

## Conversational Maxims and Moments of Physical Violence in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*

John Osborne'un *Look Back in Anger* (Öfke) Eserinde Konuşma İlkeleri ve Fiziksel Şiddet Anları

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### ABSTRACT

It is crucial to use language effectively in dramatic texts to communicate a central idea to the audience or reader. Based on the premise that each writer has his/her own unique style, stylistics, which encapsulates many subfields and areas of research, appears as a cardinal method of criticism that allows analysing an author's style by utilising the possibilities and elements of linguistics. The present study examines how language is used in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* to depict the theme of violence, a prominent aspect of Kitchen Sink Drama, which is grounded in realism. The analysis approaches the selected dialogues from the play through the lens of stylistic theories, specifically focusing on scrutinising them with the Cooperative Principle (CP) that targets cooperation in the structure of a proper dialogue for sound conversation. Therefore, applying CP theory to selected parts of drama texts effectively provides a deeper understanding of dialogues in the literature. The primary objective of this study is to illustrate that the multiple imbalanced uses of maxims in the dialogues may result in flawed or disrupted communication. This is exemplified through the selected excerpts from *Look Back in Anger*, a Kitchen Sink Drama in which Osborne's protagonist represents the Angry Young Men generation in British society. In this context, the study demonstrates that in the analysed dialogues, instances where one of the speakers perceives verbal communication as ineffective and dysfunctional may lead to misunderstandings, communicative breakdowns, and, at times, physical violence, which is identified in the study as a "Non-verbal Act."

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### Introduction

The academic value of language studies has been recognised relatively earlier than literary studies, which often emphasise artistic qualities. In this regard, literary studies have been influenced by concepts and notions borrowed from philosophy, sociology, history, and ideology, with the efforts of scholars who approached the texts with diverse perspectives, focusing on the relationships among text, writer, and reader. However, with the appearance of Structuralism and New Criticism, literary studies have gained a systematic perspective as scholars who benefited from linguistics began to categorise genres and examine texts not only as individual works of art but also as systems constructed with repeating elements. Thus, instead of being analysed through diverse approaches and changeable readings, the examination of literary works with the use of language-assisted

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methods has enabled the attainment of more verifiable results. In the light of these shifts, as one of the language-based theories, stylistics, evolving from “rhetoric, Russian Formalism, structural linguistics, Systemic Functional Linguistics, and the cognitive sciences” has emerged basing on the assumption that each writer has a unique style and has developed with a focus on social and contextual aspects in the contemporary period (Gibbons & Whiteley, 2018, p. 5).

### **Style and Literary Stylistics in Drama Studies**

The most essential element that constitutes literature is language. By using it effectively, authors rescue their works from mediocrity, differentiate and re-synthesise them in harmony. While doing this, writers present their own style by selecting words from a vast web, like a mathematician whose combinations provide different results in their use of calculations. Therefore, this selection reveals the writer's style, and each style, whether similar or different, requires a careful and systematic study with a focus on language. At this point, stylistics appears as “a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to language” (Simpson, 2004, p. 3). Jeffries (2017) points out that “stylistics is the study of textual meaning. Historically, it arose from the late-19th- and early-20th-century Russian formalist approach to literary meaning, which endeavoured to identify the textual triggers of certain literary effects from their structures” (para. 1). Although it is regarded as a tool for understanding structural aspects of any written text, stylistics contributes to literary theory and criticism with the elements of linguistics, specifically pragmatics, and the approach of structuralism. Linguists tend to view literary criticism, which employs the methods of philosophy and other humanities disciplines, as an abstract and subjective approach, because they perceive language as a system of codes composed of countable linguistic units that are the essential components of language. In a similar manner, Simpson states that “Stylistic analysis is not the end-product of a disorganised sequence of ad hoc and impressionistic comments, but instead underpinned by structure models of language and discourse that explain how we process and understand various patterns in language” (2004, p. 4). Stylistics has also been defined as “the analysis of the language of literary texts, usually taking its theoretical models from linguistics, in order to undertake this analysis” (Mills, 1998, p. 3). Leech & Short also pay attention to the mutual aspect of it and defines stylistics as “a dialogue between literary reader and linguistic observer” (1994, p. 5). Then, “stylistics is to explore language and, more specifically, to explore creativity in language use. Doing stylistics thereby enriches our ways of thinking about language and as observed, exploring language offers a substantial purchase on our understanding of (literary) texts” (Simpson, 2004, p. 3). Based on various theorists' perspectives, literary stylistics can be broadly defined as an analytical approach to decoding all types of literary texts, utilising elements of linguistics, linguistic theories, and methods to achieve countable results accompanied by more profound readings and interpretations by decoding the dominant side of language in creating meaning, rather than relying on external theories apart from the texts.

Culpeper et al. (1998) note that “in the late 1970s and in the 1980s, developments in discourse analysis, conversation analysis and pragmatics [...] have equipped stylisticians with tools to analyse the meaning of utterances in the fictional dialogue”. However, they also emphasize that “they have been somewhat tardy in investigating play-texts” (p. 4). Short asserts that it is insufficient to analyse drama solely through “performance”, and he further notes that “practical criticism” is inadequate for evaluating dramatic texts (2005, p. 137). However, studies of drama criticism also employ stylistics to understand the problems, style, and deeper meaning of dialogues, monologues, and soliloquies, which are the essence of drama texts. However, the hypotheses offered by stylistics in the analysis of drama, which mainly consists of dialogues, are more likely to be a systematic and scientific methodology for literary criticism, as it is a language-assisted method in which the main points of the work and the areas of discussion are revealed through the analysis of the use of language. Yet, since the drama texts are mainly composed of dialogues, Paul Grice's Cooperative

Principle (1975), which scrutinises the structure and components of conversations, provides insights into the power relationship between the characters or speakers involved in the dialogues for pragmatic analysis.

*Look Back in Anger* is a canonical work that has been studied from various perspectives, from feminism to alienation. However, research focusing on the analysis of the related play with language-assisted methods remains limited. Previous studies have approached it from various angles. For example, Herman (2002) analysed the play from the perspective of turn allocation. In contrast, Kalaba (2014) focused on verbal aggression and sarcasm in the play. Additionally, Kadhim and Mohammed (2021) explored both *Look Back in Anger* and Harold Pinter's *Birthday Party* from the perspective of pragmatics. While these studies provide new insights, they leave certain gaps in the analysis of the dialogues, which keep deeper messages than they initially appear. Therefore, our research aims to address these gaps by offering a new perspective on the nature of conversations in drama when physical violence sometimes appears as an act of a last attempt to communication as illustrated in the selected part of the play as "Non-verbal Act" by following the application of Grice's theories to the conversation.

Therefore, the primary purpose of this article is to decode the style of communication in the dialogues in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, classified as one of the pioneering examples of Kitchen-Sink drama with Paul Grice's Cooperative Principle Theory with the claim that flouting and violation of multiple maxims may result in physical violence, which might be considered as an ultimate action of reflecting the intention to stay in the conversation and the desire to transmit a message when the interlocutor/s diminish all means within their capacity for language. Given that, before examining the use of the Cooperative Principle in its various forms and their implications in the quotes, it is crucial to examine the literature of the Angry Young Men period and Kitchen Sink Drama in order to contextualise the period in which the play was written. While doing so, it is also necessary to study the characteristics of the play, the theme of violence, the function of language used among the characters and the reasons for its occasional dysfunction.

### **Angry Young Men Movement and Kitchen-Sink Drama**

The English theatre of the Post-war period, influenced by realism, witnessed some developments deeply concerned with the condition of English society. In this way, younger writers from the working class in England started to compose plays in the 1950s that addressed ideas and problems that troubled them profoundly. Therefore, the period is called the angry young men period, and the term "angry young man" is used to refer to "both rebellious, often working-class male characters in plays and novels (to which the phrase 'kitchen sink drama' was also applied), and also novelists such as Alan Sillitoe and playwrights such as Osborne, who were either from working-class backgrounds or who wrote about working-class themes" (Wolfreys et al., 2006, p. 9). Disillusioned with the ideals of modernism, which failed to prevent the outbreak of WWII, some writers directed their attention to the domestic but complex lives of average Britons in a realistic manner. Since, especially in drama, some plays reflect the psychology of young people who had big ideals before they experienced the heavy burden of living in a limited space in their homes, they are called kitchen-sink drama with an analogy to an everyday reality: the kitchen. In this context, kitchen-sink drama is "often used derogatorily, it applied to plays which, in realist fashion, showed aspects of working-class life at the time" (Cuddon, 2013, p. 385).

In the plays labelled as kitchen sink, the traditional working-class lifestyle is portrayed from multiple angles, with characters and their style of language befitting the strict social class system in post-war England. As Dornan notes, "unlike traditional theatre, kitchen sink drama depicted, sometimes with raw realism, the everyday lives of ordinary people in a struggle against the degradation of powerlessness, the loss of community, or the deadening influence of suburbia"

(2007, p. 452). The main characters are politicised, leftist young people who are restless due to their awareness of the present condition in which they are compelled to struggle with the everyday banalities of life rather than achieving a victory or revolution. The protagonists of the kitchen sink plays are young and educated characters who do not comply with the idea that they cannot change the country by supporting a political view against the long-established political system. Moreover, the dilemmas faced by characters in kitchen sink drama are prevalent, and they are at the centre of life, surrounded by ambiguities and amoral situations related to social issues such as disillusionment, abortion, adultery, economic inequality, and violence. These characters, who are alienated by the multiple social and psychological aspects that determine their status in life, cannot become vital and indispensable figures in their society. As for setting and language, May (2010) highlights that the plays of “Osborne, Pinter and Delaney” are set in “bedsits and neglected city parks” and involve spaces that are “rented, dilapidated, and often contested.” The language, used departs from “the prewar repartee of Coward for the demotic (everyday speech) of the working class” (p. 14). Therefore, the sense of stagnation and being ignored by others leads the characters in these plays to resort to verbal violence, which reveals fragile points in their communication.

David I. Rabey claims that “Osborne was willingly labelled as a vanguard of the ‘Angry Young Man’ conglomeration of male artists who assumed a confrontational attitude towards the platitudes of the older generation, with particular attention to the question of social purpose in the wake of World War Two” (2003, p. 30). As one of the Angry Young Men, John Osborne is considered one of the most influential playwrights of the kitchen sink realist theatre, who gave voice to disillusioned young men whose ideals were shattered by the political changes in England. As a prominent representative of kitchen-sink realism, John Osborne (1929-1994), born and raised in London, worked in different areas of theatre as an actor and assistant stage manager before creating his plays. He is often linked with social realism and the Angry Young Man generation due to his renowned play *Look Back in Anger*, whose influences were widely discussed in English drama during the post-war period (D’Monté, 2019, p. 77).

### **Gricean Maxims and Physical Violence Scenes in *Look Back in Anger***

*Look Back in Anger* (1956) is a play that explores the social conditions and emotions of the younger generation, who struggle to cope with feelings of frustration and restlessness within society. “Osborne’s play—an attack on the English class system and traditional values—was a slap in the face of ‘respectability’” (Brockett et al., 2017, p. 204). The play opens with the introduction of characters and setting. Jimmy Porter is a disheartened young man who resides with Alison in a modest apartment. He is restless about the country's condition, but he vents his anger at Alison in an insulting manner. However, in Act II, the problems with communication and relationships between characters become more complex with the advent of Alison’s close friend, Helena. In the last Act, complications among the characters Jimmy, Alison, Helena, and Cliff appear to resolve after the dispersal of the love triangle. The play, with its limited space and characters, strikingly displays the crucial problems, such as class consciousness, social injustice and degenerated relationships in English society after the post-war period. The rage and fury of the characters in the play are masterfully reflected by Osborne through the use of language and carefully structured dialogues. For this reason, the play will be analysed here in terms of how the emotional states of the characters are reflected in accordance with the characteristics of kitchen sink theatre, utilising stylistic analysis methods in selected parts of the work.

Conversations are rarely without purpose, as most are initiated with a specific goal in mind. While some reasons for engaging in conversation may remain private and may even cause embarrassment if disclosed, others are openly expressed and recognised by everyone involved (Clark & Shober, 1992, p. 22). However, the dialogue is distinct from the conversation in terms of its purpose. In line with the conversation, dialogue is an essential component of drama. Stylistics allows us to make

inferences about this fundamental unit by providing the possibilities of linguistics. Although various critical theories about dialogues have been introduced by stylistic researchers, an essential one is the Cooperative Principle, put forward by Paul Grice, who proposes that individuals tend to display cooperation during their conversations to promote a healthy exchange of ideas for successful communication. (1975, p. 45; 1991, p. 30). Grice also argues and provides a general outlook about certain principles called maxims in communication and juxtaposes them as “Quantity,” “Quality,” “Manner,” and “Relation” under the theory of Cooperative Principle (1975, pp. 45-47, 1991, p. 28).

In spite of the direct maxims determined by Grice (1975, 1991), in his study “Logic and Conversation”, Levinson (1983) systematically outlines Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP). According to Levinson's exposition, the maxim of Quality highlights the importance of truthfulness in communication, which spurs individuals to refrain from stating what they believe to be false and from making assertions without sufficient evidence (pp. 101-102). Namely, Grice highlights that the speaker in the conversation should not tell a lie (1991, p. 27). This emphasis on truthfulness and evidential support underscores the fundamental importance of sincerity and reliability in effective communication. Furthermore, the maxim of Quantity emphasises the necessity of providing a balanced amount of information for the given context without unnecessary elaboration or withholding important details (Levinson, 1983, p. 101-102). Grice emphasises the balanced “informative” aspects of the speaker's “contribution” to the conversation (Grice, 1991, p. 26). By following this maxim, participants of the conversation can ensure that their contributions are neither excessively verbose nor lacking in content, which facilitates effective and meaningful exchanges of ideas and emotions (Levinson, 1983, pp. 101-102). Moreover, the maxim of Relation emphasises the importance of maintaining coherence in conversation, which prompts participants to follow their contributions in relation to the subject matter (pp. 101-102). Grice, who proposes the “relevance” of the ideas and emotions shared in the conversation, claims that digressions deteriorate communication (Grice, 1991, p. 27). Finally, the maxim of Manner emphasises clarity and coherence in expression, directing communicators to avoid obscurity, ambiguity, verbosity, and disorderliness in their speech acts (Levinson, 1983, pp. 101-102). This comprehensive framework of Gricean maxims, along with the clarified versions by Levinson, offers considerable insights into the underlying principles structuring effective communication and serves as a foundational reference for understanding the nature of discourse across various contexts (pp. 101-102). In the same vein, Yule points out that “we expect our conversational partners to make succinct, honest, relevant and clear contributions to the interaction and to signal to us some way if these maxims are not being followed” (2020, p. 174). Considering the underlying signals and messages in conversation, in his introduction to the functioning of CP and its relationship with conversational implicature, Grice attempts to explain the situations in which maxims cannot be fulfilled by employing two fundamental concepts. He calls exceeding the maxim limits a “violation” and evaluates the “blatant” incompleteness of these maxims with “flout” (Grice, 1975, p. 49). Therefore, “by violating or floating these maxims in a foregrounded way, we intend to put some extra meaning (implicature in Grice's terms) into our speech” (İsci, 2022, p. 1410).

The collapse of Gricean maxims in dramatic conversations illustrates the deterioration of healthy and effective communication, leading to the emergence of physical violence as a means to continue the conversation in an extreme form, where non-verbal interactions dominate over verbal ones when the common ground for communication is completely lost. It is possible to follow these rare scenes in Act I Scene I and Act II Scene II of Osborne's play, where the characters lose their emotional control, break multiple conversational maxims, and attempt to continue their conversations, with a non-verbal means. This is referred to as violence in the play and can be observed in various forms of non-verbal communication, such as jests, gestures, and mimics. This attempt to continue the conversation using non-verbal communication tools, as proposed in this study, may be stylistically referred to as a “Non-verbal Act”, which appears only when the intention to continue

communication is observed. However, the “Non-verbal Act” cannot be limited to violent actions; it may appear as a gesture, mimic or another element than verbal communication, implying an intention to continue the conversation.

In the dialogue below in Act I, Scene I of the play, Jimmy and Cliff have a more prominent role than Alison in the opening conversation. Jimmy is quite angry because he feels that he is the only person who can understand the social, political and intellectual changes in English society. However, Cliff, who is accustomed to Jimmy’s arrogant and aggressive attitudes, strives to defuse his verbal attacks while also trying to prevent his misogynistic and derogatory remarks against Alison. Jimmy perceives himself as an intellectual and belittles Cliff and Alison for their lack of knowledge despite their close friendship and marriage. The turns are numbered to analyse the maxims of the selected extracts from the play.

### Dialogue I

(1) JIMMY: Why do I do this every Sunday? Even the book reviews seem to be the same as last week’s Different books – same reviews. Have you finished that one yet?

(2) CLIFF: Not yet.

(3) JIMMY: I’ve just read three whole columns on the English novel. Half of it’s in French. Do the Sunday papers make you feel ignorant?

(4) CLIFF: Not ‘arf.

(5) JIMMY: Well, you are ignorant. You’re just a peasant. (to Alison) What about you? You’re not a peasant are you?

(6) ALISON: (absently) What’s that?

(7) JIMMY: I said to the papers make you feel you’re not so brilliant after all?

(8) ALISON: Oh – I haven’t read them yet.

(9) JIMMY: I didn’t ask you that. I said –

(10) CLIFF: Leave the poor girlie alone. She’s busy.

(11) JIMMY: Well, she can talk, can’t she? You can talk, can’t you? You can express an opinion. Or does the White Woman’s Burden make it impossible to think?

(12) ALISON: I’m sorry. I wasn’t listening properly.

(13) JIMMY: You bet you weren’t listening properly. Old Porter talks, and everyone turns over and goes to sleep. And Mrs Porter gets ‘em all going with the first yawn.

(14) CLIFF: Leave her alone, I said.

(15) JIMMY: (shouting) All right, dear. Go back to sleep. It was only me talking. You know? Talking? Remember? I’m sorry.

(16) CLIFF: Stop yelling. I’m trying to read.

(17) JIMMY: Why do you bother? You can’t understand a word of it.

(18) CLIFF: Uh huh.

(19) JIMMY: You’re ignorant.

(20) CLIFF: Yes, and uneducated. Now shut up, will you?

(21) JIMMY: Why don’t you get my wife explain it to you? She’s educated. (to her) That’s right, isn’t it?

(22) CLIFF: (kicking out at him from behind his paper). Leave her alone, I said.

(23) JIMMY: Do that again you Welsh ruffian, and I will put your ears off. *He bangs Cliff’s paper out of his hands.* (Osborne, 1973, pp. 10-11)

When the selected conversation is examined until the moment of physical violence, it is first observed that Jimmy violates the maxim of Quantity as he uses more words (205 words) than Cliff (37 words) and Alison (14 words), and it is apparent that he dominates the conversation. However, Cliff and Alison, bored with Jimmy’s blunders about casual matters that are not so enjoyable to talk to, flout the maxim of Quantity with very short or incomplete sentences in their responses [2, 4, 6, 18] to silence him. Moreover, the maxim of Quality is not so openly violated and satisfied in the dialogue, but the other maxims, the relation and the manner, are often infringed. Alison violates the maxim of Relation two times with her responses [6, 8] in the dialogue, which indicates that she is

completely indifferent to what Jimmy tries to say. However, Jimmy, who considers himself superior to other characters due to his so-called social and intellectual awareness, undermines the maxim of Manner as he strives to impose his point of view on the people in his life. He looks down on Cliff and Alison for being with his insulting responses [5, 19], and this way, his multiple acts of rudeness overtly violate the maxim of Manner. It is possible to observe the appearance of physical violence with the word “bang” in the middle of line 23 following the collapse of the multiple maxims. However, in this act, Jimmy, who wishes to reflect his dominance over the other characters, especially over Cliff, the last interlocutor in the scene, loses his hope in the influential use of language, refrains from verbal communication, and attacks him as the last “Non-verbal Act”, the ultimate intent of delivering a message without words.

In most parts of the play, Jimmy is portrayed as an active character whose actions are not easily predictable, as he seeks to demonstrate his power and assert his authority over the other characters through his energy. Jimmy seems to love Alison, but sometimes acts as if he is taking revenge for something that is not related to her. “[T]he emotional space between them dilates, contracts, and dilates again. Act I demonstrates that mechanism, reaching its apogee when Jimmy, in an excess of physical action, smashes into Alison’s ironing board” (Gilleman, 2002, p. 48). Therefore, in the selected conversation, Jimmy, who desires to be regarded as powerful and intellectual, has an argument with the other characters and bangs Cliff’s paper as an element of a “Non-verbal Act” as a last attempt to pursue the conversation or end it with the symbolical reflection of limning his power.

#### Dialogue II

(24) JIMMY: Oh, hell! Now the bloody bells have started! He rushes to the window. Wrap it up will you? Stop ringing those bells! There is somebody going crazy in here! I don’t want to hear them!

(25) ALISON: Stop shouting! (Recovering immediately.) You’ll have Miss Drury up here.

(26) JIMMY: I don’t give a damn about Miss Drury- that mild old gentlewoman doesn’t fool me, even if she takes in you two. She’s an old robber. She gets more than enough out of us for this place every week. Anyway, she’s probably in church, (points to the window) swinging on those bloody bells! Cliff goes to the window, and closes it.

(27) CLIFF: Come on now, be a good boy. I’ll take us all out, and we’ll have a drink.

(28) JIMMY: They’re not open yet. It’s Sunday. Remember? Anyway, it’s raining.

(29) CLIFF: Well, shall we dance? He pushes Jimmy round the floor, who is past the mood for this kind of fooling. Do you come here often?

(30) JIMMY: Only in the mating season. All right, all right, very funny. He tries to escape, but Cliff holds him like a vice. Let me go.

(31) CLIFF: Not until you’ve apologised for being nasty to everyone. Do you think bosoms will be in or out, this year?

(32) JIMMY: Your teeth will be out in a minute, if you don’t let go! He makes a great effort to wrench himself free, but Cliff hangs on. They collapse to the floor C., below the table, struggling. Alison carries on with her ironing. This is routine, but she is getting close to the breaking point, all the same. Cliff manages to break away, and find himself in front of the ironing board. Jimmy springs up. They grapple.

(33) ALISON: Look out, for heaven’s sake! Oh, it’s more like a zoo every day! *Jimmy makes a frantic, deliberate effort, and manages to push Cliff on the ironing board, and into Alison. The board collapses. Cliff falls against her, and they end up in the heap on the floor. Alison cries out in pain. Jimmy looks down at them, dazed and breathless.* (Osborne, 1973, pp. 25-26)

This dialogue from the middle of Act I is the earliest example of the appearance of physical violence and disruption of communication after the violations of the Gricean maxims. Jimmy, in this scene, as in most scenes in the play, violates the maxim of quantity by uttering 122 words in these dialogues [24, 26, 28, 30, 32] and speaks more than Cliff (62 words) and Alison (21 words), which implies that he wants to put pressure on the other interlocutors to demonstrate his dominance and power despite being wrong in terms of his approach to the events and lack of courtesy in his relationships with his wife and friend. At the beginning of the dialogue, in turn [24], he provides

excessive information about the “bells” by overusing exclamations to reflect his irritation by giving more details than necessary. Jimmy distorts the maxims while attempting to maintain a dominant position in the dialogues. Therefore, he sarcastically calls Miss Drury as “old robber” in because he claims that she demands costly rent for her house. At this point [26], he flouts the maxim of quality by displaying the house tenant, Miss Drury, in a totally different character owing to his emotional judgements. Jimmy implies that she covers herself as a religious person by attending church. By exaggerating her character and actions, he presents his restlessness about the living conditions and the people around him. However, Cliff, who frequently adopts the role of peacemaker, flouts the maxim of Relation [27] because his offer to drink something outside is not a proper or expected suggestion following Jimmy’s complaints about the bells. Consequently, Jimmy is distracted by Cliff and his proposal, seems to forget his obsession with the bells, and attempts to give meaningful answers. He displays his rejection by making feeble excuses. In turn 29, Cliff breaks the maxim of Relation again with his new proposal, saying, “Well, shall we dance [...],” which refers to a physical activity requiring a completely different mood. Cliff’s answers and proposals focus on Jimmy’s serenity. In analysing Cliff’s responses to Jimmy’s aggression, it becomes apparent that Cliff violates the maxim of Manner, which is evident in the way Cliff approaches Jimmy’s aggression with humour and irrelevant responses and commentaries. By doing so, Cliff fails to adhere to the principle of being clear, brief, and orderly in his communication, thereby violating the principle of manner in conversational implicature in turns 27 and 29. Cliff violated the maxim of Manner by responding to Jimmy’s aggression with a humiliating and irrelevant question: “Do you think bosoms will be in or out this year?” in turn 31. The violation of the maxim results in Jimmy’s threat in turn 32. In the final part of the dialogue, before the act of physical violence between two male characters, Alison flouts the maxim of Relation when she begins her sentence with a warning and retreats with a general comment on the chaotic atmosphere of the house [33]. Following the analysis of flouting and violating several maxims in the dialogue, it becomes clear that the complex elements of conversations between characters, including their emotional states and personalities, influence their styles. The imbalance in the use of maxims disrupts the proper structure of communication, and that may lead to physical violence, as in the case of Jimmy and Cliff, resulting in Alison’s injury. This act of violence scene displays parallelism with the former ending of the conversation in which Jimmy wishes to be the dominant side. Therefore, this conversation may indicate that Jimmy’s physical action is part of a “Non-verbal Act”, which implies a character who demands to be understood by the other interlocutors despite his actions having negative effects on them.

Although there are many different scenes in the play where verbal violence takes place, physical violence as a “Non-verbal Act” emerges as a last resort of communication with the collapse of all four components of Grice’s CP theory, as proposed in the study. At this point, the important element is that the speaker or the other person thinks that he/she has exhausted the verbal means of communication and tries to give his/her last message through physical violence and the communication is terminated. This situation unfolds in a limited number of scenes, in which Jimmy plays an active role. Therefore, it would be appropriate to analyse a sample of the scenes in which this situation does not occur in the play in order to support the main claim of the study. In the following dialogue, a “Non-verbal Act” is not observed because the four maxims of Grice are not collapsed sequentially. In this scene from Act I, Jimmy, who employs sarcasm and irrelevant responses to provoke Alison and Cliff, appears to act out of his innate frustration and isolation. Moreover, he is unable to establish meaningful communication with both his spouse and friend due to intellectual and emotional conflicts, which are often accompanied by sarcasm and irrelevancies, leading to the violation of multiple conversational maxims.

### **Dialogue III**

(34) JIMMY: (TO Cliff). Did you read that bit?

(35) CLIFF: Um? *He has lost, them and he knows it, but won't leave it.*

- (36) JIMMY: (*to Alison*). You don't suppose your father could have written it, do you?  
 (37) ALISON: Written what?  
 (38) JIMMY: What I just read out, of course.  
 (39) ALISON: Why should my father have written it?  
 (40) JIMMY: Sounds rather like Daddy, don't you think?  
 (41) ALISON: Does it?  
 (42) JIMMY: Is the Bishop of Bromley his nom de plume, do you think?  
 (43) CLIFF: Don't take any notice of him. He's being offensive. And it's so easy for him.  
 (44) JIMMY: (quickly). Did you read about the woman who went to the mass meeting of a certain American evangelist at Earls Court? She went forward, to declare herself for love or whether it is, and in the rush of converts to get to the front, she broke four ribs and got kicked in the head. She was yelling her head off in agony, but with 50,000 people putting all they'd got into "Onward Christian Soldiers", nobody even knew she was there. *He looks up sharply for a response, but there isn't any.* Sometimes, I wonder if there isn't something wrong with me. What about that tea?  
 (45) (*still behind paper*). CLIFF: What tea? (Osborne, 1973, p. 14)

As it is observed in the dialogue, Jimmy wants to provoke Cliff with an inquiry about reading the piece to text in turn 34, but against his expectation, Cliff provides a very short reply, "Urn", implying that he does not care about what Jimmy mentions in turn 35, which violates the maxim of Quantity because his answer is too short compared to Jimmy's expectations. Following the dialogue, Jimmy points at Alison and flouts the maxim of Quality when he asks, "You don't suppose your father could have written it, do you?" [36] in a sarcastic manner. Clearly, Jimmy does not want to know whether the writer of this text is her father or not, or whether these sentences were written authentically for Alison. However, her request, "Written what?" in turn 37, appeals to the maxim of Manner because, despite its brevity, the speaker here utters it in the conversation, demanding clarity. Jimmy clarifies the information in turn 38 to provide clarity for his response, but Alison's response displays a violation of the maxim of Relation, as she exhibits a kind of confusion. At this point, Jimmy continues to provide sarcastic expressions: "Sounds rather like Daddy, don't you think?" [40] provides an offensive comparison, which results in a very short reply from Alison, violating the maxim of Quantity. Alison's succinct answer, which displays an emotional and intellectual distance, again provides the flout of the maxim of Quantity. Following the conversation, in turn 42, Jimmy flouts both the maxim of manner and the maxim of Quality because he employs irony with his blatant provocation of Alison, using an expression that sets up a similarity between "Bishop Bromley" and her father. Following the conversation, Jimmy violates the maxim of relation and quantity because he digresses from the topic of conversation and shifts to an irrelevant and lengthy anecdote about an "American Evangelist" in turn 44, as well as another unusual demand about tea. The conversation ends with the violation of the maxim of Quantity because Cliff intentionally fails to demonstrate intellectual engagement with Jimmy. As can be clearly seen in this conversation, although more than one maxim is violated and flouted, not all maxims are collapsed. In addition, the deviation at the end of the excerpt disrupted the integrity of the subject, but the "Non-verbal Act" did not appear, as the speaker switched to a different topic and received answers from the other speakers, albeit insufficient.

However, the last instance of physical violence, as a "Non-verbal Act", occurs in Act II, Scene II, when Helena loses her temper and slaps Jimmy. The tension in the play is so increased that the female character Helena, who cannot stand Jimmy's amoral perception of love and marriage, realises that words are useless for him to change and become rational.

#### Dialogue IV

- (46) HELENA: (calmly). If you'll stop thinking about yourself for one moment, I'll tell you something I think you ought to know. Your wife is going to have a baby. He just looks at her. Well? Doesn't that mean anything? Even to you? *He is taken aback, but not so much by the news, as by her.*  
 (47) JIMMY: All right-yes. I am surprised. I give you that. But, tell me. Did you honestly expect me to

go soggy at the knees, and collapse with remorse! (Leaning nearer.) Listen, if you'll stop breathing your female wisdom all over me, I'll tell you something: I don't care. (Beginning quietly.) I don't care if she's going to have a baby. I don't care if it has two heads! (He knows her fingers are itching.) Do I disgust you? Well, go on- slap my face. But remember what I told you before, will you? For eleven hours, I have been watching someone I love very much going through the sordid process of dying. She was alone, and I was the only one with her. And when I have to walk behind that coffin on Thursday, I'll be on my own again. Because the bitch won't even send her a bunch of flowers-I know! She made a great mistake of all her kind. She thought that because Hugh's mother was deprived and ignorant old woman, who said all the wrong things in all the wrong places, she couldn't be taken seriously. And you think I should be overcome with awe because that cruel, stupid girl is going to have a baby! (Anguish in his voice.) I can't believe it! I can't. (Grabbing her shoulder.) Well, the performance is over. Now leave me alone, and get out, you evil-minded little virgin. *She slaps his face savagely* [...] (Osborne, 1973, pp. 25-26)

In this final dialogue, physical violence is observed as the maxims collapse and are openly disrupted by the second interlocutor, Jimmy, who frequently indulges in his ideals like a self-centred person. He employs more (221) words than Helena (40 words) in order to be more dominant and powerful in the dialogue, and this condition breaks the maxim of Quantity. In turn 46, Helena, a member of the love triangle in the play, reasons and intends to warn Jimmy about an important matter, namely, critical news about the pregnancy, by adhering to the Gricean maxims efficiently. She adheres to the maxim of Manner by communicating clearly and without displaying ambiguity, reflected in her calm disposition and direct approach to communication. Helena anticipates a strong emotional response from Jimmy, as would be expected of any adult who considers family and ethical principles of living together, following the maxim of Relation by sharing vital information that she considers to be of utmost importance to their relationship. However, the assumption that she will trigger a particular reaction from Jimmy may imply a common understanding that does not exist, violating the maxim of Quality in turn 47. Contrary to Helena, Jimmy violates the maxim of Quantity with the excessive use of words. Moreover, he violates the maxim of Quality because his discourse is composed of a lie to display himself as not only smart but also a stern man. Additionally, in his discourse, he utilises misogynist language that reflects his humiliating opinions towards women, which violates the maxim of Manner. Finally, he digresses from the subject in the middle of his discourse, which might be considered a violation of the maxim of Relation. In this part of the play, the character Helena attempts to express physical aggression towards Jimmy because she believes that warning him verbally or attempting to convince him of his responsibilities will be futile. Jimmy not only provokes her but also verbally insults the other women with gender-biased expressions in his speech. Therefore, with a slap as a "Non-verbal Act", it is possible to observe physical violence against the other interlocutor in this scene as a means of continuing the communication in a different language, exempt from words. Although the maxims are both flouted and violated in this conversation, Helena, who goes beyond verbal expression through the use of the Non-verbal Act of slapping, displays a last attempt to imply the message to Jimmy that he must fulfil his responsibility as a father.

### Conclusion

In John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, there are some instances where the conversational maxims are flouted and violated. Therefore, due to these disharmonious deviations from the communication rules, the characters in the play cannot properly understand each other. Instead of cooperating in their communication attempts that require harmony and balance, the characters feel frustrated and misunderstand each other, which puts physical attacks and violence at the forefront. As a result of the collapse of multiple maxims in the selected conversations of the play, physically violent actions appear as "Non-verbal Act" in which the last interlocutor intends to continue the conversation with acts that might be considered as non-verbal because he/she believes that verbal communication turns out to be functionless. As the analysis of the selected dialogues reveals, it is possible to assert that healthy communication, consisting of mutual speeches and dialogues, requires a fair structural

and linguistic design to ensure cooperation. Furthermore, it is possible to argue that proper communication, comprising conversation and dialogue, requires a balanced structural and linguistic design that the speakers are often unaware of, with the intention of facilitating mutual understanding. Therefore, any violation or flouting of the maxims purported by Grice may create a different kind of meaning and problematised communication, which provokes deeper insights into understanding the speaker's intention.

John Osborne created his play to portray the condition of people who have lost their ideals due to the political developments in Post-war England. Since the dialogues are professionally designed and posited in the play, the violent speech of the protagonist, Jimmy, foregrounds that he unconsciously violates the qualities originated by Grice. It is possible to infer that the dialogues analysed with Gricean maxims exceed the limits of the maxims that violate the proportional balance of the Cooperation principle for natural and meaningful communication and pave the way for violence, not just with words but also with acts and attitudes in the play. The act of banging on paper and fighting in the first dialogue, Jimmy's push and Alison's wound in the second scene and Helena's slap in the last conversation are the final attempts to continue the conversation. Although they appear as an escalated form of aggression, they can be considered as Non-verbal Acts concretised with physical violence, which conveys messages when verbal communication possibilities are distorted, multiple conversational maxims are violated and flouted, and the intent of cooperation in the nature of the dialogue is lost. As a result, it can be concluded that Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, as analysed through the application of Grice's theory of maxims, demonstrates that physical violence, proposed in this study as a "Non-verbal Act", can emerge under the condition that multiple maxims of the Cooperation principle are violated and flouted. This results in a breakdown of verbal communication and a shift toward non-verbal means as a final effort to continue the communication.

### Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors

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