

Humor in The Stand-Up Comedy *You Wanna Hear Something Crazy?: A Universal Pragmatic Study*

Zainab Ahmed Mohammed

Department of English, College of Education for Women
University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Iraq
Corresponding Author: zainab.ahmed2103m@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Nawal Fadhil Abbas

Department of English, College of Education for Women
University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Iraq

Received:02/12/2023

Accepted: 06/2/2023

Published:06/24/2023

Abstract

Humor is an interesting phenomenon that has been studied widely, yet it is considered a universal trait that cannot be an old subject for a study. This study is conducted to investigate humor from a universal pragmatic lens in a stand-up comedy show, namely, *You Wanna Hear Something Crazy?*. It aims to study humor as a coin with two sides, the production side and the understanding side. To achieve the aim of the study, the researchers use an eclectic contains Grice's CP model (1975) and Habermas's UP model (1979, 1984, 1987, 1998). The study has noted that while using the observance and the non-observance of the cooperative maxims to produce humor, the universal validity claims of truth, sincerity, and normative rightness for reaching a mutual understanding with the audience are raised. The study concludes that more than one maxim can be used, whether it is observed or non-observed, to produce humor. Besides, humor can be produced through the combination sequence of the observance and the non-observance of maxims. It is also shown that humor has adhered to the universal validity claims of truth, sincerity, and normative rightness. On the whole, humor is used communicatively to get the hearer into a mutual understanding.

Keywords: Cooperative Principle, Humor, Stand-up Comedy, Universal Pragmatics, Validity Claims, *You Wanna Hear Something Crazy?*.

Cite as: Mohammed, Z. A., & Abbas, N.F. (2023). Humor in The Stand-Up Comedy *You Wanna Hear Something Crazy?: A Universal Pragmatic Study*. *Arab World English Journal*, 14 (2) 327-343. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol14no2.23>

Introduction

The word "humor" is seen as a technical term that encompasses anything that is (or maybe) perceived as amusing, hilarious, or laughable (Attardo, 2020). It is a frame of mind, a style of viewing and experiencing life, it is a kind of outlook, sharing a distinctive point of view and one which has excellent therapeutic power (Midness, 1971 as cited by Abbas, 2019). Meyer (2000) urges that humor is a social phenomenon that could be a weapon of clarification that allows people to express their thoughts creatively, as well as a tool of differentiation and enforcement that will enable people to criticize people or issues through contradiction and sarcasm. At the same time, Martin (2007) states that humor is a broad term that covers everything perceived as funny and makes others laugh, as well as the mental processes involved in creating and recognizing such an amusing stimulus and the emotive reaction involved in appreciating it. However, humor and other related terms that cause laughter are universal human expressions and aspects of human experience. Nevertheless, one of the rules of humor telling is that speaker should not laugh while the joke is being told, and the hearer should behave cooperatively with what has been suggested, i.e., it is opposed to the formal rules of behavior or what we refer to as "Good manners" (as cited in Abbas, 2019). That is why, for ages, researchers have drawn their attention to the study of humor. However, the humor genre has been the subject of many studies, but stand-up comedy has received little attention; more specifically, no attention has been paid to the American stand-up comedy, namely, *You Wanna Hear Something Crazy?*.

In the following study, the main aim will be shed on linguistic aspects of verbal humor in stand-up comedy, namely, *You Wanna Hear Something Crazy?* To explore how stand-up comedian raises clues for the audience to get them to a mutual understanding to elicit laughter and make the work appreciated. Humor can be divided into two phases: humor competence and humor performance. Humor competence refers to the speaker's and listener's ability to create and recognize humor in a context. Humor performance, on the other hand, is defined as the desire and willingness to perceive humor. As a result, a variety of linguistic and pragmatic processes have to be used by both the speaker and the hearer that aid in the accurate interpretation of the humorous utterance in the communicative action (Attardo, 2001, as cited in Abbas, 2021). In the present study, the researchers have an interest in showing how humor is produced by using Gricean Conversational Maxims (1975) and how it can be understood by the audience by using the Universal Pragmatic Theory (1979, 1984, 1987, 1998). As such, the current study aims to evaluate the two parts of humor: production and understanding, utilizing an eclectic model in Universal Pragmatics to answer the following questions for this study:

1. What are the cooperative maxims used by the speaker to produce humor in the selected stand-up comedy?
2. How does the speaker get his audience to a mutual understanding, i.e.,? What are the validity claims that are raised by the speaker to get the audience to a mutual understanding?

Literature Review

Universal Pragmatics

The power assigned to language is magical. It can be used to carry out a variety of actions because it is the human mind's mirror; as Austin (1962) stated "Saying something is doing something" (p.101). Thus, using and understanding language is dependent not only on grammatical correctness or the users' vocab bank but also on the given situated context. This appropriate use of

language within the given context is the primary concern of pragmatics. While pragmatics is the study of meaning in speech contexts (Leech, 1983), universal pragmatics is the study of understating this meaning, i.e., is the study of how a speaker offers clues in his/her speech to get hearer/s for mutual understanding in a specific context (Habermas, 1979). However, Habermas, in the 1970s, proposed the program of "universal pragmatics", in his later work called "formal pragmatics" to capture the study of language in use differently.

Humans have a deep-seated urge for mutual understanding. We are one another's harvest. We are the magnitude and connectedness of one another. Universal Pragmatics (UP) is found to identify the universal conditions of reaching a mutual understanding as well as to reduce the world's social struggles - confrontations, competitions, war, avarice, perplexity, and so on that arise from people's misunderstanding (Habermas, 1979). As a result, any approaches or projects aimed at developing understanding can significantly minimize these social conflicts.

However, UP distinguishes between communicative action and strategic actions; by this term, communicative action refers to the social action in which participants work to achieve mutual understanding and to coordinate the group actions through deliberation, agreement, and cooperation rather than acting alone to achieve their individual goals. In contrast, strategic actions refer to social situations_ as when one tries to influence others' mind and practice power over others through using tactics of persuasion (Habermas, 1984).

In contrast, strategic action needs to hide the reasons behind one's intention to influence others; communicative action needs to understand the reasons behind one's intention. That is, it needs to raise the universal validity claims behind one's utterance. By 'understanding', Habermas does not only mean raising justification for accepting a claim; rather he refers to the process of participation in which participants assess the justification for the claim. The participant decides whether the reasons raised are acceptable, and if questioned, the participant can defend his/her justifications for the rating.

The contrast between communicative and strategic action is at the core of Habermas' thought. Those who engage in strategic action pursue their goals. They might work together or compete in this process, depending on whether their goals conflict or frequently match. Their cooperation is driven by empirical factors; they want to maximize their profit or minimize their loss. Their participation in a communicative action demonstrates their desire for mutual understanding, as seen in Figure One. To say that, the motive for cooperation is logical rather than empirical, as proven by people responding to requests when they believe they are legitimate (Habermas, 1984).



Figure 1. Orientation of action(Set by the researchers)

Note. This figure demonstrates an explanation for the two main orientations of actions. To understand the figure in general, read the description above regarding strategic activities and communicative actions. Set by the researchers.

Validity Claims

The term Validity Claims (VCs) is a central point in Habermas's work. It opposes Searle's *Speaker Oriented Theory* (Habermas, 1984). Instead of this one-sided theory, Habermas aims to develop an approach to communication to reach a mutual understanding. To achieve such mutual understanding, the speaker and hearer must agree on universal VCs raised in communication. This is how Habermas describes it in his UP: "The aim of reaching an understanding [verständigung] is to bring about an agreement [Einverständnis] that terminates in shared knowledge, mutual trust (...).the agreement is based on recognizing the corresponding validity claims of comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness, and rightness"(Habermas, 2001, p. 23).

Habermas' theory is that understanding the meaning of an utterance entails understanding and accepting the reasons behind that utterance. This is why Habermas views his theory pragmatically since the "internal Connection" between meaning and understanding relies on the speaker and hearer, who provide justifications or arguments while they are engaging in communication (Finlayson, 2015). That is, to reach mutual understanding, a speaker needs to practice the art of being communicative, hand in hand; raising the following VCs is a must for acting communicatively:

1. uttering something understandable;
2. giving the hearer something to understand;
3. making himself understandable;
4. coming to understand another person. (Habermas, 1979, p. 2)

VCs are to be observed in every communication that intends to achieve mutual understanding. Coming to an understanding is the process of reaching an agreement based on mutually recognized validity claims. Habermas has outlined his three primary claims for the validity claims:

1. The truth claim is related to the external world.
2. The Sincerity claim is associated with the speaker's subjective world.
3. The Normative claim is related to others.

Based on the fact that any speaker raises the validity claims while he is acting communicatively, on the other hand, any hearer can challenge the acceptance of the speech based on the three universal VCs. Habermas uses the example of the professor who asks his students to bring him a glass of water to clarify the challenges that could be raised by the student who refuses to do the requested action of the professor. The student can refuse the professor's request based on a) the fact that there is no water around, b) his Sincerity; the professor may be testing the student to see how he reacts in front of the others, c) normative grounds, as the student can argue that it is inappropriate to ask him this (Habermas, 1987). Once this agreement is broken and the assumption that specific validity claims are satisfied (or perhaps justified) is abandoned, the goal of mutual understanding is to arrive at a new account of the situation that all participants can agree on. If their attempt fails, they cannot communicate further (Habermas, 1979).

Speech Acts

To reach mutual understanding and to identify mutual social goals through rational discourse, which is free from deception, UP recognizes that speech acts as the ground for universal VCs. Wuthnow (1984) states that the speech act is a tangible cultural unit that is examined to identify the conditions that make its use meaningful. Speech acts range in complexity from the more basic to the more complex. There are certain situations where just one word or phrase may

be regarded as a speech act. In contrast, in other situations it may be more acceptable to consider an entire conversation, book, or event (p.199). Thus, various speech acts are used in different speech settings and events (Wales, 2011, as cited in Muhammed, Hasson, & Thalab, 2022). Interlocutors may give advice, threaten, warn, or issue orders to accomplish their goals. According to Austin's (1962) theory, saying something is doing something. Searle (1969) offers modifications to this idea by proposing four felicitous conditions—propositional, preparatory, sincere, and essential—for the successful performance of an illocution. At the same time, Habermas's taxonomy (1998) is entirely based on the speaker's dominant claim to get the hearer to mutual understanding rather than his intentions only. To avoid confusion with Searle's taxonomy, Bannon, Robinson, and Schmidt (1991) use Latin terminology for Habermas's taxonomy which comprises *Imperativa*, *Constativa*, *Regulativa*, and *Expressiva*. They are explained as follows:

Imperativa

In this class, S aims to lead H to do him an act that serves his desires. For example;

- (1) Shut the door.

The power claim is the prevailing claim. The reason behind denying an *Imperativa* implies rejecting the power claim.

Constativa

In this class, S makes a claim about what is going on in the objective world that is in the real world. The claim to truth is the dominating claim. Typically, denying a *Constativa* means that H opposes the claim to truth. For examples;

- (2) It is raining.

Regulativa

Here S refers to an everyday social world in such a way that he attempts to develop a legitimate interpersonal relationship. The claim to justice is the most important. Denial of a *Regulativa* usually means H questions the claim's normative justice. For example;

- (3) I promise you to take the horse away.

Expressiva

In this category, S refers to his inner world so that he shares a lived experience with the public. The claim to sincerity is the dominant claim. Typically, denying an *Expressiva* signifies that H denies S's sincerity in expressing himself. For example;

- (4) I congratulate you on winning the race.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics is an aspect of the study of language in use. It concerns how language users connect, communicate, and understand linguistic activity (Chapman & Clark, 2014, as cited in Ibrahim & Abbas, 2016a). According to Majeed (2021), "Pragmatics is the study of meaning that systematically relies on the use of language"(p.19). It is the scientific study of meaning in the social, textual, or situational environment in which a person speaks. It also requires that the participants have a common background (Paltridge, 2012).

There are four regions in the pragmatic inquiry, as Yule states (1996). The study of the hidden meaning is the first part of pragmatics. Second, pragmatics is the study of meaning in a

given circumstance. It exemplifies pragmatics' capacity to examine how speakers order their words in response to the circumstances and environment in which they speak. Third, pragmatics studies how communication occasionally lacks a speaker's direct expression. The fourth one is that pragmatics demonstrates how communication can differ depending on how near speakers and listeners are to one another. To summarize, pragmatics is the study of speech meaning. People can learn about the meaning of communication, the assumptions that emerge from speech, and the behaviors that people perform when they engage in a conversation. In a nutshell, it provides a comprehensive picture of speech production with whatever aids are used to provide meaningful explanations. However, there are many theories under the umbrella of pragmatics. Among such theories is the Cooperative Principle Theory by Grice (1975).

Cooperative Principle

Grice (1975) asserts that four fundamental rules for communication collectively represent the Cooperative Principles that must be followed while speaking with someone, and these rules can be expressed as guidelines for successful and efficient language use (As cited in Hussein, 2020). He highlights the importance of cooperation in conversations and lays out four rules, called "maxims": quality, quantity, relation, and manner. These maxims apply purely to language use is intended to be informative, such as small talk and snap chat (Renkema, 2004, as cited in Ibrahim & Abbas, 2016b). However, there are two ways to apply these adages. The first method is to carry out the maxim's observance, and the second is to carry out the maxim's non-observance. The speaker refers to practicing a maxim observance if they successfully apply these maxims. Meanwhile, when the speaker entirely ignores the rule, this is referred to as the non-observance of a maxim.

A: Observance of Maxims

In the case where the speaker sticks to the rules of communication to get an efficient conversation; the observance of the maxim happens. Grice (1975) classifies the four maxims as follows:

(1) Maxim of Quantity

In this maxim, speakers must keep their speech as it is needed in conversation, no more or less than it is required.

(2) Maxim of Quality

Holding this maxim requires the speaker to be honest and explicit. In other words, speakers must not say what they lack adequate evidence for or what they believe to be false.

(3) Maxim of Relation

As for this maxim, the speaker must offer something related to what has come before.

(4) Maxim of Manner

Whereas the last maxim asks speakers to avoid obscurity of expression, avoid ambiguity, and be brief, and orderly (pp.45-46).

B: Non-Observance of Maxims

When the speaker completely ignores or fails to observe the maxims, non-observance occurs. There are four ways to avoid the following maxims: opting out, violating, infringing, and flouting (Cutting, 2002).

- (1) Flouting: Maxim flouting occurs when a speaker intentionally refuses to follow a maxim for specific goals. He/she may flout any of the observance maxims; that is, flouting can occur in manner, quantity, quality, and relation.
- (2) Violating: refers to situations in which the speaker intentionally offers false, insufficient, or non-existent information, and the audience incorrectly assumes they are cooperating. According to Cutting, breaching a maxim is frequently done to mislead or deceive.
- (3) Opting out: When the speaker refuses to participate, the speaker opts out of a maxim. Occasionally, the speaker cannot answer as intended for legal or ethical reasons.
- (4) Infringing: The speaker violates the maxims due to her/his poor linguistic performance. In other words, a speaker violates the maxims when he or she has an imperfect knowledge or performance of languages, such as a foreign language student or a young child (pp. 36-41).

Method

In this study, the researchers use a qualitative method for the analysis. Having a qualitative analysis enables the researchers to expand the scope of their analysis to examine the examples with more depth. According to Torihin (2012), qualitative research examines phenomena such as behavior, perception, motivation, and action that research subjects encounter(as cited in Hamood & Challob, 2023). It usually ends up with naturalistic, interpretive rather than statistical outcomes (Mackey & Gass, 2005, as cited in Abed Al-Hussein & Al-Saaidi, 2022).

Due to the nature of the current study's design, which is qualitative, the procedure for data analysis begins early in the data collection process and continues throughout the project (Wimmer & Dominick, 2010). This means that when the researchers do the data collection in this type of research, they have already begun data analysis by using the data sheets in the form of tables as a guide for processing identification and analysis. However, the form of the data sheet of the present study is presented in Table One.

In this study, the researchers employ the content analysis of the spoken words in the *Stand-up* comedian show and the written text of the show script to find out the universal conditions that are raised by the comedian to get their audience to a mutual understanding. Besides, the production level cannot be out of the project; that is, how the comedians produce humorous utterances by the observance and non-observance of the Cooperative Principle and its maxims, using an eclectic model for its analysis. An eclectic model is a term that indicates the employment of multiple models in the analytical section in a way that fits the selected data and study's objectives. The eclectic model employed in this study contains Grice's CP model (1975) and Habermas's UP model (1979, 1984, 1987, 1998). However, several remarkable points must be taken into considered; since the main objective of this study is to identify the universal conditions for reaching a mutual understanding, gender, and cultural variations are not taken into consideration; thus, they both can be beneficial suggestions for future studies.

Table 1. The form of a datasheet

Show	Pragmatics								Universal Pragmatics							EXPLANATION	
	Production Level								Process Level								
	OM				NM				VC		WO			SA			
Extract NO.	MQ	MQT	MM	MR	FLO	VLO	OPT	INF	T	R	S	OB	SO	SB	CO	RE	EX
1	√					√			√			√			√		

Ms. Pat produces humor throughout the combination of violating the quality maxim and then keeping the quality maxim. she uses the assertive form of the *constativa* act "I thought but that's not what it was". According to Habermas' (1987) theory, this indicates that the speaker makes a claim about what is happening in the objective world, or the actual world, as Ms. Pat did.

- Note:
- OM: Observance maxim
 - MQ: Maxim of quality
 - MQT: Maxim of quantity
 - MR: Maxim of relation
 - MM: Maxim of manner
 - NM: Non-observance maxim
 - FLO: Flouting
 - VLO: Violating
 - OPT: Opting out
 - INF: Infringing
 - VC: Validity claim
 - T: Truth
 - R: Rightness
 - S: Sincerity
 - WO: World
 - OB: Objective
 - SO: Social
 - SB: Subjective
 - SA: Speech act
 - CO: Constativa
 - RE: Regulativa
 - EX: Expressiva

Data Collection

The primary data source in this research is the stand-up comedian show entitled You Wanna Hear Something Crazy. The secondary data source is the script of the show, which is retrieved from <https://www.netflix.com/iq-en/browse/genre/2867892>. The selected show is one of the top shows according to the IMDB ranking in Jardon Woods's article in 2022.

To obtain the data, the researchers used the Simak and Catat (read and write) technique and careful observation (Sudaryanto, 1993). This technique aims to collect valuable data related to the research questions and objectives. Since the research data are in the form of utterances, these strategies are appropriate for use. According to Sudaryanto (1993), the simak approach is made by paying close attention to the use of language. Thus, when observing humor understanding, the researchers carefully observed the audience's response while listening to every word the character spoke. Using this method, the researchers focused on the use of humor in four extracts. The selected extracts are (a) written scripts done manually by the researchers and (b) representative of various ideas Ms. Pat tries to take her audience with to qualify as analytical materials.

Show Description

This show is about Ms. Pat's personal experience; she takes the audience through her parenting days and how she was raised. She speaks out on various problems, including pretentious dog lovers and today's unfortunate lip trends. Ms. Pat makes her audience laugh hard by filming her experiences as a black child and her children's adventures ranging from five days in a juvenile detention center to getting baptized over a hundred times at local churches.

Data Analysis

In this section, the four selected extracts from the aforementioned show "You Wanna Hear Something Crazy?" that hold various ideas Ms. Pat tries to convey will be analyzed. These extracts are contextualized and analyzed in an elaborated manner to examine the UP principles of understanding humor and humor production. This examination is based on certain steps: identifying exactly where the humor lies in the utterance and then specifying the mechanisms of production and understanding.

Extract One:

Ms. Pat: *My mom was very particular about the houses she rented, y'all. She used to love to rent a house with a chimney, and I thought the reason why she wanted the house with the chimney is because she wanted Santa Claus to come see her Black kids, [pause] but that's not what it was.*

Audience: [laugh]

Ms. Pat: The reason why she wanted a house with a chimney, 'cause we were poor as fuck and we couldn't afford light and gas, so she would always keep the fuckin' lights on, and we would have to cook in the fuckin' fireplace.....

Audience: [laugh]

Contextualizing the Extract

Ms. Pat is telling her childhood memories as an innocent child in a poor family knowing nothing about the true situation of renting a house with a chimney. She makes a laugh out of her suffering as a poor black child waiting for Santa Claus to make her dreams come true from the poor chimney. The audience laughs due to the dark comedy of the poor child.

Linguistic Analysis

The extract above shows the non-observance of the quality maxim carried out by Ms. Pat through violating it and holding the observance of the quality maxim. Ms. Pat produces humor throughout the combination of both violating the quality maxim and then keeping the quality maxim. She draws her audience with storytelling about her childhood when her mom used to rent a house with a chimney "**My mom was very particular about the houses she rented.....**", they used to live in a house with a chimney. Then she tells them why her mom used to do so when she says "**because she wanted Santa Claus to come to see her black kids**" That is neither true nor related to the actual cause for renting a house with a chimney. Santa Claus does not even exist. By doing so she violates the quality maxim when she gives a reason that is not true. Thus, the audience is aware of her violation of the truth maxim since they share almost identical background knowledge about Santa. But this violation does not create humor alone. She uses her style as a comedian and draws her audience's attention to an actual incident that occurred in her life that

makes them laugh. Humor is produced when she says "**but that's not what it was....the reason..... 'cause we was poor and we couldn't afford light and gas.....**", she keeps on the observance maxim of quality by acknowledging what has been said is not the truth and the reason behind renting a house with a chimney is that they are poor to the extent they can't afford gas and light. By doing so, she takes the darkest in her life and turns that into laughter, because when you can laugh at it that means you get control of it. That makes her audience laugh loudly.

Hand in hand goes with the production level through violating then keeping the maxims, validity claims of uttering something understandable and giving the audience something to understand have been met here to represent the understanding level. Ms. Pat's desire to be a successful comic necessitates her ability to practice the art of communication and establish a mutual understanding with her audience by raising the validity claims to achieve mutual understanding. It goes further to say that there is a shared knowledge between Ms. Pat and her audience about "chimneys, Santa, and childhood imagination, gas, and lights payments" that she uses to hold the validity claims in her utterance.

Another part of Habermas' UP theory is to achieve understanding, a successful speech must meet three more claims. One of the claims is that the speech must be valid in the sense that it reflects something in the objective world of the audience. In this regard, Ms. Pat addresses issues about "**chimneys, Santa, and childhood imagination as well as being a poor black child**" that are related to human lives which meet Habermas's truth condition. Moreover, when the speaker raises a claim of truth, willingly, a *constativa* speech act will be present in his/her utterance. As for Ms. Pat, she uses the assertive form "**I thought**", which indicates her *constativa* speech act. In Habermas's theory, the *constativa* act means the speaker claims what is going on in the objective world, that is, in the real world, as Ms. Pat did. She addresses a universal issue that can be understood by all, which is being poor to the extent you can't afford light and gas because they cost an arm and a leg for poor families; besides, what has been told about Santa Claus is not true, and life is harsh not only for adults but even for children. Furthermore, she raises the sincerity claim since what she is talking about is her own experience with her audience. This can be noticed when she uses the possessive pronoun "**my**" and the pronominal pronouns "**I**" and "**we**" for a deictic purpose to refer to her own story.

Extract Two:

Ms. Pat: you would come over to our house in the summertime. It's a hundred degrees,

Audience: [laugh]

Ms. Pat: we got a Cracker Barrel fireplace going with a whole rack in there, frying chicken on pine wood. The walls sweating, and we sweating .We're in our underwear, looking like we just got off a fuckin' boat.

Audience: [laugh]

Ms. Pat: My mama got the only fuckin' fan in her face, watching the "Young and the Restless". We back there, "Mommy, it's hot, it's hot". She'd be like, "Take it like a man". I'm like, "Bitch, I am a girl".

Audience: [laugh]

Contextualizing the Extract

Ms. Pat keeps holding the same story as a child in a low-income family when her mom used to rent a house with a chimney. At the beginning, she gives the fact behind having a house

with a chimney, but there is more to tell her audience about her darkest moment with a chimney, especially in the summertime.

Linguistic Analysis

The extract above shows the non-observance of the quantity, quality, and relation maxims and shows the observance of the maxim of relation carried out by Ms. Pat to tell her audience how is the status of living in a house with a chimney.

When Ms. Pat gives too much information about; living in a house with a chimney, summertime temperature, her mom's favorite show, and even their outfit when they are at home, she violates the maxim of quantity. Therefore, she is not being informative as she is supposed to be. Simply, she could have said that living there is hot. Starting that by pointing to the summertime temperature in their house when she overstates the true incident by saying "**It's a hundred degrees**" cause it is impossible to live in less than a hundred degrees, she violates the quality maxim. However, when she says, "**We got a Cracker Barrel fireplace.....**" she uses an analogical description to say that their house is as hot as this place, but they use it to fry chickens and not biscuits. By doing so, she keeps observing the relevance maxim since both places are used for cooking though they differ in what they are used for cooking. She uses this analogy and adheres to the observance of the relation maxims to make the picture clear for her audience. Besides, she violates the quality maxim in an ironic form when she says, "**The walls sweating, we sweating..... looking like we just got off a fuckin' boat,**" using this form to describe the weather in their house in a funny way. When she says, "**My mama watching the "Young and the Restless,**" she observes the relation maxim since the show talks about restlessness and suffering, just as their life was at that time. Finally, when she keeps complaining to her mom that it is hot, her mom tells her to act like a man, as if a man is not a normal human and he could endure a hundred degrees there. In this sense, she gives a truthful statement to her mom, holding the observance of the quality maxim when she says, "**Bitch, I am a girl,**" which triggers humor.

Hand in hand goes with the production level; validity claims of uttering something understandable, giving the hearer something to understand, and making oneself understandable have been met here to represent the understanding level. As universal pragmatic theory requires, Ms. Pat builds a foundation for legitimate interpersonal relations with her audience when she says the invitation form "**you would come over our house**" to raise the claim of rightness in the *regulativa* speech act. In Habermas's theory, the *regulativa* act means the speaker claims to develop an interpersonal relationship with the hearer; that is, to build solidarity that is free from any kind of deception or power. Besides, she builds an intersubjectivity sense in communication with her audience by using the possessive pronouns "**our**" and "**my**" to raise the sincerity claim in her *expressiva* speech act to indicate her intention to share her memories with her audience. Thus, in Habermas's theory, *expressiva* speech act means the speaker refers to his intentions in such a way that shows a lived experience with the public.

To make the long story short, Ms. Pat raises the rightness claim in a *regulativa* act that matches the social world with her audience, which causes mutual understanding, as well as raises the sincerity claim in her *expressiva* act that matches her subjective world, which clarifies her free deception utterance. The only intention she has is sharing her story with her audience without any attempt to change the world according to her words.

Extract Three:

Ms. Pat: I get to school, y'all, and my principal comes up to me, a big old, tall man with thick-ass glasses. Looked like if he couldn't read, he could have made it to the NBA. He come up to me and he was like, "Young lady, I need to speak to you in the office". So I walk in the office, and no lie, the police there, the counselor there, my teacher there, and he's there, and all these motherfuckers standing there looking at me. I'm like, "What the fuck is going on"? 'Cause you know I have been cussing my whole damn life. And he looked at me. He said, "We noticed that you got a bunch of bruises and blisters and burns all on you." We wanna know what's going on at the house. Are you a cutter? I'm like, [pause], nah. " I was frying chicken in the chimney".

Audience: [laugh]

Contextualizing the Extract

On the same rhythm, Ms. Pat takes her audience with her school's memories. She hits a susceptible point about a big challenge in communities where a child could face poverty and suffering. As they were all there, the police, the counselor, the principal, and the teacher, all noticed a bunch of bruises, blisters, and burns on her body. They were asking if she was a cutter. In fact, she was burned by the chimney, i.e., because of poverty. However, they took no action to pick her up from her suffering.

Linguistic Analysis

The extract above shows the observance of the quality and relation maxims carried out by Ms. Pat. She tells her audience a story to jot down the school community's reaction when they see her with a bunch of bruises, blisters, and burns on her body, carrying no action toward her suffering. Ironically, all those responsible people didn't even try to pick her up from her suffering. However, she gives a full description of everything there and keeps observing the quality maxim when she says "..... and no lie.....", on one hand. On the other hand, she holds all the observance maxims when they ask her "Are you a cutter?" she says, "I was frying chicken in the chimney". By doing so, she keeps her answer as true, relevant, ordered, and brief as it is supposed to be, to trigger humor.

While she produces humor by using her techniques, she raises the universal validity claims in her utterance to get the goal of reaching a mutual understanding with her audience; uttering something understandable, giving the hearer something to understand, and making oneself understandable all have been met as her audience responds by uttering a laugh. This can be explained when the pronominal "**I**" occurs frequently in her utterance; it is made for the deictic purpose that has the effect of foregrounding the sincerity of Ms. Pat in what she wants to address. She shares her story with her audience with no form of persuasive or power over them. On the contrary, using discourse markers such as "....y'all,' Cause you know..." can be considered positive expressions when she uses them to pretend shared knowledge with her audience and build an intersubjectivity sense.

In a nutshell, Ms. Pat raises the sincerity claim in her *expressiva* act that matches her subjective world, which clarifies her only intention to share her story with her audience without any attempt to change the world according to her words. In Habermas's theory, as mentioned

previously, *expressiva* speech act means the speaker refers to his intentions in such a way that shows a lived experience with the public.

Extract Four:

Ms. Pat: I gotta keep it real 'cause I love everybody...White women, I love you to death...but you gotta stop doing nigga shit, Y'all gotta stop going out here buying these nigga-lips, white women [pause]they're too big for your fuckin' face. If you're gonna buy these nigga-lips, you need these African cheekbones ...stop that shit.

Audience: [laugh]

Contextualizing the Extract

From her life experience to the trendy lips filler, Ms. Pat hits nowadays lips fillers that don't suit all women.

Linguistic Analysis

The extract above shows the observance of all the cooperative maxims carried out by Ms. Pat. She keeps her utterance as true, relevant, ordered, and brief as it is supposed to be. From the very beginning, she declares her desire to follow the cooperative principles when she says, "**I gotta keep it real.....**", that is, I am going to tell only and only the truth. Besides, when she compares white women's lips filler to the lips of women of color, she keeps her utterance related to the intended topic that both lips, lips with filler and black women's lips, are big. By making this similarity, she keeps her utterance not only related but also true since black women naturally have big lips that technically suit their facial features. Hence, if a white woman does not have black features, it is better to stop following surgical trends on her face. That is what Ms. Pat tries to hit cooperatively.

On the universal pragmatic theory, she raises various validity claims to keep herself understandable and communicative. She raises claims of truth, rightness, and sincerity that represent different worlds and speech acts by using multiple techniques. Firstly, she uses the pronominal "**I**" when she says, "**White women, I love you to death**" for the deictic purpose, which has the effect of a sincerity claim. She wishes to express her love toward white women and to establish a friendly conversation that is free from any form of red flags; she only wants to express her opinion toward nowadays trends without any attempt to offend white women or be racist. Secondly, when she asks white women to stop following the filler trend, using the *constativa* speech act "**they're too big**" claims what is going on in the objective world, that is, these trendy lips are too big for white women's face with an objective justification that they need African's cheekbones "**need these African cheekbones**". The claim to truth is the dominating claim in this act. As she talks about an already known trend, it already exists in the objective world that all the audience can comprehend. Moreover, repeating the word "**stop**" stresses the shared background knowledge about lips filler, facial features, and women's obsession with trends. Thirdly, giving a logical justification for unsuitable big lips for white women raises not only a claim of truth but also a claim of rightness. Ms. Pat has no right to prevent white women from doing so. Thus, white women have the right to choose what they like, and they have the right to question Ms. Pat because it is none of her business.

Discussion

Starting from this quote, "the whole universe is in us," the present paper explores that understanding humor starts from "us" as speakers. It begins by raising some clues to get the hearer for a mutual understanding. The present paper provides a universal pragmatic analysis of the stand-up comedy show, namely, *You Wanna Hear Something Crazy?* The analysis goes on two levels; the production level by using the cooperative maxims, proposed by Grice 1975, and the understanding level by using Habermas's theory of UP (1979, 1984, 1987, 1998).

The two research questions have been addressed using the present study's eclectic model of which; the first being, *What are the cooperative maxims used by the speaker to produce humor in the selected stand-up comedy?* It shows that humor can be produced by the non-observance of all the maxims or by violating them. Interestingly, the observance of the maxims can also be used to produce humor, as shown in the four selected extracts. Moreover, it is shown that more than one maxim can be used, whether it is observed or non-observed. Besides, humor can be produced through the combination sequence of the observance and the non-observance of maxims.

As for the second, it was: *How does the speaker get his audience to a mutual understanding, i.e.,? What are the validity claims that are raised by the speaker to get the audience to a mutual understanding?* It shows that humor has adhered to the universal validity claims of truth, sincerity, and normative rightness. It also shows that more than one claim can be raised respectively. Besides, it meets three of the universal pragmatic conditions; uttering something understandable; giving the hearer something to understand; and making himself understandable. While "Coming to understand another person" requires a process of arguments between the speaker and the hearer to reach a mutual agreement on what has been uttered, and for this show, there are no arguments between the speaker and the hearer. Moreover, it shows that raising the sincerity claim is not only used to talk about the discrimination she faced in her life, i.e., her experience and emotions but also to assure that she is not a racist. She doesn't want to be misunderstood as if she is saying, "Do Not Get Me Wrong."

Conclusion

This paper provides a universal pragmatic and linguistic analysis of humor in the stand-up comedy show, namely, *You Wanna Hear Something Crazy?* The study goes on two levels; the production level by using the cooperative maxims, proposed by Grice 1975, and the understanding level by using Habermas's UP model (1979, 1984, 1987, 1998). The researchers have come up with the following findings: the observance and the non-observance of the cooperative maxims can produce humor. The analysis demonstrates that more than one maxim, whether observed or non-observed, may be utilized to produce humor. Additionally, a combinational sequence of the observance and the non-observance of maxims can produce humor. Besides, the researchers found that humor has adhered to the universal validity claims of truth, sincerity, and normative rightness.

Moreover, it has shown that more than one claim can be raised to get the audience's understanding of the humorous utterance.

About the Authors

Zainab Ahmed Mohammed is an M.A. candidate in the Department of English, University of Baghdad, College of Education for Women. Her major is Linguistics, and she is interested in several fields within linguistics, including pragmatics and universal pragmatics. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-3456-6814>

Nawal Fadhil Abbas is a professor with a Ph.D. in English Language and Linguistics. She teaches in the Department of English, University of Baghdad, College of Education for Women. Her research interests include Pragmatics, Stylistics, and Critical Discourse Analysis. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2608-6909>

References

- Abbas, N. F. (2019). Humor in TV Talk Shows. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 9 (3), 136-147. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v9n3p136>
- Abbas, N. F. (2019). To Jock or not to Joke that is the Question: Humor as a Strategy. In S. Lah, & R. Rahman (eds.), *Research Mosaics of Language Studies in Asia: Differences and Diversity* (pp. 224-234). Penang: Penerbit University Sains Malaysia.
- Abbas, N. F. (2021). Pragmatics of Humor in Oprah Winfrey and Piers Morgan Shows. In B. P. Publishers, *Modern Perspectives in Language, Literature, and Education* (4, pp. 9-27). India: BP Publishers. <http://dx.doi.org/10.9734/bpi/mpille/v4/1548F>
- Abed Al-Hussein, I, & Al-Saaidi, S. (2022). Women's Rape in Iraq between Legislation and Social Norms: A Critical Discourse Analysis. *Journal of the College of Education for Women*, 33(3), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.36231/coedw.v33i3.1616>
- Attardo, S. (2001). *Humorous Texts: A Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis*. New York, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Attardo, S. (2020). *The linguistics of humor: An introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Austin, J. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Bannon, L., Robinson, M., & Schmidt, K. (1991, September 25-27) . Speech Acts or Communicative Action? A paper presented at the *Proceedings of the Second European Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work*, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Available at https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-94-011-3506-1_18
- Chapman, S., & Clark, B. (2014). *Pragmatic Literary Stylistics*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Charles, R. (1978). *Understanding laughter*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- Finlayson, J. (2005). *Habermas: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics 3: speech acts* (pp. 41-58). NY: Academic Press.
- Habermas, J. (1984). *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. (1979). *Communication and the evolution of society*. London: Heinemann.
- Habermas, J. (1987). *The Theory of Communicative Action* Vol.2. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J., & Cooke, M. (Eds.).(1998). *On the Pragmatics of Communication*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Habermas, J., & Cooke, M. (Eds.). (2001). *On the pragmatics of social interaction: Preliminary studies in the theory of communicative action* (B. Fultner Trans.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Hamood, B. S., & Challob, A. I. (2023). Gender Difference of Politeness Strategies Through Online Chatting Experienced by EFL Students in Al-Anbar Distinguished Schools. *Al-Adab Journal*, 2(144), 13–30. <https://doi.org/10.31973/aj.v2i144.4050>

- Ibrahim, S., & Abbas, N. (2016a). A Pragmatic Study of Humor. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 7 (1), 80-87. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.7n.1p.80>
- Ibrahim, S., & Abbas, N. (2016b). Pun and (Un)Intentional Humor. *Journal of American Academic Research*.
https://asels.org/wpcontent/themes/asels/uploads/12867_5c4f64b05722b
- Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. London: Longman Publishing.
- M. Hussein, A. (2020). A Pragmatic Analysis of Oxymoron in Poetry: Tennyson's "Lancelot and Elaine" as an Example. *Alustath Journal for Human and Social Sciences*, 59(4), 1–16.
<https://doi.org/10.36473/ujhss.v59i4.1202>
- Mackey, A., & Gass, S. M. (2005). *Second language research: Methodology and design*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Association.
- Majeed, R. M. (2021). A Pragmatic Analysis of Personal Deixes in Lyrical Poetry: Ezra Pound's Lyrics "Girl" and "A Virginal". *Journal of the College of Education for Women*, 32(1), 18–25. <https://doi.org/10.36231/coedw.v32i1.1475>
- Malterud, K. (2001). *Qualitative research: Standards, challenges, and guidelines*. Lancet. DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736(01)05627-6
- Martin, R. (2007). *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach*. California: Academic Press.
- Meyer, J. (2000). Humor as a Double-Edged Sword: Four Functions of Humor in Communication. *Communication Theory*, 10(3), 310–331.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2000.tb00194.x>
- Mindess, H. (1971). *Laughter and liberation*. Los Angeles: Nash Publishing.
- Muhammed, W. S. M., Hasson, F. K., & Thalab, A.H. (2022). Iraqi Parents' Instructions to Their Teens: A Pragma-Stylistic Approach. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Proceedings of KUST, Iraq Conference*, (1), 75-88.
<https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/KUST.6>
- Paltridge, B. (2012). *Discourse analysis: An introduction* (2nd ed.). London: Bloomsbury Academic Press.
- Renkema, J. (2004). *Introduction to Discourse Studies*. Philadelphia: John Benjamin.
- Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sudaryanto. (1993). Metode dan Aneka Teknik Analisis Bahasa: Pengantar Penelitian Wahana Kebudayaan secara Linguistik [Methods and various techniques of language analysis: an introduction to research on cultural vehicles linguistically]. Yogyakarta: Duta Wacana University Press.
- Tohirin, M. (2012). *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Dalam Pendidikan dan Bimbingan Konseling*. Jakarta: Rajagrafindo Persada
- Wales, K. (2011). *A Dictionary of Stylistics* (3rd ed.). London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.
- Wimmer, R., & Dominick, J. (2010). *Mass Media Research*. Boston: Cengage learning press.
- Woods, J. (2022, Jun 7). *10 Best Stand-Up Comedy Specials of 2022, According To Ranker*. Available at <https://screenrant.com/best-stand-up-comedy-specials-2022-ranked-ranker/#david-spade-nothing-personal-netflix>

Wuthnow, R., Hunter, J., Bergesen, A., & Kurzweil, E. (1984). *Cultural Analysis: The Work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault, and Jürgen Habermas*. London: Routledge.

Yule, G. (1996). *The study of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.