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# Pragmatics of Humor in Oprah Winfrey and Piers Morgan Shows

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## ABSTRACT

Humor is the quality of being amusing or comic in literature and speech. It is sometimes used to enhance the utterances so as to make them more comfortable since it is considered a common element of human interaction. That is why it has been given a considerable attention by many scholars from different fields of knowledge such as linguistics, psychology and sociology. In linguistics, many scholars have tried to define humor and to show its functions and the factors that enable the humor act to be adequate and interesting. This led many theories and approaches to be formulated in order to study humor from different perspectives among which the incongruity theory by Kant (1790) and the relief theory by Morreall [1]. In addition, the non-observance of Grice's conversational maxims [2] can be used as a means of creating humor. As such, the present study is intended with the aims of pragmatically analyzing humor as a strategic means by which participants achieve their goals in interpersonal interaction, in particular in TV talk shows, namely, Oprah Winfrey Show and Piers Morgan Show. It also aims to investigate the way by which participants shift the topic of interaction whenever they try to avoid a certain topic by adopting a humorous style. The study has come to the conclusion that there are many factors that affect humor in TV talk shows including the personality of the host and his/her interviewees, the topic of interaction and the way through which a character deals with a certain topic.

*Keywords: Humor; functions; interpersonal interaction; topic shift; Oprah Winfrey; Piers Morgan.*

## 1. HUMOR

### 1.1 An Introduction

It is difficult to define humor because it is a broad term that fits with many of what people say or do. The term humor is considered a synonym to parody, irony and comic. This proves that humor is perceived as something funny that makes others laugh, Abdulmajeed [3]. The word humor is derived originally from the Latin word "humor" which means "liquid" or "fluid". It still retains this meaning in psychology in reference to bodily fluids such as the "aqueous and vitreous humor of the eye", as stated by Martin [4]. In English, the word "humor" is derived from the French word "humor" in the 16th century. Humor is also introduced in the literature as an unbalanced temperament or personality trait led to refer to any behavior that deviates from social norms as cited by Abbas [5]. Mindess [6], on the other hand, defines humor as "a frame of mind, a manner of perceiving and experiencing life, it is a kind of outlook, a special point of view and one which has a great therapeutic power". Scholars believe that humor is connected to laughter and they often deal with them together. When people perceive something as humorous, they tend to laugh. Though laughter is one type of prototypical response to humor, laughter is not always equal to humor because laughter can have other meanings. Sometimes, it expresses aggressiveness, nervousness and embarrassment. In addition, people laugh when they are tickled as cited by Hutcheson [7]. In this regard, Morrison [8] states that people who appreciate humor and humorists are described as having 'a good sense of humor'; the ability to respond to humorous situations either by laughing or smiling.

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Ibrahim and Abbas [9] refer to the idea that though so many scholars have tried to define humor and differentiate it from laughter, their definitions have neglected the dark side of humor. Humor can be funny for some people still it can be offending and upsetting to others. From all the above mentioned definitions it is “evident that humor is a broad term that refers to anything that people say or do that is perceived as funny and tends to make others laugh as well as the mental processes that go into both creating and perceiving such an amusing stimulus, and also the affective response involved in the enjoyment of it” [4].

Humor has been studied by many scholars and researchers to analyze literary discourse such as Galinanes [10] and Ermida [11]. Series have also been pragmatically studied by using humor such as Allen’s study [12], Yao’s [13], and Dynel’s [14]. This study is intended to examine the use of humor in TV Talk Shows, namely, Oprah Winfrey Show and Piers Morgan Show using the incongruity theory and the relief theory.

## **1.2 Humor Factors**

Few people are characterized as having sense of humor that may be socially popular if their society thinks of humor in high esteem. Humorous people have humor competence that differentiates them from those who do not. Humorous people have the ability to respond to funny stimuli more easily. Raskin [15] believes that there are many factors for humor to be performed adequately. He calls “an individual occurrence of a funny stimulus a humor act”. This act is characterized by the following factors:

1. Human participation: for any humor act to be adequate there should be human participants. The participants may include the speaker and one or more hearers. The speaker may be replaced by “the writer, radio, television or any substitute speaker” while the hearer may be substituted by “the readers, the radio or television audiences” [15]. The physical presence of a human participant is a necessary factor for the humor act to be fulfilled. This sole participant is usually the hearer, the perceiver and the addressee of the humor stimulus.
2. The stimulus: a new stimulus should be presented and responded to humorously. This stimulus is an utterance, a situation that has to be perceived.
3. The life experience of an individual: what makes a person laugh at a certain time may fail to make him laugh twenty years or so after.
4. The psychological type of an individual participating in the humor act: this factor with the experience of the individual determines the degree of the predisposition to humor in a given situation.
5. The situational context: Raskin [15] believes that “every humor act occurs in a certain physical environment which serves as one of the most important contextual factors of the humor act”.
6. The society: humor act occurs within a certain culture. This culture belongs to a certain society which has certain social values and norms. Many researchers have commented on this fact and the way it affects the interpretation of the humor act [15].

## **1.3 Knowledge Sources and Humor**

Attardo [16] states that there are six types of knowledge sources which makes it possible to identify whether a text is humorous or not. The six types, namely, script opposition, logical mechanism, situation, target, narrative strategies, and language, are explained below:

1. The script opposition is the opposition of semantic frameworks or scripts when it comes to interpret a humor utterance generating a number of incongruities that the listener has to resolve in his final interpretation.
2. The logical mechanism is the most problematic parameter since it is the one that surrounds incongruity-resolution process, and the resolution is optional in some cases of humor.
3. The situation is everything that surrounds humor, i.e., the context which evokes and generates the framework in the humor discourse.
4. The target shows the person humor is addressed to. This knowledge source is optional because there is a type of humor which does not ridicule anyone and does not have a personal

target either. This idea is closely linked to humor with a positive effect and humor with a negative.

5. The narrative strategy has to do with the genre being used to express humor. If it is a joke, the strategy can adopt a question-answer or riddle format, for instance, although it might also be much more complex and be based on logical mechanisms and reasoning.
6. The language contains all the information required in order to be able to verbalize a humorous text, that is, the speaker has available all the instruments needed for a text to contain the suitable words which lead to an opposition of senses and a double interpretation, i.e., polysemy, ambiguity, polyphony, hyperbole, etc.

## **1.4 Functions of Humor**

Humor has a variety of functions in interpersonal interaction. These functions prove that humor is a strategic means of communication that is used to achieve certain conversational goals. Humor can function as a means that is used to facilitate communication, develop interpersonal relationships, exert power and social control, and transmit verbally aggressive messages and to express excitement or joy [17]. Moreover, she concludes that humor serves a strategic function to the extent that the use of humor accomplishes an individual's interactive goal. Attardo [18] believes that the analysis of different humor texts is the same since it has to do with the identification of the humorous linguistic texts that appear, depending on whether they are situated in the plot 'jab lines' or at the end 'punch lines' of the text. Semantically, they are the same but pragmatically with regard to function and according to their textual position, they are different. As such, if they appear in the middle of the conversation, they provide the listener with clues about the humorous intention, i.e., they are used as a jab line, but if they appear at the very end, they represent a humorous punch line.

Hay [19], from another point of view, elaborates on humor saying that it performs three functions in conversation, namely, solidarity, power and psychological needs. Each one of such functions is performed by a number of strategies. For example, solidarity is performed by sharing life experiences, highlighting similarities, cooperating in jokes and joking, and so on. In this regard, Holmes and Marra [20] believe that humor is a social strategy that helps to strengthen interpersonal relationships in the context of work where the listener interprets the communicative exchange as humorous depending on the indicators and marks available in the text and context.

Since humor serves a variety of functions in interaction, the researcher of this study intends to show the functions of humor in TV talk shows and how it can sometimes be used to shift the topic of interaction in the course of conversation.

## **1.5 Forms of Humor**

Attardo [18] states that humor depends on whether it takes place in narrative texts or in conversation. The most important points are the lack of planning which can be found in conversation and the importance that the context has for a correct utterance interpretation. Different forms of humor are communicated by different means for different purposes. Some of this humor comes from the mass media such as radio's witty comments. Besides, TV provides us with humor in the form of sections, blooper shows, standup comedy, political and humorous advertisements. Newspapers as well as comic scripts and cartoons can provide humor.

Alvarado [21] presents two types of humor depending on their effects on the conversation: humor with a positive effect and humor with a negative effect. Humor with a positive effect arises when there is no damage or criticism in the humorous utterance. Humor with a negative effect, on the other hand, stems when there is damage to the public image of the listener or an absent person or when a situation is criticized. In such cases, politeness is not preset because context does not admit it. Instead, impoliteness appears when the hearer face is damaged. Moreover, humor with a positive effect may, in turn, convey a negative image or a positive image and in this case politeness is likely to be introduced as a pragmatic strategy. When humor carries a negative image, the result will be something called 'self-humor', where the speaker himself becomes the target of humor. But when humor carries a positive image, on the other hand, the speaker must integrate into the conversational

group and humor can be addressed towards the listener, towards an absent person or towards a situation.

On the whole, the different forms of humor can be presented either as “verbal humor” or “non-verbal humor”. The forth mode is done through language while the latter is done through nonverbal acts like cartoons, gags, etc. and it depends on visual stimulus rather than verbal. Furthermore, the present study deals with verbal humor in conversation, and as such nonverbal humor is beyond the scope of it.

### **1.5.1 Verbal Humor**

Attardo [18] (as cited in Alvarado [21]) states that there are two important stages comprising the act of humor, namely, humor competence and humor performance. Humor competence refers to the ability that the speaker and the listener have to make and recognize humor within a specific context. Humor performance, on the other hand, refers to the desire and willingness to appreciate humor. As such, both speaker and hearer are to take part in the communicative act from a series of linguistic and pragmatic mechanisms that help the interlocutor to interpret the utterance properly.

Verbal humor is introduced as having the following categories:

1. Deliberate ridicule: This is done by making fun of somebody or something [15].
2. Malapropism: This type of humor takes its name from the comedian character Malaprop who is a character in Sheridan’s play “The Rivals”. This character does not utter any word in the right way. Instead, he uses one of the similar sounds but in an inappropriate way. Thus, the result is producing humorous utterances [22].
3. Spoonerism: This type of humor is named after Reverend William Archibald Spooner a famous Oxford professor who is known for his transposition of the sounds of two or more words resulting in the production of funny utterances [22].
4. Allusion: It is “the extra—linguist knowledge about the world. The double meaning may involve references to saying or quotation” [22]. If the listener does not have a common background with the speaker, ambiguity is not recognized.
5. Satire: It is a way to make sync between criticizing, foolishness, and or stupidity through ridicule with the aim of altering and making reform.
6. Parody: It is a humorous imitation of style [22].
7. Irony: It expresses the meaning, often humorous or sarcastic, but through “the use of language of a different or opposite tendency” [22].
8. Lapses: It is an unintentional humor such as a slip of the tongue.

### **1.6 Theories of Humor**

Humor has been given considerable attention by scholars from different fields. Besides, it has been treated from different points of view, i.e., sociolinguistics, ethnography, etc., although our focus here is the pragmatic perspective. Many theories and approaches have appeared. Attardo [23] referred to three theories, namely, aggression theory (where the humorous act comes as a result of an expression of a superiority feeling f a human being towards another human being), release theory (where humor is the effect resulting from a release of accumulated energy), and incongruity theory (where humor is based on the discovery of a reality or thought that turns out to be contrary to what was expected) among the schools of thought that have dealt with humor. To Ibrahim & Abbas [24], the most prominent theories to humor are the incongruity theory, the superiority theory and relief theory. Contemporary humor scholars seem to agree that these three major theories of humor are not exclusive to each other; they are mentally connected and share the same concepts. That is why the researcher of the present study will elaborate on them in the following:

- 1) Incongruity Theory: Kant (1724–1804) was the first author who was generally associated with the Incongruity Theory of humor. This theory pays attention to the “suddenness of the transformation and to the fact that the expectation is turned into nothing” [23]. Therefore, this theory is based on the mismatch between two ideas. Moreover, this theory refers to something

which is not in its appropriate situation. It must be enjoyed so that it will be considered as humor (Ruch, 2008, as cited by Marfo [25]). It is this theory that is mostly appropriate to the analysis of the present study. According to the congruity theory, Boss [26] states that humor comes from one situation or idea having multiple meanings or senses. In this sense, [26] concludes that “in order to be humorous, an entity would need to have more than one possible interpretation, or, in other words, to represent a certain degree of ambiguity. Subsequently, we can assume that this ambiguity is the factor that ‘deceives’ humor recipients, misleads them and finally surprises by ‘disambiguation’ and revealing the proper solution of the situation”.

- 2) Superiority Theory: This theory indicates that “laughter arises from a sense of superiority of the laugher towards some objects” [23]. Thus, it expresses the negative side of humor which is the aggressive one. It is based on hostility, malice, aggression, derision, or disparagement. The passion of laughter is considered nothing else but a sudden glory that arises from some sudden conception of some eminency in us. This is done by when we compare the infirmity of others and with our own. Humans normally laugh because of a ‘sudden glory’. The ‘sudden glory’ is caused either by the anxiety of some deformed thing in others, or by some surprised act of their own. This type of humor is generated from simple naïve thoughts and misadventures of young people or children who can represent a very important source of amusement. Superiority can include superiority over the person’s own former position, and not just aimed at others [27].
- 3) Relief Theory: It was first proposed by Spencer and Freud. It is based on the assumption that laughter can be described as something like a safety valve to release anxiety and tension [28]. Mindess [29] believes that “our sense of humor frees us from the chain of our perceptual, conversational, logical, linguistic, and moral systems” He regards humor as liberation from what we are trying to escape. Besides, Morreall [1] argues that the relief theory may not be a separate theory from the superiority and incongruity theories, but rather a complement theory that looks at different aspects (as cited in Andrew & Anderson [30]). As such, it is this theory that will be applied in the analysis of the episodes because it is the most related to achieve the objectives of the present study.

## **2. GRICE’S CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE**

In a normal conversation, both parties, the speaker and the hearer, communicate according to a set of rules they usually obey. Grice [2] established a set of four maxims called ‘conversational maxims’ that should be followed to ensure a smooth interaction. And these rules, of course, vary across cultures. Typically, speakers do not observe all such maxims the whole time. Usually, one or two of them are observed in every day conversation. In other words, these maxims may be perfectly observed if and only if speakers obey their rules. When speakers intentionally fail to observe a maxim, to make a specific point or to express a non-literal meaning, a conversational implicature is generated. This means that speakers violate such maxims to some extent on the surface of the talk but they commit to them at some deeper level of communication. Grice [31] narrated his cooperative principle in the following way: “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. One might label this the Cooperative Principle.” The cooperative principle seems to be the central method of demonstrating the manner through which deception has taken place; a person may ignore—or violate, to be more specific, the cooperative principle for personal benefit [19]. The vital underlying assumption of this principle is that interlocutors cooperate when they are in the process of conversing so that the communication is seen as successful. In order to know how this principle works, Grice [31] proposed four maxims, which are known as Gricean maxims.

**The Maxim of Quantity**, concerning the quantity of information to be provided:

Submaxims:

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.

**The Maxim of Quality**, related to the truthfulness of the contribution:

Submaxims:

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

**The Maxim of Relevance**, according to which contributors are supposed to contribute to the conversation in an appropriate and pertinent manner: Be relevant.

**The Maxim of Manner**, concerning how the content is said:

Supermaxim: Be perspicuous.

Submaxims:

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

### **3. TOPIC**

Topic is defined by Coates [32] as a “chunk of talk that hangs together because it is about the same thing”. It is the subject of interaction over which conversation evolves and is developed by the participants in the conversation. As such, participants are likely to produce relevant talk that is connected to one another’s talk. The hearer, for example, produces an utterance that is related to what the previous speaker has produced. As such, participants should speak topically and be cooperative [32]. Moreover, most topics of interaction are not fixed previously. Instead, they are negotiated and developed by participants in the process of conversation.

#### **3.1 Topic Shifting**

Wordhaugh (as cited in [33]) argued that a conversation usually covers a number of topics and involved shifts from one topic to another. It means that in a conversation, the speakers do not only talk about one topic from the beginning to the end, they tend to shift from one topic to another. These topics that emerge within the main one can be considered as sub—topics of the previous topic or a new topic. Similarly, topic shift is the change of a topic in a conversation when the speakers talk about another subject and discuss it in the course of conversation to make it more interesting and effective.

#### **3.2 Talk Show Genre**

Talk show is a modern “Anglo-Saxon” institution. It has emerged in the early 1930s when radio talk shows appeared in the United States. The talk show is a sort of socio-cultural practice of purposeful talk [34]. Later on, TV talk shows have appeared. They provide both talk as well as entertainment [35].

The talk show displays “a hybrid broadcast discourse”. It employs conversational as well as institutional discourse. As such, some scholars call this genre “semi-institutional”. It is semi-institutional since some forms of natural conversation are ‘embedded’ within its institutional aspect [36].

Though this genre is “highly planned” and it is ‘anchored’ by a host (or a group of hosts), Timberg [37] believes that “no matter how planned or formatted”, the talk show is based on what is called “fresh talk” i.e., spontaneous. He believes that a TV show is “entirely structured around the act of conversation”.

### **3.3 Topic Shift and Humor**

Humor is a multifunctional aspect of language and it is very useful in our life. If somebody wants to change someone's mind, he needs just to mix seriousness with humor and it will give him a good result. Moreover, when a person does not want to talk about a certain topic, he can avoid it by producing a humorous utterance thus giving the other participant a clue that he is not ready to talk about this topic. Thus, humor can be used as a topic shifting strategy. In this regard, Brown and Yule [38] agree that topic shift is the change of topic in a conversation where the speakers add another subject of discussion to the conversation to make the conversation more interesting and effective.

McCarthy (as cited in [33]) refers to issue of 'topic shifting' as being very important in keeping the conversation going on and avoiding silence. Therefore, speakers tend to talk not only one topic but also relate to another topic which sometimes has relation with the previous and sometimes does not, in order to make the conversation going on run smoothly. In addition, there are five kinds of topic shift as identified by Stenstrom (cited in [33]) which are differentiated in terms of their relation with the previous topic. They are topic shift, topic drift, topic digresses, and topic resume. And also she stated that pauses mark the topic shift.

## **4. METHODOLOGY**

The present study is qualitative in nature. It examines the extracts in their contexts. Moreover, it aims at giving a thorough analysis of the extracts by examining them, picking up the humor act and presenting its type and function. The incongruity theory of Kant (1790) and the relief theory of Morreall [1] constitute the theoretical framework on which the researcher will depend. Two talk shows have been selected for the analysis, namely, Oprah Winfrey Show and Piers Morgan Show. Two episodes are chosen from each show. Four extracts are selected from each episode to be analysed. Then, a comparison is conducted so as to tell which host uses humor more than the other and what functions and types are used and why.

## **5. DATA ANALYSIS**

This section is dedicated to the analysis of the selected extracts from two TV Talk shows which are Oprah Winfrey Show and Piers Morgan Show. Two episodes are selected from each show. From each episode, four extracts are selected. These extracts are contextualized and analyzed in an elaborated manner to examine the different types and functions of humor in TV Talk shows. This examination is based on certain steps: identifying exactly where humor lies in the utterance, by which characters are analyzed and then specifying the type of humor produced by them.

### **5.1 Oprah Winfrey Show**

Oprah Show is one of the most popular TV talk shows around the world. Oprah Winfrey is the host of the show. She tackles different topics and issues with her interviewees. She is considered as the most influential TV show host. From this show, two episodes are selected: Will Smith and family interview and Donald Trump interview.

#### **5.1.1 First episode: Will Smith and family interview**

In this episode, Oprah interviews the popular actor Will Smith and his family. She discusses with him many issues concerning his work, family and beliefs.

#### **Extract one:**

**Oprah:** *what is the bigger vision for your marriage, what is the bigger-*

**Jada:** *well, we had to figure that out because we're two big beings that come together and I had my vision and he had his so we decided to-*

**Will:** *just do what she says (laughter)*

**Jada:** *Yeah. basically. that's the vision.*

#### **Contextualizing the extract:**

Oprah is talking to the Smith's family asking them about the bigger vision of their marriage. Jada is the addressee who answers Oprah's question. In the meanwhile, Will interrupts Jada by producing a funny comment.

#### **Analyzing the extract:**

It is observed in the first extract how humor is triggered by saying "Just do...." when Will interrupts Jada, by violating the maxim of relation. To this violation, Oprah and the audience start laughing. This happens because Will's comment is a funny joke that raises humor. The function of humor in this extract is to evoke laughter by embedding humor within seriousness "Just do what she says". This humorous instance has disturbed Jada who is talking about the addressed subject in a passionate way, yet, the cooperative principle is still at work since she agrees by saying "Yeah, basically. That's the vision". The humorous act here is not detrimental to Jada's public image that is the humorous target of the utterance. Besides, Will's humor leads Jada to make a humorous interpretation which acts as a jab line in the conversation.

#### **Extract two**

**Oprah:** *Okay, so we're going to break it. You talk about—he gets his treats. I want to know what you do to keep this flame burning.*

**Jada:** *Now, how saucy do you want to get Oprah (laughter)?*

**Oprah:** *well. I wouldn't mind hearing one or two.*

#### **Contextualizing the extract**

Oprah is talking to Jada asking her about the way she keeps the flame of love burning between her and Will. Jada asks Oprah how far she wants to know about this matter by saying "how saucy do you want to get Oprah?" The audience laughs because it is a personal issue.

#### **Analyzing the extract:**

In this short extract, Oprah asks about a very personal issue and Jada gives her a hint about "how saucy" she wants to get about this subject. This hint can be related to the violation of the maxims of manner 'by not being straight' and maxim of quantity 'by saying more than is required' which, in turn, raises laughter and embarrassment at the same time on the part of the guest Jada. Humor here is caused by the subject of interaction and the expected answer which is a private issue by saying "how saucy do you want to get Oprah?" The audience laughs because it is a personal issue. So, humor is intended to evoke laughter by the host Oprah and the audience as well. Oprah gets Jada's point and tells her that she wouldn't mind hearing one or two. One more time, the humorous act is used as a jab line since it is situated in the middle of the conversation. The type of humor here which lies in the witty answer Jada produces is meant to entertain.

#### **Extract three:**

**Oprah:** *I am not giving too much a way when I say that you had your first onscreen kiss*

**Jayden:** *yeah, I had my first onscreen kiss. Yeah (laughter)*

**Oprah:** *and was this challenging for you?*



**Jayden:** *um I mean I'm good at kissing so—(laughter)—so it wasn't as challenging as it could've been*

**Oprah:** *it wasn't as challenging as it could've been, had you not had some previous experience!*

**Jayden:** *yeah, uha (laughter)*

#### **Contextualizing the extract:**

Oprah is talking to Jayden about his film “The Karate Kid”. She tells him that she is not exaggerating when she says that he has his first onscreen kiss. Jayden agrees with her proudly. The audience laughs.

#### **Analyzing the extract:**

Jayden's answer to Oprah's question is not expected to be in this way. Therefore, Oprah and the audience start laughing at “yeah, I had my first onscreen kiss. Yeah.” There is an incongruity between Oprah's question and the given answer. Oprah and the audience are surprised with Jayden's answer so they laugh. The type of this humor act is parody; Jayden tries to act like an adult but in a funny way. The function of humor in this example is to show surprise and it is situated in the center of the plot, so it is a jab line humorous act

#### **Extract four:**

**Oprah:** *so, do you think your parents are cool or do they sometimes embarrass you Jayden?*

**Jayden:** *hum, my parents embarrass me all the time.*

*(laughter)*

**Oprah:** *they do! I didn't expect that answer.*

#### **Contextualizing the extract**

Oprah is asking Jayden about his parents if they are cool or they cause embarrassment. Oprah and the audience laugh because his answer comes contrary to their expectation.

#### **Analyzing the extract**

The audience and Oprah laugh at Jayden's answer “my parents embarrass me all the time”. They have not expected such an answer. Thus, there is a mismatch between Oprah's and the audience's expectation of what the answer is to be and between Jayden's unexpected answer. Humor here is used to express astonishment. Jayden's answer violates the maxim of quantity because he gives more than is required by stating ‘all the time’ rather than answering with ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to cause laughter. Jaden here produces a humorous jab line where his parents become the humorous target of the utterance without of course being detrimental to their public image.

### **5.1.2 Second Episode: Donald Trump and Family Interview**

In this episode, Oprah interviews Donald Trump and his wife. Then, she interviews the other members of the family asking them about different topics concerning their family.

#### **Extract one:**

**Oprah:** *did they all like you immediately?*

**Melania:** *well, I don't know. Did they? (laughter)*

**Donald:** *... they really loved Melania.*

**Oprah:** *why? We'll ask them. (laughter)*

**Contextualizing the extract:**

Oprah asks Melania if the Trump's children liked her immediately. Melania expresses her lack of certainty concerning this matter. Then, she addresses a question to Donald asking him whether his children liked her immediately.

**Analyzing the extract:**

Melania answers Oprah's question with irony expressing her uncertainty through the use of 'well' followed by 'I don't know'. This irony causes the audience to laugh. Thus, it is perceived by the audience as something funny. This humorous act functions as a means that expresses Melania's lack of an adequate answer to Oprah's question. When Donald replies to her question by saying "they really loved her", Oprah seems uncertain. That is why she produces another humorous jab line in this extract which causes a positive effect on the conversation. The situation has turned to be the humorous target of the utterance which is used to strengthen the family ties.

**Extract two:**

**Donald:** *... I ran a lot of hotels you know. A lot of hotels. I screamed at people why you are late. But now I understand I'll never scream again.*

**Oprah:** *really! (laughter)*

**Donald:** *never—yeah may be not. One may be a little bit.*

**Contextualizing the extract:**

Donald tells Oprah that though he has a lot of hotels, he does not know how difficult the job of his employees is in these hotels. But now he understands them and he will never scream at them again. However, Oprah expresses her doubtfulness and the audience laugh. Donald reformulates his utterance saying that maybe he will scream a little bit.

**Analyzing the extract:**

Oprah's question 'Really?' about Donald's ability to fulfill his promise is ironic. It expresses Oprah's doubtfulness concerning Donald's words. The audience laughs at this question since they perceive Oprah's clue. The function of this humor act is to express doubtfulness. The effect of this function makes Donald violate the maxim of manner as he becomes ambiguous in his last utterance especially when he expresses his negative answer in three levels of doubtfulness 'never', 'yeah may be not' and 'One may be a little bit'. This constitutes a violation of the maxim of quantity as he states 'more than what is required'. Oprah's humorous jab line makes the absent the humorous target of the utterance without being detrimental to their public image and this causes a positive effect on the conversation.

**Extract three:**

**Oprah:** *... did you give Ivanka a budget for that?*

**Donald:** *well, she had a budget. It was unlimited and she exceeded it.*

*(laughter)*

**Contextualizing the extract:**

Oprah asks Donald if he has given his daughter Ivanka a budget for her marriage. He tells Oprah that he gave his daughter an unlimited budget; however, she exceeded it. Oprah and the audience laugh.

### **Analyzing the extract:**

Donald's answer to Oprah is ironic. He says that though he gave his daughter an unlimited budget, she exceeded it. This humor act is used to function as an indirect message by Donald to his daughter. Maybe he could not tell her before about this matter. So, he exploits this chance to send his message to Ivanka. This indirectness is expressed by the violation of the maxim of manner by being unclear or vague and the maxim of quantity by saying 'more than what is required'. The communicative act takes place in a very relaxed context where no damage to the public is being recorded. So, the humorous act has a positive effect towards the listener.

### **Extract four**

**Melania:** *yes, of course and we have a great relationship. You know, they are a little bit younger than me and eh*

–

**Oprah:** *good! (laughter)*

**Donald:** *not much (laughter)*

### **Contextualizing the extract:**

Oprah asks Melania about her relationship with Donald's kids. She tells her that she has a great relationship with them. She adds that they are a little bit younger than her.

### **Analysing the extract**

Oprah's reply to Melania is ironic. She says "good" in an ironic way to express her surprise because Melania is exaggerating by saying that the kids are a bit younger than her. Donald's "not much" is uttered with laughter to lessen Oprah's surprise which is already said with laughter. The triggers 'good' and 'not much' are used as clues or jar lines to convey via humor a positive effect towards the listener. Donald's 'not much' violates the maxim of quality as he is saying something he believes not true, i.e., Melania is definitely older than his kids. Indirectness is the function of the humorous act in this extract.

## **5.2 Piers Morgan Tonight Show**

Piers Morgan is also one of the most popular TV talk shows around the world. Piers Morgan is the host of the show. He tackles different topics and issues with his interviewees. From this show, two episodes are selected: Ricky Gervais's Interview and Morgan's interview with Winfrey.

### **5.2.1 First Episode: Ricky Gervais's Interview**

In this episode, Piers interviews Ricky Gervais, one of Hollywood's comedy stars.

#### **Extract one:**

**Gervais:** *So I don't apologize for people not getting it. If anyone gets it, it's gettable. And there's always—as I said, there's always going to be someone that's offended by what you say. Many people are offended because you exist, particularly—you. Now I—(laughter)*

**Gervais:** *Again, I've read the forums. But what are we meant to do?*

#### **Contextualising the extract**

Gervais is talking to Morgan telling him that he is a comedian and his aim is to make people laugh. So, he would not apologize for people who would not get the point because the people who laugh at his jokes get that he is joking. That means his jokes are gettable. Then, he tells Morgan that “there is always going to be someone that is offended by what you say”. It is hard to satisfy all people. He jokes with Morgan telling him that there are people who are offended by his existence.

### **Analysing the extract**

Gervais is talking about the goal of his job as a comedian. He is sure that he cannot satisfy all people. He tells a joke that carries behind it an ironical fact. He says that some people are even offended by ‘your existence’, i.e., he himself, so you can not satisfy them all. The aim of this joke is to show satire. The function of this humor act is that of satire since he is ridiculing people’s attitude towards him. Again, it is a jab line humorous communicative situation with a positive effect to save his negative face.

### **Extract two**

**Morgan:** *You’ve had this amazing career path, amazing, in many ways. If I was to have the power to relieve for you one moment—this is not personal. It would be professional, really—a moment in your life, what would it be?*

**Gervais:** *There are loads of things whizzing through my head, but they’re all from childhood.*

**Morgan:** *Like what?*

**Gervais:** *I just remembered one. My brothers and sisters are a lot older than me by—the next one is 11 years old, then 13, then 15. And I remember I was 12. I was eating my Corn Flakes.*

*And I said to my mom, I said, mom, why are all my brothers and sisters so much older than me? She went on, because you were a mistake (laughter).*

**Gervais:** *I just laughed. I went cheers. I love honesty of growing up. There’s a little thing like that that I sometimes just—*

### **Contextualising the extract**

Morgan asks Gervais about a moment from his life that would be of relief to him. Gervais tells him that there are many things in his head and they are all from his childhood. Morgan asks him “like what?” Gervais tells him that he remembers one day when he asked his mother why his brothers and sisters are much older than him. She answered him that it was because he was a mistake.

### **Analysing the extract**

The instance that Gervais mentions constitutes a humorous act. It makes both Gervais and Morgan laugh. However, it is ironic because the hidden meaning of it is that Gervais was not considered as a blessing to his parents, instead he was a mistake. Gervais violates the maxim of quantity by saying more than is required “There’s loads of things whizzing through my head” followed by “but they’re all from childhood” to prepare Morgan for the laughter. The humorous communicative situation in this example can perform the functions of amusement. Here we have intentional self-humor to reflect his positive image.

### **Extract three:**

**Morgan:** *And you’ve been with the same woman 30 years.*

**Gervais:** *Yes.*

**Morgan:** *She's a lovely, smart, attractive—*

**Gervais:** *Here we go.*

**Morgan:** *—long-suffering woman.*

**Gervais:** *Yes. Yes.*

**Morgan:** *Why haven't you married her yet?*

**Gervais:** *Well, we are, really. We are.*

**Morgan:** *And yet you're not.*

**Gervais:** *Well, I mean we've—we've— you know, we share everything.*

**Morgan:** *Do you think you ever will?*

**Gervais:** *Oh, I'd never say never. There's no reason we're not getting married other than there's no point at the moment. There might be one day, but it's not—it's not a—I'm not digging my heels in going, we can never get married for any reason. We just—there's—there's no point.*

*You know, we don't want our families to meet. That's the thing.*

*(laughter)*

### **Contextualising the extract**

Morgan asks Gervais why he has not got married to his girlfriend though he has been with her for thirty years. He tells him that they are married by the bond of love. Morgan says “yet you aren't”. Then, Morgan asks him “do you think you ever will?” Gervais answers him that he cannot say that he would never. He tells him that there is no reason to get married. Then, he says that they do not want their families to meet. That is the thing.

### **Analysing the extract**

Though Gervais is talking about a serious matter, he manages to use humor to end the topic in a humorous way. To do so, the maxim of quantity is violated by stating more than is required. He gives a witty response that is humorous so as to end the topic and shift it to another. The function of the humorous communicative situation is to amuse. The target of humor here is the situation. So no intention to damage the public image is identified and there is a positive effect towards the end of the situation.

### **Extract four**

**Morgan:** *Do you like Steve Carel*

**Gervais:** *He's great. He's fantastic. He's not only brilliant, but he's one of the loveliest people in Hollywood—untouched by it, family man, nice, honest. Yes, I've got nothing but good to say about him.*

**Morgan:** *He's got—as I said to him, he's got one of—it's a great interview and we're going to run it very soon.*

*But he's got one of those heads that's just funny.*

**Gervais:** *He's good, because you know why?*

*He's got—he's nearly handsome. (laughter)*

**Gervais:** *He's got that—he's—he's got—(laughter)*

**Gervais:** *—he's—he's like Bob Hope. If you look at him, he's chiseled, he's great. But he's got something—he's got beady eyes. He's good. I like him. I like—And that was a compliment, by the way.*

### **Contextualising the extract**

Morgan asks Gervais about Steve Carell. Gervais starts by complimenting him. He praises his appearance. He says that he is good because he is handsome. He describes him as being like Bob Hope in that he has got beady eyes. Then, he tells Morgan that what he says is a compliment in order not to be misunderstood.

### **Analysing the extract**

Gervais uses humor more than one time in this extract. In the first place, he talks about how Steve Carell looks and how handsome he is. This makes the audience laugh. This is due to violating the maxim of quantity because he is saying more than is required. This is clear as he continues to talk about the appearance of Steve Carell and about the feature he likes in him "he's got beady eyes". He tells Morgan that when he talks about Steve Carell in this way, he is complimenting him. The audience laughs at his talk. So, humor is used with a positive effect towards the absent. His aim is to show that his intention is not to make fun or belittle Steve Carell. As such, the repetition of the incomplete sentences is an indicator of a jab line. Steve Carell has become the humorous target of the utterance without being detrimental to the public image.

## **5.2.2 Second Episode: Morgan's interview with Winfrey**

In this episode, Piers Morgan interviews Oprah Winfrey. He asks her many questions concerning her life, love and work.

### **Extract one**

**Morgan:** *What advice would you give Michael Vick?*

**Winfrey:** *What advice? You know, I don't want to talk about Michael Vick because I am trying to interview him.*

**Morgan:** *Really? (laughter)*

*I love that honesty about you.*

**Winfrey:** *So, I will just save all my advice for when I sit down with him. I know you are trying to interview him.*

**Morgan:** *I'm trying to get him as well. One of us is going to win.*

**Winfrey:** *One of us is.*

**Morgan:** *Do you want wager? (laughter)*

**Winfrey:** *No.*

### **Contextualising the extract**

Morgan asks Oprah about the advice she would give to Michael Vick. She tells him that she plans to interview him, so she will save it for that time. She tells him that she knows he is trying to interview

him as well. He tells her that one of them will win. Then he asks her if she wants to make a bet. Oprah laughs and says no.

### **Analysing the extract**

When Oprah tells Morgan that she intends to interview Michael Vick, he laughs and says that he loves her honesty. He laughs since he gets Oprah's hint that she is trying to interview him first. They say that one of them will win. Morgan jokes with Oprah asking her if she wants a wager. Oprah laughs and says no. Here, humor is used twice by Morgan so as to amuse the audience who patiently waits for a comment from the two celebrities. Winfrey has become the humorous target of the both utterances but without being detrimental to her public image. That is why it causes a positive effect on the conversation.

### **Extract two**

**Morgan:** *I got that this person was your great friend but your gate keeper. I had to persuade Gayle that I was trustworthy.*

**Winfrey:** *I think that's very smart of you to go through Gayle to get it.*

**Morgan:** *Sneaky actually. (laughter)*

*But I had to get Gayle.*

### **Contextualising the extract**

Morgan tells Oprah that he got to know Gayle in the last couple of months when he was trying to convince Oprah to have an interview with him. He tells her that he finds hilarious and very protective towards Oprah. So, he had to persuade Gayle that he is trustworthy. Oprah tells him that she thinks it very smart of him to do that. He jokes with her saying "sneak actually". They laughed.

### **Analysing the extract**

After Oprah praises Morgan for his smartness, he jokes with her telling her that his way of getting Gayle was a sneaky one but still he has to do that to get him. Morgan's 'Sneaky actually' is analysed as an example of intentional self-humor since he is the target of the humorous communicative situation. It is intended to have a jab line humor with a positive effect so as to amuse the other party.

### **Extract three**

**Morgan:** *That's a real love. I love every Australian passionately because we destroyed them at the sport they love most.*

**Winfrey:** *I'm not talking about that kind. (laughter)*

**Morgan:** *You don't like cricket?*

**Winfrey:** *Cricket is fine. But I'm talking about, you know—*

### **Contextualising the extract**

Oprah tells Morgan about her experience in Australia and how lovely it was. However, Morgan talks about his huge love towards Australia since they have beaten them in cricket. Oprah tells him that this is a different kind of love. Though, he tells her that it is a real love, Oprah says that she is not talking about this kind. Morgan laughs and asks her indirectly if she does not like cricket. She tells him that cricket is fine, but the kind of love he is talking about is not.

### **Analysing the extract**

Morgan tries to be funny and humorous, however he fails to do so because Oprah does not respond to his talk in the way he expects. She feels that this humor is not good. It aims at making fun of other people and she does not like to do so. Therefore, the humorous act Morgan uses here has failed to

achieve its aim since she does not agree with him. This also can be seen as an attempt to change the topic of conversation on the part of Morgan since he intends to violate the maxim of relation by asking her "You don't like cricket?" as a yes/no question. This comes as a result of the laughter that accompanies Oprah's "I'm not talking about that kind". The humorous act is done with the function to stop discussing the issue in the first utterance. The positive effect of the humorous act here is intended to save the negative face of the host.

#### **Extract four**

**Morgan:** *Do you still read them?*

**Winfrey:** *No, I haven't read them in years. They're in a safety deposit box somewhere.*

**Morgan:** *Wow, that's amazing.*

**Winfrey:** *I was thinking I should burn them now because Gayle knows if anything happens to me, get the letters.*

**Morgan:** *I have a message for Gayle, give me the letters. (laughter)*

**Winfrey:** *Get the letters and journals.*

#### **Contextualising the extract**

Oprah is telling Morgan about the letters she has from her previous relationships. He asks her if she has them all. She says yes. He asks her if she is still reading them. She tells him that she does not know why she kept them and she has not read them in years and they are in a safe place. She tells Morgan that she thinks that she should burn them now. Morgan jokes with Oprah and tells her that he is having a message for Gayle and both laugh.

#### **Analysing the extract**

Morgan jokes with Oprah by asking Gayle to give him Oprah's messages from her previous relationships. His aim here is to facilitate the interpersonal communication and to make their conversation enjoyable. Besides, it is intended to strengthen the relationship between him and Oprah and to amuse the audience. Because of this reason, he violates the maxim of relation when he tells Winfrey "I have a message for Gayle". Oprah has become the target of the humorous act with a positive effect.

### **5.3 Comparing Humor in the Two TV Talk Shows**

Humor in TV talk shows seems to be dependent on the personality of the host of the show. He or she is the one who gives his interviewees the chance to show their sense of humor depending on the topic the host initiates and the way questions are formulated. Moreover, the interviewees' character gives the host the opportunity to evoke humor through their interaction.

In this paper, two TV shows have been analyzed. One is hosted by Oprah Winfrey and the other by Piers Morgan. From each show, two episodes have been selected. In the first selected episode from the Oprah Winfrey show, Oprah interviews Will Smith and family. They are all actors and they have sense of humor. This is obvious through their conversation with Oprah. Will's funny comment, Jada's witty answer and Jayden's openness are the factors that have made the interaction in this episode as humorous and as funny as it was. In the second episode of Oprah Show, Oprah interviews Donald Trump and family. Donald Trump is a politician. However, he has a good sense of humor. He produces many ironic and humorous utterances. In this episode, Melania's uncertainty and her exaggerating replies raise humor and laughter.



In addition, two other selected episodes from Piers Morgan show have been analyzed. In the first one, Morgan interviews Ricky Gervais who is one of Hollywood's comedy stars. Gervais is a comedian whose job is to make people laugh by using his sense of humor. He is a witty person. He produces utterances that raise humor but they are ironic and embody bitter reality. In the second episode, Morgan interviews Oprah Winfrey. She is the most popular TV talk show host in the world. She is a witty person who knows how to deal with people and she has a sense of humor. This is obvious through her interaction with Piers.

As for the show hosts personality, Oprah seems to be more intimate, friendly and natural with her interviewees. This gives her advantage to ask what she wants in the way she wants to get the required answers. Piers, on the other hand, appears to be more artificial and tries to be humorous but sometimes he fails.

When it comes to Grice's maxims and according to the analysis of the extracts, the most non-observed mechanism is that of violation. It is most evident when the characters tend to violate the maxim of relation to shift the topic of interaction and create humor. The maxim of quantity is also violated so as to raise humor and laughter.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Humor plays significant positive and negative roles in social interaction. It is an act of interpersonal interaction with the aim of strengthening ties with the other interlocutors. This is also the case when it implies attacking the public images of the others. The humorous act is intended to target the present, the absent, or the situation in which the humorous act takes place. It has many purposes or functions such as amusing, ridiculing, teasing, humiliating, breaking the tension from tough situations, or simply making fun. Yet, after conducting this study, the researcher has come to the conclusion that humor, in relation to the violation of Grice's maxims, can also be used to achieve many interpersonal aims in interaction such as ending a topic, shifting to another topic, embedding bitter reality within humorous utterances and expressing inner ideas and feelings that may hurt if produced in a serious way. Moreover, there are many factors that affect humor in TV talk show. These include the personality of the host and his/her interviewees, the topic of interaction and the way each character deals with a certain topic. The analysis of the two episodes represented by the extracts taken from them show that humor is mainly utilized to bring solidarity which is referred to as 'positive effect' throughout the section of analysis. On the whole, the humorous communicative situations discussed are shown to be of the jab line type of humor which is intended to cause a positive effect even in the case of self-humor.

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