



Flouted Maxims in Punchline of Stand-up Comedy Performance by Ronny Chieng

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Abstract

This research examines the flouting of maxims and the strategies used to create humor in the punchlines of Ronny Chieng's Stand-Up comedy performances. Using Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle which includes the maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relevance, and Manner this study explores how comedians intentionally breaks maxims to generate humor and convey deeper meanings. The data were obtained from two Netflix specials, Ronny Chieng: Asian Comedian Destroys America! and Ronny Chieng: Love to Hate It, with transcripts sourced from Scraps from the Loft. A descriptive qualitative method (Creswell, 2014) was applied to identify and categorize the punchline of maxim flouting and the strategies used in the punchlines of Stand-Up comedy performances. From 216 punchline analyzed, there is 223 types maxim flouting and 240 strategies were identified, it occurs because one punchline contained more than one type and strategy. The Maxim of Quality was most frequently flouting (162 data followed by Quantity (40 data) and Relevance (21 data), while the Maxim of Manner was not found. Among the strategies, hyperbole dominated (52 data), followed by metaphor (46), irony (45), sarcasm (41), overstatement (30), banter (17), and understatement (9), with tautology was not found. These findings indicate that Chieng's humor relies heavily on flouting the Maxim of Quality through exaggeration, irony, and metaphor to express criticism and social commentary. His deliberate use of maxim flouting enhances the comedic effect and engages audiences to interpret meanings beyond the surface, showing how pragmatic strategies shape humor and communication in stand-up comedy, particularly in the context of Asian Stand-Up comedy performance.

Key words: Flouting Maxim, Stand-Up Comedy, Ronny Chieng, Punchline, Strategies Flouting Maxim, Cooperative Principle

A. INTRODUCTION

Communication plays a essential role in human life as one of the most essential basic needs. According to Wood (2015), humans are social beings who cannot thrive without connecting and interacting with others. Effective

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communication helps address various personal and societal issues, including psychological, academic, social, and cultural challenges. Effendy (2007) emphasizes that communication can be considered successful only when the speaker's message is delivered and clearly understood by the hearer. This highlights the importance of pragmatic competence in ensuring that intended meanings are accurately interpreted in communicative interaction.

In linguistics, the study of meaning is closely related to pragmatics. Pragmatics focuses on understanding the intended meaning of language in a specific context. Ruhlemann (2019) defines pragmatics as a branch of linguistics that explores how language conveys meaning in real situations. Similarly, Yule (1996) explains that pragmatics examines how meaning is communicated by a speaker or writer and interpreted by a listener or reader. This perspective goes beyond literal language, exploring the implied meanings, intentions, and social functions behind utterances. One key aspect of pragmatics is the cooperative principle, first introduced by Grice in (1975)

According Grice (1975) proposed that effective communication happens when participants cooperate by following certain maxims. These include: (1) the maxim of quantity (providing enough but not excessive information), (2) the maxim of quality (being honest and avoiding falsehoods), (3) the maxim of relevance (staying relevant), and (4) the maxim of manner (being clear and orderly). By following these maxims, speakers and listeners can achieve smooth and meaningful communication. However, in real interactions, speakers often break or ignore these maxims intentionally to create implied meaning. This is known as flouting a maxim (Birner, 2013).

When speakers flouting maxims, they deliberately communicate indirectly. This can serve various purposes such as softening criticism, being polite, avoiding conflict, creating humor, or delivering sarcastic and ironic remarks. For example, if someone asks, "Did you enjoy the food I cooked?" and the other replies, "Well, the presentation was really nice," the second speaker is not directly answering but implying something negative, possibly flouting the maxim of relevance or quality. In such cases, meaning depends on the listener's ability to infer the speaker's true intention.

Flouting maxims is common in everyday conversations, media, and especially in stand-up comedy, where language is often used creatively to produce humor. Carter (2020) describes stand-up comedy as a form of communication that goes beyond jokes; it is an interactive dialogue between the comedian and the audience. The audience's laughter functions as a response that shapes the performance. Mintz (1985) defines Stand-Up comedy as a solo performance that relies primarily on language rather than theatrical props. Comedians often address themes such as politics, culture, ethnicity, and social issues, using humor as a tool for both entertainment and critique.

The structure of stand-up comedy typically includes a premise, setup, punchline, tags, and callbacks (Carter, 2020). The punchline serves as the climax

a sudden shift in expectation that triggers laughter. One common technique used in punchlines is the intentional flouting of maxims. By deliberately breaks expectations, comedians invite the audience to search for implied meanings behind their words. This often involves hyperbole, irony, sarcasm, or unexpected topic shifts. Beyond creating laughter, this also allows comedians to make indirect social, cultural, or political commentary, encouraging deeper audience engagement.

A clear example of this can be seen in the work of Ronny Chieng, a Stand-Up comedian known for his sharp wit and cultural critique. His Netflix special “Ronny Chieng: Asian Comedian Destroys America!” and “Ronny Chieng: Love to Hate” includes numerous moments where he intentionally flouting maxims to deliver humor and social commentary. For example, in one punchline, he exaggerates daily habits by saying, “Americans walk around like they’re invincible because they microwave everything!” Here, he flouts the maxim of quality through exaggeration to create humor and critique.

This research focuses on analyzing how Ronny Chieng uses flouting maxims in the punchlines of his performances. The punchline is the most strategic moment for flouting because it delivers the unexpected twist that drives the humor. Examining these floutings is important for understanding how comedians use pragmatic strategies to construct meaning indirectly. It also reveals how humor can function as a medium of critique and social reflection while entertaining the audience.

Moreover, this study is significant because while many previous works have explored flouting maxims in movies, novels, and Western comedy, research focusing specifically on Asian stand-up comedians and their punchline strategies remains limited. By analyzing Ronny Chieng’s performances, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how maxims are flouted to shape humor, meaning, and audience interpretation. It also contributes theoretically to the field of linguistics and pragmatics by showing how Grice’s cooperative principle operates in performances especially in Stand-Up comedy.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher employed descriptive qualitative research to analyze the flouting maxim types and the strategies of flouting maxim used by Ronny Chieng in his Stand-up Comedy performance. A descriptive qualitative approach is suitable because it observed flouting maxim as they naturally occur and helps provide a detailed understanding without changing any variables, Creswell (2014). This method aligns with the study’s objectives to explore and describes the types of flouting maxim in punchline of Stand-up Comedy performance by Ronny Chieng and the strategies of flouting maxim used on the punchline of Stand-up Comedy performance to maintain the flow of the show.

In order to fully understand the flouting maxim types and the strategies, the researcher examined the frequencies while employs a descriptive qualitative

approach, which makes it easier to analyze the results in depth and methodically. The data presented in tables that categorize the types of flouting maxim and the strategies of flouting maxim in punchline of Stand-up Comedy performance, this way helps readers clearly see the variations of flouting maxim, and the strategies used to flout the maxims and the context in which they appear

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Finding

The findings of this study reveal that, from a total of 216 punchline analyzed in Ronny Chieng's stand-up comedy performances, 223 data of maxim flouting were identified, indicating that some punchline flouted more than one maxim simultaneously. Among the maxims, the Maxim of Quality was the most frequently flouting, appearing 162 times (72.65%), followed by the Maxim of Quantity with 40 occurrences (17.94%) and the Maxim of Relevance with 21 occurrences (9.42%), while the Maxim of Manner was not observed. In terms of strategies used to flout the maxims, a total of 240 strategies were recorded, as some punchline employed multiple strategies at once. Hyperbole was the dominant strategy, occurring 52 times (21.67%), followed by metaphor with 46 occurrences (19.17%) and irony with 45 occurrences (18.75%). Sarcasm appeared in 41 data (17.08%), overstatement in 30 (12.50%), banter in 17 (7.08%), and understatement in 9 (3.75%), while tautology was not found. These results indicate that Chieng's humor predominantly relies on exaggeration, figurative language, and irony to convey criticism, social commentary, and comedic effect, demonstrating the strategic use of multiple flouting techniques within single punchlines to enhance audience engagement and interpretive depth

a. Types of Flouting Maxim

Grice (1975) explains four types of flouting maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner. Flouting the maxim of quantity happens when speakers give too much or too little information, prompting the listener to infer the hidden message. Flouting the maxim of quality occurs when the speaker deliberately says something untrue or exaggerated, often to create humor, irony, or sarcasm. Flouting the maxim of relation happens when the response seems irrelevant but actually carries an implied meaning, and flouting the maxim of manner involves intentionally being unclear or ambiguous to make the audience interpret the deeper message

No	Types of Flouting Maxim	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
1.	Maxim of Quality	162	72.65%
2.	Maxim of Quantity	40	17.94%
3.	Maxim of Relevance	21	9.42%
4.	Maxim of Manner	-	-

	Total Flouting Maxim	223	100%
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In this study, a total of 216 punchline were identified from the data. However, the total number of maxim flouting found was 223. This difference occurs because there is a unique case in which a single punchline can flouting more than one maxim simultaneously. In other words, one punchline may flouting multiple maxims depending on its context. 223 data of flouting maxims were identified. Among them, flouting the Maxim of Quality was the most frequently flouted, appearing 162 times and comprising 72.65% of all occurrences. Flouting the Maxim of Quantity followed with 40 data, accounting for 17.94% of the total flouted maxims. Next, flouting the Maxim of Relevance appeared 21 times, making up 9.42%, while the flouting Maxim of Manner was not found in the data.

1. Flouting Maxim of Quantity

Out of control. So much stuff. Every day, new stuff. It's like Christmas every day. Hyperloops, electric cars, SpaceX, robot vacuums, iPhone 8s and 10s at the same time. Can't even wait in America. We get the iPhone 8, and we're like, "You know what? Fuck 8 and fuck 9. Ten. Let's go."

In this statement, the speaker flouts the maxim of quantity by giving too much information at once, mentioning many technological innovations such as Hyperloops, electric cars, SpaceX, robot vacuums, and iPhones without any explanation. The excessive list makes the message overwhelming and indirect. This is supported by the overstatement strategy, shown when the speaker exaggerates the speed of technological change by saying, "It's like Christmas every day." This hyperbole emphasizes how fast new products appear and how people are never satisfied, making the message both humorous and critical of consumer culture.

2. Flouting Maxim of Quality

Netflix says we're losing viewers by the second. Let's get started. All right? Thank you. They're clicking X as we speak.

In this statement, the speaker flouts the maxim of quality by exaggerating the situation ("losing viewers by the second"), which is not meant to be taken literally but to highlight the urgency in a dramatic way. At the same time, the speaker uses irony by acting casual about the problem, saying "Let's get started" and "Thank you" as if nothing is wrong. The contrast between the exaggerated statement and the calm reaction creates humor and encourages the audience to find the implied meaning.

3. Maxim of Relevance

I can't watch it on the plane when I fly through the air like a god." "Prime Now!"
All These first world allergies

This flouts the Maxim of Relevance because the comedian suddenly changes the topic. He starts talking about not watching Netflix on a plane, then jumps to "Prime Now" and "first world allergies," which are unrelated. The sudden topic switch makes it funny because it's unexpected and playful.

4. Flouting Maxim of Manner

In the two stand-up comedy performances by Ronny Chieng. Ronny Chieng: Asian Comedian Destroys America! And Ronny Chieng: Speakeasy the researcher did not find any Flouting Maxim of Manner.

b. Strategies of Flouting Maxim

Cutting (2002) identifies several strategies of flouting maxims. Overstatement is when the speaker exaggerates information to emphasize a point or create humor. Understatement occurs when the speaker provides less information than expected to create irony or subtle emphasis. Tautology uses repetitive or self-defining phrases to convey implied meaning. Metaphor expresses meaning indirectly through figurative language. Irony involves saying the opposite of what is meant to highlight contrast or critique. Banter is playful teasing between speakers to build connection. Sarcasm is a sharp, often mocking way of saying something opposite to what is actually meant, usually to criticize or ridicule.

No	Strategies of Flouting Maxim	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
1.	Tautology	-	-
2.	Understatement	9	3.75%
3.	Overstatement	30	12.50%
4.	Metaphor	46	19.17%
5.	Hyperbole	52	21.67%
6.	Irony	45	18.75%
7.	Sarcasm	41	17.08%
8.	Banter	17	7.08%
	Total Strategies Flouting Maxim	240	100%

In this study, a total of 216 punchline were identified from the data.

However, the total number of flouting maxim strategies found was 240. This difference occurs because there is a unique case in which a single punchline

can employ more than one flouting strategy at the same time. Hyperbole was the most frequently use strategy, occurring 52 times and representing (21.67%) of the total. This was closely followed by Metaphor with 46 data (19.17%), and Irony appearing 45 times, in total for (18.75%). Sarcasm was found, with 41 data (17.08%). Other strategies included Overstatement with 30 data (12.50%), Banter with 17 data, both contributing (7.08%), and Understatement appearing 9 times (3.75%), and Tautology strategy were not found in the two Stand-up Comedy performances by Ronny Chieng videos.

1. Tautology

Based on the data analysis, the strategy of Tautology was not found in the research data.

2. Overstatement

Why are you yelling at me about China? Always yelling at me about China. "China is doing this. China did a weather balloon, with a camera." "China's got an artificial island in the Pacific doubling as an aircraft carrier base." "China's doing TikTok. Why is China doing TikTok?!" I don't know.] I'm not from China.

This is an overstatement because the speaker exaggerates the effect of doing homework in a ridiculous way. They claim it could solve big problems and boost the economy, which is clearly not true. The humor comes from making homework sound way more powerful than it really is.

3. Understatement

You think rappers love money? Yo, we love money more than anyone

This is an understatement because the comedian makes a big claim in a very simple way without giving details. By saying "we love money more than anyone" without explaining why, the statement sounds incomplete and indirect. The humor comes from how casually he delivers something that could be serious.

4. Metaphor

Listen man! I'm not going to roll out a red carpet for you every time I go to work! Okay? You come, or you don't! It's on Twitter. It's on my website. Figure it out! Everyone else figured it out

This is a metaphor because “roll out a red carpet” isn’t meant literally. It means giving someone special treatment or making things easy for them. The comedian uses this phrase to say they won’t make things easy, comparing special treatment to a red carpet in a simple, indirect way.

5. Hyperbole

You order anything to eat at any restaurant, they give you 50 napkins. You throw away 80

This is a hyperbole because the comedian exaggerates how many napkins restaurants give and how many are thrown away. Saying they give 50 and you throw away 80 is impossible, but it’s used to make a funny point about getting too many napkins. The exaggeration isn’t meant to be taken literally.

6. Irony

Black people have the swag. Even white supremacists are like, “Yeah, they have swag

This is irony because it shows the opposite of what’s expected. White supremacists, who usually hate Black people, admit that Black people “have swag.” The humor comes from this unexpected twist, which goes against what people would normally expect.

7. Banter

Chinese baby boomers, least fun of all the Asians right now. I can say this. I'm Chinese, okay? You don't fucking say it. [crowd laughing] This is our “N” word. You don't fucking say it. I say it.

This is banter because the comedian is playfully teasing Chinese baby boomers by calling them the “least fun.” It sounds harsh but is meant as a friendly joke, not an insult. The humor comes from the light, teasing tone.

8. Sarcasm

Do you have any idea how meaningless the concept of Thanksgiving is to me? Fuck turkey. It's dry

This is sarcasm because the comedian exaggerates his dislike for Thanksgiving and turkey to mock the holiday. The harsh and funny way he says it shows he’s not being serious but making fun of the tradition

D. Discussion

Based on the findings of this study, three of the four types of flouting maxims as classified by Grice (1975) were identified in Ronny Chieng's stand-up comedy performances, including the Maxim of Quality, Quantity, and Relevance, while the Maxim of Manner was not found. There is no Maxim of Manner flouting indicates that the comedian delivers his jokes in a clear, structured, and easily understandable way, ensuring that the audience can follow his ideas without confusion. Among the maxims, the Maxim of Quality was the most dominant (162 data), reflecting that Ronny Chieng often says things that are exaggerated, ironic, or obviously untrue to entertain the audience and express social criticism. This aligns with Grice (1975) and Cutting (2002), who note that comedians deliberately flout the Maxim of Quality to create humor and convey critical points through exaggeration, irony, or sarcasm.

The Maxim of Quantity (40 data) was flouted to control timing, build suspense, and enhance punchlines, as speakers deliberately provide too much or too little information to structure humor effectively (Jefelia & Zaim, 2024). Meanwhile, the Maxim of Relevance (21 data) was flouted less frequently, typically to surprise the audience or create unexpected connections that require the listener to infer meaning, adding a layer of cognitive engagement to the humor (Cutting, 2002).

In addition to maxim types, seven of eight flouting strategies were identified: hyperbole (52 data), metaphor (46), irony (45), sarcasm (41), overstatement (30), banter (17), and understatement (9), while tautology was not found. Hyperbole emerged as the most dominant strategy, indicating Ronny Chieng's frequent use of exaggerated statements to highlight the social behavior, culture, and daily life. Metaphor and irony were also heavily used, supporting Fogelin's (2011) claim that metaphor allows comedians to frame everyday experiences in unexpected ways, creating cognitive dissonance, while irony involves saying the opposite of what is meant to strengthen the comedic effect. Sarcasm and overstatement further highlight the comedian critical humor, with sarcasm mocking cultural habits and stereotypes, and overstatement amplifying situations for comedic impact (Cutting, 2002).

E. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This research examined the types of flouting maxims and the strategies used in the punchlines of Ronny Chieng's stand-up comedy, based on Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and Cutting's (2002) theory. The findings show that the Maxim of Quality was the most frequently flouted, with 162 data, indicating that Chieng often delivers punchline that intentionally distort truth to create humor, exaggeration, and social commentary. Flouting of the Maxim of Quantity and Maxim of Relevance was also observed, while the Maxim of Manner was not found, reflecting Chieng's clear and structured delivery that enables the audience to follow his jokes effectively.

In addition, the strategies identified included hyperbole, metaphor, irony, sarcasm, overstatement, understatement, and banter, with hyperbole being the most dominant (52 data). Some punchline flouted multiple maxims simultaneously and employed more than one strategy, showing the multi layered nature of comedic construction. Exaggeration, irony, and metaphor allowed Chieng to highlight social issues and cultural habits while engaging the audience through humor and reflection.

In conclusion, flouting maxims is essential in constructing humor in stand-up comedy. It transforms potential communicative failures into strategies for entertainment, critique, and audience engagement. Future research could explore other pragmatic phenomena, such as implicature and presupposition, to deepen understanding of how comedians create meaning, humor, and social commentary through language.

This research offers valuable insights into the use of flouted maxims and their strategies in Ronny Chieng's stand-up comedy punchlines. For future studies, it is recommended to examine other linguistic phenomena, such as implicature, presupposition, discourse, and additional pragmatic approaches, to understand how comedians construct meaning, deliver criticism, and create humor. Investigating flouted maxims and related strategies in broader contexts can deepen knowledge of how language is deliberately manipulated to generate laughter, convey satire, and provide social critique. What may normally cause misunderstanding in conversation becomes an effective tool for entertainment in comedy

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