



Conversational Maxims in Stand-Up Comedy Marcello Hernandez's Performance: A Pragmatic Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe and analyze the use and flouting of conversational maxims in Marcello Hernandez's stand-up comedy performance from a pragmatic perspective. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method, with data consisting of utterances containing Grice's maxims: quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. The data source is a stand-up comedy performance video by Marcello Hernandez on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon. The data were collected through observation, transcription, data reduction, and classification, and then analyzed using the Cooperative Principle theory. The findings reveal two main strategies: observance and flouting of maxims. From the total data analyzed, maxim flouting is more dominant than observance. The maxim of quality is the most frequently flouted, followed by relevance, quantity, and manner. These flouts are achieved through strategies such as hyperbole, metaphor, repetition, and irrelevance, which serve to create humorous effects. Furthermore, the study finds that humor in the performance is generated through cognitive mechanisms, particularly the Incongruity Theory, in which humor arises from a mismatch between expectation and reality that the audience resolves. Therefore, maxim flouting is not a communication failure but an effective pragmatic strategy for producing humor and enhancing audience engagement.

Keyword: *Pragmatics, conversational maxims, maxim flouting, humor, stand-up comedy*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan dan menganalisis penggunaan dan pelanggaran (flouting) maksim percakapan dalam penampilan stand-up comedy Marcello Hernandez dari perspektif pragmatik. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan data berupa tuturan yang mengandung maksim Grice, yaitu maksim kuantitas, kualitas, relevansi, dan manner. Sumber data diambil dari video penampilan Marcello Hernandez sebagai komedian stand-up pada acara The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, transkripsi, reduksi data, dan klasifikasi, kemudian dianalisis berdasarkan teori Cooperative Principle. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat dua strategi utama, yaitu kepatuhan (observance) dan pelanggaran (flouting) maksim. Dari total data yang dianalisis, pelanggaran maksim lebih dominan dibandingkan dengan kepatuhan. Maksim kualitas menjadi yang paling sering dilanggar, diikuti oleh maksim relevansi, kuantitas, dan cara. Pelanggaran tersebut diwujudkan melalui strategi seperti hiperbola, metafora, repetisi, dan ketidakrelevanan yang bertujuan untuk menciptakan efek humor. Selain itu, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa humor dalam penampilan tersebut dihasilkan melalui mekanisme kognitif, khususnya teori ketidaksesuaian (incongruity), yaitu munculnya ketidaksesuaian antara ekspektasi dan realitas yang kemudian diselesaikan oleh audiens. Dengan demikian, pelanggaran maksim bukan merupakan kegagalan komunikasi, melainkan strategi pragmatik yang efektif untuk menghasilkan humor dan meningkatkan keterlibatan audiens.

Kata kunci: Pragmatik, maksim percakapan, pelanggaran maksim, humor, stand-up comedy



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1. INTRODUCTION

Language is the primary means for human interaction (Bonvillain, 2019). It acts as the channel for conveying thoughts, goals, and emotions (Fedorenko et al., 2024). Meaning conveyed during communication is not always determined on the basis of the literal meaning of words uttered. It relies on the context and the manner in which the utterances are made (Afandi, 2020). This understanding of meaning informs the study of language and leads us to the branch of linguistics known as pragmatics, which examines language in the context of actual communication (Yusrina et al., 2025). The study of context is pivotal to pragmatics, as meaning is interpreted through the lens of particular situations, existing knowledge, and the presumed understanding between the speaker and the listener (Fatihi, 2025).

A fundamental framework in the theory of pragmatics is the Cooperative Principle (Dwi et al., 2019). This principle states that the parties involved in a particular communicative event must endeavor to contribute to achieving the goal of the communication event (Deavisca et al., 2023). Grice sought to articulate the Cooperative Principle as four conversational maxims: quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. These maxims set the standards for practitioners of the art of conversation to be as informative, as true, as pertinent, and as clear as possible in their utterances.

Nevertheless, in actual communication, speakers do not always adhere to these maxims literally. One significant phenomenon in pragmatics is the flouting of maxims, which refers to the intentional and overt breaking of conversational maxims in order to generate implied meaning, or conversational implicature (Luthfiyah & Rosalinah, 2025). In this sense, such flouting is not a communication failure, but rather a linguistic strategy that encourages the hearer to infer the intended meaning.

This phenomenon becomes particularly prominent in performative communication, especially in stand-up comedy. Stand-up comedy is a form of monologic performance in which comedians use language as the primary tool to generate humor (Adnan & Aladhami, 2024). Humor often arises from incongruity between what is said and what is conventionally expected in communication (Romadlani, 2021). One comedian who exemplifies this tendency is Marcello Hernandez, known for his performances on Saturday Night Live. In his material, he frequently employs flouting strategies, such as providing excessive information and using hyperbole, as key elements in constructing humor.

Research on the flouting of conversational maxims has been widely conducted in various media communication contexts. Amartya and Rosyidah (2025) demonstrate that maxim violations in podcast discourse are dominated by the overinforming strategy. Similar findings are reported by Setyadi et al. (2025). In their analysis of interviews with Anne Hathaway on The Tonight Show, the authors use violations of maxims to create humor and enhance audience engagement. Additionally, Kipya et al. (2019) confirm that maxim flouting frequently occurs in talk show interactions, which are inherently dialogic.

However, these studies generally focus on spontaneous two-way communication, in which maxim violations emerge as part of the interactive dynamics between speakers and hearers. In contrast, research examining how maxim flouting operates within structured monologic communication, such as stand-up comedy, remains relatively limited.

This gap forms the basis of the present study. Unlike spontaneous dialogue, stand-up comedy represents a systematically constructed form of discourse, in which maxim violations are not reactive but strategic (Colin et al., 2025). Therefore, this study aims to analyze how the flouting of conversational maxims in Marcello Hernandez's performances functions as a mechanism for generating humor.

Building upon this gap, the present study specifically focuses on the pragmatic analysis of conversational maxims in Marcello Hernandez's stand-up comedy performance. The scope of this research is limited to identifying both the use and the flouting of Grice's four conversational maxims, namely quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. In addition, this study seeks to examine which of these maxims are most dominantly flouted within the performance. More importantly, it aims to explore how such flouting functions as a strategic mechanism for creating humor and generating audience laughter. By addressing these aspects, this research aims to deepen understanding of how pragmatic principles operate within structured monologic discourse, particularly in the context of stand-up comedy.

2. METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method. This method is chosen because it aims to provide a detailed description of linguistic phenomena, particularly the flouting of conversational maxims in Marcello Hernández's utterances. The data in this study consist of spoken utterances delivered by Marcello Hernández that are identified as containing flouting of Grice's conversational maxims, namely the maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. These utterances are analyzed within their contextual use and in relation to the implicatures they generate. The source of the data is a video entitled "Marcello Hernández Does Stand-Up About Brazilian Waxes, Talks Getting Arrested by Sabrina Carpenter", performed on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon and obtained from the YouTube platform. The data collection is specifically focused on the stand-up comedy segment to ensure consistency with the research objective, which is to analyze maxim flouting in the context of humor.

The primary instrument of this research is the researcher, who collects, analyzes, and interprets the data. Supporting instruments include electronic devices for accessing and viewing the video and data tables for classifying flouted maxims. The data are collected and analyzed through several systematic techniques. First, the observing technique involves repeatedly watching the performance to gain a comprehensive understanding of the context of each utterance. Second, the transcription technique converts the audio data into a complete written transcript. Third, data reduction is conducted by selecting utterances that contain maxim flouting while excluding irrelevant data. Finally, the selected data are analyzed by classifying them into Grice's four maxims and examining how the resulting implicatures contribute to humor.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis in this section is based on Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975), which explains that effective communication is supported by four conversational maxims: Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. In this study, each utterance in the data (D01–D37) was analyzed and classified according to the type of maxim it reflects as well as its form of application, namely observance and flouting. The classification process was conducted to identify how each maxim is used in the conversation, both in literal expressions and in indirect forms that generate implied meanings. Subsequently, all data were calculated to determine the frequency distribution of each category. The results of the analysis are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Distribution of Maxim Usage

Maxim	Observing	Flouting
Quantity	4	4
Quality	1	17
Relation	3	7
Manner	0	1
Total	8	29

Pragmatic Strategies in Comedic Narration

The analysis of the entire dataset (D01–D37) indicates that Marcello Hernández employs two primary pragmatic strategies in conversational discourse, namely observance and flouting. These two strategies are not used randomly; rather, they serve distinct pragmatic functions within the structure of comedic narration. In general, observance of maxims occurs in the initial stages or transitional segments of the narrative, serving as a grounding mechanism that clarifies context and enables the audience to comprehend the unfolding situation. In contrast, maxim flouting emerges as the dominant strategy for producing humorous effects through systematic deviation from cooperative communicative expectations.

Accordingly, it can be concluded that the pattern of maxim usage in the dataset is not symmetrical but strategically organized: observance functions as the narrative foundation, whereas flouting operates as the primary trigger of humor production.

Dominance of Maxim Flouting

The analysis of The Maxim of Quality shows that it is most frequently flouted in the performance, with 17 instances. This indicates that in the analyzed conversation, the speakers frequently provide information that lacks sufficient evidence or intentionally make false assertions such as through irony, sarcasm, or metaphor—to convey implied meanings. To provide a deeper understanding of how these floutings manifest within the data, the following section examines specific instances of flouting across the four Gricean maxims, illustrating how each violation contributes to the performance's comedic effect.

Flouting the Maxim of Quality

Datum [31]

“They put their hair in aluminum foil like their hair is food.”

Analysis: In **datum 31**, the speaker flouts the Maxim of Quality by employing a bizarre comparison. By equating the process of hair treatment to the preparation of food, the speaker creates a surreal image that highlights the absurdity of the grooming ritual. The humor derives from this incongruous metaphor, which reduces a human aesthetic practice to a mechanical, culinary process, effectively mocking the lengths to which individuals go in pursuit of beauty.

Datum [23]

“If the eye could talk, the eye would say, ‘Please, mama, no more pencil.’”

Analysis: In **datum 23**, the speaker flouts the Maxim of Quality through personification. By attributing the faculty of speech to the eye, the speaker constructs a hyperbolic emotional projection to illustrate the physical discomfort caused by applying eyeliner. This personification serves as a comedic device to convey the pain of the beauty routine; the speaker uses this absurd imagery to evoke empathy in the audience while emphasizing the extreme nature of the grooming procedure.

Flouting the Maxim of Relation

Datum [11]

“Bro, eat the cockroach, bro. Please.”

Analysis: In **datum 11**, the speaker flouts the Maxim of Relation by introducing a suggestion that is radically irrelevant and socially inappropriate to the ongoing conversation. In a standard communicative exchange, a suggestion should be logical and constructive; however, by urging someone to eat a cockroach, the speaker deliberately violates the principle of relevance. This abrupt shift to an absurd, irrational command serves as a comedic device, highlighting the chaotic nature of the cousin's behavior. By presenting such a bizarre and "off-topic" directive, the speaker shocks the audience, using the incongruity between the expected social response and the absurdity of the request to generate humor.

Datum [21]

“I'm in the corner... I'm behind you.”

Analysis: In **datum 21**, the speaker flouts the Maxim of Relation by using professional kitchen jargon in a domestic bathroom setting. While the bathroom should logically involve personal, private interactions, the speaker insists on using communication patterns typical of a high-pressure restaurant kitchen. This deliberate shift in communicative domain makes the utterance seem irrelevant to the actual setting. By imposing "kitchen rules" on a "bathroom situation," the speaker effectively paints a humorous picture of chaos and lack of personal space, as if the bathroom were as crowded and frantic as a professional cooking line.

Flouting the Maxim of Quantity

Datum [10]

"I have hair, bro. I swear to God, I have hair."

Analysis: In **datum 10**, the speaker flouts the Maxim of Quantity by repeating the same assertion multiple times. From a Gricean perspective, the second clause ("I swear to God, I have hair") is redundant because the information has already been conveyed in the first clause. By providing more information than is necessary for the listener to understand the fact, the speaker creates a sense of comedic agitation. This redundancy highlights the cousin's panic, effectively using the violation of quantity to characterize his absurd and desperate behavior at that moment.

Datum [19]

"There's electricity and water at the same time."

Analysis: In **datum 19**, the speaker flouts the Maxim of Quantity by deliberately providing an over-informative and alarmist description of a situation. While simply stating that a situation is "dangerous" would suffice to convey the point, the speaker chooses to list the specific, hazardous elements (electricity and water) in an exaggerated, dramatic manner. This violation of the quantity principle—by adding unnecessary intensity to the description—serves to heighten the comedic tension. It transforms a potentially mundane observation into a perilous scene, allowing the speaker to draw on the listener's awareness of the obvious danger to fuel the narration's humor.

Flouting the Maxim of Manner

Datum [7]

"It's so nice to meet you." — Dad: "Me, too."

Analysis: In **datum 7**, the speaker's father flouts the *Maxim of Manner* by providing an ambiguous response. When a writer says, "It's so nice to meet you," the expected response should be a reciprocal expression of pleasure. By responding with "Me, too," the father inadvertently creates a pragmatic ambiguity, suggesting that he is happy to meet *himself* as well. This violation of the Manner maxim—specifically the failure to be clear and unambiguous—serves as a subtle comedic tool. It highlights the father's limited English proficiency, allowing the audience to find humor in the linguistic mishap rather than in the statement's semantic intent.

Mechanisms of Humor Production

The analysis demonstrates that humor in Marcello Hernández's performance is not merely a byproduct of linguistic deviations; rather, it results from specific cognitive mechanisms triggered by the flouting of Grice's maxims (Attardo, 2020). The primary mechanism identified in this study is the Incongruity-Resolution model, complemented by hyperbolic projection.

Incongruity and Expectation Violation

The core mechanism of humor production in the dataset lies in the creation of incongruity—a state in which the audience's expectations, based on the Cooperative Principle, are suddenly and sharply violated. By flouting the Maxim of Relation (e.g., D11, D21) and Maxim of Manner (e.g., D07), the speaker sets up a narrative premise and then disrupts it with an unexpected, irrational, or irrelevant conclusion. The humor arises as the audience attempts to "resolve" this incongruity. When the audience realizes that the deviation (e.g., eating a cockroach in D11) is not a communicative error but a deliberate comedic choice, the cognitive effort required to bridge the gap between expected logic and absurd reality triggers a humorous response.

Hyperbolic Distortion as Comedic Frame

Another significant mechanism is the use of hyperbolic distortion, particularly through the flouting of the Maxim of Quality (e.g., D31, D23) and Maxim of Quantity (e.g., D19). Instead of simply reporting events, the speaker distorts the "truth-value" of his observations to fit a comedic frame. By scaling up the

intensity of mundane events—such as labeling hair treatment as "burning hair" (D31) or equating a beauty routine to a "violent scene" (D17)—the speaker effectively suspends the listener's need for factual accuracy. This mechanism allows the audience to enter a "playful reality" where the exaggeration itself becomes the source of amusement.

Synthesized Mechanism: The Pragmatic Shift

Ultimately, the mechanism of humor in Hernández's discourse operates through a Pragmatic Shift. Observance of maxims acts as the "anchor" that establishes the narrative context, while flouting acts as the "trigger" that shifts the discourse into a comedic register. This constant oscillation between grounding the story (observance) and distorting it (flouting) is what sustains the comedic tension throughout the performance.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that conversational maxims in Marcello Hernández's stand-up comedy performance are utilized in two main ways: observance and flouting. Observance is mainly used in the opening and transitional parts to establish context and ensure audience understanding, while flouting is systematically employed as a deliberate pragmatic strategy to create implied meanings (implicatures). Each maxim—quantity, quality, relation, and manner—is flouted in specific ways—such as exaggeration, irrelevance, redundancy, and ambiguity—to support the performance's overall comedic structure.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals that the maxim of quality is the most frequently flouted in the performance. This indicates that Marcello Hernández relies heavily on nonliteral devices such as hyperbole, metaphor, and personification to create humor. Other maxims, including relation and quantity, are also flouted, but to a lesser extent, while the maxim of manner appears least frequently. This distribution demonstrates that humor in the performance is largely driven by intentional distortion of truth rather than by irrelevance or lack of clarity.

Finally, the flouting of conversational maxims contributes significantly to humor creation through specific cognitive mechanisms, particularly the Incongruity-Resolution model and hyperbolic distortion. Humor emerges when audience expectations, based on cooperative communication norms, are violated and then cognitively resolved. The use of exaggeration, absurdity, and unexpected shifts creates incongruity, which triggers laughter once the implied meaning is understood. Therefore, maxim flouting functions as a central pragmatic tool that transforms ordinary communication into an engaging and humorous performance.

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