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Conversational Implicature Analysis of Humor in American Situation Comedy "*Friends*"

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Abstract

Humor is a very pervasive phenomenon, observable in our daily communication. Humor has been studied from many perspectives that include fields like linguistics, rhetorics, aesthetics, philosophy, and sociology.

Situation comedy, which is a visual-verbal communication, enjoys much popularity on television nowadays. To make the audience laugh as much as possible is the ultimate goal of situation comedy. No sitcom can be acted out without dialogues and conversations. And these dialogues and conversations are the embodiment of humor, which originates from natural conversation, and at same time seems a little far away from normal daily conversation.

This present study analyzes samples on the theoretical basis of Grice's conversation maxims to see how the humorous conversation in sitcom varies from the basic rules we should obey in our daily conversation, at the same time is also a kind of cooperative effect, and why conversational implicature is one of the mechanisms which cause the humor in sitcom. Is the Cooperative Principle enough to explain the mechanism of humor here? If it is not, how can we solve this problem?

Utterances only become meaningful in context. When any utterance is analyzed, context always plays an important role for its interpretation. In Grice's theory, the context is defined as "the shared knowledge", is it enough for, at least, humor analysis here? If it is not, what kind of theory or concept can play a complementary role for it?

According to Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, in order to avoid to do some face-threaten speech act which will lead to conflict, conversational implicature works as a off-record language strategy for keeping communication processing in an appropriate way. Here, one question can be raised: at what point in the ingredients of interpretation does an implicature which is perceived as the "polite way of doing things" turn into the kind of incongruity which invites laughter?

All these questions will be answered in this dissertation.

Key word: the cooperative principle, dynamic context, humor

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1.Introduction

Within the scientific research world, the study of witty remarks and humor in speech and genres has attracted scholars' attention for many years. Humor has been studied from a multi-disciplinary viewpoint that includes fields like linguistics, rhetorics, aesthetics, philosophy, and sociology, just to mention a few. Situation comedy belongs to the verbal-visual mode of communication, in which the humor is brought out both through verbal and nonverbal strategies. As a kind of TV program, sitcom, especially American sitcom has become popular around the world. *"Friends"* is a typical example. The conversation of sitcom works as one of the main carriers of humor. The mechanisms originate in natural every day conversation. At the same time, sitcom conversation dynamics moves beyond the basic rules of our daily communication.

The present study is an attempt to investigate the underlying mechanisms of humor found in the American situation comedy "*Friends"* from the theoretical perspective of the Cooperative Principle (CP). It is intended to find out how far away the conversations in this situation comedy move from our daily communication and whether the Cooperative Principle is enough to explain the mechanism of humor here. If it is not, how can we solve this problem? In Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, conversational implicature works as an off-record language strategy for speaker to achieve his "face threaten act (FTA)" in an indirect face threaten way. Can I make a hypothesis here that the "humorous implicature", to some extent, originates from "polite implicature"? Only some incongruous element makes "polite implicature" change into " joke implicature".

The dissertation is composed of six chapters:

The first chapter is a brief introduction.

In chapter two, first, some key definitions which are the basis of present study are introduced. This is followed by a literature review, offering a brief introduction to earlier research of humor. The achievements and limitations of the past research are presented. On the basis of previous studies, the theoretical and practical significance of the present dissertation is offered.

Chapter Three provides the theoretical foundation of analysis: a general introduction to

Grice's conversation maxims and a detailed analysis of this theory.

Chapter Four is the essence of the dissertation. An analysis is carried out of the source of humorous effect as created by violating one of the four conversation maxims.

In Chapter Five, we give some examples that show some features which cannot be explained with Grice's theory. Then, two weaknesses are noted about Grice's theory and a solution is put forward.

Chapter Six addresses how the humorous conversation in sitcom is a little far away from daily conversation. According to Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, in order to avoid to do some face-threaten speech act which will lead to conflict, conversational implicature works as a off-record language strategy for keeping communication processing in an appropriate way. One question can be posed: what is the incongruous element here which make a conversational implicature which is perceived as "polite way of doing things" tip over into a joke?

Chapter Seven offers the conclusion.

2. Review of the literature

The first section of this chapter deals with the definitions of humor followed by a brief introduction to situation comedy. The second section introduces the sitcom *Friends*. The third section provides the theoretical framework for the present study.

2.1 The definitions of humor

The word humor frequently occurs happens in our daily life. So, what on earth is humor? The word "humor" originates from Latin. According to *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, the very original meaning of "humor" is "one of four liquids (blood, phlegm, choler, melancholy) in our body, said to determine a person's mental and physical qualities." When this word was introduced into art, it was something negative that referred to odd, funny and affected temperament. Finally, in the late 17th century, a new definition of humor appeared in *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* and it is at the basis of the modern meaning of humor.

What are the definitions of humor formed in the two different dictionaries?

Humor is “the quality in something that makes it funny or amusing; the ability to laugh at things that are amusing.”
(*Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary*, Sixth edition, P 863)

Humor is “the quality in something that makes it funny: "amusement” or “the ability to understand and enjoy funny situations or to laugh at things.”
(*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, P 698)

It can be seen from the above definitions that the modern definitions lay emphasis on two sides: one is humor as a phenomenon which consists of linguistic and non-linguistic human behavior; the other is the capability to understand, to appreciate and to create humor. The two aspects are also what I want to explain about humor: interpretation and comprehension. Obviously, the above definitions are general. And that is also the basis of the working definition for the present study, that is, all things that are laughable, amusing, funny can be called humor.

2.2 Existing research about humor

2.21Three traditional theories of humor

There are many humor theories developed in the past many years. Attardo compresses them to the three major groups: superiority theory, relief theory and incongruity theory. They are also the foundation for modern humor analysis.

Superiority theory

The assumption of the superiority theory is that we laugh at the misfortunes of others; it reflects our own superiority. This theory can be found in the works of Plato, Aristotle, and Hobbes (Barnes, 1992: 87-95). Plato suggests that humor is some kind of malice towards people who are being considered relatively powerless. Hobbes (ibid) further explains that humans are in constant competition with each other, looking for the shortcomings of others. He considers laughter as an expression of a sudden realization that we are better than other persons, an expression of “sudden glory”. This theory is also called laugh/win theory, which include the following (Gruner 2000: 9):

1. For every humorous situation, there is a *winner*.

2. For every humorous situation, there is a *loser*.

3. Finding the"winner" in every humorous situation, and what that "winner" wins, is often not easy.

4. Finding the "loser" in every humorous situation, and what that "loser" *loses*,is often even less easy.

But, that having been said,

5. Humorous situations can best be understood by who wins what, and who loses what.

and,

6. Removal from a humorous situation (joke, etc.) what is won or lost, or the suddenness with which it is won or lost, removes the essential elements of the situation and renders it humorless.

This theory is the basis for modern social theory about humor in which aggression, disparagement and superior feeling play an important role.

Relief theory

The relief theory has a clear physiological or psycho-physiological nature (Rutter,1997). The theory reached its zenith when Freud proposed his theory that laughter can release tension and “psychic energy”. A more conventional version of the relief theory is that we experience a pleasant sensation when humor replaces negative feelings like pain or sadness (Mulder & Nijholt, 2002: 4). The theory does not really give an explanation of why we find things funny, and in fact it can be seen as a theory of laughter.

Incongruity theory

The incongruity theory is the most influential one for the study of humor. Kant is thought to have made the first full conceptualization of incongruity in the 18th century. “The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a established concept and a real object which have been connected by some relation, and the laugh itself is just an expression of this incongruity"(Schopenhauer, 1883). In this type of theory, humor involves some differences between what is normally expected to

happen and what actually happens. The incongruities identified by researchers are of three types: the cognitive, the ethical and the formal (Holland, 1982: 21).

Although many modern humor theories, such as SSTH and GTVH, are based on incongruity theory, which attributes what we receive as opposite to what is expected or normally happens to why we laugh or the cause of humor, I agree with the opinion that the incongruity is not enough for the explanation of humor. Morreall claims in his *Humor* article that" 'incongruity' can have one of the three psychological results in humans:(1)*negative emotion* results from incongruity between what one wants and what one gets; (2)*puzzlement* results from a vital, unsolved incongruity;(3) any other (apparently) incongruity which makes us laugh"(Gruner 2000:23). Morreall himself, by the way, also admits elsewhere that "incongruity is not sufficient for amusement, though it is necessary"(Morreall 1987:224). "the speaker 'decontextualizes' speech from its original context and 'recontextualizes' it in a new conversational surrounding. In recontextualizing utterances, speakers, however, not only dissolve certain sequences of talk from their original contexts and incorporate them into a new context, they also adapt them to their functional intentions and communicative aims"(Günthner 1998:3). Wilson (1999:148)argues, along the same lines, that "echoic utterances add an extra layer of metarepresentation to the communicated content, since not only the attribution but also the speaker's attitude must be represented". No matter recontextualization or addition of an extra layer of metarepresentation to the communicated content, these two kinds of complex mental efforts always shows addressee's wit. But, how clever the wit is, the addressee still misunderstands addresser's original meaning. Therefore, it is difficult to say whether the incongruity is caused by what actually happens (as compared to what is expected) or the superiority feeling which the speaker gets from the sense of achieving his communicative aim by recontextualizing an utterance and presenting his attitude.

2.22 Modern linguistic research

Among modern linguistic studies in this field, a lot of explorations have been made from perspectives like semantics, syntax, pragmatics and rhetorics. Pepicello (1983) summarizes the linguistic analyses of linguistic humor and riddles in particular. He

attaches considerable importance to developmental changes in children's linguistic humor, proposing that linguistic studies of humor and psychological studies of humor should be complementary. In Hockett's analysis of linguistic humor, jokes are a variety of humorous vehicles with a bipartite structure: buildup and "punch line" (Quoted from Pepicello, 1983). In his external classification of jokes, there are also compound jokes. In his internal classification of jokes, jokes are either prosaic or poetic. Prosaic jokes do not involve linguistic manipulation, but rather play upon culture situation, interactions, and institutions. Poetic jokes, however, involve "accident in the design of English", and therefore are untranslatable, since they are in fact either puns (involving homophony or near homophony) or nonpuns (involving word-reversal, stress and juncture).

Although semantic-oriented studies on humor prevailed in the early years of humor research, many recent studies have given attention to the social factors, especially in pragmatic oriented studies of humor. Twenty years ago, the scope of linguistic theory of humor was rightly limited to puns and there was no coherent theory of humor that would have been capable of handling humor at all linguistic levels. The appearance of Raskin's semantic script theory of humor (SSTH) (Raskin 1979 1985) broke this deadlock. It basically states that jokes consist of two opposed frames, only one of which is firstly stimulated. And there is a frame-switch trigger (such as a lexical cue) which make us reinterpret the first activated frame in second frame. The incongruity we perceive is the origin of humor. Since SSTH is purely semantic theory, it lacks elements for understanding humor. GTVH (General Theory of Verbal Humor), is based on SSTH and broadens SSTH's scope. "Whereas the SSTH was a "semantic" theory of humor, the GTVH is a linguistic theory at large"- that is, it includes other areas of linguistics as well, including, most notably, textual linguistics, the theory of narrativity, and pragmatics broadly conceived." (Attardo 2001: 22). A number of elements (the logical mechanism, the target, the narrative strategy, the langugage and the situation) involved in the process of humor generation and interpretation is put forward in order to give humor a linguistic-pragmatic account.

Nash (1985) mainly sets out to link the content of humor to the perception of its linguistic

or stylistic structure, particularly in locative or formulaic jokes. The act of humor had three principal references: a genus or derivation in culture institutions, beliefs, typical practices and characteristic artifacts; a characteristic design, or verbal packaging; and a locus in language, which is a point at which humor is both held and discharged. He cautions that humor is an occurrence in a social play characterizing the interaction of people in a culturally constrained situation, and that the responses to humor must be understood in that broad context. Chiaro (1992) explores the pragmatics of word play and examines the narrative structures of joke forms. She focuses particularly on the socio-cultural contexts for the production and reception of jokes by examining the extent to which jokes are both universal in their appeal, yet specific to a culture. She views joke-telling, punning, and teasing in relation to power and solidarity. According to Norrick (1993), conversation is the natural home of punning, allusion, and joking; the various forms of humor in their natural conversational contexts require an investigation. He views joke-telling, punning and teasing in relation to power, solidarity, and social distance, with the aim to explain how joking can express aggression and yet still build a rapport. Norrick probes into the role of spontaneous joking in the organization of conversation. Multiple functions of it are identified, including a “metalingual” one. Joking helps to provide participants with data about their own language. By joking together, people feel much closer and rapport among them is thus facilitated.

Attardo (1994) studies humor from three aspects: first, the surface phenomenon (such as the position of the punch line and processing of the ambiguity); second, the semantics of the joke (script theory); third, the pragmatics of texts (registers, pragmatic mechanisms and their use in interaction with other speakers). Functions of humor are further classified into solidarity-based, power-based and psychological ones in Hay’s study(2000).She studies humor use between men and women in corpus-based conversations. The result reveals that each gender uses humor in a distinctively different ways. Davie (2003) takes a different perspective on the performance of humor. Davie sees joking as a speech activity and component of one’s communicative competence. What she is interested in is how English beginners manage to get involved in the humorous communication with English native speakers, that is, to joke with different sociocultural background through

making use of various resources of the discourse context, such as lexical, socio-linguistic, prosodic, and pragmatic ones.

Studies like Curcó (1995, 1996, 1998), Coulson (2000), and Yus (2003) are conducted toward establishing a cognitive model of humor interpretation. Curcó (1998) gives humor a relevance-theoretic account. Curcó (1998:35) argues that "a great amount of intentional humor, if not all, consists to a large extent in implicitly making a specific type of dissociative comment about a certain aspect of the world, or an attributable thought.[...][S]peakers lead hearers to entertain mental representations that are attributable to someone other than the speaker at the time of the current utterance, while simultaneously expressing towards such representations an attitude of dissociation". "For Curcó, incongruity is not a defining feature of humor, but simply a means of invoking the additional processing effort one needs to look beyond the purely propositional content of utterance"(Geert Brône, 2003).

2.3The description of data source –situation comedy "*Friends*"

The language data is taken from the situation comedy *Friends*. A situation comedy or sitcom is a genre of comedy performance originally devised for radio but today typically found on television. Sitcom usually consists of recurring characters in a format in which there are one or more story lines centered around a common environment, such as family home or work place. Most contemporary situation comedies are filmed with multiple-cameras in front of a live studio audience, then edited and broadcast days or weeks later. A laugh track is often included in situation comedies. A laugh track or "canned laughter" is a separate sound track with the sound of audience laughter, made to be inserted into TV comedy shows and sitcoms. It is basically the laughter of the audience who watch the sitcom in the studio when it is filmed. During the post-production of the show, the producers may also have added recorded laughter or have manipulated the sound level to get the most desirable effect. Although this *canned laugh* track has been criticized for being artificial and for being an insult to the intelligence of the viewers, television viewers seem to have accepted it quite well if the show is good in itself.

To make the audience laugh as much as possible is the ultimate goal of situation comedy. As Yus (2003) has pointed out, comedy is a kind of verbal-visual mode of communication. No sitcom can be acted out without dialogues and conversations. And these dialogues and conversations are the embodiment of humor. They are not pure satire, black comedy, puns, gags, jokes, comedy of the absurd, sketches, slapstick, parody, farce, and so forth. They are based on our daily conversation, and surpass rosy social communication to some extent, due to the ultimate goal of sitcom to make the audience laugh frequently. Sometimes what the hearer answers seems not relevant to what the speaker says, but it definitely has some implicit meaning and foreshadows something. Sometimes the speaker unconsciously provides more information than required, and usually there is some particular point in that, which will raise side issues and cause an indirect funny effect.

So in this present study, we analyze samples on the theoretical basis of Grice's theory to see how far the humorous conversation in sitcom is away from the basic rules we should obey in our daily conversation, and at the same time, it is also a kind of cooperative effect, focus on why conversational implicature is one of the mechanisms which cause the humor in sitcom. And utterances only become meaningful in context. When any utterance is analyzed, context always plays an important role for interpretation. In Grice's theory, the context is defined as "the background knowledge". Is this enough for, at least, humor analysis here? Why convesational implicature is one of the mechanisms which generate humor and what kind of cognitive effort will we put forward for understanding humor there and two additional questions will be answered.

2.4 Data collection

During the data collection process, I paid attention to conversation humor where the Gricean theory plays an important role for humor formation and transcribe them. The use of sitcom language for humor research has a number of advantages and disadvantages (Attardo 2001). It is definitely true that sitcom language is a good source for humor scholar. However, there are two drawbacks. First, the material is not totally genuine

spontaneous interaction and to some extent has been artificially designed by artist, even though we recognize art originate from life. And there are many art elements involved, such as the characters of some roles will be deliberately designed, such as in "*Friend*", the role of Chandler is good at using ironic and sarcastic humor strategy, and butt of humor showing stupidity is fully reflected on Joey. Second, since it is easy to see how one humor strategy always happens to one role, I doubt whether this will make the collected samples selective.

2.5 **A brief introduction of *Friends***

Friends is a long-running American television situation comedy centering on the lives of six twenty-somethings (eventually thirty-somethings), (three male, three female), who share neighboring apartments in Manhattan. The three male “friends” are Ross Geller, Chandler Bing and Joey Tribbiani; and the three female friends are Rachel Green, Monica Geller and Phoebe Buffay. The program was produced by Bright Kauffman Crane Productions in association with Warner Brothers. In the United States, its first episode was aired on September 22, 1994 and the last was aired on May 6, 2004. *Friends* has been one of the top television series since its debut on NBC. It has been nominated for “American Comedy Award" for many times and actually won the award in 2000. It is also the most successful situation comedy of all times in the United States in monetary terms. As the show begins, Rachel leaves her fiancé Barry at the altar and moves in with her childhood friend, Monica. They live across the hall from Chandler and Joey. They hang out with Monica’s brother, Ross — who has recently divorced his lesbian wife — and Phoebe, the “free spirit” of the bunch and Monica’s old roommate. Rachel is a spoiled Daddy’s girl who gets her first job as a waitress in the coffee house “Central Perk” and later becomes a personal shopper at Bloomingdale’s, then a buyer for Ralph Lauren. Monica is a chef, who, for the first several seasons, struggles for success, and later becomes the head chef of a fancy restaurant. Chandler is a data processor who eventually switches to a career in advertising. Joey is a struggling New York actor. Ross is a paleontologist who first works at a museum and in later years becomes a college professor. Phoebe ekes out a living as a singer-songwriter and a masseuse. A constant story line throughout the series is the on-again/off-again romance between Rachel and

Ross, and later in the series, the developing relationship between Monica and Chandler. The main settings for the show include Monica's apartment, Chandler and Joey's apartment and the coffee house downstairs, "Central Perk".

3. Theoretical foundation

Cooperative Principles

In 1975 the philosopher of language H. P. Grice published a seminal article entitled "Logic and Conversation" which made quite a stir on the linguistic scene and a large number of linguistic publications that are built on Grice's postulates were subsequently generated.

3.1 An introduction

The fundamental assumption of the theory is that the remarks in any discourse are reasonably connected. The communicators have to follow certain pragmatic, syntactic, and semantic rules in order to communicate effectively. They have to cooperate. Grice (Grice, 1975:45) says "our talk exchanges are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative effort; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, common purpose or a set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction."

Grice's Cooperative Principle consists of several maxims that appear simple, straightforward, and commonsensical at first sight. However, these principles can be observed at work on a highly technical level in language whenever spoken or written texts are analyzed. And they can be found in any text of any genre in any language. If a speaker violates one or more of these fundamental maxims, the communication breaks down. In a successful discourse, you can relate this success to their observance. When misunderstanding occurs, you can demonstrate that the breakdown is generally due to a violation of one or more of the maxims. The degree to which these principles are obeyed and applied is a criterion for the evaluation of the quality of a text. As can be seen in the following statement by Benthan Davis（2000）:"It had been noted that at the discourse level there is no one-to-one mapping between linguistic form and utterance meaning. A particular intended meaning, which could be produced via a direct speech act, could in fact be conveyed by any number of indirect speech acts." Grice (1975) is concerned with

this distinction between saying and meaning. How do speakers know how to generate these implicit meanings, and how can they assume that their addressees will reliably understand their intended meaning? His aim is to discover the mechanism underlying this process.

Here is an example given by Jean Stilwell Peccei (2000):
(a)Tom: Are you going to Mark's party tonight?
(b)Annie: My parents are in town.
In the above example, a competent speaker of English would have little trouble getting the meaning that by saying that "My parents are in town" Annie refuses the invitation. Grice posits the Cooperative Principle and its attendant four maxims as a way of explaining this implication generating process.

3.2 Four maxims

Grice (1975, 45-46) proposes four maxims for attaining cooperation:
●Maxim of quantity
Make your contribution as informative as required.
Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
●Maxim of quality
Do not say what you believe to be false.
Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
●Maxim of relevance
Be relevant.
●Maxim of manner
Avoid obscurity of expression.
Avoid ambiguity.
Be brief.
Be orderly.

Grice (1975) holds that "The first of these maxims is known as the quantity maxim, which states one's contribution should provide sufficient, but not too much information."

If one does not provide enough information during a conversation, he or she might be viewed as incompetent and uninformed. On the other hand, providing too much information during the course of a conversation can be perceived as overwhelming and insignificant to the other person. This maxim means that the speaker has to include all the information that the addressee requires to understand what the speaker means. If the speaker leaves out a crucial piece of information, the addressee will not understand what the speaker is trying to say. The meaning of this maxim is that the speaker should avoid including unnecessary, redundant information in his contribution. According to Thomas Ritter（Bethan Davies, 2000）if the speaker rambles on without saying anything new or informative, the addressee will lose interest in the discourse very quickly and stop paying attention. In a multi-agents conversation process in which the social relationship between participants is, to some extent, intimate, such as relatives, lovers, good friends, if some one says something other persons do not need and are not interested in, this kind of redundant information will disturb the path the communication will develop, which is one of the sources of humor production in sitcom.

According to Leech(1983), the two maxims “Be Informative” and “Be Brief” are in a natural state of tension with each other. Maximum informativeness automatically includes a certain amount of redundancy and wordy explanation, and some person will think this kind of redundancy is not really necessary. Maximum brevity entails leaving out information that some addressees may find important while others would consider it superfluous. Sometimes brevity will not make things clear enough to every one and cause ambiguity. The speaker has to ask himself: “How much information do I have to include so that my addressee understands what I am trying to say? How little information can I get away with, without losing my addressee?” The tension between the two opposite demands can be subsumed under linguistic economy. It exists on many different levels, syntactic, phonetic, semantic and pragmatic. It is one of the driving forces behind linguistic change.

The second maxim is what is known as the quality maxim. This maxim states that one’s contribution to a conversation should be truthful. You violate the quality maxim when

you deliberately lie or communicate in a way that does not reflect an honest intention (Grice, 1975). In linguistic term, the maxim of truthfulness refers to the importance of making only statements we believe to be true. The reason is that if we get caught making false statements we lose our credibility, which is one of the most important social assets a person can have. Obviously, in real life, this maxim is often violated in order to deceive the addressee. In less serious contexts, it can be violated in an obvious manner when the speaker tries to be humorous or teases the addressee. Grice shows four examples to illustrate how the first maxim of quality is flouted: irony, metaphor, meiosis, hyperbole. Here, my attention is paid on irony and metaphor. For the case of irony, I agree with several linguists who hold the idea that irony is a pragmatic phenomenon whose analysis is really beyond Gricean model and I will discuss it in detail in the following part. First, I will say something for metaphor. Is "say something to be false" or "literal falsity" enough to explain metaphor? Furthermore, obviously, some metaphors are funny and some ones not. What is the distinction between humorous metaphor and non-humorous metaphor, and what kind of inference process is involved for us to get the sense of humorous metaphor here? "Metaphor can be considered a construal phenomenon since the choice of a particular source domain for the conceptualization of a target inherently *construes* the target in a specific fashion. *"* Based on the *Bisociation* idea put forward by Koestler (1964), Kyratzis argues that humorous bisociation differs from metaphorical conceptualization in the profiling of the domain boundaries: whereas metaphors essentially focus on the interdomain connections, suppressing the obvious domain boundaries;humorous stimuli (un)intentionally emphasize the dissimilarity between domains"(Brône & Feyaerts 2003).

Relation: Relevance. “In the context of H. P. Grice’s Cooperative Principle, the demand for relevance simply means that the speaker should only include information in his communication that is relevant to the topic under discussion"(Bethan Davies 2000).Since many linguists elaborates this maxim, relevance is already proved to be an extremely important principle and an important cognitive theory supplementary to cooperative principle. According to Wilson and Sperber's relevance theory, "utterance raise expectations of relevance not because speakers are expected to obey a Cooperative

Principle and maxims or some other communicative conventions, but because the search for relevance is a basic feature of human cognition, which communicator may exploit. Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of it own optimal relevance. Intuitively, an input (a sight, a sound, an utterance, a memory) is relevant to an individual when it connects with background information he has vailable to yield conclusions that matter to him"(Wilson and Sperber 1995). Since understanding what is said is the result of contextualisation processes, in which different persons will pick different contextualisation cue so that the same utterance will be given different meaning since at that moment that "cue" is related, to some extent, to that situation. Hardly anything is set in stone; almost everything is a matter of degree. So relevance is not something absolute, or rather, it is a comparative dynamic matter. It is interesting to observe that the perceptions of what is relevant and what is irrelevant diverge among people.

However, does irrelevance which is the case of violation of relation maxim achieve humorous effect? "Humor should provide some. but not too much 'difficulty'. More precisely, a joke should present some cognitive challenge without, however, being too complex to process"(Attardo 1994:39). "The joke's marked constituent is least relevant but not irrelevant, that is, not entire distant or unrelated"(Giora 1991:470).

Manner maxim: under this category, the general idea is what is said should be expressed in a direct, clear, brief and orderly way without any other communicative intention involved and without thinking whether our behaviors will affect other person's feeling. If we put this kind communicative way into the coordinate, it will possess the zero position. Different direction and different distance afrom this zero point will make the communication achieve different effect. Actually, people usually communicate in an "ambiguous" way, which violates manner maxim. The speaker provides only some information hints for the hearer to infer all what the speaker should say. However, sometimes it is difficult to say whether the information hint is too vague for us to connect it with our background knowledge to infer all the target conceptualisation. The cognitive linguistics term "metonymy" really fits the situation where humor produced by violation

of manner maxim. " Metonymy is a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same idealized cognitive model"(Radden&Kövecses 1999: 21). "A well-chosen metonymic expression lets us mention one entity that is salient and *easily coded*, and thereby evoke-essentially automatically-target that is either of lesser interest or harder to name" (Langacker 1993: 30). In humorous-expressive contexts, what the speaker really intends to point to is implicitly expressed in a changing manner.

Everybody wants to live in a society which is full of friendly atmosphere. Therefore, in normal daily conversation, politeness, which is of philosophical and moral importance, is fundamental social behaviour rule to obey for rational people to avoid conflict and keep communication smooth. The demand for politeness simply means that we should treat other people, as we would like to be treated. Along with Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962 & Sear1e, 1969), Grice's work on the Cooperative Principle initiated the current interest in pragmatics, and led to its development as a separate discipline within linguistics. It is discussed by most textbooks in the area, and is often cited in academic papers within pragmatics and associated disciplines.

However, there is a contradiction among Gricean maxims. "I believe that properly understood, the Quantity, Quality, and Relation Maxims are consistent. But the Maxim of manner often clashes with the other three. In case of irony, for example, Manner clashes with Quality"(Davis 1998: 92). Irony is a communicative way in which the opposite intended meaning is expressed. Therefore, what speaker said can not achieve a literal interpretation since in that case the quality maxim will be at risk. Meanwhile, what speaker said can not be interpreted as the opposite meaning of what the speaker intends to convey because it is not clear to use a sentence to mean the opposite of what sentence means, and at this time manner maxim"being perspicuous" is violated. Furthermore, "irony is a special case of communicating a gap between two levels of dictum and implicatum (Kotthoff 2003), and what is specific about irony is to indicate the presence of an opposition: a gap between what is said and what is meant as the primary message." That means the explanation about irony is definitely beyond the case of violation of

quality maxim.

Actually speaking, "*dialogue does not presuppose cooperativity.* Dialogue is the meeting of different contextualisation universes, and very often the meeting is a clash and a conflict rather than a friendly encounter(Sarangi and Slembrouck 1992). Cooperativity is a *variable* in dialogue, not a rule"(Blommaert Jan 2005: 44). In sitcom context, what makes the"cooperativity" in sitcom varies the cooperativity in daily conversation will be answer in the following.

To sum up, the Cooperative Principle is the foundation of pragmatic interpretation of humor, in which the flouting of maxims plays a very important role. There are four maxims encompassed in The Cooperative Principle: 1. Maxim of quantity; 2. Maxim of quality; 3. Maxim of relation; 4. Maxim of manner. In short, these maxims specify what participants have to do in order to converse in an efficient, rational, and co-operative way: they should speak sincerely, relevantly and clearly, while providing sufficient information (Levinson, 1983:101-2). Although Grice's Cooperative Principle has been criticized for its limitations on its interpretational capacity, it has proved to be one of the most influential theories in the development of pragmatics and it is still a milestone of modern linguistic development.

4.Interpretation of humor in "*Friends*" from the perspective of CP

The realization of humor is closely related to two elements—context and principle. Grice points out from the angle of pragmatics that in the course of language communication, people all follow one principle—Cooperative Principle (Grice 1975). Gricean linguists believe that the successful proceeding of human communication is due to whether people voluntarily or involuntarily conform to the Maxims of Conversation. However, they also notice that people do not always follow those maxims while they communicate and in this case their violation of these maxims often leads to meaning which is different from what the speaker explicitly intends to convey, this is known as implication. Humor is one of these possible expressions. Humor can arise from the violations of one or more of these maxims. Humorous conversations can be found in our

daily life. “In the human world, there is much to be laughed at and humor can disclose and sneer under the veil of a well meaning smile"(Fan, 1992: 1296). The Cooperative Principle is only a necessary condition that must be followed by the communicators but not a structural frame that restricts speech and allows no breakthrough. People intentionally voilates some of the maxims to produce certain humorous conversational implicatures in certain contexts which is emphasized here.

In cooperative conversation, it is reasonable for the participants to follow the four maxims. But they need not always do so; a participant can violate them on purpose for some reason or another. Grice (Grice, 1975: 49) enumerates situations in which a participant in an exchange may fail to fulfill a maxim in various ways, which include the following:

(1) He may quietly and unostentatiously violate a maxim; if so, in some cases he will be liable to mislead.

(2) He may opt out from the operation both of the maxim and of the CP; he may say, indicate, or allow it to become plain that he is unwilling to cooperate in the way the maxim requires. He may say, for example, *I cannot say more; my lips are sealed.*

(3) He may be faced with a clash: He may be unable, for example, to fulfill the first maxim quantity (Be as informative as is required) without violating the second maxim of Quality (Have adequate evidence for what you say.)

(4) He may flout a maxim; that is, he may blatantly fail to fulfill it. On the assumption that the speaker is able to fulfill the maxim and to do so without violating another maxim (because of a clash), is not opting out, and is not, in view of the blatancy of his performance, trying to mislead, the hearer is faced with a minor problem: how can his saying what he did say be reconciled with the supposition that he is observing the overall CP? This situation is one that characteristically gives rise to a conversational implicature.

Rhetoric, hyperbole, paradox, euphemism and satire are specific examples of these cases. In addition to the strengthened effect, the speaker can also make his conversation humorous. Grice (1975) proposes a system of “conversational logic” based on four “maxims of conversation,”, which are in fact some intuitive principles that are supposed to guide conversational interaction in keeping with a general Cooperative Principle. In

what may now be regarded as his classic formulation of this principle, Grice recognizes various kinds of cooperation which he groups under the maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner.

In the following paragraphs, the realization of English humor in *Friends* by violating the Cooperative Principle will be analyzed in detail. The violation of the four maxims with examples to illustrate the relationship between the Cooperative Principle and humorous effect will be discussed. Normally, more than one conversation maxim is violated in one part of the conversation.

4.1Violation of the maxim of quantity

Violations of the maxims of quantity can be grouped into two categories: providing less information than required and providing more information than needed. The following example illustrates both cases.

1. [Story line: During Ross and Emily's wedding rehearsal dinner, Phoebe makes a call to Emily's step mother to say she wants to speak to Joey or Chandler to tell him Rachel will come to destroy Ross' wedding.]

(1) Mrs. Waltham: Hello, Waltham Interiors.

(2) Phoebe: Oh, hi, Mrs. Waltham. I need to speak with either one of the best men, or Ross's sister Monica.

(3) Mrs. Waltham: Who is this?

(4) Phoebe: Oh, I'm Phoebe Buffay. I'm one of Ross's best friends.

(5) Mrs. Waltham: Well, if you're one of Ross's best friends, why aren't you here?

(6) Phoebe: Yeah, um, I can't fly. I'm having my brother's babies. (laughter)

(7) Mrs. Waltham: Oh, am I on the radio? (laughter)

(8) Phoebe: No..umm, could I talk to one of them? It's very very important.

(9) Mrs. Waltham: No, I'm bored with you now. I'm going to cut you off. (She hangs up.) (laughter)

(10) Phoebe: Ohh! Okay, I'm going to have to kick her ass too. (laughter)

Turn 6 is crucial in terms of our discussion of the Maxim of Quantity. In fact, one could say that Phoebe breaches the Maxim both ways. On the one hand, one could claim that she's providing too much information: the fact that she's pregnant and not able to fly would suffice as an answer to the question. There is no need to mention who the actual father is. However, since Phoebe does mention the very peculiar fact that she's having her brother's children, she would of course have to provide more information to avoid the implication of incest (i.e. she would have to tell that she is a surrogate mother). Here, there is obviously not enough information and hence Mrs. Waltham's obvious disbelief in the follow-up turn (Am I on the radio?), referring to typical phone games on the radio in which people are tricked or fooled, the implicature we get is "are you playing a trick on me?". At this time, Phoebe is unaware that the superfluous vague information she provides just now will make MrsWaltham doubt about the thruthfulness of what she speaks. And at the same time, she is still obsessed with putting forward her own request and does nothing to explain the awkward situation, which makes the "quality" of the whole conversation at risk. In the end, Mrs Waltham cut off this telephone conversation. What is humorous about this extract is the honesty and the 'matter of factness' with which Phoebe provides the answer, an honest and ture answer, which must be supported by proper explanation and background information (her brother's wife can not bear baby and she is a surrogate mother for them). Without proper explanation, it sounds actually very odd indeed and the other people will not believe what you says.

According to the maxim of quantity, more information than is required is also uncooperative as "such over-informativeness may be confusing in that it is liable to raise side issues; and there may also be an indirect effect in that the hearers may be misled as a result of thinking that there is some particular point in the provision of the excess of information." (Grice, 1975)

2. [Story line : Phoebe dates two boyfriends at the same time, one of them has just left. Rachel criticizes her situation. In Central Perk:]

(1) Rachel: Wow, he's cute, Pheebs! But I thought you just started dating that Kindergarten teacher.

(2) Phoebe: Oh, Jason? Yeah, uh-huh, we're seeing each other tonight.
(3) Rachel: What-Pheebs?! Two dates in one day? That's so unlike you.
(4) Phoebe: I know, I know! I'm like playing the field. You know? Like, juggling two guys, I'm sowing my wild oats. You know? You know, this kind of like, you know, oat-sowing, field-playing juggler. (laughter)
(5) Joey: So Pheebs, do they know about each other?
(6) Phoebe: Does(ps: although it is a grammar mistake, it is actually what the actor says.) a dog's lips move when he reads? (Joey makes an `I don't know' face, and looks to Chandler and Rachel, who're also stumped) Okay, no they don't. (laughter)

In turn (6), Phoebe answers the question 'Do they know each other?' with "Does a dog's lips move when he reads?". Similar to 'Is the Pope a Catholic' as a rhetorical question used as an alternative for an obvious 'yes' answer, this violates the quantity maxim since it is unnecessary and a kind of repetition. Meanwhile, it is irrelevant to some extent since one question is answered by another question. Phoebe uses this expression as an alternative for an obvious 'no' answer. What is humorous is the display of Phoebe's typical weird imagination by picturing such a scene. Dogs cannot read in the first place, so wondering about moving its lips or not is absurd. In itself, 'Does a dog read?' would have sufficed as an alternative for an obvious 'no' answer, but she adds another layer and also brings in the question of the dog moving its lips or not in the event of reading. It is the layeredness which leaves the others stumped and Joey actually considering the question, since it seems to be implying that Phoebe somehow believes that dogs can read. What she actually does is build in a double negation: no, dogs do not read and even if they could they wouldn't move their lips. Her added clarification can in fact still be interpreted in two ways. The 'No, they don't' can refer to 'No, they don't know each other' or to 'No, dogs don't move their lips while reading', which makes it all the more funny.

4.2 Violation of the maxim of quality

In terms of the maxim of quality, people often mock others by deliberately saying something that they do not believe is true. Irony and metaphor are typical cases of

violation of quality maxim.

3．[Story line: Ross has been in love with Rachel since forever, but every time he tries to tell her, something kind of gets in the way, like cats, and Italian guys. Finally Chandler tells Ross to forget her but when Ross is in China on an archaeological dig, Chandler lets it slip that Ross is in love with Rachel. Rachel is amazed. She goes to the airport to meet him when he comes back, but what she does not know is, that Ross is getting off the plane with another woman. Ross is trapped between two women, and he does not know how to deal with this situation.]

Ross: I don't know what to do. What am I gonna do? I mean, this, this is like a complete nightmare.

Chandler: Oh, I know. This must be so hard. Oh, no. Two women love me. They're both gorgeous and sexy. My wallet is too small for my fifties, and my diamond shoes are too tight. (laughter)

Chandler, who mostly has problems finding and keeping a girlfriend, is clearly being cynical: what turns out to be a complete nightmare for Ross is actually a taste of paradise for Chandler (in view of his poor love life). In Chandler's eyes, Ross's complaints are unwarranted and can be compared to "problems" that being rich brings, such as having a wallet that is too small for a stack of fifties or diamond shoes that won't fit. So, Chandler's words of sympathy ("This must be so hard") are actually the opposite of what he feels. Both Ross and the audience know that the girls who are crazy about Chandler have fatal defects, such as one with really annoying sound which is too exaggerated, one with big nostrils in which bat can fly in, and Chandler has to dump them. The implicature we get here are Chandler actually hates Ross' complaints which seems to heart him so much and what Chandler really wants to say is it is really easy to decide. You can pick anyone of them as your girl friend even both of them since you have no excuse to break up with anyone of them. No man will hate the situation that two beautiful and perfect girls are crazy about him.

This example shows analysis of irony definitely goes beyond the traditional Grice

pragmatic model. People traditionally holds the idea that what is said is opposite to what is meant. However, "irony is not always a form of negative evaluation: rather, it is a way of communicating *a evaluation gap*"(Kotthoff 2002). Chandler's explicit sympathy communicates a gap: Ross' love situation is every man's sweet dream and what men really want to have. The ironic contrast is really funny.

Making an evaluation is a good chance to produce irony. Let us see the following example:

4. [Scene: Central Perk, Janine, Joey's new roommate, a very hot dance girl, just comes in from outside.]

(1)Janine: I just got a call to be a dancer on a television special for New Year's Eve. It's called some sort of Dick'n Rock'n Dickie Eve. (laughter)

(2)Monica: Hold it! Are you talking about Dick Clark's New Year's Rocking Eve?

(3)Janine: Yeah, that's what I said. (laughter)

(4)Monica: Oh my God! We love that show! I mean Ross and I have been watching it since I can remember! (laughter)

(5)Chandler: Ah, you're still just a little fat girl inside aren't you? (He kisses her on the cheek) (laughter)

(6)Janine: Well I'm gonna be on it this year. I'm gonna be one of the party people.

(7)Ross: You're gonna be a party person! Those guys rock the most! (laughter)

(8)Janine: Well they said I should bring someone. (To Joey) Do you wanna be my dance partner?

(9)Joey: Totally! I would love to spend New Year's with you.

(10)Janine: Well actually they're taping tomorrow. I don't really understand why.

(11)Ross: Oh, well you see how it works is, the part with Dick Clark in Times Square is actually live, but they tape some of the party stuff ahead of time. Yeah, not a lot of people know that. (laughter)

(12)Janine: Yeah well, do you guys wanna come too?

(13)Ross: Are you serious?

(14)Monica: We are there! (laughter)

(Rachel laughs)

(15)Chandler: What, what are you laughing at?

(20)Rachel: Well, I used to date him, but you're still going out with her!(laughter)

(21) Monica: We are going to Dick Clark's New Year Rocking Eve's Rock Eve!

(22) Ross:Oh my God!

(23) Monica:Oh my God!

(24)Chandler: (To Rachel) Oh ***my*** *God!*

The whole story is a easy one, Janine just wants to invite Joey to go to a party with her, the coincidence is the part Janine will take part in turns out to be Ross and Monica's favorite show and they like it very much since they were very young. Stupidity that is assigned to them is reflected incisively and vividly. The subject of the whole humorous contest is who is more stupid than whom.

The redundant information provided by Monica in turn 2 and turn 4 is what Janine does not need and is not interested in, and also what other persons have already known. Facing Monica's "overreaction" on this issue, which threatens his "face" to some extent, and worrying about she will not stop this silly behaviours, Chandler praises Monica that she, as an adult, still preserves traces of childishness, which in fact has the opposite meaning that "do not be such a baby! You are not a little girl any more!do not show your stupidity any more". In turn (7) and (11), bother Ross does the same thing as her sister. He also initiate himself to provide some rebundant information to show how much they love that show and how much he knows about that show. Finally Janine invites Ross and Monica to that party reluctantly. At this time, Rachel laughs out. Chandler thinks Rachel's laugh is humiliating to him and still can not stop himself to ask the reason. Rachel's answer in (20) implicitly means that since Chandler and Monica are in serious relationship, so he must accept her stupidity, and she is the lucky one because she does not go out with Ross now. Finally, Monica and Ross are still not aware of the fact that their silly behaviours make Chandler humiliating. The most humorous things here is Chandler is the biggest loser!

Now, attention is turned to metaphor.

5. [Scene: Monica and Rachel's apartment. It’s close to dinner. Monica has just told everyone that Tim, her extra boyfriend’s son, is coming to dinner.]

(1) Ross: He’s coming here for Thanksgiving!

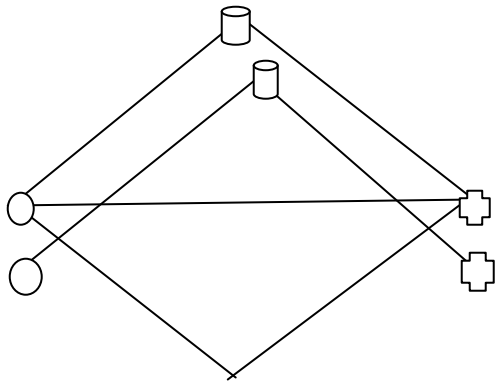
(2) Rachel: I know, it’s sick.

(3) Monica: Why is it sick?

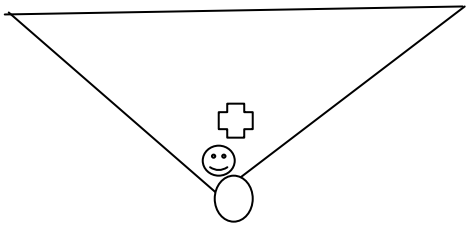
(4) Rachel: Because it’s Richard’s son! It’s like inviting a Greek tragedy over for dinner! (laughter)

In turn (4), Rachel uses the metaphor “Greek tragedy” to criticize Monica and Tim’s intended relationship as inappropriate. “Greek tragedy” impresses people with an unbelievable plot and a surprising end, and the Greek character—Oedipus,who, without realizing their identities, kills his father and marries his mother first appears in our mind. But why is it funny? We should search for the relationship between source domain and target domain. Fauconnier and Turner (1998; 2002) introduce a more widely applicable theory of the processing of metaphor, which is that of conceptual integration or blending. The conception of a mental space is introduced to explain what kind of information we select from each domain. A four-space conceptual integration network of mental spaces (Fauconnier and Turner 2002:46) shows that space A (original space) and space B (metaphorical space) can be replaced by two input spaces which are positioned horizontally at the centre of the diagram . There is a third mental space, the mixture of the elements from the two input spaces, which still has it own structure possibly. The generic space is the fourth mental space, which is a schematic presentation of structure common to all other spaces. The latter two spaces are lined vertically.

Generic



Input A Input B

(literal space)  (metaphorical space}

Blending (mixture of elements from Input A B)

Conceptual integration network

In this example, the two input spaces are " Richard's son" and "Greek tragedy". What kind of elements will we choose from these two spaces to form a mixture, which makes this situation funny? In fact, "Greek tragedy" is an abstract concept, Richard's son is a person, they share not any similarity. Here, the roles involved in the obvious unbelievable incest relationship in old Greek tragedy are accepted with the modern persons: Monica, Richard and Rechard's son. This incongruous imagery makes this situation humorous.

6. [Scene: in Monica's apartment, Chandler comes into from outside with a ringing phone and asks Joey to answer the phone, but Joey does not do that. Janice is a lady he is crazy about now.]

(1)Chandler: Just do it! Okay, it's Janice and if I get it I'm going to have to see her tonight. (phone stops ringing, , he is restless.) Oh, that's great I'm gonna have to see her tonight. (laughter)

(2)Rachel: What's the big deal? Why don't you wanna see Janice?

(3)Chandler: Okay, last night at dinner, when the meals came, she put half her chicken piccata on my plate and took my tomatoes. (laughter)

(4)Ross: And that's bad because..., you hate chicken piccata? (laughter)

(5)Chandler: Noo.

(6)Ross: You didn't want to share your tomatoes, tomatoes are very important to you. (laughter)

(7)Chandler: No, it's like all of the sudden, we were this couple. And this alarm started going off in my head: 'Run for your life! Get out of the building!' (laughter)

(8)Rachel: Men are unbelievable.

(9)Monica: What is it with you people! I mean, the minute you start to feel something,

you have to run away?

(10)Chandler: I know, that, (looks at her fake chest, and loses his train of thought, temporarily) that's why I don't want to go tonight, I'm afraid I'm going to say something stupid.

(11)Monica: Oh, you mean like that guy thing where you act mean and distant until you get us to break up with you.

(12)Joey: Hey, you know about that?! (laughter)

(13)Chandler: Look what do I do? I wanna get past this, I don't wanna be afraid of the commitment thing. I wanna go through the tunnel, to the other side! (laughter)

(Joey looks quizzically at Ross)

(14)Ross: (to Joey) Where there is no fear of commitment. (laughter)

(15)Chandler: Do we have any... (turns around and bumps Monica's fake chest) Do we have any thoughts here? (laughter)

(16)Joey: Well, I've never been through the tunnel myself, 'cause as I understand it, you're not allowed to go through with more than one girl in the car, right. But, it seems to me it's pretty much like anything else, you know, face your fear. It has a fear of heights, you go to the top of the building! If you're afraid of bugs.....get a bug. Right. In this case, you have a fear of commitment, so I say you go in there and be the most committed guy there ever was. (laughter)

(17)Rachel: Amazingly, that makes sense.

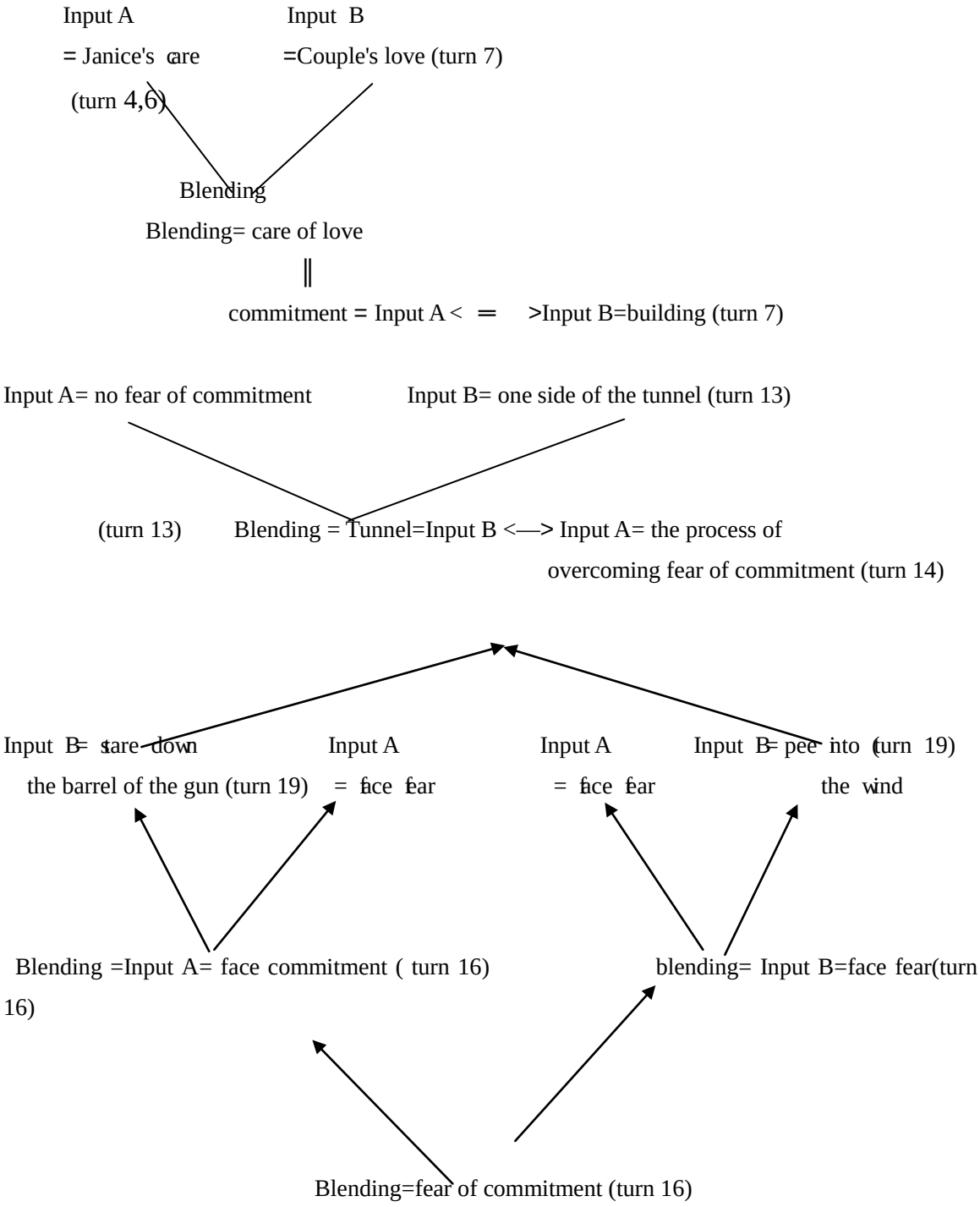
(18)Chandler: You think?

(19)Joey: Oh, yeah. Go for it man, jump off the high dive, stare down the barrel of the gun, pee into the wind! (laughter)

(20)Chandler: Yeah, Joe, I assure you if I'm staring down the barrel of a gun, I'm pretty much peeing every which way. (laughter)

In turn (1), what Chandler say flouts manner maxim since he uses an "ambiguous" formulation to voice an excuse of avoiding to see Janice, but the fact is that everybody knows no matter whether Joey picks up the phone, Chandler will see Janice. What is implicated here is he is in a conflict with himself. In this example, since there are many metaphor uses involved in this sample, I will use the four mental space frame to explain

how the metaphors works in this sample and how the humor is produced. The flowing chart shows that which mental space is touched to produce humor.



In turn (4), Chandler provides some hints to Janice's love for him. The source space is

Janice's care for him, and the target space "couple". Since he express a love affair in a restless mood, Chandler's expression is to some extent ambiguous and such incongruous behaviours make Ross test the meaning of his utterance belongs to input space A in turn (4) and (6). Finally Chandler makes us realize that expression is a metaphor. This sudden realization of the existence of two input spaces make the metaphor funny. In order to solve Chandler's "

fear of commitment" thing, Joey keeps himself in input B mental space,"face fear" in turn (20), which is deblended from blending: face fear of commitment. In final turn, why is funny here is Chandler fuses two expressions of input b mental space accidentally, then the two expression is decontextualised from one metaphorical context and recontextualised into a literal context, finally a funny picture emerges. Therefore, which input space is touched and realization of duality is the key point to humorous metaphor.

4.3 Violation of maxim of relevance

An example of the violation of the maxims of relevance is:

7. [Story line: Ross publishes a joke in *Playboy* and Chandler says that the joke was originally his. In a conversation among the three girls, Monica asks Rachel and Phoebe, “If you had to pick one of us to date, who would it be?”, Rachel answers “I do not know.” but Phoebe answers “Rachel!” immediately, and Monica feels very uncomfortable about it. Scene: In Monica and Chandler’s apartment, they are in the bed together.]

(1) Monica: (Visibly upset) She picked Rachel. I mean, she tried to back out of it, but it was obvious. She picked Rachel. (laughter)

(2) Chandler: (Visibly upset) He took my joke, he took it. (laughter)

(3) Monica: It’s wrong. You know what else is wrong? Phoebe picking Rachel.

(4) Chandler: You know who else picked Rachel? Ross, and you know what else Ross did? He stole my joke. You know what? I'm going to get a joke journal. You know? And document the date and time of every single one of my jokes. (laughter)

(5) Monica: That’s a good idea.

(6) Chandler: Yeah!

(7) Monica: Do you know what’s a bad idea?

(8) Chandler: Picking Rachel. (laughter)
(9) Monica: That is right. (laughter) Did you hear something?
(10) Chandler: Maybe it is the sound of Ross climbing into my brain and stealing my thoughts. (laughter)

Chandler is angry with Ross stealing his joke and publishing it. Meanwhile Monica is sad about Phoebe choosing Rachel. In the conversation, they violate the maxim of relevance at first. Then they seem to be cooperative, but each actually tries to get the other into talking about his/her own issue.

8. [Scene: in Phoebe's room, Chandler, Monica, Joey and Rachel are carrying a couch through the door.]
Ross: Hey hey, can I help?
Chandler: Well! We er...climbed up four flights of stairs, maneuvered a narrow hallway, dodged a rabid pitbull...but these last three feet are where it gets REALLY tricky. (laughter)
Ross: You know, sometimes your words, they hurt. (laughter)

Normally, we answer " can I help?" with "yes thanks.". What Chandler says here seem far away from the question , meanwhile it is the information Ross does not need. However, a cognitive frame which contains four steps hard trip is stimulated by Chandler's words. What is implied is that in such a hard process you does not help a little, when it ends, you asks whether you can help, which is nonsense!.

9. (Story line: Ross will marry Emily, a British girl and everybody is packing to fly to London to attend the wedding.)
[Scene: Cut to the girls' apartment, Monica is putting things into her purse as Phoebe and Rachel watch.]
(1) Monica: Passport, check! (As she puts away each item, she says check.) Camera, check! Traveller's cheques, check!
(2) Rachel: Who are you saying "check" too?

(3) Monica: Myself. You know, for remembering to pack a thing. Yeah, you do a good thing, you get a check! (pause) My mom does it, I never realized it was weird. (laughter)
(4) Phoebe: Yeah, my mom used to put her head in the oven. Well, actually, she only did it the one time. But it was pretty weird. (laughter)
(5) Ross: (entering) Hey!
(6) Monica: Hey!
(7) Ross: Hey! Are you ready yet?
(8) Monica: Yep! You got the tickets?
(9) Ross: Oh! Got 'em right here, (Pats his coat pocket) check! (laughter)

As for the word “check,” which Monica adds unconsciously, it implies a habit, which also reminds the audience of some serious context, such as the engineer checking the engine of a plane to make sure that every part of it works well. When he finishes checking one part of the engine, he does a check after that on a notebook. Phoebe’s remark in turn (4) doesn’t seem to bear much relevance to what Monica says about her mom’s “checking” habit. This might be a more logical way to link the non-relevance of the habit references. What Phoebe’s mother does will lead to her death, which is not a kind of habit, but which achieves a funny effect. When Ross, Monica’s brother, also adds “check” for packing one thing in turn (10), it reinforces the strength of his and Monica’s mother’s habit. She must have done it really often, while Phoebe’s mother’s “habit” could be done only once. The comparison of Phoebe’s mother’s death-inducing “habit” with the relatively trivial habit of Ross and Monica’s mother is a source of humor.

4.4 Violation of maxim of manner

Being brief and perspicuous is an idealized way of communicating. However, in real life communication, people often opt out of this "idealized brief" way of communicating. Ambiguity is used to express implicitly what they do not speak out explicitly, so as not to spoil the other person's feeling.

10. [Story line: Monica and Chandler want to adopt a child, so they sent an application to an adoption agency, then the person from the agency comes to their home to check

whether they are fit to adopt a child. Scene: In Monica's apartment. Somebody knocks on the door.]

Laura: Hi, I am Laura, I am here for your adoption interview.

Monica: Hi, I am Monica and this is Chandler. Please come in.

Laura: Thank you!

Monica: Would you like something to drink?

Laura: Oh, water would be fine.

Monica: Ok. Great. I am so glad that you are here. We're really excited about getting this process started.

Chandler: Oh, because we love kids. Love them to death. Well, not actually to death, that's just a figure of speech - we love kids the appropriate amount... as allowed by law. (laughter)

The final turn is the key source of humor in this sample. In this situation, candidate adoption parents are expected to demonstrate their eagerness to be parents and they are in a good condition which fits to adoption of children. In wanting to show his eagerness to be a dad, Chandler states the situationally-obvious expected information and meanwhile he adds a figure of speech to reinforce this statement in an attempt to avoid triviality. However, being very self-conscious about what he says, he tries to correct the incongruous element (the reference to death) in the figure of speech he uses (which is actually harmless) by referring to boundaries of the law. The "complicated " way he expresses his eagerness gives rise to suspicion and makes him abnormal. The more he says, the more harm he does.

11. [Story line: Chandler has payed a famous gym 50 dollars every month for several years but actually he has not time to go there. He explains that the commercial peppiness and phrases that gym made and the seducement a very hot gym girl Maria makes to him makes him fail to quit the gym every time. Ross volunteers to help encourage Chandler to quit the gym. Finally what actually happens is Ross can not resist Maria's attraction and join the gym. Scene: in Central Perk, everybody is there. Ross and Chandler come in downcastly.]

Rachel: Hey! So, did you quit?
Chandler: No, I almost did, couldn't leave Ross there without a spotter!(laughter)

The whole plan was that Ross would join Chandler to the gym (that one time) to make sure that he would not be tempted by Maria and that he would finally manage to quit the gym. However, things turn out differently and in fact Ross was lured into an expensive gym subscription. Chandler now uses this as an excuse to justify why he has hasn't quit: he has to take care of Ross now (as a spotter) to make sure he's not tempted any more by the lovely Maria. What makes it funny is the reversal of roles. Ross was there to save Chandler, but eventually Chandler portays himself as the one taking care of Ross while in fact, they are both losers.

12. [Story line: All the people are taking a holiday on a beach. Monica gets stung by a jellyfish, and Chandler has to pee on it in order to kill the pain. They feel so embarrassed about that and do not want to tell the other guys. Due to Joey's psychological pressure, they finally tell them the truth.]
(1) Ross: (coming back in with Rachel from outside.) Hey, you guys! What do you, what do you think about making that beach trip an annual thing?
(2) Chandler, Monica, and Joey: NO!!! (laughter)
(3) Rachel: All right, that's it, you guys! What happened out there?
(4) Monica: What? We took a walk, nothing happened. I came back with nothing all over me. (laughter)
(5) Ross and Rachel: Come on!
(6) Ross: What happened? Joey?
(7) Joey: All right. (gets up)
(8) Monica: (stopping him) No! Joey, we swore we'd never tell!
(9) Chandler: (running over and joining Monica) They'll never understand! (laughter)
(10) Joey: Well, we have to say something! We have to get it out! It's eating me alive!! Monica got stung by a jellyfish. (laughter)
(11) Monica: (interrupting) All right!! All right. (walks slowly into the living room) I got

stung. Stung bad. I couldn't stand. I-I couldn't walk. (laughter)

(12)Chandler: (following Monica) We were two miles from the house. Scared and alone. We didn't think we could make it. (He goes to put his hands on Monica's shoulders but for some reason can not quite complete the action and pulls back.) (laughter)

(13) Monica: I was in too much pain.

(14) Joey: And I was tired from digging the huge hole! (laughter)

(15) Chandler: And then Joey remembered something.

(16) Joey: I'd seen this thing on The Discovery Channel...

(17) Ross: Wait a minute! I saw that! On The Discovery Channel, yeah! About jellyfish and how if you... (stops suddenly and turns to look at Monica) Ewwww!! You peed on yourself?! (laughter)

(18) Phoebe and Rachel: Ewwww!! (laughter)

(19) Monica: You can't say that!! You-you don't know!! I mean I thought I was gonna pass out from the pain! Anyway I-I tried, but I-I couldn't...bend that way. So... (looks at Joey.) (laughter)

(20) Phoebe, Ross, and Rachel: (turning to look at Joey) Ewwww!! (laughter)

(22) Joey: That's right I stepped up! She's my friend and she needed help! And if I had to, I'd pee on anyone of you! Only, uhh, I couldn't. I got the stage fright. I wanted to help, but there was too much pressure. So-so I uh, I turned to Chandler. (laughter)

(23) Chandler: (wails loudly into his hands) Joey kept screaming at me, "Do it now! Do it!! Do it! Do it now!!" Sometimes late at night I can still hear the screaming.

(24) Joey: (laughs) That's because sometimes I just do it through my wall to freak you out. (laughter)

The whole story is actually not as complicated as it is narrated by the speakers. The brief way to state that may be: "what happened on that beach?" "Monica got stung by a jellyfish, then Joey remembered urine can kill the pain, finally Chandler peed on Monica." The matter is in fact expressed in such a complicated way, which is more informative than is required. In this situation, Monica, Chandler, and Joey talk as if it were some personal mishap, which makes up a presupposition for what happened after, which arouses the appetites of the audience, which sounds funny. They do not

perspicuously point to the result. Monica first says something unclear which really gives the hearer the impression that there must be something in it, which makes the story long and funny.

13. [Scene: in Monica's apartment, before Christmas day, they just finish picking names for secret Santa in order to give gift to each other. Chandler want to give Rachel a briefcase with her name's initials(RG). But Phoebe suggests he should not do that since Rachel exchanges every gifts she gets.]
Monica: Well, maybe you could give to somebody else. Ooh, like Ross Geller.
Chandler: Op, y'know what though, it's kind've a girlie briefcase.
Monica: Who cares? He works in a museum! (laughter)

What Monica implies here is the persons who work in a museum are really indifferent to other person and they will not care about whether a man uses a girlie briefcase. "When some shortcoming is assigned to a person or a group of people, for the purpose of the joke, to a person, a group, or an institution dear to some listeners, "the 'comic script,' the important event or characteristic or human failing of that group of people that makes the joke funny is universal"(Gruner 2000: 76). Clearly, here Monica mentions the place where Ross works (background knowledge tells Ross is doing some research on dinosaurs), and actually who she implicitly points to is a group of people like Ross. "who cares" detailedly means people who work in museum do not care that a man uses a girlie briefcase, which refers to one shortcoming of the group of people who work in a museum.
The butt of the humor here is that we are laughing at the unfortunate shortcoming of that group of people who are indifferent to other person. I think the two information hints Monica provides us are too brief and not perspicuous enough for all listeners to infer what is implicitly referred in this joke.

5. **Two weaknesses about Grice's theory**

Undoubtedly, the Cooperative Principle attempts to explain how communication succeeds in spite of violation of the maxims [of quality, quantity, etc.], which also leads

to the production of humor. However, too much observation is put on the violation of the maxims, and how we get target conceptual entity from source conceptual entity with a default value for interpreting joke is really beyond Grice's theory.

So in this section, firstly, I will mention why reference-point works as shortcut for interpretation of a humor. Secondly, that how we get target conceptual entity from source conceptual entity with a default value for getting the interpretation of a joke and how tension is built in this inference process will be provided. Finally, dynamic point of view about context is introduced to play a complementary role to Grice's theory.

In Giora's maked informativeness and optimal innovation approach about humor:

Maked informativeness requirement:

"Jokes and point-stories are markedly informative. Their final informative messages are marked in that they are too distant, in terms of the number of similar features, from the messages proceeding them"(1991: 469).

"The joke's marked constituent is least relevant but not irrelevant, that is, not entirely distant or unrelated" (ib.:470).

"People have the ability to focus on those parts of our (linguistic) input that are considered relevant for the purpose at hand and the possibility to simultaneously suppress those parts that deemed irrelevant"(Geert Brône & Kurt Feyaerts 2003), since search for relevance is human nature. 'Interpretation of what somebody is saying is the result of contextualisation processes in which utterances are indexically "made to fit" a particular context by participants in interaction'(Blommaert Jan 2005: 46). When we try to understand a humor, we will firstly be stimulated by some incongruous element, then automatically pick up the "reference point" for us to test whether it belongs to unmarked meaning which has already exist in background knowledge, since search for relevance is human nature and people always firstly get the meaning which produces maximal contextual effects with minimal processing effort. If the meaning we get does not fit to current situation, rethinking process will begin until we hit the final resolution.

Such as in sample 11 on page 13, what helps us to understand what is implied is the spotter which is the interpretational reference point to arouse a series of cognitive reactions:

spotter→ someone who takes care of someone else (background knowledge tells us Ross goes with Chandler to gym to take care of Chandler to resist Maria's seducement in order to quit gym.).
→ who is the "new" spotter here?
→Chandler
→ why does Chandler take care of Ross there?
→ it turns out to be that Ross can not resist Maria's temptation and joins the gym, then a funny picture emerges: a very hot gym lady is seducing Ross. The inference process involved in getting humor is :

First is finding "reference point" which will work as a shortcut to get the target entity, test whether it belongs to its former unmarked meaning.
Second is to adjust whether "reference point" to fit the current context to yield maximal contextual effects with minimal processing effort.
Third background knowledge and more rethinking processing effort help us infer the target entity.

How does our mind reach to the implied humorous target conceptualisation from the "reference point" is not reflected in Grice's theory. During this inference process, a key element which produces humor is tension-building.'Laughing at something "funny" is basically the same thing as our reactions to winning in sports and games. With humor, our behaviour indicating pleasure varies with the amount of emotional involvement with the subject of the humor and the abruptness or suddenness of the surprising outcome'(Gruner 2000:8). It seems that the more "tension" which is built on the "road" between "reference point" and target conceptualisation, the more pleasant feeling we will get when we finally reach the target entity, which will mean the joke is more funny.

As for the scope of context is concerned in Grice's theory, two categories are included. The assumption is that utterance comprehension is built on: (1) the shared background knowledge of the participants; (2) the fact that all relevant items falling under the previous headings are available to both participants and both participants know or assume this to be the case (Grice 1975: 50). We can combine these two categories as the background knowledge which is predefined before communication.

However, the conversation process changes according to the information it is exposed to. Therefore, according to Attardo, the dynamic aspect of context is taken for granted as the following:

Schemas came to be thought of, not as fixed structures to be pulled from memory on demand, but as a recipes for generalizing organizational structure in a particular context(Kintsch 1998:37).

"At a macro level, every text can be summed up (with ruinous aesthetic effects, needless to say) in a more or less stereotypical situation. So, the model of text processing consists in activating sequentially scripts, until the main script of a text is determined, then the entire text is interpretated as an instance of that script (Salvatore Attardo 2001: 56-57)."

In sample (4), the conversation begins with Janine's neutral topic that she will be a dancer in a party. However, since this part she will take part in is Monica and Ross' favourite party, the original neutral invitation context is overwhelmed by Monica and Ross' "intended show" context, in which how much they love and how much they know about that party play a main role, although Chandler and Rachel try to alter this situation implicitly, which still can not stop the "intended show" context work as main line of this conversation.

In sample(6), the humor comes from the same information is put into different scripts, in other words, the dissimilarity between the source entity and target entity is emphasized.

In metaphor, at least two scripts exist, that are literal script (Input A) and metaphorical script (Input B). And in the final turn, accidentally, two pieces of information from metaphorical script are fused together, which deautomatises the metaphorical meaning of information and put it into a literal script.

We go back to conversation (15). Here, it is not difficult for us to find that it is not the brief way to tell something, the way they are talking is not perspicuous to what really happened on that beach. Here, just violating the manner maxim obviously is not enough to explain the humor.

At the beginning, some ambiguity first gives “what on earth happened on that beach?” a mysterious color. By using the utterance in turn (4) “I came back with nothing all over me” (which violates quality maxim.), Monica raises suspicion with the other speakers who expect the default expression “something over me. ” The viewers at the same time realize that she did have something all over her. Her overtly denying that that happened has an opposite effect (as is shown in Rachel’s response) and leads to a humorous effect based on word play. In turn (10), “they will never understand.” Here again, a sentence is borrowed from another much more dramatic register (related to a truly horrifying or bewildering events), which in the context of the conversation reinforces the drama of an act which is quite innocent and funny than anything else. Their choice of words actually makes the event itself come across as more dramatic than it is exaggerating leads to humor. In turn (12), “*we were two miles from the house*, *scared and alone*,” again, the choice of register leads to humor. In turn (17), due to shared background, background emerges, then a wrong conclusion is drawn, which Ross finds already: so the implicature is that he will find it even more disgusting to find out that Chandler peed on her. Conversational participants know this so they have to renegotiate the context. In turn (22),"*That’s right I stepped up!* ", the implied meaning is no matter what disgusting things i should do to help my friend, I will do that. The register belongs to a heroic account of a heroic event, which is a kind of exaggeration, then the humor is achieved by playing with register. Sentence (23) “I can still hear the screaming.” belongs to story going back to very dramatic events.

From the above analysis, obviously, the violation of the manner maxim and the definition of context as “the backgroud knowledge” are not enough to give a good analysis to what happens here. If the registers used here can not be connected to the background knowledge, the implicature can not be understood. The disparity between these different registers, such as heroic story register and horrible register creates more tension in listener's mind than normal narration before what we know what actually happens on that beach. When we get the final resolution about the whole stuff, the more the tension released, the more funny effect it achieves.

In general, static point of view about context is not enough to explain the humor which is produced by decontextuslisation and recontextualisation of the same information, the dissimilarity is mentioned above can not be told to us by background knowledge.

6. Being polite vs Being humorous

At what point in the ingredients of interpretation does an implicature which is perceived as the "polite way of doing things" turn into the kind of incongruity which invites laughter? I raise this question since according to Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, conversational implicature works as a off-record language strategy for keeping communication processing in an appropriate way. So, I am about curious about whether I can make a hypothesis that humorous conversational implicature in sitcom originates from our daily "polite way to do things".

In order to test this hypothesis, first I would like to see what is the universal which does exist in each situation. In our daily communication, people cooperate in maintaining his own and other people's face, meanwhile hope that his own face can be respected by other person. So, preserving face action can be claimed to be universal, which can explain why conversational implicature works as off-record language strategy for it expresses speaker's intention and at the same time preserve hearer's face to some degree. In sitcom communication which causes humor, what is universal is "in every humorous situation, there is a loser and winner, and what is won. "

Let me reanalyze the "spotter" example above.

11. [Story line: Chandler has payed a famous gym 50 dollars every month for several years but actually he has not time to go there. He attributes why he can not quit the gym to the commercial peppiness and phrases that gym made and the seducement a very hot gym girl Maria makes to gym members. Ross volunteers to help encourage Chandler to quit the gym. Finally what actually happens is Ross can not resist Maria's attraction and join the gym. Scene: in Central Perk, everybody is there. Ross and Chandler come in downcastly.]

Rachel: Hey! So, did you quit?

Chandler: No, I almost did, couldn't leave Ross there without a spotter!(laughter)

Things turn out to be the opposite to what Ross intended to do. He was lured into an expensive gym subscription, and he is very upset about that. In this case, Chandler can use off-record strategy to keep Ross' face to some extent, such as "I almost did, but could not leave Ross there alone." or " I almost did but Ross can not resist Maria's temptation and join the gym." However, he uses this as an excuse to justify why he has hasn't quit: he has to take care of Ross now (as a spotter) to make sure he's not tempted any more by the lovely Maria, which change the original off-record language strategy into on-record face threaten act, which makes Ross more shameful, and this is the butt of humor here. Therefore, I can conclude that when the original off-record language strategy changes into on-record act, this incongurous element makes the "polite way of doing things" tip over into a joke.

7. Conclusion

Through the research of humor in the situation comedy "*Friend*s", three findings emerge:

(1) Although situation comedy is a kind of visual-verbal humor, here, attention is focused on verbal humor, the conversational implicature is one of the mechanisms which produce humor in a situation comedy. The speaker consciously and unconsciously violates conversation maxims, those fundamental rules we should obey in an ideal and frank communication.

(2) Although conversational implicature is one of the mechanisms which produce humor in situation comedy as it is analyzed above, Grice’s theory has its own limitation. His definition about context, “shared knowledge,”, is general and static, which should be placed by actional point of view about context for context will change according to the information it is exposed.

(3) "Reference point" works as a interpretation shortcut for us to understand humor and what is cognitive effort we put in order to reach to target conceptualization. Four-space theory gives a humorous metaphor a more thorough explanation.

There are also some limitations about this research. Situation comedy is a kind of verbal-visual humor, and the laughter is used as the indicator of humor. Inevitably the visual humor will evoke some of the laughter. However, the extent to which the visual humor affects the audience is indeterminate. Sometimes, nonverbal humor plays an important role in the dynamic context, and may impact seriously on humor appreciation. And also unavoidably, some actor has the genius to make an audience laugh, which is also a factor. Whether the ability to find "Reference point" belong to one part of communicative competence or just cognitive intelligence, and finding what is the parameter setting between humorous irony and non-humorous irony is what I should strive for in the future.

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