

CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

MASTER THESIS

TV Sitcom *Friends*. Analysis of character humor
strategies based on the violation of Grice's
Conversational maxims

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Academic Year: 2011/2012

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely the result of my own work except where otherwise indicated. I have only used the resources given in the list of references.

Prague 15.5. 2012

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude particularly to my supervisor PhDr. Renata Pípalová CSc. for her helpfulness, valuable comments and ideas. Throughout my studies, she was the teacher who inspired me the most, who taught linguistics with contagious enthusiasm and who was always opened to new ideas coming from the students.

Above all, I am indebted to my parents, who made it possible for me to study and who supported me all the way. To them I dedicate this thesis.

Abstract

The purpose of this diploma thesis is the analysis of the humor strategies employed by the characters of Phoebe and Chandler in the TV Sitcom *Friends*. The discovered prevailing strategies were then compared with the personalities of the two characters. The data analyzed were the written script of five exemplary episodes from the Season 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9, in which the utterances eliciting laughter from the audience were thoroughly analyzed from the point of Grice's Cooperative Principle: only those utterances were considered in which the characters violated one or more of the conversational maxims (quality, quantity, relation and manner). Phoebe was found to violate most often the maxim of relation, thus it is her being non-factual and non-conventional that constitutes her most entertaining quality. As she develops and grows more mature as a character, the frequency counts of this humor strategy evince a descending tendency.

Chandler, on the other hand, is mostly being ironic, violating the maxim of quality. His character also gradually changes but his sense of humor remains the same - ironic throughout the show, as follows from the instances of almost fixed frequency.

Keywords: Humor, Cooperative Principle, Conversational maxims of quality, quantity, relation and manner, Conversational Implicature

Abstrakt

Smyslem této diplomové práce je analýza způsobu tvoření humoru u postav Phoebe a Chandlera v televizním sitkomu *Přátelé (Friends)*. Zjištěné převládající způsoby byly poté porovnány s osobnostmi těchto dvou postav. Analyzovaná data tvořily přepisy dialogů u pěti vzorových dílů ze série 1, 3, 5, 7, a 9, které byly posouzeny podle Griceova kooperačního principu. Ze všech výroků byly brány v úvahu pouze ty, které u diváků vyvolaly smích a zároveň porušily jednu nebo více konverzačních maxim (kvality, kvantity, relevance a vhodného způsobu). Bylo zjištěno, že postava Phoebe porušuje nejčastěji maximu relevance, a že její nejzábavnější vlastností je její nekonvenční povaha a nevěcnost. Jak její osobnost dospívá a vyvíjí se, na číslech četnosti tohoto způsobu humoru zaznamenáváme pokles.

Naproti tomu Chandler je většinu času ironický, čímž a porušuje maximu kvality. Jeho osobnost se také postupně mění, ale jak dokazuje stabilní frekvence takových případů, jeho smysl pro humor u něj zůstává nezměnný po celou dobu seriálu.

Klíčová slova: humor, kooperační princip, konverzační maximy kvality, kvantity, relevance a vhodného způsobu, konverzační implikatura

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Introduction

I started to watch *Friends* about twelve years ago and was immediately captured by the brilliant jokes and charmed by the outstanding and real performances of all the six main actors. I fell in love with the language and looked up every word they ever used. And not only words: references to people, events, products, films or anything else which was connected to the American culture and therefore foreign to me. I learnt what it means to *call shotgun* or what a *Silly Putty* is. I owe *Friends* for teaching me first to understand American English and for expanding my vocabulary tremendously.

Much later, when I was deciding about the topic of my diploma thesis, it did not take long to find the connection between the thing that awoke my love for the language and pragmatics, for me the most interesting class at the university. I was fascinated by the hidden processes of communication; by all the aspects that we take for granted and which - when discussed - are perceived very similarly among people. Not unlike in physics, we derive rules from what we see around us but in language we are the very part of it - the creators. Each of us can therefore be the researcher. We do not need any special knowledge of the field (it of course comes in handy to have some), we ARE it and it is enough to be perceptive to our own behavior. It is the beauty of the subject that enchanted me. For the analysis of the show's humor, I chose the default theory of implicature in pragmatics - Grice's Cooperative Principle and its conversational maxims.

This work strives to analyze several episodes of the American television sitcom *Friends*, focusing primarily on the means of humor making of two characters - Phoebe and Chandler. From the many humor techniques, we selected for analysis such humorous situations which emerge from the violation of Grice's Cooperative Principle, analyzing the exemplary instances set in their situational contexts. We want to find out whether there is any correlation between the particular strategies of humor making and the character's personality traits.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 The definition of humor:

An important step to a discussion of the humor in the TV sitcom Friends is indeed an attempt to define the term humor itself. However, this first task has proved to be the most difficult one.

2.2 Definition

Many linguists, anthropologists and psychologists have tried to arrive at a generally acceptable and all-encompassing definition of humor. A considerable amount of such definitions proves their abortive endeavor to find an explanation that would thoroughly embrace the wide range of such literary modes as irony, satire, parody and countless more. Although having similar traits, one could say: *each person, a different definition*; some of them long and complicated, some very short. For example Alison Ross, a lecturer at Leeds University, presents hers - brief, plain and concise: "something that makes a person laugh or smile" (Ross 1998 : 1). The first thing that comes to mind is that this definition is so broad and vague that it can hold almost anything. It would not be of much use to an alien totally foreign to our way of life: *Could you, please, specify? First steps of your child can make you smile...* Should not we be more precise and richer in content? And why do the language theoreticians have such difficulties defining something so familiar and common? Let us elaborate on the reasons.

2.2.1 Humor complexity and the problem of internal subdivision

The first reason is the great complexity of the realm of humor itself. Schmidt-Hidding demonstrates this complexity by specifying the Semantic Field of "humor". The word humor embraces all the following terms: wit, pun, satire, mock, sarcasm fun, comic, irony, tease and many more, which automatically raises the question of "internal subdivision of the subject matter". (Schmidt-Hidding 1963 : 3, 6) In order to define the word humor, one should be able to describe and mark exactly its internal constituents enumerated above; their sum should form the generalized definition of the word humor. Despite the frequent attempts to do so, theoreticians did not succeed and took a pessimistic position that humor is impossible to subcategorize firmly.

Moreover, further difficulties are represented by the fact that in the reality of humor, there are no clear boundaries, nor are they subsequently in its lexical categories; not to mention problems related to translation of such terminology. Different disciplines also see matters in question differently. A literary critic sees "genres" like an anecdote or a joke; a psychologist a defense mechanism resulting from unresolved father issues; a sociologist an "interpersonal emotion management, whose purpose is to manage the emotions of others as well as of the self." (Francis 1994 : 147) and a medical doctor observes "...a motor reflex produced by the coordinated contraction of 15 facial muscles in a stereotyped pattern and accompanied by altered breathing." (Koestler 1969 : 29)

2.2.2 Humor culturally and individually conditioned

Since this area of study is not an exact science, such as mathematics or physics, we do not only manipulate with different points of view, different approaches, and disciplines; we experience that the notion of being funny differs individually. It is a matter of a subjective taste what we find funny and we would hardly find two people who could rank one joke exactly the same way (Ross 1998: 4). Even when focused on one person for an experiment called *What is humorous?*, you would probably receive mixed results. Imagine when you heard a joke so many times that is not funny anymore or that you are hungry or did not sleep last night that well. What you find funny is determined by your personality, personal taste, social background and group; your upbringing, occupation, religion, intellect or level of your education. What you laugh at changes even with age as well as with experience. Throughout life, one gains general knowledge which enables him/her to identify the humorous moment; e.g. a person who has never been in a relationship, married or who is not familiar with the (admittedly stereotyped) concept would not understand the following joke, an actual advertisement in The New York Post:

- *For Sale by owner: Complete set of Encyclopedia Britannica. 45 volumes. Excellent condition. \$1,000 or best offer. No longer needed. Got married last weekend. Wife knows everything.*

It is the knowledge of the widely spread stereotyped position of husband and wife in a marriage, their roles and behavior that enables us to appreciate the comical exaggeration present in the joke.

Consider the conditions under which one can appreciate the following joke:

- *What did Donald Duck say in his graduate physics class?
Quark, quark, quark!*

First of all, one has to be familiar with the character of Donald Duck. That is an easily met requirement since it is one of the most popular Walt Disney characters airing in many world countries. There has to be some understanding of the English language (of course assuming the basic language knowledge to read in it and understand the language concepts; more to this issue below) in relation to the sound that a duck makes: *Quack*. As it widely known, onomatopoeias are not the same across all languages. The imitation of the real sounds conforms to the broader linguistic system and at the same time is restricted by the phonetics of the particular language. The last requirement is the basic knowledge of physics (some might call it general knowledge, some deeper knowledge of the field) and the fundamental constituent of matter – quark.

When looking into the realm of cultural and individual conditions, we should discuss the issue of language in greater detail. Supposing the hearer masters his/her native tongue well enough, in terms of understanding the words of a

joke, it may not be enough. Grammatical difference, differences in vocabulary or pronunciation across language varieties can play an important role, as they are very often exploited to be the source of humor. As chronicled by Winston Churchill, the different meanings of the verb *to table* caused a misunderstanding during a meeting of the Allied forces of the World War II (Churchill 1948-1954 : 58). The meanings of the two words are in fact opposite: In British English to table an item on an agenda means to *open it up* for discussion while in American English it means to *remove* it from discussion or to delay or suspend discussion. In the world of humor, such minor differences can hardly cause international conflicts but can be the cause of confusion and thus hinder the perception of intended humorous meaning.

These cases of misinterpretation (vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) are relatively easy to spot, but less apparent (but often more significant) are the differences on the level of pragmatics. We need to possess both the linguistic knowledge but also the ability to "read between the lines"; to identify what the speaker implies and what his/her intent is in the context of a specific situation¹. One can argue that the necessary sense of language comes naturally to a native speaker in the course of his life (some people are innately more gifted in this area) - each of us learns to pick up the smallest meaning differences, to distinguish various facial expressions, to imitate sentence melodies and other suprasegmental features of speech, to switch codes and many more. It is true that native speakers learn all that and do so mostly unconsciously.

¹ See Chapter 3.5.

Misinterpretations based on such unfamiliarity occur mostly across languages and what is even more important – across cultures. Different cultures possess different modes of interactions and in consequence one has to know a great deal about the culture and society in question to interpret correctly its communicative value (Wierzbicka 2003 : 2). The nuances are often so subtle (in the case of e.g. cultures of Western Europe) that non-native speakers can very often miss them. However, those differences in culture-similar nations do not usually present serious problems and result mostly in minor conversational or situational mishaps without fatal communication breakdowns. More serious communication-wise are the differences between two cultures that have historically, philosophically or religiously distant backgrounds. Let me use the Japanese culture as a typical representative of a culture in all those regards distant to us – Westerners. People in Japan are reluctant to express clearly their preferences, even in response to a direct question. For example, when they are asked about their convenience, they decline to state it, using instead statements like: "*Nan-demo kamaimase*. (Anything will be all right with me) or *Itsu-demo kekkoo-desu* (Any time will do)". Wierzbicka 2003 : 75). This tendency seems very unnatural und inapprehensible to our concept of self-assertion; we are used to saying clearly and unambiguously what we want, what we would like or what we think. This clash in basic attitudes is visible on the level of pragmatics, not grammar or vocabulary. A mere language translator from Japanese into English would not therefore be enough and without understanding the Japanese culture and its social concepts, business negotiations would fail to

meet the desired expectations. Similarly, a joke based on the differences between two so different social concepts as Japanese and for example American will be funny only to those who are familiar with both.

We could of course fail to understand a joke when there is a reference to some prior encounter of the participants, to their mutual interest or to an adventure in which they were engaged together. Such inside jokes do not require general knowledge - on the contrary, they require the knowledge of a very specific situation or matter. (Norrick 1993 : 6) For this reason, some would consider the above mentioned Donald Duck joke as an example of inside joke in the area of Physics.

2.2.3 Laughter as a criterion

Although humor is a phenomenon which we all are familiar with; one of the everyday and common occurrences in language and therefore, at least according to common sense, fairly simply definable, the linguists' experience shows otherwise. The difficulty in the creation of a valid and universal definition of humor is summarized in the following quotation:

"If there were any single generalization that could be applied with equal relevance to Chaucer, Mark Twain, Evelyn Waugh, Milan Kundera, Milesian tales, Jewish jokes, banana peels, mechanical toys, content analyses, laugh-counts, broadcasts, cartoons, monkeys, hyenas, and tickling, it would be much too sweeping for any plane but that of pointless platitude." (Levin 1987 : 6-7)

However, all the various humor definitions seem to have **one common denominator: laughter**. (Attardo 1994 : 10) As shown above, we cannot somehow grasp the source of humor, its very nature, but we can easily recognize the result. Logic is similar to this case: We do not know how to define fire but we know that burning produces smoke – ergo - where there is smoke, there is also fire. This elegant bypass thus creates a valid **working definition of humor** and claims laughter to be a reliable indicator of humor.

There are of course objections, as you may suspect and probably even guess what they are. For the sake of completeness, I will briefly mention the main counterarguments by Olbrechts-Tyteca:

1. Laughter largely exceeds humor (the author distinguishes between physiological laughter – originating for instance from sodium pentathol or hallucinogens- and laughter originating from humor)
2. Laughter does not always have the same meaning (laughter in Africa, e.g., is more a sign of embarrassment or bewilderment than of amusement)
3. Laughter is not directly proportionate to the intensity of humor (age and education, e.g., teach us to hold back our reactions)
4. Humor elicits laughter but sometimes a smile (“there is no agreement among scholars about viewing smiling as an attenuated form of laughter” Attardo 1994 : 12)²

² Alison Ross, e.g., includes the aspect of smile in her definition

5. Laughter or smiling cannot be always observed directly (laughter can be simulated and must be interpreted in its social meaning)

In spite of the abovementioned imperfections of humor defined by laughter, so far it seems to be the only more or less functioning solution that solves the problem of defining the complex category of humor; but as far as a *proper* definition is concerned, we will have to wait until someone discovers how exactly a *fire* works.

2.3 Theories of humor

After reviewing the complexity of humor and arriving at an acceptable definition, we should attempt to explain what actually humor is and what social or other functions it serves. Why do we laugh? What is our goal? What psychological state is it that produces laughter? What exactly is it that we find funny?

The history of theories of humor stretches from the Ancient Greece, Rome, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance to the 19th century and the modern theories of today. For the purposes of presenting the general approach to the matter and providing a theoretical background, a complete and detailed overview is not necessary; what follows is a brief topical treatment of three principal theories that are commonly accepted and elaborated on in the field today. Incongruity is the intellectual (cognitive) root of laughter; superiority is the emotional (social) root and relief is the socio-psychological counterpart. Each of these theories deals with one aspect of laughter, but to cover humor in general,

all of them are needed together. (Walte 1997 : 19) Most of the humor theories ever proposed are actually a mixture of following theories and many contemporary researchers believe that it is impossible to incorporate a phenomenon as complex as humor into a single theory.

2.3.1 Incongruity-Resolution Theory

Incongruity – Resolution Theory is one of the most influential theories and has been dealt with already in the 19th century in the work of Kant and Schopenhauer. However, issues concerning humor in connection with incongruity can be traced back to the earliest theories of humor: for example by Aristotle. Schopenhauer defines laughter and grasps thus the essence of this theory:

“The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity” (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, 1819, quoted in Attardo (1993 : 48).

This two-stage model is usually defined as a conflict between what we, as hearers, expect (what the speaker leads us to believe through the set-up) and what in fact occurs in the joke (punch line). The most obvious and clear structural features of a joke are contrasted and destroyed by the punch line which presents the new circumstances in a whole new light. The semantics of the two stages becomes inconsistent or unsuitable – the greater the

discrepancy, the greater the surprise. (Chapman 1976 : 37) This inconsistency causes that the punch line does not make immediate sense to the hearer, who, in order to comprehend the joke, must come to a "resolution" which in form of a scenario matches both situations and allows the punch line to be congruous.

- *"Is the doctor at home?" the patient asked in his bronchial whisper.*
"No", the doctor's young and pretty wife whispered in reply. "Come right in".³

In this joke, everything preceding the punch line "come right in" builds the set-up of the joke: a sick person, having troubles speaking (probably due to bronchitis) has come to visit the doctor, asking if the doctor is at home. Incongruity in the form of the punch line forces the hearer to construct an alternative: The young and pretty wife misinterprets the question *"Is the doctor at home?"* as an intention not to see the doctor for a medical consult but as a secretive (therefore the whisper) plan to see her, having different intentions altogether.

Raskin's Sematic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH)⁴, a major contribution to the incongruity theory, adds to the basic concept the notion of scripts. According to Attardo, „script is a set of information that is typical, such as well-established routines and common ways to do things and to go about activities.“ (Attardo

³ Potschepov 1981 : 45

⁴ This new linguistic theory devised in Raskin's *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor* is nowadays, despite earlier attempts to mark the difference, commonly classified as an incongruity-resolution theory

1994 : 200) The theory assumes that a joke is always related to two different scripts that are in an opposition but have an overlapping area which allows them to be compatible, fully or in part, with the other script. The shift from one script into another is achieved by a semantic script switch trigger, in the text realized by the punch line. The semantic script switch trigger, or the punch line, introduces the second script and forces the hearer to reevaluate and interpret the joke differently than he/she had expected. In our example, the first part of the joke activates the doctor-patient script while the punch line imposes a reinterpretation in a lover-script. (Yu-wen Wu 2010 : 59)

2.3.2 Superiority Theory

Superiority theory (a.k.a. aggression, hostility, triumph or derision theory) is probably the oldest theory of humor which dates back to Plato and Aristotle but was most forcefully brought to the fore by Hobbes. The theory accentuates the negative element of humor, its aggressive side and is based on the idea that laughter arises from our sense of superiority with respect to someone else. We therefore laugh at other people's inferiority, stupidity or misfortunes. This is the reason why both Plato and Aristotle argue that too much laughter is not compatible with leading a good life – because while laughing at others, people feel that they are better, smarter or more beautiful. For this position of superiority introduces Hobbes the term "sudden glory" and although he does not deny the attitude adopted by Plato and Aristotle, he adds a new notion to the theory. Even though we ridicule the people we laugh at, we still can feel

affection toward them, and even more so when we laugh at ourselves. (Walte 1997 : 21)

- *“My girlfriend has left me. If that isn’t bad enough, it was for someone who looks exactly like me.” (Phil Nee, Chinese American)*⁵
- *I never believed in Santa Clause because I knew no white dude would come into my neighborhood after dark. (Dick Gregory)*⁶

However, the most common occurrence seems to be the case of laughing at other people’s inferiority, a sudden realization that we are better than them. In this sense, as Gruber points out (in his laugh/win theory), for us to enjoy humor, it must include our *winning* and in addition a sudden perception of it:

1. For every humorous situation, there is a *winner*.
2. For every humorous situation, there is a *loser*.
3. Finding the “winner” in every humorous situation, and what that “winner” *wins*, is often not easy.
4. Finding the “loser” in every humorous situation, and what that “loser” *loses*, is often even *less* easy.

⁵ Ross 1998 : 61

⁶ Ross 1998 : 61; Dick Gregory (1932 – present) is of the first African American comedians who performed his political message on civil rights in public

But, that having been said,

5. Humorous situations can best be understood by *who* wins *what*, and *who* loses *what*.

and,

6. *Removal* from a humorous situation (joke, etc.) what is won or lost, or the suddenness with which it is won or lost, removes the essential elements of the situation and renders it humorless. (Gruber, 2000 : 9)

The target of humor is often a group of people, strangers or other nations. Joke tellers are usually members of the more powerful group, of the majority, who joke about race, ethnicity, age or other aspects that are a sign of otherness of the other group. Commonly, the "stupidity jokes are pinned on a familiar group one similar to the joke-tellers but who live at the periphery of the joke-tellers country or culture." (Davies, cited from Walte, 1997) Almost every nation has its own group who it makes fun of: it could be a group that has a lower (e.g. Turks in Germany) or higher status (e.g. Jews); a group with a typically different political, sexual or other orientation or other group with differences of other kind. Such jokes are a typical manifestation of the prejudice in each society and show the need of people to cope with a particular situation. Examples of such

jokes are lawyer jokes, woman jokes, physicist jokes, Jewish jokes, blond jokes and many more.

- *Why are laboratory rats being replaced by lawyer? For two reasons: the scientists get attached to the rats; and there are some things a rat just won't do.*⁷
- *A Jewish sailor was shipwrecked on a desert island and the first thing he did was build two synagogues... Years later when he was rescued people were bewildered and asked him: Why he built two synagogues... to which he replied. "Oh that other one... I would NEVER go there!"*⁸

As has been mentioned earlier, the superiority theory emphasizes the social aspect of laughter because the ridiculing of others is usually a matter of group of people, not an individual. Laughter serves here the social function through helping people identify with their group and solidify their social position and bonds within. If we laugh at others, we send a message to our fellow member, that we indeed feel the same way and therefore we also belong to this social group rather than the ridiculed one. Not many people can resist such pressure in standing up for their opinions and beliefs (assuming of course their principles

⁷ Ross 1998 : 59

⁸ <http://www.angelfire.com/al/AttardBezzinaLawrenc/jewish.html>

and norms are in conflict with the particular group) and peer pressure decisions or herd mentality behavior are the aftermath of our weakness.

In addition, it should be mentioned that there are situations in which a person laughs without the feeling of being supreme: They are not directed at somebody; without a target, there can be no such feeling as being better or supreme. We laugh because we have been made aware of some general absurdity. Hobbes describes this case as 'laughter without offence', which is said to take place when we laugh at "absurdities and infirmities abstracted from persons, and where all the Company may laugh together" (Hobbes quoted in Skinner 2002).

2.3.3 Relief Theory

Relief theory (a.k.a. release, sublimation or liberation) is based on the idea that humor and laughter⁹ release tension and bring relaxation. The theory does not explain why we find something funny but - as Ross puts it - it deals with the "battle within ourselves" (Ross 1998 : 63). According to the theory, emotional tension is built up to deal with the upcoming stress, social or psychological. When the amount of energy is too high, it is eliminated through outburst of laughter. Sigmund Freud was the first researcher who deals with the psychoanalytical side of humor and laughter and claims that all human beings "have strong sexual and aggressive impulses or wishes at the unconscious level

⁹ Herbert Spencer explained humor as a release of repressed energy which was later redefined by Freud, who connected both humor and laughter. (Walte 2007 : 26)

that are seeking expression" (Freund quoted in Walte 2007). These impulses and wishes are kept inside in situations that force us to suppress our feelings, desires and thoughts; humor is seen as breaking the tension and releasing ourselves from the pressure. In our society, this kind of social stress is brought by what is called a taboo; a behavior that is forbidden or considered morally wrong. Taboos have rapidly changed in time; their topics differ between particular cultures and nations or between older and younger generations. However, the most common taboo is sexuality. (Ross 1998 : 65) By breaking taboos, we release the tension that has built up inside and we simply enjoy what is not allowed:

- *Doctor: You've got acute angina.*
Female patient: I haven't got a bad pair of tits either.

- *Marriage is like a bank account. You put it in, you take it out, you lose interest.*¹⁰

As was the case with both incongruity – resolution and superiority theory, the relief theory cannot represent the complete theory of laughter either. According to the latter, there is no laughter without a previous tension and that cannot be always the case: There is no time to build up tension if for example something unexpected happens. There are also situations that have no connection to sexuality or other taboos and thus laughter cannot be explained by the outburst

¹⁰ Both from Ross 1998 : 64

of suppressed emotions (e.g. laughter while watching a cartoon character slip on a banana peel).

2.4 Conventional Meaning and Conventional Implicature

To understand the phenomenon of conventional meaning¹¹, we must first elaborate on the meaning of the word conventional. Convention is a set of principles that are laid down by a common agreement; this agreement can be achieved through an assembly of persons, delegates or representatives of a group in official proceeding (such as selecting a candidate for an office or martial conventional concerning prisoner exchange) or as in case of social convention - the society. What do they agree on? In case of general social convention, what is a customary conduct - e.g. handshaking when being introduced to a stranger, which was supposedly practiced in ancient Greece as far back as 5th century BC.¹²

The social convention is of course not a deliberate and targeted decision established by selected representatives; it is characteristic of a human society that habits, customs, traditions and also social conventions evolve naturally throughout the time and the part on their creation must be assigned not to an individual but to the whole community. Many of those conventions find their

¹¹ Conventional meaning is often identified with literal meaning and although there has been some discussion whether these two notions are identical, for our explanatory purposes, we will assume so. (See e.g. Talmage, C. J. L. (1994). *Literal meaning, conventional meaning and first meaning*. Erkenntnis 40 (2):213 – 225)

¹² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Handshake>

way into the legal code and are thus established not as a customary but as obligatory and law binding.

Just like the already mentioned habits and traditions, a language is also a product of human society and is thus based on social conventions. A language is a living organism and so its building blocks – words (together with grammar) and naturally also their meaning - are the subject to a continuous development and change. What was a convention 500 years or even 50 years ago does not have to be so today.

Conventional meaning, or literal meaning if you will, is the meaning stripped of any additional information coming from between the lines. It is the very essence of the particular word that the vast majority of language users agreed on; it is the intention of the word, the sum or collection of its qualities. In a regular communication we add other layers of meaning, thus exceed the conventional realm and we reach the figurative language. It is a natural process since the language is being used not in a sterile environment but in a society and the social life, its experience in context, events, art and other social phenomena mirror in it.

It is not an accident that synonyms of the word "literal" in this sense include expressions like: rigid, plain, explicit, inflexible, narrow or similar. We in fact resort to an expression within the conventional meaning in very specific situations. When, for example, we are not sure of the language usage and we are afraid that this could result in an incorrect use or else in misinterpretation.

This happens when non-native speakers use their second language but their knowledge of it is limited, tied to the textbook and thus deprived of any real experience of the language "games". Another situation would be when we are on the other hand not sure of the language knowledge of our communication partner. For the sake of simplicity and for avoiding possible doubt on the side of our partner, (besides using the basic vocabulary and grammar) we use words strictly in their conventional meaning; therefore again the meaning that the recipients are most likely to have gained. (It is needless to say that with experience, the meaning of words and sentences in our perception becomes more precise, therefore the more real language experience we have, the less vague and more complete our own definitions of certain expressions are). Similarly we employ central meanings when we cannot afford to deviate from the social conventions – be it the case of a very formal and official meeting or when the language recipient happens to be a person of great respect.

The most obvious example is legal language. This is the case when it is necessary for the message to be as clear as possible, with the one intended meaning only. Wording here must be very explicit, strictly in the conventional sense and therefore as closed to other possible interpretations as possible. This is particularly important in legal documents such as contracts and agreements or laws and regulations. The unambiguity must be able to stand the testing of the citizens – so that when disputed, the judiciary would have the least difficulty to rule impartially on its basis. The significance of literal meaning in this case is evident.

However, even the simplest words, sentences or phrases can convey a variety of messages. The term *conventional implicature* was coined by H.P. Grice¹³ and describes meanings that arise from the used linguistic forms; it is therefore a semantic - pragmatic phenomenon. As for example the utterance:

- “*Even Peter¹⁴ knows it’s unethical.*”¹⁵

The adverb “even” modifies the agent of the sentence (Peter); therefore it conventionally implicates that Peter is among the least likely to know it is unethical. The speaker thus demonstrates the obviousness of the fact. We could suppose that this is due to his unethical behavior, which he is known for; or due to the fact that Peter is not very bright... Such assumptions are the matter of our imagination; however, what remains is the fact that the conventional meaning of the lexical item “even” pushes us towards them and does so with what we¹⁶ agreed to be its content.

In his *Studies in the way of words*¹⁷ the very origin of implicature theory itself, Grice presents this example, on which he explains the concept:

¹³ Herbert Paul Grice (1913 – 1988), English linguist, one of the founders of Pragmatics

¹⁴ Underlined text is to be emphasized

¹⁵ Horn 2006 : 4

¹⁶ We, as the human kind

¹⁷ Grice 1989 : 44

- *"If I say (smugly), He is an Englishman; he is, therefore, brave, I have certainly committed myself, by virtue of the meaning of my words, to its being the case that his being brave is a consequence of (follows from) his being an Englishman. But while I have said that he is an Englishman and said that he is brave, I do not want to say that I have said (in the favored sense) that it follows from his being an Englishman that he is brave, though I have certainly indicated, and so implicated, that this is so."*

2.5 Conversational Implicature

Conversational implicature, on the other hand, is not inherently associated with any expression; it is generated by the principles of conversation and listeners deduce it from the utterances in the context – the resultant meaning of the utterance is therefore nonconventional. According to Levinson, it is "the gap between what is literally said and what is conveyed."(Levinson 1983 : 98) What a speaker wants to say is characteristically more extensive than what he/she directly expresses and the desired dimension of "hidden" meaning will arise when it is applied to a particular conversational circumstance. Similarly, Yule says: "that something must be more than just what the words mean. It is an additional conveyed meaning, called an implicature." (Yule 1996 : 35)

Since the character of conversational implicature¹⁸ is easier to demonstrate than to explain theoretically, let me use the following example:

Husband and wife are getting ready to leave for a dinner party:

- *Husband : How much longer will you be?*
- *Wife : Mix yourself a drink.*¹⁹

The conventional response of the wife would be some time frame in which she thinks she would be ready; or to put it another way - a conventional implicature with a literal question. Hearing her answer, the husband then searches for a possible interpretation and concludes that she is in fact telling (without using the actual words) him that it will take a long time, or at least long enough for him to have a drink. (Depending on other factors such as intonation, facial expression etc., the statement could be an intentional exaggeration.)

Now, the question arises – how can she count on her communication partner to correctly decipher her utterance? How can her husband be sure that the alternative he has chosen as the “correct one” is, in fact, correct? To answer these questions, we must look into the principles on which a conversation works.

¹⁸ The key ideas concerning conversational implicature “were proposed by Grice in the William James lectures delivered at Harvard in 1967 and still only partially published.” (Levinson 1983: 100)

¹⁹ Ellis 1999 : 78

2.6 Cooperative Principle

The speech participants act upon an assumption that they share a common goal (or at least its approximate direction) and therefore also mutual efforts – to communicate successfully and to reach this goal in the most sufficient way; in other words – with the greatest effect and at the least cost. Yule explains: "This sense of cooperation is simply one in which people having a conversation are not normally assumed to be trying to confuse, trick, or withhold relevant information from each other" (Yule 1996 : 35).

This assumption that there is a cooperative behavior of participants governing our conversational practice was in 1975 termed as the **Cooperative Principle (CP)** by the philosopher H.P. Grice. The principle was formulated as follows: *"Make your contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged."*²⁰ In other words, cooperate with your conversational partner.

2.7 Gricean Maxims

In the scope of CP, Grice distinguishes four sub-principles called **maxims** (a.k.a. Gricean Maxims), which, governed by CP, **explain the process in which communication implications are generated**. If these four sub-maxims are adopted in a conversation, they contribute to the cooperative exchange.²¹

²⁰ Grice 1989 : 45

²¹ It is "the basis for the assumption which we seem to make, and on which (I hope) it will appear that a great range of implicatures depend, that talkers will in general (...) proceed in the manner that these principles prescribe." (Grice 1989 : 48)

2.7.1 Maxim of Quality

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

Grice proposes this maxim as an explanation for the regularity of behavior in conversation referring to the **authenticity of provided information**. According to this maxim, each contribution to a conversation should be truthful and justified. A deliberate lie or communication in a way that does not reflect an honest intention is therefore an obvious violation. (Grice 1975 : 42) According to later authors who developed Grice's theories further, this maxim should have a higher status since without its validity as a prerequisite the other maxims cannot be satisfied.²²

2.7.2 Maxim of Quantity

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

This Maxim states that one should provide just the **right amount of information**. Failure to do so can cause either (i) providing too much information, which will be perceived as insignificant or overwhelming by the communication partner or (ii) providing less information than required, by which the speaker will seem uninformed or incompetent. In this perspective, not

²² See chapter 3.10

only the quantity of information is valued but also its quality²³. One can, for example, perform sufficiently in the terms of length but with zero required information value. This issue, however, borders on the later Maxim of Relation.

2.7.3 Maxim of Relation

- *Be relevant.*

In conversation, the speaker should only include **information that is relevant to the topic of discussion**. Our utterances “raise expectations of relevance not because speakers are expected to obey a CP and Maxims (...) but because the search for relevance is a basic feature of human cognition, which communicators may exploit. (...) Intuitively, an input (a sight, a sound, an utterance, a memory) is relevant to an individual when it connects with background information he has available to yield conclusions that matter to him.” (Horn, Ward 2004 : 608) Grice himself admits that this issue conceals a number of problems, for example - there can be different kinds of relevance or how to approach the fact that the subject of conversation gradually (but naturally) changes. (Grice 1989 : 26). Together with other deficiencies, the breadth of this maxim is the subject to criticism.

2.7.4 Maxim of Manner

- *Avoid obscurity of expression.*
- *Avoid ambiguity.*

²³ Meaning communicative value of the information, not its truthfulness

- *Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).*
- *Be orderly*²⁴

The maxim of manner²⁵, whose supermaxim is *Be perspicuous*, is focused not on the content of the utterance but rather on its form – **HOW it is being said**, so that the proper implicatures arise. In order to be able to follow the aspects in question, one must work within the framework of the social conventions (in case of this maxim probably the most) and be aware what situation requires what behavior. For instance, being obscure and vague about one's job will be translated as having something to hide.

Even though the maxims appear to be the rules of appropriate linguistic conduct (*If you speak, do so clearly, sincerely, briefly, etc.*), Grice actually assigned them the status of default: "When conversation does not proceed according to these maxims, the addressee assumes that the maxims are indeed observed at some deeper level and uses his reason ability to work out how the CP applies in the case in point." (MARMARIDOU 2000 : 229)

Here we have the answer to our question from the end of the previous chapter, relating to the conversation between husband and wife getting ready to go out:

²⁴ Grice 1989 : 26-27

²⁵ "... which I understand as relating not (like previous categories) to what is said but, rather, to HOW what is said is to be said, I include the Supermaxim-Be perspicuous and various maxims such as:" Grice 1989 : 26

How can she count on her communication partner to correctly decipher her utterances? How can her husband be sure that the alternative he has chosen as the "correct one" is, in fact, correct?

Both participants (husband and wife) enter the conversation with the **prior assumption** that they both proceed as prescribed by the CP and maxims of conversation. Although first hearing her response, the husband may not identify the cooperation he expected (an exact and clear answer), he does not give up and does not reject her as uncooperative; he still believes there is a logical connection between his question and this response and finds the only possible interpretation - as she believed he would. At this point, we can argue that the wife did not proceed according to the CP; not fulfilling the maxim of manner, more specifically by being *obscure in expression*.

2.8 Failure to fulfill a Maxim

Although, in a cooperative conversation, it is reasonable to follow the conversational maxims, participants need not always to do so. They can violate them on purpose for some reason or another. Grice enumerates the ways in which a participant in a talk exchange may fail to fulfill his maxims and lists strategies for the reasons:

2.8.1 Violation

"He may quietly and unostentatiously **violate** a maxim; if so, in some cases he will be liable to mislead". (Grice 1989 : 51) This violation "typically results in the

addressee's understanding that there is something wrong with the speaker's utterance, which the addressee cannot sort out" (Marmaridou 2000 : 231) However, when the speaker violates the maxim of quality and unostentatiously lies, there is no way for the addressee to find out (unless there are some other non-verbal indicators).

2.8.2 Opting Out

He may **opt out** from the operation both of the maxim and of the CP; he may say, indicate, or allow it to become plain that he is unwilling to cooperate in the way which the maxim requires:

- *I cannot say more.*
- *My lips are sealed.*

2.8.3 Clash

He may be faced by a **clash**: he may be unable, for example, to fulfill the first maxim of Quantity (Be as informative as is required) without violating the second maxims of Quality (Have adequate evidence for what you say)

- A: Where does C live?
- B: Somewhere in the South of France." Grice (1989 : 51)

B is aware, that the information he has provided is less informative than A requires. However, B is also aware that this is all the information he can

provide without violating the maxim of quality (*Don't say what you lack adequate evidence for*) so he chooses to rather violate the maxim of quantity, implicating is that he does not know the exact location of C. In this case, the violation of the maxim of quality (e.g. lying about where he lives) would probably have more serious consequences than sharing only an approximate (but truthful) location.

2.8.4 Flouting

"He may **flout** a maxim; that is, he may blatantly fail to fulfill it. On the assumption that the speaker is able to fulfill the maxim and to do so without violating another maxim (because of a clash), is not opting out, and is not, in view of the blatancy of his performance, trying to mislead, the hearer is faced with a minor problem: How can his saying what he did say be reconciled with the supposition that he is observing the overall CP? This situation is one that characteristically gives rise to a conversational implicature; and when a conversational implicature is generated in this way, I shall say that a maxim is being EXPLOITED." (ibid. : 49)

- *A: Let's get the kids something*
- *B: Okay, but I veto I-C-E C-R-E-A-M-S.*²⁶

In this example, B flouts the maxim of manner (*Be perspicuous*), spelling out the word ice-creams, implicating that he/she does not want the word mention

²⁶ Levinson 1983 : 104

directly in front of the children “in case they are thereby prompted to demand some” (Levinson 1983 : 104-105)

Unlike simply violating a maxim, here the speaker does so intentionally and expects the listener to notice. By flouting different maxims, the speaker gives rise to conversational implicatures and employs the techniques “of the nature of a figure of speech” (Grice 1989 : 52), trying to achieve an amplification of his/her point. Grice himself mentions several rhetorical strategies as examples of implicature resulting from the violation of his maxims:

2.8.4.1 Quality

One of overt violations of the maxim of truthfulness results in **Irony**²⁷. Denoting the opposite of the literal meaning of what is said obviously violates the maxim’s requirement of making a true contribution. While stating: “*John is a fine friend.*”, the speaker means the exact opposite and therefore the proposition he is trying to get across is contradictory to what the speaker uttered. However, according to the CP, the speaker’s goal is a successful communication and stating an intentional lie would only mislead the hearer without realizing the true meaning of the utterance. It follows that the hearer must be aware of the true state of things in order to decipher the speaker’s message. Instead of conveying what the speaker really means (*John is a lousy friend*), he/she amplifies the statement by declaring the opposite. The

²⁷ According to Attardo, there is basic distinction in the field of irony between verbal irony, which is a linguistic phenomenon, and situational irony, which is state of the world which is perceived as ironical. (Attardo : 2001, 793.) In this context, we will consider exclusively verbal irony.

seemingly uncooperative statement will definitely attract more attention than another in a number of cooperative ones. Metaphor is characterized as “categorical falsity” (ibid.), so the exact opposite of what the speaker means cannot be the case. In example *You are the cream in my coffee* speaker attributes to his audience some “feature in respect to which the audience resembles the mentioned substance.”

2.8.4.2 Quantity

Tautologies such as *Women are women* or *War is war* are examples of flouting of the second maxim of Quantity, by not providing enough relevant information. Such remarks are non-informative and “cannot but infringe the first maxim (...) in any conversational context.” (Grice 1989 : 52) The intention of the speaker here is again to call attention to some element of the construct. Another example Grice presents (ibid.) is a “testimonial about a pupil who is a candidate for a philosophy job: *Dear Sir, Mr. X's command of English is excellent, and his attendance at tutorials has been regular. Yours, etc.*” The teacher of course knows that information he provides is not satisfactory for the purpose of the letter, however, for some reason he chooses to ignore it. It is evident that he chooses to be loyal to the maxim of quality and writes only information which he honestly believes. The recipient of the letter will of course be able to identify this technique, correctly deducing that this is ALL the favorable information about the pupil the teacher can provide. The actual message is therefore that the pupil is not a good candidate, hidden in an

elegant coat. As Ross puts it, although "communicatively empty, tautologies (...) do make an emphatic point, (...) they are not devoid of sense." (Ross 1998 : 32)

2.8.4.3 Relation

According to Grice, examples of violations of the maxim of Relation, where an implicature is achieved by real and very apparent violation, are rare. He presents the following: "*At genteel tea party, A says "Mrs. X is an old bag." There is a moment of appalled silence, and then B says "The weather has been quite delightful this summer, hasn't it?"*" B refused to make a relevant remark to A's statement, implying that this is not a suitable topic for discussion, perhaps even that A committed a faux pas. As will be shown show later, violation of the maxim of relation, when there is an apparent deviation from the topic, is in our field of interest not as rare.

2.8.4.4 Manner

Very common is also flouting of the maxim of manner. Grice includes examples of the violation of the ambiguity requirement which he divides into two categories:

a) Ambiguity, where there is no "striking difference between the two interpretations (...), neither interpretation is notably more sophisticated, less standard (...) than the other." (Grice 1989 : 54) As an example, Grice uses one line from a poem by William Blake: *I sought to tell my love, love that never told can be.* On the basis of the same word "love" for both the feeling ("state of emotion") and the person he loves ("object of emotion") , there is an

ambiguity in the meaning. It follows that the meaning of "love that never told can be" means either "love that cannot be told" or "love that if told cannot continue to exist." (ibid.)

- b) Ambiguity, where "one interpretation is notably less straightforward than another."(ibid.) Grice's example of ambiguity (although not morphemic but phonemic) is a message that was sent by a British General who captured the town of Sind: *I have Sind.* , which read out loud sounds *as I have sinned.*

Being obscure is another way to flout the maxim of manner. The conversation with the word "ice-cream" spelled out, is a suitable example. The speaker there intends his/her partner to understand the message despite the obscurity he/she imports into the utterance. The amount of obscurity must, however, be well balanced – exactly in the middle where the child does not understand anymore and where the hearer still does.

2.9 Humor and the CP

At last, we have come to the point where we connect the subject of humor elaborated on earlier with Grice's CP and his maxims. The lastly mentioned intentional failures to fulfill a conversational maxim will be of great interest of ours.

Since joking is an intentional act, according to Attardo, a large number of jokes involve intentional violations²⁸ of one or more of Grice's maxims.²⁹ He supports

²⁸ Attardo uses the verb *to violate* as a synonym to Grice's *to flout*. Since the case of intentional flouting of a maxim will be the area of interest in this work, both verbs will also be used interchangeably.

²⁹ See Attardo 1994 : Chapter 4 and 5

this argument by introducing the following examples, which are (with the exception of humorous disposition) in the construct identical with Grice's examples from the previous chapter:

- a) "Excuse me, do you know what time it is?" – "Yes" (Violation of maxim of Quantity)
- b) "How many surrealists does it take to screw in a light bulb?" – "Fish" (Violation of maxim of Relation)
- c) "Do you believe in clubs for young people?" – "Only when kindness fails." (Violation of maxim of Manner)
- d) "Why did the Vice President fly to Panama?" – "Because the fighting is over."³⁰ (Violation of maxim of Quality)

What this means is that when employed in a certain way, violation of one or more of Gricean maxims can create a humorous effect.

2.10 Criticism and further development of Grice's Theory

Since Grice first presented his theory of Conversational Implicature in his essay *Logic and Conversation*, where he proposed Conversational maxims based on the Cooperative Principle, it has become the default theory of implicature in pragmatics. Nevertheless, his theory has been debated and criticized for many reasons, some of which we will encounter during the analysis of *Friends*. In the following paragraphs, I would like to briefly present at least the most disputed

³⁰ Insinuation that the then Vice-President was a coward.

issues and mention some other researchers of the topic who try to further revise the Grice's Theory and who struggle to grasp the complex nature of conversation more precisely.

It has been argued that the very notion of Cooperative Principle cannot be universally applied due to **intercultural differences**³¹ and that there are nations whose communication principles follow different maxims entirely. Asians, for instance, are reluctant to turn down a request, even if they have no intention of fulfilling it. From the viewpoint of the CP, this would be considered as violation of the maxim of quality and the behavior described as uncooperative; however, their motivation is to avoid unpleasantness and hurting feelings of their communication partner.³² To explain how politeness works in conversational exchanges, **Geoffrey Leech** attempts to unite the Gricean CP with his two notions of **Politeness Principle** and **Irony Principle**. Leech rightfully argues that the Cooperative Principle alone does not explain "**why** people are often so indirect in conveying what they mean"(Leech 1983 : 82) and proposes a principle which, similarly to the CP, consists of a series of maxims:

- The Tact maxim: *Minimize the expression of beliefs which imply cost to other; maximize the expression of beliefs which imply benefit to other.*

³¹ See Keenan, E. : *On the universality of conversational implicatures*. (1976)

³² See Chapter 3.2.2.

- The Generosity maxim: *Minimize the expression of beliefs that express or imply benefit to self; maximize the expression of beliefs that express or imply cost to self.*
- The Approbation maxim: *Minimize the expression of beliefs which express dispraise of other; maximize the expression of beliefs which express approval of other.*
- The Modesty maxim: *Minimize the expression of praise of self; maximize the expression of dispraise of self.*
- The Agreement maxim: *Minimize the expression of disagreement between self and other; maximize the expression of agreement between self and other.*
- The Sympathy maxim: *minimize antipathy between self and other; maximize sympathy between self and other*

According to Leech, the Politeness Principle is needed for a complete pragmatic analysis, because these maxims can explain the instances in which an apparently cooperative communication seems to violate the CP. It follows that the reason why Asians tend to accept a request as opposed to refuse it is that they comply with the PP, namely with the tact maxim by *implying benefit to other* and with the agreement maxim by trying to *maximize the expression of agreement*.

The Irony Principle tries to overcome another shortcoming in Grice's theory – in his explanation, Irony is a form of violation of the maxim of quality (*Do not say what you believe to be false*) and condemns the speaker as uncooperative

according to the CP.³³ Leech, on the other hand, associates the Irony Principle with the PP: IP is a "second-order principle which enables a speaker to be impolite while seeming polite; it does so by superficially breaking the Cooperative Principle, but ultimately upholding it." (Leech 1983, 142) or in other words: The IP explains how speakers can violate the Politeness Principle while being cooperative.

Another controversial issue is the **categorization of Grice's maxims**, their difference in nature, vague dividing lines and consequent overlaps. The maxim of Quality is the most straightforward one: the utterance is either truthful or not. Therefore many linguists perceive this maxim as one of the expected norms but as a prerequisite for a successful communication (as will be mentioned later in this chapter). The employment of others, however, presents difficulties. The maxims of quantity, manner and relation are much more difficult to define, since it is nearly impossible to determine precisely the right amount of information, to speak with perfect clarity and to the discussed topic only. Because the maxims have the form of taxonomy, we tend to think that they will effectively define the space of conversational implicatures; however, when the maxims are applied to actual examples, we inevitably stumble across the difficulty of satisfying the vaguely defined criteria and find ourselves in insoluble doubt for instance whether the speaker in fact violates the maxim of

³³ As we will witness in the section of practical analysis, this Grice's conception of irony is not able to account for number of types of ironical utterances.

relation or quantity. As Leech states, that the CP "**does not stand up to the evidence of real language use**" (Leech 1983 : 80).

Trying to resolve the status of the maxims, **L. R. Horn** claims that "Grice's original framework is clearly at best incomplete and at worst inadequate beyond repair to the task of predicting sets of non-logical inferences which are actually drawn from a given utterance in a given context" (Horn 1988 : 130) and proposes **The Least Effort Hypothesis**. Although very close to the Grice's original idea, Horn replaced the former maxims with two contradicting principles: the **Q-Principle** (quantity), which is based on maximization of information content and the **R-Principle** (relation), based on minimization of form, trying to answer the question why some utterances evoke further interpretation and others do not. (Horn, Ward 2004 :13) Each speaker thus chooses if he/she will use the Q or the R principle. When the Q-Principle is chosen, the strongest possible statement of maximized information content is made (e.g. I ate *all* of the cookies you made), which does not require additional information. In contrast, the R-Principle says as little as possible (e.g. *She was able to solve the problem* instead of *She solved the problem.*), minimizing the form and the hearer must therefore infer as much as possible to obtain what information he/she requires. It has been observed that for economy reasons speakers usually prefer the R-Principle and would use the Q-Principle only in cases where the R-Principle cannot sufficiently convey the message.

Horn therefore takes Grice's maxims and arranges them in a different order, covering the same subject matter. He rightfully tries to make a neater theory

where, as is the obvious deficiency, the Grice's Maxims seem different in their nature.

Similarly, another linguist further elaborating on the Grice's Theory is **S. P. Levinson**, who in his reductive approach reanalyzed Grice's maxims into three **Neo-Gricean principles** (or Three Heuristics), which should guide the interpretation of ambiguous sentences and upon which all of the Gricean implicature should rest:³⁴

- Q – Principle (Quantity; Do not say less than is required or state less than you know.) *What isn't said, isn't.*
- I – Principle (Informativeness; Do not say more than is required) *What is simply described is stereotypically exemplified.*
- M-Principle (manner, marking, modality; Do not use a marked expression without reason). *What's said in an abnormal way, isn't normal; or marked message indicates marked situation.*

Neither Levinson nor Horn further elaborate on the maxim of Quality; they elevate it to a higher level and see it as a prerequisite for the other maxims: The maxim of Quality is "accorded a privileged status, since without the observation of Quality (...) it is hard to see, how any of the other maxims can be satisfied." (Horn 2004 : 7)

³⁴ Generalized Conversational Implicature (GCI) are preferred interpretations, which in certain circumstances can be cancelled or blocked. Levinson admits, that the GCI theory should "be supplemented with a theory of Particularized Conversational Implicature (PCI) and that it will have at least as much, and possibly considerably more, importance to a general theory of communication particularized conversational implicatures". (Levinson 2000 : 22) PCI is conversational implicature that is derivable only in a specific context.

In my opinion, Levinson's theory should not be seen as criticism of Grice's theory but on the contrary, as its further development. Q- and I- Principles subcategorizes Grice's Quantity maxim describing either the lack or the excess of the information provided and the M- Principle is closely related to the Grice's Maxim of manner – it focuses on peculiarities and possible generalizations of utterances in a specific manner. However, the subjectivity of what is "normal"³⁵ remains a problem, whether we find different and more detailed elaboration of the categories or not (of course putting aside cases of apparently superfluous wordage like excessive phrasing or double negation).³⁶

What I see as the most difficult and an insurmountable problem (whether we talk about the original Grice's theory or its revisions) is our incapacity to scientifically measure the subjective side of communication, implicature particularly. Whether it is the issue of Manner (there is no prescription as to what is inappropriate and there is no list of infinite number of particular situations), Quantity (how can we assess the amount of information the speaker demands?) of Relation (how does a topic evolve without violating this maxim?), the classification will always stay only approximate and subjective, because language use is not an exact science. And even if we suppose it is and approach it accordingly, there are so many relevant external elements which influence the process that the formula considering them all would be close to

³⁵ "What's said in an abnormal way isn't normal." Levinson 2000 : 33

³⁶ Detailed overview of Post-Gricean research can be found in: HORN, E., WARD, G. The handbook of Pragmatics. Oxford : Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

the theory of everything. It is, of course, important to try to reach as far as we can with scientific methods but not to be discouraged and desperate about the “fuzzy” and indeterminate rest. The rest is our added value. It is exactly the immeasurable diversity of languages and cultures that makes the research so interesting.

Although it still does not address all the issues I mentioned in this chapter and is far from perfect, the Grice’s theory of Cooperative Principle, in my opinion, captures the essence of conversation and does a great deal of work in an effort to bridge the gap between what is said and what is meant. I chose to work with Grice’s theory in this analysis because even though it has been criticized, doubted and partially revised (it must be said that sometimes in a very reasonable way as described above), no one has managed to substitute it with a general concept which would encompass all the problematic issues.

3 TV Series “Friends”

3.1 Introduction

Friends is an American sitcom³⁷ created by Marta Kauffmann and David Crane, which aired in the USA between the years 1994 and 2004. Throughout these years, *Friends* became one of the most popular sitcoms of all time (the final episode was watched by more than 51 million Americans³⁸) and by many critics

³⁷ Abbreviation for Situational comedy; definition according to The American Heritage Dictionary: “A humorous radio or television series featuring the reactions of a regular cast of characters to unusual situations, such as misunderstandings or embarrassing coincidences; a sitcom.”

³⁸ www.foxnews.com

was regarded as one of the finest shows in television history, winning a number of awards including 2002 Emmy Award for Outstanding Comedy Series or Golden Globe Award.

The sitcom revolves around the life of six characters in their 20s – Rachel (portrayed by Jennifer Aniston), Monica (Courtney Cox - Arquette), Phoebe (Lisa Kudrow), Chandler (Matthew Perry), Joey (Matt Le Blanc) and Ross (David Schwimmer) – who live in the New York City, as they “pursue love and happiness and career.”³⁹ The setting is mostly inside (their apartments or the Coffee House), where they get together to chat about hot topics - primarily escapades of relationships. At the beginning, the writers decided that Friends should be a pure ensemble, with none of the six characters more prominent than any other and remained faithful to this goal throughout the whole 10 Series.

Friends, being a sitcom, humor and jokes are an essential part of the dialogue in this series. It is therefore important to say that although the cast members are extraordinary in their performances, the success of the show must be also credited to the writers’ account, who were able to create such a universally (judging at least by the enormous number of viewers) accepted type of humor. In their production, the writers seem to grasp a certain handwriting style that many people appreciate and thus achieved partly the objective of discovering of

³⁹ Program and Supplementary Material Compilations to the DVD set: The Complete Series F.R.I.E.N.D.S., Extended, Exclusive & Unseen, 2009 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.

what humor is for most people. For my part, I will try to analyze one aspect of their work.

3.2 Main Characters' Description

As mentioned above, there are six main characters whose personalities have been carefully thought through even before there were actors coming to audience for their parts and who evolved during the ten series. In this work, I will concentrate on two of the six characters – Chandler and Phoebe; however, for the sake of completeness, it is important to include basic characteristics of all of them.

3.2.1 Rachel Green

A spoilt and careless girl from a rich family who comes to the city to make a living on her own (decision to cut up her father's credit cards is one of the hardest), trying to figure out what she really wants from life. In time, however, she becomes less self-centered, discovers her abilities, which together with her passion for the fashion world eventually lead to a deserved job in the industry.

3.2.2 Monica Geller

Monica is a previously obese, now an attractive, woman who throughout the series works as a chef in different restaurants. She is the "Mother Hen"⁴⁰ of the group, always the hostess in charge, showing her strong maternal side. She is

⁴⁰Characterization used in: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monica_Geller

obsessive with cleanness, very competitive and bossy. She and Rachel share an apartment.

3.2.3 Ross Geller

Monica's brother, a paleontologist at the Museum of Natural History. Ross is a family type of man who married his high-school sweetheart and ended up divorced few years later, when his wife found out she was a lesbian. From this marriage, he has a son named Ben. He is a hopeless romantic and the intellectual of the gang.

3.2.4 Joey Tribbiani

Joey moved from Chicago to New York to become an actor. Although professionally not very successful, this Italian-American compensates for this in the relationship area. Joey is a true womanizer - macho, sexy and promiscuous, who often relies on his famous pickup line *"How you doin'?"*. He can be described as simple-minded, under-educated but good-natured and honest man who loves food as much as he loves women.

3.2.5 Chandler Bing

Chandler is Joey's best friend and for the most of the show also his roommate. His oldest relationship is, however, with Ross, who was his college roommate and whose sister Monica he finally marries. Chandler works in a large company as an executive in statistical analysis and data reconfiguration; his job is a

running joke in the whole series, because nobody ever remembers what he does for a living.

In terms of **relationships with women**, Chandler fails tragically and particularly so in comparison with Joey, who dates very often and exceptionally attractive ladies. His regrettable part is best demonstrated in the following conversation. After a lost bet, Monica and Chandler were forced to switch apartments with Chandler and Joey. Since the girl's apartment is much bigger and nicer and the guy's apartment is a "hole"⁴¹, the girls are persuading the guys to switch the apartments back, trying to take advantage of their weak spot:

- **Chandler:** *Forget it! Okay, I'm not giving up my bachelor pad for some basketball seats!*
- **Rachel:** *Your bachelor pad?!*
- **Monica:** *Have you even had a girl up here?*
- **Chandler:** *(embarrassed) No..... But Joey has! And I usually talk to them in the morning time.*
- **Joey:** *Yeah, you do! (patting Chandler's back)⁴²*

However, the most characteristic Chandler's personality trait is this **sense of humor**. His parents, a famous erotic novelist and a Vegas cross-dresser, divorced when he was young and this, as frequently mentioned in the show, has largely influenced Chandler's personality. "When my parents got divorced is

⁴¹ Monica in The One With All The Haste - Season 4, Episode 19

⁴² The One With All The Haste - Season 4, Episode 19

when I started using humor as a defense mechanism"⁴³. In the following situation, the guys stay locked out of their car:

- **Joey:** *Relax okay, I-I-I can get this open. Anybody have a coat hanger?*
- **Chandler:** *Oh I do! Oh, no, wait a minute, I took it out of my shirt when I put it on this morning.*
- **Monica:** *So, if your parents hadn't got divorced, you'd be able to answer a question like a normal person?*⁴⁴

Other examples show that all his friends consider humor his main characteristic – he is “the funny one”. It is, however, not always pleasant and amusing for them, since it is **irony** and **sarcasm**⁴⁵ that Chandler uses the most in his jokes:

- **Ross:** *Hey, check out those two blondes over there. Hey, come with me.*
- **Chandler:** *Are you trying to get everyone divorced?*
- **Ross:** *You don't have to do anything. It will just be easier if it's the two of us, like college. Remember? First you break the ice with some kind of a joke, so they know that you're the funny one. Then I swoop in, with some interesting conversation, so they'll see that I'm the brilliant, brooding, sexy one.*
- **Chandler:** *I thought I got to make the jokes.*⁴⁶

⁴³ Chandler, The One Without The Ski Trip - Season 3, Episode 17

⁴⁴ The One Without The Ski Trip – Season 3, Episode 17

⁴⁵ “Sarcasm is a overtly aggressive type of irony (...) with clearer target” (Attardo 2001 : 795)

Even Chandler himself considers being funny as his domain. When he babysits a two-year old Emma (Rachel's daughter), he pretends to go down imaginary stairs, while crouching behind a couch.

- **Chandler:** *Emma? Emma? Look at me! Well, I think I'll go downstairs for a while.*

(He does the trick of going downstairs. As soon as he's out of sight, Emma starts crying.)

- **Chandler:** *No, no, no, no! No, no, no, no! It's okay, it's okay. I didn't go. Don't cry, it's just a bit! I'm your uncle Chandler; funny is all I have!⁴⁷*

In one episode, when Chandler and Monica are already married, Monica says about her Maitre D'⁴⁸ at work: "He is without a doubt, the funniest guy I have ever met." Chandler's reaction is of course violent and he discusses the implications with Joey, who quite nicely depicts the two main Chandler's attributes:

- **Joey:** *Seriously? She actually said that?*
- **Chandler:** *Yes! Am I crazy to be this upset?*
- **Joey:** *No! Being funny is your thing!*
- **Chandler:** *Yeah!*
- **Joey:** *Without that, you just got "lame with women".*

⁴⁷ The One With The Blind Dates – Season 9, Episode 14

⁴⁸ Headwaiter of a restaurant

- **Chandler:** *Ye... (stops because he realizes what Joey just said, and stares at him)*⁴⁹

3.2.6 Phoebe Buffay

The third woman of the group is by the show's creators described as "sweet, flaky, a waif, a hippie".⁵⁰ She does not have her own apartment; all she owns is a guitar, which she uses to play "really bad folk songs about things she cares about a lot. Like a love song to the guy who flashed her on the subway or pigeons and how they feel about people shit."⁵¹ She is spiritual (believes for example in reincarnation), vegetarian, "indiscriminate", always honest, free spirited and does not care about social conventions. Phoebe does not have a steady income; throughout the show she makes her living mostly as a free-lance masseuse, occasionally taking other short term jobs.

As gradually revealed in the show, Phoebe has a very colorful past. When she was still a child, her father abandoned her mother, who, when Phoebe was thirteen, committed suicide. With her stepfather in prison, she then ended up living on the streets of New York. Today, her only family is her identical twin sister Ursula (played also by Lisa Kudrow), whom she does not speak to. Later we find out about the existence of her birth mother and her half-brother, for whose triplets she was a surrogate mother.

⁴⁹ The One With The Male Nanny – Season 9, Episode 6

⁵⁰ David Crane and Marta Kauffman, according to: Program and Supplementary Material Compilations to the DVD set, p. 4

⁵¹ Ibid.

For several reasons, Phoebe is somehow different from the rest. The first one is the already mentioned difficult childhood. While the rest of the group comes from relatively wealthy or at least financially stable circles and had the opportunity to study, Phoebe never felt the warmth of family and never even finished her secondary education. Moreover, she rents an apartment that is geographically isolated from the two other apartments, where the other friends live and where most of the scenes take place. In one episode, after Rachel and Ross break up, Rachel is concerned that she would be “phased out” from the group:

- **Rachel:** *See? Yeah, you told me the story. He and Monica dated when they broke up they couldn't even be in the same room together and you all promised that you would stay his friends and what happened? He got phased out!*
- **Monica:** *You're not gonna be phased out!*
- **Rachel:** *Well, of course I am! It's not gonna happen to Ross! (To Monica) He's your brother. (To Chandler) He's your old college roommate. Ugh, it was just a matter of time before someone had to leave the group. I just always assumed Phoebe would be the one to go.*
- **Phoebe:** *Ehh!!*
- **Rachel:** *Honey, come on! You live far away! You're not related. You lift right out.⁵²*

⁵² The One With All The Kips, Season 5, Episode 5

As mentioned before, Phoebe's friends consider her as somehow "different"; however, this otherness is not perceived negatively. Their relationship towards Phoebe could be characterized as "you are different and we love you because you are." In one episode, Phoebe receives a box, where there is her family heirloom – her late grandmother's mink coat. It is, however, a present very unwished for. Phoebe, a true hippie, despises the consumer society with its reckless and cruel attitude toward nature: *"Why would my mother send me a fur? Doesn't she know me but at all! Plus, I have a perfectly fine coat that no innocent animal suffered to make!"*⁵³ She therefore decides to ask her friend to burn it in a crematorium. In the following conversation, Rachel enters from the bathroom and sees the valuable coat:

- **Rachel:** *Oh my God! Oh my God, look at these pelts!*
- **Monica:** *Don't get too attached, she's (meaning Phoebe) having it cremated.*
- **Rachel:** *What? (turning to Phoebe) Uhh, Phoebe, honey, honey, I know you're quirky and I get a big kick out of it, we all do actually, but if you destroy a coat like this that is like a crime against nature! Not nature, fashion!*

Unusual decisions, incomprehensible attitudes and ideas are typical for Phoebe. Ross, a scientist, is very annoyed when he finds out that Phoebe "doesn't buy"⁵⁴ evolution and he cannot believe his ears when he hears that Phoebe does not

⁵³ The One With The Yeti, Season 5, Episode 6

⁵⁴ "Yeah, I just don't buy it." Phoebe, The One Where Heckles Dies, Season 2, Episode 3

believe in gravity because: "I don't know, lately I get the feeling that I'm not so much being pulled down as I am being pushed."⁵⁵ A similar reaction of total baffle comes from Rachel, when Phoebe gives birth to her brother's triplets (she is a surrogate mother to her brother Frank and his wife Alice) and is tempted to "keep one"⁵⁶:

- ***"Rachel:*** *Okay, Phoebe, honey, you gotta be kidding. I mean, you know you cannot keep one of these babies!*
- ***Phoebe:*** *Why not?! Maybe I can, you don't know!*
- ***Rachel:*** *Yes! Yes! Yes, I do! I do know! Frank and Alice are gonna want to keep all of their children!*
- ***Phoebe:*** *Maybe not! Y'know? Seriously, three babies are a handful maybe they're y'know, looking for a chance to unload one of them. Listen, I-I hate to miss an opportunity just because I didn't ask! Y'know?"*

4 Analysis

As mentioned before, in this work we will observe and analyze the strategy of violating Gricean maxims for the purpose of creating humor in the television situational comedy *Friends* and we will do so in case of Chandler and Phoebe. The two characters are the most clearly defined; the two most standing out personalities which are largely shaped by humor.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ The One Hundredth, Season 5, Episode 3

4.1 Material

The material on which this research is primarily based is the written script of the sitcom *Friends*. Since the copy of texts used by the actors is not publicly accessible, nor has it been officially published by the producers, we have to rely on the scripts found on the World Wide Web⁵⁷ which were transcribed from the TV show by its ardent fans (occasional mistakes and discrepancies between the spoken word and the written text were corrected during the analysis). The script, however, was not the only material we had to take into account; complementary to it was the audio/video material of the sitcom itself on a DVD set published in 2009 by the producers – Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.

4.2 Methodology

4.2.1 Canned Laughter

It is usual for sitcoms to be filmed in front of an actual live audience⁵⁸, where its reactions are recorded together with the actor's performances. Considering the nature of the show, laugh is of course the most prominent response. Film producers exploit the known contagiousness of laughter and use it to provoke the same reaction of an audience at home, which is consequently left with an impression of an extremely funny and therefore successful show. The genuine situational laughter, however, cannot be always used. If a scene has to be shot more than once, (for a variety of reason, mostly to improve the actor's

⁵⁷ Particularly on: <http://uncutfriendsepisodes.tripod.com/>

⁵⁸ Friends were filmed in the presence of a live audience in Warner Bros Studios, Los Angeles

performance) the first genuine reaction to a joke is never repeated with the same intensity and so the producers use what is called a **canned laughter**. It is a previously recorded laughter, which is added to a television or radio program in a post-production creating thus the effect of a live show.

When planning a conception of this study, one of the major issues was the question of how to identify humor in the script. As mentioned earlier, humor is a matter of taste and is very specific to each individual. How can we objectify what is humorous? Probably the safest and the most transparent solution will be relying on the **working definition of humor** as described in chapter 3.2.3, where we will consider humorous what elicits laughter (or in some cases, a canned laughter).⁵⁹ The following analysis takes into account only replicas, whose response was laughter and which can therefore be considered as relevant to the study. The burden of decision-making is thus left to the real audience present at the filming or partly to the producers, who inserted the canned laughter where they found it fit.

4.2.2 Episodes

In the ten seasons which have been filmed, there are 236 episodes, from which all the even-numbered ones were chosen as the representative sample.

1. Season 1, Episode 1: The Pilot
2. Season 3, Episode 20: The One Where No One's Ready

⁵⁹ In this work, the difference between authentic and canned laughter will not be taken into account. There is no possible way to determine which is the case in a particular scene; moreover, such division is not important to the study.

3. Season 5, Episode 19: The One Where Ross Can't Flirt
4. Season 7, Episode 2: The One With Rachel's Book
5. Season 9, Episode 5, The One With Phoebe's Birthday Dinner

In each listed episode, the Phoebe's and Chandler's replicas eliciting laughter have been separately recorded and thoroughly analyzed in terms of maxim violation. The jokes⁶⁰ of each character were divided into two groups: Firstly attention was given to jokes that emerge through maxim violation, which were further subcategorized according to Grice's division to Quality, Quantity, Relation and Manner. The second group contained jokes of a different nature (in the chart labeled as *Other means*) - for example the art of performance of individual actors, which in many cases largely contribute to the overall funniness of a situation⁶¹.

For the purpose of a better characterization of the personality of Phoebe and Chandler, I will also refer to other than the above listed five episodes where a comment, reaction or a joke has a particularly testifying value. The Episode referred to will be properly marked in the footnote, the source being the Friends transcriptions on the World Wide Web.

⁶⁰ Replicas eliciting laughter

⁶¹ See Chapter 5.5.

4.2.3 Multiple violation

Due to the abovementioned vagueness of Grice's maxims⁶², there were several cases of multiple violations⁶³ of maxims detected in the script:

Phoebe and Chandler (who had been smoking) meet in the hallway:

- **Phoebe:** *Hey...hey! (Sniffs) Oh, somebody smoked out here? Oh my god, don't people know, you're not allowed to smoke in public spaces?*
- **Chandler:** *Actually, in Oklahoma smoking is legal in all common areas and offices with fewer than fifteen people.*
- **Phoebe:** *You smoked!*
- **Chandler:** *No! I just happen to know a lot of trivia about smoking in different states. For example, in Hawaii cigarettes are called leihalalokos.*⁶⁴

Chandler's two-sentence-response violates **both the maxim of quality and maxim of relation**. Firstly, he lies about not smoking and invents a Hawaiian name for cigarettes (Quality). Secondly, he presents information about smoking in different states, which is not the topic of the discussion (Relation). In response to an evident accusation of having smoked, Chandler lies and to add

⁶² See chapter 2.10.

⁶³ The term Multiple Violation expresses the occurrence of violation of more than one Gricean maxim within one turn of a conversation; a turn which elicits laughter.

⁶⁴ The One With Phoebe's Birthday Dinner, Season 9, Episode 5

credibility to his fabrications, he fabricates even more; however, not very plausibly.

For the sake of clarity and to avoid confusion, the overall statistics in chapter 4.6. will consider only the prevailing tendency of the particular utterances and classify it accordingly. For instance, the above example will be classified as a violation of quality, because it is **the dominant violation** of the two. Chandler's main objective is to cover up the fact that he smoked and he uses a deliberate lie to do so (the same situation occurs few moments later when he has a similar conversation with Monica). His being irrelevant is only a complement strategy to support the lies.

4.3 Phoebe

The Pilot episode of each TV Sitcom – especially in front of a live audience- is always a test of the show's success and decides about its fate. The writers and producers try to do their best to indicate their intentions with the show; to point to its general direction and spirit and to sketch the personalities of the main characters. In case of Friends, the situation was not different. Phoebe's very first replica gives us a hint about her somehow peculiar perception of the world:

- **Monica:** *There's nothing to tell! He's just some guy I work with!*
- **Joey:** *C'mon, you're going out with the guy! There's gotta be something wrong with him!*

- **Chandler:** *All right Joey, be nice. So does he have a hump? A hump and a hairpiece?*
- **Phoebe:** *Wait, does he eat chalk? (They all stare...)*
- **Phoebe:** *Just, 'cause, I don't want her to go through what I went through with Carl... Oh!*⁶⁵

With her question, Phoebe disrupts the continuation of mocking which started when Joey stated that there must be something wrong with the guy Monica is seeing. Chandler further continued with the enumeration: *What can make a man unattractive and therefore a suitable mate for Monica?* - "a hump and a hairpiece". Phoebe, having different measures and living in her own world with different rules has probably a different criterion.

Instead of mentioning man's breasts or a beer belly, she asks if he eats chalk, ignoring the general characteristics of unattractiveness and the common sense view. Phoebe proves that she does not take judgments of others into account; she creates her own "never again", based on her own experience, totally devoid of social conventions and therefore unrelated to the conventionally guided topic. Thus, whether intentionally or not⁶⁶ Phoebe **violates the maxim of relation**. The silent stare that follows the remark proves that the other friends perceive her contribution as unrelated.

⁶⁵ The Pilot, Season 1, Episode 1

⁶⁶ The issue of intentionality will be discussed later.

In the same episode, the others are engaged in a conversation while Phoebe, somehow mentally absent, repeats in singing everything they say and is not aware of it:

- **Joey:** *I can't believe what I'm hearing here.*
- **Phoebe:** *(sings) I can't believe what I'm hearing here...*
- **Monica:** *What? I-I said you had a-*
- **Phoebe:** *(sings) What I said you had.....*
- **Monica:** *(TO PHOEBE) Would you stop?*
- **Phoebe:** *Oh, was I doing it again?*⁶⁷

There is no doubt Phoebe violates the **maxim of relation** again. Her statements neither contribute to the conversation, nor do they push it forward - quite the opposite. She functions as a disturbing element, which forces the others to step out from the natural flow of the conversation and to deviate from the topic, so they can draw her attention to the incongruity of her behavior.

4.3.1 Relativity of relation

According to Grice, there are, however, different kinds of relevance (Grice 1989 : 26) and what one perceives as deviation. As it is the main issue in the criticism of Grice's theory, the benchmark for what is still relevant to the discussed topic and what not anymore is very individual. In many cases, Phoebe has shown she lives according to a different set of conventions which are contrasted with the

⁶⁷ Ibid.

relatively “regular” way of thinking of the other five friends. Her behavior is then responsible for the humorousness of the situation. When observing her violations of the maxim of relation, we can put the examples from her utterances as landmarks on an imaginary scale of relevance.

4.3.2 Isolated comments

Remarks on the very end of our scale are those which have absolutely **no connection** to the matter in question and no added value to the topic of the conversation. In spite of the eccentricity of Phoebe’s character, these are not very common; however, as a representative case, I would consider the above mentioned repeating words of the others in singing. Another situation, where Phoebe lives in her own world and out of a blue utters a disjointed comment is the following one: Paul, Monica’s new boyfriend comes over and while Monica is changing in her room they chat with him, and Phoebe says:

- **Phoebe:** *Ooh, I just pulled out four eyelashes. That can't be good.*⁶⁸

4.3.3 “Invisible” coherence

Another level is conversation of a very fragile coherence, where the link between the turns is so vague and obscure – almost invisible - that it is taxing for the participants to find it.⁶⁹ Logically, this behavior is again uncooperative: The communication process is disrupted through the unreasonable demands of

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Here again, we encounter the problem of maxim overlap: The relation, or rather un-relation of the remark, borders on obscurity, which is considered as violation of the maxim of manner.

excessive elaboration of the utterance. In the following situation Monica is very upset about yet another disappointment from the behavior of men towards her:

- **Monica:** *I hate men! I hate men!*
- **Phoebe:** *Oh no, don't hate, you don't want to put that out into the universe.*
- **Monica:** *Is it me? Is it like I have some sort of beacon that only dogs and men with severe emotional problems can hear?*
- **Phoebe:** *All right, come here, give me your feet.*
(She starts massaging Monica's feet)⁷⁰

Most of the viewers of the sitcom will probably accept Phoebe's reaction as another one of her "out there" remarks without trying to decipher the unclear connection to Monica's problem. Taking a closer look, however, and with regard to Phoebe's alternative way of life, her "hippie"⁷¹ and "aromatherapy"⁷² inclinations, we can assume that she wants to help Monica by massaging her feet. How? This help is not direct; it will not eliminate the cause of her agitation – massaging should probably release the accumulated tension and hate (which she should not "put out into the universe") and help her embrace the problem. This might be clear to her friends who have known her for some time (Monica immediately sits down and lets Phoebe massage her feet) but not to the

⁷⁰ The Pilot, Season 1, Episode 1

⁷¹ Martha Kauffman

⁷² In the first episode, Phoebe talks about her life and how she "found aromatherapy".

audience, who see the very first episode. Once more, we witness the relativity of the line of relevance and its mobility depending on the viewer's position.

4.3.4 Towards the absurd

There are cases where it is not the incontinuity of particular consecutive turns that causes the maxim violation but rather the absurd direction in which the situation is heading, represented by unexpected or unusual reactions, surprising attitudes etc. This notion is typical for the dramas of the theater of the absurd, where the original idea is that life is inherently without meaning and the dialogues should mirror this belief. The following extract is from the play *The Zoo Story* by Edward Albee. This is a one-act play of two characters only – Jerry and Peter - two strangers who meet on a park bench in New York's City's Central Park. Jerry, intrusive and "mentally elsewhere", forces Peter to listen, among other stories, to his reason behind his visit to the zoo:

- **Jerry:** *Where do you live? (PETER is reluctant.)
Oh, look; I'm not going to rob you, and I'm not going to kidnap your parakeets, your cats, or your daughters.*
- **Peter:** *(too loud) I live between Lexington and Third Avenue, on Seventy-fourth Street.*
- **Jerry:** *That wasn't so hard, was it?*
- **Peter:** *I didn't mean to seem ... ah ... it's that you don't really carry on a conversation; you just ask questions. And I'm ... I'm normally ... uh ... reticent. Why do you just stand there?*

- **Jerry:** *I'll start walking around in a little while, and eventually I'll sit down. (Recalling.) Wait until you see the expression on his face.*
- **Peter:** *What? Whose face? Look here; is this something about the zoo?*
- **Jerry:** *(distantly) The what?⁷³*

For the audience, this conversation causes the feeling of pervasive insanity caused by the lack of conventionally understood and universally accepted rules. The audience perceives the situation as: us (the "normal" people) versus them/him/her (the insane ones). In this case: the audience and Peter vs. Jerry.

Phoebe is not so farfetched of course; her abnormal behavior is not given a free rein and is served in small doses. What precedes the following situation is Monica's discovery that her parents spent all the money they had been saving for her wedding and that she will have to give up most of the pricey arrangement she dreamt about for her special day:

- **Chandler:** *Honey, it's gonna be okay.*
- **Monica:** *No! No it's not! It's not gonna be okay! It sucks! No swing band! No lilies!*
- **Phoebe:** *No, but that's good. You don't want lilies. If a cat ate them, it would die.*
- **Monica:** *What? (they all stare)*

⁷³ ALBEE, E. *The American Dream and Zoo Story*. Plume Drama, 1997.

- **Phoebe:** *I'm just saying that now you could invite cats.*

At that moment Phoebe is obviously concerned about something unimportant, **unrelated**. In this situation, for us, as the audience, the only anchor in our world of rationality is the five other friends who perceive Phoebe as abnormal. A similar phenomenon appears in *The Zoo Story*, where the reader/hearer can relate to Peter and can identify with him in assessing Jerry's abnormality. This one technique (identification with one character contrasting with abnormal behavior of another) is therefore used in both the absurd drama and the sitcom *Friends*, however, for two different goals. The purpose of an absurd drama is to make the viewer aware of his basically meaningless condition⁷⁴ as opposed to the purpose of Phoebe's unrelated comments, which should cause a humorous situation and elicit laughter. Phoebe's somehow strange behavior is therefore funny only in contrast with the normality of the others; her isolated strange reactions would not elicit laughter but probably a feeling of awkwardness.⁷⁵

4.3.5 Disregard of Conversational Implicature

Phoebe's comments violating the maxim of relation have often the character of a child's perception. They do have connection to the matter; nevertheless one which is unusual for an adult with certain life experience. Typical for Phoebe is

⁷⁴ The meaning of the drama of the absurd is not the subject of this theses and presented simplified definition does not encompass all the important aspects. See: Camus, A: *The myth of Sisyphus, and other essays*

⁷⁵ The question arises how the omitting of audience's laughter would influence the reactions of home viewers.

ignoring the conversational implicatures that the others make and understanding the sentences literally – as if she were a child:

Monica and Chandler are entering the apartment. They just had dinner with Monica's parents, who had spent all the money they had been saving for her wedding because they had thought she would never marry:

- **Rachel:** *Well what happened at dinner?*
- **Monica:** *My parents spent the money for our wedding!*
- **Phoebe:** *(gasps) My God! What did you order?!*
- **Rachel:** *Wait, but there's no money!? Well this is terrible! You guys are gonna have to get married in like a rec center!⁷⁶*

Although Monica's turn is arguably ambiguous, of the two possible meanings, no adult would ponder the option of them spending thousands of dollars' worth of a luxury wedding on one dinner. Phoebe, however, ignores the context and the real message of the sentence and logically connects the adverbial of place of Rachel's question "What happened at dinner." with Monica's response.

At this point we cannot claim that Phoebe violates the maxim of relation – she merely unintentionally ignores the conversational implicatures that the others rely on and misinterprets thus their utterances. Similarly, we cannot blame Monica for relying on her communication partners in such clear conversational circumstances. In an extreme scenario, we could consider Monica's response as

⁷⁶ The One With Rachel's Book, Season 7, Episode 2

a violation of the maxim of manner because she was being ambiguous with her comment. The writers then exploited the possibility of the double interpretation. After all, "the most general language phenomenon underlying many, though not all linguistically based jokes, is ambiguity". (Pocheptsov 1980 : 15)

A more moderate interpretation would understand the situation as a clash of two different communication concepts; concepts which are without the adaptation of one of the participants incompatible. For the sake of successful communication, the adaptation should be carried out by the person extending the basic literal meaning – Monica. Phoebe's understanding of social conventions is often so limited that dealing with her would require switching to a different register, one that is used when speaking with children. Yet again, her being childlike/childish is the source of humor.

4.3.6 Phoebe and The Superiority Theory

As discussed earlier, the laughter resulting from Phoebe's comments originates in the feeling of being superior, when an adult viewer witnesses another adult's childish/childlike perception. According to the superiority theory, the joke tellers (writers of the show) and the others sharing the laugh (audience and often the other five friends) are members of the more powerful group who **laugh at the sign of Phoebe's weirdness and stupidity**. She is the target of humor and laughing at her different view of the world solidifies the bonds within our group of the majority. As said before, we

thus demonstrate to our fellow members that our perception of the world is indeed the same and take comfort in the dissenting or baffled reaction of the other five friends to Phoebe's behavior. Just like when we are present at an absurd theater play, the confirmation of its abnormality is very important.

4.3.7 Other maxims

Although, in accordance with her personality, the maxim Phoebe violates most often is **relation**, her character is fortunately not as one-sided as to elicit laughter only in one recurrent manner. Such character would be easily predictable and for the audience rather monotonous.

Phoebe steps out of her usual depiction particularly in episodes where she is the center of the plot and has to stand the responsibility of a realistic storyline. In the fifth episode of the ninth season: *The One With Phoebe's Birthday Dinner*, the most often occurring maxim violation is quality, namely **irony**. The central theme of the episode is Phoebe's birthday dinner where everyone arrives late, however, for different reasons. Ross and Rachel get locked out of their apartment and Monica with Chandler get into a relationship fight. Phoebe and Joey wait for them in a restaurant for two hours, unable to order because the restaurant policy states that order can be made after the whole party has arrived. Starving, they are even moved to a small table for two. It is logical that Phoebe's frame of mind is not very easygoing but annoyed and her comments sarcastic. In the following situation, everyone has finally arrived, including Judy (Ross's mother) who was asked to come with the baby Emma (Rachel was not

ready to separate from her child completely) and sits with her at the bar, across the restaurant from the others.

- **Rachel:** *(lifts for a toast) Okay, as everybody has ordered, I would like to start the celebration and make a toast ... to Phoebe! She dropped her sock.*
- **Phoebe:** *Aw ... what?*
- **Rachel:** *N-no, Emma dropped her sock.*
- **Monica:** *Mom's here? I wanted to have lunch with her today, she told me she was out of town.*
- **Rachel:** *Ross, she still has not noticed that the baby's sock is on the ground.*
- **Phoebe:** *'s a good toast.*
- **Rachel:** *(to Ross) Could you please get her attention?*
- **Ross:** *W-oa ... Mommy! (gestures to his not understanding mother)*
- **Phoebe:** *(getting up) Oh, for god's sake, Judy, pick up the sock! (screaming louder and louder) Pick up the sock! Pick up the sock! (everybody scared) I'm sorry, was that rude? Di-did my, my li-little outburst blunt (?) the hideousness that is this evening? Look, I know, you all have a lot going on, but all I wanted to do was have dinner*

*with my friends on my birthday. And you are all so late and you didn't even have the courtesy to call.*⁷⁷

The way Phoebe draws Judy's attention to the fallen sock is of course also in contradiction to the **maxim of manner**. It is not the content of the utterance that violates the cooperative principle but the **form**. She **repeats** herself several times; she is not **brief** but most importantly instead of a normal tone of voice she **screams** from the top of her lungs, which, given the situation, is completely **inappropriate**.

Phoebe's least usual means of creating humor is the violation of the **maxim of quantity**, which occurs in only one of the five analyzed episodes. Rachel decides that in order to become independent, she needs to cut up her father's credit cards, but when the time comes, she finds it extremely difficult:

- **Monica:** *C'mon, you can't live off your parents your whole life.*
- **Rachel:** *I know that. That's why I was getting married.*
- **Phoebe:** *Give her a break, it's hard being on your own for the first time.*
- **Rachel:** *Thank you.*
- **Phoebe:** *You're welcome. I remember when I first came to this city. I was fourteen. My mom had just killed herself and my step-dad was back in prison, and I got here, and I didn't know anybody. And I*

⁷⁷ The One With Phoebe's Dinner, Season 9, Episode 5

ended up living with this albino guy who was, like, cleaning windows outside port authority, and then he killed himself, and then I found aromatherapy. So believe me, I know exactly how you feel.⁷⁸

4.4 Chandler

4.4.1 The Art of Irony

Chandler, the very opposite of Phoebe, is from the very beginning presented as the sharp and quick-witted one, who always knows what to say. Often, he exploits a situation and turns it into a joke at the expense of somebody else or utters a sarcastic comment. In the following situation, Ross consoles Rachel (it was supposed to be her wedding day but she left her fiancé at the altar) and proposes an alternative plan to being alone:

- **Ross:** (to Rachel)... *Anyway, if you don't feel like being alone tonight, Joey and Chandler are coming over to help me put together my new furniture.*
- **Chandler:** (deadpan) Yes, and we're very excited about it.⁷⁹

Even purely in a written form, this statement would be suspicious. Firstly, there is no exclamation mark at the end of the sentence, which would correspond with the described excitement and secondly, it is semantically hard to believe

⁷⁸ It is again not clear whether this comment should not be classified as violation of the maxim of relation. Arguably, it meets the required condition of unrelated matter because the significance of its content to the situation is questionable.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

that someone would be excited about putting together new furniture, let alone somebody else's. Chandler's expression and tone of his voice in the video (which is far from excited) vindicate our presumption. He tells a deliberate lie, using an implicature rather than a direct statement, and **violates thus the maxim of quality** in the form of **irony**, so typical of Chandler. Another of many jokes of this character appears in the same episode, when Monica introduces her new boyfriend Paul to her friends for the first time:

- **Monica:** *Paul, this is everybody. Everybody, this is Paul.*
- **Joey:** *Hey, Paul, the wine guy.*
- **Ross:** *Hey, Paul.*
- **Phoebe:** *Hey, Paul.*
- **Rachel:** *Hi, Paul.*
- **Chandler:** *(reaching to shake his hand) I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name. Paul, was it?*⁸⁰

The impossibility of Chandler not catching Paul's name proves the falsity of his underlined statement and another violation of maxim of quality in form of irony.

4.4.1.1 The Use – Mention Distinction

Although it may seem that the subject of irony is clear and unambiguous and as opposed to relation cannot conceal so many different aspects and issues, not all cases of Chandler's ironic comments are as easily classifiable. It is when we

⁸⁰ Ibid.

examine the matter more closely, and especially the cases of irony where the intended meaning is not the exact opposite of what is being said, that the questions appear.

At this point it is important to reveal that most books and articles on irony warn about the complexity of the matter and add that the concept of irony is an elusive one, which takes many forms and which is extremely difficult to define. (May 2009 : 408). Irony has been the object of interest to many linguists, many of whom severely criticized Grice's analysis of irony as flouting the Maxim of Quality because it was not able to account for a number of types of ironical utterances.

Consider the following example:

Newly married Chandler and Monica fight about Chandler secretly smoking.

- **Monica:** *How can you smoke in this day of age? Have you not seen that ad where the little kid walks to grandpa, it's chilling.*
- **Chandler:** *I messed up, it was a meeting, everybody was smoking.*
- **Monica:** *So what? Don't you have any will power?*
- **Chandler:** *Will power? I've watched home movies of you eating ding-dongs⁸¹ without taking the tinfoil off.⁸²*

⁸¹ American cream-filled chocolate cakes

⁸² The One With Phoebe's Dinner, Season 9, Episode 5

Although Chandler obviously does not violate the maxim of quality, because he does not mean the opposite of what is being literally said (such notion is in fact difficult to accomplish, since it is hard to see the opposite of the utterance: "*Will power? I've watched home movies of you eating ding-dongs without taking the tinfoil off.*" *would be*), we do not have to give up the impression that this is a case of irony so easily. When the Grice's identification of irony as meaning the opposite of what is being said fails, as it does in the above mentioned example, the question is: How can we reliably identify an ironic utterance? Sperber and Wilson, claiming that there is "whole range of utterance-types that can be more or less loosely called ironical" (Sperber, Wilson 1981 : 298), proposed an interesting notion of **Use – Mention Distinction**⁸³, which was originally drawn in philosophy, and which should serve as a logical test for distinguishing an ironical utterance. It states that there are generally two types of utterances:

1. Utterances, where the **use** of an expression involves reference to what the expression refers to. The speaker here expresses his attitude to the matter in question:
 - In the sentence "*These examples are rare and marginal*"⁸⁴, the word marginal is used to refer the peripheral status of certain examples.

⁸³ Sperber and Wilson 1991 : 303

⁸⁴ Ibid.

2. Utterances, where the **mention** of an expression involves reference to the expression itself. The speaker therefore expresses his attitude to the content of the utterance and dissociates himself/herself from it:
 - In the sentence *"'Marginal' is a technical term"*⁸⁵, the reference is made to the word *marginal* itself.

According to Sperber and Wilson, the only semantic condition that an ironical utterance must fulfill is belonging to the "mention" category. Irony is thus understood as a echoing of a proposition with a certain attitude of the speaker; as a meta-linguistic phenomenon. This theory makes it possible to reanalyze the already mentioned conversation:

- **Monica:** *So what? Don't you have any will power?*
- **Chandler:** *Will power? I've watched home movies of you eating ding-dongs⁸⁶ without taking the tinfoil off.*

Clearly Monica USES the expression (Don't you have any will power?) and Chandler MENTIONS it again (Will power?). Chandler mentions Monica's proposition of a will power in such a way as to make it clear that "he rejects it as ludicrously false, inappropriate, or irrelevant."⁸⁷ For Monica to interpret the utterance as ironic, it is important to:

- a) realize that it is a case of mention rather than use and to

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ American cream-filled chocolate cakes

⁸⁷ Sperer and Wilson 1991 : 308

- b) recognize Chandler's attitude to the mentioned proposition of will power (that is not hard to do - as we can see in the video, particularly his tone of voice shows this disapproving attitude)

In a more detailed analysis in accordance with Sperber and Wilson's theory, the above case can be further classified as **Irony as echoic mention**, since the original proposition is instantly echoed in the response.⁸⁸

It has been shown that the above exchange does not violate the Gricean maxim of quality. Does it, however, violate any other maxim and does it thus prove the Gibbs' and Colston's theory that violation of any maxim, not just of quality, may trigger irony? (Gibbs & Colston 2007 : 141) When being accused of having no will power, Chandler goes on the offensive and reproaches Monica for eating excessively in her youth. The issue of Monica's will power when she was a teenager, regardless of its truth value, has neither relevance nor relation to Chandler's smoking - he thus violates the maxim of relation.

Similar case of Echoic mention appears in the following conversation which takes place in Monica's apartment: Rachel just made coffee for Joey and Chandler. She does it for the first time in her life and considers it a great achievement:

⁸⁸ Sperber and Wilson introduce also other subcategories of irony, which are, however not essential to this study. The purpose of presenting their theory is to show the complexity of the matter and the impossibility to classify the analyzed cases of irony with the Gricean maxims only. It is important to note that Sperber and Wilson are by far not the only authors who elaborated on the matter of irony; for a more comprehensive overview (including for example Leech's Irony Principle) see e.g. Gibbs & Colston: Irony in language and Thought: A Cognitive Science Reader.

- *Rachel: Isn't this amazing? I mean, I have never made coffee before in my entire life!*
- *Chandler: That is amazing.*⁸⁹

Rachel is looking for an appreciation on the ground of what she considers a great achievement. Although we are tempted to say it is an ironical statement, its meaning is again not the opposite of what it says: *It is unremarkable/boring, that you have never made coffee in your entire life.* Chandler really does mean that it is amazing but refers to the fact that someone as old as her has never made coffee before and mocks her. It is amazing that someone can be this spoilt!, he thinks, using the word amazing in the sense of surprising and shocking, not fantastic or great – as opposed to Rachel. It follows that in order to correctly describe this case we will not manage only with Gricean irony based on the violation of quality maxim - Chandler does not imply the opposite of his utterance. Again, in this case, he violates a different maxim, this time the **maxim of quantity**. Although referring to a different matter than Rachel, Chandler is not more specific in his remark and does not supplement it with enough information. Chandler is intentionally being uncooperative in causing a misunderstanding.

As shown on the presented examples above, the Grice's theory suffers the flaw in not being able to clarify irony in violation of other maxims - maxim of relation and maxim of quantity.

⁸⁹ The Pilot - Season 1, Episode 1

4.4.1.2 Hyperbole

Most of Chandler's ironical utterances are in fact violations of quality. The propositions do not, however, follow the Gricean conceptions of irony in meaning the exact opposite of what is being said. They **exaggerate** the true state of things (the violation of quality lies in the factual falsity of the statement) and employ a **hyperbole** for the purpose of emphasizing a particular point. As Leech states, "the ironic force of a remark is often signaled by exaggeration or understatement." (Leech 1983 : 143) Consider the following example:

Joey's grandmother, who speaks only Italian, comes for a visit to watch the airing of a TV show, where Joey plays a minor role. However, during the film, Joey realizes that he had been cut out of the film. Not wanting to disappoint his grandmother who lives for the acting career of his grandson, he tries to persuade her that he is someone else from the show:

- **Joey:** *Soon, soon, I'm gonna be on soon. There I am! (Points to the screen, where there is a different actor.)*
- **Grandma Tribbiani:** *(pointing at the screen) No! Sam Waterston!*
- **Joey:** *No-no-no, that-that's me, that's me.*
- **Grandma Tribbiani:** *No, it's Sam Waterston! Crimes and Misdemeanors, Capricorn One.*
- **Chandler:** *Doesn't know, "Hello." But she knows Capricorn One.*⁹⁰

⁹⁰ The One Where Chandler Can't Flirt, Season 5, Episode 19

Considering how little English Joey's grandmother knows it is unexpected for her to identify a second rate American actor. Chandler aptly captures this irony⁹¹ when he contrasts her lack of language knowledge on the one hand and deep knowledge of American film industry on the other. By putting two examples of the two extremes within one sentence (*Hello* as the English word one learns at the earliest stage of language acquisition and *Capricorn One* as an American thriller not particularly praised by the critics⁹²) he further emphasizes the point.

Similarly exaggerated is Chandler's description of the male population's behavior. In the following conversation Chandler explains to Monica why she should not flirt with other guys, even though she has to intentions of sleeping with them:

- **Chandler:** (...) See when you flirt with a guy you think, "I'm just flirting, no big deal." But the guy is thinking, "Finally! Somebody who wants to sleep with me!"
- **Monica:** No way!
- **Chandler:** It's true.
- **Monica:** Well that's pathetic!
- **Chandler:** Again true.
- **Monica:** And this goes for all guys?

⁹¹ Meaning the situational irony; the ironical state of things (Attardo : 2001, 793.)

⁹² The widely known website devoted to reviews of films Rotten Tomatoes (www.rottentomatoes.com) awarded the film 59 %.

- **Chandler:** All guys that are awake. Then we go to sleep and then all the guys from the other end of the world wake up and behave the exact same way.

Clearly, it is impossible to make such generalizations. Chandler uses exaggeration for the purpose of persuading Monica not to flirt. His argument is supported by much greater weight when he involves the whole male population as opposed to his sole conviction, which is furthermore weakened by the stain of Chandler's obvious jealousy.

4.4.2 Utter and Intentional irrelevance

Relatively frequent is also the violation of the **maxim of relation**, although in a different manner than Phoebe. There are two main differences:

The **first difference** is in the very nature of the violation. As we have positioned Phoebe's violation on a scale of relevance, we can similarly subcategorize Chandler's comments:

When presenting Grice's explanation of the maxim of relation, it has been said that real and very apparent violations are rare. An example of such a case was the following:

At genteel tea party, A says "Mrs. X is an old bag." There is a moment of appalled silence, and then B says "The weather has been quite delightful this summer, hasn't it?"

As a strategy to overcome an embarrassing situation and to avoid having to deal with an unwished for topic, B resorts to a completely unrelated issue. Grice's statement concerning the rarity of such a situation (where the digression is intentional) was correct, as was shown during the analysis of Friends. Chandler uses this strategy only once.

This is again the situation with Joey's Italian grandmother: He just found out that his role had been cut out of the film and leaves the apartment to carry out an alternative plan. The grandmother sitting in front of a TV still watching the film notices:

- **Grandma Tribbiani:** *Joey!*
- **Chandler:** *Uh, Joey is gonna be right back. Right back! (Tries to pantomime it for her.) Meanwhile, let's-let's-let's talk about you.... So, you're old and small...*⁹³

Chandler's goal is to sidetrack Joey's grandmother from the fact that her grandson has left. While trying to find a common topic (which alone is humorous because she does not speak English well enough), Chandler draws on the virtually only and the most obvious information he has about her – old age and short stature. Similar was the case at the tea party, where B used the weather (a common topic of strangers) to change the subject.

⁹³ The One Where Ross Can't Flirt, Season 5, Episode 19

Although the outward appearance is identical with Phoebe's isolated comments⁹⁴, their motivations are different. This fact leads us to the **second difference – intentionality**. Phoebe's unrelated comments are in accord with her childlike character, therefore genuinely innocent;⁹⁵ Chandler's, on the other hand, are deliberate. In most cases of his violation of maxim of relation, Chandler deliberately exploits semantic, linguistic or other relationships of the discussed matter and relates the two in a humorous way. The two subjects are therefore not factually foreign, as it is true in the example with the weather, but they are linked through the Chandler's inventiveness, contradicting CP.

With this in mind, consider the following example:

Pizza delivery woman (Caitlin), just arrived with an order to Chandler's and Joey's apartment. Chandler opens the door:

- **Caitlin:** *Hi Chandler!*
- **Chandler:** *Hey Caitlin! Somebody got a haircut.*
- **Caitlin:** *Ugh, I hate it! I look like an 8-year-old boy.*
- **Chandler:** *Yeah, if that was true, gym class would've been a lot more interesting.*

The inference obtained from Chandler's violation implicates that Chandler finds the haircut attractive. He violates Gricean maxims because the way he uses to say the simple: *I think it looks great on you*, is **not straightforward** and

⁹⁴ See chapter Phoebe – Isolated comments

⁹⁵ The fact that she is a fictional character with a prepared script is put aside.

requires the communication partner to make an extra effort to interpret Chandler's comment. It has been mentioned several times that the violation of the maxim of manner consists in the form rather than in the content and therefore it follows that apart from violating the maxim of relation, Chandler also violates the maxim of manner in being obscure in his communication. This dialogue oscillates between the two violations, depending on which criterion prevails and can be therefore classified as another example of **multiple maxim violation**.⁹⁶

4.5 Other means of creating humor

For a concept as comprehensive as possible, it is important to present the results of the analysis in the context of other means of creating humor. Without a relation to the other humorous aspects not elaborated on in this study, the outcomes have little informative value. In the two charts presented above, the row marked *Other means* accounts for all laughter eliciting situations which however could not be attributed to the violation of the Gricean maxims.

It is widely believed that the brilliant writing of the show is not the only aspect responsible for its great success. The talented actors, who had a unique chemistry on the set and who allegedly got along also on a personal level, have a great deal of credit on the show's success. Their extraordinarily humorous performances are responsible for a significant part in the category of other means of creating humor. Nearly evenly distributed are

⁹⁶ See Chapter 10.2.3

- a) **strictly visual performances**, where the actor does a face expression or a comical gesture (especially Chandler) and thus achieves laughter and
- b) situations in which the actor delivers a **neutral utterance and gives it a humorous charge**. Again Chandler, the clown of the gang, thrives on stressing a particular word of a sentence.⁹⁷

Unfortunately, the instances of purely visual performance can hardly be demonstrated without the audio and video parts. Let me present an example from the show, where seemingly neutral sentence is turned into one that elicits laughter:

They all sit in the café and Chandler narrates his strange dream:

- **Chandler:** *Alright, so I'm back in high school, I'm standing in the middle of the cafeteria, and I realize I am totally naked.*
- **All:** *Oh, yeah. Had that dream.*
- **Chandler:** *Then I look down, and I realize there's a phone... there.*
- **Joey:** *Instead of...?*
- **Chandler:** *That's right.*⁹⁸

As is his usual strategy, Chandler only stresses the word *that's*, not violating any of the Gricean maxims. This neutral utterance of confirmation is performed so

⁹⁷ Humorous performances are not the only strategy of creating humor within the category of *Other means*; it is, however, the most dominant one and for this reason is here briefly presented. More detailed analysis of *Other means* exceeds the scope of this study.

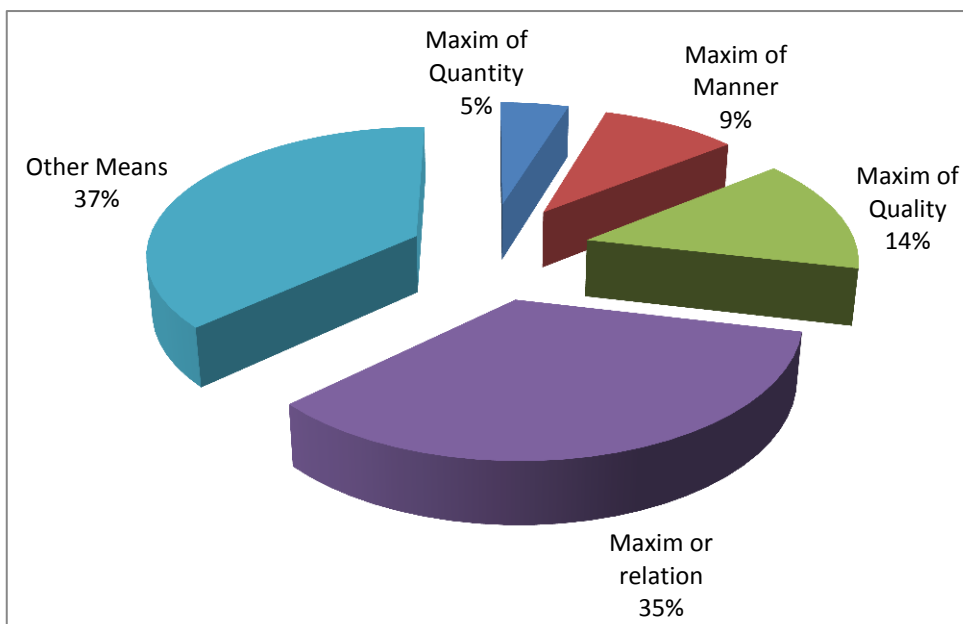
⁹⁸ The Pilot, Season 1, Episode 1

skillfully that it receives the humorous charge and causes the audience to immediately burst into laughter.⁹⁹

4.6 Overall analysis results

4.6.1 Phoebe

Table Nr. 1: Ratio of Phoebe's humor strategies



The chart above describes the overall percentage of Phoebe's strategies of creating humor in the five analyzed episodes. Present are the violations of the four Gricean maxims; the field labeled *Other means* accounts for humorous situations based on other strategies of eliciting laughter.

If follows from the Table Nr. 1 that in case of Phoebe, most frequent is the violation of the maxim of Relation (35 %). As explained in previous chapters, this is due to her weirdness and otherness from the other more conventional five friends. Phoebe lacks what other perceive as **common sense** and the feel for

social conventions and implicatures. It is, however, interesting to observe how the numbers change in the consecutive episodes:

Table Nr. 2: Phoebe - The Occurrence of Jokes Based on Maxim Violation

Violation	S 1, E 1	S 3, E 20	S 5, E 20	S 7, E 2	S 9, E 5
Maxim of Quantity	4	0	0	0	0
Maxim of Quality	0	4	2	0	6
Maxim of Relation	7	8	5	7	2
Maxim of Manner	0	2	1	1	4
Other Means	4	5	10	7	5

The chart above describes the overall number of particular violation in all five analyzed episodes. Columns designate the particular season (**S**) and episode (**E**), rows the violations of the four Gricean maxims. The row labeled *Other means* accounts for all other situations, which elicited laughter. Highlighted row presents the dominant tendency of the character.

As Phoebe’s personality evolves from a New Age “hippie” into a responsible and more conventional woman, her verbal expressions eliciting laughter change from almost exclusively unrelated (see Table Nr.2: column S1, E1) to comments violating the majority of the Gricean maxims (see Table Nr.2: column S9, E5). Although the realm of his maxims is relatively narrow, the character development from one – sided to a more complex one is still noticeable. The following conversation from the ninth season is an example of Phoebe’s character change.

Phoebe and her boyfriend Mike just announced they will be moving in together:

- **Ross:** *I can't believe you guys are moving in together. That's, that's great! I mean...I'm happy for you guys..*
- **Monica:** *I hear wedding bells.*
- **Phoebe:** *Monica slow down! Ok? I'm just excited to be living with him. You know I mean, I don't know, Can I see someday being married to Mike? Sure! Yeah. Y'know..I can picture myself walking down the aisle in a wedding dress that highlights my breasts in an obvious yet classy way. But do I want that house in Connecticut...you know..near the good schools where Mike and I can send Sophie and Mike Junior.. Oh my god I do!*
- **Ross:** *Phoebe, I had no idea you were so conventional.*
- **Phoebe:** *I know! I guess I am! Oh my god! Load up the Volvo I want to be a soccer mom!¹⁰⁰*

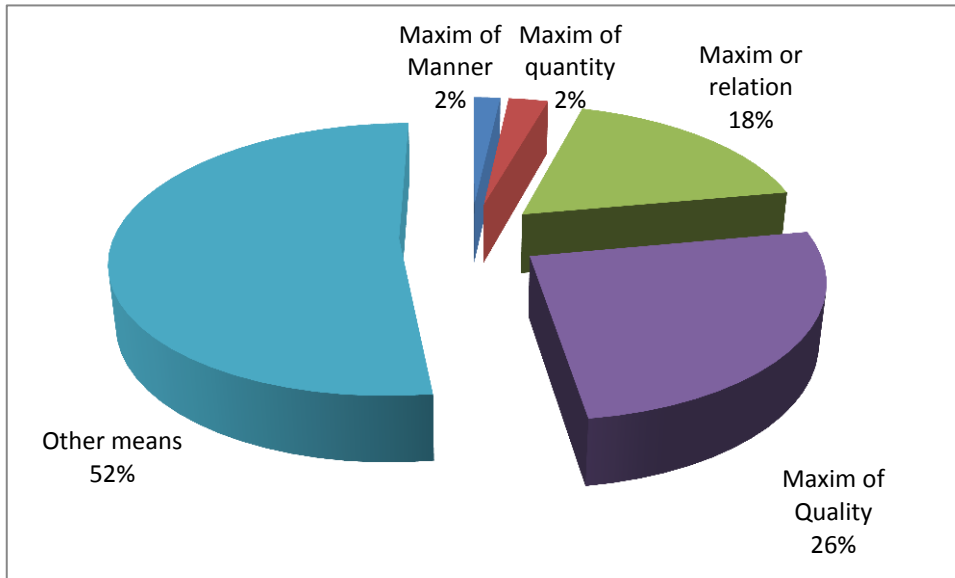
Eventually the reason for their break-up is that Phoebe wants to get married but Mike, due to the bad experience from the first marriage, does not. This is a surprising attitude from a freelance masseuse who used to give free massages outside the UN because she "figures" that "bodies at peace make peace".¹⁰¹ Phoebe still keeps some of her childlike/childish qualities but the overall impression from her personality is more mature.

¹⁰⁰ The One With The Boob Job, Season 9, Episode 16

¹⁰¹ The One Where Ross and Rachel Take a Break, Season 3, Episode 15

4.6.2 Chandler

Table Nr. 3: Ratio of Chandler's humor strategies



The chart above describes the overall percentage of Chandler's strategies of creating humor in the five analyzed episodes. Present are the violations of the four Gricean maxims; the field labeled *Other means* accounts for humorous situations based on other strategies of eliciting laughter.

As expected, from the four Gricean maxims Chandler's humorous behavior mostly violates the maxim of Quality (26 %), the most frequent case being **irony**. The high number (52 %) in the section *Other means* is due to Matthew Perry's clown-like acting style and the exceptionally humorous facial expressions and movements as demonstrated in Chapter 10.5.

Table Nr. 4: Chandler - The Occurrence of Jokes Based on Maxim Violation

Violation	S 1, E 1	S 3, E 20	S 5, E 20	S 7, E 2	S 9, E 5
Maxim of Quantity	1	0	2	0	0
Maxim of Quality	6	4	8	4	7
Maxim of Relation	1	8	4	1	6
Maxim of Manner	1	0	0	0	1
Other Means	19	9	11	6	14

The chart above describes the overall number of particular violation in all five analyzed episodes. Columns designate the particular season (**S**) and episode (**E**), rows the violations of the four Gricean maxims. The row labeled *Other means* accounts for all other situations eliciting laughter.

Chandler also undergoes a character change. In time, he gradually works on his commitment issues towards women and becomes more mature in relationships to them (especially to Monica).

In Season 5, after Monica and Chandler have been going out for some time, Chandler is the one to calm Monica down, when she tries to be a hotter couple than Phoebe and her new boyfriend:

- **Chandler:** *Yeah! I've never been in a relationship that's lasted this long before. Y'know to get past the beginning and still be around each other all the time, I think that's pretty incredible. And the fact that this is happening all with you, yeah I think that's pretty exciting.*
- **Monica:** *That is so sweet. I know that I was acting a little crazy but umm, I feel the same way.*
- **Chandler:** *Yeah?*
- **Monica:** *Yeah. (They hug.)*

- **Chandler:** *Y'know what I just realized? You just freaked out about our relationship.*
- **Monica:** *Did not.*
- **Chandler:** *Yes you did! Admit it! You freaked out!*
- **Monica:** *Okay, I freaked out a little.*
- **Chandler:** *Little?! You freaked out big time! Okay? And I fixed it! We have switched places! I am the relationship and king and you are the crazy, irrational screw up! (Does a dance of joy; Monica glares at him.)
*And now we're back.*¹⁰²*

This area, however, does not influence his attitude to humor and the development is therefore not noticeable in the figures of Table Nr.4, which are more or less stable throughout the five episodes. As mentioned several times in the show, Chandler's sarcastic sense of humor results from his childhood. It is a defense mechanism that became a permanent part of his personality and that is the reason why the numbers do not evince such dramatic change. His personality - from the view of Gricean maxims – is more balanced and stays the same throughout the show.

¹⁰² The One With Rachel's Inadvertent Kiss, Season 5, Episode 17

5 Conclusion

The humor of the show *Friends* has a unique quality and the objective of this thesis was to describe it and analyze thoroughly the means of its creation in connection to the particular characters. Along the way I found out that unfortunately there would not be enough space for the analysis of all the six characters and I decided to pick the two what I saw as the most distinctive ones in terms of humor. Chandler was a clear choice – he is considered to be the funny one¹⁰³ and his humor-making is metalinguistically discussed in the show on many occasions. Phoebe, on the other hand, “has always been somewhat of a question mark”¹⁰⁴ and the most interesting person for many reasons. It seems that her different personality is mirrored in her humor as well – she jokes differently – and that made her an attractive subject for my analysis.

In the process of analysis I decided to follow two different lines: The linguistic line assessed the means of creating humor, more specifically which maxim was violated in order to elicit laughter. The literal-psychological line tried to describe the personalities of the two characters, analyzed their motivations and goals and elaborated on their development throughout the show. Those two layers were eventually interconnected in order to find out whether and/or to what extent there is any correlation and to provide a more comprehensive conception of how the employed humor strategies mirror in the personalities of

¹⁰³ The One With The Blind Dates – Season 9, Episode 14

¹⁰⁴ Rachel, The One Where Chandler Can't Cry – Season 6, Episode 14

Phoebe and Chandler and vice versa: how the characters are, among others, constructed by the specific choice of their humor making means.

The results obtained for Chandler were not surprising – he is the sharp and quick-witted one of the group, who always knows what to say and does so most often (in terms of Gricean maxims) in the form of irony. What was surprising is that what Grice regarded as irony – a figure of speech resulting from the violation of the maxim of quality (*Do not say what you believe to be false*), where the speaker means the opposite of what he/she says – was not able to account for a large number of Chandler's ironical utterances. In order to be able to explain ironical utterances of a different nature, I had to employ the theories of other linguists (e.g. Sperber & Wilson). Nevertheless, staying true to the original strategy of analyzing the data in accordance with Grice's theory, all cases of irony were in the overall results counted as violation of the maxim of quality. Although Chandler naturally undergoes a character change (visible mainly in his relationships with women), from the viewpoint of Gricean maxims, in terms of humor making his personality is balanced and stays more or less unchanged throughout the show.

Phoebe's most frequent humor strategy is the violation of the maxim of Relation. This fact completely corresponds which her non-conventional personality and somehow different perception of the world. Phoebe lacks what the others perceive as common sense; she does not feel for social conventions and

implicatures. It is therefore only logical that she misses the implied meanings and that her utterances are considered as non-related. However, as Phoebe grows older, she somehow adapts (like children do) to the environment. She gradually becomes more responsible, and matures into a more conventional woman and in this way partly loses her "innocence". As opposed to Chandler, this change can be seen in our analysis - her verbal expressions eliciting laughter change from almost exclusively unrelated to comments violating the majority of the Gricean maxims.

Besides the specific results of the analysis, I came to some conclusions concerning the theory of Cooperative Principle that I followed. What I found out was very close to the findings of Leech, who states that the CP "does not stand up to the evidence of real language use" (Leech 1983 : 80) The differences in the nature of the maxims, their vague dividing lines and consequent overlaps made it very difficult for me to fit the actual utterances in the CP's categories. The observed shortcomings may be assigned to the fact that H.P. Grice is a philosopher of language and his views are more theoretically oriented, often not anticipating the aspects of a practical language use. Therefore, I came to the conclusion that while I agree with the general theory of implicature and general principles of conversation that Grice proposes, its elaboration is not detailed enough as to correspond with the analysis' needs. Consequently, instead of providing solutions, the Gricean CP and its maxims often seem to raise more questions.

It should be remarked that humor is a matter of a subjective taste and as Alison Ross points out, we would hardly find two people who could rank one joke exactly the same way (Ross 1998: 4). It is therefore important to note that different readers (depending on their personal taste, cultural background and many other factors) may discover other relations in the process of analysis and interpret some of the analyzed humorous situations in a different manner than proposed in this thesis.

I am well aware that the present analysis of the violation of Gricean maxims does not cover all the issues of humor in *Friends* and that it is merely a drop in the sea. However, it may be a starting point towards a more extensive study of *Friends'* humor – which is no doubt a masterpiece of television entertainment. Such a study could contribute both to a more profound understanding of humor typology and to the issue of the relationship between a person's character and the humor strategies he/she employs.

Raising the controversial issue of science in the service of the commercial sphere, in my opinion, it might also be in the interest of Hollywood show producers that a more thorough analysis of *Friends* humor strategies be developed: Such study could actually provide a recipe for a humor cocktail of a guaranteed quality, which, when followed would most likely result in a successful television show.

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