

**”I DON’T KNOW WHAT TO SAY”:  
A Study of Conversational Maxims in Post-  
Competition Sports Interviews**

**Bachelor’s thesis**

**Anniina Saarela**

**University of Jyväskylä**

**Department of Language and Communication Studies**

**English**

**May 2020**

## JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellinen tiedekunta	Laitos – Department Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos
Tekijä – Author Anniina Saarela	
Työn nimi – Title “I don’t know what to say”: A Study of Conversational Maxims in Post-Competition Sports Interviews	
Oppiaine – Subject Englannin kieli	Työn laji – Level Kandidaatin tutkielma
Aika – Month and year Toukokuu 2020	Sivumäärä – Number of pages 22
Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Nykypäivänä haastattelut ovat olennainen osa kansainvälistä huippu-urheilua ja siten myös iso osa huippu-urheilijan kilpailukautta. Urheilijat antavat haastatteluja sekä kansainväliselle että oman kotimaansa urheilumedialle ennen kilpailuja ja kilpailujen jälkeen sekä omalla äidinkielellään että englanniksi. Urheiluhaastatteluja ei ole kuitenkaan tutkittu kielitieteen näkökulmasta vielä kovinkaan laaja-alaisesti, joten tämän kandidaatintutkielman tarkoituksena on tarjota uusi näkökulma sekä kielitieteen alaan että urheiluhaastattelujen analysoimiseen.</p> <p>Tässä tutkimuksessa analysoitiin laadullisella menetelmällä kuutta englanninkielistä, kisasuorituksen jälkeen tehtyä urheiluhaastattelua. Aineistoksi valittiin haastatteluja ainoastaan talviurheilulajeista sekä urheilijoilta, joiden äidinkieli ei ole englanti. Kaikki tutkimuksessa analysoidut haastattelut on suoritettu urheiluorganisaatioiden tai urheilutoimittajan toimesta, ja videot on julkaistu kyseisten organisaatioiden sosiaalisen median kanavilla. Haastattelut litteroitiin ja analysoitiin pragmatiikan alaan kuuluvan yhteistyöperiaatteen sekä neljän keskustelun periaatteen eli maksiimien näkökulmasta, joiden periaatteena on, että keskustelun jokainen osanottaja pyrkii tavoittelemaan mahdollisimman tarkoituksen- ja totuudenmukaista tiedonvälitystä. Teorian on esittänyt H.P. Grice vuonna 1975. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli selvittää, millä tavalla urheilijat vastaavat heille esitettyihin kysymyksiin ja millä tavoin he siten noudattavat maksiimien periaatteita. Lisäksi tarkoituksena oli selvittää, millä tavalla urheilijoiden vastaukset vaikuttavat haastattelun kulkuun.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat, että yhteistyöperiaate ei täytynyt jokaisen urheilijan osalta, sillä urheilijat eivät onnistuneet välittämään tietoa maksiimien periaatteiden mukaisesti jokaisessa haastattelutilanteessa. Yhteistyöperiaatteen laiminlyöminen tapahtui useimmiten rikkomalla maksiimien yksittäisiä periaatteita. Tuloksista nousi kuitenkin ilmi, että vaikka urheilijat eivät onnistuneet kommunikoimaan yhteistyöperiaatteen mukaisesti, sillä ei ollut negatiivista vaikutusta haastattelun kulkuun, sillä haastattelija ei esittänyt enää lisäkysymyksiä tai pyytänyt urheilijaa tarkentamaan vastaustaan, mistä saa vaikutelman, että haastattelija oli tyytyväinen urheilijan vastaukseen.</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords sports interviews, pragmatics, cooperative principle, conversational maxims	
Säilytyspaikka – Depository JYX	
Muita tietoja – Additional information	

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION.....	3
2 BACKGROUND.....	5
2.1 Pragmatics.....	5
2.2 Grice’s cooperative principle.....	6
2.3 Non-observance of the maxims.....	7
2.4 Previous study on conversational maxims and sports interviews.....	8
3 DATA AND METHOD.....	10
3.1 Research aim and research questions.....	10
3.2 Data.....	10
3.3 Research method.....	11
4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	12
4.1 Observing the maxims.....	12
4.2 Non-observance of the maxims.....	13
4.2.1 The maxims of relation and quantity.....	14
4.2.2 The maxim of manner.....	15
4.2.3 A clash between two maxims.....	15
4.2.4 Opting out from a maxim.....	16
4.3 Discussion.....	17
5 CONCLUSION.....	19
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	21

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of this thesis is on the conversational contribution of athletes in post-competition sports interviews. More specifically, the primary focus of this study is on how athletes contribute to the continuation of the interview and, in addition, how they choose to respond to the questions asked of them during the interview. I will analyze the interviews from a viewpoint of cooperative principle which is based on four conversational maxims initially introduced by Grice (1975). Thus, the main aim of this thesis is to find out to what extent athletes adhere to the conversational maxims in the context of sports interviews conducted in English. The conversational maxims therefore construct the main theoretical background for my thesis.

The data of this thesis was collected by searching for applicable spoken sports interviews from the sports media. Since this study focuses on the process of interaction of non-native speakers of English, only interviews with athletes whose mother tongue is not English were chosen. After transcribing the interview extracts, I analyzed the data qualitatively from a pragmatic point of view foregrounding the conversational contribution of the athletes.

Post-competition interviews and press conferences are a prominent part of international sports and hence also an important part of the competition arrangements of Nordic skiing disciplines and biathlon, which are highly presented in this study. Athletes and teams are being interviewed by the media almost without exception immediately after their event in an organized area called Mixed Zone (Nicholson 2007: 253). In addition to that, for example, in the FIS Cross-Country World Cup the winner is being interviewed after the official results have been announced, and the interview is a live broadcast on TV. The interview with the winner is conducted usually by order of a staff member of the organizational sport federation, such as the International Ski Federation (FIS) in Nordic skiing, that is responsible for the competition. Furthermore, following their event, top three athletes are interviewed after a medal or flower ceremony at an official press conference in which the local and international media are represented.

Yet, notwithstanding the prominent presence of interviews in international sports, post-competition sports interviews have received remarkably little attention from researchers especially in the field of language study and linguistics. It is therefore interesting and worthwhile to study sports interviews from the point of view of Gricean maxims because sports interviews have not yet been studied from that perspective. By analyzing sports interviews from that point of view, it can reveal how interacting works in sports interviews and, for example,

does it differ from another type of interview context. Thus, the purpose of this study is to provide a new perspective to the topic of sports interviews from a linguistic point of view and, furthermore, to develop new ideas on what kind of characteristics does the genre of sports interviews have.

This thesis will proceed as follows. To begin with, I will present the cooperative principle and conversational maxims which constitute the background theory of my thesis. Second, I will present my research questions and data, and the method of collecting and analyzing it. Third, in the findings and discussion chapter, I will present my data more in depth and provide an analysis of it. Lastly, I will discuss the limitations of this study in the conclusion.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

In this section, I will provide an overview of the theoretical background behind my thesis which focuses on post-competition sports interviews from the viewpoint of Grice's (1975) cooperative principle. The cooperative principle has to do with the study of pragmatics and therefore it is worthwhile to commence this chapter by defining what pragmatics is. This section then continues with a definition of Grice's cooperative principle and conversational maxims. Last, in the latter part of this chapter, I briefly present previous studies on conversational maxims and sports interviews within the field of language study.

### **2.1 Pragmatics**

To begin with, Birner (2012: 2) goes on to say that pragmatics is "the study of language use in context" that is interested in human interaction and interactional meanings behind communicative language use. Furthermore, as Paltridge (2012: 38) explains, the study of pragmatics has to do with the interdependence between the language in use and the social, situational and textual context in which the speaking or writing event occurs. This means that when people take part in speaking or writing events, in other words, communicate with each other, the utterances people use have a communicative function and therefore a goal to reach. That is, there is usually an intended meaning behind every phrase and sentence that is conveyed in a communicative event.

However, the meaning may not always be clear, and it can be different depending on a context in which it is conveyed. In order to interpret the communicative function of an utterance, in other words, to understand what people mean when they say something, the interlocutors need to be aware of the context in which the conversation occurs. That enables the interlocutors to achieve the shared goal of a communicative event.

As Paltridge (2012: 38) explains: "Pragmatics assume that when people communicate with each other they normally follow some kind of cooperative principle;" to reach the shared goal of a conversation. Furthermore, from Paltridge's (2012: 38, 44) perspective, to reach the shared goal of a communication, people usually follow, at least to some extent, a set of unsaid principles in order to make the conversation in which they are "such as required". That is, when someone poses a question, for example, the questioner assumes that the person answering the question should answer in a way that is appropriate and says what is expected to say rather than saying

something that is conversationally unsuitable and does not further to reach the shared goal. Thus, in order to bring meaning across and have a successful conversation, interlocutors need to cooperate with each other. Cooperation in communicative events is a central interest of the study of pragmatics and the main focus of my thesis. I will present the cooperative principle next.

## **2.2 Grice's cooperative principle**

The idea of the cooperative principle was initially introduced by H. Paul Grice. Grice's (1975: 45) formulation of the cooperative principle is as follows:

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.

What it means is that in an interaction participants assume that every interlocutor is contributing accordingly to the continuation of a conversation and therefore adhering to the cooperative principle.

The cooperative principle is based on four maxims or rules which are quantity, quality, relation and manner. Grice (1975: 45-46) outlines the four maxims in the following way. Firstly, the maxim of quantity has to do with the informative value of the contribution. What it means is that one's contribution in an interaction should not be too uninformative or more informative as the conversation in which it occurs requires. That is, one should give enough information, but then again not confuse the listener with over-informativeness by saying too much. Secondly, with the maxim of quality Grice relates to truthfulness of one's saying. In other words, one should only tell the truth when engaging in a conversation. Thirdly, with the maxim of relation he proposes that one should be relevant and contribute to the conversation accordingly. That is, one should strive for relevance. Fourthly, with the maxim of manner Grice proposes that one should be clear, brief and orderly, and should try to avoid ambiguity.

When one's contribution is appropriate in a conversation, one is observing or obeying the maxims (Birner 2012: 43) and therefore following the cooperative principle accordingly. Grice (1975: 47) describes the objective that underlies the cooperative principle as a "maximally effective exchange of information". However, despite the fact that it is assumed that interlocutors, by and large, adhere to the cooperative principle, one's cooperative behavior can

be somewhat different than expected. That is, one can flout a maxim, violate it or opt out of it (Grice 1975: 49).

Although it is assumed that interlocutors need to obey the maxim(s) to be able to achieve the shared goal of a communication, Allan and Jaszczolt (2012: 26) point out that cooperation does not always require observing the maxims. Thus, if one violates or flouts a maxim, one can still be cooperative, but the exchange of information may not be as effective as expected. I will discuss the non-observance of the maxims next.

### **2.3 Non-observance of the maxims**

As discussed above, when one is flouting, violating or opting out of a maxim, one is not observing them. Birner (2012: 43) explains that to violate a maxim and the cooperative principle simply means that one does not obey it and intentionally wants to deceive the other person in a conversation. She adds that the difference between violating a maxim and flouting a maxim is that the listener is not anticipated to have knowledge of the violation. Thus, one can violate the maxim of quality, for example, by telling an obvious falsehood with the intention of deceiving the hearer.

As outlined above, the difference between violating a maxim and flouting a maxim is whether the listener is expected to be aware of it. As Paltridge (2012: 45) explains, a person is flouting the cooperative principle or a maxim when “they purposely do not observe the maxim and intend their hearer to be aware of this”. For example, if one answers to a simple yes-or-no question with an obscure answer, one is flouting the maxim of relation. To give an example, when someone asks “how old are you” and one answers “I am not old enough to have a driving license” the person flouts openly the maxim of relation by being ambiguous and not giving a simple answer to a simple question. If someone is failing to fulfill several maxims simultaneously, overlap between maxims occurs (Paltridge: 2012: 47).

In addition, Grice (1975: 49) explains that when one is opting out of the maxims, one indicates that they are not willing to be cooperative and to take part in a conversation in a way it necessitates. For example, if someone asks a question but one decides to be silent and not answer, one is opting out of the conversation and therefore not making their conversational contribution such as is required.

Lastly, another situation in which a person fails to observe a maxim takes place when a clash between two or more maxims occurs. Grice (1975: 49) goes on to say that a clash between



maxims occurs when a person is observing one maxim but simultaneously fails to observe another. To give an example, one can observe the maxim of quantity by giving enough information but at the same time may be failing to observe the maxim of manner by giving a long-winded answer.

#### **2.4 Previous study on conversational maxims and sports interviews**

Several studies regarding conversational maxims have been conducted, but they have not examined the topic of sports interviews. Previous studies on the Gricean maxims have examined the observance of the maxims by politicians, for example. In what follows, I will present two studies on conversational maxims and, in addition to that, two studies regarding the topic of sports interviews.

Massanga and Msuya (2017) examined Tanzanian politicians' observance of the maxims in political interviews. The study focused specifically on the maxims of quantity and quality. The results of Massanga and Msuya's (2017: 88-89) study revealed that the politicians failed to observe the maxim of quantity more than the maxim of quality. In addition, types of non-observances which occurred during the interviews were flouting, opting out and clashing the maxims. Based on their findings, they also argued that although the politicians failed to observe the maxims, it did not automatically mean that the communication during the interviews was unsuccessful.

Lööf (2018) has studied the observance of Gricean maxims by one of the characters in the television series *The Office*. The focus of his study was to find out to what extent and how frequently the character observes the conversational maxims in four episodes. Lööf (2018: 14-15) found out that non-observance of the maxims occurred in 47% of the conversations in which the character participated, and the maxim which was violated most frequently was the maxim of relation.

Although several studies on conversational maxims have been conducted, sports interviews have not been studied specifically from that point of view. It is also worth noting that previous study regarding sports interviews within the field of language study especially is remarkably few. I will introduce Maunuaho's (2019) and File's (2012) studies which both have approached their topic of sports interviews from a linguistic perspective.

Maunuaho (2019) has studied the occurrence of face threatening acts in six televised sports interviews. In her study, the aim was to find out what kind of face threatening acts are performed

during the interviews by both the athlete and the interviewer. Maunuaho (2019: 29) found out that face threatening acts, or FTAs, were performed both against negative and positive face, and threats were performed both by the athlete and the interviewer in the forms of suggesting, giving criticism, accepting compliments and showing emotions for example. However, even though face threatening acts occur in the speech events under exploration, Maunuaho (2019: 27) argues that face threatening acts do not seem to matter in sports interviews because of the goal-oriented nature of sports interviews. She continues by adding that sports interviews usually have a goal to achieve and sometimes the goal is achieved at the expense of politeness for example.

File (2012) studied the linguistic behavior that occurs in post-match interviews in a New Zealand professional rugby context. The aim of the study was to research how players and interviewers use language in the speech events, and, in addition, to examine the linguistic features that construct the tone of the interviews in terms of openings, questioning, answering, and closings. The focus of his study was mainly on the practices of the interviewers. File (2012: 21) found out that the language used and the linguistic features of the speech events build a “conciliatory interview experience” which is created by the interviewer through complimenting, congratulating, commiserating, and using nicknames for example. However, File (2012: 20) interestingly notes that in some of the interviews the interviewer was an ex-professional sport player and, therefore, that might have affected the practices and the linguistic behavior of the interviewer.

### **3 DATA AND METHOD**

In this chapter, I will introduce the aim of this thesis and my research questions. Furthermore, I will introduce my data and discuss how it was collected and what criteria was followed when choosing applicable data for the purpose of this study. Lastly, I will present the qualitative method of data analysis.

#### **3.1 Research aim and research questions**

The aim of this qualitative study is to find out how athletes who are non-native speakers of English communicate in a post-competition sports interview conducted in English. More specifically, the main aim is to find out how the athletes respond to questions asked of them during the interview and how they therefore follow the conversational maxims presented by Grice (1975) and outlined in the previous chapter. Thus, the main focus is to study how the athletes contribute to the continuation of the interview exchange, but I will also take into account the contribution of the interviewer.

The research questions are therefore as follows:

1. How do the athletes choose to respond to the interview questions and how does it affect the continuation of the interview situation?
2. To what extent the athletes adhere to the conversational maxims during the interviews?

#### **3.2 Data**

According to Birner (2012: 5), a pragmatics point of view uses data of natural language in order to elaborate the understanding of “linguistic behavior” in a certain context. Thus, this study is based on six spoken sports interviews from which three of them were conducted immediately after a competition by order of the organizing sport federation, and three of them were conducted in an official press conference after a flower or medal ceremony by order of sports journalists. All of the interviews were published on different sport federations’ social media channels.

The criteria of searching for applicable data were as follows. The main criteria were to search for spoken post-competition interviews conducted in English and with athletes whose mother tongue is not English. Secondly, the speech had to be clear and understandable in order to

transcribe the interview. Thirdly, only interviews with winter sports athletes were chosen both for personal preferences but also because of winter sports athletes come mostly from countries in which English is not spoken as first language, meaning that winter sports are very popular especially among the Nordic countries and in Central Europe. The data therefore represents winter sport disciplines such as cross-country skiing, Nordic combined and biathlon. Lastly, the interviews were purposely chosen so that each interview would represent a different case of either observing the maxims or providing an example of a case where non-observance occurs. Thus, it should be noted that the selection of participants affects the results so that more cases of non-observances were analyzed. In addition to that, only interviews with non-native speakers were chosen in order to also find out if there are differences in adhering the maxims between speakers of different languages and from different cultures.

### **3.3 Research method**

To begin with, since this study addresses the question on how athletes contribute to the continuation of the interview, I have analyzed the data qualitatively. After choosing applicable data, I transcribed the interviews. Since the purpose of this study is to find out and analyze how the athletes respond to the interview questions and how they adhere to the cooperative principle, the purpose of the transcriptions in this thesis is to transform the talk into simplified written form where only the talk is transcribed in order to analyze it. As Johnstone (2017: 19) points out, the most applicable transcriptions include only information that is relevant to the study. Thus, the transcriptions of the interviews are not so detailed, meaning that not all of them include all the transcription conventions, such as marking the pauses and silences, because they are not relevant for this study. However, temporal features and aspects of speech delivery, such as laughing or smiling, are considered if they are relevant in that context.

After transcribing the data, I approached it from the cooperative principle and conversational maxims perspective. This approach allows to examine how the athletes answer the interview questions and do they, for example, change the topic or answer indirectly. In what follows, I will present the findings of the data.

## 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In what follows, I will present my analysis of the findings of the data which consists of six post-competition sports interviews. This chapter is divided into different subsections in which I will present my analysis of cases in which observing the conversational maxims occurs and, in addition to that, I will also analyze different cases of non-observance. I will analyze the data by using Grice's (1975) cooperative principle theory of conversational maxims, which I have outlined previously in the background theory chapter. This chapter commences by analyzing two cases of observing the maxims and then an analysis of several cases where non-observance of maxims occurs, and which are also foregrounded in this thesis. Last, I will present my discussion of the findings.

### 4.1 Observing the maxims

To begin with, Thomas (2014: 64) suggests that to observe or obey the maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner is "the least interesting case" from an analysis point of view. With that in mind, I will present and analyze only two interviews as cases of observing the maxims.

The first case is an interview with a Finnish cross-country skier Iivo Niskanen (N). The interview is an example of a case in which the athlete is observing all of the maxims. Niskanen is being interviewed after a win in a cross-country ski race and the interviewer (I) is asking him to discuss how he did it. Niskanen is being as informative as the situation requires and therefore observing the maxim of quantity. He is observing the maxim of quality by describing truthfully how he felt during the competition. In addition, he is obeying the maxim of relation by giving a relevant response to a question asked of him and observing the maxim of manner by being orderly in what he says, meaning that he describes the events that happened during the competition in temporal order. By observing the maxims accordingly, Niskanen is being cooperative in the interview situation and therefore successfully addressing the interviewer's goal in asking a question. Niskanen being cooperative enough means that the interviewer seems to be content with his answer and does not ask any additional questions. The interview is seen below.

- (1) I: Iivo Niskanen, congratulations for that fantastic win on on a homeground.  
How did you do it?  
N: Uh thank you  
I maybe I didn't have my best day today

but the skies were extremely good and uh then it was really difficult to handle it to ski with Klæbo at the end I was little bit too tired to got the keep my uhh keep my seconds to Klæbo  
 But uhh anyway it was really nice feeling now to come to the stadium and everyone was cheering so much  
 so uh this is one of one of my favourite place

I: Fantastic congratulations

Next, the second example of observing a maxim is an interview with a French biathlete Julia Simon (S) who is observing the maxim of quality. The interviewer (I) is asking her how she feels after her first world cup race victory. Since the interview is conducted quite shortly after the competition has finished, Simon is still very overwhelmed by the fact that she has won her first victory in a world cup level. For that reason, she is at a loss for words and allows the interviewer to be aware of that by expressing it aloud at the end of the interview. Thus, Simon is observing the maxim of quality by being truthful and telling exactly how she feels at that moment. The interviewer then continues further with another question. The extract of the interview is seen below.

- (2) I: Julia what a day  
 What a way to finish the season  
 First career win, how do you feel?  
 S: I don't realize it just totally crazy  
I don't really remember my last shooting  
 I just saw all the target in and it was just amazing  
I don't know what to say ((laughs))  
 I: Just an hour ago probably one of the greatest in biathlon retired  
 Did you take inspiration to come out?

Next, I will move on to different cases in which the athlete is not observing the conversational maxims.

#### **4.2 Non-observance of the maxims**

In what follows, I will present four interview situations in which different cases of non-observance occur. As outlined in the background theory chapter, non-observance of the maxims occurs when one is violating, flouting or opting out of a maxim and, in addition, when a clash between two or more maxims occurs. First, a case of flouting the maxim of relation is presented.

### 4.2.1 The maxims of relation and quantity

As Thomas (2014: 70) explains, one example of a flout of the maxim of relation is when a person does not succeed in addressing the goal of a question. Birner (2012: 54) adds that current utterance has to be connected with the occurring talk exchange and the topic in order to be considered relevant in the conversation context. Next, I will present an interview which represents a case of in which the athlete is flouting several maxims simultaneously.

The interview with a Norwegian cross-country skier Johannes Høsflot Klæbo (K) is a case in which the maxim of relation is flouted by the athlete. The maxim of relation says, ‘be relevant’. The interviewer (I) is interviewing him after a cross-country skiing race he has just won and is asking about his tactic. However, Klæbo does not directly answer the question asked of him but, as a matter of fact, tells how the sprint race went better than the race he had the day before and omits to mention anything about his tactic. Despite the fact that Klæbo is informative with his response, the response is irrelevant to the current direction of the talk exchange and hence does not address the interviewer’s goal in asking a question. Thus, Klæbo is flouting the maxim of relation.

In addition, this interview could also be analysed as a case of flouting the maxim of quantity, which has to do with the informativeness of one’s saying. From the cooperative principle point of view, Klæbo does not give enough information to the current purpose of the talk exchange since his response is irrelevant. Although his response is informative, he is giving less information than the question demands and therefore the interviewer does not gain the information she is asking for. Thus, Klæbo is simultaneously failing to observe the maxims of quantity and relation. The interview extract is presented below.

- (3) I: Johannes Høsflot Klæbo, you seemed to have found the key decisive point here on the sprint course in Oberstdorf.  
Was that your plan right from the beginning?
- K: I think the sprint was much better than the 30k race yesterday  
and yesterday was uh really chall terrible day  
and today was a bit better but uhh at the end it is really cool to win here

Next, I will present and discuss a case in which the maxim of manner is flouted.

### 4.2.2 The maxim of manner

In what follows, a case of a flout of the maxim of manner is presented. To begin with, the maxim of manner has to do with how things are said which means that one should be clear with one's expressions. From that point of view, this interview with a Norwegian biathlete Ingrid Landmark Tandrevold could be analyzed as an example of a case in which the athlete is failing to observe the maxim of manner. Tandrevold (T) is being interviewed at a press conference after a relay race. She is telling about her competition, but she cannot remember a specific word in English and therefore her expression in that moment is slightly obscure. The interviewer assists her in that situation since he knows what word she is looking for and therefore helps the athlete to make her expression clearer to the audience. If the interviewer had not helped her, it would have been difficult to understand if the team, to which she is referring, was behind or ahead of her. The interview extract is seen below.

- (4) T: I was really satisfied with my leg  
even though Dorothea and the Italian team was uh far behind  
((thinking)) or before  
I: Ahea[d ahead]  
T: [Ahead] ((laughing nervously))  
Uh not far behind heh hhh  
I: Thank you congratulations

In the next section, I will present and discuss an interview in which a clash between two maxims occurs.

### 4.2.3 A clash between two maxims

In the following excerpt, a Finnish Nordic combined athlete Ilkka Herola (H) is being interviewed at a press conference after a Nordic combined race. In the interview, Herola is referring to a situation where he fell in a curve during the race. The interviewer (I) is asking Herola to describe what happened in that situation. However, Herola is not making his contribution as informative as required for the current purpose of the interview exchange and therefore he is flouting the maxim of quantity. He is referring to the situation very briefly by explaining the accident with exhaustion. Despite the fact that Herola gives a very short answer to the question asked of him, the interviewer seems to be content with his answer because the interviewer proceeds to interview Herola's teammate.

On the other hand, Herola is being brief with his response and, thus this interview could also be viewed as a case of observing the maxim of manner which proposes that one should be brief.



Herola is observing the maxim of manner by avoiding ambiguity with his short answer. Due to the fact that he is flouting the maxim of quantity but observing the maxim of manner there is a clash between these two maxims. The example is seen below.

- (5) H: My last curve was not the best possible  
but it happens sometimes  
I: Umm can you tell us what happened over there?  
H: Uh I think I was too tired  
and yeah ((with a laugh))  
I: Okay then going forward to Eero

In what follows, I will present my last interview excerpt which is a case in which the athlete opts out from a maxim.

#### 4.2.4 Opting out from a maxim

To begin with, Grice (1975: 49) explains that one “may opt out from the operation both of the maxim and of the CP”. This interview with an Italian biathlete Thomas Bormolini (B) is an example in which the athlete is opting out from the operation of the maxim but not of the cooperative principle. In a press conference after Bormolini’s competition, the interviewer (I) is asking about his secret behind his great shooting performance in a biathlon competition. Bormolini answers: “I don’t tell you the secret” with a smile on his face which makes his response slightly humorous. However, despite the fact that Bormolini is being humorous, from the cooperative principle point of view, he is opting out of the conversational maxims since he is unwilling to answer a question asked of him. Despite the fact that he is opting out, he continues discussing another topic and therefore contributing to the continuation of the interview which means he is not opting out of the operation of the cooperative principle. The interview is presented below.

- (6) I: What is the secret of such great shooting?  
And especially at this windy shooting range  
B: ((smiling)) I don’t tell you the secret  
Anyway ((laughs))  
I think we did a great job

In what follows, I will move on discussing the findings of this study.

### 4.3 Discussion

What I have discussed above are ways of how the athletes adhere to the cooperative principle and conversational maxims in post-competition sports interviews. First, my findings indicate that the athletes failed to observe the maxims mostly by flouting them which supports the view of Plag (2015: 200) who proposed that flouting a maxim occurs relatively often in conversations. Other non-observance types which occurred in the interviews were opting out and clashing the maxims.

Secondly, despite the fact that non-observance of the maxims occurred, it seemed not to affect the interview exchange negatively which supports the view of Allan and Jaszczolt (2012: 26) and also the view of Massanga and Msuya, which I have discussed earlier in the section 2.4, who pointed out that a successful conversation does not always require observance of the maxims. Despite the fact that the athletes' answers did not successfully adhere to the conversational maxims and hence address the goal of the interviewer in every interview, the interviewer seemed to be content with the contribution of the athlete as the interview did not ask any additional questions to gain more information about the current topic. For example, in the interview with Klæbo (3), the interviewer asked him about his tactic, but Klæbo omitted to mention anything about it. Nevertheless, the interviewer did not ask him again to talk about his tactic.

My findings hence share a similar kind of view that Maunuaho (2019: 27) proposed in her study. That is, the objective of sports interviews is to get answers from athletes, and it does not always seem to count in which way athletes respond to questions asked of them as long as responses are related to some extent to the ongoing talk exchange.

Moreover, as this study addresses the question of how athletes who are non native-speakers of English communicate in interviews conducted in English, it is worthwhile to note that the athletes' English communication skills affect their ability to express themselves and therefore affect also to what extent they are able to adhere to the conversational maxims. A brief or unclear answer could be explained by the fact that in these interviews English was not the first language of the athletes. For example, in the interview with Tandrevold, (4) her expression is somewhat unclear due to the fact that she cannot remember the right word in English and therefore she is failing to observe the maxim of manner.

In addition, as Grice (1975: 45) points out, posing a question in a talk exchange defines the purpose and the direction of the conversational event. To transfer that idea to the context of sports interviews, the direction of the talk is not normally mutually accepted, meaning that the direction of the talk is set by an interviewer who is asking the questions which may sometimes be unexpected. Athletes may not be prepared or not even willing to answer every question asked of them and therefore they may want to, for example, alter the pre-set direction of the talk by changing the topic. By doing that they fail to observe the maxim of quantity, for example. As seen in the interview with Bormolini (6), he did not want to reveal the so-called secret behind his great shooting performance in a biathlon race which made him opt out of the maxims.

As my study examines how athletes who do not speak English as their first language adhere to the cooperative principle, it should be pointed out that the understanding of how a maxim should be adhered may differ between speakers from different cultures and of different languages (Cutting 2002: 42). However, in my study, there were no outstanding differences in observance of the maxims between athletes of different nations due to the fact that both observance and non-observance occurred, for example, with respect to the nationality of the athlete.

Moreover, it should be emphasized that the cooperative principle and conversational maxims theory, which Grice postulated 45 years ago, have received criticism and it has some limitations. First, Thomas (2014: 90-92) points out that sometimes it is difficult to differentiate the types of non-observances and overlaps between the maxims may occur rather frequently. In addition, she continues saying that sometimes it is not always so unproblematic to say whether a speaker is successfully observing a maxim or not. This was also visible in my study in which overlaps between the maxims occurred during some of the interviews. In addition, since some of the flouts that occurred during the interviews were not extremely blatant, it was sometimes problematic to say whether the case is a flout or not.

## 5 CONCLUSION

In this study, I have analyzed how athletes who are non-native speakers of English communicate in post-competition sports interviews conducted in English. More specifically, I have explored how athletes respond to the interview questions and how they therefore adhere to the cooperative principle and conversational maxims which constructed the theoretical framework for my thesis.

The findings of this study indicate that the athletes did not always succeed in observing the conversational maxims accordingly and failed to do so mostly by flouting them. However, despite the fact that non-observance of the maxims occurred, it did not seem to have a negative effect on the continuation of the interviews since in all of the interviews analyzed in this study, the interviewer did not ask any additional questions regarding the ongoing topic or did not ask the athlete to clarify his or her answer even though the athlete did not always directly address the interviewer's goal in asking a question. Thus, it seemed that the interviewer was content with the answer of the athlete since in every interview the interviewer either ended the interview or continued discussing another topic.

It is worthwhile to point out that sports interviews have received little attention within the field of language study especially. Previously, Maunuaho (2019) has approached sports interviews from a face-threatening act point of view and File (2012) has studied them from a linguistic behavior perspective. I have discussed both studies in the background section. Thus, this study contributes to the understanding of sports interviews by analyzing them from a new perspective and therefore this study may reveal new insights of how communication works in the context of sports interviews. In addition, approaching sports interviews from the cooperative principle point of view provides a new research topic to the field of pragmatics. Since studies on conversational maxims have been conducted earlier focusing on different interview discourses, such as political, analyzing sports interviews from this point of view, can, for example, reveal if athletes' conversational contribution differs from another type of interview discourse.

In terms of generalizability, giving the fact that this study has approached sports interviews only to a limited extent, I am aware that generalizations about athletes' conversational contribution in interview situations cannot be done on the basis of the results since they are only limited to the chosen six interviews. Having chosen different interviews may have revealed something different. Furthermore, more cases of non-observance of maxims than cases of observing maxims were analyzed deliberately in the interest of analysis perspective which

makes it seem that athletes fail to observe the maxims more often than they observe them. In addition, my study has only focused on non-native speakers of English which may have also affected the results. Consequently, if sports-interviews are studied in the future from the same theoretical framework point of view, more extensive research could be done in order to establish a more generalized understanding. For example, further research addressing native speakers of English could be done in order to, for example, compare what kind of differences might be found between native and non-native speakers of English.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allan, K. and Jaszczolt, K. (2012). *The Cambridge handbook of pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Birner, B. J. (2012). *Introduction to pragmatics*. Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Cutting, J. (2002). *Pragmatics and discourse: A resource book for students: A, B, C, D*. London: New York: Routledge.
- File, K. (2012). *Post-match interviews in New Zealand rugby: A conciliatory media interview genre*. *New Zealand English Journal* 26 (1), 1-22. Victoria University of Wellington.
- Grice, P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole, and J. Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts*. New York: Academic Press, 41-58.
- Johnstone, B. (2017). *Discourse analysis* (3rd edition.) Malden (Mass.): Blackwell.
- Maunuaho, K. (2019). *Face threatening acts in sports interviews* (Bachelor's thesis). University of Jyväskylä.
- Nicholson, M. (2007). *Sport and the media: Managing the nexus*. Amsterdam: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Löf, J. (2018). *Gricean Maxims in the TV Series The Office: An analysis of the character Dwight regarding failure to observe the Gricean Maxims*. (Second term paper). University of Karlstad.
- Massanga, M. and Msuya, E. A. 2017. *The Observance of Gricean Conversational Maxims by Tanzanian Politicians in T.V. Hosted Interviews*. Academic Research Publishing Group: *English Literature and Language Review* 3 (9), 82-90.
- Paltridge, B. (2012). *Discourse analysis: an introduction* (2nd edition). London: Bloomsbury.
- Plag, I. (2015). *Introduction to English linguistics* (Third, revised and enlarged edition.). Berlin, Germany; Boston, Massachusetts: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Thomas, J. (2014). *Meaning in interaction: an introduction to pragmatics*. London: Routledge.

Wierzbicka, A. (2003). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: The semantics of human interaction* (2nd ed.). Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter.