

Verbal humor created by flouting maxims in how i met your mother series

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Abstract

Humor has been a part of our daily conversations and how we deliver humors in the daily can be studied with pragmatics and flouting maxim. There have been numerous studies on flouting maxims on media. However the connection between why people flouted maxim and what type of humor it created is still developed yet. As a result, this article aimed to find out the type of maxims flouted in comedy series How I Met Your Mother and what are the verbal humor created from the maxims flouted. How I Met Your Mother series was used as the primary source of data. This article used the documentation method for collecting data, the data was collected from the comedy series by watching the series, reading the movie script as well as seen at the subtitle of the series. Then the data were selected and identified according to the maxims flouted by the characters in it. The result of this article showed that maxim of quantity, quality, relation, and manner were flouted in the series. There were four types of verbal humor implied in the series How I Met Your Mother namely joke, irony, sarcasm, and wit. Limitations and recommendations for further research are also discussed.

Keywords: *flouting maxims, verbal humor, comedy*

Introduction

Our daily lives are built on spoken languages, which are used in spoken conversation. The purpose of spoken languages is to communicate with others. We need to communicate with one another and have excellent discussions since we are social creatures. Humor in this context operates under verbal interaction or, in a more common word, conversation therefore it enhances communication between speaker and hearer (Holmes & Marra, 2002). There are rules that interlocutors must adhere to when speaking in particular languages. These guidelines establish the proper conduct of conversation to prevent misunderstandings and ensure mutual understanding and context comprehension between the involved parties. However, despite these rules, misunderstandings still occur in everyday communication, leading to

unsuccessful conversations. As a solution to this problem, an English philosopher, Paul H. Grice, proposed the Cooperative Principle (CP), also known as Gricean Maxims or conversational maxims. These maxims are a set of rules that govern successful conversations between individuals using spoken or known languages (Maienborn, 2019). Although these maxims are provided to facilitate basic understanding in conversations, speakers may choose to mock or disregard them. When a maxim is violated, it means that the speaker intentionally deviates from it, opting for indirect speech and explicit meanings, leaving the interpretation of the utterance to the hearer.

This research analyzes the flouting of maxims in a popular situation comedy called *How I Met Your Mother*. Situation Comedy, also known as sitcom, emerged as a genre in the entertainment industry, tracing its roots back to radio networks and programs as a testament to the progress of mass communication. However, it was not until the 1950s that the term "sitcom" gained widespread usage in the American language (Marc, 2005). From the 1950s onward, sitcoms gained immense popularity in the United States, with a significant boost provided by the widely acclaimed sitcom *I Love Lucy*, which topped television viewership during its time. Since then, numerous sitcoms have been created and broadcasted across television programs, with some enjoying continuous high ratings, an enduring fan base, and becoming integral parts of pop culture (Dalton, 2016).

While sitcoms are not typically aimed at presenting realistic depictions of life, they can generate genuine humor through the development of relationships and character arcs (Bore, 2011). Typically, sitcoms feature a set of recurring characters within a defined setting, such as a family home or workplace, and incorporate one or more plotlines. Many modern sitcoms are filmed in front of a live studio audience, using multiple cameras, and are subsequently edited and broadcasted days or weeks later.

The comedic acts served by *How I Met Your Mother* are forms of entertainment that create laughter to people. This means that laughter and humor are part of a social interaction that requires communication and conversation between two people or more. According to Chiaro (1992), a humorous situation occurs when there is a double meaning or ambiguous meaning of linguistic features in a conversation, such as word choice. There is a connection between comedy and disregard for maxims (Attardo, 1994). These ambiguities may therefore appear due to the amount of slur in the *How I Met Your Mother* scenes.

There had been a lot of studies that discussed flouting of maxims. An undergraduate thesis by Irjayanti (2018) analyzed the flouting of maxims to create humor in the movie *Deadpool* which was released in 2016 where the author used Grice's cooperative principle theory and maxims theory to find out

the flouting of maxims used throughout the movie. An article entitled *The Analysis of Flouting Maxim in Good Morning America (GMA) Talkshow* (Marlisa & Hidayat, 2020) also discussed about flouting of maxims in a talk show from Good Morning America in an episode where they interviewed a non-native English speaking actor, Jackie Chan. Both research identified the flouting of maxims but both studies did not use the verbal humor approach which will be implied in this article.

Although the other research have examined the flouting of maxims in movies and television shows, most of them focused on what types of maxims being flouted and the analysis of the flouted maxims. The involvement of verbal humor is important in this study it aims to find the types of maxims being flouted in comedy series *How I Met Your Mother* and what kind of verbal humor is produced out of the maxims flouted in the series.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Cooperative Principle

While Grice was developing his views on language, the work of other philosophers, such as Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), has focused on the direct and indirect speech acts and how people describe things with words. It had a lot to do with the concept of being able to make things. Speech was viewed as an action, like opening a door or closing a window. Proponents of these "use theories" moved away from both the truth-value approach and the reliance on meaning and reference as sources of meaning. There was a growing interest not only in sentences, but also in the meaning of utterances. At the discourse level, we find that there is no one-to-one correspondence between language strengths and utterances. Grice makes this distinction between utterance and meaning, how the speaker knows how to generate these implied meanings, and how he can assume that the addressee certainly understands the intended meaning. Grice posits CP and four related maxim (quantity, quality, relation, and manner) to explain this implication process.

Flouting of Maxim

Flouting is the speaker's disregard for aphorisms intended to convey meaning in another way, known as implied meaning (implicit). According to Grice (1975), ignorance is blatant ignorance of maxims. If the speaker disobeys the maxim, he does not disobey the maxim and does not mislead or deceive the listener, but the speaker encourages the listener to understand at face value the speaker's purpose/intent behind the speaker's utterances.

Flouting the maxim of quantity

This happens when the speaker gives too little or too much information. Thomas (2014) explains flouting of the maxim of quantity is a situation when a speaker blatantly gives more or less information than the situation requires.

Flouting the maxim of quality

This is if someone says information that doesn't really correspond, or not supported by clear and concrete evidence. Under certain circumstances, the speaker will lie during a conversation, or sometimes he / she uses an ironic statement.

Flouting the maxim of relation

This happens when the speaker changes the topic of the conversation, but still expects the listener to recognize and know the change. According to Cutting (2005), which ignores the maximum of relationships as exchange topics with irrelevant comments, listeners are expected to recognize meaning by associating the current topic with the previous topic.

Flouting the maxim of manner

This happens when a speaker says something unclearly. Cutting (2005) states that flouting the maxim of manner happens when a speaker does not talk clearly, appearing to obscure and tend to ambiguity.

Verbal Humor

According to Kuipers (2015), humor and wit share similarities as they both have the ability to evoke laughter. Humor is specifically designed to entertain and can take various forms. According to Shade (1996) Verbal Humor is often based on incoherency, performed by contradictions. An understatement, exaggeration, surprise, or reversal that occurs through a linguistic medium. All kinds of language jokes are part of verbal humor. Shade divides humor into 12 subtypes.

These subtypes are as follows. Pun which is a play of words and causes ambiguity. Riddles which consist of questions and an answer that will produce humor. A joke is any funny statement that involves one of the following: words that have multiple meaning, metaphors, idioms, ambiguity, oddity, perspective change (Shade, 1996). There are a few types of jokes namely phonological joke where a structure of a word can lead to misunderstanding, lexical joke where there is a difference meaning of the word itself, deep structure joke where the humor lies in phrase or word interpretation and metalinguistic jokes where the joke focused on the language form. Satire which is exaggerating or undermining a certain fact. Limerick, a funny elaborated poem. Parody, a humorous modification of a certain literary or art work. Anecdotes, which are basically

funny stories based on true events that have meaning. Farce, which is a humor that can make fun of certain events with an exaggerated ridiculous plot. Irony, a speech that the meaning is reversed with the actual meaning. Sarcasm that uses scorn, insults, and disguised ridicule in creating humorous situations. Tall Tale and wit.

Situation Comedy

According to the Britannica Encyclopedia in 2023, situational comedy is described as a radio or television comedy series that features a recurring cast of characters in a series of episodes, sometimes it is shorten as a sitcom. The characters are frequently of distinctly different types who are put together by circumstance and reside in a communal setting, such an apartment complex or office. Typically lasting 30 minutes, sitcoms feature verbal sparring and quickly handled disputes. They are usually taped in front of a studio audience or use synthetic clapping. Situation Comedy is a genre that originated from a radio network or radio program as a proof of mass communication development, especially in the entertainment industry. The genre was later abbreviated to 'sitcom' and the term itself did not reach its full usage, especially in the American language until the 1950s (Marc, 2005).

Methods

In qualitative research, researchers are the central. In other words, Researchers independently collect data by reviewing existing documents, observing behavior in the field or questioning participants (Creswell, 2012). In analyzing the data, a Descriptive method was used in this article. The study's data were examined using the qualitative paradigm approach. The systematic process of locating, structuring, and organizing interview transcripts that the researcher collects to further understanding of the phenomenon is known as qualitative data analysis (Wong, 2008). To acquire results in this article, qualitative audio and visual data was used. In this study, the researchers observed and recorded utterances from television series to collect relevant data. In this study, the researcher observed and recorded utterances from television series to collect relevant data. The first step in collecting the data was to watch five episodes from the fifth season of "How I Met Your Mother" series on Disney+ to understand the context and the storyline, to observe and note-down the utterances that are flouting the maxims. After that, the utterances analyzed were those considered as flouting of the Grice's maxims and fit into the verbal humor category.

Findings and Discussions

From watching episodes of *How I Met Your Mother*, 37 data were collected and it has been found that maxim of relation was flouted 17 times making it the most flouted maxim in this study, followed by maxim of quality with the maxim being flouted 12 times. Maxim of quantity positioned itself as the second to last maxim that was flouted five times and the least maxim flouted is the maxim of manner three times. For verbal humor, 34 data were collected with the most verbal humor produced was joke by 18 times, irony was produced eight times, sarcasm was produced six times and lastly wit by only two times.

Flouting of Maxim of Quantity

Lily: Barney, I've had Shelly set aside for Ted for three years.

Barney: Dude, Ted was not missing out. She's brainy and annoying, kind of boring in the sack. I guess she would've been perfect for Ted.

Analysis: Lily expressed her annoyance to Barney because Barney had a relationship with a woman named Shelly who was supposed to be introduced romantically to Ted. Barney then responded to Lily's statement by implying that Ted is not at disadvantage in not knowing Shelly, however Barney gave too much information that somehow contradicts his first opinion by stating that Shelly would have been the perfect match for Ted. The type of verbal humor used in this data is irony. Barney was talking negatively about the character Shelley, a woman who was supposedly to be introduced to Ted. However, Barney attempted to make a point on why Ted and Shelly would not make a great match by naming Shelly's negative quality yet concluded that the negative characteristics of Shelly is actually good for Ted.

Flouting the Maxim of Quality

Robin: so...Strip club...

Barney: Marshall made me go

Analysis: When Robin found out that her partner, Barney had gone out to a gentlemen's club or as known as strip club, when Robin wants to talk about it to Barney, he flouted the maxim of quality by lying to Robin using the reason that his friend Marshall had encouraged Barney to go to a strip club which was not the truth. This data also uses irony to produce humor. In this scene, Barney was clearly not stating the truth of why he went to the strip club therefore he acted as if he was innocent on the fact that he was present in a strip club without his partner, Robin, knowing so. According to Shade (1996) irony happens when the meaning of something is reversed therefore Barney has applied irony in his utterance.

Flouting the Maxim of Relation

Marshall: Lily, sometimes I think about other women. Okay, it happens. But even when I do, I feel so guilty that I... I

have to imagine you passing away first because even in a fantasy world, I could never cheat on you. You're just my life, baby, and I love you.

Lily: You kill me off? I mean, fantasize about other girls all you want, but could you maybe not murder me?

Analysis: Marshall tried to prove his point that he is loyal to his wife, Lily. However, as a man he admitted that he also thought of other women other than his wife but he felt so guilty thinking about other women that he had to imagine being separated by death first before pursuing other women. Marshall's point was to show loyalty to his wife but Lily responded by being offended because she is dead in her husband's own fantasy. Lily got offended of Marshall's main point about expressing his love and loyalty and Lily responded by changing the topic to the idea of her being killed in her husband's fantasy. When a speaker changes the topic of conversation and still expects the listener to understand this means the speaker has flouted the maxim of relation (Grice, 1975) and this is what happened between Lily and Marshall's conversation. This data used Joke, especially deep structured joke to create humor. Marshall was elaborating of how much he loved his wife that the thought of another woman made him feel guilty but the joke lies on Lily's respond who only cared about Lily must die in her husband's fantasy in order for him to think about another woman. According to Shade (1996), deep structured joke lies in the interpretation of phrases or words, in this conversation Lily interpreted "passing away" as being murdered.

Flouting the Maxim of Manner

Lily: Come on, Barney, you just... You just got out of an honest to God relationship. You're a real boy now. You can't go back to these cheap tricks.

Barney: Cheap tricks?! Not one of these is a cheap trick. Except for "the Cheap Trick".

Analysis: In this scene, Barney was caught having a book full of elaborated and sometimes funny methods on how to woo women into getting sexual relationships with Barney. This book was later discovered by Lily and Lily did not like this book for Barney considering that he had just gotten out of a relationship. Lily called Barney's book full of cheap tricks however, Barney responded and this is where he flouted the maxim of manners by saying that he did not think that the methods were cheap tricks except for a method called cheap trick therefore leaving ambiguous meaning towards what he meant by 'Cheap Trick'. This data used Lexical joke to create humor by playing with the term 'Cheap Trick'. Shade (1996) explained that lexical jokes happens when there is a double meaning in words. In Barney's utterance, 'Cheap Trick' could

mean that the methods of the book are considered lowly and cheap or there is a method in the book called 'Cheap Trick'.

Conclusion

The findings of the current research reveal there is flouting of maxims in an American comedy series aired from 2004-2010 called *How I Met Your Mother*. Throughout the research, 37 data were collected as a result of flouting maxims. The maxims flouted were the maxim of quantity, quality, relation and manner. 17 data belong to the flouting maxim of relation, 12 data belong to the flouting maxim of quality, 5 data belong to the flouting maxim of quantity, and 3 data belong to the flouting maxim of manner. From the 37 data collected, the researchers also found verbal humors implied in the flouting of maxims namely irony, sarcasm, wit and jokes.

For the sake of future research, this article hopes to provide more knowledge to teachers and students about flouting of maxims in television shows. Further suggestion for teachers who wish to instill the importance of conversational implicature not only in the classroom but also in daily lives and the students can utilize language that is clear and concise especially when they are communicating. Lastly, future researchers can examine broader aspects where maxim can be flouted such as in school, households, talk shows and many more.

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