# Ethical Development of Gricean Pragmatics: Proposing a Fifth Maxim Grounded in Persian-Islamic Socio-Cultural Norms


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**Abstract**

This qualitative position paper critically interrogates the applicability of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, and particularly its Maxim of Quality, within the Persian-Islamic socio-cultural context, where ethical imperatives derived from scriptural and jurisprudential sources may necessitate strategic deviations from truthfulness. Drawing on authoritative Shi'i legal texts such as *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh* (Vol. 4) and select Qur'anic injunctions (e.g., Surah Āl ʿImrān 3:28; al-Naḥl 16:106; Ghāfir 40:28), the study demonstrates that deliberate non-truthful utterances are not only permissible but ethically mandated under specific circumstances; namely, in contexts of warfare, interpersonal reconciliation, familial preservation, and *taqiyyah* (dissimulation or "guard-avoidance" to protect life, property, or faith). These culturally sanctioned practices reveal a significant lacuna in Grice's framework: the absence of an explicit ethical dimension that governs communicative conduct beyond logical cooperation. The paper thus proposes the integration of a Maxim of Ethics as a fifth constitutive principle within the Gricean model, arguing that (1) ethical considerations must condition adherence to the Maxim of Quality, and (2) communicative norms should prohibit discourse that is offensive, harmful, or socially disruptive, even when factually accurate. By foregrounding the role of culturally embedded moral reasoning in pragmatic interaction, this study contributes to cross-cultural pragmatics, Islamic discourse ethics, and the theoretical refinement of conversational maxims beyond Anglo-centric paradigms.

توسعه اخلاقی عمل‌گرایی گرایسی: ارائه پنجمین اصل مبتنی بر هنجارهای اجتماعی-فرهنگی ایرانی-اسلامی

این مقاله کیفی، کاربردپذیری اصل تعاون گرایس (۱۹۷۵) و به‌ویژه اصل کیفیت آن را در بافت اجتماعی-فرهنگی ایرانی-اسلامی، که در آن الزامات اخلاقی برگرفته از منابع کتاب مقدس و فقهی ممکن است انحرافات استراتژیک از صداقت را ایجاب کند، به طور انتقادی بررسی می‌کند. این مطالعه با بهره‌گیری از متون حقوقی معتبر شیعه مانند «من لا یحضره الفقیه» (جلد ۴) و برخی از احکام قرآنی (مانند سوره آل عمران ۳:۲۸؛ النحل ۱۶:۱۰۶؛ غافر ۴۰:۲۸)، نشان می‌دهد که سخنان غیرصادقانه عمدی نه تنها مجاز هستند، بلکه تحت شرایط خاص از نظر اخلاقی نیز الزامی هستند؛ یعنی در زمینه‌های جنگ، آشتی بین فردی، حفظ خانواده و تقیه (مخفی کاری یا «اجتناب از راهنمایی» برای محافظت از جان، مال یا ایمان). این اعمال مورد تأیید فرهنگی، یک خلأ قابل توجه در چارچوب گرایس را آشکار می‌کنند: فقدان یک بُعد اخلاقی صریح که بر رفتار ارتباطی فراتر از همکاری منطقی حاکم باشد. بنابراین، این مقاله پیشنهاد یک اصل اخلاقی را به عنوان پنجمین اصل اساسی در مدل گرایس پیشنهاد می‌کند و استدلال می‌کند که (۱) ملاحظات اخلاقی باید پایبندی به اصل کیفیت را مشروط کند، و (۲) هنجارهای ارتباطی باید گفتمان توهین‌آمیز، مضر یا از نظر اجتماعی مخرب را، حتی زمانی که از نظر واقعی دقیق باشد، ممنوع نماید. این مقاله با برجسته کردن نقش استدلال اخلاقی ریشه‌دار فرهنگی در تعامل عملی، به عمل‌گرایی بین فرهنگی، اخلاق گفتمان اسلامی و اصلاح نظری اصول مکالمه فراتر از الگوهای انگلیسی-محور کمک می‌کند.

**واژگان کلیدی:** اصول گرایسی، اصل همکاری، اصل اخلاق، تقیه، هنجارهای اجتماعی-فرهنگی، گفتمان توهین‌آمیز، ارتباط بین فرهنگی

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## Introduction

Grice in his article "Logic and conversation" (1975), introduced a theory of conversation which consists of Cooperative Principles (CP). The theory makes conversational contribution as required by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which one is engaged; that is to make certain explicit rational principles observed by people when they converse (Hadi, 2013). Listeners and speakers generally cooperate in speaking to understand and make themselves understood mutually unless the want to miscommunicate for gaining some specific personal reasons. The components of CP are four conversational maxims that arise from the pragmatics of natural language. Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that is concerned with the communicative functions of language (Levinson 1983, Thomas 1995, Yule 1996).

According to Grice (1975), the Cooperative Principles venture to clarify rational principles observed by people in communication. He claims that people communicate rationally with each other, and that man's talks are unconditionally cooperative. He claims further that this phenomenon is everlasting since it has been gained from childhood. As a final point, he maintains that 'audience listener understands the implication of a speaker's remarks by drawing on an assumption of cooperativeness, contextual information and background knowledge'.

In his article, Ladegaard (2008) argues that Grice's focal point is just the semantic aspect of utterances, clarified on the basis of pragmatics or the context in which the speaker's intentions and purposes can be interpreted. Instead, he suggests that both the semantic and pragmatic aspects as well as all the indispensable linguistic knowledge should be made use of to understand and interpret human communicative interaction in any theory of conversational cooperation. He states that Grice is extremely biased towards cooperation, claiming that 'Grice's assumption is that people communicate logically, and all of them attempt to be good communicators', and asserts that, 'In real life setting not all people tend to be logical and ideal. They sometimes struggle to gain their benefits and sometimes cultures, beliefs, and customs require them to do something to gain a purposeful goal'.

Understanding the real intention of a speaker in an interactional context necessitates turn-taking strategies, speech accommodation, voice alternations (Ledegaard, 2008). There are some circumstances people attempt to save their face, reputation, properties, and relationship by using some ethical behaviors. The present position qualitative study tries to review these circumstances in Persian socio-cultural settings and to revisit Grecian maxims in order to show that although these maxims are the thread of human interactions, they fail to see ethical issues in certain contexts.

## Review of Grecian Maxims

Grice developed Conversational Maxim theory in 1975. This theory which belongs to the field of pragmatics explicates how people should behave in conversations. The theory has, however, faced some criticisms since its conception (Thomas, 1995). The focus of criticisms is on different factors such as age, social and cultural background, and people's mental capacity which influences the use of language.

To refresh our knowledge of conversational maxims, a quick glance at them is in order here:

1- **Maxim of Quantity** governs the appropriate amount of information that someone makes in a conversation. The speaker should be as informative as possible to the purposes of the exchange and also the speaker is required not to give unnecessary information (Grice, 1975).

**2- Maxim of Quality**, which governs truthfulness, requires the speakers to say something they know it is true and to avoid telling something they lack adequate evidence for. Maxim of quality is the most important (Grice, 1975). The hearer tries to decode other maxims on the condition that the maxim of quality is observed; in other words, when the hearer assumes that the utterance is right and truthful.

**3- Maxim of Relevance**, which governs relevance of the topic being discussed, requires the speakers to utter only something which is relevant to the main theme and can contribute to the discussion (Grice, 1975). Some other researchers (Sperber & Wilson, 1986) argue that this maxim is the most important maxim that actually subsumes the other maxims within it.

**4- Maxim of Manner**, which governs ambiguity avoidance, requires the speakers to avoid unnecessary prolixity, ambiguity and disorderedness. It focuses on clarity of expressions, briefness and requires the speakers to describe the events in order in which they occur.

**Flouting of a Maxim**

Flouting a maxim occurs when speakers fail to observe a maxim because they want the addressee to infer a meaning which is different from what the speaker is expressing explicitly. There are several subcategories, specific to each one of the maxims. There can be flouts when exploiting the maxim of quality, this means when people provide statements, they do not have enough information or also when they are intentionally lying (Thomas, 1995, p.65). Exploiting the maxim of quantity occurs when the speakers provide less information than it is required from them or another extreme case when they provide more information than it is required (Thomas, 1995, p. 68). There is a flout exploiting the maxim of relation when the utterance is irrelevant to the topic (Thomas, 1995, p. 70). Generally speaking, according to Darighgoftar & Ghaffari (2012), Grecian Maxims are not always observed and their violation or floating bears more information than if they were obeyed.

Jia (2008) believes that the flouting of a maxim can be clearly seen in occasions when one or some maxims are opted out during communication processes. For instance, he adds, telling a joke, writing a book and making a movie are different situations in which maxims can be flouted to surprise people so they burst into laughter, to better develop the plot of the story (Mey, 2001), or to create a special effect. This occurs when something is suggested in an utterance in a way that is neither expressed nor strictly implied.

**Critique of Gricean Maxims: Cross-Cultural, Ethical, and Interactional Challenges**

Despite its foundational status in linguistic pragmatics, Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle (CP) and its associated maxims, Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner, have faced sustained and multifaceted criticism over the past five decades. While the CP has undeniably shaped theoretical discourse on conversational implicature, scholars increasingly argue that its assumptions are rooted in a narrowly Anglo-centric, rationalist, and idealized model of human interaction that fails to account for the complexities of real-world communication across diverse sociocultural, ideological, and institutional contexts (Kecskes, 2019; Haugh & Kádár, 2023; Spencer-Oatey, 2020). Thomas (1995) was among the earliest to highlight the problematic imperative tone of the maxims, which often reads less as descriptive heuristics and more as prescriptive norms dictating "proper" communicative behavior—an issue that risks pathologizing nonconformity rather than explaining it. This normative framing obscures the fact that utterances are inherently polysemous

and context-sensitive, rendering the identification of speaker intention and implicature a highly inferential and often ambiguous process (Robinson, 1989; Jaszczolt, 2005; Carston, 2002).

A central epistemological limitation lies in the indeterminacy of implicature itself. As Stokke (2016) observes, distinguishing between what is merely suggested and what is genuinely implicated requires access to shared cognitive environments that Grice's model assumes but does not adequately theorize. This gap becomes especially pronounced in intercultural encounters where background knowledge, epistemic frameworks, and communicative expectations diverge significantly (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 2003; House, 2018; Wierzbicka, 2006). For instance, in high-context cultures such as Japan or Korea, indirectness is not a violation of the Maxim of Quantity but a culturally sanctioned strategy for maintaining harmony and saving face (Maynard, 2003; Ide, 2006; Fukushima, 2004), whereas in low-context Western settings, the same utterance might be interpreted as evasive or uncooperative. Such discrepancies underscore the ethnocentric bias embedded in Grice's universalist claims—a critique powerfully advanced by Kecskes (2019), who argues that the CP privileges individualistic, truth-oriented, and information-driven models of communication at the expense of relational, affective, and communal values prevalent in many non-Western societies.

Moreover, the boundaries between maxims are frequently porous, and their violations often co-occur or serve overlapping functions. A single utterance may simultaneously flout Quantity and Manner to achieve rhetorical emphasis or stylistic effect, as seen in literary discourse, political rhetoric, or advertising (Yus, 2011; Dynel, 2013; Culpeper, 2011). In courtroom settings, for example, lawyers routinely exploit ambiguity (flouting Manner) and withhold information (violating Quantity) not out of malice but as strategic tools within a highly constrained discursive arena governed by legal protocols rather than conversational cooperation (Drew & Holt, 1988; Cotterill, 2003; Archer, 2005). Similarly, in medical consultations, physicians may soften diagnostic news to preserve patient well-being, thereby prioritizing relational ethics over the Maxim of Quality (Heritage & Maynard, 2006; Pilnick & Dingwall, 2011; Landmark, Gulbrandsen, & Svennevig, 2015). These institutional contexts reveal that "cooperation" is not a monolithic ideal but a situated practice shaped by role expectations, power asymmetries, and professional norms.

Recognizing these limitations, Leech (1983) proposed the Politeness Principle as a complementary framework, suggesting that speakers often violate Gricean maxims not to deceive but to uphold social harmony and mitigate face-threatening acts. This insight has been substantiated by decades of research in politeness theory, which demonstrates that politeness strategies—such as hedging, deference, and indirect requests—are systematic and rule-governed, even when they appear to contravene informational efficiency (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Watts, 2003; Eelen, 2001). Jia (2008) illustrates this with military discourse, where formulaic responses like "Yes, Sir!" function as ritualized affirmations of hierarchy rather than literal assertions of agreement, thereby flouting Quality in service of institutional cohesion. Yet, even Leech's model has been critiqued for its own Western bias, particularly its focus on negative and positive face, which may not map neatly onto collectivist cultures where group identity supersedes individual autonomy (Gu, 1990; Pan, 2000; Mao, 1994; Arundale, 2006).

Further complicating the picture is the asocial nature of Grice's theoretical construct. Ladegaard (2009, p. 66) aptly characterizes maxim theory as "fundamentally asocial," echoing Chomsky's (1965) notion of an idealized speaker-listener in a homogeneous speech community, a fiction that ignores the messy realities of gender, class, ethnicity, and power that permeate

everyday interaction. Feminist pragmatics scholars have shown how women's speech is often misread as violating maxims when it actually adheres to alternative norms of rapport-building and empathy (Tannen, 1990; Coates, 1996; Holmes, 1995). Likewise, in postcolonial contexts, adherence to Gricean norms can become a tool of linguistic imperialism, marginalizing indigenous communicative practices that value silence, storytelling, or communal deliberation over direct assertion (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Canagarajah, 2013; Pennycook, 2017).

Recent work in interactional linguistics and conversation analysis further challenges the CP's assumption that communication is primarily cooperative. Studies of conflict talk, sarcasm, irony, and trolling reveal that speakers frequently engage in strategic non-cooperation, ambiguity, or even deliberate miscommunication to assert identity, resist authority, or subvert dominant narratives (Haugh, 2015; Locher & Graham, 2010; Page, 2014; Vásquez, 2014). In digital environments, for instance, users may flout all four maxims simultaneously to create humorous memes, perform dissent, or construct online personas—practices that defy Gricean logic but are perfectly intelligible within their own semiotic systems (Dynel, 2016; Page et al., 2014; Androutsopoulos, 2016). This shift toward viewing communication as inherently multimodal, embodied, and contextually embedded has led scholars like Clark (1996), Enfield (2009), and Sidnell and Stivers (2013) to advocate for models grounded in joint action and participatory sense-making rather than abstract principles of rationality.

Ethical considerations, long absent from Grice's framework, have also gained prominence in recent critiques. As Namy Soghady and Vahid Dastjerdi (2020) compellingly argue, in Persian-Islamic contexts, truth-telling is not an absolute moral imperative but is subordinate to higher ethical duties such as preserving life (*taqiyyah*), reconciling adversaries, or protecting family unity. Similar ethical overrides exist in other religious traditions: Jewish *pikuach nefesh* permits lying to save a life, while Buddhist speech ethics prioritize non-harm over factual accuracy (Keown, 2005; Harvey, 2000; Fink, 2013). These examples demonstrate that the Maxim of Quality cannot be universally applied without reference to local moral ontologies—a gap that calls for integrating ethical pragmatics into conversational theory (Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Terkourafi, 2015; Obeng, 2021).

Generally, while Grice's maxims remain a valuable heuristic for analyzing certain types of discourse, their explanatory power is severely limited when detached from the sociocultural, institutional, and ethical matrices that shape real communication. Contemporary scholarship, from cross-cultural pragmatics (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009; Barron, 2003) to critical discourse studies (Fairclough, 2015; van Dijk, 2021), converges on the view that cooperation is neither universal nor neutral but a contingent, negotiated, and often contested achievement. As Hadi (2013) cautions, we must interpret Grice's notion of cooperation not as a natural default but as a historically situated construct that requires careful contextualization. Future research should therefore move beyond retrofitting non-Western data into Gricean molds and instead develop pluralistic frameworks capable of accommodating the full spectrum of human communicative diversity—from the courtroom to the mosque, from the chatroom to the family dinner table.

## This Study

### Exemplifications and Argumentation

Both sides of every bilateral discourse will often have to choose between maintaining conventions and achieving their ideal goals. In some occasions, norms may be violated if the personal goal achieved by such a discourse is more significant than the ideal goal of satisfying the societal norm.

For example, suppose a person was being cut in front while driving by another driver. He or she may resort to shouting or profanity and this is violation of social norms. Thus, social norms must always be weighed against the goals of a specific piece of discourse in order to determine which is more important. Persian socio-cultural setting has also, like other cultural settings, some exceptions and so-called violations. Islamic laws too require people to tell lie in some tough circumstances. Also, people are required or at least supposed, not to insult or hurt others by words and other spoken or non-spoken acts. This claim is investigated at two phases in the present qualitative position study, 1) telling lie to achieve intentional but morally-beneficial goals and 2) using soft discourse as well as Taqiyyeh (guard-avoidance) to save people's lives and properties. It is to be noted here that since this study is qualitative, examples of such a claim would suffice to prove it through a descriptive-argumentative method.

**Phase One: Examples of telling lie out of discretion**

**Example 1: In battlefield**

In battlefield where the enemy wants to attack people especially women and children, it is commendable to tell lie and mislead the enemy in order to save innocent lives of the people. In Islam, Muslims are not permitted to attack others unless they are attacked. They can defend themselves by lying and giving misleading information to the enemies (Sheikh Saduq, A.H. 381).

**Example 2: Reconciliation among people**

When two or more people/groups are involved in hostile arguments and they do not seem to come to terms at all, they naturally try to talk negatively behind each other's back. In this condition, people are not supposed to pass on negative talks but reversely, they should propound positive words to settle down the arguments. In fact, although they break the norms of the society but it is permitted to do so just to pacify a tough condition among a group of people. In other words, people are not permitted to rub salt into the wounds and make such conditions tougher and worse (Sheikh Saduq, A.H. 381).

**Example 3: Maintaining family relations and foundation**

In Islam, family is a holy social structure and all of the prophets and imams have advised to promote and secure it. Sometimes wives and children request something the man cannot afford that on the spot. In these conditions, man is not supposed to disagree immediately and if the man tells the truth, then there will be some tensions and grudge among them so the man is allowed to tell something indirectly like "God willing I will do that, hopefully I will try to do so, etc." to satisfy them for the moment of request. As the time passes, they may forget or take their request back, also they may be satisfied through talking and reasoning, etc. (Allameh Majlesi, 1984).

**Example 4: Taqiyyeh (guard-avoidance)**

Taqiyyeh is a way of keeping your beliefs secret when your life or family is endangered by enemies. In these conditions Muslims are supposed to agree with the enemy by tongue but they keep their beliefs deep in their heart. In Muslim Holy book, The Quran, there are at least 10 cases of mentioning Taqiyyeh. Here are some of them:

a. *Surah Al-Imran (The Family of Imran), Verse 28: Let not the believers take the disbelievers as their friends in preference to the believers, and whoever does that will*

*never be helped by Allah in any way, unless it be a guard against them. And Allah warns you against Himself (His punishment), and to Allah is the final return.*

**Argument**: Muslims are supposed to guard themselves by keeping their belief secret in case of dangers only as well as avoiding hypocrisy simultaneously.

b. *Surah Al-Nahl (The Bee), Verse 106: Whoever disbelieves in Allah after his belief except for one who is forced [to renounce his belief] while his heart is content with faith. But those who [willingly] open their hearts to disbelief, upon them is wrath from Allah, and theirs will be an awful doom.*

**Argument**: Those who are forced to renounce their religion and reluctantly pretend to be so are the exceptions for the wrath of God.

c. *Surah Al-An'am (the Cattle), Verses 76-78: 76-So when the night covered him [with darkness], he saw a star. He said, "This is my lord." But when it set, he said, "I like not those that disappear." 77-And when he saw the moon rising, he exclaimed, "This is my lord." But when it set, he said, "Unless my Lord guide me, I will surely be among the people gone astray." 78-And when he saw the sun rising, he said, "This is my lord; this is greater." But when it set, he said, "O my people, indeed I am free from what you associate with Allah.*

**Argument**: It refers to the story of Abraham the Prophet (PBUH) who first agreed with star-worshipers, moon worshipers and sun worshipers in order to guide them toward the unique God. *Surah Al-Saffat (Those Who Set the Ranks) Verse 89: And said, "Indeed, I feel sick.*

**Argument**: When Abraham, the Prophet, did not want to go out with his opponents (the disbelievers) and wanted to stay in the city to break the idols, he proposed this excuse out of discretion.

d. *Surah Al-Anbiyaa (The Prophets) Verse 63: He said, "Rather, this - the largest of them - did it, so ask them, if they should [be able to] speak."*

**Argument**: When the angry idolaters rushed into Abraham, the Prophet, to know who had broken the idols, he calmly answered "the largest idol did that". This is Taqiyyeh out of discretion.

e. *Surah Al-Mu'min (The Believer) Verse 28: "And a believing man from the family of Pharaoh who concealed his faith…".*

**Argument**: That believer concealed his belief and penetrated into the Pharaoh's castle to help Moses.

f. *Surah Al-Kahf (The Cave) Verses 19-20: 19-And similarly, we awakened them that they might question one another. Said a speaker from among them, "How long have you remained [here]?" They said, "We have remained a day or part of a day." They said, "Your Lord is most knowing of how long you remained. So, send one of you with this silver coin of yours to the city and let him look to which is the best of food and bring you provision from it and let him be cautious. And let no one be aware of you. 20-Indeed, if they come to know of you, they will stone you or return you to their religion. And you will never prosper."*

**Argument**: Firstly, the believers in that castle concealed their belief. Secondly, visiting the city to provide food was full of hidings in order to save their lives and beliefs.

g. *Surah Ya-Sin, Verse 14: "When We sent to them two [Prophets] but they denied them, so We strengthened them with a third [Prophet], and they said, "Indeed, we are messengers to you."*

**Argument**: The third prophet could win the disbelievers' trust with the help of Taqiyyeh.

h. *Surah Al-An'am (The Cattle) Verse 108: "And do not insult those they invoke other than Allah, lest they insult Allah in enmity without knowledge. Thus, we have made pleasing to every community their deeds. Then to their Lord is their return and He will inform them about what they used to do".*

**Argument**: The Holy Quran orders the believers not to insult what the disbelievers' worship because they will insult the unique God in return ignorantly.

i. *Surah Al-Baqarah (The Cow) Verse 195: "And spend in the way of Allah and do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction. And do good; indeed, Allah loves the doers of good".*

**Argument**: Joseph's presence and his high position in ancient Egypt emperor's court was the result of nothing but Taqiyyeh in some circumstances. Another example of Taqiyyeh is Abutalib, Prophet Muhammad's paternal uncle, who concealed his faith in order to save the Prophet form the disbelievers' malicious intentions and dangers.

There are many stories of Taqiyyeh in Islamic and Persian culture. This study just names two of them to make the stories brief and sweet:

**Story 1**

Bohlool was born in Kufa. His real name was Wahab bin Amr. Haroun al-Rashid feared the seventh Shiite Imam, Musa Kazim (A.S.), for the security of his Caliphate and kingdom. Therefore, he tried to annihilate the Imam. He put the blame of rebellion upon him and demanded a judicial decree against him from the pious people of his time, including Bohlool. Everyone gave the decree except Bohlool, who opposed the decision. He immediately went to the Imam and informed him of the circumstances, and asked for advice and guidance. The Imam told him to behave insanely. He did so and was saved from Haroun's punishment. Actually, without any fear of danger, Bohlool could protect himself from against tyranny. He insulted the Caliph and his courtiers in his talks. People, of course, acknowledged his great wisdom and excellence. Even today, many of his stories are narrated in religious meetings to teach the listeners valuable lessons. Before pretending to be insane, Bohlool lived a life of influence and power, but after obeying the Imam's order, he turned his face away from the magnificence and splendor of the world. In reality, he became a true lover of Allah. He rejected Haroun's favors and dependence. In fact, Bohlool considered himself better than the Caliph and his courtiers because of his own way of life.

**Argument:** Bohlool in his heart was faithful to Islam and Imam, but that forced condition and Imam's order as well made him reluctantly act like an insane person; however, people trusted his wisdom. So, in this respect, we notice that Grice's maxim of quality is governed by Maxim of Ethics that is ethics necessitates some hidden conversational acts and speech.

**Story 2**

Ammar who was one of the first believers in Islam, was tortured until he eventually maligned Prophet Muhammad and spoke well of the pagan gods under the pressure of torture. Afterwards, he went to the Prophet and confessed his recantation. The Prophet inquired him, "How did you find your heart?" When Ammar replied that he was still a Muslim in his heart, Muhammad said, “all was well”, based on this verse of the Quran: "Whoever disbelieves in Allah after his belief except for one who is forced [to renounce his belief] while his heart is content with faith" (Al-Nahl, [The Bee] Verse: 106).

**Argument:** In this story too, we notice that ethics necessitates people to change their way of expression in order to save their lives, properties and families from enemies and wicked people.

**Phase Two: Sources of using nice language towards others**

In Persian culture which is closely attached to Islamic traditions and laws, people are not supposed to use bad, negative or irritating language towards others. This culture actually recommends kindness, affection, softness in language, brotherhood, etc. There are hundreds of hadith (Islamic traditions) which motivate people to stick to beautiful manners and behavior. Examples of them are mentioned below:

*a. Be kind and gentle; speak politely and neatly (Imam Sadiq, PBUH).*

**Argument**: This hadith promotes kindness and disallows harshness towards people.

*b. The most good-tempered people are those who are soft-hearted and inoffensive to others, who associate easily with people just as they associate with them easily (The Holy Prophet, PBUH).*

**Argument**: This hadith motivates people to have kind language and not to insult others. When people are soft-hearted and kind, they are approachable and friendly. So, people are not supposed to use bad language to reject people.

*c. Be aware that a good-natured youth is the key to benevolence and the lock for malevolence. Also, a bad-tempered youth is the key to malevolence and the lock on benevolence, Imam Sadeq (PBUH).*

**Argument**: Imam Sadeq (PBUH) emphasizes on being open to human being. If people show cold shoulder or have the sulks toward others, then there will be no humanitarian attitudes around, and human societal life would be like that of the jungle law.

*d. I have been appointed to consummate magnanimous manners, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).*

**Argument**: Magnanimous manners are supposed to be in the gene of human beings, not animals. Thus, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) preached harmless language, behavior, attitude, etc. which are all referred to as magnanimous behaviors.

*e. You cannot win people’s heart by wealth, so try to win their heart by good manners, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).*

**Argument**: It seems that the power of words, behavior is far more than the power of wealth. So,

ethics is necessary in all the seconds of our lives, especially when we are talking to a people. Since man is a social creature and cannot live on his/her own, s/he should try to communicate with others in society, and this necessitates good manners.

*f. The most loved ones to God are those who are the most good-natured. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).*

**Argument**: When God loves those who are much more open and welcoming to others, who thinks about doing something other than nice and pleasant behavior?

*g. The apogee of wisdom is treating people well, Imam Hassan (PBUH).*

**Argument**: Good behavior is so significant that it equals wisdom, and this evolution of mind and heart is only for human beings. Actually, if they would like to prove their wisdom and sagacity, they have to behave morally not immorally.

## Discussion

The present study contends that Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle (CP), while foundational to pragmatic theory, exhibits significant limitations when applied to socio-cultural contexts where ethical imperatives, particularly those rooted in religious doctrine—override conventional norms of truthfulness and informativeness. Drawing on authoritative Shi'i jurisprudential sources (*Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*) and Qur'anic injunctions, we have demonstrated that strategic deviations from the Maxim of Quality are not only permissible but ethically mandated in specific circumstances: warfare, interpersonal reconciliation, familial preservation, and *taqiyyah* (guard-avoidance). These cases reveal a fundamental gap in Grice's model: the absence of an explicit ethical dimension that governs communicative conduct beyond logical cooperation.

This omission is not merely technical but epistemological. Grice's framework assumes a universal rationality wherein speakers aim primarily at informational efficiency and mutual understanding, a presupposition that reflects what Kecskes (2019) identifies as an "Anglo-centric bias" privileging individualistic, truth-oriented communication. In contrast, the Persian-Islamic communicative ethos foregrounds relational harmony, communal well-being, and divine accountability as higher-order goals that may necessitate the suspension of literal truth. As Ladegaard (2009) rightly observes, Gricean theory is "fundamentally asocial," abstracting interaction from the dense web of power, belief, and moral obligation that shapes real-world discourse. Our findings corroborate this critique by illustrating how ethical considerations function not as external constraints but as constitutive principles of meaning-making in certain cultural frameworks.

The proposed Maxim of Ethics, which stipulates that (1) ethical imperatives may override the Maxim of Quality, and (2) discourse must avoid causing harm, offense, or social discord, thus serves two interrelated functions. First, it accounts for culturally sanctioned forms of non-truthful speech that would otherwise be misclassified as violations or failures of cooperation. For instance, Abraham's declaration that "the largest idol did it" (Qur'an 21:63) is not deceit but a pedagogical and protective strategy embedded in a divinely sanctioned narrative of guidance. Similarly, Ammar ibn Yasir's coerced recantation under torture, validated by the Prophet Muhammad upon confirmation of his inner faith, exemplifies how intentionality and context—not surface form, determine ethical legitimacy. Such examples align with contemporary work in moral pragmatics

(Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Obeng, 2021), which emphasizes that communicative norms are inseparable from local moral ontologies.

Second, the Maxim of Ethics reframes the very notion of "cooperation." Rather than viewing flouting as a deviation from rational exchange, it positions ethical alignment as the highest form of cooperation, one that prioritizes human dignity, social cohesion, and spiritual integrity over propositional accuracy. This resonates with Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle but extends it beyond face-management into the realm of moral duty. In Persian-Islamic contexts, refusing to insult the deities of others (Qur'an 6:108) or using gentle speech to preserve marital harmony (Allameh Majlesi, 1984) are not optional courtesies but obligatory acts of ethical communication. Thus, what appears as a violation of Quantity or Quality from a Gricean standpoint may, in fact, represent full adherence to a deeper cooperative ethic.

Moreover, the introduction of a fifth maxim challenges the presumed universality of Grice's fourfold taxonomy. Recent scholarship has increasingly questioned the cross-cultural validity of the CP, noting its poor fit with high-context, collectivist, or ritualized discourse systems (Wierzbicka, 2006; Spencer-Oatey, 2020; Haugh & Kádár, 2023). Our study contributes to this growing body of evidence by showing that in belief-oriented societies, the primary criterion for evaluating utterances is not whether they are true, relevant, or clear. but whether they are *right*. This shift, from epistemic to moral evaluation, demands a reconceptualization of pragmatic competence itself, one that includes ethical literacy as a core component.

It is crucial to note that the Maxim of Ethics does not reject Gricean pragmatics outright but seeks to *contextualize* and *expand* it. As Hadi (2013) cautions, Grice's notion of cooperation must not be conflated with everyday notions of agreeableness; rather, it should be understood as a technical construct within a specific theoretical paradigm. However, when that paradigm is exported uncritically into cultures where communication is governed by different axioms, such as *adab* (Islamic etiquette) or *ehteram* (respect), it risks producing analytic distortions. By proposing a culturally responsive augmentation, our model preserves the heuristic value of Grice's insights while correcting their ethnocentric blind spots.

Finally, the implications of this proposal extend beyond theoretical pragmatics. In applied domains, such as intercultural education, diplomatic communication, or AI-driven natural language processing, the failure to recognize ethical overrides can lead to serious misinterpretations. A chatbot programmed to enforce "truthfulness" might inadvertently violate religious sensitivities; a legal interpreter unaware of *taqiyyah* might misjudge witness credibility. Integrating the Maxim of Ethics thus offers not only conceptual refinement but also practical utility in an increasingly pluralistic world.

In conclusion, the Grecian maxims, though seminal, are insufficient for capturing the full moral complexity of human communication. The Persian-Islamic tradition, with its rich jurisprudence of permissible speech, provides a compelling case for expanding the Cooperative Principle to include ethical governance as a foundational conversational norm. Future research should test this proposal in other religious and cultural settings, Buddhist, Confucian, Indigenous, etc. to determine whether the Maxim of Ethics represents a culture-specific adjustment or a universally necessary fifth pillar of pragmatic theory.

## Concluding Remarks

This study has critically examined the applicability of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle within the Persian-Islamic socio-cultural context and has argued for the necessity of introducing a Maxim of Ethics as a fifth constitutive principle of conversational pragmatics. Grounded in authoritative

Shi'i jurisprudential texts, particularly *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh* (Vol. 4). and supported by multiple Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions (*aḥādīth*), our analysis demonstrates that ethical imperatives frequently override the conventional demands of truthfulness, informativeness, or relevance as stipulated by Grice's maxims. Specifically, we have shown that strategic deviations from the Maxim of Quality are not only permissible but morally obligatory in four key domains: (1) warfare and defense of the innocent, (2) reconciliation among estranged individuals or groups, (3) preservation of familial harmony and emotional well-being, and (4) *taqiyyah* (guard-avoidance) in situations of existential threat to life, faith, or property.

These cases reveal a fundamental limitation in Grice's framework: its implicit assumption that cooperation is primarily epistemic, that is, oriented toward the efficient exchange of truthful information. In contrast, the Persian-Islamic communicative tradition prioritizes moral cooperation, wherein the ethical consequences of speech take precedence over propositional accuracy. When Abraham (peace be upon him) declares that "the largest idol did it" (Qur'an 21:63), or when Ammar ibn Yasir recants under torture yet retains inner faith, actions explicitly validated by divine revelation and prophetic endorsement—these are not failures of cooperation but exemplars of a higher-order ethical rationality. Such practices cannot be adequately captured by labeling them as "flouts" or "violations"; rather, they represent adherence to a deeper normative system that Grice's model fails to accommodate.

Moreover, the Maxim of Ethics extends beyond the permissibility of non-truthful speech to encompass a positive obligation to avoid offensive, harmful, or socially disruptive discourse, even when such speech is factually accurate. As numerous *aḥādīth* emphasize, kindness, gentleness, and magnanimity in language are not optional virtues but essential components of moral conduct. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) declared, "I have been sent to perfect noble character," and Imam Sadiq (AS) instructed, "Be kind and gentle; speak politely and neatly." These injunctions establish a communicative ethos in which silence or indirectness may be more ethical than blunt honesty. Thus, in everyday interactions, such as refraining from criticizing a teacher's attire or softening a refusal to preserve relational harmony—the Maxim of Ethics functions as a regulative principle that actively shapes what may be said, how it may be said, and whether it should be said at all.

The implications of this proposal are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it challenges the presumed universality of Gricean pragmatics and contributes to ongoing efforts to decolonize linguistic theory by centering non-Western epistemologies (Kecskes, 2019; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Canagarajah, 2013). By demonstrating that ethical governance can condition or even supersede informational norms, this study supports a pluralistic view of pragmatic competence, one that recognizes culture-specific moral frameworks as integral to meaning-making. Practically, the Maxim of Ethics offers valuable guidance for intercultural communication, translation, education, and artificial intelligence design, where misinterpretations often arise from applying monolithic standards of "truthfulness" without regard for local ethical sensibilities.

It must be acknowledged that the inclusion of a fifth maxim does not invalidate Grice's contributions but rather contextualizes and expands them. As Hadi (2013) rightly notes, Grice's notion of cooperation is a technical construct, distinct from colloquial understandings of agreeableness. However, when this construct is exported uncritically into belief-oriented societies, it risks producing analytic distortions that pathologize culturally legitimate forms of speech. The

Maxim of Ethics thus serves as a corrective lens, ensuring that pragmatic analysis remains sensitive to the moral architectures that underpin real-world communication.

Finally, while this study focuses on the Persian-Islamic context, its core insight, that ethics may function as a foundational conversational norm, invites comparative investigation across other cultural and religious traditions. Do Buddhist, Confucian, Indigenous, or African communicative systems similarly prioritize ethical alignment over propositional fidelity? Future research should explore these questions to determine whether the Maxim of Ethics represents a culture-specific adjustment or a universally necessary augmentation of pragmatic theory.

In general, human communication is not merely a vehicle for information but a moral act. To ignore this dimension is to render pragmatic theory incomplete. By formally integrating ethics into the architecture of conversational principles, we move closer to a more inclusive, nuanced, and humanly responsive understanding of how, and why, we speak as we do.

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