

Characters' Use of Flouting Maxims to Build Humor in Situational Comedy Series *Fresh off the Boat* Season 1

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ABSTRACT

This research is conducted to identify types, strategies, and functions of flouting maxims and types of humor theory in the utterances produced by the characters in *Fresh off the Boat* Season 1. The discussion is then used to analyze the relation between characters' roles in the story and their goals, the choice of flouting maxims, and the type of humor that later resulted. This research is qualitative descriptive research that applies a pragmatic approach. The data were examined using four steps of analysis: domain analysis, taxonomy analysis, componential analysis, and cultural theme analysis. The result shows that the roles of the characters and their goals in conversation influence the choice of types and strategies of flouting maxims, which later also affected the types of humor theory. The positive functions tended to fall into the incongruity theory type of humor, while the negative functions were more likely to produce the superiority and relief theories type of humor.

1. INTRODUCTION

Flouting maxims relates to a situation in which a speaker does not observe the maxims but wants the listener to figure out the implied meaning or implicature of his/her utterances (Cutting, 2002). This indicates that the speaker's words and meanings are not the same. Flouting maxim, other than violating maxim, is often used as a way to create humor as proposed by Grice (1989, as cited in Attardo, 1994). Humor itself is one of the tools that people use to communicate with each other. Humor's impact on human life is so great that it may be seen in a variety of contexts, including the media, literature, and even politics (Ross, 1998). The influence of humor makes many scholars' studies how humor can be created. Therefore, the characters' use of flouting maxims to create humor and the functions of their utterances are investigated in this study. The location of this study is a situational comedy series with the title *Fresh off the Boat* produced by 20th Century Fox Television for ABC that is also distributed by Disney Plus. There are also other researchers who study the types of flouting maxims in the comedy like (Amianna & Putranti, 2017; Aziz et al, 2019, Noftriana et al, 2014) or types of flouting maxims and techniques of jokes (Puspasari & Ariyanti, 2019). However, the relation between flouting maxims with the theories of humor and the implicatures that served as the functions have not been examined which is essential to see how humor is built by the characters.

1.1. Pragmatic

In communication, the speaker's utterances will be interpreted based on the context captured by the listener. This interpretation of the speaker's words is called pragmatics (Yule, 1996). Pragmatic is so significant that Leech (1983) believed that people cannot truly comprehend the nature of language without first comprehending pragmatics, or how language is utilized in communication. According to Jacob L. Mey (2001), pragmatics' use is too broad to be limited to linguistic matter alone. He claimed that because society regulates people's access to language and communicative means, pragmatics must deal with social context. Thus, he defined pragmatics as the study of language use in human communication as influenced by societal situations.

1.2. Cooperative Principle

Grice (1975) coined the term "conversational implicature," which refers to an indirect meaning that can be interpreted from someone's utterance. The presence of an indirect meaning in a conversation prompted Grice to outline several principles that must be fulfilled by someone in a conversation in order for it to run smoothly, also known as the cooperative principle. There are four categories of cooperative principle that need to be fulfilled according to Grice (1975), they are maxim of quality, maxim of quantity, maxim of relation, and maxim of manner.

1.3. Flouting Maxim

The activity of someone who blatantly fails to observe the cooperative principle by Grice (1975) is considered as flouting a maxim. This is clarified by Cutting (2002) as an action when someone does not follow maxims but hopes and assumes that listeners can interpret the hidden meaning of their utterances. Flouting maxim of a quality, flouting maxim of quantity, flouting maxim of relation and flouting maxim of manner are the four types of flouting maxims.

Strategies of Flouting Maxim Quality:

- Metaphor: Calling something by using something else that is different to make a comparison is called metaphor. Metaphor can be applied as a strategy to flout the maxim of quality (Cutting, 2002).
- Hyperbole: In conversation, people often exaggerate to make the conversation more enchanting or in other words being hyperbole. Hyperbole can be used as a strategy to flout maxim of quality. It also can create a humorous situation (Cutting, 2002).
- Irony: Irony is used when people want to mock or offend someone but in a polite way (mock-politeness) (Leech, 1983, as cited in Cutting, 2002). It is also one of the strategies for flouting the maxim of quality.
- Rhetorical Question: A rhetorical question, according to Frank (1990), is one that does not expect an answer. The speaker says it to make a remark or prompts an effect rather than to produce an answer.
- Overstatement: Overstatement or giving too much information than is required is a common way to flout the maxim of quantity (Thomas, 1995).
- Understatement: Understatement happens when the speaker gives insufficient information than is required in the conversation (Thomas, 1995).
- Being Irrelevant: In a conversation, it is necessary for the interlocutor to speak in a relevant manner so that it can run smoothly. But, sometimes being irrelevant can be used to avoid certain questions or situations.
- Being ambiguous: Other than being honest, direct, and relevant someone needs to be clear with what she/he means. Being clear here means that someone needs to avoid any possible ambiguity in her/his utterance. But some situations may make someone need to be obscure.

1.4. Implicature

Conversation that has flouting maxim in it will generate to the production of implicature. Implicature according to Grice (1975) is what someone implied that is different from what they said. Yule (1996) defines implicature as thing that is communicated beyond what the speaker is said. From these definitions, context then plays an important role to know the implied meaning of someone's utterances. In this research, implicature serves as the function of flouting maxims to help the researcher find the goal in the characters' conversation.

1.5. Context

The context of utterances is important to deepen the understanding of what the speakers say in conversation. Context refers to any presumptive background knowledge that the interlocutors possess which will be useful in the interpretation process (Leech, 1983). In other words, people in the same conversation subconsciously share the same knowledge or information about the thing they are talking about and can interpret the utterances by using that knowledge.

1.6. Theories of Humor

There are three types of humor theory according to Attardo (1994). They are incongruity theories, superiority theories, and relief theories. Incongruity Theory deals with how people laugh at something that is incongruent or do not go together whether or not it is caused by accident or on purpose (Kant, 1951, as cited in Lytle, 2007). The most prominent feature to use in incongruity is ambiguity that is used to mislead the audience and later will be closed by punchline (Ross, 1998). Therefore, surprise is an essential element in it. In Superiority Theory, it is believed that people laugh at the misfortune of themselves or other people (Hobbes, 1651, as cited in Ross, 1998). This theory suggests that the laughter people do at the misfortune of someone or something, gives them some kind of superiority feelings. Therefore, humor is sometimes used as a tool to mock someone (Ross, 1998). Release

theory assumes that humor releases some kind of psychic energy and/or releases the individual from some constraint (Attardo, 2008). This is in line with Ross (1998) that defines this theory as laughter that is resulted from the success of someone in overcoming threat. Aggression is one thing of constraint or threat.

1.7. *Fresh off the Boat*

Fresh off the Boat is an American situational comedy (sitcom) produced by 20th Century Fox Television for ABC. It has 116 episodes that are divided into six seasons. This series is set between 1995 and 2000 and tells the story of a Taiwanese-American family named the Huangs, who consist of parents Louis and Jessica and their three sons, Eddie, Emery, and Evan, as well as Loui's mother, Jenny. They moved from Washington, D.C., to Orlando, Florida, in order to make a better living than they had before. In Washington, D.C., Louis worked in a shop owned by his brother-in-law, but he felt uncomfortable working there as his brother-in-law made him feel small. Therefore, he looked for a new opportunity in Orlando. In season 1 of this series, the Huangs' family faced many difficulties to overcome, such as their annoying female neighbors, the kids in Eddie's school, the business that is not doing well, and some others.

2. METHOD

This research focuses on the types, strategies and functions carried out by the characters in the *Fresh off the Boat* in order to create humorous situations. In this research, a pragmatic approach was adopted. The floating maxims and their functions in the conversation happened in the story were examined using pragmatics, a branch of linguistics that focuses on meaning in language. Meanwhile, humor in this series will be examined using humor-related approaches such as incongruity theory, superiority theory, and relief theory.

The design of this research is descriptive qualitative research with a single embedded case study. Qualitative research is a process of inquiry to understand social or human problems in their natural setting (Creswell, 2002). The reality of qualitative research is plural, constructed, and holistic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as cited in Santosa, 2021). This means, the reality of the floating maxim research in the series must be seen as multiple realities based on contexts in which all of its components must be used as a whole. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized. In addition, this research was conducted using qualitative research because it used linguistic phenomena as a data source, especially the types, strategies, and functions to create humor carried out by the characters in the situational comedy series *Fresh off the Boat*.

This research is also descriptive research because it described the flouting maxims and humors as the product throughout the entire episodes of the series. The single embedded case study was also applied because this research used a predetermined location which is the *Fresh off the Boat* situational comedy series aired in 2015 and produced by 20th Century Fox Television for ABC that is also distributed by Disney Plus. The location for this research is *Fresh off the Boat* Disney Plus series and the participants are the characters in the story. The event is the dialogues in the series that contain flouting maxims and create humor.

The data source in this research is the utterances in the *Fresh off the Boat* series from episode 1 to 12 that contain flouting maxim and create humor. Data types include both primary and secondary data. The data in this study are primary data because the data were taken directly from the source without involving a second party. Primary data contains descriptions of situations, events and participants, and interactions of research objects along with focus and context (Patton, 1980 as cited in Santosa, 2021). The primary data in this study is in the form of utterances in verbal conversation by the characters in the story which were needed to examine the types, strategies and functions in the flouting maxims.

Purposive sampling was employed in this study with the criteria that the data include the types, strategies, and functions of flouting maxims that create humor carried out by the characters in the entire series from episode 1 to 12. In this research, triangulation of data sources was used as one method of data validity. Triangulation of data sources was done through the use of the situational comedy series and its script. The data collection method was not adopted because it was done only by content analysis.

Domain analysis, taxonomy, componential analysis, and cultural themes were the four stages of analysis used to examine the data in this study (Spradely, 1980 as cited in Santosa, 2021). Domain analysis is used to differentiate between data and non-data as well as to identify the source of the data. Based on the theoretical framework employed, taxonomic analysis is utilized to categorize the data. Meanwhile, component analysis is needed to observe the relationship between categories, which are domain categories and taxonomy analysis to obtain relational patterns. Analysis of cultural themes as the last stage is employed to discuss the relational patterns that have been identified in the componential analysis.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

3.1.1. Types of Flouting Maxim

There are 112 utterances said by the characters that flouted the four maxims and created humor. The characters flouted maxim of quality 62 times, maxim of quantity 14 times, maxim of relation 7 times and maxim of manner 26 times.

Table 3.1. Types of Flouting Maxim

Types of Flouting Maxim	Total
Flouting Maxim of Quality	62
Flouting Maxim of Quantity	14
Flouting Maxim of Relation	7
Flouting Maxim of Manner	26

3.1.2. Strategies of Flouting Maxim

In flouting maxims, the characters in the series employed many strategies such as hyperbole (8), metaphor (38), irony (7), rhetorical question (9), overstatement (11), understatement (3), being irrelevant (7), and ambiguity (26).

Table 3.2. Strategies of Flouting Maxims

Strategies of Flouting Maxims	Total
Hyperbole	8
Metaphor	38
Irony	7
Rhetorical question	9
Overstatement	11
Understatement	3
Being irrelevant	7
Ambiguity	26

3.1.3. Functions of Flouting Maxim

The use of flouting maxims in the series serves for many purposes depending on the context. There are 21 functions of flouting maxims employed by characters throughout the story. They are refusing, sharing, mocking, reminding, complaining, doubting, boasting, changing topics, warning, persuading, accepting, eluding, threatening, requesting, seeking attention, competing, asking, negotiating, and lying.

3.1.4. Flouting Maxim and Their Relation to Three Theories of Humor

- Incongruity theory

Example:

Louis/Ep1/00:01:53-00:02:09/Sharing/MN/Amb/Inc

Eddie : Ugh, dad! Turn off the music!

Louis : Eddie, I know you're not excited to leave D.C., but you're gonna love Orlando. I've been there for six months setting up the restaurant, and I've grown to love it like the daughter we wished Evan had been.

Eddie was not excited about moving to Orlando from Washington, D.C. On the way to Orlando in the car, Louis played happy music loudly. Eddie, who heard this, felt annoyed and asked him to turn off the music. Louis knew it was not just about the music that Eddie got annoyed with but also because of their move to Orlando. He then said, "Eddie, I know you're not excited to leave D.C., but you're going to love Orlando. I've been there for six months setting up the restaurant, and I've grown to love it like the daughter we wish Evan had been." In these utterances, at first Louis was promising Eddie that he would love Orlando because he had been there to set up the restaurant. But then, the utterances grew into how the time he spent setting up the restaurant had made him love Orlando like he wished Evan had. Here, the phrase "and I've grown to love it like the daughter we wished Evan had been." was not an utterance that would not be expected by Eddie because the topic was differed from the preceding conversation. In this context, the humor was produced by the incongruity that happened between how Louis spent six months setting up his restaurant and how those six months were being compared to how long he wished Evan was a daughter before Evan was born. Other than that, the wish that Louis had about Evan also served as a punchline, which is served to create surprise as one of the elements in incongruity theory type of humor.

- Superiority theory
Example:
Eddie/Ep4/00:09:27- 00:09:46/Mocking/QL/Met/sup
Justin : You want to listen to some real grown-up music?
Justin : Oh, it's so good.
Eddie : This woman's terrible.

Eddie was confused about why Justin seemed to change as a person. He became more emotional. Because of that, Eddie tried to wake Justin up by turning on the music they used to like. Upon hearing the music, Justin then turned off the music and offered Eddie to listen to the music he was listening to at the time. Unexpectedly, Justin's taste in music had changed drastically from it was before. Eddie then said, "This woman's terrible." Here, Eddie used metaphor to mock Justin's taste in music. He equated music to women as a derogatory term and used the adjective "terrible" to emphasize more that Justin's taste was not good. There was a sense of superiority coming from Eddie. He considered his taste in hip-hop music better than Justin's, who liked slow music more. The phrase "this woman's terrible" contains a humorous effect because Eddie just said the phrase mercilessly just to mock Justin.

- Release theory
Example:
12/Ep2/00:16:43-00:16:44/Threatening/QL/Iro/Rlf
Jessica : Hey. (Jessica hits the boys with her car)
Boys : Oh!

Some boys came to the Cattleman Ranch and had planned to run away before paying the bills. However, Louis trusted to fully believe them, but he got betrayed at the end. Jessica, who had predicted that they would do so, wanted to punish Louis but could not because the employees in the restaurant wanted to pay the bills together because of Louis' goodwill. Jessica was moved by this and wanted to teach the boys some lessons. She looked for them and when she found them, she hit them with her car. She greeted them with "Hey" when she hit them. This greeting was humorous because welcomes are typically used in a positive setting, such as when someone wants to know about the well-being of others. Here, irony became a tool to adopt the release humor theory, which states that humor can be formed by someone releasing some kind of psychic energy or tension in order to be liberated from some constraint. The boys' actions towards Louis weighed on Jessica's mind and created emotions of revenge. Thus, when Jessica bumped into the boys with a casual and unapologetic "Hey", it sparked laughter.

3.2. Discussion

There are similarities between Jessica, Louis, and Eddie in terms of types and strategies of flouting maxims and types of jokes that they produced. All of them flouted maxim of quality and manner the most. They also exploited metaphor and ambiguity the most in flouting maxims, and the negative implications resulted in many superiority types of humor.

Flouting maxim of quality and manner became the most utilized maxims by them in creating humor. This finding is consistent with the findings of Aziz (2019), who researched flouting maxims in Indonesian comedy films and discovered that maxims of manner, quality, and quantity were the most flouted maxims.

In term of metaphor as strategy, they liked to compare one idea to another by using nouns or verbs. It means that they saw a resemblance between the two items, which is consistent with Kovecses' (2002) claim that metaphor is founded on a resemblance between two phenomena that are compared and identified. Meanwhile in applying ambiguity, they liked to put a punchline in the utterance. This is consistent with what Ross (1998) noted about ambiguity that followed by punchline being the most obvious aspect of humor.

Subsequently, when these three characters flouted maxims to achieve implicatures that were negative, like boasting, etc., the humor that later would be produced tended to fall into the categories of superiority theory and release theory types of humor. The relation between negative implicatures and these two theories of humor is based on the fact that, as Hobbes said in Ross (1998), laughter can be aroused by the sudden glory of our own triumph or an indignity endured by someone else. Then, the reason why metaphor and ambiguity strategies were used by them mostly to produce superiority and release theories types of humor is because metaphor and ambiguity word often have double meaning which makes them indirect and sound less disrespectful.

Louis, Jessica, and Eddie were also the characters that employed a release theory type of humor. In Eddie and Louis's cases the use of release theory type of humor was for adult related topics. It differs from Jessica who used it to threaten her interlocutors by releasing physical energy or tension. The use of flouting maxims by them to

create this type of humor is in line with what Ross (1998) stated that joking can be used to establish talk on taboo topic because by joking people maintain some boundaries but at the same time breaking some rules.

Emery and Evan are the last two characters to flout the maxims. Because the plot did not focus as much on them, they flouted maxims less frequently than other characters in the family. Furthermore, because they were the second and last children, they did not have many opportunities to have a voice in the family.

Emery and Evan have a lot in common when it comes to their strategies for flouting maxims. They both used hyperbole, metaphor, rhetorical questions, and ambiguity. Ambiguity is a powerful tool for them to produce superiority theory type of humor.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

According to the findings and discussion on the above, functions or implicatures play a role in determining the types and strategies of flouting maxims that are chosen, as well as the forms of humor that later appeared. The positive implicatures in this series frequently resulted in the incongruity type of humor, while the negative ones fell under the superiority and release theory types of humor. Aside from that, the involvement of one character in the story influences the number of flouting maxims produced. In this story, Jessica, as the mother of the family who managed the family in general, flouted the most maxims, while Emery and Evan, whose roles were the second and last children, did not have much chance to say so. Thus, their number of flouting maxims is much lesser compared to another character.

Other researchers who use situational comedy series as the location of study for flouting maxims and humor, with each episode having its own theme, are expected to compare flouting maxims in each episode to gain a deeper knowledge of how themes influence flouting maxims and humor.

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