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## FLOUTING GRICE'S MAXIMS IN STAND-UP COMEDY: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF JIMMY O. YANG'S *GOOD DEAL*

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**Abstract:** This study examines how Gricean maxim flouting contributes to humor in *Good Deal*, a stand-up special by Jimmy O. Yang (2020). Using Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and theory of maxim flouting, 135 instances of maxim violations were first analyzed, and then categorized into single and multiple maxim floutings. The findings reveal that the Maxim of Quality was the most frequently flouted (50%), primarily through exaggeration, irony, and falsehoods, while the Maxim of Relation (12%) was often violated via unexpected responses. In contrast, Maxims of Quantity (3%) and Manner (1%) were rarely flouted, suggesting Yang's preference for overstatement and absurdity over ambiguity or omission. Additionally, multiple maxim floutings (34%), particularly combinations of Quality and Quantity or Quality and Relation, played a crucial role in humor construction, demonstrating how layered violations helped enhance comedic impact. These results align with those of previous research on stand-up comedy as a genre that subverts conversational expectations, reinforcing the role of ethnographic and cultural factors in comedic delivery. This study contributes to pragmatics and humor research by illustrating how linguistic manipulation in stand-up comedy can trigger audience laughter. Future research can expand this research line by comparing maxim flouting patterns across different stand-up comedians and cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** pragmatics, Grice's maxims, maxim flouting, humor, stand-up comedy

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# VI PHẠM CÓ CHỦ Ý PHƯƠNG CHÂM HỘI THOẠI CỦA GRICE TRONG HÀI ĐỘC THOẠI: PHÂN TÍCH NGỮ DỤNG HỌC VỀ *GOOD DEAL* CỦA JIMMY O. YANG

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**Tóm tắt:** Nghiên cứu này phân tích cách thức chủ ý vi phạm phương châm hội thoại của Grice góp phần tạo nên yếu tố hài hước trong *Good Deal*, một chương trình hài độc thoại của Jimmy O. Yang (2020). Dựa trên Nguyên tắc hợp tác của Grice (1975) và lý thuyết về vi phạm có chủ ý phương châm hội thoại, nghiên cứu đã thu thập và phân tích 135 trường hợp vi phạm có chủ ý, được phân loại thành vi phạm có chủ ý đơn và đa phương châm. Kết quả cho thấy Phương châm về Chất (Quality) bị chủ ý vi phạm nhiều nhất (50%), chủ yếu thông qua cường điệu, mỉa mai và phát ngôn sai sự thật, trong khi Phương châm về Quan hệ (Relation) chiếm 12%, thường bị chủ ý vi phạm qua các phản hồi bất ngờ, phi logic. Ngược lại, Phương châm về Lượng (3%) và Phương châm về Cách thức (1%) ít bị vi phạm có chủ ý hơn, phản ánh phong cách hài của Yang ưu tiên phóng đại và sự phi lý hơn là mơ hồ hoặc lược bỏ thông tin. Ngoài ra, vi phạm có chủ ý đa phương châm chiếm 34%, trong đó, sự kết hợp giữa Phương châm Chất và Lượng hoặc Chất và Quan hệ đóng vai trò quan trọng trong việc tạo hài, cho thấy cách thức vi phạm có chủ ý chồng lớp giúp gia tăng hiệu ứng hài hước. Kết quả này củng cố quan điểm về hài kịch độc thoại như một thể loại tận dụng sự phá vỡ kỳ vọng hội thoại. Nghiên cứu đóng góp vào lĩnh vực ngữ dụng học và nghiên cứu hài hước bằng cách làm rõ cách thức sử dụng ngôn ngữ trong hài kịch độc thoại để tạo nên tiếng cười. Các nghiên cứu tiếp theo có thể mở rộng hướng phân tích này bằng cách so sánh mô hình vi phạm có chủ ý phương châm hội thoại giữa các nghệ sĩ hài độc thoại khác nhau và trong các bối cảnh văn hóa đa dạng.

**Từ khóa:** ngữ dụng học, phương châm hội thoại, vi phạm phương châm có chủ ý, hài hước, hài độc thoại

## 1. Introduction

Humor is a fundamental part of human interaction, shaping communication and social bonds (Martin, 2007). Among the various linguistic mechanisms employed in humor, one pragmatic constituent of humor creation is the deliberate violation of conversational norms, particularly the flouting of Grice's maxims (1975).

Grice's cooperative principle suggests that effective communication is guided by four maxims: Quantity (providing the right amount of information), Quality (being truthful), Relation (staying relevant), and Manner (being clear and orderly). However, in humorous discourse, these maxims are often intentionally flouted to generate laughter (Attardo, 1994). Many studies have examined how flouting maxims contributes to humor in comic strips (Kehinde, 2016; Saefudin et al., 2023) and sitcoms (Amianna & Putranti, 2017; Anggraini, 2014; Qiu, 2019).

Stand-up comedy is a widely recognized form of entertainment that relies heavily on language to create humor. Unlike scripted television shows or spontaneous conversational

humor, stand-up routines are crafted monologues that strategically manipulate linguistic elements to elicit laughter from the audience (Schwarz, 2009). As a globally rising genre with a unique interactive format, stand-up comedy is growing to be a powerful tool for expression and influence (Shaw, 2024). In non-Western countries, including Vietnam, emerging stand-up comedy groups are popularizing the form (Vu, 2023), showing its growing relevance. As it evolves, stand-up remains a rich subject for academic research. However, stand-up comedy has received comparatively less attention in pragmatic studies (Puspasari & Ariyanti, 2019).

While existing literature has explored how maxim flouting operates in various forms of media, few studies have systematically analyzed stand-up comedy performances, particularly from a pragmatic perspective. Previous studies have focused on general humor theories (Martin, 2007; Raskin, 1985) or discourse strategies in comedy (Schwarz, 2009) but have not extensively examined the specific mechanisms through which stand-up comedians flout Gricean maxims to create humor.

This study investigates the pragmatic strategies used in *Good Deal* (2020), a stand-up special by Jimmy O. Yang, a Hong Kong-American comedian known for his observational humor and cultural commentary. By analyzing how Gricean maxims are flouted in *Good Deal*, this study primarily aims to explore how humor is constructed through the flouting of Gricean maxims, and may contribute to the study of pragmatics in humorous discourses.

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. *What types of Grice's maxims were flouted by Jimmy O. Yang in his stand-up comedy special "Good Deal" (2020)?*
2. *In what way did each type of flouting contribute to humor construction in the performance?*

This research holds both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of pragmatic research on conversational maxims and how they can be purposefully flouted to generate humor, advancing the application of Grice's cooperative principle in creative communication. It also expands upon previous studies that have primarily focused on sitcoms and other scripted media. Practically, this study benefits comedians, writers, and performers by illustrating how humor can be constructed through strategic linguistic choices. Understanding how conversational implicatures function in stand-up comedy can also inform broader discussions on humor reception, and comedic timing. By focusing on *Good Deal*, this study bridges the gap between pragmatic humor theories and real-world comedic performances, offering a structured linguistic analysis of humor creation in stand-up comedy.

This paper is structured into five sections. The first outlines the study's rationale and research questions. The second reviews the literature on verbal humor, maxim flouting, and stand-up comedy. The third details the research methodology. The fourth presents key findings and discusses exemplary cases. The final section summarizes the study and addresses its limitations as well as suggestions for future research.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Pragmatics and the Cooperative Principle

Understanding and appreciating humor requires recognizing the speaker's intention, as incongruous statements may arise from factors other than jokes (Hoicka et al., 2008, as cited in Hoicka, 2014) and laughter can result from non-humorous triggers (Provine, 1992, 2004, as cited in Hoicka, 2014). Because verbal humor involves the use of incongruent or ambiguous

language (Shade, 1996), understanding the pragmatic interpretations of utterances is important in the study of humor. This has motivated the present study to examine humor from the lens of pragmatics. Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics concerned with how meaning is interpreted in context beyond literal semantics (Yule, 1996). One of the most influential frameworks in pragmatics is Grice's (1975) cooperative principle, which posits that effective conversations are the result of cooperative efforts between interlocutors. According to Grice (1975, as cited in Thomas, 1995), the cooperative principle involves the adherence to four conversational maxims:

- Maxim of Quantity: Provide the appropriate amount of information.
- Maxim of Quality: Do not say what is false or lacks sufficient evidence.
- Maxim of Relation: Be relevant.
- Maxim of Manner: Avoid ambiguity and be orderly.

While Grice's maxims are typically observed in cooperative discourse, they can also be deliberately violated or flouted to create conversational implicatures - meanings inferred beyond the literal utterance (Grice, 1975; Cutting, 2002). An example of flouting is shown as follows:

*A is asking B about a mutual friend's new boyfriend.*

*A: Is he nice?*

*B: **She seems to like him.***

*(Thomas, 1995, p. 66)*

In a typical cooperative interaction, speaker B could have simply answered with a "No" to address speaker A's question (if the boyfriend was a nice person). However, instead of giving a direct response, speaker B provided an answer that was irrelevant to speaker A's question by providing more information than A needed (that their mutual friends seemed to like this person). Despite the answer being weaker and less informative than a direct one, speaker A likely still understood that B did not think their friend's new boyfriend was nice, as they could draw the implicature and the indirect meaning from B's words, making this a likely flouting of the Maxim of Relation and Maxim of Quantity.

Along with its influence, many scholars have also challenged the universality and comprehensiveness of Grice's cooperative principle and its maxims, highlighting the cultural variations in how maxims are understood and expressed, and the difficulty in interpreting maxims due to their frequent overlaps (Hossain, 2021; Thomas, 1995). Nonetheless, this study adopts Grice's framework because of its foundational status in pragmatics and its well-established connection to humor, particularly through the deliberate violation of maxims (Attardo, 1993, as cited in Hoicka, 2014). Its familiarity and influence also make it a useful framework for discussion on humorous discourses, as recent studies (e.g., Hartono, 2023; Saefudin et al., 2023) demonstrate its adaptability in modern comedic contexts.

## **2.2. Flouting Maxims and Humor Creation**

Flouting occurs when speakers intentionally break a maxim in a way that still allows the listener to infer an alternative meaning (Thomas, 1995). This is particularly relevant in humor creation, where unexpected and deliberate violations of conversational norms can generate laughter (Attardo, 1993, as cited in Hoicka, 2014), as backed by numerous pragmatic studies examining floutings in various forms of scripted media, like written jokes (Attardo, 1994), comic strips (Kehinde, 2016; Saefudin et al., 2023), and sitcoms (Anggraini, 2014,

Amianna & Putranti, 2017, Qiu, 2019). Humor is often triggered when the interlocutors:

- flout Maxim of Quantity by giving excessive or insufficient details.
- flout Maxim of Quality by making exaggerated, ironic, or obviously false statements.
- flout Maxim of Relation by responding in an irrelevant manner to create surprise.
- flout Maxim of Manner by using deliberately vague or ambiguous expressions.

An example of flouting the Maxim of Quality to evoke humor in an interaction between the characters in the sitcom “How I Met Your Mother” is shown below:

*Ted: Okay, where were we? It was June of 2006 and life had just taken an unexpected turn.*

*Daughter: Dad, can't you just skip ahead to the part where you meet Mom? **I feel like you've been talking for like a year.***

*(“Where Were We”, 2006, as cited in Carolina, 2015, p. 42)*

The daughter's statement in the interaction was clearly false, as it would be impossible for anyone to talk for an entire year. This exaggeration of her father's long story flouted the Maxim of Quality. She did not intend for her utterance to be taken literally, but rather to emphasize her boredom as she waited for the part of the story where her parents met (Carolina, 2015). Humor arose from the enactment of incongruity in the interaction (Attardo, 2001), amusing the audience with the absurdity of the daughter's words and her mockery of her father's storytelling, as proven by the laugh track that ensued from this utterance in the sitcom.

### **2.3. Flouting Maxims to Create Humor in Stand-Up Comedy**

Stand-up comedy is a highly scripted yet dynamic form of performance, distinct from everyday conversation in several ways (Schwarz, 2009). Unlike dialogues where multiple participants co-construct meaning, stand-up relies on a single comedian delivering a structured monologue to an audience. Although the comedian appears to engage in natural speech, the humor is pre-crafted, often using maxim flouting (Attardo, 2001).

While previous Gricean studies have examined humor in scripted television, which often features interactions between two or more interlocutors, stand-up comedy presents a unique case. Despite its monologic nature, stand-up comedy operates on a foundation of implicit cooperation between the comedian and the audience (Rutter, 1997, as cited in Schwarz, 2009). While direct verbal exchange is absent, the comedian's performance explicitly aims to entertain, and the audience, in turn, implicitly agrees to engage with this intent, responding with non-verbal cues like laughter and applause (Schwarz, 2009). This shared communicative purpose establishes a cooperative framework that warrants that any non-observances of Grice's maxims within the performance script are intentionally crafted to create jokes. Given this deliberate breaching of maxims, such non-observances in stand-up comedy are thus regarded as maxim floutings. This interpretation aligns with the view of other researchers who also looked specifically at maxim floutings in stand-up performances of different comedians (Artikasari, 2020; Hartono, 2023; Ningsih, 2020; Savira, 2023). An example of flouting in a stand-up comedy performance is as follows:

*I believe that you are all secretly Jedi warriors, like in Star Wars, and I noticed during traffic because **every single time, especially here in Jakarta, when you want to cross the street, you block the cars using the force.***

*(Giaccobe, 2022, as cited in Savira, 2023)*

The comedian's statement flouted the Maxim of Quality by presenting obviously false

information for comedic effect, claiming that Indonesians “block the cars using the force” when crossing the street. This refers to their hand gestures used to signal other vehicles in traffic, which resemble the Jedi powers from the ‘*Star Wars*’ franchise. Both the audience and the comedian understand that the statement is not meant to be taken literally, but rather as an exaggerated claim intended to evoke laughter through the shared recognition of Indonesian traffic culture (Savira, 2023).

Despite being widely studied in other forms of media, flouting maxims as a pragmatic strategy for humor creation in stand-up comedy remains scarce. Previous studies have found that flouting Gricean maxims is a deliberate strategy commonly employed by stand-up comedians to generate various types of humor in their performances (Hartono, 2023; Ningsih, 2020), and that patterns of flouting may differ depending on the comedian’s intentions and cultural background (Hartono, 2023; Puspasari & Ariyanti, 2019). However, past studies have tended to focus on individual instances of maxim flouting without acknowledging the possibility that multiple maxims may be flouted simultaneously. Since humor often arises from the flouting of one or more maxims (Attardo, 1993, as cited in Hoicka, 2014), and these floutings may overlap (Thomas, 1995), considering how flouting multiple maxims can contribute to humor in stand-up is of great relevance.

#### **2.4. *Laughter as a Measure of Humor***

In scripted humorous discourses, the presence of a laugh track serves as a crucial indicator of humor, acting as a cue that the preceding or action was intended to be funny (Pradhan et al., 2021). Thus, the approach of seeing laugh tracks as a means to identify humorous utterances has been adopted in research on the role of maxim violations in humor creation (Carolina, 2015; Rafika et al., 2020). In stand-up comedy, collective laughter from a live audience serves a similar function as a measure of comedic success, signaling the presence of a joke and reflecting the audience’s emotional reaction (Schwarz, 2009). Though not a perfect indicator (Bochkarev, 2022), the laughter track or live audience reaction remains a tangible measure of the humor’s effectiveness in eliciting the desired response.

Many of the studies on flouting maxims in stand-up comedy have analyzed only the scripted texts of performances in isolation, without considering the audience’s reaction as an indicator of successful humor delivery. Given the importance of laughter in signaling the audience’s understanding and appreciation of a joke (Schwarz, 2009), and thus determining the success of the performance, the researcher argues that conclusions about the role of maxim flouting in creating humor cannot be fully warranted through textual analysis alone, and there exists a need for further research that identifies maxim floutings in relation to their ability to produce humor, as evidenced by audience laughter.

#### **2.5. *Research Gap***

Existing research has largely focused on scripted humor in sitcoms and written media, leaving a gap in the analysis of stand-up comedy from a pragmatic perspective. Additionally, pragmatic research on stand-up comedy often failed to consider cases of flouting multiple maxims, and laughter as an indicator of successful humor delivery. This study aims to fill this gap by systematically examining how Gricean maxims are flouted to create humor in Jimmy O. Yang’s stand-up special *Good Deal* (2020). By doing so, it contributes to both pragmatic studies and humor research, offering insights into how the strategic manipulation of language can help performers engage audiences in a scripted discourse.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Data Selection

This study examines Jimmy O. Yang's stand-up comedy special *Good Deal*, which premiered in 2020 and is available on Amazon Prime Video. This special was performed live in Washington, USA to a predominantly US-based audience. It marked the debut stand-up performance of Jimmy O. Yang - a rising Hong Kong-American actor and comedian well known for his roles representing Asian-American identity in hit series and films, including *Silicon Valley* and *Crazy Rich Asians* (IMDb, n.d.). *Good Deal*, which explored Yang's experiences navigating immigrant identity, generational gaps and racial stereotypes, has been recognized as his most popular special to date (Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.). As his debut special, *Good Deal* offers a concentrated display of Yang's comedic style and language use, featuring rich examples of creative storytelling that subverted conversational norms for comedic effects.

The selection of this performance is justified by its authenticity as a naturally performed yet scripted discourse suitable for pragmatic analysis. The performance is also rich in material relevant to Gricean analysis such as observational humor, cultural references and commentary, and frequent conversational norm violations. Additionally, despite its significance as Yang's most popular and widely viewed performance, no prior pragmatic studies have analyzed *Good Deal* under pragmatic lenses.

#### 3.2. Analytical Framework

This study adopts Thomas's (1995) definition of "flouting" as an intentional and overt breach of a maxim whereby the speaker still expects the hearer to recognize the implied meaning. In stand-up comedy, although performances are scripted, flouting is treated as deliberate on the part of the speaker-character crafted by the comedian. Each conversational maxim (Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner) is analyzed to determine how their floutings contribute to humor in the stand-up comedy performance.

#### 3.3. Research Procedures

##### *Data collection*

The researcher accessed the video of the stand-up comedy special through Amazon Prime Video and retrieved the transcript from [scrapsoftheloft.com](https://www.scrapsoftheloft.com). The data was collected by watching the full performance carefully while cross-checking with the retrieved transcript to ensure accuracy. Only utterances that triggered collective laughter from the live audience were selected for analysis. Collective laughter in this research is defined as audible laughter from multiple audience members that lasted for a discernible duration (at least 1-2 seconds). This ensures that the data collected reflect the actual comedic effects rather than subjective interpretation. Among the humorous utterances, only those that demonstrably flouted one or more Gricean maxims were selected.

This guarantees that all analyzed data meet both criteria:

- Humor (confirmed by live audience laughter)
- Flouting (confirmed by pragmatic analysis)

##### *Data analysis*

After being collected, utterances were coded into two main categories of Flouting one single maxim and Flouting multiple maxim. The categorization was based on Grice's (1975, as

cited in Thomas, 1995) and was modified to account for instances of multiple maxim floutings as follows:

**Table 1**

*Adapted Categories of maxim floutings*

Category	Types of maxim flouting	Description
<b>Flouting one single maxim</b>	Maxim of Quantity	Giving more or less information than context requires
	Maxim of Quality	Making a clearly false statement or one lacking evidence
	Maxim of Relation	Providing irrelevant or off-topic response
	Maxim of Manner	Being vague, ambiguous or obscure
<b>Flouting multiple maxims</b>	Flouting two maxims	Simultaneously flouting any two maxims (e.g., Quality and Relation)
	Flouting three maxims	Simultaneously flouting any three maxims (e.g., Quantity, Quality, and Manner)
	Flouting four maxims	Simultaneously flouting all four of Grice's maxims

Instances of humorous utterances that flouted Grice's maxims were counted, and the frequency of each type is presented by number and percentage (rounded to the nearest figure). The quantitative findings are displayed in a table, and qualitative analysis of exemplary cases of each type is provided. Exemplary cases were selected based on their clarity in illustrating the type of maxim flouted, the strength of the audience's reaction (i.e., discernible and loud laughter), and the presence of cultural elements that added depth to the humor.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Types and Frequency of Maxim Flouting

Table 1 summarizes the occurrences of maxim flouting identified in *Good Deal* (2020). A total of 135 cases of maxim flouting were observed, categorized into single maxim flouting and multiple maxim flouting.

**Table 2**

*Types of Maxim floutings in Good Deal (2020)*

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Flouting one single maxim	89	66%
- Maxim of quantity	4	3%
- Maxim of quality	67	50%
- Maxim of relation	16	12%
- Maxim of manner	2	1%
Flouting multiple maxims	46	34%
- Flouting two maxims	32	24%
- Flouting three maxims	11	8%
- Flouting four maxims	3	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 1 shows that the Maxim of Quality was the most frequently flouted (50%), followed by the Maxim of Relation (12%). Multiple maxim floutings accounted for 34% of the cases, with two-maxim flouting being the most common subtype (24%).

## 4.2. Flouting One Single Maxim

### 4.2.1. Flouting the Maxim of Quantity

A speaker flouts the Maxim of Quantity when they deliberately provide either too much or too little information (Cutting, 2002). In Yang's performance, the Maxim of Quantity was mostly flouted when the comedian provided too much information to make his joke clear, and triggered comedic effect (laughter) as a result:

*Example 1: No shame in my game. I'll play George Washington "Carver" if they let me. That's a black guy, by the way. I don't know if you know.*

In Example 1, Yang was demonstrating his willingness to take on acting roles of other races, joking about playing George Washington "Carver," a famous African American scientist, despite being Asian. The Maxim of Quantity was flouted because the fact that George Washington "Carver" was black would not traditionally be necessary information when informing people of the role one wants to play. This extra information helped to highlight the racial incongruity of Yang (an Asian actor) playing Carver (a black historical figure). The humor then stemmed from the absurdity of an Asian actor starring as a black person, and eliciting laughter from the audience as their expectations were subverted.

*Example 2: You got like, even like dumb commercials with, like, a white guy climbing a Rocky Mountain for Coors Light. It's not even a good commercial. They don't even sell you on how good the beer is. They sell you on how cold it is. It's like brewed cold, packaged cold, shipped cold. I'm like, isn't it ultimately up to my own refrigeration, sir?*

The comedian mentioned a beer commercial that tried to sell the coldness of the product rather than its quality. The repetition of "cold" three times ("*brewed cold, packaged cold, shipped cold*") provided more information than was needed to convey the idea that the beer's coldness was emphasized. However, this extra detail helped the comedian emphasize the ridiculous irrelevance of the commercial, allowing the audience to draw this implication and laugh, making it a flouting of the Maxim of Quantity.

### 4.2.2. Flouting the Maxim of Quality

Speakers often flout this maxim for effect by stating something patently untrue or impossible (Thomas, 1995). Yang frequently employs this maxim flouting in his stand-up for comedic purposes, typically through generalized and exaggerated claims, as well as demonstrably false or impossible assertions.

*Example 3: And Asian grandmas, they're the best. You give her a handshake, she's like a vending machine. You give her a handshake, out comes a red envelope.*

Clearly, Example 3 is false, as Asian grandmothers are not vending machines, nor do they automatically dispense money upon shaking hands. However, the exaggeration and metaphor served to highlight a cultural stereotype in a humorous way. By equating a traditional act of gift-giving with a mechanical transaction, Yang played with audience expectations, making the absurdity of the comparison the core of the joke. The humor arose from the unexpected literalization of a social custom, turning a familiar cultural practice into an absurdly mechanical process.

*Example 4: And I think to a lot of Americans, like, people think that Tai Chi to some, like, exotic Chinese secrets, some oriental art. No. Tai Chi is just exercise for people who are too old to exercise. Let's not exoticize these things, you know?*

Yang flouted the Maxim of Quality in the utterance as he tried to contrast the commonly perceived "exotic Chinese secret" or "oriental art" of Tai Chi with his overgeneralized and humorous version of the martial art as "exercise for people who are too old to exercise". This simplification was tied to Tai Chi involving gentle movements and typically being performed by elderly Asian people, creating a mental image that the audience could easily relate to. When this expectation was subverted, the comedic effect was created and triggered laughter as response.

#### 4.2.3. Flouting the Maxim of Relation

The Maxim of Relation is flouted when a speaker provides a response that is unexpectedly irrelevant or disconnected from the prior statement or expectation.

*Example 5: "One time, I got high and I called my mom. I was like, Mom, I just— I just want to tell you, Mom, I love you. And you can hear her start, like, crying on the other side of the line. She was like, "Oh, Jimmy, do you have cancer?"*

In Example 5, the expected response to an affectionate statement would typically be reciprocal or emotional. However, instead of responding in kind, Yang's mother jumped to an extreme and illogical conclusion, assuming that an expression of love must signal something unusual or alarming (like a cancer diagnosis). This sudden and absurd shift in logic generated humor by violating conversational expectations. The audience recognized the incongruity between a sentimental moment and an over-the-top reaction, making the unexpected contrast the core of the comedic effect.

*Example 6: The first day I got my passport, I was feeling real patriotic. So I went to my local Hooters.*

Yang stated that on the first day he received his passport, he felt very patriotic and, as a result, decided to go to his local Hooters restaurant. The Maxim of Relation was flouted as going to Hooters is not a typical or expected action that directly follows from feeling patriotic after receiving a passport. The humor arose from the unexpected and seemingly illogical connection between feeling patriotic and going to Hooters. The audience was likely surprised by this juxtaposition and had to infer the intended meaning. The humor could stem from the irony in celebrating patriotism through a stereotypical (and arguably objectifying) American establishment like Hooters.

#### 4.2.4. Flouting the Maxim of Manner

The Maxim of Manner was flouted in Yang's stand-up performance as the comedian attempted to use obscure and vague statements to evoke amusement in his audience, who likely still understood the implicature despite the disorderly manner of presentation.

*Example 7: Jimmy, what he means when he says, your chick, she's so thirsty. What's that? And I was like, "Shit, um— Dad, he's making fun of somebody's girlfriend, OK? It's saying, like, she likes attention from other guys, and she likes to do sex stuff with them, you know, like, blow jobs and such."*

In Example 7, instead of providing a clear and direct explanation, Yang hesitated and used vague expressions such as "sex stuff" and "and such." His circumlocution and euphemisms suggested discomfort, which heightened the comedic effect as the audience could recognize his

awkwardness in the interaction with his father. Rather than delivering the phrase in a straightforward manner, Yang's reluctance and indirect approach made the interaction more humorous by emphasizing his discomfort and hesitation, reinforcing the generational and cultural gap between him and his father.

*Example 8: I was obviously there for business, but I didn't get a business visa. So I looked him in the eyes. I was like, "Sir, I'm here for pleasure". And he looked right back at me. He was like, "Are you sure? Because nobody comes to Winnipeg for pleasure". The next thing you know, I was detained in this 10 by 10 box.*

In Example 8, Yang was recounting having been challenged by the Canadian border patrol officer who expressed disbelief at his claim of visiting Winnipeg for pleasure. The emboldened utterance was Yang explaining the consequence of that action, which flouted the Maxim of Manner due to the use of "*this 10 by 10 box*" instead of a clearer and more formal term like "detainment center" or "holding cell". This less formal and simplistic term understated the seriousness of the situation and created a relatable, slightly humorous image of the comedian being trapped in a box for interrogation, which likely caused the audience to laugh.

### 4.3. Flouting Multiple Maxims

#### 4.3.1. Flouting Two Maxims

In some cases, Yang flouted two maxims simultaneously, often through the combination of exaggeration or untruths (Quality) with irrelevance (Relation) or understatement (Quantity).

*Example 9: And if people are just gonna assume that I don't speak English, that's fine. That's what I do now when I get pulled over by the cops. I just pretend I don't speak English. I haven't gotten a ticket in five years. Last time I got pulled over, the cop was knocking on my window. He was like, 'Sir, you do understand you can't make a right turn here? It says right there on the sign. You can't make a right turn.' So I just looked up at him. I was like, 'Oh, I don't know. I'm sorry, but-ah English not very good. So I cannot read-ah the sign.'*

Yang intentionally flouted the Maxim of Quality and Relation to avoid a traffic ticket. The Maxim of Quality was flouted through his deliberate misrepresentation of English proficiency, as it was clear from the context that he could speak fluent English but faked his proficiency. The Maxim of Relation was also flouted, as his response was not directly relevant to the police officer's question about his traffic violation and instead shifted the focus to his supposed lack of English skills. The humor likely stemmed from the obvious pretense and the play on stereotypes that immigrant Asians struggle with English, which the audience could recognize and relate to.

*Example 10: You guys remember that shit? Jay-Z's "Big Pimpin'" was the greatest music video of all time. It was Jay-Z and his boys on a yacht pouring champagne on this beautiful woman's face for, like, four minutes. I was like, "This is America? It's amazing."*

Yang was describing a scene from the "Big Pimpin'" music video by Jay-Z, focusing on the act of pouring champagne on a woman's face on a yacht and emphasizing the duration of this act. The comedian flouted the Maxim of Quantity by intentionally giving an inadequate description of Jay-Z's music video. This, in turn, also flouted the Maxim of Quality as the phrase "*for, like, four minutes*" is an exaggerated detail. The audience knows that no music video would actually show champagne being poured on someone's face for a full four minutes and understands that the comedian's choice of describing the music video this way is meant to be

humorous rather than strictly informative. The understatement and untruth here help add to the comedic effect by bringing up an exaggerated image that subvert conventional expectations.

#### 4.3.2. Flouting Three Maxims

Fewer instances involved three maxims being flouted simultaneously, often through highly exaggerated, ambiguous, and disconnected statements.

*Example 11: "My dad would take me to every practice, every tournament game. And he always tried to give me a pep talk before every game. But you know, Asian parents, they're way too honest. So every pep talk just turned into an insult. Like, he would come up to me, be like, 'Jimmy. Jimmy. You're going to play well, OK? Even though you slow, even though you weak, and you suck.' And then he would just walk away."*

In example 11, Yang simultaneously flouted multiple maxims as he describes his father's pep talks before ping pong matches, which ironically include criticisms like "you slow," "you weak," and "you suck." This flouts the Maxim of Quantity by providing excessive negativity in the context of a supposedly encouraging pep talk. The father's utterance also flouted the Maxim of Relation by introducing irrelevant critiques, and the Maxim of Manner by using an obscure and disorderly tone for showing support. The humor arose from the unexpected negativity in a situation where support is typically expected, making the audience laugh at the incongruity between the situation and the father's so-called words of encouragement.

*Example 12: I don't even like going to Chinese restaurants with some of my friends anymore. Because this is what they do to me every time. They're like, "Jimmy, do you speak Chinese? Do you speak Chinese? Yeah, yeah, order Chinese, bro. They're gonna hook it up. Order in Chinese. Bro, bro, order in Chinese, bro". I'm like, "Bro, we're at Panda Express. She's Mexican. Like, what-? Her name tag says Consuela. That's not Mandarin or Cantonese."*

In example 12, Yang recounted friends repeatedly urging him to order in Chinese at Panda Express, believing his ethnicity would yield better service. This flouted the Maxim of Quantity through unnecessary repetition ("Do you speak Chinese?", "Order in Chinese."). The Maxim of Quality was also flouted by their baseless assumption of special service. Furthermore, urging Yang to speak Chinese to a Mexican employee at Panda Express is highly irrelevant to the situation, thus flouting the Maxim of Relation. Humor stemmed from the disconnect between his friends' stereotypical assumptions and the reality of the situation.

#### 4.3.3. Flouting Four Maxims

Although rare, some utterances in *Good Deal* flouted all four Gricean maxims simultaneously, creating humor through a combination of excessive or limited detail (Quantity), distortion of truth (Quality), unexpected responses (Relation), and ambiguous expressions (Manner).

*Example 13: "911, what's your emergency?" "My son is dead!" It's like, "Sir, is everything OK? Is your son dead?" He's like, "No, but he's dead to me. OK, bye." That's just how we love.*

Yang explained that his Asian parents show love by frequently calling him and then gave a hypothetical scenario in which his father, if ignored, would call 911 and declare, "My son is dead." This utterance flouted the Maxim of Quality, as the father clearly knows the statement was false and his son was not actually dead. The Maxim of Quantity was also flouted,

as the utterance lacked necessary clarification that the *"death"* was metaphorical rather than physical, causing confusion for the 911 dispatch. Additionally, the Maxim of Relation was flouted, as calling 911 over a missed call was neither logical nor socially relevant. Finally, the Maxim of Manner was flouted through the improper use of language typically reserved for physical death to describe a severed relationship without clarification. This example illustrates how Yang layered multiple floutings of conversational norms to heighten comedic effect. The floutings of multiple maxims emphasized the father's exaggerated reaction of treating a missed call as a literal death, and created humor by highlighting the absurdity of the situation.

*Example 14: So when I turned 15, it was a very special occasion. It was basically my Quinceañera. My dad just gave me a TI-83 Plus. And he looked me in the eyes, and he was like, "you're a woman now, OK?"*

In Example 14, Yang recounted his birthday and framed it as his "Quinceañera", a celebration typically reserved for young girls. His father's utterance *"you're a woman now, OK?"*, delivered after giving him a calculator as a gift, flouted all four of Grice's maxims. The Maxim of Quantity was flouted as the excessive information (declaration of a gender change) was not needed in the ongoing exchange. The Maxim of Quality was severely flouted through obvious untruthfulness, as turning 15 does not turn Yang into a woman. The Maxim of Relation was also flouted as the father's statement is highly irrelevant given the context of a 15-year-old boy receiving a calculator. Additionally, the Maxim of Manner was flouted as the father's statement was being obscure and ambiguous in its intended meaning within the context of the gift-giving scenario.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

### 5.1. Discussion

The findings of this research reveal that the Maxim of Quality is the most frequently flouted in *Good Deal*, both on its own and in combination with other maxims (50% of cases). This preference for exaggeration, falsehoods, and irony as a comedic strategy through the flouting of the Maxim of Quality can be attributed to several factors, including Yang's comedic style, cultural background, and the nature of stand-up comedy as a genre.

Firstly, Yang's style of humor relies heavily on observational comedy and self-deprecation, which often involve overstatements and fabricated truths. This can be attributed to the fact that stand-up comedians typically develop their own persona and comedic style, many of which involve the manipulation of reality through absurd or exaggerated narratives to heighten humor (Schwarz, 2009). This aligns with Yang's routine, where he often amplifies stereotypes, exaggerates cultural experiences, and fabricates extreme situations for comedic effect. An example of Yang's comedic style was shown in his joke about Asian grandmothers behaving like "vending machines" dispensing red envelopes, which created humor through hyperbole and the absurdity of the comparison. As overstatement and irony often entail a flouting of the Maxim of Quality (Grundy, 2013), Yang's use of this strategy is both deliberate and justifiable.

Secondly, Yang's identity as a Hong Kong-born, American-raised comedian also influences his comedic approach and flouting tendency. Studies on ethnographic humor suggest that comedians from minority groups often use exaggeration and self-aware stereotypes as a means of both subverting and reinforcing audience expectations (Mintz, 1985). Puspasari and Ariyanti's (2019) study also points to the role of cultural background in stand-up comedians'

choice of materials and maxim flouting patterns. This explains Yang's preference for flouting the Maxim of Quality as he could utilize it to exaggerate cultural norms and make them more relatable and accessible to a diverse audience. For example, his joke about pretending not to speak English when pulled over by the police as an Asian, or overgeneralization of Asian people's behaviors and traits (such as being short, frugal with money, and being blunt) all play into well-known Asian stereotypes. The exaggerated delivery, then, helps make the absurdity of the situations clear to the audience, allowing them to engage with the humor while recognizing its underlying social commentary.

Additionally, stand-up comedy as a genre inherently encourages the flouting of conversational norms (Attardo, 1993, as cited in Hoicka, 2014). Unlike conversational humor, which often emerges spontaneously, stand-up comedy is a carefully scripted performance designed to elicit maximum laughter (Schwarz, 2009). Research suggests that audiences expect comedians to be humorous and break conventional expectations (Attardo, 2001; Brodie, 2014), which makes Maxim of Quality flouting particularly effective in this setting. Yang's preference for overstatement, irony, and falsehoods aligns with these expectations, as the flouting of the Maxim of Quality allows him to build tension through exaggeration and then subvert audience assumptions for comedic effects.

In contrast, the Maxims of Manner and Quantity were the least frequently flouted, accounting for only 1% and 3% of cases, respectively. This suggests that Yang's comedic style does not rely heavily on ambiguity or withholding information, but rather on explicit exaggeration and absurd juxtapositions. Given that stand-up comedy thrives on clarity and direct audience engagement (Schwarz, 2009), it is unsurprising that Yang avoids vagueness or excessive conciseness, and instead favors clear punchlines that maximize comedic impact. While this strategy has been seen employed by other comedians who share Yang's comedic approach (Ningsih, 2020), it is important to note that flouting patterns may vary for different comedians, as supported by studies on other stand-up comics which found a preference towards flouting other maxims (Satria & Rosyidha, 2019; Savira, 2023).

## 5.2. Conclusion

This study analyzed 135 instances of maxim flouting in Jimmy O. Yang's *Good Deal* (2020), identifying distinct patterns in how conversational norms are strategically violated for comedic effect. The Maxim of Quality was the most frequently flouted (50%), often through exaggeration, irony, and blatant falsehoods, while the Maxim of Relation (12%) was commonly violated via unexpected responses. In contrast, the Maxims of Quantity (3%) and Manner (1%) were flouted far less frequently, suggesting that Yang's comedic style relies more on overstatement and absurdity than on ambiguity or omission. Additionally, multiple maxim floutings (34%) played a key role in humor construction, particularly combinations of Quality and Quantity or Quality and Relation, demonstrating how layered violations enhance comedic impact. These findings align with research on stand-up comedy as a genre that thrives on subverting audience expectations (Attardo, 2001; Schwarz, 2009) and support the idea that ethnographic factors shape comedic strategies (Mintz, 1985; Puspasari & Ariyanti, 2019). Ultimately, this study underscores how deliberate violations of conversational norms serve as a powerful tool in stand-up comedy, offering insights into both pragmatics and humor studies by illustrating how linguistic manipulation shapes audience engagement.

This study provides insights into maxim flouting in Jimmy O. Yang's *Good Deal*, but its narrow focus on only one comedian and one performance limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research could expand the scope by analyzing other comedians, performances,

and cultural contexts to identify broader patterns and cultural variations in humor. Additionally, since audience laughter can occur beyond punchlines and be influenced by various factors (Bochkarev, 2022), isolating responses to specific maxim floutings remains challenging, suggesting future studies to incorporate methods like audience surveys or live observations to ensure a clearer picture of how humor is perceived. Lastly, the subjective nature of interpreting maxims (Thomas, 1995) and the research's time constraints may have affected the depth and reliability of the analysis, warranting future studies to apply triangulation for greater objectivity.

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