

A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF HUMOR AS REFLECTED BY THE MAIN CHARACTERS IN PINK'S *ACCEPTED* MOVIE

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Abstract

This research aims to answer three objectives which are: (1) to identify the maxims which are flouted by the main characters to create humor in *Accepted* movie; (2) to describe the forms of humor expressed by the main characters through maxim flouting in *Accepted* movie; and (3) to explain the functions of humor expressed by the main characters through maxim flouting in *Accepted* movie. This research employed the descriptive qualitative method. The data were in the form of words, phrases and clauses. The contexts of the data were dialogues. The source of the data was an American comedy movie entitled *Accepted*. To ensure its accuracy, the data findings were triangulated by two linguistics students. There are three findings found in this research: (1) the main characters in *Accepted* movie employ all types of maxim flouting, i.e. flouting of maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of manner and maxim of relation to create humorous utterances; (2) there are two forms of humor found as the result of maxim flouting done by the main characters in *Accepted* movie: jokes and spontaneous conversational humor; (3) the main characters employ the four functions of humor, i.e social management, decommitment, mediation and defunctionalization in *Accepted* movie.

Keywords: humor, maxim flouting, main characters, *Accepted* movie.

INTRODUCTION

Humor helps people communicate with others. It also makes a good social interaction among them since the interaction will be more pleasurable by using it. It does not only share happiness and provide them something to be laughed about. Moreover, it also helps lessen the social boundaries among them. There are many entertainment media such as movie, novel, and comic which using humor as their theme. The trend or the happening events in the society could influence the kind of story theme which will be released. Therefore, people could also use humor as a way to relieve stress which is caused by social problems.

According to Martin (2007: 166), humor is a live form of interaction which occurs in all types of social contexts. Humor can be found in many different forms such as canned jokes, amusing personal anecdotes, spontaneous witty comments, ironic observations, puns, teasing, sarcasm, double entendres, and the like. These forms of humor could serve important interpersonal functions. The importance of humor in life could be seen in its ability to create bond among people. Therefore, it is one of the easy

ways to attract people's attention and make them feel entertained.

However, it is possible for some people to not understand the meaning of a certain humor. It is because the form and context of humor are influenced by the society which lived in a particular country. It is important for the speaker who wants to present humor to consider the meaning of the utterances which are implied in order to make the audience are able to understand the humor. Therefore, both the speaker and the audience should be cooperative to be able to digest the humor. According to Grice (1989: 24), communication is a process that requires cooperation between the speaker and the listener. Both of the speaker and the listener are expected to give appropriate contributions to the conversation between them. Therefore, he proposes Cooperative Principle in order to guide people to communicate effectively and cooperatively with each other. Furthermore, people could avoid misunderstanding by following the Principles.

Although Grice's maxims are created to make people communicate effectively to each other, the humor point usually can be found in the flouting of the maxims. According to Attardo

(2001: 49), humor is a large body of information, but it is clear that well-known pragmatic principles (such as Grice's cooperative principle) prevent it from being infinite and/or indefinite. Therefore, Grice's maxims might be flouted in order to deliver the essence of humor. Black (2006: 24) states that somehow people have their personal purposes or reasons to not employ the Cooperative Principles in doing their communication. Therefore, the four maxims of Cooperative Principle might be flouted in order to achieve certain communication purposes.

Cutting (2002: 37-39) explains the four types of maxim flouting as in the following. The speaker who flouts the maxim of quantity is not being informative since he/she seems to give too little or too much information. In flouting of quality maxim, the information which is given by the speaker seems to be false. The speaker usually exaggerates it by using hyperbole, metaphor, irony and banter. The speaker who flouts the maxim of relation seems to give irrelevant information since the real information is usually hidden behind the utterance. In flouting of manner maxim, the speaker seems to give ambiguous information.

One of the reasons why people flout Grice's maxims is to create humor. There are various forms of humor in the world. The forms of humor convey the intention why people employ such a kind of humor to tell or criticize something in different ways. Each form of humor has its own characteristics to express people's intentions. Martin (2007: 11) divides the forms of humor that occur in everyday social interactions into three broad categories: jokes; spontaneous conversational humor; and unintentional humor.

Spontaneous conversational humor could be found in various forms. According to Debra Long and Arthur Graesser (1988) in Martin (2007: 12-13), there are 11 categories of spontaneous conversational humor i.e irony, satire, sarcasm, overstatement and understatement, self-deprecation, teasing, replies to rhetorical questions, clever replies to serious statements, double entendres, transformations of frozen expressions and puns.

According to Attardo in his book *Linguistic Theories of Humor* (1994: 323-329), the functions of humor on the communicative process can be grouped into four classes: social management; decommitment; mediation; and defunctionalization. Humor as a social management is used as a tool to strengthen the bonding in group interaction or out-group rejection. It is used to overcome any awkwardness which may happen. Kane et al (in Attardo 1994: 325) explains decommitment as an act of withdrawing a certain humorous utterance which has been said by the speaker in order to avoid some offenses. It is divided into two forms which are probing and salvaging. According to Mulkay in Attardo (1994: 327), humor as a mediating tool is used either to introduce or to carry out potentially embarrassing or aggressive interactions. According to Guiraud in Attardo (1994: 329), defunctionalization is used to gain playful purposes during a conversation by using defunctionalized language.

The flouting of maxims in humor usually can be found in a comedy movie. It is one kind of media which mainly contains humor as its main theme. This kind of movie is created to provoke laughter for the audience through the acts of the characters since it usually has a very wide theme in humor. One kind of comedy movie which employs maxim flouting to create humorous statements is *Accepted* movie. *Accepted* is an American comedy movie which was produced in 2006. This movie was directed by Steve Pink. It tells about Bartleby Gaines (Justin Long), a fresh graduate high school student who gets rejected in any college he has applied. Therefore, he and his friends decide to make a fake college in an abandoned psychiatric hospital. They create South Harmon Institute of Technology to trick their parents and to avoid the attribute of being unemployed. However, there are many students who have paid the tuition to enter the college because Sherman Schrader (Jonah Hill) makes the college website clickable.

In this research, the researcher analyzed *Accepted* movie because this movie does not only tell about Bartleby who tries to maintain the fake college existence, but also tells about the social

issues which occur in the society nowadays such as education, taxes and authority. In this movie, the viewers could see Bartebly transforming into a man who has a vision and dreams, despite all of the obstacles which go against him. The humor in this movie does not only provoke laughter through the characters' everyday social life, but it also tells the viewers that humor can be used to criticize social issues that occur in the society.

The objectives of this research are: (1) to identify the maxims which are flouted by the main characters to create humor in *Accepted* movie; (2) to describe the forms of humor expressed by the main characters through maxim flouting in *Accepted* movie; (3) and to explain the functions of humor expressed by the main characters through maxim flouting in *Accepted* movie.

This research is concerned with the analysis of maxim flouting expressed by the main characters to create humor in *Accepted* movie. The final result of this research is expected to be useful for: This research hopefully can enrich the readers' knowledge about humor that is created through maxim flouting. This research hopefully can be a source of study for the students who want to conduct a research using pragmatic approach to analyze humor.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed descriptive qualitative method since the data were collected in the form of words. The purpose of the descriptive qualitative method is to study a phenomenon to discover the patterns and themes about life events. It is used when the researcher has a specific question about the phenomenon. Descriptive qualitative method is used for research which is focused on social connections, interrelationships, life events, and other matters concerned with social sciences, (Parse, 2001: 57). Therefore, the researcher analyzed the recorded or transcribed data with all their richness as detail as possible. In this research, the analysis was meant to identify the four categories of flouting of the Grice's maxims, the humor which contains maxim flouting in *Accepted* movie and the

functions of humor which are employed by the main characters in the movie.

According to Bungin (2007: 103), the data of qualitative research are in the forms of sentence, utterances, and short stories. The data in this research were in the form of phrases, clauses, and sentences showing humor. The context of the data was the dialogues taken from the conversation of the main characters. Thus, the primary source of the data in this research was the movie entitled *Accepted*. The technique of collecting data was note taking.

Moleong (2001: 121) states that in qualitative research, the researcher plays an important role as the designer, data collector, analyst, data interpreter, and reporter of the research finding. The main instrument in this research was the researcher. The researcher planned the study, collected the data, and analyzed them in the research. The secondary instrument was the data sheet. The data sheet in the form of a table was used as a device of processing identification and analysis.

Wiersma (2009: 236) states that qualitative researchers may engage to the interview, focus groups, observation and document collection in order to collect data. Wimmer and Dominick (2010: 119) state that data analysis in qualitative studies is done early in the collection process and continues throughout the project.

Moleong (2004: 178) states that the data must be checked by using three criteria which are credibility, dependability and comformability to obtain the data trustworthiness. The researcher triangulated the data

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzed the data, the researcher found that all types of maxim flouting are employed by the main characters to create humor in *Accepted* movie i.e. flouting of quantity maxim, flouting of quality maxim, flouting of manner maxim and flouting of relation maxim.. The humorous utterances in *Accepted* movie are mostly created by the flouting of quality maxim. In terms of humor, there are only two forms of

humor found as the result of maxim flouting done by the main characters; they are jokes and spontaneous conversational humor. The only type of spontaneous conversational humor which could not be found is double entendres. . Meanwhile, sarcasm becomes the most frequent form of humor found in the movie. It occurs 10 times out of 40 data with the percentage of 25% from the total 100%. This finding shows that the main characters like to criticize each other in the conversations. They use sarcasm to intentionally mock each other's appearance and behavior in order to create humor. The last finding shows that in terms of function, the four functions of humor are found in *Accepted* movie i.e social management, decommitment, mediation and defunctionalization. The function of humor as social management becomes the most prominent function found in the data since the dialogue happens among the main characters in social groups.

The discussions below explain what types of maxim flouted by the main characters to create humor including the forms of humor which are employed as the result of maxim flouting. The first discussion is regarding flouting of quantity maxim. The forms of humor created by flouting of quantity maxim are jokes and spontaneous conversational humor which are teasing, satire and puns. Datum 15 is an example of how humor is created by the main characters by flouting maxim of quantity in *Accepted* movie.

The conversation below occurs when Bartleby and Schrader have a meeting with Ben Lewis, Schrader's Uncle, at the food court of the mall. Bartleby should search for the right person to be the dean of South Harmon Institute of Technology to assure his Dad that he really studies in a real college. He tells Uncle Ben that he wants to make him as dean because he used to be an academician in Harmon College, a prestigious college in the area, back then when he was young. However, Uncle Ben seems to refuse Bartleby's offering because he is no longer have any business with education matters. Bartleby is surprised by the fact that Uncle Ben has ended his career in Harmon. Therefore, Schrader helps his

uncle to explain to Bartleby by saying that his uncle got fired so that he quits his job.

Schrader : Yeah, well,
technically, he was
fired.

Ben :That's not true. **I
got fed up with the
education racket. So I
quit. I did send in my
resignation in a rather
unorthodox fashion.**

(Datum 15)

It can be seen from the dialogue above that Uncle Ben denies Schrader's statement. He says that he quits his job as a dean because he gets fed up with the education racket instead of getting fired. He also adds the information by saying that he sent his resignation in a rather unorthodox fashion. Thus, he flouts maxim of quantity by saying too much information. He could answer Schrader's statement by only using his first utterance "*That's not true.*" in the conversation above. However, he adds more information which is not required.

In the bold utterances above, Uncle Ben refuses to admit that he got fired. He flouts maxim of quantity by using satire. This kind of humor is usually used to criticize or to give comments about social institutions or social policies in an amusing way. He says that he quits his job as a dean because he gets fed up with the education racket. He criticizes the education system in Harmon which is like a racket. It means that the system is full of dishonest activity for making a large unfair profit such as money. He also adds the information that he sent his resignation letter in an unorthodox fashion. It implies that he creates a new way in resigning a job rather than sticks to the old policies in Harmon College.

The next discussion explain how the main characters flout maxim of quality to create humor in *Accepted* movie. The forms of humor created by flouting of quality maxim are irony, sarcasm, overstatement and understatement, clever replies to serious statement, replies to rhetorical question and self-deprecation. The example is in datum 2. The dialogue occurs when Schrader just enters

the class room which is used by Bartleby and Hands to make fake ID card for the underage high school students. Schrader disagrees with this activity done by Bartleby because it is considered as illegal. Bartleby tells Schrader that he borrows his key to enter the classroom. However, he tells it after he took the key without Schrader's permission because he forgot to tell him. .

Bartleby : Uh, I forgot to tell you, I borrowed your keys.
Schrader : You borrowed my keys? Come on.
Bartleby : **Well, I needed them. Ow. We're providing a vital service to America's youth here.**

(Datum 2)

Schrader is about to be mad by what Bartleby has done. Bartleby then says that he needs to take the key because he needs it. In the bold utterances of the dialogue above, he flouts maxim of quality by exaggerating the information that he and Hands are providing a vital service to America's youth by making fake ID card in the classroom. This information is considered as hyperbole. He uses an overstatement humor by saying that they are providing a vital service to America's youth. It is an overstatement because making fake ID card for the underage high school students should not be considered as a vital service for America's youth since there are many more important things which can be considered as vital needs for youth such as education and health.

The third discussion is about humor which is created by flouting of manner maxim in *Accepted* movie. The forms of humor created by flouting of manner maxim are replies to rhetorical question, puns, satire and transformation of frozen expression. The following datum 4 is an example of flouting of manner maxim to create humorous utterance.

Schrader : Hey, I think that guy got into

Princeton.

Bartleby : Oh, what makes you say that?

Schrader : **I don't know.**

(Datum 4)

Bartleby and Schrader are on the way home from school when suddenly a guy yells that he gets into Princeton University. It is clearly stated that the guy gets accepted in Princeton because he is showing off his acceptance letter while yelling and running around the school yard. Both of Bartleby and Schrader should have known the fact that the guy really gets accepted in Princeton. However, Bartleby gives a rhetorical question to Schrader doubting about how he could assume that the guy gets into Princeton. Thus, Schrader flouts maxim of manner by giving an ambiguous statement in the bold utterance above. He says that he does not know, while both of them already know the fact about the guy. He uses a reply to rhetorical question. He replies to violate a conversational expectation and surprises Bartleby who gives the question. He says that he does not know why he could assume that the guy gets into Princeton, while he and Bartleby have already known the fact that the guy did.

The last discussion is about flouting of relation maxim done by the main characters in *Accepted* movie to create humor. The forms of humor created by flouting of relation maxim are clever replies to serious statement, replies to rhetorical question, satire and teasing. An example of flouting of relation maxim found in *Accepted* movie is shown in the following data.

Schrader : What the hell is going on here?

Bartleby : **Relax, pal. Five percent goes to your favorite charity.**

(Datum 1)

The conversation above occurs when Schrader just enters the room where Bartleby and Hands make fake ID card for the underage students. He is shocked by the fact that Bartleby

uses the classroom to do an activity which seems illegal. However, he still does not figure it out yet about the making of fake ID card. Therefore, he asks Bartleby about what actually happen. In the bold utterances above, Bartleby does not tell relevant information to Schrader that they are making fake ID cards. Instead, he asks Schrader to relax and says that five percent (from the benefit of the fake ID project) will be donated to Schrader's favorite charity. Thus, he flouts maxim of relation. . In the bold utterances above, he uses clever replies to serious statement. He states a clever, incongruous or nonsensical statement to answer serious statement. He says that five percent of the money from the profit of the fake ID project will be donated to Schrader's favorite charity.

Regarding the functions of humor found in *Accepted* movie, the main characters employed all the four functions of humor. The function of humor as social management is created by the main characters by flouting all of the types of Grice's maxim. Below is an example of the employment of social management found in humorous utterance in in *Accepted* movie.

Bartleby : I'm... I'm just saying, I mean, is that what college is?

Ben : **What were you expecting? A renaissance of the human spirit?**

(Datum 24)

Bartleby just gets back from his trip visiting a prestigious college in his area, Harmon College. He assumes that college students just come to classes to hear theories which are lectured by the lecturers or without. The lessons that they taught are already written in books and they expect the students to follow every part of it. Then, he asks Uncle Ben about the reality of a college life. Uncle Ben uses satire by flouting maxim of quantity. He implies that Bartleby could not expect too much from a college as if it could make a renaissance of the human spirit. The function of this humor is social management. It is

to strengthen social bond between them since they are skeptic about the importance of college education. It is also used to make them work better to make South Harmon becomes a college which really educates the students.

Then, the function of humor as decommitment is created through flouting of quality maxim, manner maxim and relation maxim. Datum 37 is an example of decommitment found in *Accepted* movie.

Bartleby : You're the one that applied for accreditation, aren't you?

Schrader : **Well, someone had to do it, you know? We all can't live with our heads up our asses.**

(Datum 37)

Bartleby just got an invitation from the Court in the case of accreditation. The case of accreditation for South Harmon Institute of Technology is being contested by Dean Richard Van Horne, representing Harmon College. The conversation above occurs when Bartleby just tells his friends and Uncle Ben about the invitation. However, he does not know yet about the person who applied the accreditation case to the Court. Therefore, he asks Schrader whether he is the person who applied it. In the bold utterances above, Schrader uses transformation of frozen expression by flouting maxim of manner. He says that people cannot live with their heads up their asses which means that they better stop doing something stupidly and blindly which can cause unexpected problems. The function of this humor is decommitment which is to defy unpleasant situation.

Meanwhile, the function of humor as mediation is created through flouting of quantity, quality maxim and relation maxim. The example of humor as mediating tool is seen in the following datum 30.

Bartleby : You're humiliating yourself, buddy.

Schrader : **You know what,**

**B. Don't mess
with me! These
are the happiest
times of my life,
all right?**

(Datum 30)

The dialogue above occurs when Bartleby visits Harmon College with Monica Moreland. He sees Schrader wearing hotdog costume in the school yard and yelling “Ask me about my wiener!” to anybody who passes him by. Bartleby tells Schrader that he is humiliating himself by obeying what Hoyt Ambrose wants. However, Schrader uses irony by saying that these are the happiest time of his life. Thus, he flouts maxim of quality. The function of this humor is mediation. He uses it because he feel embarrassed because he is humiliating himself. Therefore, he wants Bartleby to shut up.

The last function of humor found in Accepted movie is defunctionalization. It is created through flouting quantity maxim and manner maxim. An example of defunctionalization is in datum 6.

Schrader : Wait. South
Harmon Institute
of Technology?
Bartleby : Yeah.
Schrader : B, you realize that
makes it S.H.I.T.,
right?
Bartleby ; **S.H.I.T.? I was
wingin' it.
Whatever**

(Datum 6)

Schrader asks Bartleby to make sure about the name of the fake college, South Harmon Institute of Technology, because it will be S.H.I.T. when it is abbreviated. In the bold utterances above, Bartleby flouts maxim of manner. He creates a pun by saying S.H.I.T. This humor has a function as defunctionalization because he uses language as a playful purpose. The abbreviation S.H.I.T creates a dual meaning because it is homophonic with the word “shit” in

literal. The first one is S.H.I.T as the fake college. The second is “shit” which could be a curse word or literally means feces. Bartleby does not care about the other meaning. Although, he realizes that those two words sound the same. He will still name the fake college as South Harmon Institute of Technology which has an abbreviation as S.H.I.T.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

The main characters in *Accepted* movie flout all types of maxim flouting in order to create humor. They flout maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of manner and maxim of relation. The humor found in the movie are mostly created through flouting of maxim of quality. The main characters usually flout this maxim by using hyperbole, irony and sarcasm.

There are two forms of humor found as the result of maxim flouting done by the main characters in *Accepted* movie which are jokes and spontaneous conversational humor. Meanwhile, spontaneous conversational humor dominates the findings since the analyzed conversations occur in daily life. Sarcasm becomes the most frequent type of humor in the movie. It is often employed by the main characters during the talk. It depicts that they like to criticize each other.

Regarding the functions of humor employed by the main characters, there are four functions found in *Accepted* movie i.e social management, decommitment, mediation and defunctionalization. Social management becomes the most employed fuction of humor in the movie. The main characters use humor mainly to interact towards each other in their social life.

Suggestions

The future researchers can develop their analysis of humor by using other theories of pragmatics, such as politeness, or sociolinguistics, stylistics and the like. Meanwhile, humor can not only be found in American comedy movie. Therefore, the future researchers can use other resources as the object of the research since the types of humor can also

be found in comedy shows, celebrity shows, and even movies which do not use comedy as their main theme. Moreover, they can also analyze the effects which are caused by the employment of humor in daily conversations.

Furthermore, the English students who want to create literary works with humor as their theme can learn about the analysis of humor. Therefore, they know the types and the functions of humor that will help them in the process of writing. Moreover, they could also classify the types of humor mostly used in certain situations in a real life. Therefore, they can also conduct a research regarding humor.

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