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Conversational implicature in interrogation, therapy, and Family gathering scenes in the netflix series *adolescence*

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Abstract - The study examined conversational implicature generated through non-observance of Gricean maxims in interrogation, therapy, and family gathering scenes, as portrayed in the Netflix series *Adolescence* (2025). Using Thomas's (1995) classification of non-observance, a qualitative content analysis of characters' utterances was used to identify the types of non-observance and the conversational implicatures that occur across these three scenes. The study found four types of non-observance, which are flouting (69.71%), violating (21.63%), opting out (8.17%), and infringing (0.48%). Therapy scenes produced the most non-observance of maxims, interrogation showed almost an equal ratio of flouting and violating, and family gathering scenes yielded the fewest. The maxim of relation was the most flouted and violated across three scenes. Regarding implicature, particularized conversational implicature dominated all three settings with 195 occurrences. Generalized conversational implicature appeared only in interrogation and therapy scenes, with a total of 10 occurrences, indicating that all three scenes are highly context-dependent. These findings demonstrate that the cooperative principle is only partially applicable in institutional and strategic settings, where non-observance functions strategically. With interrogation scenes being the least cooperative, therapy is partially cooperative, while family gathering scenes serve non-strategic, relational purposes, making them the most cooperative setting.

Keywords: cooperative principle, conversational maxim, non-observance of maxim, conversational implicature

1. Introduction

In every conversation, speakers have goals to achieve and meanings to convey. However, not all of these meanings are expressed exactly as they are, and the reasons behind this indirectness largely depend on context (Musa & Mohammed, 2022). This is possible because listeners do not rely solely on the literal meaning of words, but also draw inferences about what the speaker actually means (Hansen & Terkouraf, 2023).

This phenomenon of conveying meaning indirectly is studied in pragmatics, the branch of linguistics concerned with meaning in context (Yule, 1996). Within this field, one of the most influential frameworks for understanding indirect meaning is Grice's (1989) theory of conversational implicature. Grice (1989) proposed that successful and cooperative conversation is governed by the Cooperative Principle which stated that for speakers to be cooperative, they must understand the goal of their conversation and follow the topic accordingly, asking and answering in ways that keep the conversation flowing. To fulfill this principle, Grice formulated four conversational maxims that speakers are expected to observe. However, speakers do not always observe these maxims. If a speaker does not comply with these maxims, conversational implicature can occur or might be triggered. Building on Grice's (1989) original account of how speakers do not adhere to these maxims, Thomas (1995) developed a more

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comprehensive explanation of non-observance of maxims, which are flouting, violating, opting out, infringing, and suspending the maxims. Flouting, in particular, commonly results in conversational implicature, since the speaker breaks a maxim openly and expects the hearer to infer the intended meaning (Thomas, 1995).

Grice (1989) further distinguished conversational implicatures into two types, which are generalized conversational implicature (GCI) and particularized conversational implicature (PCI). A GCI occurs without needing a highly specific context, while a PCI requires specific circumstances of the utterance to grasp the intended meaning of the words (Jary et al., 2025). Because of this dependence, PCI is widely considered more context-bound than GCI (Heritage, 2025).

In ordinary everyday conversation, successful communication generally depends on speakers and hearers sharing mutual goals (Celhar & Kavalir, 2025). In institutional contexts, especially legal ones, communication becomes more strategic. Participants do not always want to be transparent, as each has their own agenda (Dahlman, 2022). In interrogation scenes, for instance, the interrogator's goal is to uncover the truth and elicit a confession, while the suspect often conceals information, using words to implicate innocence or deflect guilt to defend themselves (Ceballos & Sosas, 2018; Catoto, 2017). Therapy sessions, on the other hand, present a related but less adversarial dynamic. Therapists guide patients toward self-disclosure (Stukenbrock et al., 2021; Knol et al., 2020). Even so, patients may still withhold, deflect, or struggle to articulate due to shame, denial, or unprocessed emotion. Family gathering conversations, by contrast, fall closer to ordinary everyday talk, where the Cooperative Principle applies mostly fully, but implicature is still commonly found (Musa et al., 2022).

As Dahlman (2022) notes in her discussion of legal language, legal communication spans several contexts, such as the language of legislation, of judicial decisions, and of legal practice, none of which functions exactly like ordinary conversation. In the legislative context that she focused on, she argues, in line with Marmor (2008), that Grice's Cooperative Principle and implicatures apply only partially because such communication is strategic rather than cooperative. Although her focus is on legislation rather than spoken legal interaction, her argument raises the broader question of how cooperative and non-cooperative communication operate differently across strategic and everyday settings. The Netflix series *Adolescence* provides an opportunity to examine this directly, as it depicts all three settings within a single fictional narrative.

Adolescence is a four-episode British psychological crime drama released on Netflix on 13 March 2025. The series centers on Jamie Miller, a 13-year-old boy arrested on suspicion of murdering his female classmate. The series unfolds across three distinct discourse settings, each of which seems to elicit different kinds of speech from its characters, suggesting that context itself shapes what can and cannot be said. Thus, forms the focus of this study.

Several studies have examined conversational implicature, non-observance of maxims, and pragmatic phenomena across three key communicative contexts relevant to the present study, which study interrogation, therapy, and casual family gathering scenes in the Adolescence series. A key finding across these studies is that implicature behaves differently depending on contextual factors. It varies by distinction between violative and non-violative contexts (Dahlman 2021), by strategic pressure (Dahlman, 2022), by the hearer's active construction (Hansen & Terkouraf, 2023), and by an inferential path (Jary et al., 2025).

Other research has investigated non-observance of Gricean maxims within strategic contexts, particularly legal, political settings, and TV talk shows. In courtroom discourse, Catoto (2017) found witnesses were likely to violate maxims during questioning. Similarly, in political speeches, flouting the maxims has been observed as a common pragmatic strategy used by politicians (Setefani et al., 2026). Then, in the TV talk show found there are maxims flouted that were used for evading questions, creating humor, image protection, etc. (Al-Mazari & Rababah, 2024). These findings collectively indicate that non-observance is a common feature across

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strategic discourse environments. However, the distribution of non-observance, specifically flouting and violation, varies across contexts. While Catoto (2017) and Ceballos and Sosas (2018) found that maxim violation is common in courtroom settings, Setefani et al. (2026) and Al-Mazari and Rababah (2024) reported flouting dominates in political speech. This suggests the type of non-observance may be influenced by the specific communicative demands and dynamics inherent in each strategic setting.

Beyond legal and political settings, research has examined therapist-client interactions, though largely outside the scope of non-observance of maxims and conversational implicatures. Direct analyses of therapeutic discourse through a Gricean lens remain scarce. While not exactly focused on non-observance, existing studies have explored therapist techniques in guiding clients or patients to reveal their experiences, emotions, and thoughts, as well as managing their resistance (Knol et al., 2020; Stukenbrock et al., 2021). These interactions inherently involve indirectness and inference, which is within the territory where non-observance and implicature would be expected to occur. The literature thus suggests that therapeutic communication is rich in indirect meaning, yet it has not been systematically coded or analyzed through the Gricean framework to map the specific forms of non-observance and implicatures that arise from such exchanges.

Substantial research has investigated conversational implicature and non-observance of maxims within everyday conversational settings. A consistent finding across this research shows that context is critical for implicature interpretation, and implicature cannot be fully separated from context. Musa et al. (2022) found that conversational implicatures that emerge from maxim violations are mostly context-dependent, yet the setting was categorized as cooperative. Furthermore, Musa and Mohammed (2022) observed that particularized conversational implicature (PCI) is the most frequently employed type in daily conversation. These findings suggest that everyday conversation is expected to be dominated by PCI and is inseparable from the specific shared knowledge tied to each context.

The study of non-observance and conversational implicatures has been studied within fictional or scripted dialog. These fictional and scripted dialogues served as a valuable data source for the research. Bulain et al. (2023) examined film and found flouting to be the most frequent strategy, with implicature serving the character's goals. In short stories, non-observance has been shown to function as a literary device for creating irony, humor, and characterization (Kizi, et al., 2026). Celhar and Kavalir (2025) conducted a comparative analysis between a novel and its film adaptation, revealing that differences in non-observance across the two media lead to different narrative interpretations. More recently, Heritage (2025) investigated videogame discourse, demonstrating that interpreting implicature required shared knowledge and that understanding implicatures in fictional worlds depends on the hearer or player's lived experience and social knowledge. These studies confirm that fictional dialogue across media can be used as data for examining and analyzing conversational implicatures and non-observance of maxims.

Existing scholarship on *Adolescence* has expanded rapidly, demonstrating that the series has become an important site for examining youth, digital culture, mental health, gender politics, and contemporary social anxieties. Most studies approach the series through cultural studies, psychology, psychiatry, media studies, or literary criticism, emphasizing its representation of adolescent identity and the broader social structures influencing young people (Horeck, 2025; Murphy et al., 2025; Grey, 2025; Brütsch, 2025).

Several researchers argue that the series effectively portrays the emotional vulnerability of contemporary adolescents while simultaneously exposing the influence of online communities, toxic masculinity, and the manosphere on identity formation. These studies highlight how digital environments amplify feelings of alienation, emotional isolation, and ideological radicalization among young men, presenting the series as a critical reflection of current social realities rather than merely fictional entertainment (Furlano, 2025; Roberts et al., 2025; Taj et al., 2026).

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Other scholars have concentrated on psychological dimensions, examining trauma, parental dilemmas, adolescent development, and criminal behaviour represented in the series. These investigations emphasize the complexity of mental health issues and family relationships, demonstrating that the narrative encourages public discussion regarding emotional wellbeing, youth violence, and the responsibilities of parents, educators, and mental health professionals (Raj, 2025; Floriani et al., 2025; Chatorikar & Agarwal, 2026; Razlin, 2026).

A growing body of literature also explores the series from communication and sociological perspectives. These studies examine digital communication symbols, intergenerational misunderstandings, and media representations that shape contemporary adolescent experiences. Their findings suggest that digital interaction increasingly influences interpersonal relationships, identity construction, and social communication across generations (Putri et al., 2026).

Despite these valuable contributions, most previous studies primarily employ thematic analysis, cultural criticism, psychological interpretation, or sociological approaches. Relatively little attention has been devoted to the micro-level organization of interpersonal interaction through naturally occurring dialogue. Conversation Analysis offers a systematic framework for investigating how conversational structures construct meaning, negotiate identities, manage emotions, and organize interactional sequences. Previous Conversation Analysis research has demonstrated its effectiveness in revealing subtle interactional mechanisms within therapeutic and institutional communication, indicating its potential applicability to cinematic dialogue as well (Peräkylä, 2019; Ong et al., 2023).

Research on film discourse further demonstrates that audio-visual narratives can be systematically examined through discourse and pragmatic perspectives, including analyses of entertainment narratives and conversational implicatures. These approaches reveal that dialogue functions not only to advance the storyline but also to communicate psychological states, interpersonal power relations, and implicit meanings embedded in interaction (Wang & Parris, 2021; Sarsono et al., 2025). Likewise, studies of Netflix productions have shown that media narratives provide valuable resources for understanding complex social behaviour, identity formation, and human interaction (Luiz et al., 2024).

The existing literature establishes *Adolescence* as a significant cultural text for investigating youth identity, mental health, digital culture, and social discourse. Nevertheless, there remains a notable gap concerning the sequential organization of conversation and interactional practices among the characters. This limitation suggests the need for research employing Conversation Analysis to provide a more detailed understanding of how meaning, emotion, conflict, and social relationships are collaboratively constructed through dialogue in the series (Peräkylä, 2019; Ong et al., 2023).

These studies are relevant to the current research on non-observance of maxims and conversational implicature, as they demonstrate that the same Gricean principles do not function uniformly across all contexts. While previous studies examined non-observance and conversational implicature in courtrooms, political interviews, talk shows, therapy, and casual conversation independently, no research has measured their distribution across these types of contexts together. Drawing on Grice's Cooperative Principle and Thomas' (1995) classification of non-observance of maxims, this study identifies the types of non-observance of maxims and the conversational implicatures the characters generate across the interrogation, therapy, and family gathering scenes in *Adolescence*. Through this comparative analysis, the study seeks to reveal how characters convey hidden meanings, intentions, and emotional states through indirect language across different communicative contexts.

Recent scholarship demonstrates that the Netflix series *Adolescence* has rapidly become an important object of interdisciplinary inquiry, with researchers examining its representation of youth identity, masculinity, psychological well-being, media influence, and narrative construction. Most studies argue that the series reflects contemporary social anxieties

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surrounding adolescence while simultaneously exposing broader cultural tensions concerning gender, digital media, and family relationships (Horeck, 2025; Brütsch, 2025; Raj, 2025).

Several scholars interpret the series through sociocultural and political perspectives, emphasizing how the narrative constructs public discourses on masculinity, vulnerability, and moral panic. These studies contend that *Adolescence* not only portrays adolescent struggles but also critiques the ideological forces that shape young people's identities, particularly through online communities and anti-feminist narratives, although some analyses focus predominantly on ideological interpretation while giving limited attention to the linguistic mechanisms that construct these meanings (Grey, 2025; Furlano, 2025; Roberts et al., 2025).

Another body of research approaches the series from psychological and psychiatric perspectives, highlighting themes such as adolescent mental health, emotional development, and behavioural vulnerability. These studies underline the educational value of the series in promoting awareness of psychological issues but primarily examine psychological outcomes rather than the communicative processes through which these issues are represented in dialogue (Murphy et al., 2025; Floriani et al., 2025; Taj et al., 2026; Raj, 2025).

Communication-oriented studies have similarly emphasized interpersonal interaction, parent–adolescent communication, and the influence of media narratives on family discussions. While these investigations contribute valuable insights into conversational dynamics and audience reception, they generally focus on interactional outcomes instead of exploring how implied meanings emerge through pragmatic features such as conversational implicature (Theiss et al., 2023; Wang & Parris, 2021; Cingel et al., 2021; Putri et al., 2026; Wajdi, 2028).

Research grounded in linguistic analysis has increasingly examined cinematic discourse using pragmatics and discourse analysis. Previous studies investigating conversational implicature in films and television series demonstrate that implicatures are essential for revealing speakers' intentions, interpersonal relationships, and contextual meanings beyond literal expressions. Nevertheless, these studies analyse different films or television series, including *Bird Box*, *Prison Break*, and *Onward*, leaving *Adolescence* largely unexplored from a pragmatic perspective (Sarsono et al., 2025; Kinanti et al., 2025; Sithiayuki, 2022).

Overall, existing literature indicates that *Adolescence* has been widely investigated from cultural, psychological, ideological, and narrative perspectives, whereas relatively little attention has been devoted to its pragmatic dimensions, particularly conversational implicature. This gap provides a strong rationale for examining how implied meanings function within the characters' interactions, thereby extending previous scholarship by integrating pragmatic analysis into the study of contemporary television discourse (Bartley & Trevisan, 2024; Nawaz & Zafar, 2025).

The cooperative principle, first introduced by Grice (1989), rests on the assumption that to ensure effective communication, participants in a conversation must be cooperative. Participants are expected to give their contribution in their utterances as expected and required of them in terms of quantity, quality, relevance to the topic of conversation, and clarity in conveying information. This assumes a mutual understanding among participants regarding their shared communicative goals. Grice divided this principle into four sub-principles called maxims. The act of following the principle is known as observing the maxims.

a. Maxim of Quantity: In conversation, each party must provide the appropriate level of information, ensuring their contribution is neither too little nor too much.
b. Maxim of Quality: Speakers must contribute to the conversation by remaining truthful, avoiding deception, and refraining from asserting claims that are not verified as fact.
c. Maxim of Relation: Every participant must maintain focus on the ongoing topic of the conversation and provide relevant responses aligned with the subject matter.
d. Maxim of Manner: Each participant must avoid ambiguity and being excessive in providing information, while ensuring their delivery of information remains clear and well-organized.

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When speakers fail to observe the conversational maxims, they engage in what Thomas (1995) categorizes as non-observance, a concept that was expanded upon Grice's (1989) foundational theories regarding communication failure. This specific failure to cooperate or observe a maxim during conversation manifests in five distinct ways, which Thomas formally identified as flouting a maxim, violating a maxim, infringing a maxim, opting out of a maxim, and suspending a maxim.

a. Flouting a Maxim: A situation where the participant has an intention to generate an implicature, to make another participant infer a meaning that is different from the literal interpretation of the utterance.
b. Violating a Maxim: A situation in which a speaker intentionally and unostentatiously fails to observe a maxim, providing information that is incomplete or misleading, intending that the hearer believe what is said as it is.
c. Infringing a Maxim: This condition happens when a speaker fails to observe a maxim without any intention of deceiving or generating an implicature because the speaker's linguistic ability is impaired due to disability, cognitive impairment, lack of language skills, or a temporary condition like nervousness or drunkenness.
d. Opting Out a Maxim: This situation occurs when a speaker explicitly expresses unwillingness to observe a maxim, often for legal, ethical, or safety reasons, to avoid generating a false implicature or appearing uncooperative. The speaker makes their unwillingness clear to avoid misleading the hearer.
e. Suspending Maxims: A condition in which a participant does not provide enough information that is required, even though they have access to the necessary information. This can be caused by cultural taboos, genre conventions, or specific event types, such as courtroom, resulting in no implicature being generated.

Implicature is defined as meaning that is implicated or communicated beyond the literal words (Cummings, 2023). Implicatures are classified into two categories, which are conventional implicatures and conversational implicatures. Yule (1996) classified conversational implicature into generalized conversational implicature and particularized conversational implicature.

According to Yule (1996), a generalized conversational implicature is a type of implied meaning that a listener can understand without needing any special or specific background knowledge about the context of the utterance. The implicature still requires context, but only a general, everyday context that most people share. This implicature is often triggered by certain words or structures, such as articles, numerals, and quantifiers.

A particularized conversational implicature is a meaning that a speaker implies, which requires special, specific, or local knowledge about the context of the conversation for the listener to understand it (Yule, 1996). Unlike generalized implicatures, these meanings do not rely on general common sense. Instead, the listener must know something unique about the situation, the people involved, or the events leading up to the conversation.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative content analysis (QCA) research approach. According to Drisko and Maschi (2016), qualitative content analysis was defined as a methodology for exploring and describing meanings within "text". The term "text" encompasses a broad range of materials, including shows and films, a category within which *Adolescence* (2025) falls. The primary data for this study consisted of characters' utterances across three scene types – interrogation, therapy, and family gathering scenes – drawn from all four episodes of *Adolescence* (2025), a Netflix original series. The series comprised 4 episodes of approximately 50 minutes each, totaling 3 hours and 50 minutes. The three scene types were identified as the primary contexts of analysis, as the narrative of the series was structured around characters in these distinct interactional settings across episodes. All dialogue and utterances within pre-selected scenes were included in the analysis, with no utterances excluded from the selected scenes. The

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unit of analysis was the utterance within each scene type, with relevance determined by the presence of non-observance of maxims and conversational implicatures between characters within the scene.

2.2 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, which enabled a comprehensive description and interpretation of meaning within the transcribed dialogue. This technique was selected because it enabled systematic identification of themes and patterns across the dataset while remaining sensitive to the dialogue's contextual and relational dynamics. Through this approach, the data were examined using established theoretical frameworks, non-observance maxims, and conversational implicatures in a sequential, multi-layered analytical process.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

The study found a total of 205 utterances that contain 208 non-observances of maxims and 205 conversational implicatures. The interrogation scene lasts 22.4 minutes with 58 utterances; the therapy scene lasts 41.7 minutes with 115 utterances; and the family-gathering scenes last 45.45 minutes with 32 utterances.

3.1.1 Types of Non-Observance Maxim

Out of 5 types of non-observance maxim, 4 types of non-observance maxim were found in the interrogation, therapy, and family gathering scenes, and one, which is suspending, was absent. The table below describes the classification of the occurrences of non-observance maxim across three types of scenes in the Netflix series Adolescence (2025).

Table 1. The types of Non-observance of Maxims found across Interrogation, Therapy, and Family Gathering scenes in Adolescence (2025)

No	Non-Observance of Maxim	Interrogation	Therapy	Family Scene	Total	Percentage
1	Flouting Maxim	27	93	25	145	69.71%
2	Violating Maxim	21	20	4	45	21.63%
3	Opting-out Maxim	9	5	3	17	8.17%
4	Infringing Maxim	1	0	0	1	0.48%
5	Suspending Maxim	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	58	118	32	208	100%

From the table, the total of non-observance maxims found is 208, which exceeds the number of utterances observed, as some of the utterances have more than one non-observance maxim. The most dominant type across all three scenes is flouting, with 145 occurrences out of 208 (69.71%) performed by the series' characters. The second-most common type is violation, with 45 occurrences (21.63%). This is followed by opting out as the third, with 17 occurrences (8.17%), and infringing as the fourth, with only 1 occurrence out of 208 (0.48%).

The table shows that therapy scenes have the most non-observance maxims, with 118 occurrences, while family gathering scenes have the fewest, even though their observed duration is almost the same. The dominant type of non-observance in each scene is flouting. Flouting is most prominent in interrogation (27 out of 58), therapy (93 out of 118), and family gathering scenes (25 out of 32).

Both interrogation and therapy have almost the same number of violating instances. Only 4 violations were found in family-gathering scenes. Interrogation has the highest number of opting out instances (9), which is higher than in therapy and family-gathering scenes. Interrogation has relatively high occurrences of violating and opting out, with the highest opting-out rate, indicating refusal to cooperate. Therapy scenes show a large gap between the types of non-observance maxim, with flouting as the most common. Family gathering scenes have the

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lowest total non-observance maxim, as well as the fewest violations and opt-outs across the other scenes.

3.1.2 Flouting Maxim

Based on the data provided earlier, the characters in the Adolescence series most often flouted the maxim across the three scenes. The flouting of the maxim shown in the table can be understood as follows.

Table 2. Flouting of Maxim found across Interrogation, Therapy, and Family Gathering scenes in Adolescence (2025)

No	Flouting of Maxim	Interrogation	Therapy	Family Gathering	Total	Percentage
1	Maxim of Quality	3	15	15	33	22.76%
2	Maxim of Quantity	4	12	4	20	13.79%
3	Maxim of Relation	19	60	5	84	57.93%
4	Maxim of Manner	1	6	1	8	5.52%
	Total	27	93	25	145	100%

Drawn from the table above, the most frequent type of maxim that dominates flouting in all three scenes is the maxim of relation. Maxim of relation accounts for 57.93% (84 out of 145) of all flouting. This is more than the sum of quality (22.76%), quantity (13.79%), and manner (5.52%). However, the table reveals that the pattern varies across three scenes in the degree of domination of the flouted maxim. The interrogation and therapy scenes' most flouted maxim is the maxim of relation, with 19 and 60 occurrences, respectively. While relation dominates in both contexts, the gap between relation and other flouted maxims is much wider in therapy than in interrogation. Therapy scenes also exhibit a higher frequency of flouting the maxim of quantity (12 occurrences) than the other contexts. In contrast, family-gathering scenes present a unique pattern, as they are dominated by the flouting of the maxim of quality, not of relation. Additionally, flouting of the maxim of manner is very low in this context (1 occurrence), and flouting of the maxim of quantity is minimal (4 occurrences). The maxim of manner appears most frequently in therapy, followed by interrogation and family-gathering scenes.

Therapy Scene Episode 3 No. 55
[BRIONY] Are you attracted to women?
[JAMIE]**Yeah. I'm not gay.**

In this particular instance in the therapy scene, Briony asked Jamie a straightforward yes-or-no question of whether he is attracted to women. Jamie replies, "*Yeah, I'm not gay*." The first word, "Yeah", sufficiently answers the question. The addition of "*I'm not gay*" provides more information than was requested, making the response overly informative. By blatantly offering excess detail, Jamie flouts the maxim of quantity. Briony is expected to infer that Jamie is not merely confirming his attraction to women but was actively defending himself against an unstated assumption that he might be gay (Kizi, et al., 2026). This defensiveness is consistent with Jamie's characterization throughout the series that he was influenced by incel culture and toxic masculinity, making him deeply uncomfortable with any perception that threatens his heterosexual identity. Earlier in the conversation, Jamie reveals that he does not find himself attractive, adding another layer to the implicature that he is overcompensating by asserting attraction to women may reflect an attempt to reconcile his desire to be seen as desirable with his own insecurities.

3.1.3 Violating Maxim

In this study, classification is based solely on the speaker's intention to be discreet in violating the conversational maxim, as violating the maxim is only judged through the speaker's intention.

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The violation of the maxim found in interrogation, therapy, and family gatherings in the Adolescence series can be seen in the table and can be understood as follows.

Table 3. Violation of Maxim found across Interrogation, Therapy, and Family Gathering scenes in Adolescence (2025)

No	Violation of Maxim	Interrogation	Therapy	Family Gathering	Total	Percentage
1	Maxim of Quality	18	19	4	41	91.11%
2	Maxim of Quantity	0	0	0	0	0%
3	Maxim of Relation	3	1	0	4	8.89%
4	Maxim of Manner	0	0	0	0	0%
	Total	21	20	4	45	100%

Derived from the table presented above, there are a total of 45 occurrences of violating the maxim in the interrogation, therapy, and family-gathering scenes in the Adolescence series. The maxim with the highest violation rate across all three scenes is the maxim of quality, with 41 violations (91.11%), followed by the maxim of relation, with 4 violations (8.89%). The maxim with the fewest violations in the study is the maxim of quantity and manner, with 0 occurrences.
The particular finding is that the violation of the relation can only be found in interrogation and therapy scenes, and there are no violations of the maxim of quantity and manner across all scenes. Interrogation and therapy scenes are contexts with the most violations, and they violate the maxim of quality and also relation.

Interrogation Scene Episode 1 No. 24
[Bascombe] You didn't kill her?
[Jamie]**No, I didn't. You… you've got me confused with someone else.**

In the interrogation scene, Bascombe asked Jamie whether he killed Katie. Jamie answered with a false statement, claiming he did not. He deflected by saying that Bascombe had confused him with someone else, offering a denial that is designed to appear believable (Dahlman 2022). Jamie had the intention to mislead Bascombe into accepting the lie and did not want to be detected. Unbeknownst to Jamie, Bascombe already possesses proof of his guilt, which Bascombe, as the police officer, revealed at the end of the interrogation. Although Bascombe already knew the truth with proof, Jamie was unaware of it and was still consciously lying with the intention to deceive, which makes it a violation of quality (Ceballos & Sosas, 2018).

3.1.4 Opting Out the Maxim

Unlike flouting and violating, opting out occurs when the speaker explicitly refuses to cooperate or declines to provide the expected information directly (Setefani et al., 2026). Opting out of the maxim occurs in all three scenes. The opting out in interrogation, therapy, and family scenes can be understood as follows.

Table 4. Opting-out of Maxim found across Interrogation, Therapy, and Family Gathering scenes in Adolescence (2025)

No	Opting-out of Maxim	Interrogation	Therapy	Family Gathering	Total	Percentage
1	Maxim of Quality	0	0	0	0	0%
2	Maxim of Quantity	9	1	0	10	58.82%
3	Maxim of Relation	0	4	3	7	41.18%
4	Maxim of Manner	0	0	0	0	0%

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Total	9	5	3	17	100%

Based on the table, there are found a total of 17 maxim being opted out. The maxim being opted out is only the maxim of quantity and relation. The opting out of the maxim of quantity only happens in interrogation and therapy, while opting out of the maxim of relation only happens in therapy and family gatherings. Therapy is the only context where the characters opt out of more than one type of maxim, which are the maxim of quantity and relation. The most opted-out maxim is the maxim of quantity, with a total of 10 opted out (58.82%), followed by the maxim of relation, with a total of 7 (41.18%).

3.1.5 Infringing the Maxim

This study found only 1 instance of infringement across all interrogation, therapy, and family-gathering scenes in the Adolescence series. The table below summarizes infringement occurrences across three types of scenes in the Netflix series Adolescence (2025).

Table 5. Infringing of Maxim found across Interrogation, Therapy, and Family Gathering scenes in Adolescence (2025)

No	Infringing Maxim	Interrogation	Therapy	Family Gathering	Total	Percentage
1	Maxim of Quality	0	0	0	0	0%
2	Maxim of Quantity	1	0	0	1	100%
3	Maxim of Relation	0	0	0	0	0%
4	Maxim of Manner	0	0	0	0	0%
	Total	**1**	**0**	**0**	**1**	**100%**

From the table, it can be inferred that there is only one occurrence of infringing the maxim, and the maxim being infringed is the maxim of quantity. It only happens on one occasion in an interrogation scene.

All types of conversational implicatures can be found in the scenes of the Adolescence series. The table below describes the classification of conversational implicature occurrences across three types of scenes in the Netflix series Adolescence (2025).

Based on the data from the table, a total of 205 conversational implicatures were identified across the three scenes in the Adolescence series (2025). Particularized conversational implicature is the most dominant type, accounting for 195 out of 205 implicatures, or 95.12% of the total of conversational implicature. In contrast, there are only 10 instances of generalized conversational implicature found, representing just 4.88% of the total, and these occur exclusively in interrogation and therapy scenes. The following is an elaboration of conversational implicature found in each setting.

3.2 Discussion

These findings reinforce and align with previous studies (Bulain et al., 2023; Al-Mazari & Rababah 2024; Setefani et al., 2026), which similarly found flouting to be the most frequent type of non-observance of maxims across diverse contexts. This consistent pattern suggests that flouting is often used as a pragmatic tool to convey hidden meaning by producing implicature while maintaining conversational cooperativeness, even when maxims are neglected. Moreover, the near-total dominance of PCI further confirms that implicature can be found in all settings, but is mostly dominated by implicature that depends on specific contextual knowledge for interpretation (Musa & Mohammed, 2022).

Beyond the general patterns, the data exhibit distinct contextual dynamics in how non-observance strategies and implicature operate across the interrogation, therapy, and family gathering scenes. In interrogation scenes, it was found that violations and opting out were significantly more frequent than in the other types of scenes. This is in line with Catoto (2017) and Ceballos and Sosas (2018), who found that legal contexts such as courtroom and interrogation tend to elicit higher rates of maxim violation and opting out. This finding also suggests the same

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conclusion as Ceballos and Sosas (2018) that violation of maxims in the legal realm often happens for the characters as a defensive strategy, avoiding implication of crime or an attempt to hide the truth, making this context the least.

Notably, the characters most frequently producing non-observance were the suspects, witnesses, or those being questioned by the legal authorities. This interpretation is consistent with Dahlman's (2022) argument that the cooperative principle applies only partially in legal discourse. The data further imply an unequal application of the maxims in which legal authorities followed conversational maxims, while suspects or witnesses did not.

The interrogation scenes also produced a considerable amount of particularized conversational implicature (PCI). This finding expands Dahlman's (2022) claim that strategic legal contexts, such as legislative drafting, cannot produce PCI. This contradiction likely stems from the different structures of legislation and interrogation context. Legislation is unidirectional, whereas interrogation is interactive.

The therapy scenes present a distinct pattern. Flouting emerged as the most dominant strategy, with flouting the maxim of relation being extremely dominant. Notably, it is mostly the patient, not the therapist, who generates most non-observance of the maxim, particularly through flouting the maxim of relation in order to avoid answering direct and sensitive questions. This expands Knol et al. (2020) and Stukenbrock et al. (2021) studies that emphasized therapists' strategies, revealing that patients also deploy strategies in their communication. While the therapist remained largely cooperative, the patient flouted and violated the maxim as a defensive mechanism. This suggests that non-observance is not only a tool used by the practitioner, but a sign of the patient's psychological avoidance.

Additionally, the patient's behavior mirrored the behavior of witnesses in courtrooms (Ceballos & Sosas, 2018). It is similar to a suspect deflecting a prosecutor's question, in that a patient in the Adolescence series responded to the therapist's inquiries with mostly irrelevant answers. This indicates that the patient perceives the therapy room not as a safe cooperative space, but as an adversarial one, where evasion is a communicative strategy to express themselves while protecting their ego and PCI produced to express what one cannot say directly. All in all, the context still retained its cooperativeness because the therapist worked hard to maintain the cooperative principles and the patient's willingness to open up despite the flouting.

The family gathering scenes present a contrasting pattern. No generalized conversational implicatures were identified, suggesting that the family gathering context remains highly context dependent. Unlike the interrogation and therapy scenes, which were dominated by flouting the maxim of relation, the family gathering scenes were characterized by flouting the maxim of quality. This aligns with Kizi et al. (2026), who found that flouting the maxim of quality creates irony, humor, and characterization. In the non-strategic context, speakers flout the maxim of quality more for humor and to maintain good relationships between each other, rather than flouting the maxim of relation to avoid sensitive topics.

This finding suggests a different function of flouting from that reported by Celhar and Kavalir (2025), where flouting was used to protect one's image. In Adolescence, by contrast, flouting serves as a tool to build connection. This is consistent with Al-Mazari and Rababah (2024), who found that flouting functions as a tool to maintain social relationships. The present study extends their finding by demonstrating that the function of maintaining social relationships is also applicable to non-strategic contexts.

Overall, the study reveals how non-observance and conversational implicature are used and generated across interrogation, therapy, and family gathering scenes in Adolescence. The findings demonstrate that the characters used non-observance of maxims as a strategic device, functioning either to defend themselves or to build connection, depending on the context and settings, because each has different communicative goals. The analysis of implicature shows that each setting produced hidden meanings that are exclusively tied to its specific circumstances. These findings conclude that each setting has its own pattern, the cooperative principle is only

partially applicable in institutional and strategic settings, and particularized conversational implicature can still be generated in strategic context but it depends on the type of context and the level of interactivity involved.

4. Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that non-observance of maxims operates as a context-dependent strategic device. In adversarial settings such as interrogation and therapy, it functions as self-defense. In non-strategic settings like family gatherings, it fosters social connection. This proves that the cooperative principle applies only partially in institutional and strategic contexts, and that the generation of particularized conversational implicature depends on the type and interactivity of the context. This study contributes to pragmatic theory by offering a comparative, context-sensitive analysis of non-observance and conversational implicature across three distinct communicative settings within a unified narrative framework. Although this study has provided insights into these aspects, some issues remain to be explored and uncovered in future research. For example, this study analyzed only three fictional settings. It would be more comprehensive for future research to explore these findings with real-world data and future studies can explore patterns across different variables such as culture, age group, gender, and generation.

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