

A Study of Non-Observance of Grice's Cooperative Principle Found in Humor Discourse: A Case Analysis of the Situation Comedy *The Big Bang Theory*^{*}

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Abstract

The purposes of this qualitative study were to investigate the types of non-observance of Grice's Cooperative Principle employed in humor discourse of the sitcom entitled *The Big Bang Theory* and to explore the rhetorical techniques that are used to help non-observance of the Cooperative Principle provoke the sense of humor in the dialogue of the series. The theoretical frameworks are applied using Thomas (1995) and Berger's inventories of the rhetorical categories (1990). The data of this study was based on the texts of subtitle collected from the American comedy series *The Big Bang Theory* from the third season. The investigation concentrated on the parts of the text that receives a humorous effect; namely, soundtrack laughter.

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The findings revealed that various means of non-observance of the Cooperative Principle maxims had contributed to humor generation in which flouting was the most frequently used type by occurring 117 times (66.86%) throughout the series. Repartee was the rhetorical technique employed the most by characters with 24 times (16.22%) to interchange a witty reply during interlocution in the series. In sum, the results reveal that the rhetorical techniques of humor are used to complement the types of non-observance to the study by rendering a reason for the cause of humor.

Keywords: humor discourse; cooperative principle; pragmatics

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพครั้งนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อศึกษารูปแบบวิธีต่างๆ ของการละเมิดกฎความร่วมมือในการสนทนาซึ่งบัญญัติขึ้นโดยไกรซ์ ที่พบในวาทกรรมตลกของละครซีรีส์เรื่อง *The Big Bang Theory* (ทฤษฎีวุ่นหัวใจ) และเพื่อศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ของการละเมิดกฎความร่วมมือในการสนทนาที่มีต่ออารมณ์ขัน ซึ่งปรากฏในบทสนทนาผ่านทางกลวิธีเชิงโวหาร ภายใต้กรอบทฤษฎีของโทมัส (1995) และประเภทการสร้างกลวิธีเชิงโวหารของเบอร์เจอร์ (1990) แหล่งที่มาของข้อมูลที่ใช้คือบทบรรยายได้ภาพของละครโทรทัศน์แนวตลกสถานการณ์จากสหรัฐอเมริกาเรื่อง *The Big Bang Theory* ในปีที่สาม โดยศึกษาจากบทพูดเฉพาะที่ได้รับเสียงหัวเราะจากเสียงในฟิล์ม ผลการวิจัยพบว่า มีหลากหลายวิธีในการไม่ปฏิบัติตามหลักการความร่วมมือระหว่างสนทนาอันนำไปสู่กลวิธีในการสร้างอารมณ์ขัน อย่างไรก็ตาม รูปแบบที่พบในบทสนทนาจากละครเรื่องนี้มากที่สุดคือ “flouting” (การละเมิดหลักการสนทนาแบบแสดงนัยแฝงของผู้พูด) ปรากฏถึง 117 ครั้ง (66.86%) ในขณะที่กลวิธีเชิงโวหารที่พบบ่อยที่สุดคือ “repartee” (การตอบโต้อย่างรวดเร็วและเฉียบแหลม) ปรากฏทั้งสิ้น 24 ครั้ง (16.22%) เพื่อใช้โต้ตอบคู่สนทนาอย่างมีไหวพริบ ผลการศึกษพบว่ากลวิธีเชิงโวหารในวาทกรรม

ตลกเป็นองค์ประกอบสำคัญที่ช่วยให้การวิเคราะห์ทฤษฎีละเมิดหลักการสนทนาในการศึกษานี้สมบูรณ์ยิ่งขึ้น โดยอธิบายสาเหตุของความตลกขบขันเพิ่มเติมจากทฤษฎีการไม่ปฏิบัติตามหลักการสนทนาของไกรซ์

คำสำคัญ: วาทกรรมตลก; กฎความร่วมมือในการสนทนา; วัจนปฏิบัติศาสตร์

Rationale of the Study

Humor is a quality that involves amusement and funniness, it can be perceived in human trait through speech and action which can be further expanded into other forms of human creations such as literature in books, a comedy in television, and work of arts etc. With its valuable contributions in several aspects, humor has become an interesting topic for many scholars to study it thoroughly within different perspectives as found in sociology, philosophy, linguistics, and finally pragmatics.

As the studies of humor have recently started to gain attention from some scholars who conducted research in the field of semantics and later pragmatics (Raskin, 1985; Attardo, 1994; Kotthoff, 2003), various ranges of humor topics have been explored substantially from the cognitive theories which focus on incongruity to social dimension on interpersonal and adversarial interaction (Brone, 2008). Raskin (1985) recognizes that jokes have violated all Grice's conversational maxims, thus proposes bona-fide and non-bona-fide communication mode. In his view, bona-fide communication is the information-conveying mode of verbal communication which is based on Grice's CP maxims while joke-telling works in the non-bona-fide mode of communication. According to Attardo (1991: 240), violations of one or more of Grice's CP maxims can be observed through joke telling. Likewise, humor researchers make a general agreement that

the non-observance of one or several of the Cooperative Principle maxims can create humorous effects (Thomas, 1995). However, there are quite a few research studies (Dornerus, 2005; Kalliomaki, 2005; Li, 2009) conducted to analyze the violation of the CP maxims in humor discourse.

Hence, in this study, verbal humor in *The Big Bang Theory*, an American situation comedy, presents an area of investigation in utterances regarding the non-observance of the Cooperative Principle in a more thorough aspect than the prior studies, with an inclusion of the rhetorical techniques of humor. Since the show involves a live studio audience in order to invoke laughter to the show's soundtrack, this study intends to take into account the laughter element. In other words, the study aims to analyze the types of non-observance of Grice's Cooperative Principle maxims which cause a laugh track as a context clue of humor, found in the dialogue of *The Big Bang Theory* from the third season. In order to better understand the comical effect generated by utterances in the series, these questions are posed as the following.

Research Questions

1. What types of non-observance of the Cooperative Principle are employed in humor discourse of the *Big Bang Theory* series?
2. What are the rhetorical techniques in the *Big Bang Theory* series that are used to help non-observance of the Cooperative Principle provoke the sense of humor?

Review of Literature

1. Humor

Humor is regarded as the mental experience of discovering and appreciating absurd ideas, events, or situations that bring pleasure to the individual (McGhee, 1979). According to Attardo (1994), most of the humor theories may fall into three categories; that is, superiority theory, incongruity theory, and the relief theory.

Thomas Hobbes (cited in Gruner, 2000: 13), states that superiority theory mentions about an occasion that we feel elated when comparing ourselves favorably to others as being less foolish, less ugly, less unfortunate, and laugh at the senseless actions of others. The full development of the incongruity theory is credited to Kant (1987) who claims that *“laughter is an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing”* (Kant, 1987 cited in Attardo, 1994: 48). This statement asserts the root of the incongruity theory in which it is the sudden turning of the expectation into nothing. The last theory is the relief theory which comes from a release of tensions created by societal constraints through laughter and humor.

With respect to humor study on linguistics, Raskin (1985) proposes the Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH) by claiming that *“the text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts which are contrary to each other.”* This means that in order for the text to be funny, the text must be deliberately ambiguous, and the punch line takes the reader from one script to the other by *“making the hearer backtrack and realize that a different interpretation was possible from the very beginning”* (Attardo & Raskin 1991: 308). There are three main semantic oppositions:

real vs. unreal, normal vs. abnormal, possible vs. impossible. In addition, Raskin offers another principle; that is, the non-bona-fide communication mode (NBF) which involves joke telling. This theory does not aim to transmit any information but rather to generate a special effect via the text, that is to say, to entertain hearers and make them laugh. Giora (2003) adds The Graded Salient Hypothesis apart from the aforementioned concepts. This hypothesis shares a number of assumptions with the modular view with two distinct mechanisms: one modular contains more salient meanings, which are coded foremost on an addressee's mind due to conventionality, prototypicality, and familiarity; therefore, the more salient ones are accessed faster than the less salient. In the end, it is the less salient meanings that the addresser intends to convey, leaving the addressee so much puzzled and surprised that he needs to look back and reinterpret the given information in order to accept the less salient meanings contained in jokes.

2. The Cooperative Principle

In order to explain the mechanism by which people interpret conversational implicature in logic and conversation, Grice (1975) introduces the Cooperative Principle (CP). The CP runs as follows: *"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"* (Grice, 1975 cited in Thomas, 1995: 61-63). This statement is formulated into four conversational maxims:

Maxim of Quantity: giving the right amount of information

Maxim of Quality: being truthful

Maxim of Relation: being directly related to the point

Maxim of Manner: being clear and orderly

The following examples are shown to support the claim that jokes involve the violation of all four maxims:

Violating the maxim of Quantity

“Excuse me, do you know what time it is?”

“Yes.”

(Attardo, 1993: 541)

Violating the maxim of Quality

“Why did the Vice President fly to Panama?”

“Because the fighting is over.”

(Attardo, 1993: 542)

Violating the maxim of Relation

“How many surrealists does it take to screw in a light bulb?”

“Fish!”

(Attardo, 1993: 541)

Violating the maxim of Manner

“Do you believe in clubs for young men?”

“Only when kindness fails.”

(Attardo, 1993: 542)

Consequently, humorous results come from the violation of all four conversational maxims by failing to conform to Grice’s codes of conduct in conversation.

3. Non-Observance of the Maxims

Any failure to observe a maxim may be referred to as breaking a maxim. When a speaker breaks a maxim, the hearer looks for an implicature, which is an implied meaning ostentatiously guided by the speaker, as he assumes the Cooperative Principle to be in operation. Grice mentions five ways of failure to observe a maxim as follow.

Flouting

When flouting a maxim, the speaker has no intention to mislead the hearer, but wants the hearer to look for the conversational implicature. Therefore, the hearer is ready to look for a clue from the utterance to help interpret the speaker's utterance.

Katee: "How are we getting there?"

Amy: "Well we're getting there in Dave's car."

(Thomas, 1995: 69)

Amy flouts the maxim of Quantity by blatantly providing less information than Katee needs, thereby generating the implicature that, while she and her friends have a lift arranged, Katee will not be travelling with them.

Violating

In contrast to flouting, when violating a maxim, the speaker intends to mislead hearers; there is no obvious clue in the utterance.

Husband: "Is there another man?"

Wife: "No, there isn't another man."

(Thomas, 1995: 73)

It is later revealed that the wife's assertion that she is not having an affair with another man is true, but not the whole truth. In fact, the wife in the above context is having an affair with a woman. From her reply, the violation of the maxim generates the intentionally misleading implicature that Alice is not having an affair with anyone.

Opting out

When opting out of a maxim, the speaker is unwilling to cooperate and reveal more than he already has. The speaker chooses not to observe the maxim and states an unwillingness to do so.

Caller: "um I lived in a country where people sometimes need to flee that country."

Host: "Uh, where was that?"

Caller: **"It's a country in Asia and I don't want to say anymore."**

(Thomas, 1995: 75)

Infringing

When the speaker infringes a maxim, he unintentionally deceives or fails to observe the maxim. The speaker does this with no intention of generating an implicature.

English speaker: "Would you like ham or salad on your sandwich?"

Non-English speaker: **"Yes."**

The interlocutor has not intentionally generated an implicature. In fact, he or she has not understood the utterance due to his or her English deficiency.

Suspending

In certain circumstances, it is not necessary to observe the maxims due to cultural-specification. When one suspends a maxim, it is understood that what is uttered is not completely true or that there are things the speaker ought not to say such as taboo words.

“...they told him he could not be cured,” Bistie’s daughter said in a shaky voice. She cleared her throat, whipped the back of her hand across her eyes.

“**That man** was strong,” she continued.

(Thomas, 1995: 77)

In this excerpt, the speaker suspends the maxim of Quantity when mentioning a name of a dead person which is a taboo word in her culture. On the surface, ‘that man’ would generate an implicature that the speaker does not know the name of the mentioned person. However, among the Navajo this implicature would not be generated in the case of a person who had encountered a premature death since mentioning his name in this circumstance is considered taboo.

4. The Rhetorical Techniques of Humor

The traditional meaning of rhetoric is the art of persuasion. In his analysis of humor, Berger (1990; 1995) approaches the subject from a rhetorical perspective by regarding that rhetorics can be used to analyze popular culture. According to Berger (1995: 53), techniques that can be used to make people believe something are unimportant, rather the techniques used to ‘persuade’ people to laugh are more emphasized. Berger has divided the techniques into four categories: humor involving language; logic; identity; and visual (Berger, 1995: 54). The language-based

techniques are applied to this study since the present research concentrates on the use of language that is considered as humorous. They are the followings:

Allusion: An indirect reference for example to literature (Oxford).

Bombast: Words without meaning used to impress the hearer (Oxford).

Definition: A statement giving the exact meaning of a word (Oxford).

Exaggeration: The action of exaggerating something by making it seem larger, better, worse, etc. than it really is (Oxford).

Facetiousness: Trying to be amusing but at a time that is not appropriate (Oxford).

Insults: A remark or act hurtful to the feelings or pride (Berger, 1995: 61).

Infantilism: The state in adults of keeping the physical or mental characteristics of a very young child (Oxford).

Irony: The expression of one's meaning by saying the direct opposite of what one is thinking but using tone of voice to indicate one's real meaning (Oxford).

Misunderstanding: A failure to understand something correctly (Oxford).

Literalness: The act of taking words in their usual sense without metaphor or exaggeration (Oxford).

Puns: The clever or humorous use of words, involving a word that has two meanings or different words that sound the same (Oxford).

Repartee: Conversation consisting of quick clever replies (Oxford).

Ridicule: Language intended to make somebody appear foolish (Oxford).

Sarcasm: Anger remarks implying the opposite of what they appear to mean and are intended to upset or mock somebody (Oxford).

Satire: The practice of mocking people, institution, etc. and making them appear ridiculous in order to show how foolish or incompetent they are (Oxford).

Research Methodology

This research study was designed to be qualitative. The descriptive approach was employed, for it was aimed to describe the types of non-observance of the Cooperative Principle and the rhetorical techniques found in the utterances of *The Big Bang Theory* series text script.

1. Data Collection

The data in this study were the utterances spoken by the characters containing the types of non-observance of the Grice's Cooperative Principle. The utterances could be found in the data source *The Big Bang Theory* TV series that was aired during September 2009 – May 2010 in the US. A purposive sampling was used to collect the data in the complete third season. Next, the scripts retrieved from the website 'bigbangtrans.wordpress.com/' were cross-checked and compared with the actual conversation. Subsequently, Then, the series was replayed in order to underline the utterances of the characters that received a laughter effect.

2. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed according to the following stages:

First, the transcripts were marked to identify the five types of non-observance of the Cooperative Principle maxims based on the theoretical framework suggested by Thomas (1995) as follows: (1) flouting; (2) violating; (3) opting out; (4) infringing; (5) suspending that received the laughter effect. Second, the data were analyzed by explaining the character's reason behind the non-observance of the CP maxims. Next, the researcher identified the rhetorical techniques of humor based on the framework introduced by Berger (1990) which were found in the series and coding any other techniques found besides the suggested techniques. After the utterances that receives the laughter effect were categorized according to the aforementioned methods, the total number of each type of non-observance and the rhetorical techniques were counted and the percentage of each type were calculated by applying the following formula: [(the number of each type of non-observance and the rhetorical techniques/ the total number of all types of non-observance and the rhetorical techniques appeared in the transcripts) x 100%]. Finally, the conclusion was drawn from the analysis of the data.

Results of the Study

1. The Non-Observance of the Cooperative Principle

Flouting the maxim

According to Grice (1975), the speaker flouts a maxim so as to urge the hearer to look for another possible meaning which is dissimilar to the expressed meaning. This alternative way of interpretation is termed as 'conversational implicature.' It is important to note that, for the case of

flouting a maxim, the speaker clearly reveals a signal for the hearer to interpret what is said, and mostly the hearer is well-aware of the implicature, thus the conversation will go smoothly since the message is understood by the participants.

Example 1:

[Raj, who is an astrophysicist, is looking for a job. Fortunately, Sheldon offers Raj an opportunity to work for him.]

Data description:

Raj: You want me to work with you?

Sheldon: For me. You're going to have to listen more carefully when you're on the job.

Raj: Okay, uh, please don't take this the wrong way, but I'd rather swim buck-naked across the Ganges with a paper cut on my nipple and die a slow, agonizing death from a viral infection than work with you.

Raj clearly flouts the maxim of Quality by lying to Sheldon in a form of exaggeration. His exaggerated utterance contains an implicature that to work for Sheldon who possesses the unusual and annoying characteristics such as his rambling habit, his high self-esteem, and his behavior of being headstrong, is more tormenting or worse than an experience with 'agonizing death from a viral infection.' The exaggeration works so well that the audience finds it amusing since Raj can imagine such an excruciating suicide in a very abnormal way and it is possible that he will commit the mentioned suicide if he intends to. However, his utterance flouts the Quality maxim; Raj does not conform as to what he says.

Violating the maxim

The distinction between the two terms 'flouting' and 'violating' the maxim is somewhat apparent. However, the use of them is sometimes overlapped; that is, either flouting or violating is used to include all forms of non-fulfillment. In this study, there is an attempt to identify the obvious use of all types of non-observance correctly.

When the speaker violates the maxim, he or she intends to delude the conversational partners by concealing some information that the hearer needs to know. Though what the speaker utters is true, the whole truth is withheld. With this reason, the hearer is liable to be misled in the case of violating the maxim. He or she is not conscious of the speaker's deceitful words, and tends to readily believe what is heard, whereas the hearer is prompted to search for an implicature in the case of flouting the maxim since the speaker conveys signals.

Example 2:

[Raj has gone to a job interview and been rejected due to his unintentional verbal sexual harassment to a lady. When telling his friends about the interview, Raj creates a lie that the reason of his being denied stems from the employer's racial discrimination.]

Data description:

Howard: What do you mean you didn't get the job? How could you not get it?

Raj: You know, he's British, I'm Indian, ever since Gandhi they haven't liked us very much.

Leonard: Wait, are you saying that he discriminated against you? Because we should file a complaint.

Raj: That's okay. A complaint has been filed. So, that's it. That was my last hope.

Raj violates the maxim of Quantity by abstaining from telling the necessary information in order to hide the whole truth. In other words, he speaks the truth, but not the entire truth with his intention to deceive Leonard who knows nothing about Raj's sexual remark during his interview. In this manner, audience laughs at Raj's cunning reply to save his face by providing less information than required causing Leonard to misunderstand Raj's employer. With the sentence "*A complaint has been filed,*" the audience will suddenly realize that 'a complaint' is actually referred to the one that the lady files for Raj's misbehavior toward her.

Opting out the maxim

Based on this type of non-observance, Grice (1975) states that a speaker opts out of observing a maxim by indicating a reluctance to comply in the way the maxim requires. In other words, there is an explicit intention from the speaker that does not wish to appear uncooperative, thereby employing this way of non-observance.

Example 3:

[Howard tells their friends about the profile of the ring found at the garage sale. According to an unknown man from whom Howard obtains information, the ring is an actual prop from the movie *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.]

Data description:

Howard: Listen, I was looking at the ring, and it seemed a little weird. No copyright notice on it. So, I took it down to this buddy of mine who deals with, shall we say, the seedy underbelly of the collectibles world.

Raj: Who's this mysterious buddy you suddenly have?

Howard: Just a guy. I know a guy.

Raj: Is it Eddie Crispo?

Howard: No, I can't tell you who it is. Stop asking.

Howard opts out a maxim of quantity when he gives less information than is required, but he explicitly indicates the unwillingness to answer the question instead of using other strategies such as lying, changing the topic, or making it difficult to understand etc. in escaping to answer a question. It is amusing since Raj doubts the identity of the guy whose name is Eddie Crispo and requests a clear answer, but Howard is still insisting on concealing the guy's name. Consequently, Howard's over-reaction in keeping the information in secret along with his obvious annoyance toward Raj arouses the audience to laugh in this context.

Infringing the maxim

According to Thomas (1995), neither the speaker intends to produce an implicature, nor does he wish to deceive the hearer(s) in the case of infringing the maxims. The reasons that cause the speaker to perform this low interaction type due to the speaker's own impairment such as intoxication, excitement, incapable of speaking clearly or to the point, and being a foreign learner of that language.

Example 4:

[After hearing a cricket chirping in the apartment room, Howard and Sheldon make a bet. Their bet is on whether the cricket is a common field cricket (Howard's assertion) or a snowy tree cricket (Sheldon's assertion).]

Data description:

Howard: Okay, okay, tell you what. I am willing to bet anything that's an ordinary field cricket.

Sheldon: I can't take your money.

Howard: What's the matter, you chicken?

Sheldon: I've always found that an inappropriate slur. Chickens are not, by nature, at all timid. In fact, when I was young, my neighbor's chicken got loose and chased me up the big elm tree in front of our house.

Sheldon infringes the maxim of Relation by not answering directly to the point without producing an implicature. In other words, he fails to address the topic directly. This type of non-observance occurs due to Sheldon's unique nature of not speaking to the point. The audience laughs at Howard's facial expression indicating his unexpected shock to hear such an irrelevant answer. In this case, the irrelevance found in the utterance corresponds to an incongruity theory of humor in which the speaker creates an expectation in the hearer and then violates it, resulting in the hearer's own disappointed anticipation. Since Howard expects to hear a reason why Sheldon does not wish to accept money as their bet, Sheldon however expresses his opinion about the term 'chicken' which is irrelevant to the point.

Suspending the maxim

When one suspends a maxim, it can be implied that what is said is not entirely true or that there are things the speaker should not to say such as taboo words. It may be due to cultural differences that a speaker suspends a maxim or to the nature of certain events or situations

(Thomas, 1995: 77). This non-observance of the maxims creates no implicatures since all the participants know that it is suspended.

Example 5:

[At the university cafeteria, Leonard, Howard, and Raj are talking about how Sheldon is coping with sadness after learning that the three of them have tampered with his experiment at the North Pole. Suddenly, Howard is the one who changes the topic of the conversation.]

Data description:

Howard: *If I may abruptly change the subject, **did you and Penny finally...you know.***

Leonard: Howard...

Howard: *Personally, I don't care, but my genitals wanted me to ask.*

Leonard: *Well, tell your genitals **what I do with Penny** is none of their business.*

Both Howard and Leonard are suspending the maxim of Quantity by providing less information than is required, though they are mentioning to the necessary information. The phrase, “*did you and Penny finally...you know,*” is referred to Leonard and Penny sexual affair. Instead of directly asking “*did you and Penny finally have sex together,*” Howard suspends the maxim in this circumstance since he talks about a sensitive issue which is an intercourse by omitting a keyword or a direct reference. Hence, one way to avoid embarrassment toward both the speaker himself and the hearer is to employ suspension. This way of non-observance of the maxim can make the audience chortle because of the characters’ expression indicating their awkwardness during conversation on a suspended sexual reference.

2. The Rhetorical Techniques of Humor Found in the Study

The most language-based technique that is employed the most is **repartee**. It is an act of exchanging humorous and witty retorts with the conversational participants, this quick-witted humor often leaves the audience impressed. This technique is used 24 times throughout the series by almost every character.

Example 6:

[Howard has just arrived from his dinner with a woman. As he is walking through the door of Sheldon and Leonard's apartment, Penny asks him a question.]

Data description:

Penny: Why are you back from your date so early?

Howard: In romances, as in show business, always leave them wanting more.

Penny: What exactly does that mean?

Howard is overtly flouting the maxim of manner by replying in a convoluted way to Penny. The rhetorical technique applied is **repartee**. His intricate answer regarded as quick clever response can catch the audience's attention and make them laugh by suggesting that he is playing hard to get so that he will be at the advantage point of the relationship, and that is the reason why he does not stay at a woman's place after dinner. Howard's hidden message is that he wants to show off his success in impressing a woman in the courting game. However, his answer is so complicated that Penny cannot understand his utterance.

The second technique found regularly in the series is **irony**. It is an act of uttering a deliberate contrast between apparent and intended

meaning for humorous and rhetorical effect. The addresser always puts some signals; for example, tone of voice, gesture, facial expression, to indicate the real message. Most characters used this technique 20 times.

Example 7:

[Leonard is angry with his mother who does not seem to care about him; therefore, he has been locking himself in his room while Sheldon tries to comfort him.]

Data description:

Sheldon: To comfort you, of course. Leonard, what you're experiencing is a classic Jungian crisis in which the aging individual mourns the loss of the never-to-be realized ideal family unit.

Leonard: Thank you, that's very comforting. (with a tiresome voice)

Sheldon: That's not the comforting part. The comforting part is that the Germans have a term for what you're feeling. Weltschmerz. It means the depression that arises from comparing the world as it is to a hypothetical, idealized world.

Leonard: You're right, I do feel better. (in a high pitched sound)

Leonard flouts the maxim of Quality by uttering an untrue statement; that is, the opposite from what he intends to convey, but he does not tell a lie to Sheldon since there is an indicator hidden in his utterance such as his tiresome voice. The rhetorical technique employed is **irony** because his spoken expression is contrast to what he is thinking by using the tone of voice to signal his genuine meaning. Leonard uses an irony as a way to make Sheldon aware of his being unhelpful. The

audience perceives Leonard's intended message and laughs at his irony strategy.

The least used technique found in the series is **literalness** with merely 3 times. Literalness is the way the speaker takes words in their most ordinary sense by freeing from exaggeration or distortion. Sheldon is the only character who employs literalness as a result of his idiosyncrasy nature. To be more specific, Sheldon is rigidly logical to everything, particularly with words attached to the literal meaning.

Example 8:

[Penny has recently broken up with Leonard. She meets Sheldon at the lobby and has a conversation with him.]

Data description:

Penny: God, can we please just say no longer seeing each other?

Sheldon: Well, we could if it were true. But as you live in the same building, you see each other all the time. The variable which has changed is the coitus.

Sheldon infringes the maxim of Manner by saying long and complicated sentence instead of answering 'No.' He does not generate an implicature since it is his unique nature to speak long and hard to understand sentences which always confuse or perhaps irritate the hearers. The rhetorical techniques found are **misunderstanding** and **literalness**. Misunderstanding is termed as a failure to understand or interpret correctly. It occurs when Sheldon inaccurately interprets the phrase '*no longer seeing each other*' as is attached to its literal meaning, not in the sense that the relationship of the couple has reached an end.

In this case, he substitutes the phrase '*no longer seeing each other*' by the phrase '*no longer having coitus*' to refer to sexual intercourse which is a direct term to describe sexual act based solely on his literal interpretation. The phrase '*no longer seeing each other*' in Sheldon's understanding is that both Leonard and Penny do not have a chance to meet each other again. Thus, his literalness causes the hearer find it shocking toward Sheldon's blunt utterance, in contrast to the audience who enjoys his outspokenness.

Findings and Discussions

From the finding results, there are five different forms of the non-observance of the Cooperative Principle maxims including flouting, violating, opting out, infringing, and suspending, that accounts for humor generation in the series. However, the most frequently used type is flouting the maxims; it occurs 117 times (66.86%) throughout the series. The second most repeated type is infringing the maxims; it appears in the dialogue 29 times (16.57%), followed by violating the maxims which receives 24 times (13.71%), and opting out the maxim which appears only 3 times (1.71%) respectively. The least frequently employed type is suspending. It occurs only 2 times (1.14%). All of the five types of non-observance lead to audience's amusement and comicality, yet it is almost certain that humorous outcomes usually arise from flouting the maxims compared with the other four types which are less employed.

In respect to the rhetorical techniques of humor, it is discovered that Repartee is a technique that occurs the most by 24 times (16.22%) and it is employed by almost characters to interchange a clever reply during conversation. Therefore, it can be inferred that the characters'

repartee remarks are likely to cause humor. The secondly occurring technique is irony. The characters use irony 20 times (13.51%) to obviously express the utterance which is opposite to the intended meaning. With this reason, irony usually patches up with the non-observance type 'flouting the maxim of Quality.' Exaggeration is the third humorous strategy that is used by all main characters with 16 times (10.81%) to enlarge the matter being talking about beyond the truth. Another techniques fourthly utilized are misunderstanding and ridicule. They are appeared in the humorous dialogue by 14 times (9.46%). Misunderstanding happens when the characters misinterpret the spoken utterances while ridicule is used to express contempt or mockery towards the others. The least frequently found technique is literalness occurring only 3 times (2.03%) in the series. In conclusion, the rhetorical techniques of humor are used to complement the types of non-observance to the study by rendering a reason for the cause of humor in a way that the non-fulfillment types of Gricean maxims cannot.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Since the five types of non-observance of the Cooperative Principle are found rather useful toward the pragmatics analysis on humor generation appeared in the texts of subtitle collected from the comedy series *The Big Bang Theory*, the addition of the rhetorical strategies of humor is also found beneficial to the study as the latter approach help to analyze the data more comprehensively than used with only one method.

The present study contributes to pragmatics approach to examine the types of non-observance in respect to Grice's Cooperative Principle and the rhetorical strategies in generating humor. The result of the study

allows the researcher to reveal how the humor is produced in the situation comedy *The Big Bang Theory* which is highly achieved in the United States and across the countries. Not only the current study offers the knowledge on pragmatics-based humor research, it also provides guidelines of various humorous strategies for novice playwrights to include in their manuscripts whose areas are not restricted to comedy series, but diverse ranges of media channels such as talk shows, radio broadcasting, commercial programs, and movies etc. which are widely seen in popular culture.

For further studies, the present study may contribute to humor studies in the field of English for Specific Purposes with a current choice of data. Alternatively, the data conducted in the previous studies are somewhat obsolete since all of the three situation comedy series have been originally produced over the past ten years. Additionally, the methods employed in the present study are considered as more thorough and comprehensive than those of the previous studies in terms of non-observance types. Nonetheless, it would also be useful to observe the data of this study analyzed with other methods regarding humor generation such as the Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH) and the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), or the data from various sources such as other situation comedy series, novels, and movies are conversely applied to the above mentioned methods. Lastly, owing to the fact that the data in this study is limited to the situation comedy *The Big Bang Theory*, in which the dialogues and circumstances in the series are mainly concerned with close-friend theme. With this reason, it will be of great benefit to see the data conducted in real-life conversations among various groups in different contexts such as between teachers and students at school, boss and

colleagues at workplace, intimate friends at university etc. by applying the same theoretical frameworks as this present study.

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