



## Revealing Humor Sense Through the Use of Maxim Violations and Humor Devices: A Study of He Huang's Stand-Up Comedy

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### ABSTRACT

He Huang, a Chinese stand-up comedian who is now becoming a diaspora in Australia, was known for her appearance in the television program *Australia's Got Talent*, which got almost 8,3 million views on YouTube even though she did not win the competition. In her stand-up comedy, Huang raised issues on her experience related to discrimination and racism into humor. This study is aimed at revealing humor sense on Huang's Stand-Up Comedy through examining closely to utterances in terms of maxim violations and humor devices. Operating Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principles and Chan's (2011) Humor Devices, this study centers the analysis on types of violated maxims and their devices to generate humor. The result presents that Huang produced ten utterances that have met both maxim violations and humor devices. The numbers distributed to variously violated maxims are almost even comprising 3 violated maxims of quantity, 3 violated maxims of quality, 2 violated maxims of relevance, and 2 violated maxims of manner. Unlike violated maxims, the numbers of humor devices are disparate. Satire goes as the most dominant humor device embedding in 6 utterances. The rest numbers are distributed to Pun (3 utterances) and Understatement (1 utterance).

Keywords: violated maxims, humor devices, comedy

### 1. Introduction

Stand-up comedy is a performance where a comic tells jokes by standing in front of an audience (Badara, 2018). In stand-up comedy, the comics rely on their speaking skills to deliver humor effectively. Although stand-up comedy is typically a monologue, the process of transferring ideas inherently involves at least two parties: the comedian and the audience. Sometimes, the comic makes the audience a target of their jokes, creating a situation that resembles a dialogue, even though it just needs a little interaction (Sjöbohm, 2008). The origin of stand-up comedy can be traced back to the United States, with its development significantly influenced by Jewish-American comedians who wrote many books about stand-up comedy. As time passed, the emergence of television played a major role in popularizing stand-up comedy, especially through late-night talk shows. In the 1960s, comedy clubs began to emerge, such as "The Improv" in New York and "The Comedy Store" in Los Angeles which started in 1972 (Sjöbohm, 2008). Brodie (2020) stated that stand-up comedy is an art, so it should be supported just like other arts. This can be done by giving comedians the same opportunities as other artists, such as demonstrating their competence in the context of an actual performance.

Over time, the interest in stand-up comedy has increased, transforming it into a global phenomenon. Apparently, stand-up comedy is not merely an event to deliver jokes, but it also serves as a platform to convey discourses with specific intentions such as social, political, and cultural issues. The tool used by stand-up comedians to communicate these discourses is humor. Humor refers to something that provokes laughter, amusement, or enjoyment. The laughter generated by humor often arises through the use of language play. The issues highlighted in stand-up comedy can serve as an effective medium for social criticism. According to Takovski (2019), social criticism expressed through humor can potentially drive social change. Further, humor could be an effective tool to prevent negative action as the issues taken in humor might be very striking to those who are being talked about or being the object of sarcasm (Friedman, 2019). As a medium for social change, stand-up comedy often highlights reality, expresses social anxiety, and photographs people's social lives in a humorous way. This phenomenon is interesting because it turns out that stand-up comedy is not only a means of entertainment but also an influential medium for promoting social awareness and change.

Stand-up comedy is basically a form of communication that employs a humorous way to share personal experiences, express ideas, critique issues, and engage audiences through laughter and storytelling. Communicating humorously can be achieved by breaking common principles of communication which are specifically known as "Cooperative Principles" proposed by Grice (1975). The principle consists of four maxims, namely quality, quantity, manner, and relevance. Violating those maxims, in fact, can generate humor (Attardo, 1990).

This research is going to see the intertwining of humor and disobeying maxims by violating them to generate humor. The object of this research is He Huang's jokes. Huang is a Chinese comic who has left China for 5 years and has become a diaspora in Australia. Huang's comic journey was started by joining the talent show *Australia's Got Talent*. The television program *Australia's Got Talent* is a show where the participants compete to win rewards from A\$100,000 to A\$250,000. The participants of this program come from different ages with different skills and compete to win the rewards based on

their unique skills. Huang did not become a winner of the competition, but her video became viral and she got 8,3 million views on YouTube. In Huang's video, we can see that she produces humor by frequently violating Grice's maxims. By deliberately violating the maxim, Huang turns sensitive topics like discrimination and racism into relatable humor. The frequent use of maxim violations makes Huang's performance a compelling subject for analyzing how humor can emerge from the disobedience of conversational norms.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Stand-Up Comedy

Stand-up comedy is known as one of the mediums to deliver humor in which the comedian directly interacts with the audience. This form of entertainment primarily relies on the use of verbal skills to deliver jokes rather than body language. Therefore, humor in stand-up comedy can be defined as spoken language, either reinforced through words or actions, and is collectively understood by the audience. In stand-up comedy, humor contains two elements, which are the set-up and the punchline. The set-up introduces an idea or a context that guides the listener into the narrative, while the punchline offers a twist conclusion designed to evoke the audience's laughter. Ideally, the shift between set-up to punchline will evoke amusement and laughter. This humor phenomenon is related to the incongruity theory because it shows how the laughter is triggered by the recognition of an incongruity (the punchline) that violates the audience's presumption (the set-up) (Xie and Pu, 2020).

### 2.2 Cooperative Principles

The distinction between meaning and saying is what Grice is concerned about. He always wonders how the speakers elaborate the implicit meaning and how the speakers ensure that the audience can understand the implicit meaning, so he sought to reveal the mechanism of this process. Grice (1957) reveals that the relationship between the conventional meaning of an utterance and its implicit meaning is calculable. He argues that there is a standard way of speaking that is widely accepted, which he later refers to as 'standard behavior.' This concept is further elaborated in his cooperative principle theory. Grice (1975) reveals that in a conversational interaction, people assume that there is a set of rules that must be obeyed called the cooperative principle, except there is a contradictory indication. Operating cooperative principle, Grice (1975) breaks the principles into four sub-principles called maxims, namely:

- Maxim of Quantity

The first maxim is the maxim of quantity which requires some rules: contribute to the discussion as much as is necessary and do not contribute more or less informatively than is necessary. From those rules, we can conclude that we need to say as much as the interlocutor wants and not give more or less information to the interlocutor.

- Maxim of Quality

In the maxim of quality, two rules must be obeyed: avoid saying something wrong about what you believe and do not say about something that you do not have enough evidence. The purpose of this maxim is to make our utterances trustworthy because we are honest about what we say.

- Maxim of Relevance

The rule of the maxim of relevance is that the speaker's answer must be relevant to the question that the interlocutor asks. Thus, both the speaker and interlocutor will understand each other as they share the relevant information.

- Maxim of Manner

Maxim of manner has some rules that must be obeyed, which are: do not show any vagueness, steer clear of uncertainty, brief, and be organized.

### 2.3 Violated Maxims

A violated maxim is a situation where the speaker intentionally violates the maxim with the aim that the listener does not know the true meaning and only understands the surface meaning (Cutting, 2002). Violating the maxims is used by the comics to implicitly convey their joke to create humor. Sometimes, people who are involved in the conversation are unaware that the speaker is violating the maxim, yet they think that the speaker is still cooperating with them. Some purposes to be achieved when violating the maxim are to prevent unbearable situations, to be courteous, and lastly to implicitly deliver jokes (Attardo, 1990). The following discussion elaborates on the types of violated maxims:

- Violated Maxim of Quantity

The first type of violated maxim according to Grice is the violated maxim of quantity, which occurs when the speakers provide either too little or too much information than what the interlocutor asks, for example:

John: Where have you been? I searched everywhere for you during the past three months!

Mike: I wasn't around. So, what's the big deal?

(Khosravizadeh & Sadehvandi, 2011, p.123)

In the above conversation, John asks a question to Mike. Mike's answer is not wrong, but it is inadequate. This situation can happen because Mike does not want to explain his reason. Thus, Mike can be considered uncooperative since he violates the maxim of quantity.

- Violated Maxim of Quality

The second type of violated maxim is the violated maxim of quality, which happens when the information being delivered is not true and there's a lack of evidence, for example:

Mother: Did you study all day long?

Son who has been playing all day long: Yes, I've been studying till now!

(Khosravizadeh & Sadehvandi, 2011, p.122)

The exchange shows that the boy is dishonest about what he already said. He lied to avoid the punishment his mother might give him. The boy is uncooperative because he delivers untrue information which violates the maxim of quality.

- Violated Maxim of Relevance

The third type of violated maxim is the violated maxim of relevance, that occurs when the speaker's response or information is not relevant to the subject discussed in a conversation, for example:

Teacher: Why didn't you do your homework?

Student: May I go and get some water? I'm so thirsty.

(Khosravizadeh & Sadehvandi, 2011, p.123)

In this conversation, the violation of the maxim of relevance happens. It is because the student's answer is completely irrelevant to the questions asked by the teacher. The situation occurs because the student tries to avoid the teacher's interrogation.

- Violated Maxim of Manner

The last type of violated maxim is the violated maxim of manner, which occurs because the utterance given is ambiguous, rambling, or delivered in vague language, for example:

Sarah: Did you enjoy the party last night?

Anna: There was plenty of oriental food on the table, lots of flowers all over the place, people hanging around chatting with each other....

(Khosravizadeh & Sadehvandi, 2011, p.123)

The conversation above shows that Sarah is asking a simple question. However, the answer that she receives from Anna is a rambling explanation of what has happened at the party. Two conclusions can be drawn from Anna's explanation: First, Anna enjoys the party so much that she's too excited to tell Sarah about the party. Second, Anna has a bad time at the party and she is complaining about the party. So, the conversation above violates the maxim of manner because Anna's response is ambiguous and rambling.

The theory of violated maxims was applied in this study to demonstrate how breaking conversational norms can generate humor. The speakers can create unexpected or exaggerated responses that will surprise the audience and evoke laughter by intentionally disobeying Grice's maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. This analysis highlights how humor often arises not from adhering to conversational rules but from creatively subverting them. Humor often relies on the audience's ability to detect the discrepancies between what is said and what is meant, creating a playful tension that enhances the comedic effect. This theory provides valuable insights into how language can be manipulated to entertain, criticize, and enrich the overall understanding of humor as a linguistic performance.

## 2.4 Humor Devices

Humor is something that is intentionally created to make laughter (Ross, 2005). To make sure something can be categorized as humor, it should contain one of the humor devices. Humor devices are used to reduce subjectivity in humor and ensure that something is humorous rather than just distinguishing the humor devices used (Chan, 2011). Chan (2011) stated that there are seven categories of humor devices, namely:

- Pun

Pun is one of the categories of humor devices that relates to playing with words. Pun refers to the use of the humor aspect of a word or phrase that can lead to two different interpretations. This category may consist of words that have the same or similar pronunciation but different meanings, for example:

The magician got so mad he pulled his hare out.

(Kao, Levy, & Goodman, 2016, p.2)

The word “hare” can be interpreted in two ways. First, the word can be interpreted as the magician being mad that he performed a trick of pulling a hare (rabbit) from his hat. Second, the pronunciation of the word “hare” is almost similar to “hair,” so it can also be interpreted as the magician getting so mad that he pulled out his hair. The humor aspect of the sentence above is obtained from playing with the word’s meaning so that it is called a pun.

- Understatement/Exaggeration

Understatement/exaggeration is a category of humor devices that relate to something being understated or overstated to create a humorous effect. This category is related to the underestimated or exaggerated reaction toward a phenomenon, product, person, etc., for example:

(There is a hurricane at your vacation home and there is most likely severe damage to the house.)

You say, “At least the plants will get watered.”

(Ebers, 2013, p.11)

The expected reaction from normal people is commonly panic and try to find a safer place. If the response given is only “At least the plants will get watered,” it is an understatement depiction of a phenomenon.

Carson: I was visiting a small-town last week.

The audience: How small was it?

Carson: The enter and exit signs for the town were on the same pole.

(Drennan, 2021, p.583)

The situation above shows exaggeration because it creates humor by presenting an absurdly extreme description of reality. Carson’s claims that the town’s entrance and exit signs were on the same pole humorously exaggerate the town’s smallness to an unrealistic degree. By using visual absurdity and overstatement, Carson shows how exaggeration can transform ordinary experiences into humorous stories.

- Jokes/Nonsense

Jokes/nonsense is the category of humor devices that create a funny situation by presenting something without specific meaning. The humorous process in this category can be created by combining irrelevant things or presenting some scenes that have no specific meaning with the purpose of ridiculing them, for example:

Kathy: What’s at the end of everything?

Tim: The letter G

(Shade, 1996, p.4)

In the above conversation, it can be seen that the answer given is logically irrelevant to the intended meaning of the question. Kathy’s question demanded a profound or abstract response, but Tim’s answer of “the letter G” which is the last letter of the word “everything” is a literal sense that refers to a word rather than a concept. Therefore, this conversation can be categorized as jokes/nonsense since the comedic value comes from the lack of meaningful connection, where the punchline is funny precisely because it disregards logic and relevance.

- Ludicrous

Another category of humor devices is ludicrous. Ludicrous is related to a humorous situation that is produced through the application of senseless, absurd, or illogical. One of the ways that this category produces humor is by showing a character doing an improper thing, for example:

A turtle was mugged and robbed by a gang of snails. When the police asked for a description of the villains, the turtle replied, “I’m sorry, but I just don’t know. It all happened so fast”.

(Cohen, 1999, p.39)

The example given above is ludicrous since the conversation that happens is absurd and illogical. There’s no way an animal as big as a turtle can be robbed by a snail that has a smaller size, besides how snails can do the theft quickly because snails are slow-moving animals.

- Satire/Irony

Satire/irony is one of the categories of humor devices that create a humorous situation by saying something but meaning another or intentionally meaning the opposite. This humor device is usually related to mocking a well-known public figure, situation, or thing, for example:

The United States is donating 500 million vaccines to the rest of the world. Which seems generous until you remember that Biden can’t get anyone else in America to take them.

(Rahma, Lubis, & Perangin-angin, 2023, p.237)

The sentence above is taken from Noah's utterance in The Daily Show episode 104. The context of the sentence is when Biden donated 500 million vaccines. The vaccines should be for Americans but most of them refused to be vaccinated. Afraid that the vaccine would be wasted, Biden decided to donate it. Noah criticizes this situation as Biden was forced to donate the vaccine rather than intending to donate in the first place. From the explanation given, it can be concluded that this sentence is a satire.

- Comic

Comic can be defined as using funny stuff to create a humorous situation. An example of this category is the use of funny figures (cartoon, clown, etc) to make a situation more interesting, for example:

There is an advertisement that shows a hamster presenting news about what is happening during the 'hamsterweek' of the Albert Heijn (a marketplace in the Netherlands).

(Elbers, 2013, p.12)

The situation given above is a comic as the humor is produced by a funny figure. Hamster is known as a cute character. Using this cute character can attract more attention and make the advertisement more interesting.

- Others

Others is the category that refers to other humor devices than the six categories that have already been explained. An example of this category is slapstick (Elbers, 2013, p.12). Slapstick is a style of humor made by exaggerating physical activity. It usually involves intentional violence by using inappropriate property, for instance, a ladder and saw.

The theory of humor devices plays a crucial role in enriching this research by providing a structured framework to analyze how humor is constructed. Categorizing different forms of humor into puns, understatement/exaggeration, jokes/nonsense, ludicrous, satire/irony, comics, and others will give a deeper exploration of the humor. This theory of humor devices helps to identify the specific mechanisms through which humor arises. Additionally, humor devices are also used as a tool to validate that a particular instance is genuinely humorous by aligning the observed elements with established humor patterns and techniques. This condition ensures that the analysis is objective and grounded in theory rather than relying solely on subjective interpretation. The application of humor devices theory in this research tries to uncover the underlying communication strategies that contribute to audience engagement and entertainment.

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### 3. Research Methodology

The type of research in this study is qualitative research because the data are qualitative data. Creswell (2018) stated that the qualitative research data is in the form of text or images, not numbers. The data of this research are the utterances of a comedian named He Huang whose video was uploaded on *Australia's Got Talent* channel. Since the data are not in the form of numbers, this research meets the requirement of qualitative research.

The source of data in this research is a YouTube video uploaded by Australia's Got Talent channel showing Huang doing stand-up comedy to compete in that contest. The researcher takes several steps to collect the data:

- 1) Watching the YouTube video of Huang's stand-up comedy through the following link: [https://youtu.be/k\\_rNaqV8B1c](https://youtu.be/k_rNaqV8B1c)
- 2) Transcribing the YouTube video of Huang's stand-up comedy.
- 3) Selecting the utterances that were identified as violated maxims that produced humor based on Grice's (1975) theory of cooperative principle. In this study, 10 utterances were obtained as the data to analyze.

The 10 selected utterances are classified into types of violated maxims based on Grice's (1975) classification of cooperative principle, namely violated maxim of quantity, violated maxim of quality, violated maxim of relevance, and violated maxim of manner. The next process is to categorize the data (10 violated maxims) based on the humor devices by Chan (2011), which are puns, understatement/exaggeration, jokes/nonsense, ludicrous, satire/irony, comic, and others. Finally, by examining the relationship between the maxim violation and the humor devices, it can be concluded that the violated maxims effectively generate humor in the given context.

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### 4. Results and Discussion

#### 4.1 Results

In Huang's stand-up comedy video, she produces humor by violating conversational maxims. The data, consisting of ten utterances, were identified from the punchlines of Huang's stand-up comedy based on the audience's laughter. These utterances include three instances that involve the violation of the maxim of quantity, three instances of the violated maxim of quality, two instances of the violated maxim of relevance, and two instances of the violated maxim of manner. The following table present the total number of each violated maxim.

**Table 4.1**The total number of types of violated maxims

Types of Violated Maxim	Datum Number	Total
Violated Maxim of Quantity	1, 3, 9	3
Violated Maxim of Quality	2, 4, 5	3
Violated Maxim of Relevance	6, 10	2
Violated Maxim of Manner	7, 8	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>10</b>

The most frequently violated maxims used by Huang are the maxim of quantity and the maxim of quality. The violation of the maxim of quantity in this research appears when excessive information is given to create humor. This violation of the maxim of quantity can be seen in datum 1, where Huang provides too much information about her name, even explaining how it is spelled during her self-introduction. Furthermore, in datum 3, she shares unnecessary details about her cousin's family surname. Lastly, in datum 9, Huang gives an exaggerated response regarding the standards for choosing her husband. Meanwhile, the violation of the maxim of quality arises when false or inaccurate information is provided to create humor. This violation of the maxim of quality can be seen in datum 2, where the man in Huang's story conveys incorrect information about her name. In datum 4, Huang gives false information by saying that she was 'made in China.' Finally, in datum 5, Huang apologizes for COVID-19, which was obviously not her fault, making her statement a clear example of false information. Overall, this data talks about her experiences, which correlate with discrimination and racism.

After identifying the violated maxims, the next step is to categorize them into humor devices. Among ten utterances, six instances are classified as satire, three instances as pun, and one instance as understatement. The outline of the result is illustrated in the following table.

**Table 4.2**The total number of humor devices

Humor Devices	Datum Number	Total
Satire	4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10	6
Pun	1, 2, 3	3
Understatement	6	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>10</b>

In humor devices, Huang mostly uses satire. Satire generates humor by saying one thing that may mean other than what it literally means. It is often associated with mocking well-known people, ideas, or phenomena. The topics in Huang's stand-up comedy revolve around her experiences with discrimination and racism which makes the use of satire highly appropriate. Satire is known to be highly effective in delivering social, cultural, or political criticism in a light and entertaining manner which allows the audience to accept the message easily. Huang uses satire to expose stereotypes related to China, such as the term 'made in China,' 'leftover ladies,' and the COVID-19 pandemic. She addresses these stereotypes to evoke the audience's empathy and raise awareness of these issues. The combination of criticism and humor makes satire a powerful tool for entertaining, educating, and influencing social change.

#### 4.2 Discussion

This part provides a detailed discussion of the results obtained from Huang's stand-up comedy video, which serves as the primary data. It elaborates the violated maxims and humor devices identified in 10 utterances from Huang's performance in *Australia's Got Talent* competition. As presented in the result of the research, there are three instances of the violated maxim of quantity, three instances of the violated maxim of quality, two instances of the violated maxim of relevance, and two instances of the violated maxim of manner. Additionally, the identified humor devices include five instances of satire, three instances of puns, one instance of understatement, and one instance of exaggeration. Here is the discussion of each datum:

##### Datum 1

Hello everyone my name is He, it spelled as H E, and that's it. Yes, it is

my name it is not my pronoun. People get confused all the time.

(Huang, 2022, lines 1-2)

In the datum above, Huang violates the maxim of quantity. In the first sentence, the violation occurs because Huang provides too little information. In the initial face of her stand-up show, she introduces with this statement "Hello everyone my name is He, it spelled as H E, and that's it," the phrase "and that's it" suddenly ends the explanation, leaving the audience with insufficient context about why Huang felt the need to spell out her name. Meanwhile, the second sentence, "Yes, it is my name it is not my pronoun," violates the maxim because it gives too much information. The phrase "it is not my pronoun" introduces unnecessary information, as the distinction between a name and a pronoun is already implied. So, we can conclude that the statement

above contains some details that lack explanation while others go beyond the information required when Huang introduces herself. In the context of self-introduction, people are generally expected to provide relevant information about themselves, such as their name and background, to help their interlocutor identify them.

The humor device identified from the datum above is a pun. Chan (2011) stated that a pun is related to playing with words. A pun refers to the humor aspect of a word or phrase that can lead to two different interpretations. It usually consists of words that have the same or similar pronunciation but different meanings. In the datum above, the word "He" can be interpreted in two ways. The first interpretation is the word "He /Hə/" which refers to the Huang's name. The second interpretation is the word "he /hi:/" which refers to a male's pronoun. The humor aspect arises from the use of similar pronunciation, yet has a different meaning from the word "He." By juxtaposing the personal name "He" with its phonetic similarity to the common pronoun "he," the comic transforms a mundane introduction into an engaging and witty wordplay.

### Datum 2

The other day I was drinking a pop, this cute blow came up to me and he

was like, "Yoo, what's your name?"

I said, "My name is He."

He was like, "Huh?"

I said, "He, H E sir."

And he said, "Nice to meet you Hoe."

(Huang, 2022, lines 3-8)

The conversation above demonstrates the violated maxim of quality. Grice (1975) on his cooperative principle theory, stated that the maxim of quality is violated when the information being delivered is not true and there's a lack of evidence. In this case, during Huang's dialogue, the response of the man in her story, "*Nice to meet you Hoe*" violates the maxim of quality because it conveys inaccurate information that does not correspond to Huang's actual name due to different language backgrounds. This violation occurs due to the man's inability to correctly pronounce Huang's name "He /Hə/" in the Chinese dialect, leading to the mistaken pronunciation of "hoe." It constitutes a maxim violation since Huang had already provided clear information about her name, yet the man still blatantly mispronounced it, calling her by a name she is not. The word "hoe" is a slang term referring to a woman who engages in casual sexual relationships with multiple partners and is often used as an insult (Bucholtz, 2006). Its use is highly disrespectful, especially when it is directed toward women, regardless of their relationship to the speaker.

Pun is the humor device found in this conversation. According to Chan (2011), a pun is one of the categories of humor devices that involves wordplay, where its humorous aspect relies on a word or phrase that can be interpreted in two ways. It often features a word that sounds alike or has similar pronunciations but carries different meanings. In this context, the pun lies in the use of the word "hoe," which can be understood in two different ways. First, it can refer to the name "He" which occurs due to linguistic performance incompetence. On the other hand, the word "hoe" is a slang term with a negative connotation and is often used as an insult. The humor that occurs arises from the similarity of the pronunciation of the name "He" in the Chinese dialect with the word "hoe." As a Chinese diaspora in Australia, Huang's interaction with the man she met (a likely Australian native) illustrates the dialectal differences that contribute to this misunderstanding, which enhances the comedic effect.

### Datum 3

And I said, "What? Excuse me? I am not a Hoe, you know, that's my

cousin. Ya, she is a Hoe, her mom is a Hoe, and her dad is a Hoe too.

Those Hoes are loyal though."

(Huang, 2022, lines 9-11)

The datum above demonstrates a violation of the maxim of quantity, as described in Grice's (1975) cooperative principle theory. The violation occurs because the datum provides too much information than what is necessary. The sentence "*I am not a Hoe, you know, that's my cousin. Ya, she is a Hoe, her mom is a Hoe, and her dad is a Hoe too. Those Hoes are loyal though.*" is unnecessary since it includes details that go beyond the context of clarification. On the other hand, the mention of the "Hoe" family's loyalty does not contribute to resolving the misunderstanding and lacks direct relevance to the purpose of the conversation. In this context, Huang only needed to correct the misunderstanding of her name and clarify that she was not "Hoe" (due to a previous misunderstanding). However, instead of limiting her response to essential clarification, she expanded the conversation by introducing her cousin's family named "Hoe."

The use of humor in the line above arises from wordplay, specifically by utilizing a term that can be interpreted in two distinct ways. This type of humor can be categorized as a pun, as described in Chan's (2011) humor devices theory. The word "Hoe" is the keyword of the humor that can be interpreted in two ways. First, "Hoe" is presented as the surname of Huang's cousin's family. Second, the word "Hoe" is a slang term with a negative connotation that refers to a woman who engages in a casual sexual relationship. The humor emerges from the similarity in pronunciation and spelling between these two words that create an ambiguous yet humorous misunderstanding.

**Datum 4**

As you can tell from my outfit that I was made in China.

(Huang, 2022, line 12)

Since Huang is from China, she addresses issues related to China in the datum above. However, her sentence “As you can tell from my outfit that I was made in China” violates the maxim of quality. In the theory of the cooperative principle, Grice (1975) states that the violation of the maxim of quality happens when the information presented is not true or aligned with reality. In the datum above, she refers to herself as “made in China” to indicate that she is from China. However, a person cannot be “made” like a product, which makes Huang’s statement factually incorrect. The phrase “made in China” is typically associated with products, goods, or merchandise produced in China. Applying this phrase to describe a person is not appropriate, but creates an intentional incongruity, which contributes to humor. By juxtaposing the literal meaning of the phrase “made in China” with her identity as a Chinese individual, Huang leverages a well-known stereotype to create a humorous connection between her cultural background and her statement.

In the above data, the humor device identified is satire, which, according to Chan (2011), is known as a humorous situation that refers to saying something but meaning another or the opposite. Satire is frequently used to mock or critique a public figure, a situation, or a thing. In this case, Huang employs satire to mock China, specifically its reputation as a low-cost manufacturing country. The statement, “As you can tell from my outfit that I was made in China,” humorously critiques the economic situation in China, where a high supply of low-wage manual labor has played a significant role in attracting foreign investment and becoming the world’s largest export country (Huang, Sheng, & Wang, 2021). Highlighting the phenomenon of most clothes in the world being labelled “Made in China” yet produced by underpaid workers, Huang’s statement aligns with Chan’s (2011) concept of satire. This demonstrates how the violated maxim of manner, combined with the use of satire, effectively produces humor in this context.

**Datum 5**

Yes, look guys, I’m really sorry for the COVID. Yeah, I’m really sorry for it, but I didn’t do it, I was here the whole time.

(Huang, 2022, lines 13-14)

The statement above violates the maxim of quality, which occurs when a speaker provides information that is either untrue or lacks of sufficient evidence. In the sentence, “Yes, look guys, I’m really sorry for the COVID,” Huang sarcastically apologizes for the COVID-19 pandemic, an event far beyond any individual’s responsibility. Her utterance implies that she is unfairly blamed simply because she is Chinese, as China is known as the country where the first case of COVID-19 was reported. Her follow-up statement, “Yeah, I’m really sorry for it, but I didn’t do it, I was here the whole time,” further emphasizes the absurdity of the idea that she could have caused the pandemic. Huang clarifies that she had been in Australia the entire time before the pandemic started. It is known that COVID-19, caused by the SARS-Cov-2 virus, is a disease that can result in severe pneumonia and has the potential to cause fatal outcomes (Ciotti, Ciccozzi, Terrinoni, Jiang, Wang, & Bernardini, 2020).

Satire is the category of humor device identified in the statement above. According to Chan (2011), satire creates humor by expressing one thing while *intending* another or conveying the opposite meaning. This form of humor is typically used to ridicule widely recognized public figure, situation, or idea. In the statement “Yes, look guys, I’m really sorry for the COVID,” the humor arises from mocking the phenomenon of COVID-19 pandemic. As we already know, Huang is a comedian from China, the country where the first case of COVID-19 was reported. Huang uses satire to address this sensitive topic. Additionally, the virus was first identified in Wuhan, Hubei province, China during the latest epidemic of pneumonia in January 2020 (Ciotti, Ciccozzi, and Terrinoni, 2020). Since that moment, the virus has rapidly spread across the globe, and it has infected and killed millions of people. Huang uses satire to address this sensitive topic and her use of satire indirectly critiques how China as a country became a scapegoat for the COVID-19 pandemic. Her ability to transform an offensive and serious topic into an absurdly personal and humorous narrative allows her to address sensitive issues.

**Datum 6**

Last year, I was roaming around the city, and there’s a guy just yelled at me.

He was like, “Yoo, go back to China!”

I was like, “Sir, there is no flight.”

(Huang, 2022, lines 16-19)

The *statement* above violates the maxim of relevance as it disobeys Grice’s (1975) cooperative principle. The maxim of relevance is violated when the speaker’s response or information is not relevant to the subject discussed in a conversation. In the conversation above, the man’s statement, “Yoo, go back to China!” implies a hateful and racist suggestion for Huang to leave. However, Huang’s response, “Sir, there is no flight,” is not relevant to the man’s statement. The relevant statement should be a direct response to the guy’s questions, either addressing the racist intent or rejecting the demand outright. The conversation above happened during the COVID-19 pandemic when all travel activities were restricted. China as a country where COVID-19 was first reported, led to increased discrimination and racism towards their people, including Huang.



The humor device identified in the conversation above is an understatement. Chan (2011) in his humor devices theory explains that *understatement* is a humorous effect that is created by understating something. This category is usually related to the underestimated reaction toward a phenomenon, product, person, etc. In the conversation above, Huang's response, "*Sir, there is no flight,*" exemplifies understatement as she minimizes the seriousness of the man's racist statement. Instead of directly addressing the offensive remark, she responds humorously, which causes the audience to laugh, and mock the absurdity of the situation. By responding with humor, she transforms the offensive comment into a moment of comedic relief and exposes the irrationality of the man's demand. Huang's subverts the tension with her unexpected and understated response, which allows her to defend herself.

#### Datum 7

I left China about three years ago because I feel pathetic. Yes, people are really judgmental, if you're like me over the age of 27, not dating or not married in China, you'll be called leftover ladies.

I know it is brutal, but I love leftovers.

(Huang, 2022, line 20-23)

The violated maxim found in the statement above is the maxim of manner. A violation of the maxim of manner occurs when the given utterance is ambiguous, *rambling*, and delivered in vague language. In the sentence "*I know it is brutal, but I love leftovers,*" ambiguity arises from the phrase "*I love leftovers.*" This phrase can be interpreted in two ways: first, it might refer to leftover food; second, it refers to the derogatory term "*leftover ladies,*" a label used in Chinese society to describe unmarried women over the age of 27. In a literal context, according to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), the word "leftover" refers to something (usually food) that is unused or unconsumed. However, in the context of the sentence above, the word "leftover" is used to refer to an unmarried woman. This ambiguity requires the audience to infer the connection between Huang's appreciation for literal leftovers and her commentary on social labels.

The *statement* above can be identified as satire. Satire is a humor device that according to Chan (2011) relates to saying something but meaning another or intentionally meaning the opposite. This category usually refers to ridicule of a well-known public figure, situation, or thing. In this case, Huang uses satire to address the stigma surrounding unmarried women over the age of 27 in Chinese society, who are often labelled as "*leftover ladies.*" By saying she loves leftovers, Huang mocks the cruelty of this societal label and highlights how it reduces women to an expiration date based on their marital status. Her statement turns the negative connotation of the term "*leftover*" into something positive and humorous. Through satire, Huang critiques societal pressures on women and exposes the irrationality of such cultural norms.

#### Datum 8

C'mon who doesn't love Chinese leftovers? Yeah, I know, thank you.

We are yummy and cheap, that is my Tinder bio, Chinese leftover, yummy, just take me home, and eat me.

(Huang, 2022, line 24-26)

The statement above shows the violated maxim of manner. The maxim of manner is violated when the given utterance is unclear, ambiguous, and rambling. In this statement, Huang intentionally creates ambiguity by blending literal and figurative meanings. The phrase "*Chinese leftovers*" can be interpreted differently. It might refer to the literal meaning of leftover food from Chinese cuisine, which is often considered affordable and delicious. Another interpretation might refer to the derogatory term "*leftover ladies,*" used in Chinese culture to describe unmarried women over the age of 27. The phrase "*yummy and cheap,*" is typically associated with leftover food rather than people. Furthermore, the phrase "just take me home, and eat me" carries a strong sexual innuendo. The verb "eat" has a double meaning, where the literal interpretation refers to the earlier food-related metaphor (Chinese leftovers) and, based on Green's Dictionary of Slang (n.d.), the slang usage "eat me" can have sexual connotations, which refers to oral sex. So, in this context, that phrase is used to mock the objectification and negative stereotype implied by the label "*leftover.*"

The statement above can be categorized as satire. It is a type of humor device described by Chan (2011) as expressing one thing while intending another or deliberately conveying the opposite meaning. This form of humor is often used to mock or criticize a famous public figure, event, or concept. By referring to herself as "*Chinese leftovers,*" Huang satirizes the derogatory term "*leftover ladies,*" a societal label in Chinese culture used to demean unmarried women over the age of 27. The humor arises from Huang's use of the term "*Chinese leftover,*" which, literally means food, and metaphorically means the societal stereotype of unmarried women. Huang's used of the terms "*yummy, cheap, just take me home, and eat me*" shows that Huang is teasing and attacking the label. The satire is intensified when she frames this self-deprecating humor as her Tinder bio, a platform associated with dating. Through this satirical portrayal, Huang does not only critique societal norms but also transforms the insult into an empowering narrative.

#### Datum 9

Yes, my parents are the ones who always pushed me to get married. I remember my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, my dad just told me, he was like, "He, can

you lower your standard? And get a husband?"

I was like, "What? Dad, I don't have any standard, you know, just like my mom."

(Huang, 2022, line 27-31)

The statement above violates the maxim of quantity as it is disobeying Grice's (1975) cooperative principle. The violated maxim of quantity happens when the speakers convey too little or too much information than what the interlocutor asks. In this case, Huang responds "*What? Dad, I don't have any standards, you know, just like my mom,*" provides more information than it is needed and is irrelevant to her father's question. Her father's statement focuses on urging Huang to lower her standards so that she can find a husband. Instead of addressing this directly, Huang adds an unnecessary explanation about her mother, which leads to giving too much information. Within this context, questions about marriage are a sensitive topic and Huang's response, which mocks her father as someone who does not have any values, reflects her subtle irritation.

Satire is the category of humor devices identified in the statement above. Chan (2011), in his humor devices theory, states that satire involves saying one thing while meaning another or intentionally conveying the opposite to produce humor. The dialogue in Huang's stand-up comedy where Huang's father stated, "*He, can you lower your standard? And get a husband?*" shows a traditional pressure placed on women to marry regardless of their personal preferences. However, Huang's response, "*What? Dad, I don't have any standard, you know, just like my mom,*" delivers an unexpected twist by subtly implying that her mother also had no high standards when choosing a husband, indirectly mocking her father. The use of satire in this context exposes and ridicules societal norms through humor.

#### **Datum 10**

The other day I was chatting with a friend. She was complaining that, "I wish I hadn't married you know, all the BS (Bullsh\*t) from my in-laws, my husband is lazy, my kid is a failure."

I was like, "What the heck, Mom? Are you serious?"

(Huang, 2022, line 34-37)

The maxim violation in the above conversation is the violated maxim of relevance. A violated maxim of relevance happens when the response or information given by the speakers is not relevant to the object discussed. Huang's response "*What the heck, Mom? Are you serious?*" does not directly address the concerns raised by her mother. Instead of providing a relevant response or acknowledging her mother's grievances, Huang uses a rhetorical question that deflects the conversation into a humorous twist. Additionally, although Huang initially introduces the interaction by stating "*I was chatting with a friend,*" it is revealed in the punchline that the conversation is actually hers with her mother's. Thus, Huang's irrelevant response reflects her shock at her mother's unexpected statement.

The conversation above can be identified as satire. It is one of the humor devices that expresses one thing while intending another or conveying the opposite meaning to critique or mock a well-known public figure, situation, or thing. In this context, the satire emerges by attributing grievances about marriage, in-laws, children, and family life to her mother. Huang mocks the traditional pressure and expectations placed on women to marry and maintain the "ideal" family. The humor lies in the absurdity of her mother being the one who complains about these expectations. Huang's satirical framing does not only critique these societal norms but also sheds light on the emotional toll and unfairness that accompany them. Through this humorous exchange, she challenges the audience to question the inequalities of traditional gender roles in family life.

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## **5. Conclusion**

This study focuses on analyzing maxim violation and humor devices to gain the sense of humor on Huang's stand-up comedy. The analysis results that there have been found 4 types of violated maxims and 3 categories of humor devices. The four types include violated maxim of quantity with three instances, violated maxim of quality with three instances, violated maxim of relevance with two instances, and violated maxim of manner with two instances. The use of violated maxims in Huang's stand-up comedy shows how humor arises from the disobedience towards conversational rules. Further, the three categories of humor devices include six instances of satire, three instances of puns, and one instance of understatement. The use of these humor devices demonstrates how humor is constructed in Huang's stand-up comedy;

Finally, by examining these humor devices with the cooperative principle, this study shows how maxim violations are not merely instances of miscommunication but deliberate strategies for humor creation. The findings suggest that Huang effectively manipulates conversational rules to produce humor that remains understandable for the audience. This research underscores the intricate relationship between linguistic violations and humor construction, demonstrating that humor in stand-up comedy is not merely spontaneous but also systematically structured.

#### **Appendix**

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**Title of the Video:** "I Was Made in China" – Funniest EVER AGT Audition?! | Australia's Got Talent 2022

**Channel Name:** Australia's Got Talent

**Source (URL):** [https://youtu.be/k\\_rNaqV8B1c](https://youtu.be/k_rNaqV8B1c)

**Publication Date:** October 12, 2022

**Date Accessed:** February 4, 2025

**Video Duration:** 3:54 minutes

Line	
1	Hello everyone my name is He, it spelled as H E, and that's it. Yes, it is my name, it is not my pronoun. People get confused all the time.
	The other day I was drinking a pop, this cute blow came up to me and he was like, "Yoo, what's your name?"
5	I said, "My name is He."
	He was like, "Huh?"
	I said, "He, H E sir"
	And he said, "Nice to meet you Hoe."
	And I said, "What? Excuse me? I am not a Hoe, you know, that's my
10	cousin. Ya, she is a Hoe, her mom is a Hoe, and her dad is a Hoe too.
	Those Hoes are loyal though."
	As you can tell from my outfit that I was made in China.
	Yes, look guys I'm really sorry for the Covid. Yeah, I'm really sorry for
	it, but I didn't do it, I was here the whole time.
15	I know, ehehehehe thank you.
	Last year, I was roaming around the city, and there's a guy just yelled at
	me.
	He was like, "Yoo, go back to China!"
	I was like, "Sir... there is no flight."
20	I left China about three years ago because I feel pathetic. Yes, people are
	really judgmental, if you're like me over the age of 27, not dating or not married in China, you'll be called
	leftover ladies.
	I know it is brutal, but I love leftovers.
	C'mon who doesn't love Chinese leftovers? Yeah, I know, thank you.
25	We are yummy and cheap, that is my Tinder bio, Chinese leftover,
	yummy just take me home, and eat me.
	Yes, my parents are the ones who always pushed me to get married. I
	remember my 30 <sup>th</sup> birthday, my dad just told me, he was like, "He can
	you lower your standard? And get a husband?"
30	I was like, "What? Dad, I don't have any standard, you know, just like
	my mom."
	Yeah, I don't understand why people want to get married, almost all of
	my married friends are miserable.

35	<p>The other day I was chatting with a friend. She was complaining that “I wish I hadn’t married you know, all the BS (Bullsh*t) from my in-laws, my husband is lazy, my kid is a failure.”</p> <p>I was like, “What the heck, Mom? Are you serious?”</p> <p>You know.... No wonder I’m not married</p> <p>That’s my time, thank you guys so much, thank you.</p>
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