



Pragmatic Analysis of Maxims Flouting Contained in *PunHubOnline* Memes on Instagram

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Abstract

The massive use of the internet in Indonesia is followed by the use of social media. This gave birth to a new phenomenon among its users, the creativity of making memes. Memes in the form of images or videos are defined as ideas, behaviors or styles that spread from one person to another through social media which become a vehicle for entertainment due to their funny and parodic nature. Humor in memes can occur because speakers are flouting Grice's Cooperative Principle. This study employs a qualitative method with a pragmatic approach, and the data source is the Instagram account PunHubOnline. The sample analyzed consists of 130 memes uploaded between September 2022 and September 2023. The results of the study indicate that all four of Grice's maxims quantity, quality, relevance, and manner are deliberately flouted in PunHubOnline memes to create humor. Violations of the maxim of quantity occur when information is either overly detailed or insufficient. The maxim of quality is flouted through the use of irony, hyperbole, and non-factual expressions. Violations of the maxim of relevance arise from responses that are contextually inappropriate, while violations of the maxim of manner are evident in the use of ambiguous or unclear language. These four types of violations trigger conversational implicatures that are humorous and effective in conveying messages indirectly within the realm of digital communication.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of digital technology and the dominance of social media platforms have reshaped the way people communicate. In this digital age, interaction is no longer limited to face-to-face encounters or formal language. Instead, users creatively engage in communication using a blend of visuals, symbols, and short texts, often in the form of memes. Memes have emerged as powerful tools of expression, allowing individuals to convey humor, criticism, social commentary, and emotion in concise and entertaining ways. These humorous visuals are not only part of pop culture but also reflect deeper linguistic strategies and pragmatic functions that deserve scholarly attention.

Despite their seemingly casual and playful nature, memes involve complex language use. Behind their humorous construction lies a pattern of communication that frequently deviates from traditional norms of cooperative conversation. This deviation is especially interesting when viewed through the lens of pragmatics, particularly Grice's Cooperative Principle. According to Grice (1975), effective communication relies on speakers adhering to four conversational maxims: quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. However, in the case of memes especially conversational ones these maxims are often intentionally flouted to produce humorous or ironic effects. Such violations are not signs of communicative failure but rather strategies used to create implied meanings, or conversational implicatures, that rely on the audience's shared knowledge and interpretive skills.

The central issue that this research addresses is the need to better understand how humor is pragmatically constructed in memes through the flouting of conversational maxims. Although humor is a widely studied phenomenon in linguistics, most research has focused on traditional genres such as stand-up comedy, novels, films, or political discourse.

Memes, which now play a central role in shaping public discourse, remain relatively underexplored in pragmatic studies particularly in the context of Indonesian digital culture. Moreover, most existing literature emphasizes the function of memes as cultural or sociological products, with less focus on the linguistic mechanisms underlying their humor. This study aims to fill that gap by focusing on maxim flouting as a central linguistic strategy in meme construction.

To date, several scholars have examined Gricean maxims in various media contexts. Manurung (2019) and Marlisa & Hidayat (2020), for instance, have explored how conversational maxims are flouted in talk shows to achieve humor or soften sensitive topics. Similarly, studies by Nuringtyas (2018) and Lasiana & Mubarak (2020) show how movies often exploit violations of the maxims to create dramatic irony or comedic tension. Research on comics, such as those by Saefudin et al. (2023), reveals that humor often emerges when the reader is required to infer meaning beyond what is explicitly stated. However, while these studies have enriched our understanding of pragmatic strategies in various contexts, they have not sufficiently addressed how such mechanisms function in digital meme communication, where immediacy, brevity, and intertextuality play vital roles.

The present research focuses on memes published by PunHubOnline, a popular Indonesian Instagram account known for its puns and visual-linguistic humor. These memes often involve short dialogues or utterances embedded in humorous illustrations. Linguistically, they resemble informal everyday conversations but with added layers of creativity and subtext. Unlike conventional conversation, meme dialogues are crafted with specific humorous intentions, frequently relying on ambiguity, exaggeration, irony, or irrelevance—all of which suggest potential flouting of Gricean maxims. Analyzing these meme texts through a pragmatic lens allows us to uncover how meaning is constructed, interpreted, and manipulated in digital spaces.

One notable aspect of PunHubOnline memes is their use of linguistic playfulness to generate humor. The creators often exploit ambiguity, sarcasm, and contextual mismatches to elicit laughter. These forms of expression cannot be fully understood without examining the implied meanings that arise from the flouting of conversational norms. By investigating such flouting, we not only gain insight into humor mechanisms but also into the evolving nature of digital communication where indirectness, implication, and shared cultural references play increasingly central roles. This highlights the need for a pragmatic approach to meme analysis—one that integrates theory with actual language use in digital platforms.

The importance of this research lies in its dual contribution: theoretically, it advances the study of pragmatics by applying classical concepts to contemporary digital phenomena; practically, it provides valuable insights for content creators, educators, and media analysts. For instance, understanding how humor is generated through flouted maxims can help content creators design more engaging materials. For educators, especially in language and communication fields, it offers a pedagogical tool to teach implicature and non-literal language use. Furthermore, for scholars and analysts interested in digital culture, this research illuminates how memes function as rhetorical tools in online discourse.

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive method, using a pragmatic analysis approach. A total of 130 memes were selected from PunHubOnline's Instagram account, published between September 2022 and September 2023. The memes were chosen based on specific criteria: they must contain humorous dialogues and show evidence of maxim flouting. Each meme was analyzed to determine which maxim(s) were flouted, how the implicature was constructed, and what linguistic strategies were used (e.g., hyperbole, irony, metaphor, ambiguity). The analysis aims to identify patterns in the use of these strategies and their pragmatic impact on meaning construction and audience reception.

Based on the background and review above, this study seeks to answer the following research question: How do PunHubOnline memes flout conversational maxims to create humor and generate conversational implicature from a pragmatic perspective? Sub-questions include: (1) What types of maxims are flouted in the memes? (2) What linguistic strategies are used to flout them? and (3) What kinds of implicatures are produced as a result? Through these questions, the study aims to offer a structured understanding of how flouting the Cooperative Principle in memes contributes not only to humor but also to richer, layered communication in digital contexts. In doing so, the research maintains a balance between the theoretical exploration of pragmatic phenomena and their applied significance in the landscape of contemporary digital media.

METHOD

This study is a descriptive qualitative study. The data were taken from PunHubOnline Meme from Instagram. The primary data source consisted of 130 memes posted between September 2022 and September 2023. These were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method, based on specific inclusion criteria: (1) the meme contains a written dialogue or utterance, (2) the content conveys humor or comedic intent, and (3) the humor can be analyzed in terms of Grice's (1975) four conversational maxims quantity, quality, relevance, and manner.

To collect the data, the researcher first conducted a comprehensive review of the PunHubOnline Instagram feed during the designated period. Memes that matched the criteria were saved, documented, and organized chronologically. Each meme was labeled with a unique code that included its number, the maxim it flouted, and the strategy used (e.g., 10/Quan/GLI for meme number 10, flouting the quantity maxim with a general linguistic implicature).

The classification and interpretation of the data followed a multi-step coding procedure. First, each meme was examined to identify

which conversational maxim(s) were flouted. This identification was based on Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975), which includes:

Maxim of Quantity (providing as much information as needed); Maxim of Quality (saying what is true and supported by evidence); Maxim of Relevance (being relevant to the context); Maxim of Manner (being clear, unambiguous, and orderly).

After identifying the flouted maxim, the researcher applied a coding framework adapted from Cutting (2002) and Yule (2014), which categorized types of flouting strategies such as: Overstatement/Understatement (for quantity); Irony, Hyperbole, Banter, and Metaphor (for quality); Topic Shifting or Irrelevance (for relevance); Ambiguity or Obscurity (for manner).

Each instance of flouting was then interpreted in terms of the conversational implicature it generated, drawing on Grice's theory and further supported by contextual clues within the meme (visuals, puns, intertextual references). The coding framework also integrated a layer of implicature analysis, distinguishing between generalized implicature (which does not require specific context) and particularized implicature (which relies on shared knowledge or situational understanding).

To ensure analytic rigor, the data were classified into a two-stage analytical sheet:

1. Preliminary Analysis Sheet: for initial identification of flouting and strategy.
2. Secondary Analysis Sheet: for deeper interpretation of implicature, context, and humor effects.

The interpretation process followed a pragmatic textual analysis model, involving close reading and contextualization of each meme, assessing how flouting served communicative functions, and how audiences might infer meaning beyond literal content. Where necessary, triangulation was employed through re-evaluation of coding and peer validation to strengthen the credibility of the findings.

By combining Grice's Cooperative Principle, implicature theory, and a structured

coding framework, this method provides a robust foundation for understanding how memes exploit linguistic norms to convey humor and layered meanings in digital communication.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this part, the data findings of the flouting maxims are revealed. This section provides the data of categories of maxims flouted in the PunHubOnline Meme. The result of this research is a description of the flouting of the cooperative principle in PunHubOnline Meme. In this meme, there are four types of flouting of the cooperative principle, namely 1) flouting of the quantity maxims, 2) flouting of the quality maxims, 3) flouting of the relevance maxims and 4) flouting of the manner maxims. The analysis of the categories of maxims flouting is presented below:

1. The flouting of Quantity Maxim in PunHubOnline Meme

Flouting the quantity maxim refers to a flouting of the cooperative principle where the speaker provides information that does not match the amount required in a conversation. The quantity maxim requires the speaker to provide enough information, no more and no less, according to the context of the conversation.

Data 1

Context:

This utterance takes place in the hospital room and the participants in this utterance are two people, the doctor and the patient. As seen in the picture, the purpose of the conversation is that the doctor wants to conduct an investigation on his patient. The conversation started when the patient started asking questions to the doctor who was observing him, so the following conversation took place.

10/Quan/GLI



Figure 1. Quantity Meme

A: How often do people die during the procedure?
B: *Just once*

The utterance Data 1 (10/Quan/GLI) above is a flouting Grice's cooperative principle. The flouting is categorized into a flouting of quantity maxims. The violation is reflected in Doctor's lack of answers. This contradicts Grice's cooperative principle. Grice states that the maxim of quantity does not require the interlocutor to give a long or short explanation. The utterance Data 1 (10/Quan/GLI) shows that the Doctor is lacking in answering his patient's question about the data on how many people die in the procedure, instead of the doctor answered with the true data he answered "just once" because people normally are died only once. This is in line with other studies that show that flouting the quantity maxim is often accompanied by the use of rhetorical devices which further amplify the effect of humor. Thus, flouting of the quantity maxim not only flout communication norms, but also enrich the audience's experience by presenting layered and complex meanings.

How humor is generated when the speaker provides either too little or too much information than what is contextually required. The humor arises from the incongruity between the audience's expectations and the response delivered, producing an element of surprise or absurdity. The Audience reactions (Instagram comments): "Dark but hilarious,," "Why am I laughing at something so tragic?" These responses show that the audience recognizes the irony and enjoys it as a form of dark or morbid humor.

2. The flouting of Quality Maxim in *PunHubOnline* Meme

Flouting the quality maxim is a breaking of the cooperative principle in which the speaker purposefully conveys false or inaccurate information. This happens when the speaker makes a statement that contradicts reality, such as lying or providing inaccurate information. This form of flouting is frequently employed to convey hidden meaning, avoided conflict, or add humor to a conversation.

Data II

Context:

This Dialogue between a waiter and his customer, takes place at the restaurant. The waiter asks to the customer.

22/Qual/GLI



Figure 2. Quality Meme

A: Would you like to order Sir?
B: What are my options?
A: *Yes or No*

The utterance Data (22/Qual/GLI) above is a flouting Grice's cooperative principle. The flouting is categorized into a flouting of quality maxims. When the customer asking "what are my options?" He's expecting to hear some of the menu that the waiters will mention it instead of mention the menu he just answering "Yes or No". That's implied a flouting into maxim of quality because the waiters gave the answer which is not correlate with customers' question. This is in line with other studies which show that Flouting maxim often occurs with strategies such as hyperbole, metaphor, irony, and banter to create humor. As shown in a study by Serli Bukka (2015), it was found that flouting the quality maxim was the most commonly used in the sitcom "Seinfeld," with irony as the main

strategy that generated humor, accounting for 31.39% of the total violations identified. Thus, violations of the maxim of quality are done to manipulate facts and speak nonsense, which serves to create humorous and entertaining situations.

This maxim is flouted when the speaker says something blatantly untrue, exaggerated, sarcastic, or metaphorical. The humor stems from the awareness that the speaker is intentionally being insincere or playful. The Audience reactions: “Ouch! That hurts but it’s hilarious,”; “Someone’s sleeping on the couch tonight.” Such comments indicate that readers understand the subtext and appreciate the humor in its biting sarcasm.

3. The flouting of Relevance Maxim in PunHubOnline Meme

Flouting relevance maxim occurs when the speaker makes statements that are irrelevant or unrelated to the topic being discussed. In context this violation creates a situation where the speaker does not meet the listener's expectation to make a contribution that is appropriate to the context of the conversation.

Data III

Context:

This conversation takes place in an airplane cabin and the participants in this conversation are two people, a passenger and a flight attendant. As seen in the picture, the purpose of this conversation is that the flight attendant is providing services to the passenger. The conversation begins when the passenger starts asking questions to the flight attendant so that the following conversation occurs.



Figure 3. Relevance Meme

A: Would you like some headphones?

B: Sure, but *how did you know my name is Phones?*

The utterance Data 2 (23/Rel/BIR) above is a flouting Grice's cooperative principle. The flouting is categorized into a flouting of Relevance maxims. The flouting is reflected in Passenger's answers. This contradicts Grice's cooperative principle. Grice states that the maxim of Relevance requires participants to deliver contributions that are synchronized with the topic of discussion. In the above speech, the passenger gave an answer that deviated from the flight attendant's question. There is unsynchronized of information that the stewardess doesn't know her passenger's name is "Phones" that's why when she asked "Would you like some headphones?" the passengers are confused how did she know his name.

This is in line with other studies which show that flouting relevance maxim often occurs with strategies such as being irrelevance to create humor. In a study by Kurniawan (2020), it was found that the use of being irrelevance strategy in comedic dialog not only generates laughter, but also highlights the unique characteristics of the speaking character, thus enriching the narrative. In addition, another study by Suastini (2016) showed that flouting relevance maxim can be used to add depth in social interactions, where this violation creates space for the audience to ponder the deeper meaning behind seemingly irrelevant statements. Thus, the violation of relevance maxim is done to create humorous and entertaining situations.

This flouting occurs when a response is contextually irrelevant. The humor lies in the violation of conversational expectations, while the implicit meaning remains inferable. The audience reactions were “Wordplay like this cracks me up,”; “So annoying but so clever.” These reactions suggest that readers enjoy the layered meaning and find humor in the unexpected interpretation.

4. The flouting of Manner Maxim in PunHubOnline Meme

Flouting of manner maxim is a break of the cooperative principle where the speaker does not convey information in a clear, organized, or concise manner. This flouting can occur through the use of ambiguous, wordy, or indirect language, making the message difficult for the listener to understand.

Data IV

Context:

This Dialogue between a waiter and her customer, takes place at the restaurant. The waiter asks to the customer.



Figure 4. Manner Meme

A: Would you like some olive oil with that sir?

B: Is it extra virgin?

A: *No, it's the same price*

The point from the waitress is offering an olive oil to the customer but instead of assuming the olive oil the customer thinking about “extra virgin” which is regularly mention in terms of olive oil. Then the waitress misleading us that the price is the same with “not virgin”. This is in line with other studies which show that flouting of manner maxim often occurs with strategies such as being irrelevance to create humor. The

study by Rifa'i (2014) shows that flouting manner maxim through the strategy of being obscure can create intentional confusion, encouraging the audience to ponder the meaning behind the obscure statement. In this way, humor comes not only from absurd situations but also from the uncertainty generated by the way information is conveyed. Research shows that flouting manner maxim is often used in comedic contexts to create humor, due to vagueness or ambiguity in communication.

This involves making statements that are obscure, overly complex, or ambiguous. Humor is triggered when readers work through the confusion and uncover the speaker's actual intention. The audience reactions “Feels like a dad joke but it works,” “Why not just say ice cream?” These responses show that the audience enjoys the challenge of interpretation and finds amusement in the delayed clarity.

Each type of maxim flouting in PunHubOnline memes effectively generates humor through deliberate violation of conversational norms. These violations trigger conversational implicatures that rely on shared contextual knowledge and cultural awareness. Audience responses on Instagram reflect positive engagement, as users appreciate humor that is layered, clever, and context dependent. This confirms that in digital discourse, especially memes, humor thrives on brevity, creativity, and indirectness highlighting the relevance of pragmatic theory in the study of online communication.

People need to adhere to the principle of communication in order that the process runs smoothly and effectively. As stated by Grice (1975), offer your contribution in accordance with the understood purpose of the conversation exchange in which you are participating. Under the principle, there are four maxims with their unique qualities to be fulfilled, which are occasionally disobeyed and flouted depending on the speaker's aims. In truth, the existence of the maxim is undeniable given that communication necessitates cooperation, yet not everyone consistently adheres to the cooperative principle.

Based on the analysis of maxim flouting found in PunHubOnline, there have been some findings how the use of maxim flouting by the characters produces some sorts of humor to the audiences. The findings showed that the least occurred maxim flouting was flouting of quality maxim. Flouting quality maxim rarely produces humor because this violation is often interpreted as conveying incorrect or misleading information, which can reduce the clarity and effectiveness of communication. In a study conducted by Rafika (2020), it was found that flouting quality maxim is generally used to avoid conflict or to convey information that is difficult to prove, which means that the purpose of this violation is more about maintaining social relationships than creating humorous moments.

In addition, the humor generated from flouting quality maxim tends to be more subtle and indirect, so it is not always easily picked up by the audience. Research also shows that these violations often serve to manipulate facts and speak nonsense, which may not generate a strong humorous reaction if the context is not right. Thus, although flouting quality maxim can produce humor in certain situations, its frequency is lower compared to flouting other maxims, such as quantity, relevance or manner.

Meanwhile, the most common maxim flouting was the disregard of relevance maxim. It demonstrated that maxim flouting relevancy is a powerful communication method for generating comedy. This is consistent with Sperber and Wilson's (1995) statements that due to differences in personal experiences, cognitive background, and communicative abilities between the speaker and the hearer, optimal relevance may not be achieved, resulting in misunderstandings and humorous effects on various scenes. As a result, disregarding relevance maxims will produce amusing results that can only be understood by the audience.

There are four results in terms of the strategies applied to flout the maxim defined by Cutting (2002), which was reflected on the flouting of the cooperative principle in order to create humour. First, there were two types of tactics for flouting

the quality maxim: giving too much information and giving too little information. Giving too much or too little information can create confusion and generate funny reactions from the audience as both strategies create a mismatch between expectations and reality in communication. When speakers provide excessive information, they often present irrelevant or too many details, which can create a situation where listeners feel overwhelmed and unable to follow the speaker's train of thought. This vagueness can trigger humorous reactions as the audience may find absurdity in the situation, or they could respond with sarcastic or humorous comments about the confusion caused. Conversely, providing too little information can cause the audience to feel curious or confused about the context or meaning of what is being conveyed which can result in humorous or unexpected conclusions. In many cases, this uncertainty can create moments of humor as the audience is surprised by interpretations that differ from those intended by the speaker. Thus, these two strategies demonstrate how violations of communication expectations can result in humorous confusion. In the context of comedy, the mismatch between expectation and reality is often the main source of humor, creating an entertaining experience for the audience.

Second, in flouting quality maxims there are several strategies such as hyperbole, metaphor, irony, and banter that can create humorous reactions from the audience because they violate communication expectations in a surprising and entertaining way. In the context of humor, the use of hyperbole can create a ridiculous or unrealistic image, which makes the audience laugh because of the absurdity presented. Metaphors allow speakers to convey ideas in a creative and indirect way, often resulting in humorous visuals. Irony occurs when there is a difference between what is expected and what actually happens. In the context of humor, irony can create humorous situations when unexpected results arise from seemingly serious statements. The Banter strategy is a quick and often sharp form of

conversation, where participants tease each other or comment in a humorous way. This strategy creates an interactive dynamic that invites laughter, as the audience enjoys the witty and humorous exchanges between the characters. Taken together, these strategies serve to break the usual expectations of communication, create surprise, and generate humorous moments that the audience can enjoy.

Third, in creating flouting relevance maxims, the being irrelevance strategy can create humorous reactions from the audience because it violates communication expectations in a surprising and absurd way. When the speaker gives an answer or statement that is irrelevant to the context of the conversation, it creates a mismatch between the listener's expectations and what is actually being conveyed. This situation often results in humor as the audience finds pleasure in the uncertainty and confusion caused.

Fourth, in creating flouting manner maxims, the being obscure strategy can create humorous reactions from the audience because it involves using vague, ambiguous, or indirect language, which often confuses listeners. When the speaker conveys information in a way that is unclear or difficult to understand, it creates uncertainty that can trigger laughter.

The findings of this study, which examine how PunHubOnline memes flout Grice's maxims to create humor, align with and extend previous research in both scope and modality. Compared to talk show studies such as those by Manurung (2019) and Marlisa & Hidayat (2020), which found frequent flouting of the maxim of quality through sarcasm and hyperbole, this study illustrates how similar strategies appear in memes, albeit in a more compact, visual textual form. Unlike talk shows that depend on intonation and real-time interaction, memes operate in static, asynchronous formats where visual cues play a significant role in reinforcing the flouting of maxims.

Similar patterns are also found in comic and film studies. Research by Saefudin et al. (2023) and Lasiana & Mubarak (2020) highlights

flouting of quality and relevance maxims to generate humor through character interactions and narrative context. However, PunHubOnline memes distinguish themselves through brevity and their reliance on intertextuality often requiring the audience to draw on cultural references, idioms, and viral knowledge for interpretation, making meme based humor more fluid and context dependent than scripted media.

In the context of digital communication, this study shares common ground with Fauziah et al. (2020), who investigated humor in web comics. Yet, it goes further by offering a systematic categorization of flouting strategies, such as ambiguity, irrelevance, and banter while also incorporating audience responses (e.g., Instagram comments) into the analysis. This approach strengthens the link between humor production and reception, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how humor operates pragmatically in online settings. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that even in informal and humorous online environments, complex linguistic strategies are actively used, positioning digital memes as valuable subjects of pragmatic inquiry.

The findings of this study reveal that humor in PunHubOnline memes, achieved through the flouting of Grice's maxims, functions not only as entertainment but as a strategic form of digital communication. By employing irony, hyperbole, and ambiguity, memes convey implicit messages that rely on shared cultural knowledge and contextual interpretation. This supports and expands theories of incongruity, relevance, and pragmatic implicature, showing that maxim flouting is a creative, not disruptive, communicative act. Moreover, the study highlights that digital humor though brief and visual is linguistically rich and socially meaningful, positioning memes as semiotic tools that reflect the values, critiques, and collective identities of online communities.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on analyzing Flouting of Grice's Maxim in the *PunHubOnline* Meme. Based on the finding above, there are 130 data flouting of a maxim of quantity, quality, manner and relation in the *PunHubOnline* Meme. The most prominent flouting of a maxim is that of relevance. Sometimes, the actors flout this maxim, they say something being irrelevance. Because of that, usually, humor is created in the conversation.

The kinds of strategies used to involve in the flouting of Grice's maxim are Giving too little much information, giving too much information, hyperbole, metaphor, irony, banter, being irrelevance, and being obscure. Almost all of them are found in all memes analyzed. The results of the analyses are the most prominent is being irrelevance.

Flouting of maxims is one of many topics that is interesting to investigate. The subjects of the research usually use film, situation comedy, book, or advertisement. To enrich the study of flouting of maxims, the further researches can use different text or they can collect the data from naturally occurring conversation in different settings such as talk show etc.

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