

FLOUTING MAXIMS AND HUMOR IN THE BARBIE MOVIE: INVESTIGATING THE WORLD OF LIVING DOLLS

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E-ISSN:

P-ISSN:

Abstract. This study aims to identify and categorize the types of humor created through flouting maxims in the Barbie movie. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. The data source in this study is the Barbie movie, which was released in 2023. Data collection techniques were conducted using audiovisual and digital materials. Data were analyzed using the interactive model by Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The results show that all types of maxims in Grice's theory (1975) have been flouted, with the maxim of relevance appearing most frequently, the two types of humor that appear through flouting maxims in this movie based on Martin's theory (2007) are spontaneous conversational humor and unintentional humor. The most dominant type of humor is clever replies to serious statements, which is a subcategory of spontaneous conversational humor. The type of humor jokes and replies to rhetorical question were not found in this movie. These findings show that flouting maxims are not merely linguistic deviations, but could be an effective tool for creating humor in a movie.

Keywords: barbie movie, flouting maxim, humor, pragmatic

Abstrak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis jenis-jenis humor yang terbentuk melalui flouting maxim dalam film Barbie. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus. Sumber data dalam penelitian ini adalah film Barbie yang dirilis pada tahun 2023. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan menggunakan teknik audiovisual and digital materials. Data dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif dari Miles and Huberman, yang meliputi data reduction, data display, serta conclusion drawing and verification. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa semua jenis maksim dalam teori Grice (1975) telah dilanggar, dengan maksim relevansi yang paling sering muncul, dua bentuk humor yang muncul melalui flouting maxims dalam film ini berdasarkan teori Martin (2007) adalah spontaneous conversational humor dan unintentional humor. Jenis humor yang paling dominan adalah clever replies to serious statement yang merupakan sub-kategori dari spontaneous conversational humor. Jenis humor jokes dan replies to rhetorical question tidak ditemukan dalam film ini. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa flouting maxim bukan sekedar penyimpangan linguistik, tetapi dapat menjadi alat yang efektif untuk menciptakan humor dalam sebuah film.

Kata kunci: film barbie, flouting maxim, humor, pragmatik

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INTRODUCTION

Humor has long been recognized as an integral part of human interaction, serving as a means to express feelings, convey subtle criticism, provide entertainment, and reduce stress in daily life. According to Hasanat & Subandi (1998), humor is a way for people to express their emotions and find enjoyment in things deemed funny. Similarly, Rahmanadji (2009) emphasizes that humor functions not only as a form of entertainment but also as a medium of information and a subtle tool of social criticism, while simultaneously helping individuals to

relieve stress caused by personal pressures. However, the effect of humor is subjective, as what amuses one group may not appeal to another. Therefore, humor is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by cultural, cognitive, and personal factors.

In *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach*, Martin (2007) explains that humor is closely related to human behavior, cognition, and personality. Within this linguistics, humor often arises from violations of conversational norms. Grice (1975), through his theory of the Cooperative Principle, established a framework that explains how individuals are expected to contribute to conversations in ways that are truthful, informative, relevant, and clear. When these maxims are intentionally flouted, humor often emerges. Attardo (1996) further asserts that all jokes, in essence, involve some form of violation of the Cooperative Principle, thereby establishing a direct link between humor and linguistic pragmatics.

Grice's four maxims guide conversational cooperation: quantity (the right amount of information), quality (truthfulness), relevance (staying on topic), and manner (clarity and order). Humor occurs when these maxims are flouted, through irrelevance, exaggeration, ambiguity, or excessive/insufficient information, which invites hidden meanings and triggers humor.

Movie as a form of popular entertainment often employ humor through such pragmatic strategies. Baltag (2021) states that humor in movies often aims to create an enjoyable ending, provide relief, or subtly criticize societal issues without directly offending the audience. Movies themselves can be considered cultural artifacts, equivalent to buildings, books, or symphonies (Bordwell & Thompson, 1997). Within this framework, humor enriches cinematic narratives through dialogue, expressions, and situational absurdities. Particularly, dialogue plays a key role when irrelevant or ambiguous exchanges provoke laughter or highlight incongruities.

The *Barbie* movie released in 2023, presents an engaging case for studying humor from a pragmatic perspective. The movie blends the real world and the fictional Barbie Land, where dolls behave like humans. Its humor functions not only for amusement but also as social commentary, addressing identity, gender, and societal norms. The characters' uses of irrelevant or exaggerated statements, creates humor while critiquing real-world issues.

The urgency of analyzing humor in *Barbie* lies in its dual function as entertainment and social critique. Unlike films that use humor solely for comedy, *Barbie* integrates humor into its narrative to address cultural and gender issues. The interplay between reality and fantasy demonstrates how humor challenges societal norms, making it both a linguistic and sociocultural tool. By focusing on humor created through flouting conversational maxims, this research highlights the role of language in shaping comedic effects and meaning-making in cinematic discourse.

Research on humor has been widely explored across various media, but most studies focus on sitcoms and podcasts, leaving movies like *Barbie* unexplored. Thus, examining humor through flouting conversational maxims in movies offers a valuable contribution to linguistic and cultural studies. Humor in cinematic contexts often functions as a narrative device that conveys character identity, critiques social norms, and enhances emotional engagement. By analyzing the movie through Grice's Cooperative Principle and Martin's theory of humor, this study provides a nuanced understanding of how linguistic strategies create meaning and laughter simultaneously. Moreover, situating humor within a cultural and pragmatic framework emphasizes that humor is not merely a source of amusement but also a reflection of social consciousness. It shows how the deliberate flouting of conversational norms can act as a subtle critique toward societal structures, stereotypes, and expectations. Therefore, this research contributes not only to linguistic theory but also to the broader understanding of language as a tool for both entertainment and resistance in modern cinematic discourse.

Zelianti et al. (2024) examined humor in Deddy Corbuzier's *Close the Door* podcast featuring Komeng, using Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) and Attardo's humor theory (1994). They found that the maxim of relevance was most frequently flouted. Sabrina (2023) analyzed humorous effects from flouting and violating maxims in Fajar Sadboy's speech on Raditya Dika's YouTube channel. She found that violations of the maxim of quantity were most frequent.

Wang (2023) examined maxim violations in the American sitcom *Friends* and found that the maxims of quality was the most violated, creating humor through exaggeration. Hakim & Indah (2022) explored humor in the Netflix series *Pretty Smart* and found the maxim of quantity most frequently flouted. Yulianti & Handayani (2022) analyzed humor in the *Hawkeye* TV series using Attardo's (1994) theory and also found the maxim of quantity most common.

From these studies, it is evident that previous research has predominantly focused on television and digital platforms, leaving movies relatively underexplored. Few studies use Martin's (2007) framework, which this research combines with Grice's Cooperative Principle to fill a gap in pragmatic humor studies. The relevance of Grice's Cooperative Principle lies in explaining how conversational expectations and their violations produce humor. These pragmatic violations are central to the Barbie movie, where characters often exploit conversational norms to generate laughter.

Martin's (2007) theory categorizes humor into jokes, spontaneous conversational humor, and unintentional humor, types that align with the interactions in Barbie. This framework helps identify and classify humor according to its social function in dialogue. Thus, while the role of conversational maxims in humor has been established, there remains a gap in applying these concepts to movies. This study contributes by applying both theories to analyze humor in Barbie.

Based on these considerations, the objectives of this research are twofold: first, to identify the types of flouting maxims that create humor in the Barbie movie, and second, to classify the types of humor generated through these flouting maxims using Martin's (2007) theory. Therefore, the theoretical framework emphasizes pragmatics, particularly Grice's Cooperative Principle, in explain humor mechanisms. Meanwhile, Martin's humor theory provides classifications to analyze the social and functional aspects of humor. Together, these theories form an integrated approach that enables a comprehensive analysis of humor in Barbie, contributing to linguistic theory and understanding of humor in contemporary media.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, which according to Creswell & Creswell (2018), is suitable for exploring the meaning of social issues in depth. The data were taken from the Barbie movie that was released on 2023, selected because humor is one of its elements and because of its popularity.

The source of data consists of transcribed dialogues that contain humorous elements. As Bogdan & Biklen (1982) state, qualitative data are presented in the form of words rather than numbers, such as transcripts and recordings, making this approach appropriate. Data were collected through audiovisual and digital materials (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), starting from downloading the movie, transcribing its dialogues, verifying the transcript for accuracy, and identifying utterances that contain flouting maxims based on Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975). These dialogues were then analyzed further to determine whether humor was created, guided by Martin's (2007) theory of humor.

For the data analysis, this research follows the interactive model proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994), which consists of three stages. The first stage, data reduction, involves filtering the dialogues to focus only on flouting maxims and narrowing them to those that

generate humor. The second stage, data display, organizes the selected data in a table that shows the dialogue, the type of flouting maxim, how it contributes to humor, the humor category, and its description. The final stage, conclusion drawing and verification, revisits the findings to ensure validity and checks them against Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and Martin's (2007) humor theory. This systematic procedure ensures that the analysis is both reliable and theoretically grounded.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research reveal that all four types of flouting maxims proposed by Grice (1975), occur in the Barbie movie and are employed by the characters as strategies to create humor. These findings indicate that humor in the movie is strongly connected to the intentional deviation from the Cooperative Principle. In addition to flouting maxims, this research also identifies the categories of humor formed through these flouting. Based on Martin's (2007) classification, two main types are found, spontaneous conversational humor and unintentional humor. Meanwhile, the types of jokes do not appear in this movie. Furthermore, within spontaneous conversational humor, all subtypes are identified, but the subtype replies to rhetorical question is not found in this movie. The results provide a clear overview of how humor is systematically constructed in the Barbie movie through pragmatic violations.

Table 1. Flouting Maxims that Create Humor in the Barbie Movie

No	Types of Flouting Maxims	Total	%
1	Flouting Maxim of Quantity	19	34.5%
2	Flouting Maxim of Quality	10	18.2%
3	Flouting Maxim of Relevance	23	41.8%
4	Flouting Maxim of Manner	3	5.5%
Total		55	100%

Table 2. Types of Humor in the Barbie Movie

No	Types of Humor	Sub-types	Total	%
1	Spontaneous Conversational Humor	Irony	6	10.9%
		Satire	3	5.5%
		Sarcasm	3	5.5%
		Overstatement and Understatement	10	18.2%
		Self-deprecation	8	14.5%
		Teasing	5	9.1%
		Clever Replies to Serious Statement	12	21.8%
		Double Entendres	3	5.5%
		Transformation of Frozen Expression	1	1.8%
		Puns	1	1.8%
2	Unintentional Humor	Linguistic Form	3	5.5%

Total	55	100%
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Data 1

Gloria : "Hello?"
 Weird Barbie : **"Humans. We're fine. Come into my Weird house. Hi! I'm Weird Barbie. I'm in the splits. I have a funky haircut, and I smell like basement."**

In this dialogue, Weird Barbie introduces herself by not only stating her name but also adding excessive and unnecessary details, such as her constant split position, her funky hairstyle, and her basement-like body odor. This shows a flouting maxim of quantity because she provides more information than needed in a simple introduction (Grice, 1975). Through this flouting, a type of spontaneous conversational humor emerges in the form of self-deprecation, as Weird Barbie humorously belittles herself while still showing confidence in her uniqueness (Martin, 2007).

Data 2

Ken (Simu) : "I guess she's going without you."
 Ken (Ryan) : **"You're so lost, Ken. She literally asked me, and di was like, 'I prefer to stay here'."**

This conversation takes place during a farewell event when Stereotype Barbie decides to go to the Real World. Ken (Simu) sarcastically remarks that Stereotype Barbie is leaving without inviting Ken (Ryan). To protect his pride, Ken (Ryan) claims she did invite him, but he chose to stay. This shows a flouting maxim of quality because his statement is not true (Grice, 1975). Through this flouting, a type of spontaneous conversational humor emerges in the form of irony, as the contrast between Ken's (Ryan) words and the actual facts creates humor while also highlighting his insecurity (Martin, 2007).

Data 3

Lifeguard : "Oh, so you want to be a lifeguard?"
 Ken (Ryan) : **"Oh, I'm not trained to go over there (points to water). I'm trained to stand confidently over here (points to the sand at his feet)."**
 Lifeguard : "But nobody is in danger here."
 Ken (Ryan) : **"And even if they were, I'm not trained to save them."**

This conversation occurs when Ken (Ryan) applies for a lifeguard job. Although he is confident, he admits that he cannot save people in the water and only stands on the sand. This shows a flouting maxim of relevance because his answer does not match the lifeguard's question about his capability. Through this flouting, a type of spontaneous conversational humor emerges in the form of clever replies to serious statement (Martin, 2007). The humor arises from the absurd contrast between the serious expectation of the job and Ken's uselessly confident reply.

Data 4

Policeman 2 : "She looks even better in more clothes."
 Policeman 1 : **"Because you can imagine more."**

This conversation takes place after Stereotype Barbie and Ken (Ryan) are arrested for the second time, following an incident in a clothing store. During police custody, Policeman 2 remarks that Stereotype Barbie looks more attractive in various outfits, to which Policeman 1

replies that it is because he can imagine more. This response shows flouting maxim of manner because it is vague and ambiguous (Grice, 1975). Through this flouting, spontaneous conversational humor emerges in the form of double entendres, as the statement carries both a literal compliment and a suggestive implication (Martin, 2007).

Data 5

Stereotype Barbie	: “You’re very brave, Ken.”
Ken (Ryan)	: “Thank you Barbie. You know surfer is not even my job. And is not lifeguard, which is common misconception, because actually my job is just beach. ”

This conversation occurs after Ken (Ryan) crashes while surfing and is examined by Doctor Barbie in the ambulance. When Stereotype Barbie praises his bravery, Ken (Ryan) responds not only with thanks but also by claiming that his job is simply ‘beach’. This shows flouting maxim of quantity, as he provides more information than needed (Grice, 1975). Through this flouting, a type of unintentional humor emerges, as Ken (Ryan) mistakes treats ‘beach’ as a profession. The absurdity of his logic, in which he believes that simply standing on the sand counts as a job, creates humor unintentionally (Martin, 2007).

CONCLUSION

All four types of flouting maxims proposed by Grice (1975) were identified in the Barbie movie, showing that humor is intentionally constructed through conversational deviations, with the maxim of relevance being the most frequently flouted. According to Martin’s (2007) theory of humor, only two types of humor, spontaneous conversational humor and unintentional humor were found, with spontaneous conversational humor dominating most of the data. The most prominent subtype identified was clever replies to serious statement, followed by overstatement and understatement, self-deprecation, and irony. These results indicate that humor in the Barbie movie is not created by chance but through deliberate flouting of conversational norms that generate incongruity and surprise. Thus, the humor in this movie is not merely based on linguistic play, but rather reflects the character’s intentional use of conversational flouting to create contrast, absurdity, and comedic effect that enhance the movie’s entertainment value.

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