, particularly concerning danger or mortality (Data 7, 8, 17). Fourth, a smaller subset reflects protective or strategic concealment, in which a character constructs a false account whose insincerity is nonetheless recoverable from the scene, for a self-protective or relationship-motivated purpose (Data 16, 17). Finally, a substantial group of instances functions to redirect questions toward a more important implied meaning, allowing characters to avoid direct engagement with a literal question while still communicating a meaningful, inferable response (Data 1, 2, 3, 5, 6).

These functional patterns suggest that maxim flouting in *The Wild Robot* is not primarily a comedic device, although humor is clearly present in several instances, but is more fundamentally an instrument for managing emotionally difficult material within the film's central relationships, particularly the found-family bond between Roz, Brightbill, and Fink, and the adversarial relationship between Roz and Vontra's Universal Dynamics unit. Characters flout maxims when direct, literal communication would be too emotionally costly, too dangerous, or too socially awkward to sustain, relying instead on the hearer's inferential capacity to recover the intended meaning. This pattern is consistent with the broader pragmatic literature's account of implicature as a resource for indirect, face-saving, and emotionally sensitive communication (Thomas, 1995; Levinson, 1983), and it extends this account to the specific narrative and thematic concerns of an animated science-fiction family film.

Comparison with Previous Studies

The finding that Quality is the dominant flouted maxim in *The Wild Robot*, accounting for 52.94% of retained instances, aligns closely with Sitorus et al.'s (2025) analysis of *Conclave* (2024), in which Quality was likewise the most frequently flouted maxim, at 44.29%, followed by Relation and Quantity. Although the two films differ substantially in genre, tone, and target audience, Quality flouting was the

most frequently identified category in both studies. This shared pattern is limited to the two films examined here; further comparative research across a wider range of films would be needed before drawing conclusions about film dialogue more generally.

By contrast, Devi and Ambalegin's (2022) analysis of *Thor: Ragnarok* found Quantity, rather than Quality, to be the most frequently flouted maxim among seventeen identified instances, with Quality, Manner, and Relation appearing less frequently. This contrast indicates that the dominant maxim type identified in one film's dialogue does not necessarily hold for another: in *The Wild Robot* and in Sitorus et al.'s (2025) *Conclave* dataset, Quality was dominant, whereas in Devi and Ambalegin's (2022) *Thor: Ragnarok* dataset, Quantity was dominant. Based on the studies compared here, the dominant maxim type appears to depend on the specific film analyzed rather than following a single pattern across films.

The present study's Relation-flouting instances, meanwhile, resonate with Dayabhi and Candra's (2025) focused analysis of relevance flouting in *Inside Out 2*, which similarly connected relevance flouting to hidden meaning, emotion regulation, and the negotiation of interpersonal relationships among animated characters. In both the present dataset and Dayabhi and Candra's (2025) study, Relation flouting allowed characters to convey emotionally significant meaning indirectly, through redirection rather than explicit statement. This similarity is drawn from the two studies compared here and is not presented as a claim about animated family films in general.

Finally, in relation to Fitria et al. (2025), whose Systemic Functional Linguistics analysis of *The Wild Robot* traced Roz's emotional growth through the Mood system, the present study's findings offer a complementary rather than competing account. Where Fitria et al. (2025) demonstrate Roz's emotional development through the grammatical choices of declarative, interrogative, and imperative mood, the present study demonstrates a parallel emotional trajectory through Roz's, and other characters', strategic departures from cooperative conversational norms, particularly in instances involving Roz's use of Quality flouting to protect Brightbill (Data 16, 17) and Relation flouting to express her evolving capacity for friendship and attachment (Data 5). Read together, these two studies suggest that Roz's emotional growth across the film is legible through multiple, independent linguistic frameworks, reinforcing the interpretive significance of the film's dialogue as a site of rich pragmatic and grammatical meaning-making.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the flouting of Gricean conversational maxims in the dialogue of *The Wild Robot* (2024) and the conversational implicatures generated through such flouting, based on a descriptive qualitative analysis of seventeen retained dialogue instances verified against the screenplay. In answer to RQ1, the analysis found that characters in the film flout three of Grice's (1975) four conversational maxims: Quality, Relation, and Quantity. No instance of Manner flouting satisfied the inclusion criteria after contextual examination; potential candidates involving unusual or technical wording were excluded when their interpretation could be explained more plausibly as characterization, literal technical language, or stylistic choice rather than deliberate maxim flouting. This absence is treated as a legitimate descriptive characteristic of the film's dialogue rather than as an analytical shortcoming.

In answer to RQ2, the conversational implicatures generated through maxim flouting in the film cluster around several recurring pragmatic functions: sarcasm, irony, and humorous non-literal meaning;

indirect emotional disclosure and interpersonal meaning; concealment, softening, or withholding of uncomfortable information; protective or strategic concealment; and the redirection of sensitive questions toward more emotionally significant implied meaning. These functions collectively suggest that maxim flouting in *The Wild Robot* operates primarily as a resource for managing emotionally difficult material within the film's central relationships, rather than as a purely comedic device, although humor remains present in several instances.

In answer to RQ3, the Maxim of Quality was found to be the most frequently flouted maxim in the selected conversations, accounting for nine of the seventeen retained instances (52.94%), followed by Relation with six instances (35.29%) and Quantity with two instances (11.76%). This Quality-dominant pattern aligns with previous findings reported by Sitorus et al. (2025) in their analysis of *Conclave* (2024), while contrasting with the Quantity-dominant pattern reported by Devi and Ambalegin (2022) in their analysis of *Thor: Ragnarok*. Based on the studies compared in this article, the dominant maxim type identified in a film's dialogue appears to vary from one film to another rather than following a single, predictable pattern.

This study is subject to several limitations. As a descriptive qualitative analysis of a single film, its findings are not intended to be statistically generalizable beyond the seventeen purposively retained instances examined here, and the classification of individual utterances as instances of flouting, while grounded in established Gricean criteria, necessarily involves a degree of interpretive judgment. The analysis is further limited to dialogue explicitly verified against the screenplay and does not incorporate paralinguistic features such as vocal tone, facial animation, or musical scoring, which may also contribute to audience interpretation of implicature in an animated film. Future research could extend this analysis by comparing maxim-flouting patterns across a larger corpus of contemporary animated films, by examining how non-verbal and audiovisual cues interact with verbal flouting to shape audience interpretation, or by investigating audience-side comprehension of the implicatures identified here through empirical reception studies. Such directions would help to situate the present findings within a broader understanding of how conversational implicature functions across the expanding landscape of contemporary animated cinema.

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