

# Study of Humor Research from the Perspective of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle in Comic Sketch “Huan Bu Huan”

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## Abstract

Comic sketch has become an essential part of the China Media Group Spring Festival Gala Evening stage every year. Its form is simple and the verbal has some kind of humor. Through the dialogue between the person, the comic sketch is loved by the audience. To make jokes, the actors in the comic sketches often violate the Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle to realize the pragmatic functions of humor. Grice's Cooperative Principle in daily communication, communicators should follow the principle of a particular task. Linguist Leech put forward the Politeness Principle. The principle is an addition to the Cooperative Principle and is further extended. This paper under the perspective of the Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle in the comic sketch Huan bu huan of the 2022 China Media Group Spring Festival Gala Evening, some humorous dialogues are analyzed. Results showed that these dialogues for violating the rules produced between the lines to achieve the humorous effect. The purpose of this paper is to deepen people's understanding of comic sketch language and to provide a reference for the audience to appreciate the unique artistic and aesthetic value of the comic sketch.

## Keywords

Cooperative Principle; Politeness Principle; Comic Sketch.

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, more and more people are living under pressure and feel tired and nervous. As a result, they are looking for ways to relax. And humor is a kind of unique way of communication, and playing an important role in our daily life. It can bring happiness to people and help people relax their tired minds. On some occasions, humor can break the awkward atmosphere, and make the conversation go smoothly (Xie, 2013). In recent years, many scholars study humor from the perspective of linguistics, particularly in the field of pragmatics research on all aspects of humor generation mechanism. One of the most important theories in pragmatics is the American language philosopher Grice's theory of Conversational Implicature. He thinks that there are rules in the conversations. When people talk did not say a string of unrelated words, because the conversation of mutual cooperation and commonality abides by a principle, the Cooperative Principle. To make up for the Cooperative Principle and explain why people deliberately in violation of the Cooperative Principle and its maxims, linguists Leech (1983) put forward the Politeness Principle. (Leech, 1983) Many scholars are from the perspective of the analysis of verbal humor, most scholars have put forward that the formation of verbal humor violates one or certain maxims of the Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle (Han, 2019). In this paper, the author analyzed the verbal humor in Huan bu huan, the comic sketch of the 2022 China Media Group Spring Festival Gala Evening, which aims to deepen people's understanding of comic sketch verbal humor and from the angle of pragmatics to understand

the causes of comic sketch language humor to provide a reference for the special artistic value of the audience to appreciate the comic sketch.

## 2. Theoretical Basis

### 2.1. Cooperative Principle

Grice (1975) proposed that there is a general principle guiding conversation, which he called the Cooperative Principle (CP for short), with Quantity, Quality, Relationship, and Manner as its main maxims. In his view, in normal communication, communicators abide by the Cooperation Principle, and they are supposed to abide by the general conversational maxims of the Cooperative Principle, which are as follows:

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) This general statement of the Cooperation Principle means that there is a certain set of rules in the dialogue and interaction. This set of rules controls the normal conversation and makes the conversation go smoothly. In other words, under normal circumstances, people communicate on the assumption that all participants are cooperative; otherwise, communication will not take place.

The Cooperative Principle subsumes mainly four maxims, which are the actual realizations of the Cooperative Principle. The four maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner, were formulated as follows (Grice, 1975):

Maxim of Quantity:

- (1) Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
- (2) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Maxim of Quality:

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

Maxim of Relation:

Be relevant.

Maxim of Manner:

Be perspicuous.

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

If people strictly follow these four principles, they can achieve the best communication. However, in actual language communication, people do not strictly follow this principle. If people deliberately violate these guidelines, there must be other intentions. In other words, what they say is intended to express a person with profound meaning or implication, that is, "conversational implicature". Conversational implicature is a kind of implicit meaning. It can be derived from the general meaning and context of words under the guidance of the cooperative principle and its guidelines.

### 2.2. Politeness Principle

Leech put forth the famous Politeness Principle (PP) in Principles of Pragmatics (1983) with the intention to "rescue" Grice's Cooperative Principle. As we know, though the Cooperative Principle explains how the conversational implicature is inferred, it does not explain why

people often choose to be indirect in what they want to say. He believes that in all language communication, the speaker and the hearer should maximize the expression of polite beliefs and minimize the expression of impolite beliefs. Leech explains the problem in terms of politeness. In his view, indirectness is motivated by politeness (Leech, 1983, p. 81). He believes that the politeness principle plays an important role in language communication and is one of the people in need to follow the principle.

Leech further formulates his Politeness Principle with the negative and positive forms: (in the negative form) "Minimize (other things being equal) the expression of impolite beliefs" and (in the positive form) "Maximize (other things being equal) the expression of polite beliefs." (Leech, 1983, p. 81) His Politeness Principle is further categorized into six main maxims, which go in pairs as follows:

- (1) Tact Maxim (in impositives and commissives)
  - (a) Minimize cost to other.
  - (b) Maximize benefit to other.
- (2) Generosity Maxim (in impositives and commissives)
  - (a) Minimize benefit to self.
  - (b) Maximize cost to self.
- (3) Approbation Maxim (in expressives and assertives)
  - (a) Minimize dispraise of other.
  - (b) Maximize praise of other.
- (4) Modesty Maxim (in expressives and assertives)
  - (a) Minimize praise of self.
  - (b) Maximize dispraise of self.
- (5) Agreement Maxim (in assertives)
  - (a) Minimize disagreement between self and other.
  - (b) Maximize agreement between self and other.
- (6) Sympathy Maxim (in assertives)
  - (a) Minimize antipathy between self and other.
  - (b) Maximize sympathy between self and other (Leech, 1983, p. 132).

### 3. The Analysis of the Verbal Humor in the Comic Sketch Huan Bu Huan

This paper selects the comic sketch named Huan bu huan of 2022 China Media Group Spring Festival Gala Evening as the data. This comic sketch is performed by Shen Teng, Ma Li, Allen and Chang Yuan. They came from Mahua FunAge. Founded in 2003, Mahua FunAge is a Beijing private enterprise, which has the most market appeal in comedy with its 19-year endeavor in China. Since 2012, Mahua FunAge has explored the development mode of cross-screen integration and created 86 stage plays, 64 of which are original. In 2019, the number of performances in China exceeded 3000 for the first time in the year. Over the years, the performances have covered more than 120 cities across the country, creating the miracle of Chinese stage play performance many times and bringing infinite joy to tens of millions of audiences. At the same time, 10 language works appeared on the stage of the CCTV Spring Festival Gala in 8 years and appeared in many TV Spring Festival Galas and variety shows, creating an "experimental" innovative comedy. Over the years of comedy content creation, it has formed its own system and gradually formed a comedy style of "wonderful stories, moving feelings, smart and sharp reviews of hot spots, novel and unique", which has become the personalized label of Mahua FunAge and is loved by the audience. This comic sketch tells the story of borrowing money easily but paying back money is difficult. This comic sketch through

humorous words reflects the same problems in the social phenomenon. They use the comic sketch to reflect the social reality. Comic sketch language originates from life and is higher than life and verbal humor is one of the unique ways of performing the comic sketch (Wang, 2002). Verbal humor is often reflected in interpersonal communication. Its interesting words and content can have the effect of pleasing the listener and is an important form of communication (Zhang, 2017). The comic sketch by carefully analyzing its dialogue, found the dialogue, characters repeatedly broke the conventional mode of dialogue and violates Grice's Cooperative Principle and Leech's Politeness Principle to achieve the effect of humor (Yan, 2010). Some typical examples in this paper are selected from this comic sketch.

### 3.1. Violate the Maxims of the Cooperative Principle

In Grice's 1975 paper, he defined "violating a maxim" as "the unostentatious non-observance of a maxim". If a speaker violates a maxim, he "will be liable to mislead". (Grice, 1975, p. 49).

(a) The violation of the maxim of Quantity

In communication, people only need to provide needed information. That is to say, don't say too much or too little. In the fragments of the comic sketch, people deliberately break the rules and shake out "baggage", so as to achieve a humorous effect (Yan, 2010).

Case1: Ma Li: You are living in fear every day!

Shen Teng: It's OK. They are my old classmates.

Ma Li: Shen, we have money. It's over if we pay back the money we owe.

Shen Teng: If we give them, we really have no money. Don't worry. They are easy to deal with. They want money, but I can't let him open his mouth. Go to meet them.

Case 1 is the beginning of the comic sketch. Allen and Chang Yuan want to ask Shen Teng to pay for their money. Shen Teng let the guard say he wasn't at home. However, Allen and Chang Yuan have been heard and come in. Ma Li thought the day that does not pay money have scary. She advised Shen Teng to pay for money. But Shen Teng said, if he pays for the money, he would have no money and then he wanted to talk with Allen and Chang Yuan that he does not have any money. So, they don't ask him for money. In this case, Ma Li let Shen Teng pay for money so Shen Teng just needed to answer if he wanted to pay money. But he answered not also he did not pay for the money; also want they don't ask him to pay for the money. This kind of violation of the maxim of Quantity lets a "deadbeat" image begin to appear in front of the audience.

(b) The violation of the maxim of Quality

The maxim of Quality requires that people in communication told the truth. In the comic sketch of the conversation, the actors say something that does not conform to the fact deliberately to achieve a humorous effect (Wei, 2017).

Case 2: Ma Li: What's wrong with you? Tell them!

Shen Teng: If you want to know what's wrong, you don't have to spend money to see it. When I have money, I go to the hospital. I pick up a few medicine bottles and I come back to use it. It's better if I can do well. Otherwise, my life will be over.

Ma Li: A!

Allen: You can't use drugs indiscriminately. What are they for, sister-in-law?

Ma Li: Ah!

Allen: You have to check! Why there be a bag of vinegar?

Shen Teng: Oh, oh, I said, how can I still crave dumplings when I lose? Hurry to pinch them. Li, where can I put them? Why do you hang them here after using them?

In case 2, Allen and Chang Yuan asked Shen Teng to pay for the money. However, Shen Teng pretended his infusion to fake it. Allen saw a bag of vinegar and asked why Shen Teng there have vinegar. Then Shen Teng asked his wife Ma Li. But the vinegar was accidentally put up by

Shen Teng. In the dialogue, Shen Teng didn't tell the truth. Just because of Shen Teng's behavior and words, makes the story more interesting and increase the sense of humor.

Case3: Shen Teng: You want to sue me? Well, I'll tell you. You are the last who want to sue me. Li and I have divorced. I didn't take anything. My money is on her card and my house is hers. I can live here now because we are in love!

Allen: That's very annoying!

Ma Li: Dalun, you can ask for money. But you can't beat someone. After the fight, he will blackmail you!

In case 3, Allen tells Shen Teng that if he doesn't pay back the money again, he will find a lawyer with a lawyer's certificate to sue him. As a result, in order not to pay back the money, Shen Teng told Allen that he had divorced Ma Li and does not have any money. This dialogue violates the maxim of Quality of the Cooperative Principle.

Case4: Ma Li: Shen, I used to envy you because you had so many friends. That's why I love you. I value love and justice. But how about now? If you don't return the money to others, are you still a human? Let's get divorced!

Shen Teng: Daughter-in-law!

Mary: Call me ex-wife.

Shen Teng: I'm wrong. Please help me pay back my classmate's money!

Mary: What?

Shen Teng: I also paid my brother's money!

Mary: Ah!

In case 4, Ma Li tells Shen Teng that if he still has money but doesn't pay it back, she will really divorce Shen Teng. So, Shen Teng decided to pay back the money. Shen Teng said to Ma Li, "Give me back my friends' money!" In this dialogue, Ma Li should just answer yes or no. But she said, "What?" Ma Li's answer also violated the maxim of Quality of the Cooperative Principle. Ma Li violated this maxim, indicating her surprise. At the same time, it also adds a comic effect to this comic sketch.

(c) The violation of the maxim of Relation

The maxim of Relation requires that the dialogue between the content is associated and to avoid the irrelevant answer. In daily communication, in order to avoid an awkward situation, the situation of irrelevant answers is common (Shi, 1999). In the comic sketch, in order to achieve the effect of humor, the situation is more common (Li, 2020).

Case5: Ma Li: Lao Shen, Lao Shen, let's have a look. Your photo has been posted online and you are already on the list of dishonest people. Who will call you Lao Shen after that? They will call you Lao Lai. What a shame! Come to think of a way.

Shen Teng: I really need to find a way. I have to find someone to change the photo. I have double chins in this picture.

In case 5, Ma Li told Shen Teng that his photo had been posted online and Shen Teng was already on the list of dishonest people. She told Shen Teng to find a way as soon as possible to solve this problem. But Shen Teng said, "We really have to find a way. We have to find someone to change the picture. I have double chins in this picture." In this plot, Ma Li wants Shen Teng to find a way not to be put on the Internet by others, and try not to be on the list of dishonest people. But Shen Teng's words had nothing to do with Ma Li's idea. Shen Teng's unexpected and irrelevant answer not only brings a certain humorous effect to the comic sketch but also highlights his image of the "deadbeat".

Case 6: Shen Teng: Lun, Yuan, I'm walking in the gate of death! I've seen through a lot of things. People, except for feelings, everything is external. I owed you two before. Since then, our previous affairs have been written off.

Chang Yuan: Don't write it off! At any rate, it's OK to divide it into several strokes!

Allen: Don't worry. It will be all right.

Shen Teng: Far away, Lun, lift your ass up. I'm bleeding now. You are sitting on my infusion tube. In case 6, Shen Teng pretended he was ill and said that money is a thing apart from the body. He doesn't want to pay and wants to write it off. Chang Yuan said to Shen Teng that he can write off little by little. Allen didn't answer Shen Teng's write-off. Instead, he comforted Shen Teng and said that will be fine. According to the maxim of Relation, Allen's answer violated the maxim of the Relation. This reflects the eagerness that Allen wanted Shen Teng to pay for his money.

(d) The violation of the maxim of Manner

The maxim of Manner requires that the speaker of the language is simple and clear (Ran, 2020). In order to achieve the effect of humor, in many cases, deliberately said there is ambiguity and prolixity in language.

Case 7: Allen: Sister-in-law, take the 1000 yuan and take my brother to the hospital to have a health check. Take it.

Shen Teng: Lun, what are you doing, Lun?

Allen: Take it, take it.

Shen Teng: Lun, Yuan, what does he doing?

Allen: Here you are.

Shen Teng: Why do you talk about the friendship between classmates?

Allen: Take it!

Shen Teng: Yuan, you don't learn from him!

Chang Yuan: Ah.

Shen Teng: Don't learn.

Ma Li: Look.

Chang Yuan: I, sister-in-law.

MaLi: No.

In case 7, Allen gave Ma Li some money. He wants Ma Li to take Shen Teng to go to the hospital. Then Shen Teng began to suggest Chang Yuan also gave him some money. But he used ambiguous language and constantly hinted at Chang Yuan which makes the dialogue prolix. So that highlights Shen Teng's image of a "deadbeat".

Case 8: Allen: Your central heating is very good! As you know, I have been alone all these years. I'm 40 years old. When I finally got along with a girl and wanted to get married, her son asked me for 100000 yuan as the bride price.

Shen Teng: Lun, the girl who doesn't have children is called a girl. She should be called a woman. Besides, why does her son want so much money?

Allen: Her son is also anxious to get married.

Shen Teng: Ah! This is a group wedding. If we don't pay for the bride price, we will not get married. Li, when we got married, did I pay for your family?

Ma Li: Yes. I made an IOU.

Shen Teng: Did I just write an IOU?

Ma Li: My father beat you up after that.

Shen Teng: You see, it's also a good marriage. You should also give him a note of debt so that she can follow you for the rest of her life. OK, your family affairs will be solved in this way.

Chang Yuan: Lao Shen, I have a problem at home. My son should go to kindergarten now. My business has been stagnant recently. He should go to kindergarten. I have to spend money. Do you think I should let him go to kindergarten or go to work outside?

The maxim of Manner requires that the speaker of the language is simple. In the comic sketch, Allen and Chang Yuan come to ask for the money lent to Shen Teng. In case 8, the two of them made some excuses, which made the plot lengthy. So, they violated the maxim of Manner. At the same time, their dialogues also add interest to the comic sketch.

### 3.2. Violate the Maxims of the Politeness Principle

Case 9: Shen Teng: Yuan, you can't want to learn from him!

Chang Yuan: Ah.

Shen Teng: Don't learn.

Ma Li: Look.

Chang Yuan: I, sister-in-law.

Ma Li: No.

Chang Yuan: Take it.

Ma Li: Far away.

Chang Yuan: Take it.

Ma Li: I really can't have it.

Chang Yuan: Sister-in-law, take it! This is pure moral kidnapping of money.

Ma Li: Shen, if you take the money, you will not be a human being!

Shen Teng: Don't you take this?

In case 9, after Allen gave Shen Teng some money, Shen Teng began to hint Chang Yuan also gave him money. Chang Yuan had to give the money to Ma Li. Ma Li said that the money she would not have. Chang Yuan said this is the money of pure moral kidnapping. Ma Li told Shen Teng that if he took Chang Yuan's money, he is not the person. However, Shen Teng said that the money is in Ma Li's hand. Shen Teng's hint for Chang Yuan and Shen Teng of his wife's response, all of this is in producing disagreements and conflicts. So, they violated the maxims of the Politeness Principle. At the same time, Ma Li said that if Shen Teng took the money, he was not a person. Her words were derogatory to Shen Teng and also violated the maxims of the Politeness Principle.

Case 10: Chang Yuan: Lao Shen, I have a problem at home. My son should go to kindergarten now. My business has been stagnant recently. He should go to kindergarten. I have to spend money. Do you think I should let him go to kindergarten or go to work outside?

Shen Teng: Go to work!

Chang Yuan: I went out to work when I was three years old!

Shen Teng: A migrant worker (Da gong zai in Chinese). He has to go out to work when he was young, right? This child of the same age is still preparing for the college entrance examination. Our children have become a labor contractor. How wonderful! OK, Yuan, your family affairs have also been solved. Look at you, stay here and there is nothing to eat at home. Ah, otherwise I will add some warm water for you two!

In case 10, facing Chang Yuan's question that his son should be in kindergarten or working, Shen Teng chose to work. This violated the maxim of the Politeness Principle which is to maximize the benefit to others. In this way, made the humor for the comic sketch.

Case 11: Wang Chengsi: Don't touch me!

Shen Teng: Do you think I can't drag you? Are you getting fat again?

Allen: Brother, you misunderstood me. We have just finished the shareholders' meeting and the capital chain has been resolved. You can return the money later!

Chang Yuan: Don't worry!

Wang Chengsi got up: This means that you two are going to jump into the pit too. Don't believe him. Every time I come to ask for money, he tells me many lies. He has hemiplegia, facial paralysis, cerebral thrombosis, mouth tilt, eye tilt, and kidney failure. He is an old rascal. Whoever has a close relationship with him, Shen Teng will kill him. You don't know that he has two classmates who have a very close relationship with him. They were embarrassed to ask for the money they lent him. They don't get money back every year and they have to take money in every time. After taking money, he still scolds them for being stupid!

Chang Yuan: Is he talking about us?

Allen: No, he can't speak behind us.

Wang Chengsi: Brother, if I'm not wrong, you should be called Silly Lun!

Allen: Look, I said it wasn't me. I'm not stupid.

Chang Yuan: Silly Lun must be you. Who is that person?

Wang Chengsi: Must be you. You are heartless Yuan.

Chang Yuan: Heartless Yuan, Lao Shen, you hurt me.

In case 11, Wang Chengsi makes a guest appearance as the cousin of the protagonist Shen Teng. Shen Teng didn't want to let him in and said to him, "are you fat again? Eat!" Shen Teng's remark violates the Politeness Principle. That is Approbation Maxim (in expressives and assertives): minimize dispraise of others and maximize the praise of others. Then Allen and Chang Yuan told Wang Chengsi that Shen Teng has the money. Wang Chengsi said in his reply that Shen Teng scolded the person who lent him money behind his back for being stupid. Wang Chengsi's words showed that Shen Teng violated the Approbation Maxim of the Politeness Principle.

Case 12: Allen: Sister-in-law, take this 1000 yuan and take my brother to the hospital to have a good look. Take it.

Shen Teng: Lun, what are you doing, Lun?

Allen: Here you are.

Shen Teng: Lun, Yuan, what does he doing?

Allen: Here you are.

Shen Teng: Why do you talk about the friendship between classmates?

Allen: Take it!

Shen Teng: Yuan, you don't learn from him!

Chang Yuan: Ah.

Shen Teng: Don't learn.

In case 12, when Shen Teng saw that Allen gave Ma Li 1000 yuan, he immediately hinted that Chang Yuan would also give him money for his own benefit. Shen Teng violated the Tact Maxim and Generosity Maxim. That minimizes the cost to other, maximize benefit to other and minimize benefit to self, maximize cost to self. In this way, their dialogue increased the comedy effect of the comic sketch.

#### 4. Conclusion

Comic sketches attracted numerous audiences with their humorous speech. And seemingly at random humor lines conceals implicit the principles of pragmatics. The paper under the perspective of pragmatics researched the comic sketch's generation mechanism of verbal humor. And know that this comedy sketch of verbal humor mainly by violating the maxims of the Cooperative Principle and the maxims of Politeness Principle. That is, people intentionally or unintentionally violate the maxim of the Cooperative Principle and the maxims of the Politeness Principle. It is possible to produce a humorous effect. Comic sketches as the program of China Media Group Spring Festival Gala Evening can reflect the theme of the social

phenomenon and with their humor and unique language style give people some positive energy. The Huan bu huan through humorous language reflects the social phenomenon of paying for money. But the plot of the settlement also let many audiences feel warm. And some people begin to think if they have the same problem. Analyzing the comic sketch from the perspective of the Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle can make the audience understand humor from the perspective of pragmatics and improve the virtuosity of comic sketch language. In addition, the author also suggests that people pay close attention to words in real communication between the lines and don't violate the maxims of the Cooperative Principle and the maxims of Politeness Principle to achieve good communication. After all, life is not a comic sketch.

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