

A Study of Humor: The Outcome of Flouting the Maxims in *Yes Man* Movie Utterances

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Abstract

The use of humor does not always run well in a conversation. People may misunderstand and draw wrong inference. Therefore, the more comprehensive the study on humor language in linguistic perspective, the better it will be, particularly from pragmatic outlooks. Considering the phenomenon above, this thesis analyses the use of Flouting the Maxims of Cooperative Principles constructs humor in *Yes Man* movie utterances. This study is conducted by using mixed method (both qualitative and quantitative methods). The result of this thesis shows that the Flouting the Maxims of Cooperative Principles construct humor. It is also found that the characters in *Yes Man* movie blatantly flout the Maxims to indicate that they have implied meanings in their conversation.

Keywords: Humor, Pragmatics, Cooperative principles, Maxims.

Abstrak

*Penggunaan humor tidak selalu berjalan baik pada setiap percakapan. Seseorang bisa salah menerima atau mengalami kebingungan terhadap humor yang diucapkan orang lain. Oleh karena itu, semakin mendalam penelitian tentang humor dalam lingkup ilmu kebahasaan, khususnya dalam segi ilmu pragmatik, akan semakin baik. Melihat gejala tersebut, skripsi ini mengulas pelanggaran maksim-maksim dalam prinsip-prinsip kerjasama yang terjadi pada perkacakapan di dalam film *Yes Man* yang menimbulkan kelucuan. Skripsi ini menggunakan metode gabungan (kualitatif dan kuantitatif). Temuan dari skripsi ini adalah pelanggaran maksim-maksim dari prinsip kerjasama menimbulkan kelucuan. Selain itu, dalam skripsi ini juga ditemukan bahwa tokoh-tokoh dalam film *Yes Man* sengaja melanggar maksim untuk menunjukkan bahwa mereka mempunyai maksud tersembunyi dalam percakapan mereka.*

Kata Kunci: Humor, Pragmatik, Prinsip-Prinsip kerjasama, Maksim.

Introduction

In daily activity, consciously or not, people do not always say what they mean explicitly. It is sometimes larger than what they say. People tend to make their conversation run smoothly. Therefore, in expressing their intention and ideas people occasionally use humor to reduce the tensions which potentially ruin their relationship. By using humor, it is possible for people to say the truth softly, and elegantly, without disturbing someone else's feeling. However, in daily conversation, the use of humor does not always run well. Some people may misunderstand and draw wrong inference. Hence, the more comprehensive the study on humor language in linguistic perspective, the better it will be, particularly from pragmatic outlooks.

Humor does not only happen in real life, but also in a movie because it is a reflection of human life. It is created because humans want to share their life's story or their ideas of life through a certain media. In relation with this study, *Yes Man* is a movie that presents language phenomena where humor is used by the characters in the movie. In this movie, humor shows its importance in communication. However, there is a phenomenon in this movie which cannot be

simply understood without analyzing it, that is the use of humor itself. Humor can be understood by considering the three main approaches, Incongruity, Superiority, and Relief theory (Hassan, 2013). Incongruity theory is considered as a linguistic theory, Superiority is a sociological approach to humor and Relief is psychological one.

Furthermore, an approach in linguistic theory is also used to get more understanding in humor, such as Cooperative Principles which is considered as Implicature theory. Grice (1975:26) states "make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchanged in which you are engaged". This means that the participants in conversation are assumed to say as clearly as possible. Hence, the participants are expected to observe the Cooperative Principles when they want to understand and be understood (Grice, 1975:26). Unfortunately, the participants' disobedience to the Cooperative Principles in the conversation has an intended meaning and gains a certain purpose, including humor. Therefore, this research applies those theories to analyse humor utterances in the movie. The research is held to find out; 1. What type of Fouting the Maxims is dominantly found in *Yes Man*

movie, 2. What is the intended meaning of the Implicature that exist in the chosen utterances in *Yes Man* movie, 3. How does language used by the characters construct humor in *Yes Man* movie.

This study is designed to achieve three purposes; 1. To figure out the Flouting the Maxims which dominantly occur in *Yes Man* movie, 2. To find out the intended meaning of the Implicature exist in the chosen utterances in *Yes Man* movie, 3. To describe language used by the characters construct humor in *Yes Man* movie.

Research Method

The strategy applied in this study is the mixed-method. Denscombe (2007:107) states “a mixed methods strategy is one that uses both qualitative and quantitative methods.”. The use of qualitative and quantitative approaches within a single research project is one of the characteristic features of mixed method approach (Denscombe, 2007:108). Qualitative-interpretative analyses the data in the form of selected utterances in *Yes Man* movie that includes flouting maxims and provides the interpretations of the implied or intended meaning. On the other hand, qualitative-statistical analyzes the data in the form of the number of Flouting the Maxims found in *Yes Man* movie and provides result based on statistic. Furthermore, this study uses purposive sampling. Blaxter (2006:163) states that purposive sampling is “handpicking supposedly typical or interesting cases”. Purposive sampling is applied to the situation where the researcher already knows something about the specific data because they are seen as instances that are likely producing the most valuable data (Denscombe, 2007). This means that the researcher selects the data which is relevance to the topic of the investigation. Hence, purposive sampling is compatible to apply in this study because the researcher only selects dialogues which contain humor and flout the Maxims. In consequence, only 27 utterances in *Yes Man* movie are picked to be analyzed. After classifying the data found, the data tabulation of *Yes Man* movie that flout the maxim is made to make it easy to analyse their belonging categories. One data can consist of more than one type of Flouting the Maxims. It is also possible each type only have one datum found. After finding the type of Flouting the Maxims of the utterances and classify it, they are counted to know what type of maxim that are dominantly used by the characters and find out the implied meaning of the characters with the support of the context in the movie. Then, this study applies descriptive, statistical, and interpretative method. Descriptive method is used to apply the theory of humor and the theory of Cooperative Principles and the Maxims proposed by Grice on the selected sentences taken from the characters’s dialogues in *Yes Man* movie. It is used to analyse the sentences that flout the Maxims and the type of Flouting the Maxims. Then, statistical method is applied to classify and counting the type of Flouting the Maxims in sentence used by the character as well as counting the frequency of the type of

flouting maxim. Last, interpretative method is used to find out the implied meaning of the utterances in *Yes Man* movie based on the type of Flouting the Maxims and the context.

Result

The result of the Flouting the Maxims analysis shows that there are 19 sentences that flout one Maxim which consist of 6 sentences flout the Maxim of Quality (31.5%), 10 sentences flout the Maxim of Quantity (52.6%), 1 sentence flout the Maxim of Relation (5.2%) and 2 sentences flout the Maxim of Manner (10.5%) and 4 sentences that flout two Maxims (Maxim of Quantity and Maxim of Manner).

Discussion

The analysis illustrates that the characters in this movie tend to flout the Maxim of Quantity. As Grice (1975:45-46) stated that to fulfil Maxim of Quantity, the speaker should make the utterances as informative as required for the topic being discussed. The speaker is not allowed to make his utterances more informative than is required. Some characters in this movie are regarded flouting the Maxim of Quantity because they blatantly give less or more information than is required. It is proved by the following dialogues:

Carl: “I’m serious. Stephanie’s at the bar”

Lucy: “The Stephanie?”

Carl: “Yes, my ex-wife. She’s at the bar”

Peter: “Oh, God. That is Stephanie”

Rooney: “Looks like she’s with someone there too”

Carl: “They seem to be thriving. Good for her. Oh, look, they’re touching each other’s genitals. Isn’t that amazing? I’m so glad I came out. Love it. Okay, you know what? I gotta go”

(Moviesubtitles.org, 0329)

Context of situation: *speaker*: Carl, *hearer*: Rooney, Lucy, Peter, *place*: in a bar, *time*: evening. Carl sees his ex-wife, Stephanie, chats with her new boyfriend. Carl still loves Stephanie. He is jealous for seeing Stephanie chats with her new boyfriend.

According to the theory of Cooperative Principles, Carl’s utterance “*They seem to be thriving. Good for her. Oh, look, they’re touching each other’s genitals. Isn’t that amazing? I’m so glad I came out. Love it. Okay, you know what? I gotta go*” is regarded as Flouting the Maxim of quantity because Carl gives information more informative than is required. Based on the theory of Cooperative Principles, Carl should give the quantity of the information as informative as it is required by saying, for example, “*Yes, she is*” for Rooney’s utterance “*Looks like she’s with someone there too*”.

The inference drawn from Carl’s utterance is that Carl wants to emphasize that he does not feel uncomfortable to see his ex-wife chats with her new boyfriend.

The least Flouting the Maxims is Maxim of Relation. Grice argues that to fulfil Maxim of Relation, the speaker should make relevance contribution to the topic being talked about. The main character in this movie (Carl) is regarded Flouting the Maxim of Relation because he gives unrelated responses to the topic being discussed. It is proved by the following dialogues:

Nurse: "Sir, you need to get back to your room"

Carl: "No, I don't"

Security: "Sir, stop right there"

Carl: "Eat me"

(Moviesubtitles.org, 01.31.04)

Context of situation: *speaker*: Carl, *hearer*: a nurse and security, *place*: hospital, *time*: morning. Carl gets an accident in the road. He is inpatient in a hospital. After he gets consciousness, he immediately runs away from the hospital to meet his girlfriend, Allison. He wants to apologize to Allison for what he has done.

According to the theory of Cooperative Principles, Carl's utterance "Eat me" is regarded as Flouting the Maxim of Relation because Carl's response is out of the topic being discussed. Based on the theory of Cooperative Principles, Carl should give a response which is relevant to the topic being discussed by saying "No, I don't want to stop" to the security's command. The security somehow needs Carl to stop running and get back to his room because he is still a patient in the hospital. Instead of saying "Eat me", it would be relevant if Carl says "No, I don't want to stop".

The inference drawn from Carl's utterance is that Carl does not care about what the security say and intends to run away from the hospital to meet his girlfriend immediately.

Maxim of Quality is also flouted by the characters because they give untrue information. Grice explains that to fulfil this Maxim, the speaker is required to tell the truth; he is not allowed to say something he knows to be false. It is proved by the following dialogues:

Norman: "So look, we're kind of short on Saturday staff. Is there any way you could come in?"

Carl: "Sure. Nothing I like better than the inside of a bank on a beautiful Saturday"

(Moviesubtitles.org, 27.57)

Context of situation: *speaker*: Carl, *hearer*: Norman, *place*: on the telephone, *time*: morning. Norman is Carl's boss. They talk on the telephone. Carl has joined 'Yes' seminar which asks him to say 'yes' or gives positive response to every condition in his life. He joins 'Yes' seminar because he has a pathetic life.

According to the theory of Cooperative Principles, Carl's utterance "Sure. Nothing I like better than the inside of a bank on a beautiful Saturday" is regarded as Flouting the Maxims of Quality because Carl gives untrue information to Norman's utterance. Based on the theory of Cooperative Principles, Carl should answer "I'm sorry. I can't go to the bank" as true information because assumingly nobody likes to work on Saturday or weekend.

The inference drawn from Carl's utterance is that Carl wants to give a positive response to Norman's utterance because he has already joined 'Yes' seminar which asks

him to always say 'yes' or gives positive response to every condition in his life.

Last, the characters are considered Flouting the Maxim of Manner since they give unclear contribution. Grice states that to fulfil maxim of Manner, the speaker should make his utterances unambiguous, orderly, brief, and clear as it is required. It is proved by the following dialogues:

Peter: "Do you even know my fiancée's last name?"

Carl: "Yeah. Fisher. Fishman. Wait. Fishwall?"

(Moviesubtitles.org, 11.21)

Context of situation: *speaker*: Carl, *hearer*: Peter, *place*: Carl's apartment, *time*: evening. Carl becomes withdrawn and has a negative outlook on his life since his divorce from his ex-wife. He rejects Peter's call. Carl does not want to come to his Peter's invitation for several times. One night, Peter comes to Carl's apartment. He talks to Carl. He complains about the way Carl treats his friend.

According to the theory of Cooperative Principles, Carl's utterance "yeah. Fisher. Fishman. Wait. Fishwall?" is regarded as Flouting the Maxim of Manner because Carl does not give brief and orderly response to Peter. Carl revises his answer three times. Based on the theory of Cooperative Principles, Carl should give brief response by saying "yeah. Fisher".

The inference drawn from Carl's utterance is that Carl does not know the correct last name of Peter's fiancée. The correct last name of Peter's fiancée is 'Burns'. Carl deliberately revises his answer three times to make a humor so that Peter will not be too angry about what Carl has been done.

The characters also flout two Maxims (Maxim of Quantity and Maxim of Manner). There are 4 sentences which are regarded as Flouting two Maxims. As stated before that Grice (1975) argues that to fulfil Maxim of Quantity, the speaker should make the utterances as informative as required for the topic being discussed and to fulfil Maxim of Manner, the speaker should make his utterances unambiguous, orderly, brief, and clear as it is required. The characters are regarded flouting those Maxims because they give more or less information than is required and unclear information as well. It is proved by the following dialogues:

Allison: "Am I going too fast for you?"

Carl: "No. In fact, I think you should go faster. That way if we crash, at least I'll die"

(Moviesubtitles.org, 25.22)

Context of situation: *speaker*: Carl, *hearer*: Allison, *place*: on the street, *time*: evening. Carl gets his Car's gas run out. He meets stranger girl in a gas station, Allison. Allison takes Carl back to his car by using her motorbike. Carl likes Allison.

According to the theory of Cooperative Principles, Carl's utterance "In fact, I think you should go faster. That way if we crash, at least I'll die" is regarded as Flouting the Maxim of Quantity because Carl gives information more than is required. Based on the theory of Cooperative Principles, Carl should give the quantity of the information as informative as it is required by saying, for example, "No, you are not" for Allison's utterance. Allison's

question needs “yes” or “no” answer. Moreover, by saying “*in fact, I think you should go faster. That way if we crash, at least I’ll die*”, Carl also flouts the Maxim of Manner because he makes his utterance ambiguous. By saying “No”, Carl gives positive response to Allison that she is not going too fast. Vice versa, Carl also gives negative response to Allison which indicates Allison is going too fast by saying “*in fact, I think you should go faster. That way if we crash, at least I’ll die*”.

The inference drawn from Carl’s utterance is that he wants to get closer relationship. Therefore, Carl makes his remark humorous by uttering ambiguous sentence which contain inconsistency.

The examples above show that the reasons of the characters flouting the Maxims are various according to what Maxims they flout. They are obtained by the help of context of situation in the movie. As Malinowsky (as cited in Halliday and Hassan, 1989:6) stated that context of situation is needed to comprehend the environmental senses of an utterance. The context of situation gives information about who the speaker is, who the hearer is, where the conversation takes place, and when the conversation happens.

The analysis finds that the characters in *Yes Man* movie dominantly flout the Maxim of Quantity to make a pun. Therefore, Carl Allen, as the main character, is shown as a withdrawn and spontaneous person since he involves in the dialogues which are flouted the Maxim of Quantity. By giving less information than is needed, Carl is shown as a withdrawn man. Whereas, by giving more information than is required, Carl is shown in *Yes Man* movie as a spontaneous person which is still look funny.

In line with the genre of *Yes Man* movie which is included as a comedy-romantic movie, the analysis finds that the characters deliberately do not follow Grice’s Cooperative Principles as a purpose to generate laughter. This is proved by the implementation of the theory of humor in each dialogue. As a sub theory of humor, the Incongruity theory dominantly occurs in the humorous dialogues. According to the Incongruity theory (Latta as cited in Hassan, 2013), laughter is generated by the element of surprise which contains ambiguity and inconsistency which deliberately misleads the audience, followed by punchline. Therefore, the pun is the dominant element which constructs humor in *Yes Man* movie since the incongruity theory is considered as a linguistic approach of humor. Nevertheless, the main character (Carl Allen) which is shown as a spontaneous person also supports in generating laughter. The dialogue below is the example of the implementation of the theory of humor:

Allison: “Are you stalking me?”

Carl: “No. I would never do that. By the way, your new living-room furniture looks great from the yard”

(Moviesubtitles.org, 45.02)

Context of situation: *speaker*: Carl, *hearer*: Allison, *place*: in the bar, *time*: evening. Carl coincidentally meets a woman who helps him when he runs out of gas, Allison. Carl likes Allison.

According to the theory of Cooperative Principles, Carl’s utterance “*No. I would never do that. By the way, your new living-room furniture looks great from the yard*” is regarded as Flouting the Maxim of Quantity because Carl gives information more than is required. Based on the theory of Cooperative Principles, Carl should give the quantity of the information as informative as it is required by only saying “*No. I would never do that*”.

The inference drawn from Carl’s utterance is that Carl wants to be humorous to Allison. He tries to be a spontaneous person. Therefore, he will get closer relationship with Allison.

According to the theory of humor, especially the incongruity theory, which states that laughter is generated by the element of surprise which contains ambiguity and inconsistency which deliberately misleads the audience, followed by punchline, Carl’s utterance “*By the way, your new living-room furniture looks great from the yard*” triggers laughter because his utterance contains inconsistency which is incongruent with the expectation. Carl’s first sentence “*No, I would never do that*” shows that Carl does not stalk Allison. On the contrary, the second sentence “*By the way, your new living-room furniture looks great from the yard*” shows that Carl stalks Allison. The common information which Carl should give to Allison is that Carl assumingly follows the Maxim of Quantity by only saying “*No. I would never*”.

Finally, the incongruity of this dialogue lies on Carl’s flouting the Maxim of Quantity as his way to be humorous to Allison. Hence, this phenomenon is a stimulus that generates laughter because Carl’s utterance is incongruent with the expectation.

In conclusion, the formula of humor in *Yes Man* movie is constructed by 19 sentences that flout one Maxim which consist of 6 sentences flout the Maxim of Quality, 10 sentences flout the Maxim of Quantity, 1 sentence flouts the Maxim of Relation and 2 sentences flout the Maxim of Manner and 4 sentences that flout two Maxims (Maxim of Quantity and Maxim of Manner). Therefore, the Flouting Maxim of Quantity is the dominant formula which constructs humor in *Yes Man* movie.

Conclusion

The analysis shows that The reasons of the characters flout the Maxims are various according to what Maxims they flout. They are obtained by the help of context of situation in the movie. As Malinowsky (as cited in Halliday and Hassan, 1989:6) stated that context of situation is needed to comprehend the environmental senses of an utterance. The context of situation gives information about who the speaker is, who the hearer is, where the conversation takes place, and when the conversation happens.

In the dialogues of the characters in *Yes Man* movie, the character tends to flout the Maxim of Relation because they would like to be ignorance. Another Maxim flouted is Maxim of Quality. The reason is that they would like to be

sarcastic. The characters flout the Maxim of Quantity to indirectly emphasize their discomfort. The characters flout the Maxim of Manner to satirize their interlocutor. This shows that the types of Flouting the Maxims determine the reasons of the characters flouting the Maxims.

It is also found that the characters flout two Maxims to emphasize their implied meaning they want to deliver to other characters. The characters do not explicitly say what they want to say, but they implicitly emphasize their implied meaning by flouting the two Maxims.

From the analysis it is found that the characters in *Yes Man* movie dominantly flout the Maxim of Quantity to make a pun. Therefore, Carl Allen, as the main character, is shown as a withdrawn and spontaneous person since he involves in the dialogues which are flouted the maxim Quantity. By giving less information than is needed, Carl is shown as a withdrawn man. Whereas, by giving more information than is required, Carl is shown in *Yes Man* movie as a spontaneous person which is still look funny.

In line with the genre of *Yes Man* movie which is included as a comedy-romantic movie, the analysis finds that the characters deliberately do not follow Grice's Cooperative Principles as a purpose to generate laughter. This is proved by the implementation of the theory of humor in each dialogue. As a sub theory of humor, the Incongruity theory dominantly occurs in the humorous dialogues. According to the incongruity theory (Latta as cited in Hassan, 2013), laughter is generated by the element of surprise which contains ambiguity and inconsistency which deliberately misleads the audience, followed by punchline. Therefore, the pun is the dominant element which constructs humor in *Yes Man* movie since the incongruity theory is considered as a linguistic approach of humor. Nevertheless, the main character (Carl Allen) which is shown as a spontaneous person also supports in generating laughter.

In conclusion, the formula of humor in *Yes Man* movie is constructed by 19 sentences that flout one Maxim which consist of 6 sentences flout the Maxim of Quality, 10 sentences flout the Maxim of Quantity, 1 sentence flouts the Maxim of Relation and 2 sentences flout the Maxim of Manner and 4 sentences that flout two Maxims (Maxim of Quantity and Maxim of Manner). Therefore, the Flouting the Maxim of Quantity is the dominant formula which constructs humor in *Yes Man* movie.

Lastly, by comprehending the formula of humor in *Yes Man* movie, this study is expected to give a contribution in the field of pragmatics, particularly for the information of using flouting maxims. The finding of this study hopefully will provide knowledge about the intended meaning and how flouting maxims triggers humor in utterance. Hence, people will know the mechanism of humor based on pragmatic outlooks in order to avoid unpleasant and confusing feeling in their conversation.

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