

HUMOR AND MAXIM VIOLATIONS: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE KOREAN VARIETY SHOW ‘GREEN BEAN, RED BEAN: REAP WHAT YOU SOW’ (EPISODE 1)

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Received 2026-06-16; Revised 2025-06-19; Accepted 2026-06-26

ABSTRAK

Humor memainkan peran penting dalam komunikasi sebagai alat hiburan, ikatan sosial, dan penghilang ketegangan. Salah satu mekanisme pragmatis yang mendasari humor adalah pelanggaran Prinsip Kerja Sama Grice. Makalah ini menganalisis jenis-jenis pelanggaran maksim dan hubungannya dengan teknik humor dalam acara variety show Korea Green Bean, Red Bean: Reap What You Sow (Episode 1). Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi dan pencatatan, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan empat maksim Grice—kuantitas, kualitas, relasi, dan cara—dan teknik humor linguistik Berger. Temuan menunjukkan 44 ujaran humor yang mengandung 75 pelanggaran maksim, dengan maksim relasi menjadi yang paling sering dilanggar. Selain itu, 78 strategi humor diidentifikasi, dengan hiperbola dan ejekan sebagai yang dominan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pelanggaran maksim dan teknik humor saling terkait erat, dan humor Korea sangat bergantung pada permainan kontekstual dan dinamika relasional, yang membedakannya dari tradisi komedi Barat.

Kata kunci: humor; pelanggaran maksim; pragmatik; variety show Korea; implikatur percakapan.

ABSTRACT

Humor plays a significant role in communication as a tool for entertainment, social bonding, and tension relief. One of the pragmatic mechanisms underlying humor is the violation of Grice's Cooperative Principle. This paper analyzes the types of maxim violations and their relation to humor techniques in the Korean variety show Green Bean, Red Bean: Reap What You Sow (Episode 1). Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through observation and note-taking, then analyzed using Grice's four maxims—quantity, quality, relation, and manner—and Berger's linguistic humor techniques. The findings reveal 44 humorous utterances containing 75 maxim violations, with the maxim of relation being the most frequently flouted. Additionally, 78 humor strategies were identified, with exaggeration and ridicule being dominant. The results suggest that maxim violations and humor techniques are closely intertwined, and that Korean humor relies heavily on contextual play and relational dynamics, distinguishing it from Western comedic traditions. This study contributes to pragmatic research on humor and enriches cross-cultural perspectives on linguistic strategies in entertainment discourse.

Key words: humor; maxim violation; pragmatics; Korean variety show; conversational implicature.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a fundamental aspect of human interaction, allowing speakers and hearers to exchange information and construct shared meaning. To ensure effective communication, Grice (1975) proposed the Cooperative Principle, which consists of four maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner. While Marwah et al. (2018) explain maxims are expected to guide conversations, they are often deliberately violated to produce conversational implicatures. One of the most significant functions of such violations is the creation of humor. Previous studies in pragmatics suggest that flouting maxims can generate humorous effects, as the incongruity between what is said and what is implied often leads to laughter (Hamdi, 2024; Thomas, 1995: 23). In recent years, the intersection of pragmatic failure and comedic effect has increasingly been analyzed through digital and broadcasting media, demonstrating that non-observance of Gricean maxims remains a primary driver for audience engagement in modern entertainment formats (Smith & Lee, 2023: 45).

Humor plays an important role in communication, both to relieve tension, strengthen social bonds, and provide entertainment. Berger (1993, 1997) classified humor into several techniques, particularly within the linguistic domain, such as exaggeration, ridicule, irony, sarcasm, and wordplay. In the context of Korean humor, cultural values such as Confucian norms and collectivism make it distinct, often more context-dependent and socially embedded compared to Western humor (Kim & Plester, 2019: 114). Furthermore, contemporary Korean broadcasting media leverages specific linguistic subversions where standard politeness norms are playfully violated to trigger comedic relief, a phenomenon highly prevalent in unscripted reality and variety television (Park & Choi, 2024: 112). Variety shows, as one of the most popular forms of Korean entertainment, frequently employ these linguistic strategies to create comedy that resonates with both domestic and international audiences.

Despite the growing scholarship on humor and conversational implicature, relatively few studies have examined maxim violations as a source of humor in Korean variety shows. Most existing research has focused on stand-up comedy, sitcoms, or social media discourse (Atqiya, 2018: 17; Kencana, 2021: 59; Puspasari & Ariyanti, 2019: 45). Moreover, while recent studies

have begun to map out how pragmatic strategies evolve in digital talk shows (Nguyen, 2025: 78), limited attention has been given to how Grice's maxims interact with Berger's humor techniques in shaping the comedic discourse of Korean popular culture. This gap highlights the need to investigate how conversational strategies function within Korean humor, particularly in variety shows.

The present study aims to identify the types of maxim violations and explain their role in producing humor in the Korean variety show *Green Bean, Red Bean: Reap What You Sow* (Episode 1). By employing Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) and Berger's Humor Theory (1993), this study seeks to contribute to pragmatic research on humor while offering insights into how linguistic strategies are used in Korean entertainment discourse. The findings are expected to enrich the understanding of cross-cultural humor and expand the scope of linguistic studies in the domain of popular media.

Problem Identification

From the explanation above, a hypothesis emerges that there is a link between maxim violations and the creation of humor. This potential raises the urgency to examine more deeply how maxim violations contribute to the creation of humor. This paper identifies the types of conversational maxim violations in the Korean variety show *Green Bean, Red Bean: Reap What You Sow* (Episode 1) and clearly explain how these violations play a role in the development of humor. By combining Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) with Berger's humor theory (1993), the study aims to provide a pragmatic account of humor in Korean entertainment discourse.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to identify the relationship between violations maxim and the creation of humor. This research aims to clearly and coherently describe how humor can be created through violations of maxims. It also demonstrates how violations of maxims can serve other functions in language or communication activities, so that they are not merely seen as communication failures, but can also serve other purposes or uses in conveying messages and meanings.

Literature Review

This study is grounded in three main theoretical frameworks: the Cooperative Principle, Implicature Theory, and Berger's Humor Theory. First, the Cooperative Principle proposed by Grice (1975) explains that successful communication requires cooperation between speakers and hearers. To achieve effective communication, participants are expected to follow four conversational maxims: the maxim of quantity (providing sufficient information), the maxim of quality (providing truthful information), the maxim of relevance (providing relevant information), and the maxim of manner (expressing ideas clearly and unambiguously). Violations of these maxims may disrupt communication and often generate additional meanings within a conversation.

Second, this study employs Grice (1975) theory of implicature, which refers to meanings that are implied rather than explicitly stated by the speaker. Implicatures enable speakers to convey intentions, opinions, or emotions indirectly while relying on the listener's ability to infer meaning from context. Grice distinguishes between conversational implicature, which arises from contextual interpretation and maxim violations, and conventional implicature, which is derived from the conventional meaning of specific linguistic expressions. This theory is essential for understanding how speakers communicate meanings beyond the literal interpretation of their utterances.

This study draws on Berger (1993) theory of humor, which categorizes humor into four major types: language, logic, identity, and action. The focus of this research is on language-based humor, or verbal humor, which is created through the use of words and linguistic expressions. Berger identifies fifteen verbal humor techniques, including irony, sarcasm, satire, exaggeration, puns, ridicule, and misunderstanding. These techniques provide a framework for analyzing how humor is constructed in discourse and how it relates to conversational maxim violations and the generation of implicatures.

Several recent interdisciplinary studies have also strengthened the argument that there is a clear relationship between humor and maxim violations, one of which is through the creation of implicatures. Hu (2024) asserts that Grice's maxims are not only cognitive principles but also social norms in interaction. Violation of a maxim encourages listeners to engage in an interpretive process that results in implicatures. This argument is reinforced by Yahya (2024)

and Umam (2024), who state that "intentional" non-compliance with the cooperative principle is one of the main pragmatic mechanisms in constructing humor.

Methods of research

This study applies a qualitative descriptive approach, as it allows for detailed interpretation of conversational data. The primary data were collected from the dialogues of the first episode of *Green Bean, Red Bean: Reap What You Sow*, a popular Korean variety show. Data collection was conducted through observation and note-taking, following (Sudaryanto, 1993: 133–135) observation and note-taking technique. Instances of maxim violations were first identified using Grice's four maxims—quantity, quality, relation, and manner—and then categorized according to Berger's linguistic humor techniques, such as exaggeration, ridicule, irony, sarcasm, and wordplay. The analysis focused on uncovering the relationship between maxim flouting and humorous effects in the dialogues. To make it easier for readers whose mother tongue is Indonesian and English, the data is also provided in romanization via website <http://roman.cs.pusan.ac.kr/> an official Korean Romanization Converter by Pusan National University (accessed on January, 28th 2025).

Findings and discussion

The analysis revealed 44 instances of humorous dialogue containing 75 maxim violations. Among them, violations of the maxim of relation were the most frequent (30 occurrences), followed by the maxim of quality (21 occurrences), quantity (18 occurrences), and manner (6 occurrences). These violations often resulted in humorous effects due to unexpected, exaggerated, or irrelevant responses, which produced laughter among the audience.

Furthermore, 78 humor strategies were identified based on Berger's framework. The most common were exaggeration (26 occurrences) and ridicule (18 occurrences), followed by irony (11), facetiousness (5), repartee (5), bombast (4), allusion (3), sarcasm (2), wordplay (2), definition (1), and insults (1). The findings suggest that maxim violations and humor strategies are closely intertwined, with each type of violation frequently aligning with specific humor techniques. For instance, violations of the maxim of quantity often coincided with exaggeration, while violations of relation were linked to ridicule and repartee. Here are some analyses of the

variety show members' speech that show how the violation of maxims can creates humor in within their interactions.

Data 1

- 우빈 : “우리 이제 들어가서 씻고 잘까요?”
Ubin : [uri ije deureogaseo ssitgo jalkkayo]
Woobin : ‘setelah kita kembali, haruskah kita mandi dan tidur?’
Woobin : ‘After we get back, should we take a shower and sleep?’
- 광수 : “아니면 오늘은 이쯤에서 헤어지교”
Gwangsu : [animyeon oneureun ijeumeseo heejigo]
Kwangsoo : ‘bagaimana kalau kita akhiri saja’
Kwangsoo : ‘How about we just end it’

(콩콩팔팔 Ep 1, menit 00/50/17 – 00/50/23)

Kwangsoo’s response violates the maxim of manner because it is ambiguous and not a clear answer to Woobin’s question. The utterance could mean ending the day’s activity or literally breaking up the group, creating confusion. At the same time, the statement exemplifies ridicule, as it playfully mocks the situation with an absurd suggestion. The humor arises not from the content itself but from the lighthearted delivery, which turns fatigue into laughter.

Data 2

- 이광수 : “이걸 가져온 거예요 지금 (물병)? “
Gwangsu : [igeol gajyeoon geoyeyo jigeum (mulbyeong)?]
Kwangsoo : ‘Kamu sekarang mulai membawa ini? (botol minum)’
Kwangsoo : ‘You’re carrying this now (a water bottle)?’
- 김기방 : “매니저가 챙겨 줘서”
Gibang : [maenijeoga chaenggyeo jwoseo]
Kibang : ‘Manajerku memberikannya kepadaku’
Kibang : ‘The manager gave it to me’
- 이광수 : “너무 꼴 보기 싫은데? “

Gwangsu : [*neomu kkol bogi sileunde*]
Kwangsoo : ‘Aku sangat tidak suka melihatnya ‘
Kwangsoo : ‘I really hate seeing that.’

(콩콩팔팔 Ep 1, menit 00/03/43 – 00/03/51)

Here, Kwangsoo violates the maxim of quality by stating something untrue. He does not genuinely dislike the water bottle, but exaggerates his reaction to create laughter. The humor comes from irony, since his words contradict his real intention. By pretending to be annoyed over something trivial, Kwangsoo playfully mocks Kibang in a dramatic way, which the audience easily recognizes as a joke. The incongruity between the ordinary act of carrying a water bottle and the exaggerated negative response produces the comic effect.

Data 3

나 PD : “청담동 미용실은 어떤 일로 ?”

Na PD : [*cheongdamdong miyongsireun eojeon illo?*]

Na PD : ‘kenapa kamu pergi ke salon rambut di cheongdam-dong ini?’

Na PD : ‘Why did you go to the Cheongdam-dong salon?’

기방 : “예 오늘 뭐 특별한 촬영이 있어 가지고 놀러 왔습니다”

Gibang: [*ye oneul mwo teukbyeolhan chwallyeongi isseo gajigo nolleo watseumnida*]

Kibang : ‘ya aku datang untuk berkumpul untuk syuting spesial hari ini’

Kibang : ‘I came here because there’s a special filming today’

나 PD : “죄송한데 어딜 하신 거예요?”

Na PD : [*joesonghande eodil hasin geoyeyo?*]

Na PD : ‘maaf, tapi mana hasilnya? ‘

Na PD : ‘Sorry, but where’s the result?’

(콩콩팔팔 Ep 1, menit 00/12/40 – 00/12/53)

In this exchange, Na PD (stands for producer Na) flouts the maxim of quantity by giving an under-informative response. Instead of clarifying what “result” he means, he leaves it vague, creating humor through ambiguity. At the same time, his remark represents irony, since visiting an elite salon in Cheongdam-dong should imply an impressive transformation, but his question

suggests that Kibang's appearance shows no noticeable change. The humor emerges from the contrast between expectation and reality, with the word "sorry" functioning not as a true apology but as a playful jab. This ironic teasing is effective because of the close relationship between NaPD and Kibang, which allows criticism to be taken humorously rather than offensively.

Data 4

김우빈 : “어느 정도 쓰셨는지를 살짝 들어 볼 수 있을까요? “

Ubin : [eoneu jeongdo sseusyeonneunjireul saljjak deureo bul su isseulkkayo?]

Woobin : 'Bolehkah kami tahu berapa yang kamu habiskan? '

Woobin : 'May we know how much you spent?'

나 PD : “아니 뭐 기름값 이런 거야 “

Na PD : [ani mwo gireumgap ireon geoya]

Na PD : 'Biaya bensin bukan masalah besar'.

Na PD : 'Gasoline costs are not a big problem'.

(콩콩팔팔 Ep 1, menit 00/05/14 – 00/05/20)

In this dialogue, Na PD's response, "*It's just gasoline expenses,*" creates facetious humor because it treats a potentially serious topic (production expenses) in a lighthearted and unserious manner. The utterance violates the maxim of quantity by providing insufficient information about the actual amount spent, the maxim of relevance by shifting the focus from total expenses to a single cost item, and the maxim of manner because the response is vague and does not clearly explain the expenditure. These maxim violations generate a conversational implicature that Na PD intentionally avoids answering Woobin's question directly. By downplaying the issue through humor, Na PD maintains a relaxed atmosphere and prevents the conversation from becoming overly serious, allowing the audience to infer his reluctance to disclose the actual expenses.

Data 5

광수 : “어머니 뽀 보셨죠?!”

Gwangsu : [eomeoni baem bosyeotjyo?!]

Kwangsoo : ‘Bu, kamu melihat ular kan?!’

Kwangsoo : : ‘Mom, you saw a snake, right?!’

옆집 어머니 : “네, 진짜 뱀이 아니라 지렁인 줄 알았어 “

Yeopjip eomeoni : [Ne, jinjja baemi anira jireongin jul arasseo]

Ibu tetangga : ‘Ya, itu ular sungguhan. kukira itu cacing’

Neighbourhood

Lady : 'Yeah, that's a real snake. I thought it was a worm'

광수 : ” 그러니까 어머니 ! 이 경수가 지금! 이 위험한 상황을 지금!! 선생님 저희
관리기 줌 빌려주십시오! 지금 뱀을 잡았습니다 뱀을 ! 지렁인 줄 아셨어요
어머니는.. 그거 여기서 자라서 이만해졌으면 진짜...”

Gwangsu : [geureonikka eomeoni ! i gyeongsuga jigeum! i wiheomhan sanghwangeul jigeum!!
seonsaengnim jeohui gwalligi jom billyeojusipsyo! jigeum baemeul jabatseumnida
baemeul ! jireongin jul asyeosseoyo eomeonineun.. geugeo yeogiseo jaraseo
imanhaejeosseumyeon jinjja]

Kwangsoo : ‘Benar kan, Bu! Kyungsoo menyelamatkan kita dari situasi berbahaya! Pak,
bisakah kami meminjam traktornya? Kami baru saja menangkap ular disini. Ibu
berpikir itu cacing... Jika tumbuh sebesar ini...’

Kwangsoo : ‘Isn’t it true, Mom! Kyungsoo saved us from a dangerous situation! Sir, can we
borrow your tractor? We just caught a snake here. I think it’s a worm... If it grows
this big...’

옆집 아버님 : “그게 어디서 났어..?”

Yeopjip eomeoni : [geuge eodiseo nasseo]

Ibu tetangga : ‘Dari mana asalnya? ‘

Neighbourhood

Lady : 'Where does it come from?'

광수 : “여기 있었어요 여기서”

Gwangsu : [yeogi isseosseoyo yeogiseo]

Kwangsoo : ‘Dari sini.’

Kwangsoo : 'From here.'

(콩콩팔팔 Ep 1, menit 01/06/00 – 01/06/23)

In this dialogue, Kwangsoo creates humor through exaggeration and bombast by dramatically portraying the discovery of a small snake as a dangerous crisis. He exaggerates the situation by claiming that Kyungsoo has “saved” everyone from danger and by imagining that the snake could grow into a much larger threat if left alone. The humor is further intensified through bombastic language, particularly when he requests to borrow a tractor and elevates Kyungsoo to the status of a heroic rescuer, creating a clear contrast between the trivial situation and the exaggerated response. These humorous effects are accompanied by violations of the maxim of quantity, as Kwangsoo provides excessive and unnecessary details; the maxim of quality, as his claims about the danger and future growth of the snake are clearly exaggerated and not factually grounded; and the maxim of relevance, since references to borrowing a tractor and imagining the snake’s future size are unrelated to the immediate topic. These violations generate the implicature that Kwangsoo does not genuinely perceive the snake as a serious threat but is intentionally dramatizing the situation to entertain others and create a comedic atmosphere.

These results highlight the central role of pragmatic strategies in shaping Korean humor. Unlike Western stand-up comedy, where humor is often explicit and individualistic, Korean variety show humor relies heavily on contextual play, linguistic ambiguity, and relational dynamics among participants. This study, therefore, not only confirms the significance of maxim violations in humor creation but also expands the cross-cultural understanding of pragmatic mechanisms in entertainment discourse.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the role of conversational maxim violations in creating humor in the Korean variety show *Green Bean, Red Bean: Reap What You Sow* (Episode 1). The findings revealed that all four of Grice’s maxims—quantity, quality, relation, and manner—were deliberately violated to generate humorous effects. Among these, violations of the maxim of relation occurred most frequently, often producing laughter through irrelevant or unexpected responses.

Each type of maxim violation contributed differently to humor creation. Quantity violations generated humor when information was presented in excess or insufficiency, while quality violations relied on exaggeration or untruths. Relevance violations evoked laughter through off-topic or unpredictable replies, and manner violations through ambiguity or obscurity. These violations gave rise to implicatures that forced the audience to reinterpret meaning. The contrast between what was said and what was implied produced surprise and incongruity, both central elements of humor.

The analysis also demonstrated a strong connection between maxim violations and Berger's linguistic humor techniques. Exaggeration and ridicule were found to be the most dominant strategies, supported by irony, repartee, sarcasm, and other techniques. These results confirm that maxim violations serve as a pragmatic mechanism for humor creation, while simultaneously highlighting the cultural specificity of Korean humor, which relies heavily on contextual play and relational dynamics.

Recommendations for Future Research

By combining Grice's Cooperative Principle and Berger's humor theory, this research contributes to the broader field of pragmatic studies on humor and expands the understanding of how linguistic strategies function within Korean entertainment discourse. However, we believe that this research still has shortcomings, or at least has some potential that can be a basis for further research.

Future research could delve deeper, not only into how humor is formed from implicatures created by maxim violations, but also beyond that. This research has not yet successfully examined how maxim violations can actually serve a specific function in humor. This function can be unknowingly present and become part of the humor's delivery strategy. Further research on this topic could detail both the function and strategy in humor for conveying messages.

The results of this study convince us that there are many more varieties of humor created from maxim violations, whether they are intentional or not. This section has great potential for research to complete the theoretical framework of maxim violations, especially in relation to humor. The development of such studies could lead to the potential discovery of complementary theories, such as a comprehensive description of the details of how maxim violations actually

serve other functions in interactions. With this great potential, similar studies are worth continuing to enrich the research results on the application of maxim violation theory in Korean, while also possibly providing new and useful findings.

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