

An Analysis of Violations of Maxims' Cooperative Principle in Creating Humor in American Situation Comedy 'Friends'

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Abstract

Cooperative maxim principles refer to the rules that should be obeyed to generate effective and efficient communication in a conversation. However, in certain circumstances, cooperative maxim violation may create a sense of humor among audiences. Hence, this study is conducted to analyze the violation of four maxims in cooperative principles to create humor in one of the episodes of the American situation comedy 'friends' (Episode 9 in 6th Season: "The One When Ross Got High"). Grice's four maxims; Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner are the main analysis tool in the study. This research is conducted by using a descriptive qualitative study. The primary data is taken from the video of the sitcom and the dialogue was transcribed. The result revealed that there were 27 maxim violations; 13 times quality maxim violation, two times quantity maxim violation, three times relation maxim violation, and 9 times manner maxim violation. The 'friends' sitcom characters are dishonest, provide unnecessary details, are redundant, and cause expression obscurity and ambiguity. However, these violations, in the eyes of sitcom viewers, attract laughter and a humorous effect.

Keywords: Cooperative Principle Maxims; Violation; Humor; Situation Comedy; Friends

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the process through symbols, signs, or general actions of exchanging information between people (Albiansyah et al., 2021). To interact with each other, the conversation is a way of communicating in which the interlocutors attempt to express their perspectives, desires, intentions, or hopes through their utterances. Both speaker and hearer should build a proper conversation to understand what they intend to say which leads to a cooperative conversation (Liu, 2017; Sari & Afriana, 2020; Xin & Xin, 2019). The cooperative conversation should follow the cooperative principles (CP) that are labeled by Grice (1975) "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged". In the cooperative principles, Grice proposes four maxims as a precept for the efficient use of language in a conversation. These four maxims are; quantity, quality, relation, and manner. Each maxim means to convey as much information as needed, to be truthful, to be relevant, and to avoid redundant vagueness. However, people do not always communicate efficiently and straightforwardly. In some circumstances, speakers may not follow the expectation of maxims by violating them. Grice (1991) implies that maxim violation is when a participant in a dialogue fails to fulfill a maxim by quietly or ostentatiously disobeying a maxim to mislead the conversation. In fact, some factors could cause the speaker to disobey the maxims. In reality, Qiu (2019) stated that interlocutors in a communication do not always correspond to these principles. They are frequently accustomed to mistakenly or intentionally violate the cooperation principle maxims. One of the causes when speaker intentionally violate the maxim is when they attempt to produce humor in their utterances. Hadiati (2018) described humor as everything that causes others laugh or is entertaining, as well as the ability to perceive what is

funny about a situation or a person. Cooperative maxims can be not fully adhered to create a humor effect in an utterance to invite laughter among speakers or audience. The breaking of communication principles indicated by linguistic principles might produce humorous spoken language both textually and interpersonally (Al-Zubeiry, 2020; Mifdal, 2019). Humor can be found not only in a casual daily conversations, but also in a spoof texts, television shows, theatre, movies, serials, and many more works to entertain the audience by creating a sense of humor. The highest-rating American television situation comedy "*friends*" which was first aired in 1994 until 2004 is still one of the most memorable works that linger in people's minds to this day. Even though the sitcom ended its broadcast seventeen years ago, the sitcom's humor is still engaging and relevant to any generation today. This sitcom revolves around the relationship among six friends in New York that have been friends for over 10 years. The characters in the play have distinct personalities, and the dialogue is vivid and humorous (Yang, 2019). Needless to say, the humor produced by the characters in this sitcom appears in various scenes throughout each episode. However, it may be feasible that a violation of cooperative maxims expectedly occurs in this sitcom to create a comic effect. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the violation of the cooperative maxim to create humor in one of the episodes of the American television situation comedy '*friends*'.

Grice's maxim that is elaborated in Huang (2014) will be mentioned as follow:

1. Maxim of Quality
Take the opportunity to make your contribution truthful. Do not say anything that you believe to be factually inaccurate. Do not say anything which you do not have sufficient proof.
2. Maxim of Quantity
Ensure your participation is as informative as possible (for the current purposes of the conversation). Make your contribution no more informative than required.
3. Maxim of Relation
Be pertinent in your contribution.
4. Maxim of Manner
Be perceptive in your contribution. Eliminate ambiguity and obscurity of expression. Maintain your contribution to be well ordered.

Speakers' contribution to a conversation is expected to consider the accordance with the maxims. The notion of communication and the amount of information contained in a conversation will precisely achieve the goal of interaction if the four cooperative maxims are fulfilled. Based on Grice's maxim of cooperative principles in a conversation, the speaker may not fulfill the maxim to create a certain intention in the conversation by violating it. It is feasible to occur when a speaker purposefully disobeys the maxims in order to produce a comedy effect or humor in a dialogue. Thus, this research will analyze and describe the violation of cooperative principles in the situation comedy "Friends" where the characters violate the maxim to create humor among audiences.

METHOD

This research was conducted using a qualitative design. A qualitative design is a research method that generates descriptive data in a form of words (Raharja & Rosyidha, 2019). The data is taken from the situational comedy "Friends" episode 9 of the sixth season aired in 1999. The researcher chose this episode because in this episode, there were a bunch of hilarious secret reveals, so the characters may violate maxims to lie, use ambiguous utterances, and provides unnecessary and irrelevant information all to hide the truth or create humor after all.

To collect the data, the researcher watched the episode 16 times to fully understand the actual intention of every dialogue. Next is the process of identifying and analyzing the four maxims

violated by the characters in the episode (Monica, Ross, Chandler, Rachel, Joey, Phoebe, Mr. and Mrs. Geller) from the dialogue that is manually transcribed by the researcher. After all the data has been found, the data is classified based on four maxims in Grice's cooperative principles. The analyzed data of maxims violations will be described.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

According to the analysis of Grice's cooperative maxim violation in the conversation uttered by friends' characters, the present results confirm it was found a total of 27 maxim violations produced in the episode. The violated utterances then classified into the four cooperative maxim principles, it is seen in the following table

Table 1. Types of maxim violations of characters in situation comedy 'Friends'

Characters	Maxim Violation				Total
	Quality	Quantity	Relation	Manner	
Monica	3	-	3	-	6
Ross	6	-	-	3	9
Chandler	1	2	-	-	3
Phoebe	1	-	-	2	3
Joey	-	-	-	3	3
Rachel	-	-	-	1	1
Mr. Geller	1	-	-	-	1
Mrs. Geller	1	-	-	-	1
Frequency	13	2	3	9	27

Based on Table 1, the result can be described that Violation of Quality Maxim was found 13 times done by all characters except Rachel. Maxim of Quantity was violated two times by Chandler only, three utterances showed the Relation Maxim Violation by Monica, and Maxim of Manner was violated by Ross, Phoebe, Joey, and Rachel in total 9 times. By looking at the number, the maxim of quality was violated the most by the characters. Moreover, Ross was the character who produced the most maxim violation among the other characters. Additionally, some excerpts are inserted to account for evidence and reason around the maxim violations that occurred by the 'friends' characters.

1. Violating the Maxim of Quality.

Excerpt. 1

Chandler : Hey! Oh good, Ross! Your parents like me, right?
 Ross : Yes of course they like you!
 Chandler : Well Monica just told me that they don't.
 Ross : Yeah, they don't like you.

Chandler, as Ross's best friend and a boyfriend of his sister's, Monica, tried to confirm their parents' impression of him since Monica said they did not like him. In the dialogue, Ross, in the beginning, implies that their parents liked Chandler, untruthfully. After hearing the "truth" from Monica, Ross finally admitted that their parents did not like Chandler. Ross's reply had violated the quality maxim since he was not being honest in his utterances. Furthermore, Ross did not want to hurt Chandler's feelings about the truth, and also, this invited the laughter of the audience as well.

Excerpt. 2

Mrs. Geller : I've gotta call my friend Mary and tell her how good this is from Monica's room.

Mr. Geller : I'll help you dial!

This is the scene where Rachel's dessert was served. Everybody secretly hated the dessert, but they agreed to fake it in front of Rachel after Ross convinced them. Mr. and Mrs. Geller, who also forcedly tried the trifle, sought an excuse to leave the dining area and stopped eating it. In their utterances, Mr. and Mrs. Geller lied by telling everybody the dessert was good and telling their friend about it in Monica's room. Again, the characters were not adhering to the maxim of quantity by not being honest.

2. Violating the Maxim of Quantity

Excerpt. 3

Monica : Mom, uh- Chandler was just saying how beautiful your sweater is.

Mrs. Geller : Oh thank you, Chandler. I just bought it.

*Chandler : Oh yes. Well, it's very beautiful. **It's cream-colored and tight- I don't mean tight, I mean it's not too tight, not that I was looking at-***

In this scene, Chandler was being charming and tried to win his girlfriend's parents' hearts. Chandler attempted to praise Monica's mother by saying how beautiful her sweater was. However, he could have just simply said how pretty the sweater was instead of overly providing unnecessary details in the conversation. This led to a violation of Quantity Maxim for not being brief and providing unnecessary information than is required.

3. Violating the Maxim of Relation

Excerpt. 4

*Monica : Yeah, and you know, if you could not mention to them that we live together, that would be great! [attempt to change topic quickly] **I was thinking we would eat around four.***

Chandler : Why can't I tell them that we live together?

*Monica : Because they don't know we are dating [trying to change topic quickly again] **should we eat in the kitchen?***

In the conversation between Chandler and Monica, they were debating about why Monica had not told them about her relationship with Chandler and the fact that they lived together. Monica was clearly uneasy about it, and she abruptly changed the subject to avoid the issue by bringing in unrelated topics. Thus, Monica violated the maxim of relation by not being relevant in her utterances.

4. Violating the Quality of Manner

Excerpt. 5

Rachel : The beef? Yeah, that was weird to me too. But then you know, I thought "well, there is a minced meat pipe" I mean, that's an English dessert, these people just put every strange things in their food, you know. Oh! [To Joey] by the way, can I borrow some rum from your place?

Joey : Yeah sure!

Rachel : And while I'm gone don't you boys sneak a taste.

*Joey & Ross : (pretend to be disappointed) **Okay.***

This scene revealed the oddity of Rachel's dessert that she put beef in her Trifle-which was not good. Joey and Ross noticed it as a weird thing too, worrying the dessert would not taste

delicious. Rachel, who was still optimistic about her dessert teased the boys to not sneak a taste while Joey and Ross were agreeing with their ambiguous expression to faking disappointment. This indicated the violation of Manner Quality due to creating obscurity of expression.

Excerpt. 6

Rachel : I don't think us getting back together is a good idea.

Ross : Eh?

Rachel : I thought this might happen today. Ross, I know the holidays can be rough, you know? And it's probably hard for you to be alone right now.

Ross : You're alone.

Rachel : No, I live with phoebe. I mean you're alone-alone. And I just-it's just not the time for us. I'm sorry.

Rachel and Ross used to date, which meant they were ex-companions to each other. In this scene, Ross were actually distracting Rachel while Joey was convincing everybody inside to fake a reaction to Rachel's dessert so they could finish the dinner quickly. Thus, Ross was awkwardly having conversations with Rachel separately outside the apartment. Well, Rachel misunderstood it as his attempt to ask her to get back together and said how hard it was for him to be alone. However, Ross misunderstood the word "alone" here, which Rachel implied was who they live with. Rachel uttered "you're alone, alone," which meant that Ross was single and lived alone. Thus, Rachel's utterances were ambiguous and led to interlocutors' misunderstandings. These excerpts were evidence that Rachel had violated the maxim of manner for being ambiguous.

Discussion

According to the findings, all of the maxims were violated to create comedy in the sitcom. Wu (2019) states that the actors or speakers always violate or flout the Cooperative Principle in order to create a cheerful atmosphere or to produce a humorous effect. Hence, the dominant maxim violations are Quality and Manner. Quality maxim violation in the episode occurs several times due to the truth-hiding between speakers. However, the maxim of quality is present to promote truth in a conversation. It indicates that humans should tell their conversation partners what they believe is true (Kasap & Dağdemir, 2021). The other major violation in the episode is a maxim of manner. Violation of manner maxim in the episode occurs by the characters' expression obscurity and ambiguities. Furthermore, Tang (2016) states that pragmatic ambiguity possesses the recreational function to entertain the audience. This leads to a violation of manner has intention to create humor effect. In a research conducted by Guo (2021) which analyzed humor in one of episode of the sitcom friends came with conclusion that the humor in some 'Friends' conversations was created by deliberately violated the maxims of quality, quantity, relation, and manner. As well as in the present study, the violation of maxims in cooperative principles produce humor for the audience. Liu et al., (2018) analyzed the verbal humor in the sitcom 'Two Broke Girls'. In the research findings, it was found that verbal humor can be achieved by violating the cooperative principle and it can be viewed as a verbal humor approach. This indicates that violation of cooperative principle is not always viewed as failed communication in a conversation. In some cases, masterfully violating the Cooperative Principle can contribute to linguistic humor (Dong & Zhang, 2019). However, in some circumstances, cooperative principle maxims violation is a way to incorporate an entertainment in a situation, like humor.

CONCLUSION

Based on the investigation, this study found that all the cooperative principles were violated in the episode. During the conversation, the characters were being untruthful, providing

unnecessary information than is required, irrelevant, and produce expression obscurity and ambiguity. Nonetheless, in the view of sitcom viewers, these violations invited laughter and comedy effect. Therefore, it can be concluded that in some situation, cooperative maxim violation incorporate humor and create entertainment among audience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Alhamdulillah robil ‘alamin All gratitudes to Allah SWT Who gave His blessings. The researcher would like to appreciate the supervisor and lecturers who always give guidance, advice, suggestions, and feedback during the research.

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