

THE PRAGMATICS OF IRONY IN HUMOR: EMERGING DRIFTS IN PHILIPPINE WITTICISM

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ABSTRACT: *This study reported on the pragmatics of irony in humor in Vice Ganda's conversational jokes as an emerging drift in Philippine witticism. We analyzed a 52-token corpus of conversational witticisms (CWs) of the subject across the forms of media where he delivered this kind of witty and humorous utterances. Through the analyses made, We were able to find out that in using irony as a strategy to achieve a humorous CW, other or all of the Gricean Maxims could be violated without affecting the ironic effect of a humorous CW. The results and findings of this study could be utilized to identify some elements that are present in today's Philippine humor in conversations. Also, this study could be used as a baseline for studying more features of the least studied field in Philippine linguistics—Humor.*

Keywords: Irony, humor, witticism, Gricean maxims, conversational witticism

1. INTRODUCTION

Filipinos love witticisms. We love to joke and to listen to jokes as well. We laugh and deliver jokes even that is full of irony. [1] mentions that humor is a natural part of human behavior, ability, or competence, other parts of which compromise such important social, psychological manifestations of the human race as language, morality, logic, or even faith. Therefore, humor may be described as partly natural and partly acquired. On the other hand, [2] defines humor as being impregnated with the convictions, customs, and associations of a nation. This makes any study on humor more complex than ever since humor that exists as a practice is linked to national identity and cultural practices. The researchers argue that humor as a phenomenon is largely affected by the changes that happen through time. These changes encompass language, habits, technology, media, and even the very people that use humor.

Today, ironic humor in the Philippines has been an ordinary part of any casual conversation or even serious talks. It is crucial to note that this phenomenon is greatly factored by what we see and hear in the different forms of media entertainment. [3] study on irony and criticism as the basis of Filipino humor, she stressed out that the exchange of jokes among his college student subjects are greatly embedded with irony and as modeled after the jokes of one of the leading comedians on Philippine TV, Vice Ganda. Vice Ganda is known for his stand-up routines and comedy, for which, he uses observational comedy on typical "Pinoy" lifestyle and using situational irony that pertains to Filipino culture, behavior, and even on sexuality. Today, many are amazed by his verbal wit. That is why this study examined, investigated, and interpreted the pragmatic use of irony in Vice Ganda's conversational witticisms (humor) through the violation moves (MVs) of H.P. [4] co-operative principle's maxims and submaxims.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEMS

Thus, the following research questions were formed:

1. What are the Grice's maxims violated (MVs) in the conversational witticisms of Vice Ganda to achieve irony in the following media:

- a. Television shows and guests;

- b. Films; and

- c. Stand-up routines?

2. What are the emerging drifts in Philippine witticisms today?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study made use of the descriptive research method because it deals with the analysis of the irony in humor and the emerging drifts in Philippine witticisms through Vice Ganda's conversational witticisms (CWs).

[5], the descriptive research is a purposive process of gathering, analyzing, classifying, and tabulating data about prevailing conditions, practices, processes, trends, and cause-effect relationships and then making an adequate and accurate interpretation about such data with or without or sometimes minimal aid of statistical methods. He also reiterated that it ascertains prevailing conditions of facts in a group under study. It also gives either qualitative or quantitative or both, descriptions of the general characteristics of the group. In addition, comparisons of the characteristics of two groups or cases may be made to determine their similarities and differences. The variables or conditions studied are not usually controlled because there is no variable manipulated.

2.2. SUBJECT

The subject of this study is Jose Marie Borja Vicala, also known as, Vice Ganda. Vice, for short, is one of the leading and most influential comedians on Philippine media today. Apart from being a comedian, he is also known to many as a TV presenter, endorser, actor, fashion icon, and recording artist.

He was originally known for his stand-up routines on various comedy bars in the country and stand-up routine shows abroad. Furthermore, he is known for his use of observational comedy, situational irony and sarcasm pertaining to Filipino culture, and human sexuality in his humor. Vice was finally launched to be a TV icon in 2009 at 'It's Showtime', one of his longest running, regular shows. From that year onwards, he has gained the respect and attention of many Filipinos. Despite his fame, he also receives criticisms on some of his jokes that are considered

by some to be mean and offensive of physical appearance, race, or sexuality.

2.3 CORPUS

The corpus of this study came from the different media where Vice has access to deliver his CWs from 2010 to present. These forms of media are the TV; recorded stand-up routine shows; and his films. Only Vice’s CWs were included in this paper for analysis.

There were 52 transcribed CWs. 28 came from Vice’s TV shows and guestings; 12 from his films, namely: ‘The Unkabogable Praybeyt Benjamin’ in 2011 and ‘Sisterakas’ in 2012; 12 from his stand up comedy shows here and abroad, which were all retrieved from youtube.com. The transcribed ‘Tagalog’ CWs were later translated to English.

Table 1. Distribution of CWs in three forms of media

Forms of media	F	%
Television Shows/Guestings	28	53.84
Films	12	23.08
Stand-up routines	12	23.08
Total	52	100

2.4 PROCEDURE

In this study, the CWs for analysis were carefully selected through watching the different shows and recorded stand-up routines of the subject via youtube channel while the films were downloaded through torrent.

We have examined the utterances of Vice’s witticisms and have only considered the CWs as his punchlines. The CWs were transcribed in their original language form, Tagalog, and later were translated to English.

The CWs were labeled according to their categories or the form of media they belong. CWs from Vice’s television shows and guestings were labeled, TVCW; FCW for the films’ CWs; and SRCW for stand-up routine CWs. A number is attached to each letter code to signify its number in the arrangement. The corpus was analyzed using hand tagging.

2.5 METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The texts in both ‘Tagalog’ and their English equivalents were considered in the analysis of the violated maxims and submaxims of [4] Co-operative Principle. We labeled these violated maxims and submaxims as violated moves (MVs). The violated moves were counted for each CW. A specialized accounting for the MVs was applied by dividing the number of occurrence/s of a particular maxim or submaxim to the number of CW tokens for a particular category multiplied by 100 [e.g. there are four (4) violated submaxim 2 under the Film category with 12 tokens; that is $4/12 = 0.33 * 100 = 33.33\%$ of occurrence]. This was applied to determine the trend in the violated maxims and submaxims through irony to achieve humor in Vice’s CWs in a proportional manner.

The emerging drifts in Philippine witticisms were determined through presenting the corpus and their conversational implicates and analyses of the violated maxims and submaxims in the discussion part of this paper.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 RESULTS

The analyses of the 52 CWs distributed in three (3) forms of media or categories were found evidence of the violation of Grice's Co-operative principle's maxims and submaxims; thus, conversational implicatures. We assumed in this study that these violated moves (MVs) were used as a set of strategies in order for Vice to inject irony and eventually achieve humor in his CWs.

The following table presents the MVs in Vice’s CWs on his television shows and guestings.

Table 2. The occurrence of MVs in Vice's CWs on TV shows and guestings

Maxims/submaxims	f	%
Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically— Quality ₁ : Do not say what you believe to be false	16	57.14
Quality ₂ : do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.	3	10.71
Quantity: Try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically— Quantity ₁ : make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.	1	3.57
Quantity ₂ : do not make your contribution more informative than is required.	9	32.14
Relevance: Make your contributions relevant	13	46.43
Manner: Be perspicuous and specifically— Manner ₁ : Avoid obscurity	0	0
Manner ₂ : avoid ambiguity	3	10.71
Manner ₃ : Be brief	12	42.86
Manner ₄ : Be orderly	4	14.29

Table 2 presents that Quality₁ is the most violated submaxim (f=16; 57%); followed by the maxim of Relevance (f=46.43%); then, the submaxim, Manner₃ (f=12; 42.86%). The results imply that irony to achieve humor in Vice's CWs on his TV shows and guestings is achieved by saying what he believes to be false; by giving an irrelevant contribution in the conversation; and by being wordy in his utterances. On the other hand, it is also evident in the Table that the utterances were not obscured at all as indicated under the submaxim of Manner₁ (f=0; 0%).

Table 3 shows the occurrences of MVs in Vice’s CWs on Films.

Table 3. Occurrences of MVs in Vice’s CWs on films

Maxims/submaxims	F	%
Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically— Quality ₁ : Do not say what you believe to be false	11	91.67
Quality ₂ : do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.	0	0
Quantity: Try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically— Quantity ₁ : make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.	0	0
Quantity ₂ : do not make your contribution more informative than is required.	4	33.33
Relevance: Make your contributions	3	25.00

relevant		
Manner: Be perspicuous and specifically—	0	0
Manner₁: Avoid obscurity		
Manner₂: avoid ambiguity	2	16.67
Manner₃: Be brief	4	33.33
Manner₄: Be orderly	0	0

It can be seen from Table 2 that the MVs found on Vice’s CWs in his films were evident of the MVs on the submaxim of Quality₁ (f=11; 91.67%). The submaxims of Quantity₂ and Manner₃ have the same number of occurrences (f=4; 33.33%). It is notable that in Vice’s films’ CWs, achieving humor through irony is done by saying what is perceived to be false. Moreover, giving more information from what is needed and prolixity in his utterances were also used to emphasize an ironic statement and eventually make it appear humorous. Stating what is irrelevant is also a strategy that could be considered (f=3; 25.00%).

The next table shows the occurrences of MVs in Vice’s CWs on his stand-up routines.

Table 4. Occurrences of MVs in Vice’s CWs on stand up routines

Maxims/submaxims	F	%
Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically—	10	83.33
Quality ₁ : Do not say what you believe to be false		
Quality ₂ : do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.	1	8.33
Quantity: Try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically—		
Quantity ₁ : make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.	0	0
Quantity ₂ : do not make your contribution more informative than is required.	4	33.33
Relevance: Make your contributions relevant	3	25.00
Manner: Be perspicuous and specifically—	0	0
Manner ₁ : Avoid obscurity		
Manner ₂ : avoid ambiguity	1	8.33
Manner ₃ : Be brief	4	33.33
Manner ₄ : Be orderly	0	0

It can be gleaned from Table 4 that the submaxim Quality₁ has the highest number of occurrence (f=10; 83.33%); the submaxims of Quantity₂ and Manner₃ are next (f=4; 33.33%); and the maxim of Relevance (f=3; 25.00%). It is noticeable that the MVs of CWs of Vice in his stand-up routines are similar to his films’.

3.2 DISCUSSION

[6] claim that in achieving humor, the use of irony is necessary. Furthermore, they also mention that the only Gricean maxim that could be violated in using irony to achieve humor is the maxim of Quality since stating the opposite of what is expected is what irony is all about. In the present study, the submaxim of Quality₁ (do not say what you believe to be false) may have resulted in the most number of MVs. Furthermore, there were sample CWs which violated maxim is only the submaxim Quality₁. The samples CWs below across categories illustrate this claim.

TVCW1: Nakakita ng gwapo
‘Has seen a handsome man’

Vice: Hi, ano pangalan mo?
(Hi, what’s your name?)

Gwapo: Ako po?
‘me?’

Vice: Hindi, sila. May nakikita ka pa bang ibang tao? Malamang ikaw, ang tanga.

‘No, they. Do you see other people? For sure, you, stupid.’

FCW1: Vice Ganda sa opisina 1

Vice: Pasok mo nga dito yung mga papeles ko.

‘Vice Ganda at the office 1’

‘Bring my papers here.’

Secretary: Saan ko po ipapasok? Dito po?

‘Where? Here?’

Vice: Hindi, sa labas. Ipasok nga di ba? Pwede bang ipasok sa labas? Sige nga subukan mong ipasok doon sa labas.

‘No, outside. Here right? Can you bring the papers there? Go, try to bring them outside.’

SRCW2: Vice sa ospital 1(Na ospital yung pamangkin, kasi buntis)

‘(Vice at the hospital 1) (Vice’s niece was rushed to the hospital because she is about to give birth)’

Sa emergency room...

‘At the emergency room...’

Vice: Nurse! Tulong!

‘Nurse! Help!’

Nurse: Ano po nangyari? Manganganak?

‘What happened? Is she about to give birth?’

Vice: Ay hindi, ipapatira ko pa lang. Dinudugo na nga di ba?

Syempre manganganak na.

‘No. I will have her fucked just now. She’s bleeding right? Of course, she is about to give birth.’

In the sample CWs above, the violation of Quality₁ is evident of denying the question with a negative statement, *No*. By what is supposedly the claim is simply stating what is believed by the speaker to be false.

On the other hand, the results of this study also yielded that the submaxims of Quantity₂ (do not make your contribution more informative than is required), Relevance (Be relevant), and Manner₃ (Be brief) could also co-occurred with the violation of the maxim of Quality to achieve humor through irony in Vice’s CWs across the forms of media where he used his irony embedded CWs. The samples CWs across categories illustrate this claim.

TVCW2: Sa gasoline station, pagbaba ni Vice ng window ng car nya

‘At the gasoline station. After Vice has lowered the window of his car’

Gasoline boy: Magpapagas po?

‘For refill?’

Vice: Hindi. Magpapaconfine ako. Malamang magpapagas, gasolinahan to di ba? Alangan namang magpapaconfine ako dito, tapos dextrose ko yung unleaded gasoline nyo? At iyon na ang ikamamatay ko.

‘No. For confinement. Of course, for refill. This is a gasoline station, right? How can I be confined here? I will have unleaded gasoline for dextrose? That’s going to kill me.’

FCW2: Vice Ganda sa restaurant 1

‘Vice Ganda at a restaurant 1’

Waiter: Good afternoon po! Kakain po kayo?

'Good afternoon! Are you going to eat?'

Vice: Hindi, magluluto. Tutulongan ko chef nyo. Kakahiya naman nakiupo ako dito tapos hindi pa ako tutulong? Bilis na. Gusto mo tulungan pa kita sa customers nyo? Tapos aasenso business natin. Edi masaya di ba? Umunlad na kayo, nagutom pa ako. Ang galling no?

'No, to cook. I will help your chef to cook. It is going to be embarrassing if I am just going to sit here and won't help out. Come on. Do you like me to help you with your customers? Then, our business will grow. Happy right? Your business will grow; then, I starve. Fantastic, right?'

SRCW1: Vice Ganda sa park

'Vice Ganda at the park'

Nakaupo si Vice at walang nakaupo sa ikatabi niyang upuan.

'Vice was seated and nobody was sitting beside him'

Manong: Pwede po bang umupo dito?

'May I sit here?'

Vice: Hindi. Tinatalunan yan. Nakikita mo di ba, andaming nakaupo? Mamaya tatalunan ko yan. Tapos sabay nating gawin. Sama na rin natin yung mga dumadaan. Para mukha tayong mga baliw lahat. Bilis na, simulon mo na. Maya maya lang susunod na ako.

'No. It is meant for hopping. You have seen it right? There are many people seated on the benches? Later, I will hop on it. Then let's hop on it together. Let us also invite the others to do the same. Go, you can start now. I will do it after you.'

The samples above have shown the co-occurrence of Quantity₂, Relevance, and Manner₃ in the CWs across categories. The highlighted statements have shown over information; irrelevance; and prolixity.

[7] believe that the Relevance maxim is never violated in expressing ironic statements since they support the idea that relevance may be achieved by expressing irrelevant assumptions, as long as this expressive behavior is in itself, irrelevant. This means that the relevance of an ironic statement is embedded in the information it gives about the speaker's attitude toward the attributed thought in the statement. We argue that in Vice's CWs where the Relevance maxim was indeed violated because an irrelevant statement could give hints or associations; and/or presuppositions [6] to what Vice explicitly means in these statements, which stay irrelevant to what has to be contributed in a typical conversation adherent to the Co-operative principle.

In a study conducted by [8], he was able to find out that in achieving comedic effects (humor) in an American comedy series, *Community*, the mostly violated maxim is the maxim of Quantity followed by the maxim of Quality; then, Relevance; and lastly, Manner. In the case of Vice's CWs, the maxim of Manner, specifically, the submaxims of Manner₂ and Manner₃ in the case of his television shows and guestings and submaxim Manner₃ in both his films and stand-up routines were the commonly violated ones. [9] claims that being obscure (Manner₁) and ambiguous (Manner₂) are the most frequently violated submaxims of Manner since ironic expressions are used to criticize. Contrarily, in our analysis, the submaxim Manner₁ was not found evident in any of the CWs of Vice across the presented

categories instead submaxim Manner₃, which is the preference of prolixity in statement, appeared to be most prevalent, and most useful in expressing irony in humor.

4. CONCLUSION

The analyses and examples in this study give evidence that irony is used to achieve humor in Vice Ganda's CWs. In using irony in conversational witticisms, and to appear humorous, it is essential that the maxim and submaxims of Quality₁; Quantity₂; Relevance; and Manner₃ are violated. It is apparent that today's Filipinos use these strategies in their humorous remarks. It may be unfortunate to think that even children [3] are into this kind of humor when they talk to others of their age, or even to people older than they. This may have been caused by the popularity of Vice Ganda in the different forms of media that the modern Filipinos have access to (e.g. TV; internet).

Linguistically, it is also notable that it is not only the maxim of Quality that could be violated when using irony as a strategy in achieving humorous conversations. In fact, violating other maxims and submaxims can also be done without diminishing the ironic effects of CWs. Furthermore, irony in humor in this study was also seen as a pragmatic element viewed as disobedience to Grice's co-operative principle, but the implicatures make the CWs appear extremely humorous and popular among Filipinos.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Analysing the production of similar CWs through recorded conversations (e.g. students conversations) would be a good corpus for analysis.

To adequately tackle irony in humor as an emerging drift in Philippine witticisms, it would be advisable that other pragmatic approaches be explored (e.g. speech acts; presuppositions; deixis) since irony in humor is such a complex phenomenon. Furthermore, exploring other genres where irony in humor could be evident could also be studied (e.g. political).

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