

Cooperative Principle in the Verbal Humor of Two Broke Girls

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Abstract: The aim of this research is to explore how the violation of Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP) achieves verbal humor by analyzing *Two Broke Girls*. The study uses a qualitative research method to analyze these discourses and conversations from the first episode of the first season of *Two Broke Girls* and answer the following research questions. Which CP are violated to achieve verbal humor in *Two Broke Girls*? How can verbal humor be achieved by violating the CP in *Two Broke Girls*? It was found that verbal humor can be produced in dialogue by violating four maxims of CP. That can have a humorous effect that amuses and delights the audience. It needs to be cautious when applying the CP to achieve verbal humor in different cultural contexts. The study not only provides new perspectives for applying the CP, but also provides a reference for the study of verbal humor in cross-cultural communication.

1. Introduction

Humor is constantly researched for English learners from different countries and it is intensively used in situation comedies, and it can be a window for people to learn from western history and culture. In addition, people are likely to appreciate the surface meaning of conversations when they appreciate the original English movies or situation comedies. However, the characters in movies or situation comedies tend to express implicature by saying something irrelevant or obscure. Therefore, the paper uses the Cooperative Principle (CP) of Grice to analyze the implicature of lines in *Two Broke Girls*, which can help the audience understand the verbal humor and connotation.

2. Objectives and Research Questions

2.1 Objectives

To demonstrate that violating the CP can achieve verbal humor in *Two Broke Girls*.
To find ways to achieve verbal humor in *Two Broke Girls*.

2.2 Research Questions

- Q1: Which CP are violated to achieve verbal humor in *Two Broke Girls*?
Q2: How can verbal humor be achieved by violating the CP in *Two Broke Girls*?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Definition of Cooperative Principle and Its Four Maxims

The cooperative principle (CP) was first proposed by H.P. Grice in 1967. It states that to achieve a specific goal in all linguistic communication activities, there exists a principle between the speaker and the listener that should be observed by both parties^[1].

1) Quantity Maxim

Make your contribution as informative as required

Say neither more nor less than the discourse requires

2) Quality Maxim

Do not say what you believe to be false. (do not lie)

Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. (do not make unsupported claims)

3) Relation Maxim

Be relevant

Stay on topic

4) Manner Maxim

Be brief and orderly

Avoid ambiguity and obscurity

3.2 Previous Studies of CP

Table 1: Literature on the CP in Google Scholar in the Recent Five Years

Literature	Number of Literature
Theoretical literature on the CP	2
Applying the CP to the verbal humor analysis of works	20
Applying the CP to the verbal humor analysis of <i>Two Broke Girls</i>	3

From Table 1, the number of researches on the verbal humor analysis of *Two Broke Girls* from the perspective of the CP is few, and this study is innovative to do research from this direction. In Table 2, Dodit Mulyanto's violation of the CP in the fourth season of *Stand Up Comedy Indonesia* is shown to raise the comedy's sense of humor^[2]. Huang attempts to analyze the verbal humor in the sitcom *Two Broke Girls* from the perspectives of the CP and Conversational Implicature, aiming to cultivate English language learners' comprehensive ability of American humorous discourse and cross-cultural communicative^[3]. Previous studies have reported Jing selected the sitcom *Modern Family* to study the dialogue that violates the four maxims under the CP for comedic humor^[4]. Using questionnaires and case studies, Seth analyzes extracts from *Nurse Awuni*, a Ghanaian comedy film on YouTube, to show that interlocutors using CP and presuppositions can achieve comedic effect^[5].

Table 2: Previous Studies of CP

Author, Publication Year	Data Resources	Research Design
Raharja et al., 2019	<i>Stand Up Comedy Indonesia</i>	Achieving verbal humor by violating the CP
Huang, 2020	<i>Two Broke Girls</i>	
Jing, 2020	<i>Modern Family</i>	
Seth, 2021	<i>Nurse Awuni</i> , a Ghanaian comedy film on YouTube	

Similarities and differences in the above literature in Table 2:

Similarities:

- (1) Theoretical framework: Grice's CP and its maxims
- (2) Research purpose: To achieve verbal humor by violating the CP

Differences:

- (1) Different data resource and methodology
- (2) Authors from different cultural backgrounds and countries have different understandings of the CP and the verbal humor.

3.3 Brief Introduction of *Two Broke Girls*

Time: 2011

Place: A fast food restaurant in Brooklyn, New York, USA

The main characters: The waitresses Caroline and Max

Cause:

Caroline and Max has fallen into poverty and difficulty

They have the same workplace and personality

Effect:

they become good friends

discuss how to raise funds to start a new business together.

3.4 Explanations of Humor

Humor is a kind of wisdom that can stimulate a certain emotion in human psychology, a certain form of processing or destroying reality after the proper regulation of logic. Chaplin once said, "humor is the highest expression of wisdom." Verbal humor, as a kind of language art, is the reflection of language skills. It is people's deep understanding of real life, expressed through simple, vivid, graphic, witty, or exaggerated, ironic language forms to express the views or opinions. The production of humor is both an inner factor of language itself and the use of language in context. For a long time, Western scholars have studied the meaning and function of humor from the fields of psychology, cognition, linguistics, and sociology^[6].

4. Methodology

The paper utilizes a qualitative study to analyze the lines which have humorous effect on audience and violate the maxims of Grice, and the data is collected from the episode 1 of season 1 in *Two Broke Girls*. The qualitative method is more suitable to the analysis of lines since the data is showed through the conversations or discourses. In addition, the authors choose and analyze several typical conversations to show the humorous implication implied by the speaker or the hearer. Therefore, contextual data can be analyzed through the qualitative method.

4.1 Humor Created Through the Violation of the Quantity Maxim

Conversation

Boss: I already hire new waitress. She work in all top restaurants in Manhattan. I gave her Paulina's uniform.

Caroline: Hi, Mr. Lee, not to complain, but I think someone wore this uniform before me, like right before me. Is it possible that I could get another one? Maybe one that's a little less moist. Also this mustard color doesn't really go with my skin tone neither do the mustard stains...And these various other stains, and smells. I hope that's clam chowder. So.. I think it'd be better for everyone, including my immune system, if I just keep on wearing what I'm wearing, and not the apron,' cause

this is Chanel. So, thank you, and let's waitress.

In this dialogue, Caroline complained about the uniform and she said too much to describe the drawbacks of it, implying that she did not like the uniform at all. Therefore, the behavior of Caroline violated the Maxim of Quantity and produced the humorous effect.

4.2 Humor Created Through the Violation of the Quality Maxim

Conversation

Customer: Miss, could we have some menus?

Caroline: Oh, sure.

Max: Don't smile. Cause it raises the bar, and then I have to smile, and I can't be doing that. It's exhausting and I have a bad back. That's Earl, we're in love. Do not talk to him, unless you want to feel whiter than you already are.

In this dialogue, Max said that Earl (75 years old) was her lover as she would like to imply that Caroline did not know how to communicate with Earl and might cause trouble, violating the Quality Maxim and causing laughter.

4.3 Humor Created Through the Violation of the Relation Maxim

Conversation

Max: So where do you live?

Caroline: Our townhouse was taken and bolted up by the bank, so...

Max: Is this where I'm supposed to feel sorry for you?

Caroline: I mean, I don't want you to, but just so you know, a well-adjusted person would.

Max asked about the accommodation of Caroline, and she did not answer directly and merely told that her house was taken. In this dialogue, Caroline's behavior disobeyed the Relation Maxim, which implied that she had no house to live and produced the humorous effect.

4.4 Humor Created Through the Violation of the Manner Maxim

Conversation

Max: Go marry the ketchups.

Caroline: Marry the ketchups. I'm on it.

Max: Okay. Now divorce the ketchups. Stop! Stop! Stop! There's no such thing as divorcing the ketchups. You've never waitressed a day in your life.

Max told Caroline to prepare ketchups by expressing obscure words, which violated the Manner Maxim and caused the misunderstanding in Caroline. Actually, Max asked Caroline to prepare ketchups for cooking, but she misunderstood the meaning of Max. In the conversation, humor was produced by the wrong behavior of Caroline.

5. Findings and Results

(1) This analysis of the first episode of Season 1 of *Two Broke Girls* from the perspective of CP provides readers with guidance on **how to make conversations humorous by violating Grice's four maxims**. For instance, it is shown in the series that disobeying the Quantity Maxim and saying more than necessary can **produce humorous annoyance** and **amuse the audience**.

Example: One time, two of our schoolmates spoke loudly in the hall-way. One of them said a lot to the other without stopping to show that she did not like something, and their schoolmates around them were amused by the scene.

(2) The authors use **the descriptive qualitative method** in the case analysis so that CP can be deeply applied and developed in daily conversations. Looking at the data above, the interlocutors **violated** every maxim of Grice. However, this is exactly how **the humorous effect was achieved**.

- The director arranged such scenes to **amplify the daily lives of common people in America** and to **attract the audience** by showing that **the protagonists still find joy in their lives despite their struggles**. This demonstrates the power of humor.

Example: My cousin failed an exam multiple times but eventually passed. When people asked her why she did not give up, she smiled and replied, “Well, not giving up is the only option for stupid people like me.”

(3) Producing humor through the violation of CP in this series mainly occurs within **the language environment of the U.S.**, which **may not be the same** in other cultural backgrounds. Therefore, applying CP to achieve the effect of humor should be **approached with caution in cross-cultural circumstances**. Additionally, it should be analyzed in the future whether disobeying CP is the only way to create such an effect.

In conclusion, verbal humor is produced through **the flexible violation of CP** in this series. When communicating humorously, the atmosphere is usually **more relaxing**, making conversations **more effective**.

6. Conclusion

- Based on the above information, **the flouting of CP creates the necessary humor** in comedy, and it can be implied that communicating humorously and indirectly **creates a more flexible and relaxing conversational environment**.

- This poster provides examples of **violating CP to achieve verbal humor in *Two Broke Girls***, which little research has done before. It also makes further contributions to **the development of the application of Grice’s Maxim**.

- It includes further inspiration for **applying CP to better achieve communicative purposes**.

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