



# On Grice's Maxim of Quantity: A Comparative Study of Texts Written by Iranian Authors and Native Speakers of English

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## Abstract

*This study aimed to compare the texts produced by Iranian writers and native speakers of English with respect to Grice's maxim of quantity. To achieve this aim, the researchers selected and compared 30 psychological articles written by Iranian and native English writers. The corpora included 10 Persian articles written by Iranian authors, 10 English articles written by the same Iranian authors, and 10 English articles written by the native English authors. These articles were selected from different journals of psychology. The researchers then rated all the sentences included in the discussion and result sections of the above-mentioned articles with regard to observance/non-observance of the Gricean maxim of quantity. The data quantified as such were then subjected to paired-samples and independent-samples t-test in order to see which factor(s) may have an important role in observing or infringing that maxim. The data obtained from the native English articles were also examined through descriptive statistics to find out the frequency of the quantity maxim violations in the total of discussion and result sections. The findings revealed that not only the native speakers of Persian language but also the native speakers of English language violated the quantity maxim of Grice in their English writings. Statistically, no significant difference existed between Persian and English texts written by the same Iranian writers regarding the observance of quantity maxim. In fact, although Iranian writers infringed the maxim in both English and Persian articles, the frequency of occurred violations in Persian articles was more than that in native English articles and English articles written by Iranian authors. In other words, the frequency of violation of that maxim in native-English articles was less than those in both English and Persian texts produced by Iranian authors.*

**Keywords:** Grice's cooperative principle, the Gricean maxim of quantity, Reading comprehension, Writing.

## Introduction

Man is a social being who likes to experience the world around him in groups. Through this journey, he interacts by means of different communicative ways such as writing. Grabe and Kaplan look at writing as an adventure directing the writer into a highly elaborated process of problem solving<sup>1</sup>. In the written discourse, in fact, each sentence intends to say something necessary, true, and relevant to accomplish some objective in which the text producer and the intended audience are mutually interested<sup>2</sup>. Then, the task of writing has so far been considered to be an interactive activity, it is often expected that there should be a mutual and interactive communication or negotiation between the writers and readers. According to Hoey, a text should also be known as a place in which writers and readers meet and interact with each other<sup>3</sup>. In fact, he regards a text as a two-sided phenomenon, where the writers, on the one hand, control and produce most of the interaction. Readers, on the other hand, have enough power to drop a text when it does not respond to their expectations, interests, and needs. These are several good reasons for writers to see whether or not their readers had an interactive communication. In other words, their writing in different areas would be totally acceptable and understandable by their readers or audiences of various languages. For this reason and others, writing has always been

the focus of attention of many researchers in applied linguistics and language teaching. It hence seems that there have been so far offered different models and solutions to improve writing skill. From among those, it appears that the most applicable and simplest one is Grice's cooperative principles and its associated maxims including quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. "Quantity" maxim of Grice's framework which is the focus of this study contributes to the amount of information represented by a writer. According to its sub-principles, "Q1 and Q2", the information provided on the behalf of the writer must be enough, that is, no less (Q1) and no more (Q2). Grice<sup>4</sup>, as a language philosopher, is principally concerned with the strategies operating in conversation but he stipulates that the CP and maxims govern not merely talk-exchanges, rather any cooperative "indeed rational behaviors". In Grice's terms, when there is some problem in the understanding of the meaning, a maxim must be flouted intentionally. According to Davis, the act of generalization of these maxims is an indicative of rational cooperative behavior of human beings in general<sup>5</sup>. Hence, those are applicable not only in linguistic conventions such as conversation and writing but also in non-linguistic conventions like our daily activities. Close to these views, Celce-Murcia and Olshtain also argue that Grice's maxims play a beneficial role in written forms, especially during revision and editing of written texts<sup>6</sup>. They elaborate how each maxim can be adjusted for

written discourse as well. In this respect, Davies<sup>7</sup> also points out that any act of communication, either through speaking or writing, may occur if there is some cooperation. That is, participants are obliged to keep rationality and work together because she supports rationality as the meaning of cooperation in Grice's CP model. According to Chapman, "Grice's theory of conversation aimed not at describing the exact practices and regularities of everyday conversation, but at explaining the ways in which people attribute psychological states or attitudes to each other, in conversation or in any other type of communication<sup>8</sup>". Among well-known figures who elaborated on infringing those maxims in a written communication was Van Dijk, who was the first figure that proposed and developed the application of the the Gricean maxims to analyze written communications, with a special focus on the literary communication<sup>9</sup>. White conducted a research in the field of writing because he believed that although Grice's maxims are formulated for successful communication in conversations, they can also be adapted to teaching of writing<sup>10</sup>. His idea may stem from figures like Grabe and Kaplan<sup>11</sup>. The two in their discussion of written texts point out that each written text is to communicate information within structurally certain accepted principles. White holds that cultural differences can have an influence on writer-reader expectations<sup>10</sup>. He shows this problem in lay readers' reactions to a sample of letter, using the Gricean maxims. Ozhan tried to discover the application of Grice's cooperative principle and its maxims through analyzing students' argumentative essays<sup>12</sup>. His findings demonstrated that teacher's coherence judgments appeared to be pertinent very much to the cooperative principle and its maxims.

However, these maxims have tended not to be considered equally by all writers-readers due to their preferences. That is, the writers' treatment may originate from inter-cultural dimensions of communication or other parameters existing among writers on how they approach those maxims. Therefore, a good number of figures recommend the teaching and applying of the Gricean maxims in writing classes<sup>10,13</sup>. In addition, some experts believe that using the Gricean model in writing can improve reading comprehension<sup>8,14-16</sup>. Grabe and Kaplan claims that the organization used by learners, coming from certain a culture, is distinct from that taught in English<sup>1</sup>. He states that SLLs/FLLs make use of the discourse patterns of their first language that cause them to order and to express their meanings in a different manner when they write in SL/FL. Moreover, some disparities that occur in writing might be regarded as the authors' language deficiency, causing them to fall short of the readers' expectations<sup>17</sup>.

As noted above, the cooperative principle can now be a standard tool of discourse analysis among linguists. It has been described through one of the most influential and classic papers, *Logic and Conversation*, published by Grice<sup>18</sup>. Indeed, writing is another form of communication and violating these maxims in writing can generate difficulties in conveying or understanding the meaning of a particular text. In their discussion of written

texts as some form of communication, Grab and Kaplan<sup>11</sup> reminds that "a written text, too, is to structure to include Gricean maxims as well as systematically interpretable violations of these maxims". For this, this study surveyed a descriptive research to figure out whether or not native speakers of Persian and English observe the Gricean maxim of quantity when writing in L1 and L2.

As it was previously mentioned, quantity maxim contributing to the amount of information can make a chance for writers, on the one hand, to improve their writing skill and for readers, on the other, to enhance their reading comprehension. This research thus began to make an attempt to see to what extent native-speakers of English and native-speakers of Persian observed the Gricean maxim of quantity in their English writings. Considering the observance/non-observance of quantity maxim, the researchers were eager to know if there is any significant difference between English texts produced by both native English and Persian speakers as well as whether there is a meaningful difference between English and Persian texts produced by the same Iranian writers or not.

## Material and Methods

**Participants:** An attempt was made to select a sample of articles in psychology by both native-speakers of English and native speakers of Persian. The justification for choosing the above-mentioned sample was controlling for the extraneous factors such as rules and conventions which govern each of specialized written texts. Moreover, this discipline included materials which were familiar to one of the researchers because she was interested in some related courses in psychology and had studied some related materials extensively. The total number of sample was thirty psychological articles divided into three groups, including ten Persian articles as well as ten English articles written by the same Iranian writers, and also ten English articles written by different native speakers of English. These articles were concerned with different psychological issues.

These three samples were taken from different journals in terms of the determined factors and their availability. Ten Persian selected articles were published in different journals; namely, Journal of Family Research, the Journal of Psychology Researches, the Journal of Educational Science and Psychology, and so on. Regarding L2 English articles, most of them, that is, eight articles, were published in the same journal named International Journal of Psychology and the rest were published in the British Epilepsy Association Published by Elsevier Ltd and the Journal of Psychological Research. Moreover, native English articles came from various journals such as International Journal of Stress Management, Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, Journal of Abnormal Psychology, and so on. All journals were almost popular and well-known. It is worth mentioning here that these articles were written between 1996 and 2011.

**Instruments:** A short questionnaire which contained five questions to reveal some information about being native and nonnative of English writers was sent to the authors' emails. The questionnaire sent to their emails also required them to answer to questions such as how and where they have learned English language, and where they live now.

**Procedure:** In this comparative research, an effort was made to compare three groups of articles written by Iranian authors and native-speakers of English in order to discover how much "quantity" maxim was violated in writing of "result" and "discussion" sections.

To achieve this aim, the researchers had to collect articles written in terms of three parameters; namely, having just one author, having "result" and "discussion" sections, and having native English authors. So, they faced limitations which forced them to select the available psychological articles published by different journals at different sites on various psychological subjects. Three samples ranged from 1998 to 2009 and from 2002 to 2009 for Persian and English articles written by Iranian writers respectively as well as from 1996 to 2011 for native English articles.

The researchers selected "result and discussion" parts of articles to examine their sentences according to the Gricean maxim of quantity. The two-mentioned sections were where the writer must exactly express the results and then discuss them. Hence, these could help the researchers to assure whether adequate amount of information was presented over the findings of each article and whether the information was also discussed on behalf of the. In addition, these parts would most directly be written according to the writer's views and knowledge. So, it was more possible to figure out the differences that might be revealed in their writing as a result of observing or infringing the Gricean maxim of "quantity".

To analyze the content of each part, all sentences related to each part were read by the researchers one by one and were rated according to quantity maxim, included sub-principles, Q1 and Q2. Then, for the convenience of statistical computations, the researcher added Q1 and Q2 violated by each writer to obtain a single number for each article. Then, all of the obtained numbers for each section were added once more. Finally, there were two numbers for each part and a total number gained by summing those two numbers for each group. Statistical

procedures done in order to determine existing differences among them are in the following:

At first, three groups of articles were compared with regard to the "quantity" maxim of "discussion". That is, two groups of English and Persian articles written by Iranian writers were compared with the discussion sections of English articles written by the natives separately. Secondly, two groups of Persian and English articles written by the Iranian authors were compared to each other. The same process was implemented both for the "quantity" maxim of result and total "quantity" maxim of "discussion and result" parts. Finally, the same processes were done for comparing Persian articles and the English articles written by the native speakers of English language as well.

## Results and Discussion

As it can be found, many factors exist in written communication which may hinder or accelerate readers' understanding of the text among which is the amount of information presented by the writer or what is termed by Grice as "quantity maxim". Therefore, it is essential to see to what extent writers, both Iranian and native English, observe this maxim in their writing. To achieve this aim, the researchers used their impression and then rated all the sentences included in the discussion and result sections of the above-mentioned articles with regard to observance/non-observance of Grice's maxim of quantity. They came up with the following results:

According to the above table, out of ten English writers, three (% 30) had one violation, two (%20) had two violations, three (% 30) had three violations, one (% 10) had four violations, and one (% 10) had seven violations in total.

Descriptive statistics was used according to which % 8 of the native English writers violated the maxim of quantity in the discussion section of their articles. Compared to their Persian counterparts, their numbers were too low and can simply be ignored. The mean of native English writers who also had this violation in their result sections were 1.8 and this number reached to 2.7 for those who did not observe the maxim in their both sections.

Table-1

Frequency and frequency percentage for the violation of "quantity" maxim in both result and discussion sections of native English articles

Native English Writers	Frequency	0	3	2	3	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
	Frequency percentage	0	30	20	30	10	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
	Cumulative frequency percentage	0	30	50	80	90	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	-
The number of violations		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	15	Total
Row		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15

**Table-2**  
**Descriptive statistics for the violation of "quantity" maxim in native English articles**

Row	Research Variables	Native English writers		
		SD	SE	Mean
1	Quantity in Discussion	% 29	%91	% 8
2	Quantity in Result	2/3	% 72	1/8
3	Total Quantity	1/82	% 57	2/7

The following table shows the frequency of violations made in English and Persian texts produced by the same Iranian writers in total.

As indicated in the above table, out of ten Iranian writers (English articles), two (% 20) had two violations, two (% 20) had three violations, two (% 20) had four violations, one (% 10) had five violations, one (% 10) had six violations, one (% 10) had seven violations, and one (% 10) eleven violations in total. Regarding their Persian articles, one (% 10) had no violation, one (% 10) had four violations, one (% 10) had five violations, one (% 10) had six violations, one (% 10) had seven violations, one (% 10) had ten violations, two (% 20) had eleven violations, and one (% 10) had fifteen violations in total. In fact, the most number of violations occurred in Persian articles written by Iranian writers. It happened when the most number of violations done by English native writers was seven.

Descriptive statistics of the data also indicates that the average of Iranian writers who violated the maxim of quantity in the discussion section of their English and Persian articles was about 2/2 and 3/3 respectively. In the result section, these mean

reached to 2/5 and 4/8 respectively. Totally speaking, 4/7 of Iranian writers did not observe this maxim in the English articles discussion section and 8/1 did the same in their Persian articles discussion section. As shown, Iranian writers ignored this maxim much more when they wrote in their L1.

Considering the difference between English texts written by both native English and Persian speakers, the following analysis was run. The data obtained for this question were subjected t-tests or independent-samples t-test. As it can be observed in Table-5, variance equality pre-assumption for doing independent sample t-test has been observed at the level of % 5 ( $P > \% 05$ ). In these conditions, it is necessary to refer to the conditions of observance of variances equality pre-assumption in order to examine the result of independent sample t-test.

It is revealed from table-5 that there was no statistically significant difference between the quantity maxim of discussion section of native English articles and L2 English articles. The same was quite true for the result section. In other words, the difference between the result sections of these kinds of articles regarding the frequency of quantity maxim violation did not reach statistical significance. Regarding the total quantity maxim of Native English articles and L2 English articles, there was no statistically meaningful difference.

To answer the question "Is there any difference between English and Persian texts produced by the Iranian writers or not?" the data were analyzed by means of paired-samples t-test, and the hypothesis was then tested at the .05 level of significance.

**Table-3**  
**Frequency and frequency percentage for the violation of "quantity" maxim in both result and discussion sections of Persian and L2 English articles**

Iranian writers (English articles)	Frequency	0	0	2	2	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	10
	Frequency percentage	0	0	20	20	20	10	10	10	0	0	0	10	0	0	100
	Cumulative frequency percentage	0	0	20	40	60	70	80	90	90	90	90	100	100	100	-
Iranian writers (Persian Articles)	Frequency	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	1	1	10
	Frequency percentage	10	0	0	0	10	10	10	10	0	0	10	20	10	10	100
	Cumulative frequency percentage	10	10	10	10	20	30	40	50	50	50	60	80	90	100	-
The number of violations		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	15	Total
Row		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15

**Table-4**  
**Descriptive statistics of two groups of research sample in variables**

Row	Research variables	Iranian writers (English articles)			Iranian writers (Persian articles)		
		SD	SE	Mean	SD	SE	Mean
1	Quantity in "Discussion"	2/2	% 69	2/2	2/36	%75	3/3
2	Quantity in "Result"	2/8	% 88	2/5	3/36	1/06	4/8
3	Total	2/7	% 87	4/7	4/48	1/42	8/1

**Table-5**  
**Independent-Samples t-test for comparing the quantity maxim of native English writers' articles with Iranian writers' L2 English articles**

Independent samples t-test				Leven's Test		The conditions of variance equality pre-assumption	Compared variable
Average difference	P	df	t	P	F		
-1/4	% 08	18	-1/85	% 16	2/15	The observance of variance equality pre-assumption	Quantity of Discussion
-1/4	% 08	12/04	-1/85			The lack of observance of variance equality pre-assumption	
-% 7	% 55	18	-% 61	% 94	%006	The observance of variance equality pre-assumption	Quantity of Result
-% 7	% 55	17/35	-% 61			The lack of observance of variance equality pre-assumption	
-2	% 07	18	-1/91	% 28	1/24	The observance of variance equality pre-assumption	Total Quantity
-2	% 07	15/65	-1/91			The lack of observance of variance equality pre-assumption	

**Table-6**  
**Paired-Samples t-test to compare the quantity maxim in English and Persian articles written by Iranian writers**

Compared Variable	P	df	t
Quantity of Discussion Section	% 29	9	-1/13
Quantity of Result Section	% 17	9	-1/5
Total Quantity	% 9	9	-1/93

As understood from the table presented above (Table-6), no statistically meaningful difference existed between Persian articles and L2 English articles both of which were written by the same Iranian writers regarding the Grice's maxim of Quantity in discussion section. The same was quite true for the result section. Considering both sections together, the difference did not again reach statistical significance. It is worth mentioning that Iranian writers did observe this maxim in their L2 English articles more than in their Persian articles.

The discussion of the obtained results is presented in the following: the investigation of the data indicated that all the native English writers violated the maxim of quantity. While the most of these writers (90%) had four or less than four violations, one violated the maxim seven times. It is worth mentioning here that most of these violations had occurred in the result sections and not in the discussion ones. This may be due to the lack of enough knowledge or unawareness about what information must be given in the result part. Moreover, some of researchers sometimes were not sure over the statistical numbers of their findings. Therefore, they happened to refrain from offering the obtained figures in their studies. However, there were some specialized experts who had sufficient knowledge on the topic in question as well as on the required information both in result and discussion parts. Nevertheless, they did not write clearly. That is, they gave less information. This problem might be the result of linguistic deficiencies<sup>17</sup>. These researchers also seemed to ignore and not consider all groups of their audiences. In other

words, they just wrote for certain readers or actually the experts of that field. That is why they did not elaborate well on the concepts and other information in a way which will be understandable for the general public. In all-mentioned cases, the native English speakers expected to adhere to the Gricean maxims due to their culture but they did not do so. It therefore can be concluded that the sub-principal (Q1) of quantity maxim was violated by the article authors intentionally. Exemplifying this violation with regard to the context in which it occurred would be:

Ex1: [Two regression equations] were computed, one with Roberts Depression as the dependent variable, the other with CDI as the dependent variable.

This violation occurred in the result section; the writer must logically provide regression equations but he did not. Since the information was not sufficient, this resulted in the infringing of Q1.

Ex2: The formally [open] but culturally and socially [closed] British society described by previous [theorists] may be giving way to greater acceptance, and indeed endorsement, of self-advancement irrespective of social origins.

This violation occurred in the discussion section; the author did not define what she meant by open and close societies or, at least, she could refer to some theorists, who talked about these two terms, as reliable references in order to help readers get the meaning of the author. As a result, the violation of Q1 occurred.

The statistical analysis of the data totally revealed that there was no significant difference between the native English writers and Iranian writers regarding the observation of quantity maxim in their English writings. It is completely evident that Iranian writers have attempted to decrease their distance with the English counterparts while writing in English. Some other

factors also help accelerate this process. The process through which L2 English articles have been edited by high competent writers in English before they were handled to the related journals or the process through which these articles have been edited by an editor who are proficient in English writing are among these factors. Lack of an appropriate and standard scale by which the researchers can exactly determine how much information should be given by a writer also plays an important role in this regard. These data was actually analyzed through comparing the researchers' perception of the amount of given information with the definitions given by Grice's framework for the maxim of quantity.

The investigation of the last research question depicted that Iranian writers did not observe the maxim of quantity both in English and Persian articles. In other words, no significant difference was found between them. This may also be indicative of cultural diversity. It was expected that Iranian writers observed the Gricean maxims for their universality especially while they were writing in English, but this did not occur. The explanation for such an arisen problem may be that though EFL writers have often been trained how to write linguistically and culturally in English, they appear to have transferred their Persian rhetorical patterns in to their English discourse. This finding confirms Kaplan's theory, believing EFL/SL learners organize their meaning in terms of their own language. This may imply that they were not fully acculturated in the English academic discourse needed for international publication and they preferred to compose their task in terms of the cultural and linguistic considerations of their first language. That is, the Persian L1 texts require some culture- specific writing style. It is worth mentioning here that the English L2 texts produced by Iranian writers appear to be developing. Another justification for this behavior of Iranian writers who seem to be aware of the necessity of application of these principles but not to adhere to them may be their lack of information over the subject in question. The following examples show the occurred violations in both English and Persian texts generated by the same Iranian writers. These findings approve the gained results by White who emphasized on the teaching and employing the Gricean maxims<sup>10</sup>.

Ex 1: In mohaghegh-ân neshân dâd-and, moallem-ân-i ke del-suz, hemâyat-gar va samimi hast-and va bedun-e saxt-gir-i-e ziâd e?mâl-e rahbari mi-kon-and, afzâyesh-e moaffagh-iiyat-hâ-ye shenâxt-i va âtef-i [?] farâgir-ân râ bâes mi-shavand ehtemâl-e farsude-gi tahsil-i râ kâhesh mi-dah-and These researcher+pl show+ 3plS, teacher+ pl+ inde that sympathetic, protector and intimate are+ 3pluS and without+EZ severity + EZ high exercising+ EZ lead+ 3plS, increasing+ EZ success+ pl+EZ cognitive and emotional [?] + EZ learner+ pl+ ra cause become+ 3plS and probability+ EZ depreciation+ EZ educational + ra decrease + 3plS.

These researchers indicated that teachers who are sympathetic, protector, and intimate and without high severing exercising

lead, causing the increasing of cognitive and emotional successes [?] of learners and decrease the probability of educational depreciation.

In this example, the writer did not clarify what he meant by cognitive and emotional successes and talked about his idea in general without giving any examples or explanations. Hence, the information did not suffice and the violation of Q1 was occurred.

Ex2: The cognitive-perceptual factor may be analogous to the positive symptom factor (delusions and hallucinations). The interpersonal factor may be an analog to the more negative symptom factor [?] in schizophrenia patients, although social anxiety, which loads on this factor, has no clear analog in positive or negative schizophrenic symptoms.

As can be seen in the above example, the author mentioned the positive symptoms in the first sentence but he did not do that in the second one. This can be considered as the infringing of Q1.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed the disturbing fact that although the native Persian speakers seem to have received all necessary instructions to write correctly and acceptably both in L1 and L2, there are still some problems which make their texts not be meaningfully produced. Generally speaking, by comparing three groups of articles written by Iranian writers and native speakers of English with regard to the application of the Gricean maxim of quantity, it was found that though the number of violations of this maxim in English psychological articles written by Iranian writers were more than did in those of written by native speakers of English, especially in the discussion sections, the difference did not reach statistical significance. In other words, none of the writers observed the maxim of quantity in their writings.

It is worth mentioning here that Iranian writers did not adhere to Grice's quantity maxim in writing both Persian articles and English articles. Indeed, even though Iranian writers observed quantity maxim in their English articles much more than in their Persian ones, there was no statistically significant difference between them. In addition, the native English speakers followed the maxim of quantity in English articles much more than did Iranian writers in English articles.

It can be concluded that the authors should primarily expand in addition to their linguistic knowledge, their background knowledge of the topics about which they intend to write. Moreover, they should carefully follow the standard instructions and make their entire attempt to observe the Gricean maxims in the texts they are going to produce. In fact, the findings from such studies in English-language research articles would be especially beneficial for newcomers in helping them meet the expectations of international scientific academia.

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