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Term Paper

Humour as a result of flouting conversational maxims

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
CHAPTER ONE. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF HUMOUR	6
1.1. General characteristics of humour as an object of rhetoric	6
1.2. Pragmatic account of humour	7
1.3. Conversational maxims as a methodological tool for the study of humour ..	9
Conclusions to Chapter One	11
CHAPTER TWO. HUMOUROUS SITUATIONS AS A RESULT OF FLOUTING CONVERSIONAL MAXIMS: A STUDY OF COMIC STRIPS...	12
2.1. Flouting the maxim of quality.....	12
2.2. Flouting the maxim of relevance	15
2.3. Flouting the maxim of quantity.....	18
2.4. Flouting the maxim of manner.....	20
Conclusions to Chapter Two	21
GENERAL CONCLUSIONS	23
RÉSUMÉ	24
LIST OF REFERENCE MATERIALS	25
LIST OF ILLUSTRATION MATERIALS	27

INTRODUCTION

Humour is an important part of our daily lives, and it is often used to entertain, persuade, or relieve stress. Humour can take many forms, including jokes, cartoons, satire, and memes. Memes, in particular, have become a popular medium for humorous expression on social media platforms.

The **topicality** of this coursework lies in the increasing use of memes as a means of humorous expression in social media platforms. As memes continue to gain popularity, there is a growing interest in understanding the nature and function of humour in social interaction, and how it can be analyzed using linguistic and pragmatic theories. The focus on flouting conversational maxims in this coursework is particularly relevant, as it provides a framework for analyzing how humour can be created through the violation of cooperative communication principles.

The **object** of the study is humorous situations.

The **subject** of the study is flouting conversational maxims in humorous situations.

The **aim** of coursework is to study the mechanisms of creating humorous situations using the example of memes that arise as a result of flouting of conversational maxims.

- 1) achieving the goal of the research involves the following **tasks**:
- 2) to investigate the theoretical foundations of understanding humour as an object of rhetoric and to find out the characteristic features of humour.
- 3) to characterize the pragmatic account of humour.
- 4) to analyze the main conversational maxims and their functioning in rhetorical relationships.
- 5) to analyze how the flouting of conversational maxims affects the creation of humorous situations using the example of memes.
- 6) to systematize the research results.

To achieve this goal, the following **methods** were used in the study: continuous sampling method (for selecting examples), analysis and synthesis

method (for analyzing scientific literature and memes), descriptive method (applied in the theoretical part), statistical analysis and systematization (for summarizing), quantitative analysis (to describe the quantitative indicators of the analysis results).

The **material** of the study was 14 memes, selected by the continuous sampling method from Pinterest.

The **methodological and theoretical basis** of the coursework was made up of the works of researchers in the field of humour, such as N. V Filatova (Філатова, 2020), J. N. Amianna (Amianna et al., 2017), S. Bai (Bai, 2019), E. Hoicka (Hoicka, 2014), L. Kant (Kant et al., 2019), etc., as well as conversational maxims: H. P. Grice (Grice, 1975; Grice, 1989), F. Maulida (Maulida et al., 16), M. Okanda (Okanda et al., 2015), etc.

The **scientific novelty** of this coursework lies in its application of the pragmatic theory of humour to the analysis of memes as a form of humour. While there have been numerous studies on humour from various perspectives, there has been relatively little research that specifically examines the relationship between conversational maxims and humour in memes.

The **theoretical significance** of this coursework lies in its potential to broaden our understanding of the nature of humour as a communicative phenomenon. By focusing on memes as a form of humour, this coursework also contributes to our understanding of the role of humour in contemporary online culture.

The logic of the research determined the **structure** of the coursework. The study consists of an introduction, two chapters, conclusions to them, general conclusions and list of reference materials. The total volume is 27 pages.

CHAPTER ONE. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF HUMOUR

1.1. General characteristics of humour as an object of rhetoric

For centuries, humour has been acknowledged as a crucial component of rhetoric – the practice of convincing through language. Within rhetoric, humour is frequently employed to captivate and amuse the audience, while also bolstering the speaker's reliability and persuasiveness (Bai, 2019).

One definition of humour in rhetoric is the use of wit or amusement to create a positive emotional response in the audience. This can be achieved through various rhetorical devices, such as word play, irony, sarcasm, hyperbole, and satire. For example, a speaker might use a pun to make a serious point more memorable or use satire to criticize a political opponent (Romero, 2008: 396).

Another definition of humour in rhetoric is the use of laughter as a means of persuasion. This involves using humour to create a shared sense of camaraderie with the audience, which can increase their receptiveness to the speaker's message. Humour can also be used to break down barriers and defuse tension, allowing the speaker to establish a more personal connection with the audience (Martin, 2007: 136-137).

Humour is a rhetorical device that is often used to engage and entertain audiences. In rhetoric, humour is defined as a form of communication that uses language, gestures, or other forms of expression to provoke laughter or amusement (Філатова, 2020: 213).

It is important to add that humour is a form of social commentary that can challenge societal norms and expectations. Humour can be used to criticize authority, to expose hypocrisy, or to promote social change. By subverting established norms and expectations, humour can inspire people to think critically about the world around them (Kant et al., 2019: 2).

Humour also is a complex phenomenon that requires careful consideration of the audience, context, and purpose. The successful use of humour in rhetoric requires

a deep understanding of the target audience, including their values, beliefs, and cultural background. Humour that is insensitive or inappropriate can backfire, causing offense or alienation (Kant et al., 2019: 3).

In addition, humour can be used in rhetoric to enhance the speaker's ethos, or credibility. By demonstrating a sense of humour, the speaker can appear more likable, relatable, and trustworthy, which can increase the audience's willingness to listen and be persuaded (Béal et al., 2021).

Overall, humour plays a significant role in rhetoric, serving as a powerful tool for engaging and persuading audiences. The concept of humour in rhetoric encompasses the use of various rhetorical devices, laughter as a means of persuasion, and the enhancement of the speaker's ethos.

1.2. Pragmatic account of humour

Humour is a complex social phenomenon that occurs in different contexts and is interpreted differently by different people. Pragmatics is a key area of linguistics in relation to humour, as understanding context and intent is often key to interpreting humour. A pragmatic approach to humour examines the communicative function of humour in human interaction. According to this approach, humour is a type of language use that serves a specific purpose in social interaction, such as reducing tension or creating solidarity among group members (Grice, 1989: 160).

The investigation of the structure of humour has been ongoing since ancient times and continues to be a crucial area of research for contemporary linguists. Several renowned philosophers, including Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Schopenhauer, and L. Kant, developed their own theories on humour to comprehend the reasons why people laugh in certain situations and remain indifferent in others. These thinkers scrutinized various cognitive processes that trigger the perception of humour. Over the years, from Plato and Aristotle, who first studied the nature of humour more than two millennia ago, to contemporary influential linguists such as V. Raskin, K. Levinson, J. Morreall, and others, a multitude of modern theories of humour have been proposed. Broadly speaking, the primary theories of humour can be classified into three main categories:

As K. Levinson notes, the theories of preference and relief are more related to the mechanisms of the humorous reaction than to its conceptual essence. The theory of inconsistency seeks to determine the formal object of the comic, which is contained in certain types of inconsistency. The superiority theory is associated with an affective reaction that often accompanies the comic, which, according to the theory, is a pleasant feeling of superiority over the object of the joke (Levinson et al., 1983).

According to incongruity theory, the comic is governed by the rules of humorous play rather than the rules of language, which is consistent with the metalinguistic status of puns and the comic in general. J. Morreall and V. Raskin considers the theory of incongruity "the most popular modern philosophical theory of the comic" and states that it "claims that the formal object of the comic is a certain "incongruity" (Morreall, 1987; Raskin, 1985).

Many researchers share his opinion and consider inconsistency to be the most important element of the manifestation of the comic. Thus, incongruity theory "focuses on the cognitive elements of humour." The term "incongruity" is explained as follows: "the general assumption that the components of a joke or comic incident are in mutual conflict, conflict, or contradiction." The comic arises in this case because there is a difference between what is waiting for the recipient and what actually happens. This means that the comic is created by the inconsistency caused by two conflicting meanings (Cambridge dictionary).

Thus, the theory of inconsistency means that the recipient has certain expectations that are justified by the next phrase or action. Obviously, the manifestation of the comic, according to this theory, tries to send the recipient on the wrong track in order to further surprise him. After realizing this inconsistency, the recipient tries to understand the climax using the information contained in the joke, that is, he needs to "allow" the inconsistency. Yes, a "permissive mechanism" is necessary to distinguish the comic from the ridiculous. While the inconsistency in nonsense cannot be allowed, the comic can be characterized as a resolvable

inconsistency. When the addressees cannot resolve the inconsistency, it can be stated that they did not understand the joke (Cambridge dictionary).

One of the main assumptions of the pragmatic interpretation of humour is that humour is a form of implicit communication that relies on shared knowledge and the context to be understood. This means that people of similar backgrounds, cultures, and experiences are more likely to find the same thing funny. Humour can also be used strategically to establish or maintain social power and dominance, such as when a person uses sarcasm or irony to make fun of someone else (Desoucey, 2005).

Another important aspect of the pragmatic interpretation of humour is that it recognizes the importance of context in the interpretation of humour. The same joke can have different meanings or be perceived differently depending on the context in which it is told. For example, a joke that is appropriate in one social environment may be inappropriate or offensive in another (Hoicka, 2014: 3).

In addition, a pragmatic approach to humour emphasizes the role of the speaker and the audience in the creation and interpretation of humour. The intent and tone of a performance can influence how the audience perceives and reacts to a joke. Similarly, an audience's background and experience can influence its interpretation and response to humour (Ferrar, 1993: 16).

In general, a pragmatic understanding of humour emphasizes the social function and contextual nature of humour in human interaction. It emphasizes the importance of shared knowledge and context, as well as the role of speaker and audience in interpreting humour.

1.3. Conversational maxims as a methodological tool for the study of humour

Conversational maxims are a set of rules that govern how people communicate with each other. They were first proposed by philosopher H.P. Grice and are often used as a methodological tool for the study of humour in linguistic research (Grice, 1975: 41-58).

The four conversational maxims are:

- 1) maxim of quantity: speakers should provide the right amount of information, neither too much nor too little (Okanda et al., 2015);
- 2) maxim of quality: speakers should only say things they believe to be true, and should not say things they believe to be false or lack evidence for (Betti, 2021);
- 3) maxim of relevance: speakers should only say things that are relevant to the conversation at hand (Betti, 2021);
- 4) maxim of manner: speakers should be clear, brief, and avoid ambiguity (Benton, 2016: 701).

The use of conversational maxims in the study of humour allows researchers to analyze how people use language to create humour in conversation (Betti, 2021). For example, a speaker might violate the maxim of quantity by providing too much information in a way that is unexpected or humorous. Similarly, a speaker might violate the maxim of quality by saying something that is intentionally false or absurd for humorous effect.

By analyzing how speakers violate conversational maxims in the creation of humour, researchers can gain insights into the cognitive processes involved in understanding and appreciating humour. This can include examining how listeners interpret and respond to humorous statements that violate conversational maxims, and how speakers use conversational maxims to create humorous effects (Maulida et al., 2022: 76).

Furthermore, the study of humour using conversational maxims can also shed light on the role of context in humour creation and comprehension. The maxim of relevance, for instance, suggests that speakers should only say things that are relevant to the conversation at hand, but what counts as relevant can vary depending on the context of the conversation. By examining how speakers and listeners navigate these contextual factors in creating and appreciating humour, researchers can gain a more nuanced understanding of how humour functions in social interaction (Amianna et al., 2017).

Overall, the use of conversational maxims as a methodological tool for the study of humour can provide a framework for analyzing the linguistic, cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions of humour, and can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of this complex and multifaceted phenomenon.

Conclusions to Chapter One

In the first chapter, we have explored the theoretical framework for the study of humour. Humour in rhetoric refers to the use of language or literary devices to create a humorous effect. In rhetorical theory, humour is seen as a powerful tool for persuasion and can be used to connect with an audience, break down barriers, and create a positive emotional response.

We have discussed the general characteristics of humour as an object of rhetoric and how humour can be analyzed from a pragmatic perspective. We have also looked at the use of conversational maxims as a methodological tool for studying humour, which can provide a framework for examining the linguistic, cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions of humour. By exploring these different theoretical perspectives, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of how humour functions in social interaction and the various factors that contribute to its creation and reception. This foundation will serve as a basis for our further exploration of humour in next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO. HUMOUROUS SITUATIONS AS A RESULT OF FLOUTING CONVERSATIONAL MAXIMS: A STUDY OF COMIC STRIPS

2.1. Flouting the maxim of quality



Fig. 1 Example 1

This meme (see Fig. 1) is an example of a humorous situation that arises from flouting the conversational maxim of quality.

The first bro asks the second bro, "What is H₂O?" and the second bro correctly responds with "Water." However, the first bro then asks, "Then what is H₂O+H₂O+H₂O?" and the second bro responds with "FLOOD, maybe," which is a humorous subversion of the first bro's expectation.

This situation is humorous because the second bro's response is nonsensical and not directly related to the question. The first bro's repetition of the chemical formula and the second bro's unexpected response add to the humour of the situation. The response of "FLOOD, maybe" is also a play on the fact that three molecules of water combined could create a flood, but it is not a direct or accurate answer to the question.

Overall, this meme plays on the audience's expectation of a straightforward conversation and subverts it with a humorous twist, making it a funny and entertaining situation. The humour arises from the violation of the maxim of quality, where the second bro's response is not accurate or truthful, but instead provides a humorous and unexpected response.



Fig. 2 Example 2

The humorous situation in this meme (see Fig. 2) is a result of the seller flouting the conversational maxim of quality, which requires speakers to provide truthful information. When the woman questions the high price of the mirror, the seller responds with a humorous exaggeration about the mirror's durability. By suggesting that the mirror will not break until the 99th floor if dropped from the 100th floor, the seller is clearly providing an absurd and untrue statement, thus violating the maxim of quality.

The woman's response, "WOW! Please pack this!", adds to the humour of the situation because she appears to have taken the seller's statement at face value and believes that the mirror is indeed indestructible. This response also suggests that the woman has missed the seller's joke, which adds an element of irony to the situation.

Overall, the humour in this meme is based on the incongruity between the absurdity of the seller's statement and the woman's naive acceptance of it. The violation of conversational maxims and the resulting miscommunication between the seller and the woman create a humorous and entertaining situation.



Fig. 3 Example 3

This meme (see Fig. 3) is an example of a humorous situation that arises from flouting the maxim of quality.

The son asks his father to buy him a motorbike, and the father responds with surprise and a rhetorical question about why God has given the son two legs. The father's response violates the maxim of quality as it does not provide a truthful or relevant answer to the son's question.

The son's response is unexpected and humorous, as he uses the father's rhetorical question to provide a clever and humorous justification for why he wants a motorbike. By saying that he needs one leg to change gear and the other to apply the brake, he playfully suggests that having a motorbike would be more efficient than walking or riding a bicycle.

The humour in this situation lies in the playful and unexpected response from the son, which subverts the father's expectation of a serious conversation and adds a humorous twist to the interaction. The meme also plays on the audience's expectation of a serious and responsible attitude from parents and children, and subverts that expectation with a humorous justification for wanting a motorbike.



Fig. 4 Example 4

This meme (see Fig. 4) is an example of a humorous situation that arises from flouting conversational maxims, specifically the maxim of quality.

The patient asks the doctor why their case is complicated, expecting a truthful and informative response. However, the doctor responds with a humorous and unexpected answer, saying that the patient's disease is from a chapter that the doctor left as optional during their studies. This violates the maxim of quality, as the

doctor's response is clearly not true and does not provide any meaningful information about the patient's condition.

The humour in this situation lies in the absurdity of the doctor's response, which is unexpected and defies the patient's expectations of a serious and truthful answer.

2.2. Flouting the maxim of relevance



Fig. 5 Example 5

This meme (see Fig. 5) plays with the conversational maxim of relevance, which states that participants in a conversation should only say things that are relevant to the topic being discussed. In this case, the robber is asking for money, and Trump responds by pointing out his fame as a politician, which is not relevant to the request. The robber then flouts the maxim of quantity by being intentionally ambiguous with his statement "give me MY money," which could be interpreted in different ways. The humour comes from the ironic twist that the robber is able to turn the tables on Trump, who is used to being in control and in a position of power.

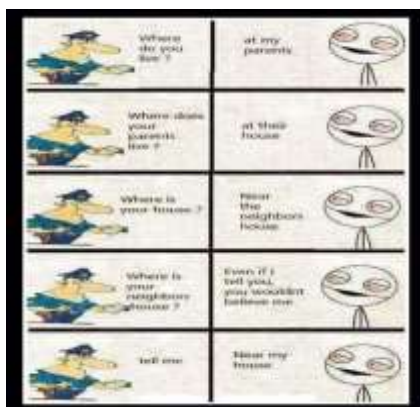


Fig. 6 Example 6

This humorous situation (see Fig. 6) is a result of flouting the conversational maxim of relevance. The policeman is asking the boy a series of questions to

determine where he lives, but the boy's answers are not directly relevant to the question asked. The boy is being intentionally unhelpful and perhaps even sarcastic in his responses, which adds to the humour.

The boy's final response, "Even if I tell you, you wouldn't believe me," is a classic example of the use of irony. The boy implies that the policeman is not capable of believing his answer, even though the answer is obvious and straightforward. The final punchline, "Near my house," adds to the irony and reinforces the boy's sarcastic attitude. Overall, the humour in this meme is based on the clever use of language and the unexpected responses of the boy, which violate the conversational maxim of relevance in a humorous way.



Fig. 7 Example 7

This meme (see Fig. 7) is an example of a humorous situation that arises from flouting the maxim of relevance.

The woman asks the man why he can't marry her, and the man responds by saying that his family is against it. The woman then asks who his family is to stop him, expecting to hear about his parents or siblings. However, the man's unexpected response that it is his current wife and children who are against him marrying someone else is a violation of the maxim of relevance because it is not a direct or expected response to the woman's question. This unexpected response leads to a humorous situation because it subverts the woman's expectations and highlights the man's inappropriate behavior.



Fig. 8 Example 8

This meme (see Fig. 8) is an example of a humorous situation that arises from flouting conversational maxims, specifically the maxim of relevance.

The woman asks the man for his opinion about their love, expecting a sincere and meaningful response. However, the man responds with an irrelevant and vague statement, that is the maxim of relevance, as his response does not directly address the woman's question. The woman, trying to salvage the conversation, asks if the stars are infinite, hoping for a poetic response. However, the man once again violates the maxim of quantity by providing a short and uninformative answer.

The humour in this situation lies in the unexpected and nonsensical responses from the man, which create a humorous contrast to the woman's sincere and romantic tone. The meme plays on the audience's expectation of a serious response to a romantic question, and subverts that expectation with a humorous twist.



Fig. 9 Example 9

This meme (see Fig. 9) is an example of a humorous situation that arises from flouting conversational maxims, specifically the maxim of relevance.

Bro 1 asks Bro 2 if their dog bites, expecting a straightforward and honest answer. Bro 2 responds with a simple "Nope," but Bro 1 then becomes upset when the dog bites them, because they believed Bro 2's answer that the dog did not bite. Bro 2 responds by saying that the dog that bit Bro 1 was not their dog, which violates the maxim of relevance as it does not directly answer Bro 1's complaint.

The humour in this situation lies in the unexpected and playful responses from Bro 2, who subverts Bro 1's expectations and takes the question in a different direction.



Fig. 10 Example 10

This meme (see Fig. 10) is an example of a humorous situation that arises from flouting conversational maxims, specifically the maxim of relevance.

The teacher asks the student why they were absent from school, expecting a straightforward answer. The student responds by saying that their father was in the hospital, which violates the maxim of relevance as it does not directly answer the teacher's question. Seven days later, the teacher follows up with the student and asks if their father is still in the hospital. The student responds with a humorous and unexpected answer, saying that their father is a doctor.

The humour in this situation lies in the unexpected and playful responses from the student, who takes the teacher's question literally and responds in a way that subverts the teacher's expectations.

2.3. Flouting the maxim of quantity



Fig. 11 Example 11

This meme (see Fig. 11) is an example of a humorous situation that arises from flouting the maxim of quality.

The boy compliments the girl by saying that she is so beautiful that words can't even describe it. This is a hyperbolic expression of admiration that is commonly used to praise someone's beauty. However, the girl's response flouts the maxim of quality by providing a negative evaluation of the boy's compliment. Instead of accepting the compliment graciously, she responds by saying that numbers can describe her beauty and gives her a rating of 2 out of 10.

Overall, this meme is an example of a humorous situation that arises from flouting the maxim of quality, as the girl's response is unexpected and subverts the expectation of a positive response to a compliment.



Fig. 12 Example 12

This meme (see Fig. 12) is an example of a humorous situation that arises from flouting conversational maxims, specifically the maxim of quantity.

The father asks his son a simple question, "What comes after 5?", expecting a straightforward answer. However, the son responds by listing multiple numbers, violating the maxim of quantity by providing more information than required. The

dad then asks, "And what comes after 8,9,10?" expecting his son to give a numerical response, but the son responds with "Jack, Queen, King," which is a humorous subversion of the dad's expectation.

The humour in this situation lies in the unexpected and playful responses from the son, who takes the father's question literally and responds in a way that subverts the father's expectations.

2.4. Flouting the maxim of manner



Fig. 13 Example 13

The humorous situation in this meme (see Fig. 13) is a result of the bro flouting the conversational maxim of manner, which requires speakers to be clear and concise in their speech. The bro responds to Tina's question about what he's buying with a sarcastic and unexpected comment that is not directly related to the question. By doing so, the bro is deliberately violating the maxim of manner, which can create confusion and humour in the conversation.

Tina's response, "But you have no hair. What's the use of buying a comb?" is a reasonable and expected follow-up question, but the bro's response turns the conversation into a humorous exchange. His comment about the Rubik's cube and Tina's brain is an insult disguised as a joke, which adds to the humour of the situation.

The overall humour in this meme is based on the incongruity between the expectation of a straightforward response to Tina's question and the bro's sarcastic and insulting comment. The violation of conversational maxims of manner and the

resulting miscommunication between the bro and Tina create a humourous and entertaining situation.



Fig. 14 Example 14

This meme (see Fig. 14) is an example of a humourous situation that arises from flouting conversational maxim of manner.

The father asks his son about his age and then follows up by asking when the son plans to get married, violating the maxim of manner by putting pressure on the son to get married. The son responds by asking about the father's age, violating the maxim of relevance once again as his response does not answer the father's question. The father then responds with his age, expecting a respectful response from the son. However, the son responds by stating that 70 is the age of death, violating the maxim of manner by making a blunt and potentially offensive statement.

The humour in this situation lies in the unexpected and subversive responses from the son, who turns the father's questions around and responds in a way that challenges the father's expectations.

Conclusions to Chapter Two

In this chapter, the focus was on the analysis of humourous situations that arise as a result of flouting conversational maxims in memes. The four conversational maxims, namely quality, relevance, quantity, and manner, were examined in detail. Examples of memes were provided to illustrate how these maxims are flouted to create humourous situations. As an example, 14 memes from the Pinterest social network were selected. The results of the analysis are presented in Figure 15 (see Fig. 15).

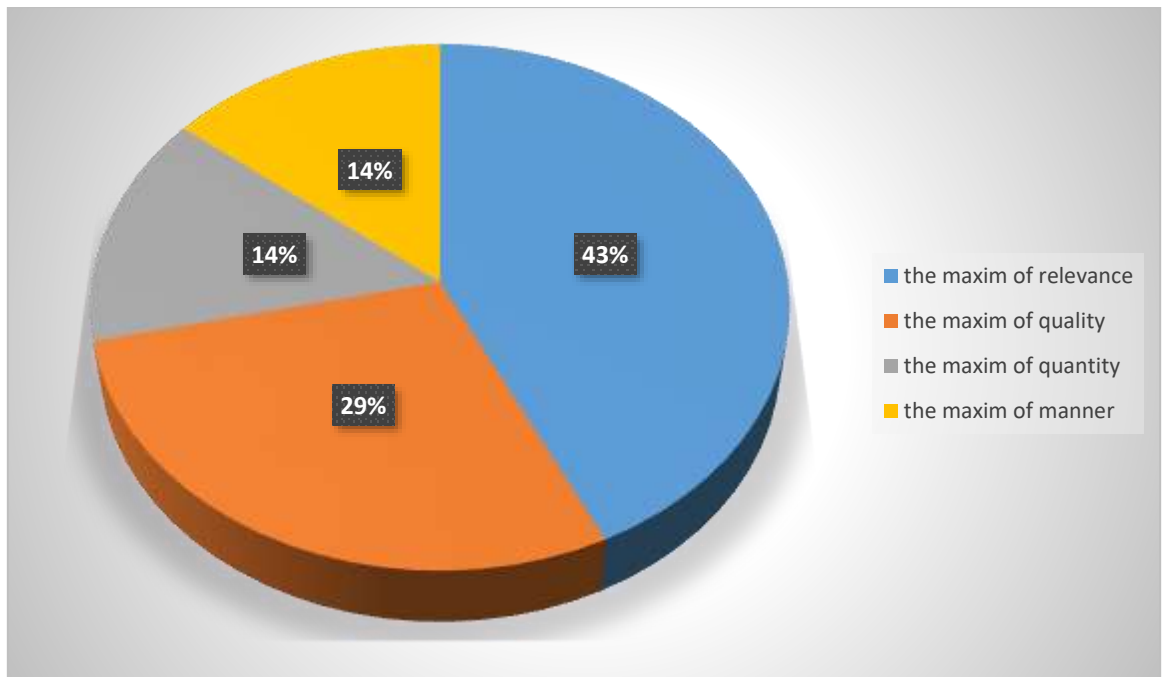


Figure 15. Using flouting conversational maxims to create humor in comic strips

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The present term paper aimed to explore the phenomenon of humour in memes through the lens of conversational maxims. The main goal was to investigate how flouting conversational maxims can lead to humorous situations in memes. To achieve this goal, a thorough analysis of 14 memes was conducted, focusing on the maxims of quality, relevance, quantity, and manner.

The analysis revealed that the maxim of relevance was the most frequently flouted in the memes, with 6 instances (43% of the analyzed memes). The maxim of quality was the second most flouted, with 4 instances (29%), followed by the maxim of quantity, with 2 instances (14%), and the maxim of manner, with 2 instances (14%). These results suggest that violating the maxim of relevance is the most effective way of creating humorous situations in memes.

In conclusion, the present study contributes to the understanding of the role of conversational maxims in creating humour in memes. The findings show that flouting conversational maxims is a powerful tool in creating humorous situations in memes, and the maxim of relevance is the most commonly flouted maxim in memes. The study highlights the importance of considering conversational maxims in the analysis of humour and provides insights for further research in the field.

Moreover, the study highlighted the importance of pragmatic theories in understanding humour and the role of memes as a contemporary form of communication that allows for creative and humorous expression.

RÉSUMÉ

The present coursework aimed to investigate the relationship between humour and flouting conversational maxims in the context of internet memes. To achieve this objective, a thorough literature review was conducted on the general characteristics of humour and conversational maxims in linguistics and rhetoric. The theoretical framework was then applied to the analysis of a sample of 14 memes, which were classified based on the specific maxim being flouted. The results of the analysis showed that the maxim of relevance was the most frequently flouted maxim, followed by the maxim of quality, quantity, and manner, respectively.

The study highlights the importance of conversational maxims in creating humorous situations and demonstrates how flouting these maxims can generate humorous effects in memes. Additionally, the research suggests that internet memes serve as a unique platform for the manifestation of humour as they rely heavily on the shared cultural knowledge and experiences of the audience.

Key words: conversational maxims, humour, memes, pragmatics, rhetoric

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