



## The Creation of Humor in *Ronny Chieng: Asian Comedian Destroys America!*

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**Abstract.** Communication is carried out to exchange information and requires the fulfillment of the cooperative principles so that the goals of communication can be achieved. However, in the context of comedy or humor, violations of cooperative principles are actually explored optimally. Violations of maxims and use of language are managed in such a way so that humor, which is similar to joke, can be created. Nowadays, a comedy performance full of humor that is quite popular in society is stand-up comedy. One of the Asian comics who is well known and has the opportunity to present stand-up comedy materials across the continents is Ronny Chieng. In the Netflix stand-up comedy show "Ronny Chieng: Asian Comedian Destroys America!", Chieng expressed humorous materials about not only the United States but also Asian society. The purpose of this research is to analyze what types of maxim violated in the stand-up comedy performance and how these maxim violations contribute to creating humor. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method in the form of interpreting patterns and meanings in the data, categorizing types of maxim violation and their function to create humor found in the stand-up comedy performance. From the analysis of the maxim violations based on Grice's theory, Chieng uses quality maxim violation (38.62%) more than other maxim violations as he often gives too much information than needed. A lot of humor is conveyed in the form of verbal irony (49.21%) because many of Chieng's statements are the opposite of what he truly means.

**Keywords:** Maxim Violations, Humor, Stand-Up Comedy, Ronny Chieng

### INTRODUCTION

Communication is carried out to exchange information and this requires good cooperation so that the goals can be achieved. The principle of cooperation needs to be considered by the speakers and interlocutors, which contains rules for conveying information in the communication. Grice proposed the four cooperative principles in communication, namely maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of relevance, and maxim of procedure [1]. However, in the context of comedy or humor, violations of the cooperative principles are actually explored optimally. The deviations are carried out with the aim of freeing the recipients of speech or the audiences from the burden of boredom, seriousness, and so on [2]. It also relates to the aim to make the audiences catch the hidden meaning that a comic wants to convey. Regarding violating maxims, according to Attardo, this can create humorous effects [3].

By violating maxims and using language that is managed in such a way, humor can be created, and the humor such things can also be called jokes [4]. According to Rahmanadji, humor is a feeling or symptom that stimulates the speakers and the interlocutors to laugh or tend to laugh mentally, humor can be a feeling, or awareness, within oneself (sense of humor) and can be a symptom or creative result from within or outside oneself [5]. This is in accordance with what Wijana stated, that humor is a verbal and visual stimulus that spontaneously provokes smiles and laughter from listeners or people who see it. Verbally, the language used in humor has uniqueness [2]. The expression of verbal humor is done by utilizing linguistic aspects, such as meaning, choice

of diction, and sounds. Verbal humor is not always intended for mere entertainment, but can also be an invitation to think critically and reflect on the content of the humor. This also happens in a comedy show.

Globally, a comedy show that is full of humor is quite popular in society, which is *stand-up comedy*. This type of comedy is performed by one person or a group of people. The stand-up comedians, or commonly called comics, will stand on stage to tell jokes directly to the audiences. Even though stand-up comedy uses a monologue type of storytelling, comics still need to convince the audiences to follow the topic being discussed. In the stand-up comedy show, the jokes are performed in a stage by telling a series of funny material based on the comic's experiences, observations, or opinions [5] [6]. The main aspect of stand-up comedy is aimed at building expectations from the audiences, in the form of set up (normal things that do not contain jokes) and punch line (climax where the audiences' expectations are broken with ridiculous things).

One of the Asian comics who is well-known and has the opportunity to perform stand-up comedy show across continents is Ronny Chieng. In the Netflix stand-up comedy show *Ronny Chieng: Asian Comedian Destroys America!* (7), Chieng expressed humorous criticism that was not only targeted at the United States but also Asian society, especially China and its culture. As an Asian descendant who grew up in a household with a strong Chinese culture, Chieng then moved to the United States, where he was further exposed to American culture. Chieng certainly experienced culture shock as he lived and interacted with American society. This experience later became materials for jokes that he brought to his stand-up comedy shows, that is the life in the United States from his point of view.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the types of maxims are violated by a comic in the Netflix stand-up comedy show *Ronny Chieng: Asian Comedian Destroys America!* and the contributions of the violations of these maxims to creating humor, and the reasons why comics most often violate certain maxims and using certain humor. It is hoped that the findings from this research will reveal the maxims violated in the Netflix stand-up comedy show *Ronny Chieng: Asian Comedian Destroys America!*. Furthermore, the contributions of maxim violations in creating humor can be obtained. Apart from that, it can be concluded the reasons why the comic most often violates certain maxims and use certain humor. This research is useful in adding to the research repertoire of pragmatic studies, especially regarding the significance of violations of the cooperative principles in the creation of humor.

## METHODS

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method to describe a phenomenon and the reasons that cause it (8). The method used is interpreting patterns and meanings in the data, categorizing types of maxim violations and their functions to creating humor in *Ronny Chieng: Asian Comedian Destroys America!*. The researchers used documentation techniques to collect the data from the stand-up comedy show from Netflix channel. The application of documentation techniques requires an analytical approach in the form of content analysis. Data for content analysis consists of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences in the form of verbal utterances spoken by Ronny Chieng. The data was then interpreted using secondary data sources from books, academic journals, magazine articles, and any references about Ronny Chieng and his stand-up comedy show obtained from various sources.

This research data was analyzed using qualitative methods that describe the data in the form of a comprehensive descriptive explanation during the analysis process. There are several data analysis steps in this research. The first step is to copy the verbal utterances by watching the show into Microsoft Word. The second step is to sort the data by highlighting important data appropriate to the research topic and understanding the discourse and propositions of utterances conveyed that contain of maxim violations. The next step is to categorize the data based on Grice's classification of maxim violations, namely: a) maxim of quantity violation, b) maxim of quality violation, c) maxim of relevance violation, and d) maxim of procedure violation [1]. The next is an analysis of the verbal humor created from the applications of maxim violations carried out using an understanding of context based on Spanakaki, namely: a) wordplay, b) allusion, and c) verbal irony [9]. The main instruments in this research were the research team, where they transcribed the data and carefully analyzed the maxim violations performed by Ronny Chieng. Explanations of each type of maxim violations will be classified in each column in the data sheet. Next, in the last column, fill in "goal" which is based on the results of data analysis using context understanding. The next instrument is a data sheet in the form of a table which is used to record all descriptions/classifications of the types of maxim violations committed as well as the variety of verbal humor created.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the research results, there were 189 data of maxim violations were found from *Ronny Chieng: Asian Comedian Destroys America!* The maxim violations based on Grice's theory were intended to form verbal humor that can be classified based on Spanakaki's theory. Those were told by Chieng to the audiences that provoke laughter and applause. The findings of maxim violations include: 73 data on quantity maxim violation (38.62%), 67 data on quality maxim violation (35.45%), 30 data on relevance maxim violation (15.87%), and 19 data on manner maxim violation (10.05%). The verbal humor formed from the realization of maxim violations can be classified into 49 data of wordplay (25.93%), 47 data of allusion (24.87%), and 93 data verbal irony (49.21%)

### MAXIM VIOLATIONS

#### 1. QUANTITY MAXIM VIOLATIONS

This happens when a speaker gives information more or less than it is needed. This can be in form of falsehoods, exaggerations, jokes based on misconceptions, and sarcasm or irony. A comic often violates this maxim to create humor.

**DATUM 98: Even during Chinese New Year, the biggest holiday for Chinese people, Chinese New Year, when we see each other during Chinese New Year, the way we greet each other is we say, "gong xi fa cai," or "gong hei fat choy" in Cantonese. I'm sure you've heard that, at least peripherally, "Gong xi fa cai." Gong xi fa cai means, "Hope you get rich!"** [audiences laugh]

In his statement, Chieng flouts the maxim of quantity because he provides excessive details about Chinese New Year greeting and its meaning. He elaborates on the greeting in different dialects and its significance in a way that may be considered more information than necessary to make his point about the cultural obsession with wealth. Quantity maxim violation in Chieng's performance subvert audiences' expectations, leading to surprise and amusement. The discrepancy between the expected level of information and the actual amount provided can create cognitive dissonance, which is often humorous.

#### 2. QUALITY MAXIM VIOLATIONS

This happens when the speaker says something that is false and lack of evidence. This can be in form of non-sequiturs, tangential digressions, unexpected connections, and absurd comparisons. A comic often violates this maxim to create humor.

DATUM 31: **China in Chinese is *zhong guo*. That means “middle country.” It means nothing!** [audiences laugh] **We named this place better than we named our own shit!** [audiences laugh] It’s a Beautiful Country. Let’s go to the Beautiful Country. Let’s leave the Middle Country. Let’s go to the Beautiful Country. Risk it all to start from scratch in the Beautiful Country. And then you finally come here, and everybody hates everything. In the statement spoken by Chieng that there is a phrase “middle country means nothing” is factually inaccurate. The term “zhong guo” holds significant historical and cultural meaning in Chinese, and saying it means nothing is an exaggeration to provoke humor. The exaggeration and hyperbole can be inherently funny, as they allow the comic to create absurd and unrealistic scenarios.

### 3. RELEVANCE MAXIM VIOLATIONS

This happens when a speaker says something or gives response which is irrelevant to the topic being discussed. This can be in form of subversion of expectations, cognitive dissonance, unexpected connections, and absurd comparisons. A comic often violates this maxim to create humor.

DATUM 15: Yeah. [laughs] **Yeah, it’s been great living in America. Yeah, New York City, it’s a great city, but by any objective measure, it’s like... it’s just barbaric, right?** [laughs] If you compare it to other cities... Like, if you go to Japan, any city in Japan— Anyone here been to Japan, by any chance?

In this statement, Chieng states something that contains a satire to the Americans. At first, he flattered America, especially New York but after that he is being honest with Americans that are savage. That is his statement flouts the relevance maxim. It is because this statement intentionally subtly satirizes the Americans by irrelevant information that is delivered by the speaker. These absurd comparisons can be humorous because they allow the comic to create unexpected and absurd juxtapositions.

### 4. MANNER MAXIM VIOLATIONS

This happens when the speaker is not being brief or not to the point, using vague language, and being ambiguous. This can be in form of ambiguity or vagueness, obscurity or complexity, prolixity or wordiness, and disorder or lack of clarity. A comic often violates this maxim to create humor.

DATUM 39: Let me speak from the heart here for just one minute. If you take nothing else away from the show here tonight, please just hear me now. Okay, I’m speaking from personal experience here. **There are fewer joys you will experience in life... than organizing three weddings at the same time.**

In this statement, Chieng flouts the manner maxim because he states something that is ambiguous to the audiences. It can cause misinterpretation to the audiences: to do many weddings. Ambiguity can create double meanings or hidden interpretations, which can be humorous. Disorder and lack of clarity can be humorous as well because they can create a sense of chaos and absurdity.

## VERBAL HUMOR

### 1. WORD PLAY

This is verbal humor which refers to playing with the meaning of words and words usually used to build a joke. It is a common technique used by a stand-up comedian to create humor as it involves playing with the meanings of words, their sounds, and their

relationships to each other. Chieng uses a lot of word games which then provokes laughter from the audiences.

DATUM 99: [audience cheers and applauds] **That's not "Happy New Year."**[audience laughs] **Do you understand, the go-to phrase during Chinese New Year isn't, "Hey, happy New Year." It's, "Yo, hope you get rich."** [audience laughs] **"Hope you get rich. Hope you get richer than all these other motherfuckers. Hope you get so fucking rich, man. Hope you get rich and also hope... You better hope I get rich. We can hope each other... Both get rich together."**

In this statement, Chieng provides excessive details and repetitive elaboration on the phrase "Hope you get rich" used during Chinese New Year". He goes beyond simply stating the phrase and repeatedly emphasizes and elaborates on the wish for wealth exaggeratedly. Wordplay can be a powerful tool for creating humor in stand-up comedy. It can be used to surprise audiences, create double meanings, and make jokes more memorable.

## 2. ALLUSION

Allusion is a reference to a place, person or something events that are well known and considered to be common knowledge and understood by many people. In its use, a writer or speaker often refers to things that are related to historical, religious, cultural events, even other things fictional to indicate an implicit meaning. A comic often uses allusions to connect with their audience, evoke shared experiences, and add depth to the jokes.

DATUM 66: **And you can trust us because we don't care. Because our skin is not in the game.** [audience laughs] Literally, NFL, NBA, our skin is in none of those games, all right? [audience laughs]

In this statement, Chieng compares sports, specifically the NFL and NBA, which is not directly related to the initial point about their impartiality and lack of care. Allusions can help the comic connects with the audiences by tapping into shared cultural experiences or familiar concepts or stories.

## 3. VERBAL IRONY

This is done with saying an event that is the opposite of its true meaning and the inconsistency between the atmosphere presented and the underlying reality. In stand-up comedy, it is a common technique used to subvert expectations and evoke laughter.

DATUM 114: Not in America. **In America, one man... can stop the entire train line. Because everyone can make a difference.**

In this statement, Chieng states a criticism by giving hidden meaning of what he has said before. He tries to satirize Americans that using their freedom is not in the right way while it is different with Malaysians. The statement contains a hidden meaning which is a criticism to the Americans intentionally. Verbal irony can be relatable to audiences because it allows the comic to express frustration or disappointment in a humorous way.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research results and discussion in the previous section, as well as in accordance with the problem formulation and research objectives, it can be concluded that: 1) From the analysis of the maxim violations based on Grice's theory, Chieng uses quality maxim violation (38.62%) more than other maxim violations as he often gives too much information than needed, and 2) A lot of humor is conveyed in the form of verbal irony (49.21%) as many of Chieng's statements are the opposite of what he truly means. The further researches to conduct can be comparative analysis by comparing the use of maxim violation in different stand-up comedy cultures or genres, audience

perception by studying the audiences' reactions to different types of maxim violation to understand their preferences, evolution of humour by exploring how the use of maxim violation has changed over time in stand-up comedy, and many other related topics. The verbal element is a very dominant element in stand-up comedy humor showing that there are linguistic aspects building humor.

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