

FLOUTING MAXIM IN CREATING VERBAL HUMOR IN THE PRETTY SMART NETFLIX SERIES

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Abstract: Humor is a complex social phenomenon generally encountered around us. It is repeatedly used in mass entertainment. However, humor is still a relatively uncommon topic in research. Therefore, this study attempts to uncover verbal humor in *Pretty Smart* Netflix Series. The two objectives of this study are to identify the types of flouting maxims and describe the flouting maxim employed by the characters to produce verbal humor. This research used a descriptive qualitative method by employing Grice's Cooperative Principle theory and Shade's verbal humor theory. Twenty floating maxims were included in the seven episodes of the *Pretty Smart* Series. The most frequent type found is the flouting maxim of quality, followed by the flouting maxim relation and the flouting maxim of quantity, and the last is the flouting maxim of manner. These flouting maxims create types of verbal humor, including jokes, irony, wit, and satire. This research can be used as a reference for further research to understand Pragmatics, particularly regarding the flouting maxims and verbal humor.

Keywords: *Schizophrenia, speech abnormality, A Beautiful Mind*

INTRODUCTION

Humor has an essential role in social interaction and human daily life. It is used not only to comfort oneself from sadness but also, according to Sujoko (1982), humor also has the function of conveying a desire and a message, as well as satire to make someone aware that he is not always accurate. Humor also teaches people to see problem from different perspectives, fosters tolerance, entertains, reduces stress, and makes people understand unique problems. Even though it is just a word game, humor cannot be separated from people of all ages. Humans need humor in various situations in both formal and informal communication, so that humor has a central role in human life.

Humor that involves language in delivering jokes can be categorized as verbal humor. Verbal humor is any form of speech capable of producing humor and is not limited to word games and language games (Shade, 1996). The audience can enjoy verbal humor when the actors involved in the humor program express utterances that make the audience laugh. Verbal humor can occur because of the differences in understanding meaning or context between speakers and listeners.

Understanding contextual meaning closely relates to one branch of linguistics called Pragmatics. It studies the relationship between the meaning of the context outside the language and the meaning of speech. It also examines the relationship between meaning of the context outside the language and speech by discussing a situation in the narrative situation. Accordingly, Crystal (1987) states that Pragmatics is a linguistics study that examines the influence of language choice in social interaction on listeners and the factors driving the choice of language. Theoretically, we can say something as we wish, but practically we unconsciously have to follow several social rules. Moreover, Purwo (1990) defines Pragmatics as the study of the meaning of speech that uses contextual meaning. Examining the meaning of context in verbal humor requires objects that contain elements of humor. In this case, the researcher will explore the humor in the Netflix series entitled *Pretty Smart*.

Pretty Smart series is a sitcom from America created by Doug Mand and Jack Dolgen. This series consists of 10 episodes, starring Emily Osment as Chelsea, Gregg Sulkin as Grant, Olivia Macklin as Claire, Cinthya Carmona as Solana, and Michael Hsu Rosen as Jayden. This series tells the story of a novelist and her roommate. *Pretty Smart's* story begins when Chelsea, a Harvard-educated novelist, recently broke up with her boyfriend. Chelsea is forced to move and live with her cheerful and jolly sister, Claire, and her three eccentric roommates. The other three best friends are a handsome athletic trainer named Grant, a former lawyer, Solana, and an Instagram influencer, Jayden (Netflix.com). The series premieres on October 8, 2021, exclusively on Netflix.

Pretty Smart represented the millennial generation. It can be seen from the language used and the characters described in the film. Moreover, *Pretty Smart* is set in the daily life of a group of teenagers and a friendship that continues to develop in the midst of trouble. It is a good film for millennial teens because it relates to their daily lives.

This study analyses the verbal humor found in the *Pretty Smart* Netflix series based on Richard Shade's and Grice's theory. It classifies a few verbal

humor types based on the classification of verbal humor according to Richard Shade and analyzes the verbal humor that flouts the Grice maxims theory. On that basis, this in-depth study aims to obtain a clear and deep understanding of verbal humor.

Verbal humor analysis studies have been studied by several previous researchers. It can be traced in various scientific journal portals. Researchers have found several previous studies that used verbal humor analysis studies and were quite relevant to the research the researcher was going to do. Researchers divide it into three research trends.

The first trend is research on verbal humor using Grice's maxims theory, violations and flouting of conversational maxims in Sitcom causes verbal humor, analysis of verbal humor based on the cooperative principle, the ambiguity in verbal humor, and devaluation of Grice's maxims of conversation. The second trend is research on verbal humor using the theory of humor by Shade and the general theory of verbal humor (GTVH). Last, the third trend is research on verbal humor in songs.

Based on the three trends above, the researcher found similarities and differences with this present research. The similarity lies in the analysis of verbal humor. Meanwhile, the difference lies in the focus of the analysis of verbal humor, which is only based on Grice's maxim; such as verbal humor made with a violation and flouting maxim conversational, cooperative principle, ambiguities in linguistic verbal humor and devaluation of Grice's maxims of conversation as the data (Amianna & Putranti, 2017), (Qiu, 2019), (Ocampo, 2020), (Al-Zubeiry, 2020), (Wen, 2021), and (Tian-yu, 2021). This study, therefore, uses two theories to solve the two problem formulations.

The focus of the second trend is the analysis of verbal humor using the humor theory by Shade and the general theory of verbal humor (GTVH) (Azka & Hamzah, 2019), (Wahyuni & Hamzah, 2019) and (Bhaskoro, 2019). The third is the analysis of verbal humor in the song (Saragi et al., 2018). Meanwhile, this research concerns on humor in Netflix series, in general, to classify humor into Shade theory collaborated with analysis linguistic using Grice's theory, flouting maxim.

Based on the similarities and differences above, the position of this research against previous studies is to add the analysis of verbal humor in the Netflix series entitled *Pretty Smart*. Therefore, it departs from the assumption that in-depth exploration of verbal humor is still needed; this research is still

very feasible to do. As for several previous studies, the results of the analysis can be compared with the present study. It aimed to identify the type of maxim flouting in the *Pretty Smart* Netflix Series. It also aimed at describing the flouting maxim used by the characters to create verbal humor.

METHOD

Research Design

This research aimed to analyze the verbal humor used by the characters in the *Pretty Smart* series. Therefore, a qualitative descriptive method is used to analyze verbal humor in the movie. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative descriptive is a method used to find the meaning of a social phenomenon that occurs in society. Therefore, it is in accordance with the purpose of this study which examines the social phenomenon, namely verbal humor. In this research, the cooperative principle theory was used to facilitate researchers in analyzing data and answering the two problem formulations.

Data collection and analysis

It took several steps to collect the data. First, the researchers searched for data sources from Netflix and downloaded the data. Next, the researcher collects all verbal humor data from the film and ignores humor other than verbal humor, so this study focuses more on verbal humor. The researchers then observed and listened to the conversations in each episode. Then the researchers watched the video repeatedly to collect humorous conversations. After that, the researchers wrote down all the conversations that contained humor.

This current research employed two theories to answer the two research questions. The two theories are Richard Shade's theory of verbal humor classification and Grice's theory of flouting maxim. There were several steps in analyzing the data to answer the two problem formulations. First, the researchers read the data in detail by paying attention to the script's words, clauses, phrases, and sentences. After understanding all the types of verbal humor, the next stage was classifying all verbal humor found in the series into twelve categories: pun, riddle, joke, satire, limerick, parody, anecdote, farce, irony, sarcasm, tall tale, and wit. This step is needed to answer the first problem. To answer the second research question, the researchers identified verbal humor from the conversations among the characters in the film that violated maxims. After that, the data were classified and analyzed based on Grice's theory. The last step is to draw research conclusions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Types of Flouting Maxim in the *Pretty Smart Netflix* series

The results show that the most frequent flouting maxim used by the characters are flouting the maxim of quality, flouting the maxim of relation, flouting the maxim of quantity, and flouting the maxim of manner. The summary is presented in figure 1.

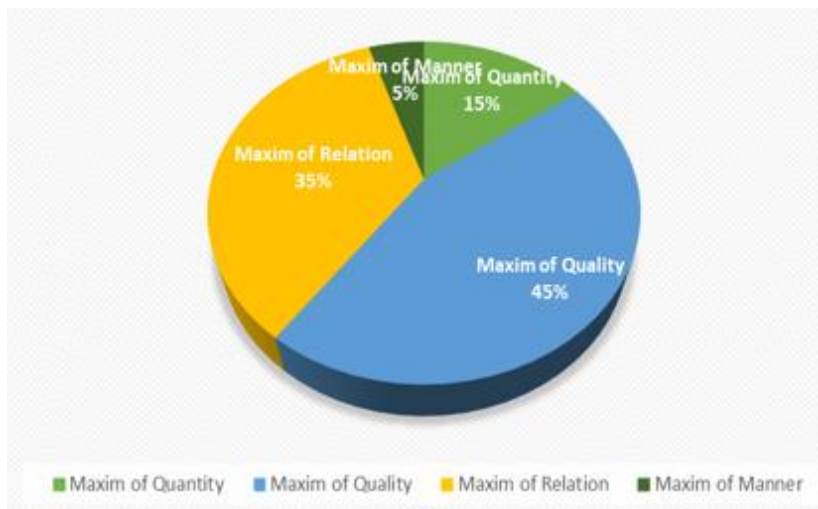


Figure 1. Types of Flouting Maxim

The following are the details of each type of flouting maxim with examples of the data.

a. Flouting of the Quality Maxim

The maxim of quality occurs when the speakers say that they do not follow the facts or lies and their utterances do not match with what they think, even though they have spoken clearly. In this situation, the speakers speak sarcastically and hope the listeners will understand the meaning of what they are saying. It occurs when the speakers say something that looks fake.

Grant: Welcome to our home.

Margot: It's nice to meet you, Chelsea says you're a scientist.

Grant: Yes, I'm a microwave-ologist.

Margot: A microwaveologist?

Grant: Yes, that is what I said. (Data 2)

In episode 3 (09:40 – 09:48), Chelsea arrives with Margot, who is a college friend and rival of Chelsea in college until now. Chelsea tells Grant to lie to Margot and tells Grant to pretend to be a scientist in the field of microbiology. But Grant misheard Chelsea's word microbiologist, so when he met Margot Grant said microwave-ologist. It happened because Grant lacked of information about scientists, so he thought the job existed.

The bolded sentences of data 2 contain the flouting maxim of quality. Grant flouts the maxim of quality twice. It is because Grant did not say anything based on facts. In other words, Grant lied to Margot that he was a scientist. Even though it was done intentionally and ordered by Chelsea, technically, Grant has flouted the maxim of quality by saying that he is a scientist when he is a gym instructor.

b. Flouting of the Relation Maxim

Flouting the maxim of relation occurs when the speaker overreacts to the topic being discussed on purpose. Another thing that can cause flouting of the maxim of relation is when the speaker does not speak according to the discussed topic. Cutting (2002) adds that someone is said to violate relational maxims when the speaker says it is not following what he thinks but connects his words to the topic being discussed in the hope that the speaker can understand the implied meaning in the speaker's words. The example is in the following:

Grant: Not every lid has a perfect match, Jay, I have to accept that.

Jayden: I know sweetie. This Tupperware mission took a lot out of me too. (Data 4)

In this scene, Grant declares his love for Claire, but with a heavy heart, Claire doesn't accept it because Claire prefers Grant to be her best friend. It causes Grant to be heartbroken, and then Grant goes into the house to the kitchen where there is Jayden looking for the missing jar. It can be seen from episode 5 (24:11 – 24:30). Grant produces a figurative sentence by expressing his heart feeling to Jayden, that Grant was hurt after Claire rejected his love. But Jayden didn't know what Grant had just experienced, so Jayden assumed that the sentence that Grant had just said was a sentence that didn't have any meaning or could be called a denotative sentence.

The bolded sentences contain the flouting maxim of relation. Jayden couldn't understand the meaning of Grant's sentence because Grant and Jayden spent all day trying to find the missing jar, and all that was left was the lid of the jar. So, when he heard Grant's words, Jayden immediately assumed that Grant was tired of looking for the jar and wanted just to give up. However, hearing Grant's words at that time, Jayden immediately calmed Grant and said that he also felt tired of the Tupperware jar search mission. It indicates that Jayden has changed the subject even though he did so by accident which is included in flouting the maxim of relation.

c. Flouting of the Maxim Quantity

Flouting of the quantity maxim occurs when a speaker provides too much or too little information and unnecessary information to the listener. The example is as follows:

Jayden: oh, my god, you guys. A troll tearing me a part in my comments.

Isn't that great?

Grant: I thought trolls were bad (Data 8)

The conversation above is taken from episode 7 (08:17 – 08:25). In this scene, Jayden looks panicked because he sees hate comments on his Instagram account, then he tells Grant and Claire. Jayden said “oh, my god, you guys. A troll tearing me a part in my comments”, he paused before continuing his words. It caused Grant and Claire to assume that Jayden was in trouble with hate comments on his Instagram account. Grant and Claire feel sorry for Jayden, this is shown by Grant and Claire's expressions. A few moments later, Jayden continued his words, "isn't that great?" Hearing the continuation of Jayden's words, Grant and Claire felt confused because what Jayden said did not match the general facts. In this context, the general fact is that there are hate comments on Jayden's Instagram account. In general, hate comments are not a good thing, but Jayden is happy about it.

The bolded sentences contain the flouting maxim of quantity. In this scene, Jayden has flouted the maxim of quantity. Jayden gave too little information to Grant and Claire by cutting him off to make Grant thinks in the context of Jayden's given meaning. Then Jayden continued his words by blatantly not meeting the maxim of quantity which in principle expects the speaker to provide information according to what is needed by the listener, not too much or too little.

d. Flouting the Maxim of Manner

When someone has failed to fulfill the maxim of manner, it can be said that the speaker has flouted the maxim of manner. These principles are to speak, not to use words or sentences that cause ambiguity, to avoid ambiguity in speech, to speak briefly, not be too rambling, and to speak systematically. The following is an example of the flouting of the maxim of manner.

Solana: you know I date Ezra?

Jayden: from your yoga class.

Solana: then I date Marley.

Jayden: From the herbal remedy shop.

Solana: and I dated river.

Jayden: from the river

The conversation is taken from episode 9 (08:52 – 09:02). In this scene, Solana mentions some of the friends she had dated to Jayden to remind Jayden. However, Solana has flouted the maxim of Manner. Even though Solana has fulfilled the four maxims of manner, namely perspicuous, avoid obscurity of expression, Be brief, and Be orderly, Solana does not fulfill one of the five maxims of manner, namely, Avoid ambiguity. So that Jayden can't understand the meaning of Solana and raises the ambiguity of the word "River". Here the "River" spoken by Solana gives rise to two different meanings and contexts, the first context is "River" as the name of a friend that Solana had dated, and the second context meaning is "River" as a river of actual meaning.

The bolded sentences contain the flouting maxim of manner. After repeatedly seeing the conversation between Solana and Jayden, the researcher can conclude that the meaning of the word "River" spoken by Solana is the name of someone Solana had dated. It can be seen from the structure of Solana's speech from the beginning. From the beginning, Solana systematically mentioned the names of the people he had dated. Jayden replied by mentioning the place where Solana met, Solana said the second name, and Jayden also replied. Then when Solana mentions his last name, which is "River", Jayden cannot understand what Solana means. Therefore, it is clear that Solana flouts the Maxim of Manner.

The use of flouting maxim in *Pretty Smart* to create verbal humor

In this research, the data that had been collected amounted to twenty data. Then the analysis used the theory of classification of verbal humor by Shade (1997) to describe how flouting maxims used by the characters in the Netflix series *Pretty Smart*. Shade (1997) categorizes verbal humor into twelve types: pun, riddle, joke, satire, limerick, parody, anecdote, farce, irony, sarcasm, tall tale, and wit. The frequent appearance of verbal humor in sequence is joke, irony, satire, and wit. The result of the analysis can be seen in figure 2.

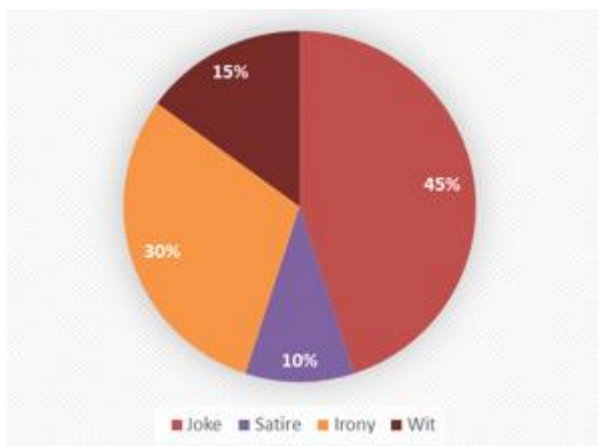


Figure 2. Types of Verbal Humor Created by Flouting Maxim

The detail of the analysis of verbal humor created by flouting maxim is as follows.

a. Joke

Any funny utterances involving words with more than one meaning, idioms, metaphors, weirdness, ambiguity, and change of perspective can be said to be jokes. According to Shade (1997), jokes can be divided into five categories: Phonological Jokes, Lexical Jokes, Surface Structure Jokes, Deep Structure Jokes, and metalinguistic jokes. In this study, there are only three types of jokes from five categories of jokes, namely lexical jokes, deep structure jokes, and metalinguistic jokes. In addition, two types of jokes are not found in the data: phonological and surface structure.

1) Phonological Joke

The phonological structure of the word has an important role in the formation of humor in this type. Phonological jokes can result from the sound of words causing misleading and misunderstanding.

Data 2 shows the context that Grant misheard the word Chelsea said, namely "microbiologist." Grant heard it as "microwaveologist" because the pronunciation of the two words is almost the same. The humor does not happen in the scene where Chelsea tells Grant to lie, but when Grant meets Margot. The humor can occur because Grant flouts the maxim of quality. Grant lies to Margot at the time about her job, so Grant lacks information about a scientist's work so he insists that his job is "microwaveologist" which does not exist. It causes the audience to laugh because there is no job as a microwaveologist.

2) Lexical Joke

Lexical jokes occur because there are differences in the meaning of a word. The humorous effect created by these kinds of jokes is highly dependent on words with multiple meanings, and misleading interpretations that differ from what they should be.

In data 5, Solana flouts the maxim of manner because Solana uses ambiguous words in her speech. Solana said "River", in which River has two meanings, the first meaning is someone's name and the second meaning is the literal meaning of the word "river". It led to Jayden. In this scene, verbal humor occurs when Jayden misinterprets the word "River" literally, which contradicts what Solana meant. Jayden was confused and might think Solana had dated someone from the river.

3) Deep Structure Joke

A deep structure joke is a type of verbal humor whose humor lies in misinterpreting a word or phrase. Jokes from this type of joke are when some phrases or words contain ambiguous meanings that cause two alternative contexts or interpretations.

In data 1, Grant flouts the maxim of relation twice. The first happened when Grant didn't understand what Chelsea said: "the endorphins are contagious." The second was when Chelsea said, "Staph infection" Grant also couldn't understand the meaning of the phrase that Chelsea spoke, so Grant changed the topic being discussed. Verbal humor that resulted from the flouts of the maxim that Grant did occur because of Grant's emergence of alternative interpretations.

In the first flouts, Grant does not understand what endorphins are, so Grant interprets endorphins as infectious diseases. So, he talked about a contagious disease infecting people in the gym. Then Chelsea asked if it was a staph infection. Grant misinterprets the word "staff". Verbal humor occurs when Grant answers not only staff but customers as well. Since there is a misinterpretation of Chelsea's speech, it can be included in verbal humor, a type of deep structure joke.

a. Satire

Satire is humor in which there is criticism or satire, but this satire includes humor. The burden of humor criticism is created by exaggerating or understating facts. In data 9, Grant flouts the maxim of quality and causes satirical verbal humor. Grant aims to satirize Claire in the hope that Claire can understand the implied meaning of Grant's words. Here Grant wants to convey the implicit meaning in his words and criticizes Dave that Dave is a sucker because he cannot adequately explain what a 401k is to Grant.

b. Irony

The irony is a speech containing statements contradictory or inversely proportional to the existing reality, or the meaning is opposite to the actual meaning. The point of humor lies in the contradictory utterances. In data 3, Jayden creates irony and verbal humor by flouting the maxim of quality. Verbal humor occurs when Jayden says things that contradict what happened. In this case, Jayden said that the drink he ordered was not delicious, but ironically, he ordered the same drink again, which made the audience laugh at it.

In data 7, Dave has flouted the maxim of quality because Dave does not speak truthfully, or it can be said that Dave has lied to Claire. Dave deliberately flouts the maxim of quality by lying because Dave doesn't want to hurt Claire's feelings by telling the truth that his work is really bad. It indicates that flouting the maxim of quality can have a humorous effect. In this case, the humor that is created is irony.

c. Wit

The use of clever words to create a humorous and intellectual effect by causing a sudden change in perception of a topic under discussion is called wit. In data 11, it occurs when Grant flouts the maxim of quantity. Grant said that his mother liked Chelsea, and this made Chelsea feel happy, but later, Grant explained that his mother not only liked him but liked everyone. It makes Chelsea's perception of Grant's mother, who likes him, change suddenly.

In data 15, Jayden flouts the maxim of quantity to create a wit-humor effect. In this case, Jayden said that he had won a quiz. For a moment, Claire felt that Jayden was great. Then Jayden said he could win the quiz because none of his opponents or other contestants took the quiz. It causes a sudden change in Claire's perception, at first, she thought Jayden was great, then the perception changed.

From the results of the research, it can be concluded that the flouting maxim is related to the type of verbal humor created from the flouting maxim. It can be seen in Table 1

Table 1. The relation between maxim flouting and the type of verbal humor

Flouting the Maxim of Quantity	Flouting the Maxim of Quality	Flouting the Maxim of Relation	Flouting the Maxim of Manner
Wit	Irony and Joke	Joke	Joke
Datum 11 and 15	Datum 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 13, 16, 17, and 19	Datum 4, 6, 10, 12, 14, 18, and 20	Datum 5

Table 1 shows that the pattern of verbal humor results from the flouting maxim of quality, relation, and manner always leading to one type of verbal humor, namely jokes. It is apparent that the flouting maxim is related to the creation of verbal humor.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings on the types of flouting maxim found in the Netflix series *Pretty Smart*, the dominant floating maxims is on quality. It is followed by floating maxims of relation and floating maxims of quantity. The last one is flouting the maxim of manner. In addition, the result of the analysis shows that the flouting maxim has a relation to the creation of verbal humor.

Concerning how the flouting maxim is used by the characters in the Netflix series *Pretty Smart*, it can be concluded that flouting the maxim can create humor, especially verbal humor. A joke is the most common verbal humor in the *Pretty Smart* series, while the rest are scattered in satire, irony, and wit. The flouting maxim of quantity produces verbal humor of wit, the flouting maxim of quality produces verbal humor of irony and jokes, and the flouting maxim

relation and manners also produce verbal humor jokes. The purpose of the characters in the Pretty Smart series to flout the maxims is to create various types of humor so that they can make the audience laugh.

SUGGESTIONS

The first suggestion is for writers of comedy genre films to consider increasing the use of flouting the maxim of quality on characters in writing scripts. It is because flouting the maxim of quality can create very funny humor. The scriptwriters can also expand the verbal humor produced by flouting other maxims besides quantity.

The second suggestion is for other future researchers that should examine the same topic to use objects from mass media in the spontaneous comedy genre. It is due to the fact that this study used the object of the film, which is creating humor in the role of the scriptwriter. Therefore, it is highly recommended for future researchers to select research objects in the spontaneous comedy genre.

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