

## A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF VERBAL HUMOR IN THE US TV SERIES THE MARVELOUS MRS. MAISEL

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### ABSTRACT

Based on the current research at home and abroad, this thesis takes the humorous conversations in the US TV Series The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel as data for study, analyzing the generation and understanding of verbal humor in it with the framework of the Cooperative Principle, aiming to discover the mechanism of generating and understanding English humor in the process of communication. It also seeks to guide people to better create and appreciate humor, to better feel and experience humor in different cultures, and meanwhile to provide some valuable insights into the interpretation of humor.

From the analysis, it can be easily seen that it is necessary to analyze the pragmatics of verbal humor in the US TV Series The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel to promote our understanding of the meaning of humor, improve our ability to use humor rationally, and enrich our life through the use of humor. The analysis will benefit the audience in that it enables them to appreciate and enjoy The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel from a new pragmatic perspective and achieve a better and thorough understanding of the characters' personalities. At the same time, the study of verbal humor from the perspective of the Cooperative Principle can also provide some inspiration for second language acquisition, helping second language learners understand the mechanisms of humor production, thus creating and interpreting speech humor more efficiently.

**Keywords:** Verbal humor; The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel; the Cooperative Principle.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Humor is a special type of verbal expression. It is a tool for people to adapt to their environment and is one of the ways to reduce mental and psychological stress when faced with difficult situations. Humor is also an old research topic. Dating back to Plato and Aristotle's time in ancient Greece, humor theories have been revised and developed over the centuries. Contemporary research on verbal humor is framed by the Cooperative Principle, the Contextual Theory, and the Speech Acts Theory. A review of previous research on verbal humor in family comedy reveals that most of these studies have been limited to discourse analysis, cross-cultural studies, and other fields. With the development of interdisciplinary and multimodal research, the integration of speech humor and pragmatics has received more attention. The focus of verbal humor research has also shifted from static and isolated phrases to dynamic and multidimensional texts, such as movies, plays, advertisements, and sitcoms.

Since it was first aired in 2017, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* has been a hit with audiences worldwide. Set in the 1950s, 25-year-old New Yorker Midge Maisel is a savvy, sunny, vibrant, and lovely Jewish woman who once summed up her life as follows:

- Go to college.
- Get married.

- Have two or three children.
- Serve Yom Kippur dinner in an elegant Manhattan apartment.

One day her husband Joey suddenly leaves her, however, without warning. She needs to figure out her new path as quickly as possible; for others, going from housewife to appearing in stand-up comedy would be a terrified choice, but not for Midge. Many factors contribute to the success of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, including the cast's superb acting, the great plot, and so on. But verbal humor is a key factor in the huge success of this American TV show.

As for studies of verbal humor in comedy guided by the CP have been extensively studied, but the reasons characters flout the CP have been little explored. Reflections on the discourse analysis of two-way dialogue in comedies have received extensive attention. Still, the one-way form used by the play's female protagonists to express verbal humor, i.e., stand-up comedy, has rarely been explored. Therefore, this thesis takes the US TV Series *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* as a sample for study and analyzes the generation and comprehension of humorous conversations in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, aiming to discover the mechanism of generating and comprehending English humor in the communicative process. And to guide people to create humor, appreciate humor, experience humor better from different cultures, and provide some valuable insights into the translation of humor.

In terms of theoretical significance, this study also proves the applicability of Grice's principle of cooperation to family comedy, verifies the universal importance of its principle, and enriches the research theory of situational comedy. In terms of practical significance, pragmatic analysis of the verbal humor in the US TV Series *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* is necessary to facilitate our understanding of the meaning of humor, improve our ability to use humor rationally, and better enrich our lives through humor. Through the analysis of this thesis, the audience can enjoy *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* from a new pragmatic perspective and better appreciate the characters' personalities. At the same time, the study of verbal humor from the perspective of the CP can also provide some inspiration for second language acquisition. Second language learners can understand the mechanisms of humor production and can interpret and create speech humor more comprehensively.

In this thesis, taking the CP as the guiding framework for corpus analysis, the authors intend to focus on the following three issues: (1) the mechanism of producing verbal humor in the corpus, (2) the mechanism of understanding verbal humor in the corpus, (3) the pragmatic significance of verbal humor. At the same time, there are some difficulties in the pragmatic analysis of verbal humor in the corpus. The forms of expression that we generally use to convey humor are two-way, for example, in a conversation where there is a messenger on one side and a receiver on the other side. The identities of the two parties in this dialogue may constantly shift. In this process of conveying and receiving information, the linguistic meaning of humor is conveyed by flouting the CP, etc. But in the US TV Series *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, the form used by the heroine to express linguistic humor is more of a one-way form ---- stand-up comedy. In this form of expression, the identity of the communicator and the receiver of the message is stable. So it requires thinking and studying flexibly outside the traditional mode of thinking when analyzing this kind of corpus.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Previous Researches of Humor**

From ancient times to the present, many scholars have studied humor, making the field of humor a fruitful one.

#### **2.1.1 Definition and classification of humor**

If someone asks what humor is, for sure, everyone has their answer. Humor is an abstract concept that cannot be seen or touched, so it is difficult for us to have a unified definition of the concept of humor. From ancient times to the present, many scholars have studied the abstract concept of humor and have explained and outlined what humor is in their own ways. The English philosopher Sorel describes humor, "There is no word in a certain language more difficult to define than 'humor,' which everyone is familiar (Sorel, 1908)."

Various dictionaries have given various definitions of humor. For example, the New Coxswain's Encyclopedia defines humor as "the observation and understanding of the dramatic side of things". It refers to the attitude towards life and human beings, i.e., seeing ourselves as both comical and solemn.

The American New Age Encyclopedia defines humor as "everything funny and ridiculous".

Since the term humor entered the field of aesthetics at the end of the 16th century, there have been numerous theoretical works on humor. However, the definition of humor still varies. What we can confirm is that humor exists its way in the process of verbal communication and adds a special aesthetic flavor to speech, so Bacon said, "Good talk must be humorous." Humor in speech means that we use speech conditions to show witty and funny feelings about things in our talk. The thesis tentatively defines humor as anything "witty and comical, intended to make both sides of the communication pleased".

So far, scholars have classified humor in different ways. But the most popular of them is the classification of humor by its form of expression. According to its state of expression, humor can be classified as verbal humor and acting humor (such as mime, etc.), verbal plus acting humor (such as comedy, etc.), comics, and even music and dance. Verbal humor is the most common form, and humor has its unique characteristics in different languages and cultures. Verbal humor requires the use of linguistic tools to construct and express itself. It covers a wide range of expressions, including anecdotes, jokes, irony, comedy, and satire, etc.

Since this thesis aims to analyze verbal humor in American TV series, the humor in following are all examples of verbal humor.

#### **2.1.2 Previous researches of humor**

In general, there are three major theories in the study of humor, namely Superiority Theory, the Release Theory and the Incongruity Theory. These three classical theories of Western humor are studied from the various points of philosophy, psychoanalysis, and psychology respectively with three outstanding representative scholars: Hobbes, Freud and Kant, etc.

The classical rhetoric theory of ancient Greece and Rome is a crucial cornerstone of Superiority theory, especially superiority theories of humor involving negative emotions, such as contempt and ridicule. The representatives of this idea include Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Darwin, etc. Plato first put forward the "gloating theory" he pointed out that the task of ludicrousness is a lack of self-knowledge. The laughter caused by this ludicrousness is a kind of gloating laughter that contains both pleasure and grief, that is, ridicule or performance with the nature of emotional criticism. This

kind of laughter can cause joy because he makes himself feel superior through the criticism of others. People's hostility against the comparatively inept is shown through humor. In his *Human Nature* (1650), Thomas Hobbes made another point that had a profound influence on later scholars. He argued that laughter is nothing else but sudden glory because we suddenly feel superior to others. In sum, despite the various nuances within the superiority thesis, they are related in one respect. Namely, they believe that their superiority is manifested by laughing at or despising the misfortunes of others or things. Humor is seen as a civilized situation of attack.

Release Theory is based on psychology or psychoanalysis, which regards laughter caused by humor as a release from the intention and depression triggered by social constraints. Spencer, Freud, and Eastman have all discussed it, and Freud is the most distinguished scholar of this theory. In his book *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, he proposed that humor is essentially characterized by release and liberation, which is formed by the constraints and prohibitions suppressed by society. However, Freud's theory does not emphasize the nature of humor, so this does not demonstrate why humor is hilarious. In this case, it can be classified into a theory only about laughter.

Incongruity Theory is still the leading psychological study of humor of the time. In the meantime, it is also one of the most momentous theories in the research about humor and laughter. Humor, as referred to by the Incongruity Theory, is essentially dissonance, and humor is the result of dissonance, so we can also call it dissonance theory. Aristotle, in his book, notes that if their expectations collapse for the audience, there is a humorous effect. Immanuel Kant then suggests that "laughter is the sudden emotion of falling short." After that, the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer elaborated more specifically on the Incongruity Theory, arguing that laughter is caused by the sudden realization of abstract concepts and physical objectives. In essence, the Incongruity Theory indicates that humor is what reality is perceived when perceiving incongruity between concepts and things.

In short, the three major theories of humor are shortcuts to the repeated in-depth consideration of humor over the centuries. They each provide answers to why humor causes laughter from different perspectives. Since Plato and Aristotle in ancient Greece, Western humor and drama theories have developed the above-mentioned traditional doctrines. Although they have focused on different objects as philosophers, dramatists, and psychologists, they have developed several diverse doctrines. Raskin (1985) further expounded the relationship from an interpersonal perspective, stating that the Superiority theory reveals that humor is caused by people's negative emotions; the Incongruity Theory concerns more with the stimuli that elicit a humorous response; and the Release Theory mainly analyzes the psychological activities of listeners. And when we study humor, we should pay attention to the compatibility of these three classical theories and combine them organically to analyze the mechanism of humor more completely.

## **2.2 Previous Researches of Verbal Humor**

As the most important part of humor, verbal humor plays a critical role in people's daily lives. The following section provides an overview of significant national and international research on verbal humor.

### **2.2.1 Previous researches of verbal humor abroad**

Western scholars' inquiries into humor enjoy a long history, dating back even to ancient Greece and Rome, and, of course, the study findings have been highly beneficial. However, the study on

humor has traditionally been dominated by the studies in philosophy, depth psychology, and sociology. It wasn't until the late 1970s that linguistics finally gained prominence among the numerous studies on humor.

Raskin's Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH) and its developed form, the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), are the most widespread and influential of these theories. From the perspective of SSTH, the analysis of humor is based on scripts. In the field of SSTH, the word 'script' is no longer a familiar concept in our daily life; Raskin defines a script as a word or some related semantic information triggered by the word. It can also be said that a script is the cognitive structure and form of each person. Philosophically, it is a person's worldview, and Raskin believes that each person has two sets of scripts, one with common knowledge about the world and the other unique to each person. The latter is determined by the individual's personal experiences and background. Another important aspect of SSTH is that the activated scripts are not limited to lexical text-only information, but they can also reveal the speaker's cognitive patterns, i.e., his worldview. The combination rules filter out inappropriate scripts as later sentences are involved in the construction of the text; they specify the default interpretation unless the preceding information requires a particular interpretation, and they allow recursion to the prior information. Raskin's (1985) theory of semantic scripts suggests that a discourse constitutes a jocular discourse if two conditions are satisfied simultaneously. First, the discourse contains two different scripts in whole or in part; second, the two scripts contained in the discourse are in some way opposed to each other.

Extending and modifying Raskin's theory of semantic scripts, Attardo and Raskin collaborated to develop The General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH). If Raskin's SSTH is just a semantic theory of humor, then the General Theory of Verbal Humor is a comprehensive linguistic theory. That is, it is also concerned with other branches of linguistics, such as narratology, pragmatics and so on. In addition to the framing opposition from semantic script theory, the general theory of speech humor includes five other parameters called Knowledge Resources (KRs). The lower the KRs in the hierarchy, the more concrete they are, the weaker their humor generating power, and the higher the similarity of their representations. Conversely, the higher the KRs in the hierarchy, the more abstract they are, the stronger their humor generating power and the lower the similarity of their representations. The six knowledge resources, in descending order, are Language (LA), Narrative strategy (NS), Target (TA), Situation (SI), Local mechanism (LM), and Script Opposition (SO).

In addition to the above, pragmatic research based on Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory is another prominent sort of linguistic study on humor. In terms of Relevance Theory, Curco (1996) agrees with Sperber and Wilson's view of humor.

### 2.2.2 Previous researches of verbal humor at home

Humor is a universal phenomenon in human society. The interdisciplinary study of this phenomenon has never ceased in both ancient and modern times. With the introduction of the linguistic analysis of humor in the West into China, we have been exploring the pragmatic, semantic, rhetorical, and logical aspects of humor more and more. The study of humor in the modern sense in China has been going on for almost a century since Lin Yutang created the term "humor" in 1924, while linguistic studies and research should have started in the 1980s.

Since the 1980s, the scope of humor research has gradually expanded and the content of research has become increasingly rich. The famous Chinese linguist Hu Fanzhu and Tan Daren are the



representative works of this period. Both of their works have explored in some detail the rhetorical device and techniques of humor. However, Hu and Tan's limitation is that they only consider humor as a rhetorical mode of language use but neglect to examine the principle of the inner generation of humor.

From the start of this century, as foreign discourse studies and cognitive linguistic studies continued to heat up and deepen, domestic humor research has also entered a new stage. Xu (2003) referred to previous research methods and theories from different disciplines and adopted the three linguistic metafunctions as well as the three principles of elation to explore humorous discourse in three dimensions. Liu (2005) used Attardo's Graph Theory as a tool to study further. Fang (2007) studied verbal humor and developed an analytical model of verbal humor. Zhang (2011) applied Conceptual Blending to interpret verbal humor and explored how humorous language functions from a cognitive perspective.

However, domestic humor research is still relatively weak compared to studies abroad. In terms of the breadth and depth of research, there is generally a significant gap between domestic research on humor and Western research. Both in the last century and the present century, it seems that the investigation has not yet attracted sufficient attention from the linguistic community. Meanwhile, there is great lack of applied and empirical research on humorous speech in China. For example, in recent years, China's traditional language performing art, comic dialogue (xiangsheng), has been on a steady decline, and the once-loved sketch comedy (xiaopin) has been going downhill. These grim facts are a cause for reflection and concern for the realization of humor in China.

### **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Theoretical Framework**

In this thesis, Grice's Cooperative Principle are used as a basic framework for analyzing specific data.

##### **3.1.1 A brief introduction to Grice's Cooperative Principle**

The famous linguist H. P. Grice pointed out in *Logic and Conversation* that our conversations are subject to certain maxims and that the reason why we do not have a series of incoherent words is that at different stages, the talkers follow this one or a set of purposes and then cooperate with each other. In other words, in order to communicate accurately and effectively, both the speaker and the listener must cooperate. The Cooperative Principle (shortened as CP) states, "make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged (Grice, 1975: 45)."

##### **3.1.2 Four basic maxims of the Cooperative Principle**

To further explain CP, Grice proposes the following four maxims:

“1. The Maxim of Quantity

(a) Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange)

(b) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required

2. The Maxim of Quality

(a) Do not say what you believe to be false

(b) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence

3. The Maxim of Relation

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Make your contributions relevant

4. The Maxim of Manner

- (a) Avoid obscurity
- (b) Avoid ambiguity
- (c) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
- (d) Be orderly (Grice, 1975: 84)”

The four maxims have distinct perspectives. The first three maxims are primarily concerned with the contents of the conversation or what to say, whereas the fourth maxim is concerned with the manner, or how to say something in a conversation. The CP and its maxims ensure that the appropriate amount of information is provided in the conversation exchange and that the interaction between speakers is truthful, relevant, and perceptive. (Grice, 1975, p. 309).

The maxims as mentioned above are the primary prerequisites for a regular and smooth conversation, but this does not mean that people always have to adhere to these maxims in communication. On the contrary, they are constantly violated intentionally or unintentionally. Inadvertently flouting the above maxims will cause misunderstanding or even produce jokes; if it is to achieve a particular effect and deliberately flout these things, it is the authentic humor. What is commonly referred to as a sense of humor is the ability to make or understand this type of humor. More than that, conversational implicature is also a product of intentional violation of CP.

### 3.2 Research Methodology

In the thesis, the author mainly uses data collection, qualitative and quantitative analysis as research methodology.

#### 3.2.1 Data Collection

The data used in this study were obtained from the famous American family comedy *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*. The writer has collected the data from March 20 to April 15, 2022. The series has four seasons, each with eight episodes, and each episode is about one hour in length. The author chose the first season as the corpus data. Since the thesis aims to analyze verbal humor in the discourse, therefore, amusing effects caused by other factors like facial expressions, funny gestures, etc., were all excluded. Finally, 95 examples were taken, and 11 of them were analyzed in detail to meet the needs of the study. This thesis also provides background information on each dialogue, which makes the data analysis process easier to understand for viewers who have never seen *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*.

#### 3.2.2 Quantitative and qualitative analyses

In order to conduct a systematic and in-depth analysis of how verbal humor is realized in the TV series, this thesis examines the verbal humor in the corpus in terms of both quantitative statistics of the characters' dialogues and qualitative analysis of typical examples. This thesis uses qualitative analysis as the primary method to analyze and explain the verbal humor in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*. The quantitative analysis is made by counting the number and frequency the distribution of each category of maxims flouted in humor generation to make the analysis more in-depth and the conclusion more convincing.

#### 4. AN ANALYSIS OF VERBAL HUMOR IN THE MARVELOUS MRS. MAISEL

This chapter will reveal the number and percentage of each supervisor and the strategies used to react in conversation based on the data collected. In addition to this, this chapter examines why the characters in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* flout CP in their communication.

##### 4.1 Some General Quantitative Findings

Quantitative analysis of specific data is essential to draw the conclusions of this thesis. The actual data and corpus will be given in the following section.

##### 4.1.1 Percentage of violations of the Cooperative Principle

Table 4.1 Percentage of Flouting Each Maxim of the CP

Maxim of the CP	Number	Percentage
Flouting of Quantity Maxim	23	24.6%
Flouting of Quality Maxim	14	14.4%
Flouting of Relation Maxim	30	32%
Flouting of Manner Maxim	28	29%
Total	95	100%

As shown in Table 4.1, 95 examples were selected from these 8 sets in the chosen family comedy. Among these cases, the largest number of instances violated the maxim of relation, with 30 and 32% in number and percentage, respectively. The second was the maxim of manner (29%), then the third was the maxim of quantity (24.6%). The maxim of quality, on the other hand, was flouted the least number of times, only 14.4% of the total. We can infer that the language of humor in American family comedies flout the maxim of relation most frequently. However, violations of other maxims, i.e., the maxim of quantity, manner and quality, also play a pivotal role in the generation of humor in American family comedy.

##### 4.1.2 The significance of the quantitative findings

As mentioned above, when people flout one of the maxims in CP, they produce a humorous speech effect. The quantity maxim in CP requires the speaker to provide just the right amount of information, which means not too much but not too little either. You should say as much as you know what the other party in the conversation asks for or expects you to say, but you are not supposed to say things that the other party does not need you to say. The violating of the maxim of quantity generally occurs in two situations: the amount of information provided by the speech placed in the process of verbal communication is insufficient, and the second in which too much information is provided. In both cases, the verbal communication will be extra-verbal, which we call conversational implicature. The production of partially humorous speech can be explained in terms of these two violations of the maxim of quantity in verbal communication.

After conducting the data analysis, it was straightforward to find that among all the CP's maxims, the maxim of relation is flouted the most often. The humorous effect occurs when the speaker involved in the conversation provides irrelevant information. Although there are many ways to flout this maxim, people tend not to flout it directly. People prefer to violate the maxim of



relation through indirect means, mainly through rhetorical devices. Rhetorical devices such as hyperbole, metaphor, and irony are frequently used in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*.

Grice's rule for the maxim of relation is that what is said should be relevant. In other words, the maxim of relation stipulates that speech should be relevant, not irrelevant, to the topic, i.e., what is said should be relevant to the intention to be achieved. You will be led astray if you flout this maxim or even interrupt the conversation. But in some cases, such as when a speaker does not want to continue with the previous topic, the most common method is to provide irrelevant information and change the subject in progress. And by doing so, they hope they can avoid embarrassment and keep the conversation moving along smoothly.

Finally, let's discuss the maxim of manner. This maxim addresses how to say something in the process of communication. That is, it addresses the way of expression. It requires that the subject of communication speak in a concise, unambiguous, and non-verbose manner. However, ambiguity, obscurity, redundancy, and other uncommon expressions can also be used to create humor in communication.

In the next section, the author will conduct a more detailed case study of humor realization to reveal how characters achieve verbal humor effects by flouting CP and why characters flout CP in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*.

## 4.2 Verbal Humor Resulting from Violations of the Cooperative Principle

The following analysis of the specific corpus will demonstrate how the effect of humor can be achieved by violating the four maxims.

### 4.2.1 By Flouting Maxim of Quantity

Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange), which is the first maxim. In the context, conversationalists often do not provide enough information, i.e., they deviate from the maxim of quantity, which sometimes produces powerful humorous effects.

(1) Midge's mother: It is not going to last.

Midge: What's not?

Midge's mother: I saw him check his watch. Twice. (S1E5)

Mrs. Maisel's family meets her husband and his lover, who abandons her while eating at a restaurant. In order to avoid an awkward encounter, Mrs. Maisel and her family hurry home. After returning home, Mrs. Maisel's mother, Rose, tells Mrs. Maisel that Joel and his lover will not stay together for long because the shrewd Rose finds that Mr. Maisel checks his watch twice while he is having dinner with his lover. Although Rose flouts the maxim of quantity in her conversation with her daughter, providing less information but making it clear that Mr. Maisel's impatience during his time with his lover proves that the affair will not last.

Grice believes, "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, p. 45). However, in some special situations, the speaker provides more information instead to produce verbal humor.

(2)Presenter: That was Misty Dream, ladies and gentlemen. You know, she is only 18...in dog years.

This is Mrs. Maisel and her husband, Mr. Maisel Joel, together to perform in the show. The host of the previous show's summary of the words heats up the atmosphere of a joke. He says, "she is only 18... in dog years.", which causes laughter in the audience. We all know that the longest life span of a dog is less than 20 years, so for a dog to be 18 years old can be considered very old. In the first half of the sentence, the host says that the performer is only 18 years old, so people think she is a young girl. Still, in the second half of the sentence, he says, "in dog years," when people consider the age gap between people and dogs, it becomes clear that the performer was already an old man. The presenter flouts the maxim of quantity by adding a letter, generating conversational meaning, and deriving verbal humor.

(3).Midge: Morning, Ethan.

Ethan:...(just playing his toys)

Midge: Ethan. Ethan. Ethan.N... never mind.

Midge's mother: Did you have coffee?

Midge: Yes, and a great welcome from my son.

In this scene, Mrs. Maisel is greeting her son Ethan, but Ethan is focused on playing with his toys and completely ignoring Mrs. Maisel. Later, when Mrs. Maisel's mother, Rose, asks her if she has coffee, she says she has more than coffee and gets a warm welcome from her son. This is clearly an irony because Ethan ignores her. In this conversation, Mrs. Maisel flouts the maxim of quantity because she provides more information than Ross asks for.

(4)Interviewer: Mrs. Maisel, you are a very delightful woman, but I'm not sure that being an elevator operator is the right fit for you. I'm sorry.

Midge: Oh, but I have such a passion for it. I grew up with one in my building, my sweet Jerry. So, in a way, I feel as if my whole life has been leading up to this.

Interviewer: Your whole life?

Midge: And I really hit it off with Darren on the way up. Lots of informative shoptalk.

Interviewer: Darren is very personable.

Midge: And uniform. Picture me in that hat and the coat with a tapered waist. I mean, come on.

Interviewer: Thank you for coming in.

This conversation takes place during Mrs. Maisel's interview process. The interviewer believes that Mrs. Maisel, as a woman, is not suitable for the position of the elevator operator. Although Mrs. Maisel tries hard to convince the interviewer that she could do the job, she fails. Mrs. Maisel's reasons for believing she could be an elevator operator have nothing to do with the actual

requirements of the job, but she is eager to say more verbal information to convince the interviewer.

#### 4.2.2 By Flouting Maxim of Quality

The maxim of quality is: The maxim of quality stipulates the truthfulness of speech, which means that the speaker is required to tell the truth and not to tell lies, and not to say things that are not based on evidence. By truthfulness, we mean that the speaker believes the words to be true, without denying that there can be situations in which the speaker believes himself to be accurate but is actually untrue. In this case, even though the speaker is unconsciously lying, he is still following the maxim of quality.

People consistently violate this guideline in their ordinary lives, intentionally or unintentionally. Knowingly saying something untrue gives rise to phenomena such as exaggeration and reflexivity. Although not all exaggerations and paradoxes are humorous, a significant of them are manifestations of humorous speech.

(5)Midge's father: You listen to me, Midge. You are a child. You cannot survive this. Now, I am no fan of Joel's, but you need a husband. And those children need a father.

Midge: What am I supposed to do, go buy one at Zaybar's?

Midge's father: You fix your face. Put on his favorite dress. Then you go out, find him, and make him come back home.

After Mr. Maisel leaves Mrs. Maisel, a fight breaks out between Mrs. Maisel and her father, Abe Weissman, who asks his daughter to get her husband Joel back because she can't live alone and her two children need a family with a father. Mrs. Maisel, however, finds this unconscionable and asks her father if a trip to the grocery store is enough to buy a husband. Mrs. Maisel's hypothesis is obviously impossible to realize, so it is a speech phenomenon that flouts the maxim of quality.

#### 4.2.3 By Flouting Maxim of Relation

The maxim of relation stipulates that speech should be on-topic and not irrelevant to the topic, i.e., what is said should be relevant to the intention to be achieved. Violation of this maxim in communication can lead to a feeling of disagreement, misdirection, and even interruption of the conversation. And the maxim of relation is usually accompanied by violations of the maxim of relation. Some humorous speech can be produced by flouting this maxim.

(6)Midge: Hello?

Joel: You tell everyone about the rabbi?

Midge: What am I, a braggart? Please. How's work?

Joel: I believe I got something sold today. How's the brisket?

Midge: I am buying it a sash and a crown.

Joel: Good. We will need it.

The context of this conversation is that Mr. Maisel calls Mrs. Maisel to confirm several of his questions. Mrs. Maisel doesn't even answer his questions directly but gives him the answers by flouting the maxim of relation in the CP. Mr. Maisel's first question is if she had told everyone about the rabbis coming to their house. Mrs. Maisel should have answered "yes" or "no" directly, but she asks Mr. Maisel if she is a braggart, which implies a negative. After Mr. Maisel asks her how the brisket is doing, Mrs. Maisel tells him that she will buy a sash and a crown for the brisket, which kings usually wear. Mrs. Maisel's answer is obviously to tell Mr. Maisel that the brisket she makes is very delicious.

(7)Midge: Papa. Why are you mad? I didn't do anything wrong.

Midge's father: When I agreed to send you to that fancy goyische college, what was the one thing I told you?

Midge: They will have terrible deli?

Midge's father: The important thing I told you.

Midge: That was about deli, too.

Midge's father: The other important thing I told you!

Midge: Don't pick a weak man.

Midge's father: Ah-ha.

Mr. Maisel had already left by this time, and Mrs. Maisel told her parents the news. Mrs. Maisel's father is furious at Mr. Maisel's irresponsible behavior and questions his daughter: "When I agreed to send you to that fancy goyische college, what was the one thing I told you?" But the first thing Mrs. Maisel remembers is her father's complaint about the cooked food at her college, which is clearly not the answer her father wanted and flouts the maxim of relation. Then, after her father confronts Mrs. Maisel again, Mrs. Maisel gives the answer her father wants. Mrs. Maisel's two incorrect answers have an excellent humorous effect.

(8)Midge: There are so many questions spinning in my head. Why did he leave? Why wasn't I enough? And why didn't they put the stage over there against that wall instead of over here by the bathroom so you wouldn't have to listen to every giant bowel movement that takes place in there? Yeah. Clear as a bell.

Mrs. Maisel began her career as a stand-up performer when she stepped onto the stage. Her first subjects come from her real-life experiences. Ever since her husband left her, she has been in a deep state of self-doubt and lack of confidence. So she raises a question on stage about her innermost feelings towards Mr. Maisel, and then she turns the topic to a question that has nothing to do with her question, i.e., why is the stage separated from the toilet by a wall so that everyone can hear the sound from the bathroom. Then she uses an explicit metaphor to show how loud the toilet is. Although Mrs. Maisel flouts the maxim of relation, it draws thunderous laughter from the audience.

#### 4.2.4 By Flouting Maxim of Manner

The maxim of manner in the Grice Cooperative Principle requires that the speaker talks in a concise, clear, and organized manner in order to make the conversation go more smoothly. However, in some cases, flouting the maxim of manner can make the conversation humorous.

(9)Midge: Who gives a toast at her own wedding? I mean, who does that? Who stands in the middle of a ballroom

after three glasses of champagne on a completely empty stomach...and I mean completely empty because fitting into this

dress required no solid food for three straight weeks. Who does that? I do.

This is a speech given by Mrs. Maisel at her wedding. Because according to the western tradition, the guests usually give the speeches at weddings, but Mrs. Maisel, as the bride, chooses to give a speech to herself, so she says, "Who gives a toast at her own wedding?" and then she raises a series of questions and gives the answers to them. She then asks a series of questions and provides the answers. This kind of dialogue with multiple questions in a row flouts the third and fourth rules of the maxim of manner, which are not concise and unorganized, but it shows Mrs. Maisel's efforts and strict demands on her image for the wedding.

(10)Midge: What are you doing?

Joel: I have to go. I have to leave. You. I have to leave you.

Midge: That is my suitcase.

Joel: Is it?

Midge: You're going to leave me with my suitcase?

Mr. Maisel wants to leave Mrs. Maisel to live outside, but Mrs. Maisel loves her husband and family so much that she cannot accept her husband's abrupt departure. In extreme anger and surprise, she does not even ask Mr. Maisel why he does that but asks him why he was using her suitcase to pack his luggage. This actually flouts the CP's maxim of manner of avoiding obscurity and produces the conversational implicature that refers to the fact that his husband cannot leave her in his life, even if it is going to be her suitcase for packing his luggage when he abandons her.

(11)Audience: Who's Joel?

Midge: My husband. Joel is my husband of four years, and tonight he left. Left. He packed up my suitcase and left.

I'm going to have to lie to the rabbi about why Joel's not there. Lying to the rabbi on Yom Kippur. I couldn't get a clean slate for one fucking day.

Audience: I don't understand what's going on.

Midge: Me, either, sister, me, either.

After Mrs. Maisel is abandoned by her husband, she walks onto the show's stage alone. The audience on stage does not know the origin of this drunken-looking woman but is very interested in her story. After Mrs. Maisel explains who Joel is, the audience is even more confused by the strange stand-up show, so one audience member says, "I don't understand what's going on." But



what Mrs. Maisel does not understand is why her husband leaves her, and what the audience does not understand is an entirely different matter. Therefore, Mrs. Maisel flouts the principle of avoiding ambiguity in the maxim of relation.

From the above analysis of the verbal discourse, we can conclude that the violation of the four maxims is an essential mechanism for generating humor, which also proves the rationality and universal significance of Grice's Cooperative Principle.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This thesis uses Grice's Cooperative Principle as the underlying theoretical framework to analyze the verbal humor in the now popular US TV series *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*. In particular, the author makes a quantitative analysis of some specific dialogues in TV series and analyzes how the characters in the dialogues produce humor by flouting the maxims in the CP. The major research findings are summarized as follows.

From the exploration of the four aspects of discourse that flout the CP, it is found that both parties in a conversation do not always adhere to the CP. Still, one or even more maxims may be flouted in certain circumstances, and the phenomenon does not lead to communication barriers. On the contrary, the ability to euphemistically convey the meaning behind a conversation can even have a subtle humorous effect. *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, which focuses significantly on the theme of American feminism in the 1950s, shows the characterization of different characters by analyzing the specific and unique meanings of the conversations in Chapter 4 of this thesis. Thus, this study provides pragmatic considerations for exploring character, plot, and theme.

Secondly, by collecting and analyzing typical dialogues from *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, it is possible to reveal the numbers and percentages of each code that flout the CP. Ninety-five examples were selected from all eight episodes of the show. Of these cases, the maxim of relation is flouted the most, with numbers and percentages of 30 and 32%, respectively. The second is the maxim of manner (29%), and the third is the maxim of quantity (24.6%). On the other hand, the maxim of quality is belittled the least, accounting for only 14.4% of the total. We can infer that the language of humor in American family comedies flouts the maxim of relation most frequently. But the flouting of other maxims, i.e., quantity, manner, and quality maxims, also plays a pivotal role in the generation of humor in American family comedies.

Although this paper tries to analyze verbal humor as comprehensively and precisely as possible from the perspective of Grice's CP, this study still has evident limitations.

First, as an American family comedy, the humorous elements of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* are undoubtedly successful. In addition to the contribution of verbal humor, we should also consider the actors' excellent acting skills, funny body movements, facial expressions, etc. These humorous elements are also worth studying and analyzing.

Second, due to the limited space of this thesis, there are still many issues to be further addressed in future research. For example, we should study humor in conjunction with dynamic contexts. This is because differences in the specific contexts in which humor is used, such as the type of conversation, the difference in the status of the interlocutors, the role of the listener and the level of involvement, etc., can lead to very different ways in which speakers construct humor.

It is also important to note that although the term humor is usually categorized as a positive word, it is not always possible to use humor in all contexts. Therefore, it is important to use humor in the right way to ensure the most effective communication.

In general, as in the early stages of any discipline, humor research needs to strengthen its theoretical approach. The collection of relevant and representative materials and cross-cultural perspectives are also important research issues. As humor research matures in its approach, we expect humor to make a more outstanding contribution to successful communication in our life.

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