

**THE NON-OBSERVANCE OF GRICE'S MAXIMS IN THE  
CREATION OF HUMOUR IN A CHINESE SITCOM**

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**2017**

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**DESSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL  
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF MASTER OF LINGUISTICS**

**FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS  
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA  
KUALA LUMPUR**

**2017**

UNIVERSITI MALAYA

**ORIGINAL LITERARY WORK DECLARATION**

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## ABSTRACT

Sitcoms provide entertainment, one of which is through humour. This study focuses on how humour was created in a few episodes of a selected Chinese sitcom - Home with Kids (Season 4). Using Grice's (1975) non-observance of Cooperative Principles – flouting, violating, infringing, opting out, and suspending as framework for analysis, the study aims to understand which type of non-observance and maxim played an important role in creating humour. Data were compiled from 96 episodes and a comparison of the non-observances was made before findings were qualitatively presented. The outcome of the study indicates that not all the maxims were observed in generating the humour effect. Among the non-observances noted, flouting and violating appear to be used most frequently, with the Maxim of Quality being cast as the most preferred manner of creating humour. The outcome of this study will benefit learners who take Mandarin as a second or third language, and help them to comprehend Chinese humour better.

**Key words:** Humour, Chinese Sitcom, Non-observance, Maxim

## ABSTRAK

Sitcom memberikan hiburan melalui komedi dan penyelidikan ini berfokus kepada teras komedi yang diterapkan dalam beberapa episod di dalam sitcom Bahasa Cina—*Home with Kids* (Musim 4). Dengan menggunakan ketidakpatuhan prinsip kerjasama Grice (1975), iaitu “*flouting, violating, infringing, opting out, suspending*” sebagai asas penyelidikan, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji dan memahami jenis ketidakpatuhan maksim yang memainkan peranan penting dalam melahirkan adegan dan situasi komedi. Data dikumpulkan melalui 96 episod dalam sitcom tersebut dan perbandingan di antara jenis ketidakpatuhan tersebut dilakukan dan hasil kajian kemudiannya dihuraikan secara kualitatif. Dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa tidak semua maksim diikuti dalam menjana kesan lawak dan komedi. Di antaranya, ketidakpatuhan secara “*flout*” dan “*violate*” dikesan sebagai “ketidakpatuhan” yang paling kerap digunakan dalam Maksim Kualiti. Ini dikenalpasti sebagai asas yang paling kerap digunakan dalam menjana lawak dan komedi. Hasil dapatan daripada kajian ini dapat memberi faedah kepada pelajar yang mempelajari Bahasa Cina sebagai bahasa kedua atau ketiga. Pada masa yang sama mereka boleh memahami unsur kelucuan dalam Bahasa Cina dengan lebih baik .

**Key words:** Jenaka, Komedi Bahasa Cina, Ketidakpatuhan, Maksim

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to express my heart-felt thanks to my dear and respectful supervisor, Dr. Kuang Ching Hei for her detailed and invaluable suggestions and professional guidance for my research. Her guidance and meticulous review of numerous drafts to the final version of the dissertation has provided me with valuable input and confidence. Without her patience, support, help and encouragement, it would have been impossible for me to finish my dissertation.

My gratitude also goes to Dr. Veronica Lowe Siew Yoke and Dr. Siti Nurbaya Binti Mohd Nor. I feel deeply appreciative towards them for giving me constructive suggestions for my research.

My sincere appreciation should be given to my friend, Lee Vonli, who is doing the Master of Linguistics at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics of the University of Malaya. She helped me to check the translation of the data. I am grateful towards Wu Yingqi who is also doing the Master of Linguistics in the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics of the University of Malaya, for helping me to clarify the strategies occurring in the data of this study.

Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my family. They have always been there to encourage, comfort, and support me without any expectations in return.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

China is the most populous nation in the world with a population of 1.2 billion people. One fifth of the planet speaks Chinese, making it the most widely spoken first language in the world (Lazaro & Rick, 2015). In addition to the speakers of mainland China, Mandarin Chinese is also spoken in other important and influential Chinese communities of Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, the Philippines, and Mongolia (Defrancis, 1990). With the growing importance and influence of China's global economy, each year more and more students whose mother tongue is not Mandarin are learning how to use it (How hard is it to learn Chinese, 2006). Consequently, the people who learn Chinese as a second or third language try to adopt sources of learning such as videos or audio files which can help them acquire the use of Mandarin Chinese.

In mainland China, Chinese sitcoms such as “I love my Family”, “I Partment”, “Home with Kids” and “My Own Swordsman” are well watched by people for entertainment. Amongst them, the one closest to real life is “Home with Kids” where episodes usually stem from circumstances that typically arise in our daily lives, incidentally reflecting people’s living styles. Thus the characters’ dialogues can be considered to be a normal representation of people’s everyday life experiences.

In this study, “Home with Kids” serves as the context for data collection. In this context, the people are living in China. The episodes are appreciated by a wide audience because it demonstrates real life contexts and events, and it appears that the dialogues generated help viewers to destress, i.e. by becoming happier and being able to appreciate reality by perhaps learning of ways to deal with the ups and downs of life. While speakers of Mandarin may be able to comprehend the humour generated in the dialogues, learners of Mandarin may not be able to do so. Thus, it is important to see how the dialogues generated humour so that foreign learners of Mandarin can learn to appreciate the Chinese culture, their way of life, and their daily life events. It is hoped that the findings of this study will enable learners or linguists to understand how the non-observance of Grice’s (1975) maxims was used in the Chinese sitcom to create verbal humour. From these findings, those who are learning Mandarin as a second or third language can further improve their communication skills in Chinese, thereby also learning to appreciate Chinese humour within the Chinese context.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

Undeniably, the understanding of humour differs from locality to locality. Some people may see something to be humorous while others may see it as offensive. Hence, it is apt to understand the concept of humour. Humour is defined by Attardo (1994) as an emotion that makes people laugh, but then humour can be said to be very elaborate. While local humour is well understood by local people, foreigners may not be able to enjoy this humour because they cannot follow the generated meanings of the speakers and this can create confusion. It is noted that humour in the Chinese language

(Mandarin) may be difficult to understand for non-native Chinese audiences, especially learners of Mandarin as a second or foreign language, because they can barely understand the way humour is created in Mandarin. Therefore, there is a need to examine humour in Chinese sitcoms so as to facilitate the non-native Chinese audience to comprehend humour in Chinese sitcoms. The strategies noted from this study will be able to show how humour was generated amongst Chinese speakers. In this regard, second language speakers of Mandarin will be able to appreciate the humour as well as the Chinese culture and their idiosyncrasies.

### **1.3 Research Gap**

Previous studies (Murata, 2014; Rogerson, 2007; Schnurr & Chan, 2011) have examined humour but these were mostly done in various workplace contexts. Only a few studies focused on sitcom humour, where studies (Caesilia, 2015; Shu, 2012) focused mainly on American sitcoms or comparisons were made between American sitcoms and Chinese sitcoms (Zhen, 2013; Wu, 2005). The exception was Lu's (2014) study which selected the Chinese sitcom "Home with Kids" as data, applying the non-observance of Grice's maxims to investigate how the non-observance phenomenon happened and whether the non-observance phenomenon in Chinese culture would be different. However, Lu (2014) only analysed the humorous conversations in "Home with Kids" by using flouting maxims rather than applying all the five types (flouting, violating, infringing, opting out, suspending) of the non-observance of Grice's (1975) maxims. Therefore, this thesis is a focused study that analyses humour in Chinese sitcoms and uses the framework of the five types of non-observance (flouting, violating,



infringing, opting out, suspending) of Grice's (1975) maxims.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

For the purpose of examining humour in a Chinese sitcom, this study focuses on two objectives:

- a) to find out how the language of humour is created in the Chinese sitcom "Home with Kids (Season 4)"; and
- b) to find out which maxim is not observed in the creation of humour.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

In order to achieve the above objectives, the research questions formulated are as follows:

- 1) What types of non-observance of Cooperative Principle (CP) maxims are used in the language of humour in "Home with Kids (Season 4)"?
- 2) What types of Grice's maxims are not observed to create humour in "Home with Kids (Season 4)"?

#### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The study is significant for the following reasons:

Firstly, as a form of communication in our daily life, humour may change people's minds from being in a chaotic state to being calm, and this is beneficial to health. Following humour, when people laugh, humour can deflect stress and help to assuage the mental turmoil afflicting many people's lives, although temporarily. In fact, when

faced with hardship and discord, humour may even help a person to transform the stressful situation into a peaceful one. Hence, it is significant to learn how to say something in a humorous way and in this case, from the Chinese perspective.

Secondly, very few learners who take Mandarin as a second or third language are able to understand Chinese humour completely, which in turn, can lead to misunderstandings in daily communication. An accurate understanding of Chinese humorous utterances is necessary to foster friendships and promote better ways of interacting between foreign learners and the Chinese community, particularly in China.

### **1.7 Limitations of the Study**

1) Sitcoms are a form of verbal-visual humour with group laughter, and is normally created for entertainment. Visual humour may influence the audience's response, for example, through the actors' facial expression, verbal tone and so on. However, the current study does not take these into consideration, thus some aspects of humour could be overlooked during analysis. The focus of the current study is on verbal humour only (Koestler, 1993).

2) The study analyses humour in "Home with Kids (Season 4)" only from the perspective of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle. Other related theories, such as Politeness Principles and the Relevance Theory may be applied to analyse verbal humour in the sitcom so as to ensure a more comprehensive analysis.

3) This study looks at only one season of the Chinese sitcom. The data for the study are thus based on a small corpus of utterances retrieved from the Chinese sitcom “Home with Kids (Season 4)”. In this regard, the results and findings only act as a representation for the chosen conversations in the Chinese sitcom and cannot be generalized for all Chinese sitcoms.

## **1.8 Definition of Terms**

Prior to proceeding with the study, it is necessary to define some of the key concepts that emerge in this study.

### **1.8.1 Sitcom**

Situation comedy, usually abbreviated to sitcom, refers to a series of shows shown on television to make the audience laugh. “A sitcom is a Television Program which is about half an hour long and is set in a regular location, usually a household or a work Place” (Reed, 1992, p. 109). Since sitcoms tend to originate from daily life situations, the conversations shared by the characters can be considered as representative samples. In fact, most topics of modern sitcoms are based on current events happening in our society and depending on the era, some popular sitcoms can reflect a particular kind of living style during that particular era.

### **1.8.2 Humour**

Humour is ubiquitous and cosmopolitan, existing throughout every culture, race, and region. Humour is reflected in literary works, films, and television programs. As

Berger (1993, p. 58) puts it, “There is no escaping humour and there is no subject, whether it be marriage, sex, politics, religion, work, sports; you name it –that has not been ridiculed, joked about, and used or abused one way or another, as grist for someone’s comic militancy.” In the context of this study, the concept of humour is defined further.

Humour, as a kind of phenomenon that is absorbing and interesting in human society, has been studied for hundreds of years, but until now, the academic field has not reached a consensus on the definition of humour (Palmer, 1994, p. 39). The definition of humour can be traced back to the civilization of the Ancient Greek. According to Plato, an Athenian Greek philosopher, humour refers to “a mixed feeling of the soul” which is a mixture of pleasure and pain (Piddington, 1933, p. 152).

Today, definitions of humour focus on either speaker intentions or audience interpretation (Hay, 1995). Humour, according to Berger (1976, p. 113), is “a specific type of communication that establishes an incongruent relationship or meaning and is presented in a way that causes laughter”. Ross (1998, p. 1) shares the same view as Berger (1976), stating that the definition of humour is “something that makes a person laugh or smile”. Berger (1976) includes laughter whilst Ross (1998) incorporates laughter and smiles into the definitions of humour, and they both concentrate on audience interpretation.

Although there are various definitions of humour, we can conclude that the essence of humour is to create laughter. The definition of humour as adopted in this thesis for the current research is “a text whose perlocutionary effect is laughter” (Attardo, 1994, p. 13). There are two reasons for choosing this definition: Firstly, the intention of the situation comedy is to make every effort funny; secondly, the unique characteristic of situation comedies – the “laugh track” (Brock, 2008), enables the researcher to measure the effects of humour.

### **1.8.3 Types of Humour**

Scholars have attempted to classify humour by looking at it from various perspectives as there are various definitions of humour.

Koestler (1993) gave a general classification of humour which includes verbal humour and situational humour. While situational humour is situation-oriented humour which is related to situational context; verbal humour on the other hand, refers to linguistic-oriented humour which is conveyed through verbal language. However, this does not mean that situational humour does not involve language, and that verbal humour does not need context. Verbal humour usually conveys humour through rhetorical techniques such as sarcasm, ridicule, irony, bombast, puns, allusion, and other rhetorical skills in certain context. It produces an effect on sounds, words, and ideas and refers to jokes, comic verse, anecdotes, satire, the bogus proverb, and nonsense verse by means of allegory (Yu, 2014). In contrast, situational humour is concerned with comic designs such as imitation, impersonation, and disguise (Ma & Jiang, 2013). In this paper,

the focus is on the study of verbal humour, i.e. how humour is generated.

Since situational humour almost has no influence on language, this thesis will exclude this area and focus instead on verbal humour only.

#### **1.8.4 Grice's Cooperative Principle**

The basic description of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle governs how people ordinarily react in conversation: be true, be brief, be relevant, and be clear. The Cooperative Principle according to Grice (1975) is to "make your conversational 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, p. 45).

#### **1.8.5 Grice's Maxims**

The maxims are the sub-principles of the Cooperative Principle. Grice (1975) proposed four maxims which are the Maxim of Quality, Maxim of Quantity, Maxim of Relation, and Maxim of Manner. Usually the maxims are regarded as unstated assumptions in the conversation (Yule, 1996, p. 37).

#### **1.8.6 Non-observance of Grice's Maxims**

According to Grice (1975), non-observance is defined as either blatant or unostentatious failing to observe the maxims i.e. corresponding to flouting or violating maxims (Brumark, 2006); the rest of which are infringing, opting out, and suspending.

## **1.9 Summary**

This chapter provides a brief explanation on the components of the research. The aim is to ensure that the readers clearly understand the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research gap, research questions, significance of the study, limitations of the study, and also introduces several definitions of terms. Following on from Chapter One, Chapter Two covers the literature review of previous studies, focusing on humour and sitcoms as well as Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle. Chapter Three introduces the methodology applied in the study, whilst Chapter Four presents a statistical illustration of the findings and the analysis of results. Chapter Five then provides a summary of the main study findings and offers recommendations for further studies.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will provide an overview of related theories and research. It begins by looking into the theories of humour, Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and its four maxims. Subsequent to that, it several definitions and examples of "flouting", "violating", "opting out", "infringing", and "suspending" of Grice's (1975) four maxims shall be provided before conversational implicature is introduced. Previous studies of humour in sitcoms that are relative to this study shall also be looked into.

#### **2.2 Theories of Humour**

There are three major humour theories: superiority, incongruity, and relief, which are widely depicted by most researchers in humour investigation. The three theories clarify the purpose of using humour in daily lives. Theorists have noted that none of these theories is in fact adequate to provide a general theory of laughter; however, it is argued that each theory provides a helpful framework for understanding the existence of humour and laughter (Rushing, 2009). The current study will concisely define on the notion of the three humour theories, which have been widely applied in a number of literature reviews (Caesilia, 2015; Shu, 2012; Sri, 2006).



### **2.2.1 Superiority Theory**

The superiority theory of humour originated from the perception that laughter can be said to be an expression of the feeling of superiority over another person or situation. Thomas Hobbes, the famous superiority theorist, claimed that humour arises from a “sudden glory” which is achieved by observing the infirmities of others and comparing them with the “eminency” in ourselves (Keith-Spiegel, 1972, p.7). The “sudden glory” refers to the awareness that he/she is better than others and thus humour, joy, and victory are celebrated by laughing at the misfortune of others (Keith-Spiegel, 1972).

This type of humour is applied towards people who have stepped outside social norms and it is accomplished through manipulating the power one has over others. Superiority humour provides enjoyment and amusement through suppressing and lowering people who are in a weaker situation.

### **2.2.2 Incongruity Theory**

The incongruity theory is possibly the most widespread description of humour due to its impropriety, disagreement, and inaptitude bringing about amusement (Feinberg, 1978). Pollio (1983) observed that all the theories of humour seem to recognize the “unexpectedness” or at the very least, the “suddenness” of humour which is an important aspect for situations to evoke laughter and smiles from others within the vicinity.

The incongruity theory proposes that someone laugh at something owing to its impropriety when compared to the conventional patterns of things, therefore leading to amusement. The main feature of this theory is ambiguity, paradox, and dissimilarity (Raskin, 1985).

As Suls (1972) mentioned, the incongruity theory emphasizes the cognitive ability as well as one's psychology to comprehend the humour. The response to experience and grasp the incongruity of humour may result in laughter and smiles (Rothbart, 1976).

### **2.2.3 Relief Theory**

The relief theory of humour facilitates relieving tension and nervous energy by laughter and mirth. According to Spencer (1860) who first discovered relief humour, laughter in relief humour serves to discharge the suppressed desires in an individual.

The basic principle of the relief theory is that laughter supplies psychological support, reduces pressure, and provides supremacy energy in a nervous situation. In consequence, the usage of humour in tense conditions release the nervousness and helps people to return to a stable condition after struggles, stress, and tension (Raskin, 1985).

## **2.3 The Cooperative Principle**

The study of language in context calls for the understanding of the cooperation between the speaker and the listener. Grice (1975) stated that conversation is not just a succession of disconnected remarks but is a naturally accepted direction between the

speaker and the listener. He summed up the cooperativity between speaker and listener in conversations as the following principle: “Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of talk exchange in which you are engaged” (Grice, 1975, p. 45).

The Cooperative Principle explains how a hearer is able to interpret a speaker’s intention. According to Grice (1975, p. 58), “The success of a conversation depends on the various speakers’ approach to the interaction. The way in which people try to make conversation work is sometimes called the Cooperative Principle”. Grice (1975) was suggesting that when communicating, people talk in an accepted way which we all accept as standard behavior in order to reduce misunderstanding (Finch, 2000). When communicating with others, we assume that the utterance will be mostly true, have the right amount of information, be relevant, and this utterance is couched in understandable terms. If an utterance does not match this model, it does not mean that the utterance is nonsense; instead, we assume that an appropriate meaning is there to be inferred. Grice (1975) was not suggesting that people should always speak in a cooperative way, but he was pointing out that, generally, people obey a certain set of rules in interaction and this purpose was to explain one of the regularities which manage the generation and interpretation of conversational implicature (Thomas, 1995).

In other words, people attempt to contribute useful and productive information in a conversation in order to make the interaction move further. It is also possible that someone might be uncooperative in a conversation, but it is not safe to assume that the

utterance does not make any sense. It is assumed that the speaker could be lying, or speaking randomly. In this context, we assume that he or she is attempting to convey a certain meaning, and this calls for the hearer to infer the appropriate meaning.

## **2.4 Grice's Conversational Maxims**

### **2.4.1 The Maxim of Quantity**

The Maxim of Quantity requires the people in a conversation to provide the appropriate amount of information when speaking. People should not be too brief by providing too little information, or give more information than is required in particular situations. The Maxim of Quantity means that a participant has to give all the information which the hearer looks in order to be understood. If the participant excludes a critical piece of information, the hearer will not comprehend what the participant is attempting to express. For example:

Example 1:

A: What's your name?

B: My name is George.

(Lu, 2014, p. 7)

We see in Example 1 that the reply provided by B was brief and clearly answered A's question. Therefore, B was adhering to the Maxim of Quantity.

### **2.4.2 The Maxim of Quality**

The Maxim of Quality is concerned with giving correct and truthful information as shown in Example 2.

Example 2:

A: Where is Juliet?

B: She is in her room, I'm sure.

(Agnes, 2013, p. 44)

In Example 2, B answered truthfully, because B told A where Juliet was. This example shows that B was adhering to the Maxim of Quality.

#### **2.4.3 The Maxim of Relation**

Based on this maxim, the participant is required to be relevant when speaking in order to adhere to the Maxim of Relation. According to Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, the maxim clearly means that the participant should only provide information that is relevant to the communication topic.

Example 3:

A: Where are the car keys?

B: They are on the table in the hall.

(Shu, 2012, p. 1186)

In Example 3, B's contribution observed the Maxim of Relation because his or her response was relevant to A's question whereby B told A where the car keys were. It was a direct and appropriate answer to the question given. The answer is thus relevant to the purpose of the conversation.

#### **2.4.4 The Maxim of Manner**

This maxim requires the speaker to describe things in the order in which it occurs, and ambiguity should be avoided. In the Maxim of Manner, a participant who adheres to the Maxim of Manner will be brief, orderly, and clear in his or her contribution to the

conversational exchange. Consider Example 4:

Example 4:

To obtain a ticket, insert a 20p coin into the machine.

(Cruse, 2000, p. 360)

In Example 4, the information was clear and brief without redundancy or unnecessary details. Therefore, the Maxim of Manner was adhered to.

In this study however, the observance of the maxims will not be discussed, as the focus of this study is on the non-observance (flouting, violating, infringing, opting out, suspending) of Grice's (1975) maxims which tends to be the framework in humorous conversations.

## **2.5 The Non-observance (flouting, violating, fringing, opting out, suspending) of Grice's Maxims**

In our daily lives, it is impossible for people to obey the Cooperative Principle all the time. Sometimes, people will fail to observe these maxims intentionally so as to achieve special effects such as humour.

Thomas (1995) states that Grice (1975) had listed three ways in which a participant in a talk exchange may fail to fulfill a maxim: a) the speaker may flout a maxim, b) violate a maxim, or c) opt out observing a maxim. Grice (1975) later added a fourth category of non-observance: d) infringing a maxim. Several writers since Grice (1975), have argued the need for a fifth category—suspending a maxim.

### **1) Flouting a maxim**

Grice (1975) says that someone may flout a maxim and in this case, he/she may deliberately fail to observe the maxim without any intention of misleading the hearer for communicative purpose. In other words, the speaker deliberately intends to generate a conversational implicature and wishes for the listener to understand his/her meaning either as a literally expressed meaning or as an implied meaning.

Example 5:

Husband: Your nagging goes right in one ear and out the other.

Wife: That's because there is nothing in between to stop it.

(Kotthoff, 2006, p. 274)

In the above example, the wife was not deliberately trying to deceive her husband. The literal meaning of the wife is that her husband has no brain. In this example, the wife flouts the Maxim of Quality because as a person, everyone has a brain as we know, but in this example, the wife is implying that her husband does not listen to her constant nagging and she therefore says something that is obviously not true (her husband has no brain) in an attempt for him to look for another set of meanings (her husband does not listen to her).

### **2) Violating a maxim**

Grice (1975) states that if a speaker violates a maxim, he will be liable to mislead someone or provide improper information, causing a misunderstanding.

Example 6:

Clouseau: Does your dog bite?

Receptionist: No.

Clouseau: (Bends down to stroke it and gets bitten) Ow! You said your dog doesn't

bite!

Receptionist: That isn't my dog.

(Cutting, 2008, p.38)

In this example, it is obvious that the receptionist has violated the Maxim of Quantity, since he did not provide enough information to Clouseau, which resulted in Clouseau being misled into thinking that the dog belonged to the receptionist. Clouseau had wondered if the little dog bites, and when asked, the receptionist did not give Clouseau enough information, deliberately misleading him. This caused him to mistake the dog to belong to the receptionist. As a result of the receptionist's misleading, Clouseau was then bitten when stroking the dog.

### **3) Infringing a maxim**

Grice (1989, p. 56) mentioned, "A speaker infringing a maxim fails to observe a maxim because of his/her imperfect linguistic performance. This can happen if the speaker has an imperfect command of the language". Infringing a maxim usually takes place when a speaker has an imperfect linguistic performance, or when a speaker cannot speak clearly or to the point due to excitement, drunkenness, nervousness, etc. Infringing a maxim also occurs when the speaker possesses a lack of knowledge of the topic. In other words, the speaker (a child or foreign learner) lacks the ability to express his/her ideas.

Example 7:

Our enemies are innovative and resourceful, and so are we. They (enemies) never stop thinking about new ways to harm our country and our people, and neither do we.

George W. Bush, Washington, DC, 5 August 2004

(Cutting, 2008, p. 40)

In this case, former president, President Bush had said "They never stop thinking about new ways to harm our country and our people, and neither do we"; in other words,



this was to say that American people also wanted to destroy their own country by all means. This seems to imply that Americans like what the enemies did. These ridiculous words turned the former president, President Bush into a laughing stock. In this example, former president, President Bush was so nervous in public that it caused him a verbal misstep through infringing the Maxim of Manner.

#### **4) Opting out a maxim**

Someone opting out a maxim indicates an unwillingness to cooperate although the speaker may not want to appear uncooperative. Opting out a maxim often happens under the condition that “when the speaker cannot, perhaps for legal or ethical reason, reply in the way as normally expected” or when “giving the requested information will hurt a third party” (Thomas, 1995, p. 74). He or she cannot reply in the way expected due to legal reasons; for example, a police officer refusing to release the name of an accident victim until the relatives have been informed (Thomas, 1995).

#### **5) Suspending a maxim**

Under certain circumstances/as part of certain events, there is no expectation on the part of any participant, that one or several maxims should be observed (Thomas, 1995). For instance, in Indians: Mentioning a late person’s name might evoke evil spirits and bring bad luck (Sri, 2006).

Undoubtedly, Grice’s (1975) Cooperative Principle has played a significant role in pragmatic. However, his theory has also been criticized. Pfister (2010) criticized the

Maxim of Quality, since Grice (1975) suggested that a lie or false information does not contribute to the communication and does not belong to information. Nevertheless, a lie from a speaker can still make a contribution since the hearer has a response. Additionally, following Mey's (2001) suggestion that Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle is not universal, fulfilling Grice's (1975) maxims would reply to the culture of the communicators at times and the circumstance in which the dialogue would occur.

## **2.6 Implicature**

Grice (1975) noted that in daily conversations, people do not usually say things directly but tend to imply or suggest them. By doing this, a speaker often manages to convey implicature which does not express the information explicitly but the hearer may recognize it through the implicature.

According to Yang (2008, p. 59), implicature is when speakers are able to mean more than what is actually said. This basically sums up that implicature is the additional, unstated meaning which the speaker implies. Therefore, we can say that implicature is a component of the speaker's meaning that constitutes an aspect of what is meant in a speaker's utterance, as being part of what is said (Horn, 1992).

### **2.6.1 Conventional Implicature**

Grice (1975) distinguishes two different types of implicature: conventional implicature, and conversational implicature. Conventional implicature is associated with particular words and it results in an additional conveyed meaning when those words are

used. There are comparatively few examples of conversational implicatures; Levinson (1983, p. 127) lists four: *but*, *even*, *therefore*, and *yet*. Consider the following example:

Example 8:

He is poor but honest.

(Salmon, 2011, p. 3417)

In the example, notice that although it is not actually asserted that poor people are untruthful, the word “but” definitely implies that this is the case. In other words, poor people are usually dishonest except in this case. The word “but” shows the implied meaning that what follows will not be compatible. This sense of “but” usually means this implicature, in spite of the context in which it occurs. To some extent, the sentence meaning and the implied meaning are equivalent.

### 2.6.2 Conversational Implicature

Grice’s main interest lies in situations where the speaker blatantly fails to observe a maxim without the intention of deceiving or misleading but rather to prompt the hearer to look for the additional meaning (Thomas, 1995). This additional meaning is termed “conversational implicature” and the process by which it is generated is “flouting a maxim”. Thus, when a maxim is flouted, an implicature is created.

Briefly, one could say that “conversational implicature” includes the context in understanding the additional conveyed meaning of an utterance. The meaning of an utterance in conversational implicature is indirectly stated in the utterance. Consider the following example:

Example 9:

Charlene: I hope you brought the bread and the cheese.

Dexter: Ah, I brought the bread.

(Yule, 1996, p. 40)

In the conversation above, Dexter tried to convey an unstated meaning, that he did not bring the cheese. As the listener, Charlene was expected to understand the unstated meaning of Dexter. Charlene should assume that Dexter was aware and being cooperative. The unstated meaning inferred from the conversation above belonged to conversational implicature.

## **2.7 Previous Studies on the Non-observance of Grice's Cooperative Principle**

Grice's (1975) maxims have always been famous for research on humour. The maxims are used as tools to analyse and explain the findings of the research. One such research was done by Brumark (2006). The researcher looked into the issue of indirect speech and the different reasons why the family members were using indirectness in their interaction during family dinners through flouting Grice's maxims. Data were collected by video-recording 19 families during their dinner. From the recordings, the researcher found that the fathers were mostly direct and they flouted the maxims only when humour was intended. For example, the father is being sarcastic in order to regulate the child's behavior by flouting the Maxim of Quality. In addition, men seemed to have special reasons for flouting the maxims, such as "showing off" by being humorous and making ironic or sarcastic comments addressed to their conversational partners. Amongst the children, it was noticed that the teenagers flouted the Maxims of Quality by using ironic speech or teasing others to make humorous conversations and

also to joke about something amongst themselves. It seems fairly common that mothers use sarcastic irony by flouting the Maxim of Quality and Maxim of Manner to imply a demand that the children do their homework right away.

However, the researcher could not prove that these interactions would be the same within those involved families with the absence of the recorder. This question is raised because in data analysis, the researcher indicated that some children and mothers moved away from the camera to prevent themselves from being heard or recorded when they wanted to say something.

Another research based on Grice's Cooperative principle was by Rochmawati (2012). The research focused on humour strategies in the short-joke text discovered that all humour strategies using to create humour resulted from the violation of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle. Data were collected from 30 short-joke texts in the Readers' Digest section for World's Funniest Jokes, and later analysed for violating Grice's maxims. Rochmawati (2012) claimed that nearly all instances in his corpus showed that funny lines result in jokes from the incorporation of different kinds of humour strategies violating Grice's (1975) maxims. Irony as one of the strategies in humour was most frequently used. In the jokes, the speakers intended to say something that was the exact opposite of their true intention, violating the Maxim of Quality in order to make fun of or to tease the hearer. The humour effect is therefore created.

The findings revealed that the speakers in the jokes also applied other humour strategies by violating Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle. Using irony, absurdity, exaggeration or simply lying to cause misunderstandings often violated the Maxim of Quality. Likewise, the Maxim of Quantity was violated for humorous purposes by the speakers when they blabber things they should not be saying or when they give sarcastic answers to silly questions. Next, the humour strategy violating the Maxim of Relation employed irrelevant statements and involved changing the topic. The speakers would use the strategy to avoid being put in an awkward situation to answer some embarrassing questions. Responding with something ambiguous was also the technique frequently used as humour strategies in the jokes. Therefore, the results and analyses in Rochmawati's research (2012) showed that there is a close relationship between humour and the violations of Grice's Cooperative Principles (Attardo & Raskin, 1991)

Lu (2011) also studied how the maxims were violated in short-joke text. The researcher focused on English humour, especially in violation of the Cooperative Principle. The findings revealed that on the surface, the speakers violated the Maxim of Quality by telling lies in order to hide the truth or using rhetoric features such as irony, metaphors, meiosis, hyperbole, etc, but these did not lead to the failure of communication. On the contrary, they expressed their ideas clearly and resulted in a sense of humour. The researcher also mentioned that the violation of the Maxim of Relation may cause a humorous effect. In some instances, Lu (2011) noticed that in the social intercourse, people sometimes intentionally violate the Maxim of Manner by using tactfully ambiguous words, polysemy, or giving contradictive information,

making their utterances not brief and orderly, for the achievement of a special purpose such as humour or hiding the truth. The strength of this research is that the researcher uses easily understandable examples to explain how Grice's maxims were violated to create humour. However, the examples provided by Lu (2011) for the violation of the Maxim of Quantity were not typical and persuasive. For example:

A: Now, Madame, what do you need at home?

B: Money.

(Lu, 2011, p. 478)

Lu (2011) explained that on the surface, B is very honest and gives the correct answer. However, the information provided by B is not enough for A, and violates the Maxim of Quantity. However, in this example, B absolutely observes Grice's maxims and it is nonsense to say that B provide less information for A, as there was no indication of any contradicting statement being showed in the data for the researcher to identify that what B said was not enough.

## **2.8 Studies Examining Humour**

It is noted that research on humour in the Chinese language is still a new and relatively unexplored area. The related literature is rather limited, and thus not many impressive studies were found related to the current study.

### **2.8.1 Studies on China's Mandarin Sitcoms**

Lu (2014) analysed the conversations of a Chinese sitcom named "Home with Kids" and she aimed to determine the humorous effect in "Home with Kids" and the reasons for the non-cooperative phenomenon in order to formulate the humour-generating

system in Chinese sitcoms. Being interdisciplinary, this study did not only use the knowledge in pragmatics, but also the knowledge in cross-culture communication. By analysing the non-cooperative conversations in the Chinese context, Lu (2014) classified and explains these non-cooperative phenomena. The finding was different from common conversations which usually observe the Cooperative Principle; humorous conversations usually violate the Cooperative Principle and its four maxims, which contradict with audience's expectations, thus causing humour. The results indicated that flouting more than one maxim was often observed in the Chinese sitcom because the four maxims were closely related, and flouting one of them can also be read as flouting another maxim. When people were expressing complicated meanings or hard-to-say meanings, they usually flouted more than one maxim. An utterance was non-cooperative in Grice's (1975) maxims, but was generally cooperative on a deeper level. Lu (2014) explained that on the surface level the conversation was uncooperative because it flouted the maxims, but looking at the deep meaning, the conversation went on smoothly and the true meaning was successfully delivered from the speaker to the hearer. Meanwhile, being polite was a very important reason for Chinese people to flout the Cooperative Principle and its maxims. Finally, Lu (2014) concluded that flouting the Cooperative Principle can cause different results—generating humorous effect, exchanging true meanings, or causing silence or breakdown in conversation.

The strength of this research is that the researcher linked the reason of flouting the maxims with Chinese culture and the communicative goal. She revealed that the goal determines whether the interlocutors will continue the conversation and the culture



determines how the interlocutors speak. Usually people get more than the words meaning in their conversation, contributing to the non-observance of Grice's maxims, especially in high-context cultures like Chinese. In China, people infer more often than people in western countries and the people depend more on the way of speaking, the tones, and other so-called paralanguage.

However, there are some limitations that should be paid attention to:

1. In Chapter One, the author introduced the Chinese sitcom "Home with Kids", which was selected as her data source, having been popular for more than ten years with five seasons (276 episodes altogether) and being nominated for many awards. However, in the literature review, Lu (2014) said that in "Home with Kids" Season 1 to Season 4, there were 376 episodes in total, and that Season 5 was still under way, different from what she mentioned in Chapter One. Here, the author did not provide accurate information about her data and failed to achieve reliability.
2. The aim of the thesis was to use the non-observance of Grice's (1975) maxims to investigate how humour is created in "Home with Kids". However, the author only investigated humour by using "flouting a maxim", and ignored "violating", "infringing", "opting out" and "suspending" a maxim. Moreover, "violation" is sometimes used in this thesis as a synonym for "non-observance". It was easy to confuse or cause a misunderstanding with the reader.

3. Although this study provides the basic information about which maxims were flouted in the Chinese sitcom, Lu's (2014) explanations on why they were flouted as such were not sufficient. The reasons given were not supported by any evidence and they seemed like the researcher's perception. The current study will fill the three gaps in Lu's (2014) research.

Another research involving a Chinese sitcom was done by Luo (2006). This researcher focused on humour in China and looked into the creation of humour as accomplished by flouting Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle. The data source came from the Chinese sitcom "I Love My Family" which is a story about the daily life between grandparents and grandchildren. Luo (2006) found that the grandchildren often provided untrue information or mocked each other in order to show their distrust, flouting the Maxim of Quality and creating humour. Luo (2006) also stated that the grandparents often flouted the Maxim of Quantity by saying or explaining too much in order to avoid hurting their grandchildren's feelings to show their concern and love, causing a humorous effect. While the Maxim of Relation was flouted to show the generation gap because the grandparents were too old to catch the fashion, they did not understand what their grandchildren meant and provided unrelated information, and thus creating a humorous effect. In this sitcom, the Maxim of Manner was usually flouted by grandchildren by using puns to show their intelligence. One minor problem is that the data source of the research is too old, because the first airing of the Chinese sitcom was 20 years ago and it cannot well reflect the present daily life in China.

### 2.8.2 Studies on American English Sitcoms

Caesilia (2015) conducted a research of humour in the language process whilst taking Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle into perspective and describing the involvement of the non-observances of Grice's (1975) maxims in creating humorous effects. The research data were taken from the sitcom "How I Met Your Mother (Season 2)" because humour in TV shows often arises from the verbal interaction that often emerges in daily life conversations and the humorous fragments are often found in the characters' utterances. From the data, it could be seen that opting out the maxims in the data did not appear to be humorous. Rather it appeared to be a disappointment or a curiosity for the hearer. Hence, Caesilia (2015) found that there were four types of non-observances of Grice's (1975) maxims employed in humorous conversation which are: flouting, violating, infringing, and suspending the maxims and humour was attributable to non-observation of four maxims.

Caesilia (2015) concluded that the first way of failing the maxim was by flouting it. The Maxim of Quality was flouted by the way of exaggerating, using metaphors and delivering utterances in a sarcastic tone. The Maxim of Quantity could be flouted by providing less or more information than required without the intention of deceiving. The Maxim of Relation could be flouted by changing a new topic with implicature to be inferred. Lastly, the Maxim of Manner could be flouted by constructing obscure language, using a slang. The other way of failing the maxim was by violation. The finding of the research exposed the way to violate the maxims. The Maxim of Quality could be violated by sincerely lying to hide the truth or informing without providing

adequate proof. The Maxim of Quantity could be violated by giving less or more information with the intention of deceiving. The Maxim of Relation could be violated by straying from the subject being discussed with the intention to exclude from current conversation. Lastly, the Maxim of Manner could be violated by being intentionally obscure, ambiguous, and unordered. Infringement of maxims was also discovered when the speaker was drunk or too excited. Suspending the maxims was seldom used to create humorous effects.

This research has its strength in explaining in detail about the issues that were never noticed before when watching sitcoms like how certain characters were stereotyped to flout certain maxims all the time. One issue to be noticed in this research is that the researcher wrongly stated that violating the maxims can also generate a conversational implicature, as unlike the flouting of maxims, which occurs when speakers convey a conversational implicature to hearers, the violation of maxims causes misunderstanding on the part of the hearer without conversational implicature (Khosravizadeh & Sadehvandi, 2011).

Wang (2014) analysed the American sitcom “Friends” and looked into how Grice’s maxims were flouted in order to create humour. He found that characters had the tendency to flout the Maxim of Quantity by offering too much information to answer questions posed by others. The abundant information led to humorous effects. He also noted that sometimes more information doesn’t guarantee a better understanding of the hearer. The more the speaker talks, the worse the situation seems to be. Meanwhile,

Wang (2014) also gave examples to illustrate characters flouting the Maxim of Manner to create humour through saying obscure jargon in a daily communication, having deliberate redundancy as well as giving contradictory information. One issue to be considered was that the researcher mixed two terms—"Violating" is sometimes used in this thesis as a synonym of "flouting". It was easy to make the reader confused or result in a misunderstanding.

## **2.9 Summary**

This chapter has explained the theories of humour, the theoretical basis for this study (Grice's Cooperative Principle; five types of Non-observation of Grice's maxims), and the previous studies conducted in this area of humour. The following chapter will explain the procedures involved in carrying out this study in detail.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the description of the research design of the study and the information about the Chinese sitcom “Home with Kids (Season 4)” and the characters involved. It is then followed by three predominant sections of the methodology which encompasses the theoretical framework, procedure of data collection, the transcription of data and the analysis of the data. As this chapter also looks at the non-observance of Grice’s (1975) Cooperative Principle and its four maxims, as well as the concepts developed in the Cooperative Principle and its four maxims, the concepts developed in the Cooperative Principle are also explained and illustrated.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

This study adopts a qualitative research design, i.e. it focuses on data that has been collected for the purpose of qualitative analysis. Creswell (1994) stated that qualitative research begins with vaguely formulated research questions and develops insights from the pattern of data. According to Creswell’s (1994) statement, this study begins with research questions shown at the beginning of the study and is followed by the analysis of data and a discussion of the findings. The study attempts to examine how humour is projected via verbal responses by characters of a Chinese sitcom “Home with Kids (Season 4)”. Sitcoms usually stem from circumstances arising in our daily lives. To some extent, certain popular sitcoms may also project dialogues which reflect people’s

living styles (David, 1997), thus the dialogues in “Home with Kids (Season 4)” were selected as data, where that may also be a reflection of real-life issues. The study deals with detailed explanations of the findings since numerical representations of data could not provide much explanation regarding the results. Hence, this research is qualitative.

### **3.3 The Profile of the Chinese Sitcom “Home with Kids (Season 4)”**

Until now, “Home with Kids” has four seasons altogether. Season 1, Season 2, Season 3 and Season 4 were released in 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007 respectively. Amongst all the four seasons of “Home with Kids”, “Home with Kids (Season 4)” is relatively the most recent one. It includes 67 episodes with every episode running for about 25 minutes. The following narration contains the justifications for selecting “Home with Kids (Season 4)”:

Firstly, “Home with Kids” is an enormously popular sitcom in China and it initiates a new era in Chinese sitcom (Wei, 2007). It has won a high audience rating since it first began airing. It has been aired on prime time in many TV stations in China, America, and Japan (Wei, 2007). Secondly, “Home with Kids” won the China TV Golden Eagle Award for best teenage drama series and the national prize for Best Works Award (Yi, 2008), proving that it is an excellent sitcom. Thirdly, the sitcom can be regarded as a context comprising of a rich linguistic corpus for linguistic analysis of verbal humour as the amount of humour in the show is immense (Wei, 2007). Hence, “Home with Kids (Season 4)” was chosen as the source of data collection in this study.

### **3.4 Background of “Home with Kids (Season 4)”**

This sitcom tells the daily story about the lives of a remarried couple’s family living in Beijing, China. The father, Xia Donghai, is a divorced man who has just returned from America with his little son, Xia Yu, and is to be reunited with his daughter, Xia Xue, who grew up in China. He then married a divorced nurse, Liu Mei, who has a naughty son, Liu Xing, from a previous marriage. Xia Xue is an outstanding student whereas Liu Xing is an underachiever with poor academic results. Consequently, Liu Mei often criticizes Liu Xing because of his poor results but praises Xia Xue who manages her studies very well. This leads to animosity on the part of Liu Xing who begins to regards Xia Xue as his “enemy”. As a result, a lot of interesting issues which include the inevitable quarrel arise in this household.

### **3.5 Characters in “Home with Kids (Season 4)”**

In this study, the characters are coded and listed as the following:

- a. “F” refers to Xia Donghai. He is the father of Xia Xue and Xia Yu, and the stepfather of Liu Xing, and he is easygoing and humorous. F was a director of the children's theatre before being hired as the chief editor of a children’s magazine. As a person who has been influenced by the American educational model, his ways with children mainly involve tolerance, understanding, and signs of equality. He can also be quite lazy and incompetent with housework or sports.
- b. “M” refers to Liu Mei. She is the head nurse at a hospital and is in charge of the household. M often demonstrates a strong preference for Xia Xue due to her



outstanding school grades and many talents. She often attempts to inflict corporal punishment on her misbehaving children (in particular her own son Liu Xing), but most of the time she fails to do so. She constantly attempts to understand the three children and tries to help them in all fashions possible.

- c. “D” refers to Xia Xue. She is the elder daughter of Xia Donghai. She is a typical "smart girl" with excellent grades. D is confident but is also somewhat arrogant. She is often the creator of the more "advanced" issues for her parents. She distrusts her new stepmother, Liu Mei, and even tries to scare her by developing a trend for puppy love but she soon finds her very trustworthy. D is depressed for not making the marks required for Qinghua University, but she soon overcomes the depression.
- d. “S1” refers to Liu Xing. He is the son of Liu Mei. He is an academically poor student, but is quite witty and tactful. The resident troublemaker of the home, he receives most of the blame from his parents. Apart from that, he is sporty, chivalrous, and is always filled with ideas and advice (both good and bad) for others.
- e. “S2” refers to Xia Yu. He is the little son of Xia Donghai. Being raised in America, he is capable of speaking good English and has knowledge of many American customs. He follows his stepbrother Liu Xing in his exploits, and will often be the potential troublemaker after Liu Xing.
- f. “F1” refers to S1’s good friend, Mouse who is fat and lazy.
- g. “F2” refers to S2’s good friend, Lu Lu.
- h. “F3” refers to Jia Jia who is secretly liked by S1.
- i. “F4” refers to S1’s friend, Da Li.

- j. “F5” refers to F’s friend and F2’s father, Lao Gao.
- k. “Ex-F” refers to S1’s ex-father.
- l. “C1” refers to M’s cousin.
- m. “C2” refers to S1’s cousin.

### 3.6 Data Collection

As mentioned earlier, “Home with Kids (Season 4)” was selected as the source of data collection in the research. This study only focused on 96 conversations occurring in the living room in “Home with Kids (Season 4)”. The following are reasons to justify the selection of 96 examples in “Home with Kids (Season 4)”:

Firstly, all the examples chosen include the laugh tracks which were inserted into the TV series. This can be seen as an indicator of humour or is considered one of the unique features of sitcoms (Brock, 2008). Hence, the laugh track in “Home with Kids (Season 4)” is seen as the criterion to determine if verbal humour (Koestler, 1993) exists in the chosen source of data. Secondly, it is difficult to transcribe, translate and analyse all the humorous conversations (including humorous conversations happening in the living room, bedroom, garden, classroom and friend’s house) due to time limitation. According to Table 3.1, these humorous conversations happening in the living room have the highest frequency of occurrence (62.7%) in the sitcom. Creswell (2012) says that the larger the sample, the more reliable the results. Therefore, selecting humorous conversations happening in the living room as data can make the results of this study more reliable.

**Table.3.1** Distribution of Humorous Conversations

Scene	Living room	Bedroom	Garden	Classroom	Friend's house
Number	96	19	23	6	9
Frequency	62.7%	12.4%	15.1%	3.9%	5.9%

Only portions of the data are presented in the study as they are used to illustrate the non-observance (e.g. flouting, violating, infringing, opting out, suspending) of the four maxims of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle. This study is based on the following steps as listed below to collect data:

Step 1: Firstly, watching all the episodes (67 episodes) of the Chinese sitcom "Home with Kids (Season 4)" that have been fully and carefully downloaded from [www.youku.com](http://www.youku.com) via the Internet. The conversations that happened in the living room and accompanied by laugh tracks were also selected from the 67 episodes. Specifically, when watching the sitcom, if the laugh track occurs (hearing audience laughter), the subtitles can be seen as an example of humour, and were first noted down in Excel form with 7 items in Chinese. This process is repeated until the author finished watching all 67 episodes. The following are the 6 items of the Excel form used for data collection:

- (1) Example: refers to example from the sitcom.
- (2) Episode: refers to each episode of the data.
- (3) Episode theme: refers to the main topic of each episode.
- (4) Time: refers to the time when the utterance occurs (for ease of double checking

data).

(5) Context: refers to the background that the conversations occur.

(6) Conversation: refers to the utterances to create humorous effect.

(7) Strategy: refers to the way Grice's maxims were not observe (e.g. flouting, violating, infringing, opting out, suspending)

Step 2: Secondly, after the selection of data in the Chinese sitcom, the researcher transcribes and translates all the materials with Microsoft Word. As mentioned in Chapter One, since situational humour (Koestler, 1993) almost has no influence on language, this thesis will thus exclude looking at it, paying attention instead to the portrayal of verbal humour (Koestler, 1993). The sentences accompanied with the laugh track will be underlined (refer to Appendix A).

Step 3: Thirdly, in order to validate the data to ensure that it is reliable, all transcriptions were further verified by a bilingual person, who understands Chinese and English well. This is to ensure the accuracy of the translation.

### **3.6.1 Transcription and Translation of Data**

Firstly, during the transcription process, the whole sitcom was watched fully and carefully to confirm that the audio lines and the subtitles in the sitcom were matched. When watching the Chinese sitcom, the utterances which contained the laugh track were first noted down and underlined in Excel form with 7 items (refer to Section 3.6) for further analysis in Mandarin. Since the data were collected from a sitcom, the data used

in this study placed emphasis on the subtitles. The transcriptions of selected data were done verbatim. Since this is not a study on discourse analysis, other audible features commonly found in the transcription of spoken discourse such as intonation, pronunciation, interruption, pauses, and others were not included in the transcription for this study.

The data collection in Mandarin was initially translated into English by the researcher. It was then checked by Lee Vonli, a bilingual (Chinese and English) postgraduate student of linguistics to ensure the accuracy of the translation. During the translation procedure, both the “literal translation (word-for-word translation)” and “free translation (sense-for-sense translation)” were applied to translate Mandarin into English, because “literal translation” and “free translation” are complementary to each other. There is no absolute “literal” nor entirely “free” version of translation (Chan, 2004).

### **3.7 Theoretical Framework**

This study aims to illustrate how the Chinese sitcom and its characters failed to observe the maxims of Grice’s (1975) Cooperative Principle as a way to create humour for the audience.

The justification for applying the non-observance (flouting, violating, infringing, opting out, suspending) of the maxims of Grice’s (1975) Cooperative Principle as the framework is because Attardo (1994. p. 271) had conducted a research on humour

where he attested that “a consensus has been built within humour research to show that humorous texts violate one or several of the maxims”. This means that humour is seen as a result of the violation of such maxims. Moreover, as Mey (2001) stated, it is impossible to abide by the Cooperative Principle since we, as interlocutors have sarcasm, irony, humour, exaggeration, and deceit. Grice (1989) had also pointed out that irony and humour might be related with the violation of Grice’s (1975) Cooperative Principle. Therefore, in this study, Grice’s (1975) maxims were applied as an approach to understand humour that is interlaced in the sitcom.

### **3.7.1 Grice’s Cooperative Principle**

The Cooperative Principle was proposed by H. P. Grice in 1975. In a conversation, participants would like to cooperate with each other, otherwise, it may be difficult to continue their conversation; which as Grice (1975, p.47) presented, “make your conversation 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”. To better illustrate the Cooperative Principle, Grice (1975) introduced four categories of maxims as follows:

“The Maxim of Quantity:

1. Make your contribution as informative as required.
2. Do not make your contribution more informative as required.

The Maxim of Quality:

Try to make your contribution one that is true.

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

The Maxim of Relation:

Be relevant.

The Maxim of Manner: Be perspicuous, and specifically:

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly.”

(Grice, 1975, p. 46)

### **3.7.2 Non-observance of Grice's Maxims**

There are many occasions, when people fail to observe the maxims. For example, they are incapable of speaking clearly or because they deliberately choose to lie. According to Grice, in a study by Jenny Thomas (1995), there are five ways of failing to observe a maxim which are:

- 1) Flouting: to blatantly fail to observe a maxim with no intention of misleading the hearer but with the intention of creating a conventional implicature.
- 2) Violating: to quietly and purposely fail to observe a maxim with the intention to mislead the hearer.
- 3) Opting out: to be unwilling to cooperate and withdrawing from the interaction.
- 4) Infringing: to unintentionally fail to observe a maxim due to limited language capabilities and understanding.
- 5) Suspending: under certain circumstances/as part of certain events there is no expectation on the part of any participant that one or several maxims should be observed.

### **3.7.3 Laugh Track**

Situation comedy contains several laugh tracks which are also deemed as "laughter". The laugh tracks are so distinctive and different from the rest of the forms of television shows. It separates the soundtracks from the audience who watched the sitcom when it was being shot. In order to get better humorous effects of the sitcom, the producers inserted some canned laughter during the post-production period. It is also the main attraction for most of the audience. Attardo (1994) highlights one criterion which makes it easier to differentiate what can be counted as humorous and what does not belong in this category, and that is laughter. According to Brock (2008, p. 544), "Laughter was long seen as an immediate consequence of humour".

As an important element for this study, the audience laughter is taken as a standard for depicting humour, and thus it was applied in the selection of corpus for this study. Thus, humour is equivalent to the laugh track appearing in the sitcom.

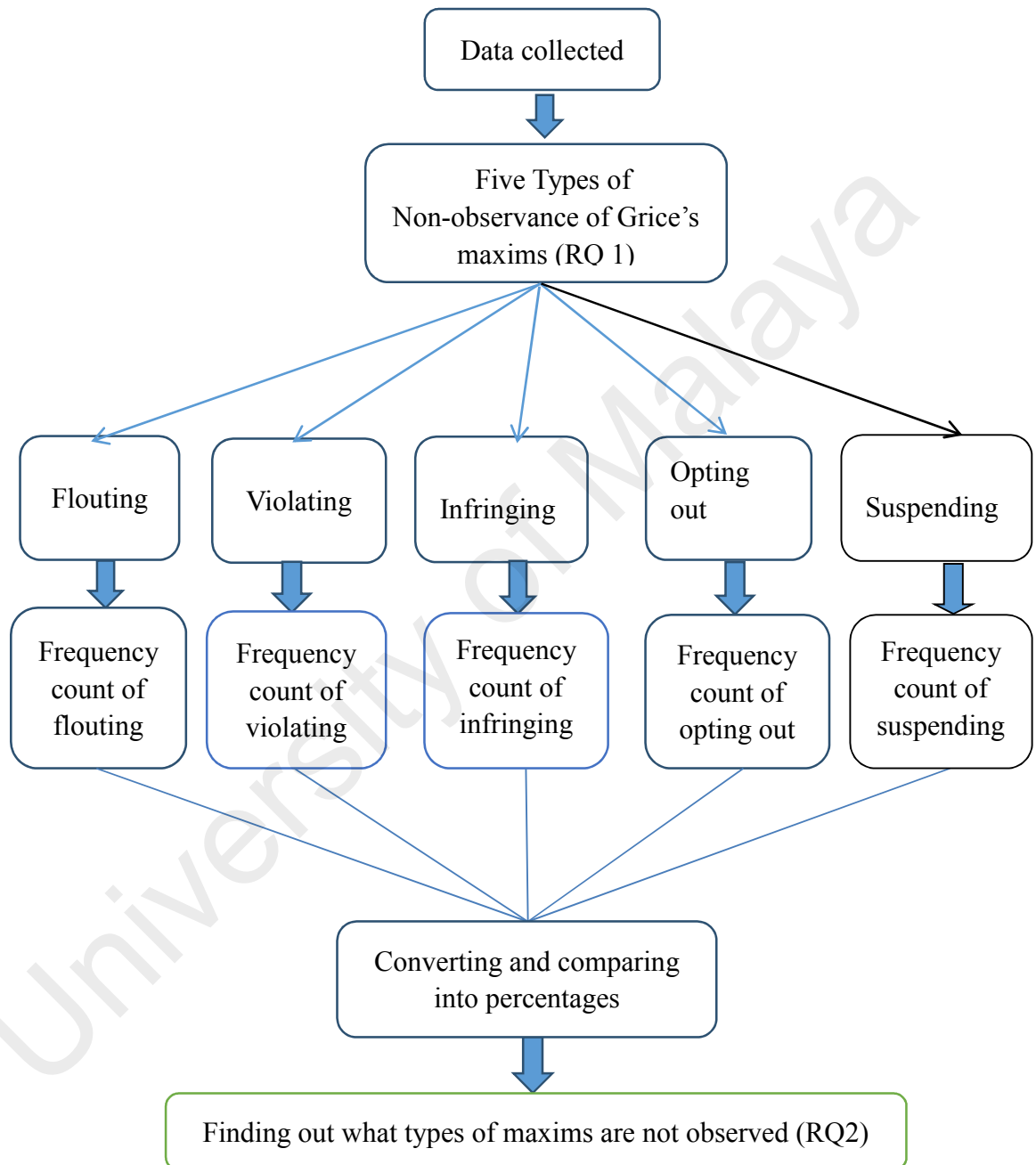
### **3.8 Data Analysis**

In order to answer the research questions sufficiently and adequately, data were analysed via the five types of non-observance for Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and its four maxims.

The data analysis experienced the process of: categorizing the conversations into five types of non-observance of Grice's (1975) maxims; identifying the conversations with four maxims of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle; describing the role of



non-observance of maxims in creating humorous effects; and the last being the summary of findings.



**Figure 3.1** Procedure of Data Analysis

As Figure 3.1 shows, data collected were initially coded based on framework—the five types (flouting, violating, infringing, opting out, suspending) of non-observances of

Grice's (1975) maxims, then being placed into five groups of flouting/ violating/ infringing/ opting out/ suspending. Next, data were identified and analysed according to each of the non-observances of four maxims in Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle. Following this, the data coding and analysing were validated by a native Chinese speaker, Wu Yingqi, who is also doing the Master of Linguistics at the University of Malaya. It was also checked by the author's supervisor, an academic staff at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics of the University of Malaya. Data were then accounted for based on occurrence frequency. They were calculated and converted into percentage. Hence, the finding will show what types of non-observance of Grice's (1975) maxims were used to create humour and what maxim was not observed to create humour.

Below is an example to show how the data were analysed and the utterances that are underlined are analysed and discussed:

Example 10: (Episode 14, Home with Kids 4)

Context: S1 bought a bird then persisted in teaching his bird to say "Mommy".

Turn 1: 刘星: 妈。妈。妈。妈。

(S1: Mommy. Mommy. Mommy. Mommy.)

Turn 2: 刘梅: 哎。干嘛? 你叫我干嘛?

(M: Ai. What? You call me for what?)

Turn 3: 刘星: 我没叫您, 我叫它“妈”呢。 (Laugh track)

(S1: I didn't call you, I am calling it (the bird) "Mommy".)

Turn 4: 刘梅: 叫什么?

(M: What?)

Turn 5: 刘星: 不是, 我让他叫我“妈”。 (Laugh track)

(S1: No, I mean, I training it (the bird) to call me "Mommy".)

In this example, S1's utterance infringed the Maxim of Quality to create humour in turn 3 and 5. This is because he was nervous and excited; he could not say something

coherently whilst answering his mother. In turn 3, S1 replied that he called the bird “Mommy” and in turn 5, S1 replied that he wanted the bird to call him “Mommy”. This ridiculous answer made the audience laugh, because we all know that S1 is a male person who cannot become a mother of a bird. S1 could not speak clearly or to the point since he was a little afraid of his mother, and this was the main reason that made him nervous. In this example, S1 had infringed the Maxim of Quality to create humour. In Chapter two, Caesilia (2015) also concluded that the speaker infringed the maxims when he or she was too excited in the sitcom.

In Chapter Four, all discussions and analyses are illustrated by using examples and explanations. All the Chinese scripts transcribed were provided with English translations, and the Chinese data were provided in the examples.

### **3.9 Summary**

In general, this chapter has outlined the methodology of the study. It includes the qualitative research design, the background of the Chinese sitcom “Home with Kids”, justification for selecting the data, the theoretical framework used which is the non-observance of Grice’s maxim (1975), and samples of how data were selected for analysis. These are very important portions in the methodology as it makes the research simple, clear, and easy to understand.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **ANALYSIS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the analysis and findings of the study based on the following two research questions. The analysis of the study was carried out in five phases in order to fully answer two research questions. Research question one was solved through the first five steps based on the framework of the non-observance of Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975). In the first phase, an in-depth analysis of the humorous examples happening in Xia's living room is presented by using the framework—flouting the four maxims and conversational implicature. The following phrase is the in-depth analysis of the violation of the four maxims in the data chosen. In the third phrase, a generic analysis of applying infringing, opting out, and suspending the four maxims was used to explain the humour in the examples collected. In the final phase, a frequency count of the occurrences flouting, violating, infringing, opting out as well as suspending the four maxims will be calculated and compared, to answer research question two.

#### **4.2 Non-observance of the Four Maxims**

The main focus of this part is to identify and analyse the non-observance (flouting, violating, infringing, opting out, suspending) of the Maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner; and how humour was created in the Chinese sitcom "Home with kids (Season 4)".

#### 4.2.1 Flouting the Four Maxims

Flouting a maxim occurred when a participant in a conversation chose to ignore one or more of the maxims by using a conversational implicature (Thomas 1995, p. 65). In this study, all four maxims of Grice (1975) were discovered to be flouted to create humorous effects in the selected data.

##### 4.2.1.1 Flouting the Maxims of Quantity

In this section, examples of statements flouting the Maxim of Quantity in the data are provided. This maxim is flouted when speakers contribute more or less than is required for the purpose of the conversation. The information contributed should not exceed or be less than is required. The conversational implicature was implied when the speaker conveyed messages that were less informative or when the information was too much and unnecessary. For example:

Example11: (Episode 2, Home with Kids 4)

Context: While S2 was doing homework in his room, he was required to see F playing marbles in the living room.

Turn 1: 夏雨: 爸, 您快点弹吧?

(S2: Dad, can you play the marble right now?)

Turn 2: 夏东海: 哎, 好, 看着啊。那个弹之前, 爸爸必须再跟你说几句啊。虽然爸爸是当年人见人夸的"弹球大王", 但是毕竟这么多年不练了, 手可能有些生了, 爸爸就不再给你再现当年百发百中的惊人场面了。就是爸爸弹三次, 如果有一次弹中爸爸就算赢。就是让你感受一下爸爸当年的风采就行了啊。(Laugh track)

(F: Ah, ok, look. Before playing, Dad have something to say. Although as I was crowned the "King of playing marbles" during my younger years, and because I haven't practiced for years, now your dad cannot fling the marbles accurately every time, successfully every time. So, give me three tries, and as long as I fling one marble accurately, it will be counted as my win. I just want to show you how good your dad was in those days.)

Turn 3: 夏雨: 爸, 我想问问你这弹球是用嘴弹还是用手弹呢。

(S2: Dad, I just want to ask that you are playing marbles with your hands or with your mouth.)

In this example, the Maxim of Quantity was flouted in turn 2, because F said too many words. In turn 1, when S2 asked F to play the marble right now, all M needed to reply was “Ok, look”, which is sufficient enough. However, in turn 2, F went into a long-winded utterance about how invincible he was at playing marbles during his younger years as well and being the "King of playing marbles", but making excuses about why he was not able to show the amazing skills now. F tried to negotiate with S2 by saying “So, give me three tries, and as long as I fling one marble accurately, it will be counted as my win” in order to save face, if he could not fling the marbles accurately every time. Hence, in turn 3, S2 grew impatient with F who provided too much unnecessary, redundant information, and satirized F about whether he intended to play with the marbles with his hands or his mouth. Actually, one sentence could answer S2’s question clearly in turn 1, but in turn 2, F said too many words creating humour. It indicated a conversational implicature that F’s skill of playing marbles was not excellent as he had said before, so F explained too much in turn 2 to prevent S2 from laughing at him.

Wang’s (2014) research showed how the characters in the American Sitcom “Friends” flouted the four maxims of the Cooperative Principle and how the humorous effect was derived. He mentioned that the characters had the tendency to flout the Maxim of Quantity by offering too much information to answer others’ questions. The abundant information leads to humorous effects. He also noted that sometimes, more

information does not guarantee a better understanding for the hearer. In this example, F's explanation in turn 2 provided too much information, making S2 impatient. It flouted the Maxim of Quantity and created humour.

Example 12: (Episode 5, Home with kids 4)

Context: M found that the door was broken again, so she was fretting about it and trying her best to fix the door. At this moment, S1 came and asked M a question.

Turn1:刘星: 我问您一问题。

(S1: I want to ask you a question.)

Turn 2:刘梅: 少问我问题, 不听。

(M: Don't ask me, I don't want to hear it.)

Turn 3:刘星: 我求您了, 您听听成吗? 就一个问题。

(S1: I am begging you. Can you please just listen? It's only one question.)

Turn 4:刘梅: 说, 什么问题。

(M: Alright. What is the question?)

Turn 5:刘星: 您说啊向您这样一个成熟的人, 女的, 如果遇见了一些烦心的事, 您是应该克制呢, 还是急躁呢?

(S1: Let's think about it, if a mature woman like you happened to face some troubles, will you restrain yourself or be irritated?)

Turn 6:刘梅: 我这么回答你吧, 如果这个女人有你这么一个儿子, 她遇什么问题都会急躁。 (Laugh track)

(M: Let me answer it this way, if the woman has a child like you, she will be irritated in encountering any problem.)

In this example, in turn 6, M answered S1's question by giving a redundant answer. From turn 5, it is obvious that S1 could see that M was in a fret because of the broken door (refer to the context in Example 12), thus, S1 wanted to persuade M to not be irritated by flattering M and calling her a "mature woman". However, it could be seen that towards turn 6, S1's efforts failed, because M provide too much information by saying that she would be irritated in encountering any problem because S1 was her son, causing a humorous effect. If M replied "I am still irritated" directly, that would have been clear and brief enough to answer S1's question. In turn 6, M's redundant answer

implicated that she was irritated at that moment and wanted to be left alone.

#### 4.2.1.2 Flouting the Maxim of Quality

The Maxim of Quality indicates that one should not say anything that one thinks is not true. If someone flouts the Maxim of Quality, he or she will say something which is blatantly untrue or lacks adequate evidence. At the same time, conversational implicature could be drawn when the contribution was untrue or lacked adequate evidence. Flouting the Maxim of Quality discovered from the data selected was done by exaggerating, using metaphors, and delivering utterances in a sarcastic tone. The following is an example:

Example 13: (Episode 38, Home with Kids 4)

Context: S1, S2, and D played badminton together, but D always couldn't get the ball and this made S1 and S2 feel disappointed. When they reached home, S1 and S2 complained about D.

Turn 1: 刘星: 小雪, 你这协调性可真够呛。你别老闷屋里看书了, 你多运动运动。

(S1: Xiao Xue (D), look at your poor physical coordination. You should not be staying indoors and just reading books. You do more sports.)

Turn 2: 夏雨: 女生嘛, 小脑不发达。

(S2: Cerebellum of girls are not so advanced compared to boys.)

Turn 3: 夏雪: 小脑不发达也比你没有大脑强。 (Laugh track)

(D: My cerebellum does not develop so well as compared to boys. However, it is still better than you who doesn't have a brain.)

In example 13, in turn 3, D's utterance clearly flouted the Maxim of Quality by expressing that S2 has no brains, which is ridiculous. It is clear that D is really not good at exercising from turn 1. Next in turn 2, S2 teased D that her cerebellum is not completely developed, which suggested to D as a hint that she was a stupid person.



Therefore, in turn 3, D fought back to save face by satirizing S2 as having no brains. As we all know, as a person, S2 cannot live without having brains. D's untrue words in turn 3, flouted the Maxim of Quality by delivering sarcasm. This flout generated a conversational implicature that S2 is more stupid than D, making the audience laugh.

According to Brumack (2006), amongst children, it was noticed that teenagers flouted the Maxims of Quality by using ironic speech or teasing others to make humorous conversations. This is also similar to the example highlighted by Caesilia (2015) in her study about the teacher who was being sarcastic in order to regulate the student's behavior by flouting the Maxim of Quality. Caesilia (2015) stated that the teacher satirized a student who arrived more than ten minutes late to the class by saying "Terrific! You're such a punctual fellow! Welcome to the class."—which was not true and created implicature by telling the student what he should do. In example 4, D could be said to be encountering the same situation, since her sarcasm was untrue and it generated a conversational implicature that S2 was more stupid than herself. Hence, the humour effect was generated by flouting the Maxim of Quality.

Example 14: (Episode 54, Home with Kids 4)

Context: S1 prepared to be a volunteer in Northwest of China and decided to set off in the afternoon. When went home in the evening, S2 and D found that S1 was still staying at home.

Turn1:夏雨: 刘星, 你是不是改变主意, 不想走了啊?

(S2: Liu Xing (S1), did you change your mind? Have you decided not to go anymore?)

Turn 2:刘星: 得了吧, 我改变主意? 我跟你们说, 我刘星决定的事没有完不成的。就算公鸡下了蛋, 我也去, 我也不改变注意。 (Laugh track)

(S1: Come on, I would never change my mind. I told you that if I make the decision to do something, then by all means I will do it. Even if the rooster could lay eggs, I

would still insist on going to the Northwest, I will never change my mind.)

This is another example where the Maxim of Quality was flouted. As it appears in the context, S1 had prepared to leave home in the afternoon in order to be a volunteer, but he did not leave until the evening. In turn 1, S2 just wanted to confirm with S1 whether or not he changed his mind and that maybe S1 did not want to be a volunteer in the Northwest of China anymore. Then, S1's reply in turn 2 flouted the Maxim of Quality by giving an untrue but ridiculous answer: "Even if one day the rooster lays eggs, I still insist on going to the Northwest of China". Common sense tells us that roosters don't lay eggs, hens do and thus, S1 used an untrue statement (the rooster lays eggs) to implicate that he is still prepared to go to the Northwest of China and build his belief: Don't give up. Therefore, S1's utterance in turn 2, "the rooster lays eggs" flouted the Maxim of Quality to create humour.

#### **4.2.1.3 Flouting the Maxim of Relation**

The Maxim of Relation was flouted when a speaker was giving a response or making an observation that was deliberately not relevant to the topic which was being discussed. Its implicature arose when the speaker deviated from the particular topic being asked and discussed. The example of which could be illustrated by changing the subject or failing to keep to the topic (Thomas 1995, p.70). Consider the following examples:

Example 15: (Episode 1, Home with Kids 4)

Context: M showed her own artistic photographs to D, S1, and S2. The three children were amazed, because the woman in the photo was very young and

beautiful and did not look like M.

Turn 1: 夏雨: 这姐姐是谁啊?

(S2: Who is the sister in the photo?)

Turn 2: 刘梅: 谢谢小雨对妈妈的夸奖。谢谢, 谢谢, 谢谢。 (Laugh track)

(M: Thank you, Xiao Yu (S2), for praising your mother. Thank you very much.)

In the example above, it is evident that the answer given by M in turn 2 is irrelevant to S2's question. Although the question in turn 1 was to ask M to reply who the young and beautiful woman was in the photo, M gave an irrelevant answer in turn 2, "Thanks for Xiao Yu (S2)'s affirmation". The answer indicated that "sister" was M. When she heard S2 referred to the woman in the photo as her sister, M was greatly elated because only she clearly knew that the woman in the photo was herself; so in turn 1, S2 who knew nothing about the woman in the photo, had unconsciously praised M. Here, the Maxim of Relation was flouted by M answering S2's question with an irrelevant answer to hint the children in turn 2. This implicated that M was the "sister" in the photo and the humorous effect was created.

This could be compared to Caesilia (2015) who mentioned that the character flouted the Maxim of relation by providing unrelated information on account of giving hints to the hearer, creating a humorous effect in sitcoms. In the example, M provided an irrelevant answer in turn 2 to create humour, flouting the Maxim of Relation and generating a conversation implicature that the "sister" in the photo was M.

Example 16: (Episode 42, Home with Kids 4)

Context: S1 lied to M because he wanted to use M's money to buy a pair of sneakers. S1 secretly bought a pair of Heelys instead of a pair of sneakers. Then, S1 wearing the new Heelys ran down his grandma. One day, when S1 was not at home, S2 wore S1's Heelys to have fun. Unfortunately, M saw the Heelys and she knew that S1 had

lied to her and demanded S2 to tell her the truth.

Turn 1:刘梅: 刘星就打算穿这双鞋参加学校五千米长跑比赛?

(M: Is Liu Xing (S1) going to wear this Heelys to take part in the 5000 meters race?)

Turn 2:夏雨: 估计是。

(S2: Most probably.)

Turn 3:刘梅: 他是不是就穿这双鞋把姥姥撞倒的?

(M: Was this the Heelys that he wore when he run down grandma?)

Turn 4:夏雨: 哎呦, 我困了, 我回去睡觉。(Laugh track)

(S2: Gosh, I'm so sleepy now. I must go to bed.)

In this example, in turn 4 it is evident that the answer given by S2 was not in reply to the question about whether his grandmother was knocked down by S1 or not, as questioned by M in turn 3. In turn 3, from the way M said that she speculated that S1 wore the new Heelys to run down his grandmother, it could be said that S2 faced a problem about whether he should tell M the truth that S1 wore the pair of Heelys and ran down their grandmother, and if he told M the truth, he knew that S1 must be punished by her. Hence, in turn 4, S2 initiated a new topic by saying that he wanted to go sleep in order to avoid the current discussion. It suggested that he purposely answered M's question in that way and tried to hide the truth about S1 running down their grandmother when using the Heelys. Thus in turn 4, S2 answered the question by shifting the focus of M to another matter which was about going to sleep, making the audience laugh and at the same time, flouting the Maxim of Relation.

#### 4.2.1.4 Flouting the Maxim of Manner

If someone flouts the Maxim of Manner, he or she may provide ambiguous, excessive information or speak in a disorderly manner. The conversational implicature will be generated when the speaker's utterances were not brief, ambiguous, and obscure. In the sitcom, this maxim was flouted by either giving unordered, vague or indirect

answers. These are shown in the example below.

Example 17: (Episode 16, Home with Kids 4)

Context: S1 admitted that he stole S2's sunglasses and apologized to S2. However, S2 and F2 were reluctant to forgive S1.

Turn 1: 刘星: 我不都说对不起了嘛, 我也做了自我检讨了。

(S1: I have already said sorry to you and I also reflect on what I did.)

Turn 2: 夏雨: 你一句对不起就得了? 你想想你当初是怎么批评我们俩的。

(S2: Do you think saying sorry is enough? Think about how you criticized us both before.)

Turn 3: 璐璐: 可不是, 把我们批评的非常痛苦。我回到家里晚上连饭都没吃, 就吃了两张肉饼。 (Laugh track)

(F2: I cannot agree more. Because of you severely criticizing us, I was deeply hurt. I didn't even eat anything for dinner, beside two pieces of meat pie.)

Turn 4: 刘星: 肉饼不是饭哪?

(S1: Isn't meat pie a type of food?)

This example showed how F2's unordered utterance in turn 3 flouted the Maxim of Manner by providing an inconsistent and contradictive answer. In turn 3, at the beginning, F2 had said that she ate nothing in the evening because of S1's criticism, but then contradicted it by saying that she ate two pieces of meat pie, flouting the Maxim of Manner. From F2's inconsistent answer, it was suggesting that, although S1 had already said sorry in turn 1, F2 didn't want to forgive S1. F2 tried to hide the truth that she had dinner and deliberately aimed to make S1 feel guilty. Therefore, in turn 4, firstly, F2 said she ate nothing, and then that she ate two pieces meat pie. F2's disjointed utterance flouted the Maxim of Manner which requires people to speak orderly and briefly.

Wang (2014) also gave examples to illustrate that characters flouting the Maxim of Manner to create humour by giving contradictive information. In this example, F2's utterance flouted the Maxim of Manner by s giving an inconsistent answer. These flouts

caused humour and generated a conversational implicature that F did not want to forgive S1, and F tried to make S1 feel guilty forever.

Example 18: (Episode 10. Home with Kids 4)

Context: S2 and S1 would like to take part in summer camp which encouraged them to spend three days to live with monkeys in the zoo. There is no doubt that M strongly opposed their decision.

Turn1: 夏雨: 我要跟他 (刘星) 一起去猴山。

(S2: I would like to go to the Monkey Hill with him (Liu Xing S1).)

Turn 2: 刘梅: 成, 你们俩同盟是吧?

(M: All right. You guys decide to form an alliance, right?)

Turn 3: 夏雨&刘星: 嗯。

(S2& S1: Of course.)

Turn4: 刘梅: 成。你们好好玩去吧。我通知你们一下, 从今天晚上这顿晚饭开始, 就没你们俩的了。

(M: Ok. You guys go and have fun. However, I would like to inform you that starting from tonight, there will no longer be dinner for both of you.)

Turn 5: 夏雨&刘星: 为什么呀?

(S2 & S1: Why?)

Turn 6: 刘梅: 为什么? 这还用问为什么。太明显了, 我只给人做饭, 不给猴做饭。 (Laugh track)

(M: Why? It's needless to ask "why". Apparently, I only cook for human beings, not for monkeys.)

In this example, in turn 6, it could be noticed that M did not directly say that she forbade S1 and S2 to live with monkeys in the zoo but by using a pun, which flouted the Maxim of Manner. Firstly, in turn 4, when M knew S1 and S2 planned to live with monkeys, she clearly mentioned that she will not cook for S1 and S2 from tonight and that she forbade S1 and S2 to have meals. When S1 and S2 felt confused in turn 5, M chose to give an indirect and vague answer in turn 6. M explained that she only cooked for human beings and not for monkeys. This pun generated a conversational implicature that if S1 and S2 were to live with monkeys in the zoo, M would consider them monkeys as well and not human beings anymore. As a result, M would not cook meals

for S1 and S2, because in M's opinions, they became monkeys. On the contrary, if S1 and S2 gave up living with monkeys, M still regarded them as humans and would cook dinner for them. Thus, in turn 6, M's pun was humorous and flouted the Maxim of Manner by not giving a direct answer of "you are forbidden to live with monkeys" as studied by Luo (2006).

#### **4.2.2 Violating the Four Maxims**

Violating a maxim occurred when someone in a conversation failed to observe one or more maxims with the intention to deceive the recipient on purpose. Different from flouting a maxim, violating a maxim will not generate any conversational implicature. People in real life tend to violating the maxim for different reasons, hide the truth, save face, feel jealous, satisfying the hearer, cheer the hearer, building one's belief, avoid hurting the hearer, and convincing the hearer (Caesilia, 2015).

##### **4.2.2.1 Violating the Maxim of Quantity**

The speaker who violates the Maxim of Quantity seems to give insufficient or too much information on purpose in order to mislead the hearer. It will not generate a conversational implicature. In this section, we can see examples that violate the Maxim of Quantity in the sitcom.

Example 19: (Episode 11, Home with Kids 4)

Context: M bought a great calligrapher's work as a decoration. D, S1, and S2 found that calligraphy was terrible and laughed at the calligrapher.

Turn 1: 刘梅: 自己不会欣赏,就在这瞎狂.我告诉你们,欣赏墨宝也是要学的要品味的,要胸怀的。这里面包含着很多容量的呢。

(M: You don't know how to appreciate art and you act like one who knows. Let me tell you this, only those who have knowledge, great taste, and an open mind are able to appreciate the beauty of calligraphy. This calligraphy contains lots of meaning.)

Turn 2: 夏雪: 妈, 您懂啊?

(D: So mom, do you know how to appreciate it?)

Turn3:刘梅: 当然了。

(M: Of course.)

Turn 4:夏雪: 那您懂, 你说说它哪好?

(D: Since you know how to, could you please enlighten us on its beauty?)

Turn 5:刘梅: 它.....多好啊。 (Laugh track)

(M: It is .....sooooo beautiful.)

This is an example where the Maxim of Quantity was violated in turn 5 by M who provided less information to appreciate the calligraphy. In turn 4, D's question "could you please enlighten us on its beauty?" clearly asked M to elaborate which part of the calligraphy is good, since M said that she can appreciate the calligraphy in turn 3. However, in return, D received an unsatisfying answer from M. In turn 5, all M said was "It is .....sooooo beautiful" instead of giving enough details to appreciate why the calligrapher's work is beautiful. For example, M could have said, "The calligraphy is vigorous and forceful" to identify its beauty. In turn 5, M purposely provided less information to reply to D's question, creating humour and making the audience doubt if M really knew how to appreciate the beauty of calligraphy. In this case, M may have just wanted to save face as a "knowledgeable" mother.

Likewise, Rochmawati (2012) found that in the jokes, when people violated the Maxim of Quantity and did not provide what addressees were required, humour usually hid in the speakers' absurd responses. Hence, M's absurd utterance in turn 5 violated the Maxim of Quantity by offering too little information about the appreciation of calligraphy and created humour.



Example 20: (Episode 1, Home with Kids 4)

Context: M wanted to take artistic photography. But F thought that she's too old for that.

Turn 1: 夏东海: 我觉得,都这岁数了, 拍什么艺术照, 是吧?

(F: I think that since you are not young anymore, there is no need to take artistic photography, right?)

Turn 2: 刘梅: 夏东海, 我哪岁数了? 我怎么就不能拍艺术照? 你回答我, 怎么回事?

(M: Xia Donghai (F), are you telling me to quit? Why can't I take artistic photography? Answer me and tell me the reason.)

Turn 3: 夏东海: 不, 那个, 你千万别误会我。我绝对是为你好, 你想想, 这岁数的人, 一般骨骼都变成那样那个了.....然后一脸的开花褶子.....你到时候拍出来自己一看, 多伤心。(Laugh track)

(F: No, ummmm, don't get me wrong. What I suggested is actually good for you. Just think about it, since now you're old, your body will not be the same anymore...and wrinkles appeared on your face... you will be sad when you see the photo.)

In the example, F violated the Maxim of Quantity by saying too much in order to avoid hurting M's feeling. In turn 2, M questioned F to tell the reason why F disapproved of M taking artistic photography. In turn 3, F gave a long and indirect answer "what I suggested is actually good for you. Just think about it, since now you're old, your body will not be the same anymore...and wrinkles appeared on your face...". Here, F's explanation violated the Maxim of Quantity by offering too much information about telling M reasons because F used so many words to describe M's old face instead of expressing a clear idea: M was too old to take artistic photography. In a nutshell, all M should have said in turn 3 was "Because you are old and not beautiful anymore." Although F's original intention was to not make M angry and avoid hurting her feelings, his detailed explanation in turn 4 in trying to do a seemingly clever thing turns out to be a foolish one instead and makes the audience laugh.

#### 4.2.2.2 Violating the Maxim of Quality

When the speakers contribute false or untrue information on purpose, they may violate the Maxim of Quality for different reasons: hiding the truth, saving face, feeling jealous, satisfying the hearer, and convincing the hearer (Caesilia, 2015). Different from flouting the Maxim of Quality, violating the Maxim of Quality cannot generate a conversational implicature.

Example 21: (Episode 5, Home with Kids 4)

Context: The main door of S1's house was broken. S1's good friend, F1, came to find S1 to have fun. F1 entered the house without knocking, and walked towards the refrigerator to find some food to eat.

Turn1:刘星: 你怎么随便进我们家门啊?

(S1: How can you just simply sneak into my house without my permission?)

Turn 2:鼠标:你们家门坏了, 没锁。

(F1: The door was broken and it wasn't locked.)

Turn 3:刘星: 哦, 对了。我们家门坏了。那你也不能随便翻我们家冰箱啊。

(S1: Eh, right. Our main door has broken. However, you can't just simply open our refrigerator.)

Turn 4:鼠标: 我不是想看看你们家冰箱门坏没坏嘛。 (Laugh track)

(F1: I just want to check whether the door of your refrigerator is broken as well.)

In example 21, F1's utterance violated the Maxim of Quality by offering an untrue answer to S1 in turn 4, when F1 was asked that why he raided S1's refrigerator without his permission. In turn 1 and 2, we knew that F1 slipped into S1's house since the door was broken. In turn 3, S1 was not satisfied that F1 raided the fridge without his permission. In order to make S1 calm down and save face, F1 deliberately withheld the truth that he aimed to find something to eat in S1's refrigerator in turn 4. Then, F1 gave an idea to S1 that he helped S1 to check the door of refrigerator, out of kindness, which makes the audience laugh. From the way F1 explained it, it was evident that he tried to mislead S1 and told a lie, violating the Maxim of Quality without conversational

implicature and created a humorous effect. Lu's (2011) findings revealed that on the surface, the speakers violated the Maxim of Quality by telling lies in order to hide the truth but they did not lead to the failure of communication. On the contrary, they introduced a sense of humour. Here, F1 violated the Maxim of Quality by telling lies, making the audience laugh.

Example 22: (Episode 6, Home with Kids 4)

Context: It was the time for dinner. Everyone sat at the table except S2. S2 was standing near the table because his hip was hurt by darts. But S2 was too shamed to tell his family the truth. Hence, everyone felt weird about S2's unusual behavior.

Turn1:夏东海: 坐下吃啊。

(F: Please sit down and eat.)

Turn 2:夏雨: 坐不下。

(S2: I cannot sit now.)

Turn3:刘梅:为什么?

(M: Why? )

Turn 4:夏雨:因为我实在是太激动了, 有这么多好吃的。(Laugh track)

(S2: Because.... I am too excited as there are so many delicious foods on the table.)

Turn 5:刘梅: 呵, 你激动就坐不下了。赶紧坐下吃。快点。

(M: Haha, once you are excited, you cannot sit down anymore. Quickly sit down and eat. Hurry up.)

Turn 6:夏雨:我还是坐不下。

(S2: I still cannot sit.)

Turn 7:刘梅: 为什么?

(M: Why?)

Turn 8:夏雨: 我这个胳膊太短够不着。(Laugh track)

(S2: My arms are too short to reach.)

Turn 9:刘梅: 怎么你每天都够得着, 就今天够不着。

(M: How come you can reach them every other day, but not today?)

In this example, S2's utterance in turn 4 and 8 violated the Maxim of Quality by providing falsehood. The responds in turn 4 and 8 did not truly explain why S2 cannot sit down to have dinner but they were more to being deceptive to M's questions. S2 was shamed to tell his family that his hip were too painful to sit down, thus he chose to lie

that because there were so many delicious foods on the table, he was too excited to sit when saw too much delicious food in turn 4. However, S2 did not successfully mislead M as M still hastened him to sit down. Reluctantly, this time, S2 gave a ridiculous reason that his arms were too short to reach the table in turn 8 so as to mislead M. This makes people laugh, because from turn 9, it is strange that S2 can reach the dish every other day except for that day itself. Obviously, S2's ridiculous response to M's inquiry was liable to mislead by untruthfully putting the blame on his arms, which violated the Maxim of Quality to generate humour.

#### 4.2.2.3 Violating the Maxim of Relation

If speakers violate the Maxim of Relation, they expect to change the topic, or the speakers tend to stop the conversation. Different from flouting the Maxim of Relation, violating the Maxim of Relation does not generate any conversational implicature.

Example 23: (Episode 61, Home with Kids 4)

Context: M was suffering from menopause, so she was easily irritated and made angry. One day, she quarreled with a man outside. Upon returning home, she complained to F, D, and S1. M hoped that her husband and children could do something as an act of justice for her.

Turn 1: 刘梅: 刘星, 这个时候你是不是应该站起来, 跑出去, 为妈妈打抱不平啊, 说“谁啊谁啊谁啊, 谁欺负我妈了”?

(M: Liu Xing (S1), shouldn't you stand up for me now and run out, saying “Who? Who? Who bullied my mom?”)

Turn 2: 刘星: 我觉得我还是回屋复习一会吧。 (Laugh track)

(S1: I think it's better for me to stay at room and do some revision.)

Turn 3: 刘梅: 小雪, 你是不是应该替妈妈说几句话啊?

(M: Xiao Xue (D), shouldn't you speak up for your mom?)

Turn 4: 夏雪: 嗯, 我觉得我也应该回屋看会书了。 (Laugh track)

(D: Eh, I think that I should stay in my room and read books.)

Turn 5: 刘梅: 夏东海, 你老婆在外面可是受人欺负了.....

(M: Xia Donghai (F), your wife was bullied by a man outside.....)

Turn 6: 夏东海: 这电视看时间久了, 我发现脑袋特别疼。真的, 我回屋躺一会。脑袋怎么回事? (Laugh track)

(F: I spent too much time watching TV, and I feel I have a terrible headache. Yes, I think I had better return to my room and lay in bed for a while. What's wrong with my head?)

This example showed how the Maxim of Relation could be violated by uttering about other topics to evade the current situation. From the context, it is noted that M was bullied by a man outside, so she had hoped that her family could support her. In turn 1, M was questioning S1 for not backing her when she was bullied. S1 chose to give an irrelevant reply that he had better return to his room and review the lessons in turn 2, so as to get away from his mother who was menopausal. Then, M turned to D for comfort. Like S1, D also replied that she had to study in turn 4 and ran away because she clearly knew not to irritate M when she was in such a bad mood. At last, M had to pin her hope on her husband, F. Being afraid of M's bad temper, in turn 6, F had an excuse to escape as well. All the family members avoid M by using ridiculous reasons at the same time, and this provided amusement to the audience. In the example, F, D, and S1 violated the Maxim of Relation by talking about other affairs when answering M's question.

Rochmawati (2012) stated that the humour strategy violating the Maxim of Relation employed was by making irrelevant statements and changing the topic. The speakers would use the strategy to avoid being put in an awkward situation to answer some embarrassing questions. From the way F, D, and S1 answered M, it could be concluded that they deliberately gave irrelevant answers to avoid answering M's embarrassing questions as well as to avoid annoying her, creating a humorous effect.

Example 24: (Episode 26, Home with Kids 4)

Context: S2 didn't pass his exam. In the evening, M was persistent in asking S1 about his grades when they were having dinner. However, S2 kept avoiding the question because he was afraid of receiving a punishment from M.

Turn1:刘梅: 小雨,妈已经问你两遍了。考试到底多少分啊?

(M: Xiao Yu (S2), I asked you twice. How many marks did you get in the exam?)

Turn 2:夏雨: 妈, 这菜太好吃了。(Laugh track)

(S2: Mom, the dish is so delicious.)

Turn 3:夏雪: 这招刘星早就使过了。不顶用。

(D: Liu Xing (S1) have already done what you did just now. It is no use.)

Turn 4:夏东海: 就是, 考多少就说嘛。甭管好坏, 要敢于面对嘛。

(F: I agree, you should tell us your grade. No matter it is good or bad, you should face your grade.)

Turn 5:刘梅: 就是。别老跟黄花鱼似的老溜边。你到底考多少分啊?

(M: Yes. Don't be a yellow croaker which always run away. How many marks did you get?)

Turn 6:夏东海: 这菜还真是挺好吃的啊。我不是为了打岔啊。(Laugh track)

(F: The dish really tastes good. I didn't mean to change the topic.)

Turn 7:夏雨: 世上只有爸爸好。

(S2: Dad is the best all over the world.)

This example showed the way S2 and F gave irrelevant answers to M's question, which violated the Maxim of Relation. In turn 1, M wondered what S2's grade was. However, in turn 2, S2's response which M received in return was not as she expected. S2 changed the current topic to appreciating her dishes. In fact, S2 did not pass the examination (refer to the context in example 24) but he covered the truth with such utterances in order to avoid punishment. It did not work because in turn 5, M still asked S2 what his grade was. This time, in turn 6, which was taken by F, was irrelevant to the topic being discussed in the current conversation. F was also trying to help S2 to evade the "grade" topic from M by uttering the irrelevant topic which was about appreciating the dishes as well. Thus, S2 and F replied to M's question by diverting the focus to other topics in order to avoid from answering how many marks S2 received in the examination. S2 and F's utterance in turn 2 and 6 resulted in humour, and by doing that,

S2 and F violated the Maxim of Relation.

#### 4.2.2.4 Violating the Maxim of Manner

When speakers are obscure and unclear to the point that the message is indecipherable, it is considered as instances of violating the Maxim of Manner. This maxim is violated when speakers are obscure and ambiguous on purpose, and the utterances tend to be long-winded and not arranged in an orderly fashion. Different from flouting the Maxim of Manner, violating the Maxim of Manner will not generate a conversational implicature as the following examples demonstrate.

Example 25: (Episode 4, Home with Kids 4)

Context: F's mouse malfunctioned, so he wanted to borrow from S2. Unfortunately, S2's computer was sold by S1. S1 asked S2 to keep the secret and would buy S2 three boxes of chocolate ice cream as a reward. Hence, S2 had to turn down F's request. M was angry with S2's behavior.

Turn 1: 刘梅: 怎么回事啊, 小雨?

(M: Is there something wrong, Xia Yu (S2)?)

Turn 2: 夏雨: 那个, 妈, 那个, 刘星啊, 他把这电脑送典当行了, 但是我只要了三盒巧克力味的冰淇淋。我什么都不知道。(Laugh track)

(S2: Eh, mom, it's because Liu Xing (S1) pawned my computer for cash, but I just asked him to buy me three boxes of chocolate ice cream in return. I know nothing about it.)

In this example, S2's utterance violated the Maxim of Manner by making the utterance with unordered information. In turn 1, when asked for the reason for refusing F's request, first of all, S2 mentioned that S1 pawned his computer for cash in turn 2, so he could not lend F his mouse. However, S2 remembered that S1 had promised him to keep his secret and had promised to buy three boxes of chocolate ice cream for S2 as a reward, prompting S2 to add on, "I know nothing about it". Since S2's response in turn

2 was inconsistent and disordered, he stated that he knew nothing. The answer given by S2 in turn 2 tried to explain why he did not want to lend F his mouse, but at the same time he had also considered to hide the fact that S1 sold his computer for money, making S2's utterance in a mess. S2 violated the Maxim of Manner because he did not construct his utterance in a good order, confusing the hearers, and making the audience laugh. According to Lu (2011), people sometimes intentionally violate the Maxim of Manner by using tactfully ambiguous word polysemy or by giving contradictory information, making their utterances not brief and orderly, for the achievement of some special purpose, such as humour or to hide the truth. Here, S2 spoke in a disorderly way with the purpose of helping S1 to conceal the truth, violating the Maxim of Manner to create humour.

Example 26: (Episode 17, Home with Kids 4)

Context: S1 wanted M to buy the concert tickets for him, so S1 helped M to wash the clothes manually to get on her good side.

Turn1: 夏雪: 洗衣服用洗衣机洗不就完了? 干吗用手洗?

(D: Why not wash the clothes by using washing machine? Why do you need to wash manually?)

Turn2: 刘星: 没听老妈说吗? 手洗的比洗衣机洗的干净。再说了这样不是显得我更努力一些嘛。

(S1: Do you know that manually washed clothes is cleaner than the clothes that is washed by washing machine? Besides, this can show my effort and sincerity.)

Turn3: 夏雪: 真努力。太阳都从西边出来了。那你肯定有什么企图吧。

(D: How hard-working you are, even the sun is rising from the west today. I know that you must have a hidden purpose.)

Turn 4: 刘星: 小雪, 你想哪里去了。你以为我这么努力是想管老妈要周杰伦演唱会的票吗? 才不是呢。我是想管妈要点小钱, 买几张周杰伦演唱会的票。

(Laugh track)

(S1: Xiao Xue (D), don't take this in the wrong way. Do you really think that I do this is to ask mom to buy me the ticket to go for Jay Chou's concert? You are wrong. I just want to ask for some money from mom, then I can buy the ticket to go for Jay Chou's concert by myself.)



In example 26, S1's answer to D's question was tedious and chaotic. From turn 1 and 2, it is noted that S1 was washing clothes for mom. In turn 3, D guessed that S1's motivation is not pure, hence she wanted S1 to tell the truth. By uttering unordered information in turn 4, firstly, S1 denied D's guess and stated that he did not want to let M buy the ticket for Jay Chou's concert for himself. However, in the following sentence, S1 admitted that he aimed to make M give him some money to buy the ticket for Jay Chou's concert. Undoubtedly, S2's answer in turn 4 violated the Maxim of Manner because it was contradictory and not clear, interfering with D's comprehension and making people feel funny and humorous. Thus, S1 violated the Maxim of Manner to create a humorous effect.

#### 4.2.3 Infringing the Four Maxims

A speaker, infringing a maxim, fails to observe a maxim because of his or her imperfect linguistic performance (children, foreigners) or impairment (drunkenness, nervousness, excitement). It is not often for the characters in Home with Kids (Season 4) to infringe a maxim, therefore, only two examples were found: one was analysed in Section 3.8 and the other one is shown here.

Example 27: (Episode 18, Home with Kids 4)

Context: At night, M and F went out for a drink. When they were home, they saw the children were sitting on the couch waiting for them to come home.

Turn 1: 刘梅: Children.

(M: Children.)

Turn 2: 夏雪: 确实有情况。

(S2: How unusual, something must have happened.)

Turn 3: 刘梅: Good morning. (Laugh track)

(M: Good morning).

Turn 4:刘星: 妈, 妈, 妈。这怎么说也不能算是 morning。  
(S1: Mom, mom, mom. It is not morning now.)

In this example, M seemed to be drunk and lost her mind, hence, she said “Good morning” to her children in turn 3, instead of using Chinese “早安 (zao an)” which is an unusual action for a Chinese person. Actually, it was night at that time (refer to context), but M lost track of time and had her days and nights completely reversed, which made people laugh. Here, M infringed the Maxim of Quality, because of her drunkenness, which generated humorous effect.

#### **4.2.4 Opting Out of the Four Maxims**

A speaker opting out of a maxim indicates an unwillingness to be cooperative, although he does not want to appear to be uncooperative. Opting out by changing the topic and discussion could also be considered under opting out of a maxim. If the characters in “Home with Kids (Season 4)” chose to be uncooperative or said “I have nothing to say” by opting out a maxim, the conversation cannot continue, creating a humorous effect.

As Caesilia (2015) stated, opting out of a maxim in the situation comedy does not appear to be humorous. Rather it appeared to be a disappointment or curiosity for the hearer. Therefore, the typical occasion for opting out Grice’s (1975) maxims were not found in “Home with Kids (Season 4)”.

#### **4.2.5 Suspending the Four Maxims**

In certain circumstances, it is not necessary to observe the maxims due to cultural-specification. When one suspends a maxim, it is understood that what is uttered is not completely true or that there are things the speaker ought to not say such as taboo words.

“We find similar instance of the suspension of the Maxim of Quality in the case of funeral orations and in the case of obituaries, of the Maxim of Manner in the case of poetry, of the Maxim of Quantity in the case of telegrams, telexes and some international phone calls. It is hard to find any convincing examples in which the Maxims of Relation is suspended.” (Thomas, 1995)

In the Chinese sitcom “Home with Kids (Season 4)”, the characters have never encountered situations such as funeral orations, poetry, telegrams, telexes, and some international phone calls. Hence, it is hard to find any convincing example suspending Grice’s (1975) maxims. Likewise, Sri (2006) concluded that suspending Grice’s (1975) maxims rarely occurred in creating humour. In terms of this Chinese sitcom, humour cannot be created by suspending a maxim.

#### **4.3 The Types of Maxims that are not observed**

After analysing humorous extracts happening in the living room, the second research question will be answered. In this part, a total 86 humorous extracts from “Home with Kids (Season 4)” can be further divided into four groups according to the

four Grice's maxims. The distribution of the data is presented in the following Table 4.1.

**Table. 4.1** Comparison of Non-observance of Grice's (1975) Maxims in "Home with Kids (Season 4)"

Four maxims	Flouting	Violating	Infringing	Opting out	Suspending	Non-observance	
						Number	Percentage
The Maxim of Quantity	6	2	0	0	0	8	8.3%
The Maxim of Quality	27	22	2	0	0	51	53.1%
The Maxim of Relation	8	8	0	0	0	16	16.7%
The Maxim of Manner	10	11	0	0	0	21	21.9%
Total	51	43	2	0	0	96	100%

The Table above indicates that the characters' utterances in "Home with Kids (Season 4)" failed to observe all the four maxims. Amongst the 96 examples of non-observance of the four maxims, the Maxim of Quality is the most frequently not observed. 51 examples failed to observe the Maxim of Quality, taking up 53.1% of the total. Because children, as the main characters in the sitcom, often tease or satirize others (refer to Example 13) and they also say something untrue in order to save face (refer to Example 21). This is similar to what Brumark (2006) stated, children flouted the Maxim of Quality by using ironic speech or teasing others. The second most

frequently non-observed maxim is the Maxim of Manner accounting for 21.9% of the total. The reason is that the characters sometimes use unordered language (Luo, 2006) or provide contradictory information to try to hide the truth (refer to Example 25). This is similar to Lu's (2011) and Wang's (2014) findings, which showed that people sometimes failed to observe the Maxim of Manner by tactfully using ambiguous words or giving contradictory information to achieve a special purpose such as creating humour or hiding the truth. The third is the Maxim of Relation which makes up 16.7%. In the Chinese sitcom, the characters occasionally failed to observe the Maxim of Relation, because they tend to avoid putting themselves into an awkward situation. Thus, when this happens, they choose to change the topic (refer to Example 16). This complies with the findings of Rochmawati (2012) who said people often change the topic in order to avoid answering awkward questions. The Maxim of Quantity occurs the least frequently, taking up 8.3%. This is because that in this sitcom, the characters seldom provide too much or little information to answer the question in order to save face or to hide the truth (refer to Example 11). Luo (2006) stated that the grandparents often flouted the Maxim of Quantity by saying or explaining too much in order to avoid hurting their grandchildren's feeling to show their concern and love. Different from Luo's (2006) findings, in "Home with Kids (Season 4), the parents criticized their children by complain too much without caring about children's feeling instead of explaining too much (refer to Example 12).

From the findings of the Table, it is easy to find that:

1. The non-observance of the Maxim of Quality plays a leading role in the generation

of humour in this sitcom, which is same as Caesilia's (2015) findings. In the Chinese sitcom, with regard to the non-observance of the Maxim of Quality, most of the examples flout this maxim, comprising 27 of the total. The second most frequently occurring non-observance is violating this maxim ( 22 examples), while the third most frequent non-observance is infringing this maxim with only 2 examples. It should be noted that Caesilia (2015) found that violating the Maxim of Quality is the most frequent, when flouting this maxim is the second most frequent in American sitcom.

2. The non-observance of the Maxim of Relation, the Maxim of Manner, also makes a contribution to generating humour in "Home with Kids (Season 4)". The Maxim of Relation was not observed 16 times in all. Amongst these examples, this maxim is flouted 8 times and violated 8 times, whilst infringing, opting out, and suspending this maxim makes no contribution. The Maxim of Manner was not observed 21 times in total. Specifically, the maxim is flouted 10 times, whilst there are 11 examples in the chosen data violating this maxim. Infringing, opting out, and suspending this maxim are not employed. It is in line with Emma (2005)'s findings, which described that the Maxim of Relation and Manner played a role in creating humour in sitcoms and flouting these two maxims occurred more frequently than violating.
3. The Maxim of Quantity makes a small contribution to create humor, because it is the least occurred in humorous conversations. To be more specific, there were 8

examples that failed to observe the Maxim of Quantity, in which examples of 6 flouts this maxim and 2 violates this maxim, while fringing and opting out the Maxim of Quantity are not employed. Likewise, Caesilia (2015) and Emma (2005) also found that flouting the Maxim of Quantity occurred more frequently than violating this maxim. However, both of them pointed that the Maxims of Quantity was not the least occurred in American sitcoms which is different from the findings of the current study. The reason could be that different cultures between China and America cause different ways of speaking.

It is noted that amongst the five types of non-observance of Grice's (1975) Maxims, flouting Grice's (1975) maxims is the most important way to create humour, because there are 45 examples flouting Grice's (1975) maxims in the Chinese sitcom. The second and third important ones are violating and infringing Grice's (1975) maxim. Opting out and suspending Grice's (1975) maxims have no contribution to creating a humorous effect in the Chinese sitcom.

From the analysis above, the two research questions are solved:

1. In the Chinese sitcom, Grice's Cooperative Principle maxims were not observed by flouting, violating and infringing.
2. All of Grice's maxims were not observed to create humour and the most frequent type of maxim that is not observed is the Maxim of Quality.

#### 4.4 Summary

In this chapter, the data analysis is provided. From the analysis, it was found that the characters in the chosen data failed to observe all of Grice's (1975) maxims to generate a humorous effect. For example, flouting the Maxim of Quality creates humour. From Table. 4.1, it shows that all the Grice's (1975) maxims are non-observed. Flouting and violating the maxims play an important role in creating humour, whilst infringing the Maxim of Quality makes a small contribution and opting out the maxims is not used. The Maxim of Quality is the most frequent type of maxim used to create humour. In terms of the five types of non-observance of Grice's (1975) maxims, flouting, violating, and infringing Grice's (1975) maxims are used to create humour.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This study is an analysis of creating humour in the selected data focusing on non-observance of four maxims of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle. This chapter discusses the results presented in the previous chapter. This chapter also concludes which type of non-observance of Grice's (1975) four maxims is strategically used and what types of maxims are not observed to create humour in the Chinese sitcom "Home with Kids (Season 4)". This is followed by a summary of limitations in the current study and some recommendations for future studies. Lastly, the chapter discusses the implications and contributions of the current study. Finally, a brief summary is provided at the end of this chapter.

#### **5.2 Discussion of Research Question 1: "What types of non-observance of Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP) maxims are used in the language of humour in 'Home with Kids (Season 4)'?"**

The first research question "What types of non-observance of Grice's maxim are used to create humour in the Chinese sitcom 'Home with Kids (Season 4)'?" looks at applying the five types (flouting, violating, infringing, opting out, suspending) of non-observance of Grice's (1975) four maxims to create a humorous effect in the Chinese sitcom.

From the analysis, it was found that not all the five types of non-observance of Grice's (1975) maxims were used to create humour in the Chinese sitcom. The findings revealed that flouting, violating, and infringing the maxims contributed in creating humour, whilst opting out and suspending the maxims had no influence on creating humour in the Chinese sitcom.

To be specific, flouting Grice's (1975) maxims which occurred 51 times, represented the most frequently used amongst the five types of non-observance of Grice's (1975) four maxims. The second most frequent type was violating the maxims; it appeared in the selected conversations 43 times, followed by infringing the maxims which only accounted for 2 times. These three types of non-observances lead to the audience's amusement and comicality, yet it is almost certain that humorous outcomes usually arise from flouting and violating the maxims compared with infringing the maxims which are less employed.

This was very similar to the findings in the research conducted by Caesilia (2015). She also found that flouting and violating the maxims played an important role in creating humour, whilst infringing had little influence on creating humour in the selected conversations. It should be noted that Caesilia (2015) stated that opting out Grice's (1975) maxims does not appear to be humorous. Rather it appeared to be a disappointment or curiosity for the hearer, which was the same as the finding of the Chinese sitcom "Home with Kids (Season 4)" (refer to Section 4.2.4).

According to Sri (2006), suspending Grice's (1975) maxims means hiding the truth because of the cultural code and is rarely occurred. Similarly, in the Chinese sitcom, suspending the maxims was not found to create humour (refer to Section 4.2.5).

### **5.3 Research Question 2: “What types of Grice’s maxims are not observed to create humour in ‘Home with Kids (Season 4)’?”**

This section discusses the second research question, which concerns Grice's (1975) maxims not being observed in the creation of humour. According to the analysis in Chapter 4, it is found that all the four maxims, “the Maxim of Quantity”, “the Maxim of Quality”, “the Maxim of Relation”, and “the Maxim of Manner” as listed by Grice (1975) are non-observed in the sitcom.

For instance, the Maxim of Quality in Section 4.2.1.2, discovered from the examples were flouted by creating implicature, exaggerating, saying something untrue, delivering a sarcastic tone and using metaphor (Caesilia, 2015). The speaker misrepresented his/her information in order to make the hearer understand the intended meaning of an utterance. Its conversational implicature could be drawn when the contribution was untrue or lack of adequate evidences.

In Section 4.2.2.2, the Maxim of Quality could be violated by sincerely lying to hide the truth or informing without adequate proof. Tupan and Natalia (2008) said that the violation of the Maxim of Quality occurred when the speaker deliberately spelt out untruthful utterances for different reasons: hiding the truth, saving face, building one's

belief, avoiding hurting the hearer, and convincing the hearer. They added that the violation of the maxim of quality was executed by speaking untruths or lying, overstating, understating, and lacking evidence.

In relation to the Maxim of Quantity, in Section 4.2.1.1, the speakers were prone to flout this maxim by offering too much information with implicature in the selected conversations. According to Leech (1983), the speaker gave incomplete or too many words when the speaker was speaking. Its implicature was implied when the speaker conveyed messages that were less informative or the information which was too much and unnecessary.

In Section 4.2.2.1, the examples would suffice to describe how the speaker deliberately violated the Maxim of Quantity by giving less or more information than required with the intention to make the hearer not fully understood the actual situation. The Maxim of Quantity could be violated by giving less or more information with the intent of deceiving.

The instances in which the Maxim of Relation (refer to Section 4.2.1.3) was flouted when the speaker was giving a response or making an observation that was deliberately not relevant to the topic. Its conversational implicature arose when the speaker deviated from the particular topic being asked and discussed. The Maxim of Relation could be flouted by changing a new topic with conversational implicature to be inferred (Thomas, 1995).

In Section 4.2.2.3, the analysis showed that the speaker's answer or response was by no means relevant to another speaker's question. One reason for this answer could be the fact that the speaker was trying to evade the current topic possessed by the other speakers. The Maxim of Relation could be violated by straying from the subject being discussed with the intention to exclude from current conversation (Khosravizadeh & Sadehvandi, 2011)

Based on the analysis in Section 4.2.1.4, the Maxim of Manner was flouted by constructing unordered language and contradictive information (Thomas, 1995). Its conversational implicature occurred when the utterances were not brief, and were ambiguous and obscure. According to Thomas (1995), the Maxim of Manner could be flouted by constructing obscure language, using unordered language, contradictive information and created a conversational implicature which made the participants look for an additional set of meanings.

According to the analysis of Section 4.2.2.4, the Maxim of Manner was violated when the speaker intentionally refrained from being cooperative in their conversation by constructing ambiguous, unordered, and undirected information to cause the hearer to misunderstand, or to achieve specific purposes. Likewise, Tupan and Natalia (2008) mentioned that the Maxim of Manner could be violated by being intentionally ambiguous and unordered.

## **5.4 Implications**

This study is an investigation of humour in a Chinese sitcom. Data were collected from a Chinese sitcom “Home with Kids (Season 4)”. The Chinese sitcoms are loaded with humorous language, cultural knowledge and social values, and so they contain the ideal materials for both language and culture learning to the non-native Mandarin learners.

Concretely, Chinese sitcoms have the following advantages in providing learners of Mandarin as a second or foreign language with the best native-like environment. First, language and culture are interwoven in sitcoms so it is good to develop learners’ communicative and linguistic competence. Second, sitcoms immerse language study within stories and real-life situations, and can not only help to provide a better language-learning atmosphere but also make language-learning more interesting, enabling the learned things to be more firmly remembered.

As pointed out by Shifman (2007), humour could be a key to comprehend social and cultural processes, and by incorporating humour in the learning of Chinese as a second language to non-native Mandarin learners can benefit them greatly by understanding the differences of the humorous Chinese language used by native speakers while also gaining an appreciation for humour in different cultures.

## **5.5 Recommendations for Future Study**

There are several recommendations to improve the current study. First of all, due to data limitations, the current study only covers a small sample, which is not adequate

enough to support statistics for comprehensive results or findings. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized. Future studies are called for to use a large quantity of data to enable data to be analysed more comprehensively.

Secondly, future studies are encouraged to conduct research on humour by taking other factors into account such as lexical, gender difference, culture difference amongst other factors; all of which may have an impact on creating humour. Moreover, future studies could be carried out in examining humour in different places such as in the classroom, office, and courtrooms which could all yield similar or very different findings.

The last but certainly not the least is the third recommendation which points towards theoretical framework. Humour is not only created from the non-observance of the Grice's (1975) cooperative principle and its maxims. Future studies are called for to apply other theories to analyse the humour such as the Politeness Principle, the use of irony, hyperboles, and Speech Acts.

## **5.6 Contributions of the Study**

Firstly, this study investigated how humour was created in Chinese sitcoms, covering the details that analysed humour by using the five types of non-observance of Grice's (1975) four maxims. This will contribute knowledge to a pragmatics study, especially related to Grice's (1975) four maxims and verbal humour in general. Moreover, it can be used as an academic reference about a pragmatic analysis in the

language based on sitcoms. Additionally, it will help learners of Mandarin as a second or foreign language to understand the way that Chinese speakers express humour. Secondly, this study examined creating humour in a Chinese sitcom by using five types of non-observance Grice's (1975) four maxims with further exploration of which types of non-observance and which maxim plays an important role in creating humour. There are few studies that have been done on humour in Chinese sitcoms by applying the five types of non-observance Grice's (1975) four maxims. Therefore, theoretically, this study shall contribute in expanding the scope of studies on humour in the Chinese language.

### **5.7 Summary**

This study answered two research questions asked in Chapter One: "What types of non-observance of Grice's (1975) maxims are used to create humour?" and "What maxims are not observed to create humour in the Chinese sitcom "Home with Kids (Season 4)"?" Data were collected from a Chinese sitcom made in Mainland China. The data suggested that three types of non-observance (flouting, violating, and infringing) were used and all the maxims were non-observed to create humour in the Chinese sitcom. From the data analysis, it shows that all the Grice's (1975) maxims are not observed. Flouting and violating the maxims play an important role in creating humour, whilst infringing the Maxim of Quality makes a small contribution and opting out the maxims is not used. The Maxim of Quality is the most frequently used to create humour.



This study is a small contribution to the knowledge on humour in a Chinese speaking context (a Chinese sitcom in this case) and aims to expand the scope of the current existing studies on humour. More studies are recommended to examine humour in the Chinese context, where visual humour can be taken into consideration and include facial expression and verbal tone; so that a better understanding regarding the topic of humour can be further developed.

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