

Analyzing Jokes in the Light of Cooperative Principle

— Taking George Carlin's Stand-up Comedy as an Example

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Abstract: George Carlin was one of the most brilliant and outstanding comedians in the United States. He criticised social hypocrisy by highlighting conflicting facts that people typically ignore. In stand-up comedy, several linguistic mechanisms assist in the creation of humour. Many linguistic mechanisms contribute to the production of comedy in stand-up comedies. Through a literature analysis, this paper investigates the use of "Cooperative Principle" in George Carlin's comedies and how he uses his language proficiency to entertain his audiences. It reemphasizes the significance of rationality in the "Cooperative Principle" by analyzing the implementation of Grice's theory from a novel perspective, as opposed to focusing on daily conversations. Based on Grecian theory, this research focuses on the implicature of speakers in stand-up comedians and how implicit sentence generates humour.

Keywords: Cooperative Principle, humor, George Carlin, stand-up comedy

1. Introduction

George Carlin was one of the most brilliant and outstanding American comedians. Carlin, renowned for his far-sighted views on politics, language, and religion, satirised ludicrous situations in American culture, transforming stand-up comedy into a potent weapon that transcends the realm of amusement and expresses the viewpoints of the common people. He devoted the most of his comedy to portraying the sociopolitical and cultural contradictions of his country. Carlin attacks social hypocrisy by highlighting contradictory facts that are typically overlooked by individuals. Many linguistic mechanisms contribute to the production of comedy in stand-up comedies.

Presumptive Meanings by Stephen C. Levinson proposes a theory of generalized conversational implicature (GCI). Levinson puts various examples of GCI into three categories, with each category indicating a distinct licencing heuristic that can be tied to Grice's maxims. The book offers an interesting new perspective on the relationship between semantics and pragmatics. This book, however, lacks a sophisticated computational or formal orientation [1]. In addition, Bethan L.Davies does additional research on Grice's CP and concludes that this theory does not focus on the concept of cooperation, but rather on phrase and speaker meanings, as well as people's rationality in communication. He emphasises that Grice focuses on the contrast between saying and meaning. The speaker in a discussion is aware of sentence implicature and the challenge of whether the listener can

reliably determine sentence meanings. In this process, rationality is more important than collaboration because all actions and responses are based on commonsense reasoning [2].

This study examines Carlin's use of the "Cooperative Principle" in his humour and how he capitalises on his language skills to entertain audiences. It analyses Greek philosophy based on speakers' implicature in order to comprehend the logic of communication, blending comedy with implicit speaking. This paper concentrates on Grice's theory in stand-up comedies as opposed to everyday communication, delving further into the relevance of rationality in the "Cooperative Principle" and irrationality in humour generation.

2. Cooperative Principle

According to H. P. Grice, to achieve successful communication, people obey the "Cooperative Principle". They are the most basic maxims, including: "maxim of quantity", "maxim of quality", "maxim of relation" and "maxim of manner". He explains these four maxims in his book *Logic and Conversation* that [3]:

- a. Maxim of Quantity: Your contribution is expected to be neither more nor less than is required.
- b. Maxim of Quality: Your contribution is expected to be genuine and not spurious.
- c. Maxim of Relation: Your contribution is expected to be appropriate to the immediate needs at each stage of the transaction.
- d. Maxim of Manner: You are expected to make it clear what contribution you are making and to execute your performance with reasonable dispatch [3].

In most cases, these maxims are observed in conversation. Yet, there are situations when people intentionally disobey one or more of these maxims in order to achieve a specific objective — such as creating humour. In the following chapter, examples of humour resulting from violations of the many CP maxims will be provided.

3. Humor as the Violation of Grice's Maxims

A significant number of jokes violate one or more of Grice's maxims. The idea that jokes might be interpreted as violations of maxims can be traced back to Grice himself, who views irony as a form of implicature [4]. George Carlin's stand-up comedy frequently violates or disregards Grice's maxims to convey his political or religious ideas in a humorously oblique manner.

The first one is flouting maxim of quantity. "I don't like to lose anything!"... "Where is it?" "I don't know." "It's gone." "That's true." "It's lost." "I know." "Where could it be?" "Could be anywhere." "Maybe it will come back." "Maybe but not yet." "It's gone." "That's true. Are we going to go through this shit again?" [5]

Carlin recounts a conversation that occurs when someone loses an item. This conversation appears nonsensical because it disregards the quantity maxim. It provides no valuable information and only repeats previously stated messages. This conversation is humorous and nonsensical, but it is typical in everyday life. Once comprehending this, the audience is typically amused by Carlin's humour.

The second one is violating maxim of quality. "I'm telling you, some of this language makes me want to vomit. Well, maybe not vomit, makes me want to engage in an involuntary personal protein spill"[6].

Carlin intends to attack that "American English is riddled with euphemisms...Americans have difficulty facing the reality, so they create a soft language to shield themselves from it. And it worsens with each successive generation. For whatever reason, it continues to worsen"[6].

He states that this phrase (referring to euphemisms) makes him want to vomit, and thus "corrects" the word "vomit" to "an uncontrollable personal protein spill." In reality, he does not have a tendency to vomit; rather, he exaggerates his emotions to produce amusement.

The third one is flouting maxim of relation. "The world has been through far worse than we have... ..been through seismic events, volcanoes, tectonics, continental drifts, solar flares, sunspots, magnetic storms, magnetic pole reversal, thousands of millions of years of barrages by comets, asteroids, and meteoroids, global floods, tsunamis, global fires, deterioration, cosmic rays, repeated ice ages, and we think a few plastic bags and aluminium containers will have an impact" [7]?

In order to maximise a relationship, individuals must provide pertinent information in a discourse. Yet, when it comes to the question of whether people should safeguard the earth by lowering their use of plastics, he avoids giving a direct response and instead discusses the planet's history. He argues that these so-called environmentalists are nothing more than self-important, self-righteous politicians. In order to emphasise his view that "saving the planet" is merely an arrogant slogan and that the only thing humans can do is to rescue themselves, he makes a connection between horrific tragedies and plastic bags and aluminium cans. This obvious but overlooked fact is humorous.

The fourth one is violating maxim of manner. "It's called the American dream because you have to be asleep to believe it." [8]

Ambiguity is essential to humour. Ambiguity refers to a linguistic unit with multiple interpretations. It might lead to misinterpretation of what is said or written. In ordinary speech, people tend to avoid ambiguous phrases and adhere to the manners maxim. Yet, Carlin intentionally breaches this rule to enhance the meaning of his sentence. He critiques the current condition of the United States and makes fun of politicians that speak gibberish. The word "dream" has two definitions: "a series of visions, events, and sensations that occur in your head while you are asleep" and "a wish to have or be something, especially one that seems difficult to achieve." Politicians utilise the second sense of dream, while Carlin employs the first meaning to lampoon the so-called American dream, so enlivening the environment.

4. Implicature in George Carlin's Stand-up Comedies

4.1. Religion is Bullshit

In his *Religion Is Bullshit*, he needs to discuss the question whether the God exists. He doesn't respond to this question directly, but says that:

"Religion has genuinely convinced people that an unseen guy lives in the sky and watches their every action, every minute of every day. And the invisible man has a list of ten things he specifically forbids you from doing. And if you commit any of these ten things, he will send you to a specific area filled with fire, smoke, scorching, torment, and pain, where you will live, suffer, burn, choke, scream, and cry forever and ever till the end of time! Yet He loves you. He needs money and He loves you! Always in need of funds! He is all-powerful, all-perfect, all-knowing, and all-wise, but he can't handle money for some reason"[9]!

In this section, he cites some irrational facts. It appears he failed to observe the principle of amount and relationship. He discusses the features of a God in whom he does not believe. The description of God might not be accurate. In addition, he asks whether God exists in the world, but his response focuses on God's actions rather than his existence. Yet, his audience understands the intent of his comedy: the presence of God is foolishness. They adhere to the cooperative concept in order to acquire Carlin's information and consider the conflicts he identifies.

Humans are warned in the Bible that if they do not control their behaviour, they would face severe consequences from the All-Powerful, hence it can be inferred that God is cruel and his authority is so rigorous that practically everyone loses their freedom. This assumption, however, contradicts another verse in the Bible: "God so loved the world." In addition, the Bible asserts that God is omnipotent, omniperfect, omniscient, and omnipotent. If the Bible is genuine, God must have the ability to generate wealth. The first statement follows the second. The latter statement, however, is false, as

Christians are constantly urged to contribute money to God. The entailment ceases to exist when the entailing sentence is refused. People can draw from this that God is not almighty. Contrary to what the Bible says and what the Church has done, the Church claims to be God's representatives. In this approach, Carlin satirises the Church's unquenchable desire for wealth and seeks to expose people to its ugliness and avarice.

4.2. *It's Bad For Ya*

In his *It's Bad For Ya*, he discusses Christianity once more and examines the logic of the famous phrase "God bless America." "If they say 'God bless America,' they must believe in God, and if they do, they must have heard that God loves all people." "May God bless America" Listen, good. Nowadays, there are 200 countries in the world. Do these individuals honestly believe that God is selecting his favourites? Why would he act this way? Why would God have a preferred country? And why would it be America among all other nations? Because we possess the most wealth? Since he enjoys our National Anthem? Perhaps he heard that we offered 18 exquisite flavours of classic Rice-A-Roni" [10].

In this paragraph, the illogic of this statement is apparent. He generates humour by combining rational analysis and irrational jokes, therefore breaching the maxim of quality and relation. Secondly, he asserts that the Bible portrays God as a person who loves all people equally, implying that God does not favour any particular nation. This basic logic leads to a conclusion that contradicts the phrase "God bless America." With this conclusion in mind, he attempts to determine why Americans believe God blesses America. And his response is money, the national anthem, and Rice-A-Roni, which the majority of the audience finds rather absurd. National Anthem and cuisine are inconsequential compared to other aspects of America, yet Carlin selects this response to mock the self-importance of some Americans. Frequently, in response to a question such as "why does he love you?" Individuals must enumerate their benefits and superiority. In this section, however, George Carlin provides an unrelated response that conveys his implication that America has no advantage over other nations in gaining God's favour. Given his previous statements, he does not believe that America is blessed by God, or more precisely, he denies the existence of God. Hence, his discussion completely contradicts his true beliefs. His violation of the quality principle is not to pretend to believe in God, but to the absurdity of some religious assertions. In his comedies, the implicit meaning is hidden, and he utilises nonsensical language to amuse the audience.

5. Conclusion

In George Carlin's stand-up comedies, there is no distinction between humour and sarcasm. He is a master of the English language and employs the cooperative principle to explain his thoughts with precision. His humour and irony are rooted in bizarre societal realities, and he highlights these obvious tensions in daily life. It is ludicrous that individuals disregard such obvious indicators of social problems. Thus, humour is generated once more.

This article fails to give complete analyses on the implicature in George Carlin's jokes because it lacks sufficient linguistic data and a computational approach. In addition, this study does not clearly differentiate between comedy and irony, which may lead to confusion. It will examine the distinction between irony and humour and conduct additional study on how comedy is generated based on the Cooperation Principle.

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