



## Investigating the Conversational Maxims in Some of Dorothy Parker's Quotes Incorporating Satire

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### Abstract

This paper is a qualitative study of the conversational maxims of Grice, to investigate the importance of flouting the maxims by using Satire. This study is focused on some of Dorothy Parker's quotes, that was known for carrying satirical devices. This study adapts Grice's model of Cooperative Principles in its analysis. This study consists of two sections, section one is an introductory section to the related literature on the topic. While section two is a methodology to how the data was selected and analyzed, and what are the findings of the analysis, then this paper concludes its study by providing some conclusions to what has been tackled.

**Keywords:** Satire; Pragmatics; Dorothy Parker; Conversational Maxims; Violating a Maxim

### 1. Introduction

Like a series of snapshots that freeze a specific time and place, language captures an individual's understanding at a particular point in time (Francus,1994: xi). Although consensus definition makes basic communication possible, the variant linguistic associations of both writer and reader ensure a degree of textual misapprehension. Over time, accumulated connotations and denotations ensure textual erosion.

This paper highlights the meaning and uses of meaning in a context, according to the use of those who employ the language to match their purposes (e.g., communication). In which it is a qualitative study of Dorothy Parker satirical quotes. In this paper, the focus is set towards the importance of Satire in Pragmatics in general and specifically in Conversational maxims (Co-operative Principles). How can additional meanings be conveyed by flouting the maxims?

#### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

This paper tries to show how flouting the maxims (i.e., breaking conversational maxims) will provide another meaning much stronger than the surface one, in a satirical way, to provoke something or someone.

#### 1.2. Aims This paper aims to:

- 1) Investigating the Conversational Maxims in some of Dorothy Parker's Quotes.
- 2) Explaining the purposes of Flouting the Maxims.



3) Highlighting the use of Satire in Dorothy Parker's Quotes.

### 1.3. Literature Review

This study is focused on the flouting of the conversational maxims for satirical purposes, to carry a hidden meaning or to evoke certain feelings for humour, or sarcasm. In which the quotes of Dorothy Parker were selected as data for this study since Parker was highly known for her satirical quotes and writings.

Moreover, the previous studies that, the writer of this paper had tackled, such as “Flouting Maxims in Creating Humor: A Comparison Study between Indonesian and American Stand-Up Comedy” by Puspasari and Ariyant in 2019; and “Flouting the Maxims in Comedy” by Andersen in 2013, was focused on comedy and humour to analyze flouting the maxims in other selected data.

### 1.4. The Language of Communication

According to Iqbal (nd:297), Communication is viewed as a medium that transmits the wanted information from one to another via signals. The four main elements that are used to transmit information are " transmitter; signal; channel; and receiver" to put it into what is called communication. Therefore, Language is considered a communication property (Iqbal, nd: 297-8). We say things, but we mean other things by using different tones. We sing to each other, yell, whisper, and plead all with language. As humans, we rely on our sophisticated human skills which is language.

#### 1.4.1. Meaning in the Scope of Pragmatics

Pragmatic studies language use in interpersonal communication as it's concerned with the speaker's decisions in terms of social interactions and what affects those decisions (Hickey, nd). Moreover, examining the effects that participants use while communicating via language.

Pragmatics can be defined as the study of language use in context, in comparison with semantics (which studies the literal meaning independent of context) (Birner, 2013: 11-12). This can be seen in the example *My day was a nightmare*; it can be explained as semantics meaning (competence) and pragmatics meaning (performance). Pragmatics knowledge is part of our knowledge of how we use language appropriately.

According to Aitchison (2003: 104) “Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics which studies those aspects of meaning which cannot be captured by semantic theory.”

#### 1.4.2. Grecian Principles (Co-operative Principles)

Beginning with the notion of “Conversational Implicature”, the English philosopher Paul Grice (1913-188) accounts for how humans behave in normal



situations (Hickey, nd). To successfully catch the intended meaning that the interlocutors produce, people should follow certain maxims of conversation.

The maxims of conversation are as follows (Grice, 2004: 45-7):

- 1) The Maxim of Quality: "What you say is assumed to be true."
- 2) The Maxim of Quantity: "Be informative but not too much so."
- 3) The Maxim of Relevance: "Be relevant to the purpose of the exchange."
- 4) The Maxim of Manner: "Be perspicuous, avoid absurdity and ambiguity."

According to Thomas (1995:62, cited in Andersen, 2013:4), in terms of Cooperative Principles, people's communications are controlled via rules that shape the way they converse, i.e., the success of any conversation is governed by the various cultural rules that differ depending on the settings in which it is used. The Cooperative principles assume that humans are innately known to be cooperative when they talk to each other.

Here are two of the main types of conversational maxims rules (Thomas, 1995:64, cited in Andersen, 2013:4):

- 1) **Observable of the Maxims:** This indicates that mostly all of the maxims are being observed, and therefore no additional meaning added to the conversation.
- 2) **Non-Observable of the Maxims:** is interested in studying the additional meaning that has been not conveyed through the direct level.

According to Grice, there are five ways of failing to observe the maxims(ibid):

### 1) Flouting a Maxim

According to Grice (2004, cited in Marlisa & Hidayat, 2020: 3), flouting any maxim depends on the speakers whether they intentionally don't want to cooperate or not. Since they want their counterpart to grasp the intended meaning that the speakers want to convey. Resulting in the receiver of the listener either being able to catch what the speaker wants to convey as they mostly need to share the same common grounds (inference) or failing to do that as they fail to observe the maxims used in the interaction.

In many cultures, it can be socially unacceptable to express one's mind (honest ideas or feelings) unless s/he has acquaintance with the hearer (Cutting, 2002: 36). As in "*This looks awful on; I don't want it after all,*" is considered an unpolite way to say to a shop assistant, as we handling back a dress, instead "*I'll go away and think about it and may become back later,*" is considered a polite expression. When someone intentionally violates the maxims to optimize the listeners will be able to grasp the conveyed meaning via their utterances (Jorfi & Dowlatabadi, 2015, cited in Puspasari, Ariyanti, 2019:76).



- a) Flouting the Maxim of Quantity: this happens mostly when a speaker tries to provide information more or less than is needed. For instance (Thomas, 1995:68, cited in Andersen 2013: 8):

- A: "*How are we getting there?*"
- B: "*Well we're getting there in Dave's car.*"

In this example, B stresses “we” in a way that signals to A that she is not included, which through its implicature tells A that B’s friend Dave has a ride arranged for them and that A is not going to travel with them to the designated destination.

- b) Flouting the Maxim of Quality: this happens mostly when a speaker states something which is false or lacks evidence. For example (Thomas, 1995:68, cited in Andersen 2013: 7):

- A: "*What do you do?*"
- B: "*I'm a teacher.*"
- A: "*Where do you teach?*"
- B: "*Outer Mongolia*"
- A: "*Sorry I asked!*"

B's response was flouting the maxim of quality since the generated implicature means that B told A to leave her alone in an indirect way.

- c) Flouting the Maxim of Relevance: this happens mostly when a speaker states something or gives a response which is irrelevant to the topic being discussed. For example (Thomas, 1995:70, cited in Andersen 2013: 8):

*"We were discussing the ordination of women. The bishop asked what I thought. Should women take the services? So long as it doesn't have to be me, I wanted to say, they can be taken by a trained gorilla. 'Oh yes,' Geoffrey chips in, 'Susan's all in favour. She's keener than I am, aren't you, darling?' 'More sprouts anybody?' I said."*

By “more sprouts anybody” the speaker indicates that she does not want to take part in the conversation.

- d) Flouting the Maxim of Manner: this happens mostly when a speaker states something which is not brief or not to the point, by using vague language or being ambiguous. Such flouting makes the hearer try to grasp the additional implied meaning through the utterances (ibid:77).

For instance, in Thomas (1995:71, cited in Andersen 2013: 8):

- Interviewer: "*Did the United States Government play any part in the Duvaliers' departure? Did they, for example, actively encourage him to leave?*"



- Official: *"I would not try to steer you away from that conclusion."*

By stating such an answer, the Official's implicature is that he is unable to give a clear and direct answer such as "no comment" so it will make him directly involved. Therefore, he states something which is deliberately unhelpful to the interviewer.

## 2) Violating a Maxim

When someone fails to observe one or more maxims in a conversation to deceive the hearer aiming to mislead him\her (Thomas, 1995:73, cited in Andersen, 2013:5). For instance, *"She has a family bereavement; her grandmother has died."* This violation of the maxim of quality happens when an athlete gets pulled out of a race because she has a positive result on her drug test resulting in the press officer telling a deliberate lie to the audience to keep things under control.

## 3) Infringing a Maxim

When a participant infringes a maxim without any intent of a hidden message but simply because of the speaker's lack of knowledge about the language 'adult learner' or because he\she is a child. For instance, in Rost (2013:44, cited in Andersen, 2013: 5):

- Carpenter: *"I'm not sure what kind of wood you would want to use for the shelves."*
- Non-native speaker: *"Yes, we want to have wood shelves."*

The person here is unable to understand what the carpenter is saying since he is a non-native speaker. So, there is no implicature nor any intended misleading.

## 4) Opting out a Maxim

By opting out of a maxim, the speaker indicates his unwillingness to cooperate (ibid:6). It often occurs when people want to stir away from critical situations for ethical or private reasons, so they will try to withhold part of the answer. The following examples, from a radio show hosted by Nick Ross (Thomas, 1995:75):

- Caller: *"...um I lived in uh a country where people sometimes need to flee that country."*
- Ross: *"Uh, where was that?"*
- Caller: *"It's a country in Asia and I don't want to say any more."*

The caller here withholds part of the information to avoid hurting or stirring up problems.

## 5) Suspending a Maxim



This happens when the participants withhold information because of cultural necessities such as Taboo words (Thomas, 1995:76, cited in Andersen, 2013:6). The participants are not only expecting the maxims to be fully fulfilled but also they don't expect to generate any implicature. The following is an example showing the use of suspending a maxim:

*“Last time you were with that FBI man – asking about the one who got killed,” she said, ‘respecting the Navajo taboo of not speaking the name of the dead.’ “You found out who killed that man?”*

In this example, the speaker is the daughter of a murdered man and she is talking to an officer of the Navajo Tribal police. The daughter of the murdered father speaks in a vague language describing her father as a stranger but following the same traditions of not naming the dead, the people involved are aware that the maxim is being suspended, and therefore, no implicature was created.

### 1.5. Satire in Pragmatics

Humour is a quality that makes something funny (Puspasari, Ariyanti, 2019:77). According to Audrieth (1998: 3-4, cited in *ibid*), humour is "any kind of thing which is intentionally made to trigger laughter."

The strategies for creating humour by flouting maxims are as follows (*ibid*:77-8):

#### a) Paralanguage:

"This is a type of verbal humour including body language and intonation."

#### b) Ridicule:

This is a joke trigger that uses an insult or mockery to create laughter. Berger (cited in Schwarz 2010) states that ridicule can be defined as “a form of direct verbal attack against a person, thing, or idea.” Ridicule is distinguished into three kinds: private ridicule which is primarily used to mock racial and cultural minorities that are directed to real people; shared ridicule which happens when the comedians ridicule themselves and their audience at the same time; and self-ridicule which happens when the comedians ridicule themselves.

According to Berger (cited in Schwarz, 2010), ridicule can be defined as " a form of direct verbal against a person, thing, or idea." Therefore, it can be distinguished into three parts: either private 'primarily used to mock racial and cultural minorities that are directed to real people'; shared 'when comedians ridicule themselves and their audience at the same time'; or self-ridicule 'when the comedians ridicule themselves.'

#### c) Satire:



This is the subdivision of ridicule that is mainly focused on how to make fun of people when the speaker thinks he has the superiority to do that. As Berger (cited in Puspasari, Ariyanti, 2019:77) explains satire is constructed to mock or ridicule a specific phenomenon, person, institution or event. Moreover, it is also considered a “verbal caricature which distorts characteristic features of an individual or society by exaggeration and simplification” (Koestler, cited in Schwarz, 2010). Satire aims to improve an individual, thing or idea by ridiculing their shortcomings or mistakes to make them think over it and try to improve themselves, in contrast to humour whose main aim is to arouse laughter only.

In literature, satire can be considered a type of social commentary in which writers tend to use exaggeration, irony and other devices to poke fun at a particular leader, a social custom or a tradition, or any other prevalent social figure as they want to comment on and call into question (Web Source 1).

**The following are the main three types of Satire in Literature (Web Source1):**

### **1) Horatian Satire:**

Is a type of comic that offers a light social commentary as it is meant to poke and evoke fun at a specific person or specific situation for entertainment. For instance, "*The Onion*" is a popular example of Horatian satire that describes the online news site and its content.

### **2) Juvenalian Satire:**

Is a type of dark comic that is meant to provide true stories concerning power. Such as "South Park" which is a television show that combines biting satire with juvenile humour. Moreover, this show focuses on all sorts of hot-button targets, such as Pope, Hollywood stars and criminal justice.

### **3) Menippean Satire:**

Is a type of comic, that is meant to provide moral judgement on a particular belief or situation, such as racism, homophobia or Islamophobia. As much as Horatian satire it can be comic and light even if it is stinging as Juvenalian satire in some cases. Such as "*Saturday Night Live*" This show's content is mainly focused on poking fun at elected officials as a long tradition since Chevy Chase's 1975 impersonation of Gerald Ford.

### **d) Power, Solidarity, and Politeness Strategies:**

Schwarz (2010, cited in Puspasari, Ariyanti, 2019:78) exclaims that the most essential trigger for creating hostility is power. In humour, power and authority do not have to be conveyed via direct speech acts only but they mainly be



expressed implicitly rather than explicitly by using sarcasm and satire. Moreover, solidarity itself can be expressed by using humour to soften the seriousness of the situation.

## 2.1. Methodology

This paper is a qualitative study, which adapts Grice's model of Cooperative Principles in analyzing its data. This paper selected some of Dorothy Parker's quotes since Parker is considered one of the best writers of her generation, especially in using satire to reflect women's struggles for freedom and respect.

## 2.2. Data Collection

The data was collected from Google websites especially from (Hutton (2017) Ten of Quick-Witted Satirist Dorothy Parker's Sharpest Quips; and Goodreads, cited in Web source 2).

## 2.3. Data Analysis

### 1) *"The first thing I do in the morning is brush my teeth and sharpen my tongue."*

Parker flouts the maxim of the manner by using the metaphor "sharpen my tongue" since tongues cannot be sharpened. She used vague language to show her daily routines every morning, which prepared her to criticize someone or something. Therefore, she used Menippean satire, to evoke ridicule and humour since the reader will assume that getting ready to criticize and mock is like brushing one's teeth in the morning.

### 2) *"A little bad taste is like a nice dash of paprika."*

Parker flouts the maxim of relevance by using irrelevant things since having bad taste is not compatible with having a nice dash of paprika. Here, she tries to say that having bad taste is not a crime or something wrong, but it gives us our sense of humanity and reality just as tasting a dish that is perfectly seasoned with a nice dash of paprika. Therefore, she used Menippean satire, to evoke ridicule about those who despise those who have a bad taste on something, which she tells her readers that bad taste has its unique flavour.

### 3) *"By the time you swear you're his, Shivering and sighing, And he vows his passion is Infinite, undying – Lady, make a note of this: One of you is lying."*

Parker flouts the maxim of quality by stating something which is not true. She exclaims that for those who declare their love for each other, one of them must be lying since there is no infinite true love. Therefore, she used Menippean satire, to poke on true love and marriage sermons, and consider them as liars.



4) ***“Three be the things I shall never attain: Envy, content, and sufficient champagne.”***

Parker flouts the maxim of quality by stating things which are not true. She explains that there are three things that she shall never attain, but she attained these three in her life. Therefore, she used Menippean satire, to mock herself for having the things that she promised not to have.

5) ***“I require three things in a man: he must be handsome, ruthless, and stupid.”***

Parker flouts the maxim of relevance by stating things that are irrelevant to each other. She states that she is looking for a man with three features, but these features were contrasting to common sense. She used Horatian satire, to mock her requirements for the man of her life.

6) ***“Money cannot buy health, but I’d settle for a diamond-studded wheelchair.”***

Parker flouts the maxim relevance by saying things that are irrelevant to each other. She said that money cannot buy health, but then she said that she would agree to be unhealthy but wealthy by sitting in a diamond wheelchair. She used Horatian satire, to mock herself for favouring wealth against health.

7) ***“There’s a hell of a distance between wise-cracking and wit. Wit has truth in it; wise-cracking is simply callisthenics with words.”***

Parker flouts the maxim of the manner by playing with words. She stated that there is a distance between wise-cracking and wit, one carries the truthiness with it, while the other is just like calisthenics to evoke humour and comedy atmospheres. She used Menippean satire, to poke on those who cannot differentiate between wit and wise-cracking usages.

8) ***“You can lead a horticulture, but you can’t make her think.”***

Parker flouts the maxim of the manner by using vague expressions, to carry ambiguous meaning. She used the term horticulture in the same sense as “you can lead a horse to water but you can’t make it drink”. She used Menippean satire to poke at the one who told her to use horticulture in a sentence.

9) ***“Beauty is only skin deep, but ugly goes clean to the bone.”***

Parker flouts the maxim of the manner by using this proverb, to indicate the idea of beauty inside. She states that beauty is not a physical matter, but it is a matter of heart and soul, so being beautiful from the outside is only related to the skin, you may be beautiful from the outside but ugly from to the bone. She used



Juwendian satire to poke on those who favour beauty against the purism of hearts and souls, to indicate that beauty is only related to skin.

**10) “I hate writing, I love having written.”**

Parker flouts the maxim of relevance by saying something irrelevant to each other. She used this proverb to indicate that she hates the process of writing, but she loves the feeling of writing something and seeing it complete. She used Horatian satire to mock herself when she was in the process of writing something new.

**11) “What fresh hell is this?”**

Parker flouts the maxim of quality by stating something untrue. Since hell is not fresh, but she wanted to give a dramatic reaction when falling into a new(fresh) situation or disaster. She used Menippean satire to mock herself and others when someone falls into a new misfortune.

**12) “This wasn't just plain terrible; this was fancy terrible. This was terrible with raisins in it.”**

Parker flouts the maxim of quality by stating things that are not true. She stated that sometimes terrible things come not only terrible but sweetly terrible. She stated that sometimes when terrible things happen, they will carry something good behind them, such as her description of “with raisins in it.” She used Menippean satire to mock the situations in which you achieve something by losing something else, or from others' misfortunes.

**13) “That woman speaks eighteen languages, and can't say 'No' in any of them.”**

Parker flouts the maxim of quality by stating untrue things. She stated that when someone knows more than ten languages, and still cannot refuse other's requests. She used Menippean satire to mock these women who are easy and cannot stand against men and say No to others.

**14) “She was pleased to have him come and never sorry to see him go.”**

Parker flouts the maxim of relevance by stating a thing that is irrelevant to each other. She stated that she would be pleased to see him come, but at the same time, she would not care to see him go. She used Menippean satire to mock her views of love and care.

**15) “Now I know the things I know, and I do the things I do; and if you do not like me so, to hell, my love, with you!”**

Parker flouts the maxim of quantity by giving information more than needed. She explains that after falling in love and devoting herself to love and at last



getting hurt, now she knew that caring about one's self is the most important thing, therefore, if someone doesn't like her for being her, she said that to hell, my love with you. She used Menippean satire to mock herself for ignorance when she was young for believing in true love and sacrificing for it.

## 2.4. Findings

This paper reached to the following findings:

- 1) Flouting the maxims can carry bigger messages that cannot be transmitted through direct speech.
- 2) Satire is a ridicule device that can be used in different ways to evoke different feelings and purposes.
- 3) Dorothy Parker's quotes carry plenty of messages that can be reflected or interpreted according to the readers who read them.
- 4) Parker's flouting of the maxims was mostly based on flouting the maxim of manner, quality, and relevance.
- 5) She mostly used Menippean satire to evoke and poke at something or someone.

## 2.5. Conclusions

This paper arrives at the following conclusions:

- 1) There are several ways to flout conversational maxims to carry a message that cannot be derived from direct speech for different purposes, such as the sarcasm of a political figure or a religious aspect.
- 2) Dorothy Parker's satirical quotes were mostly poking at things that were related to women's freedom, misfortunes, believing in true love, and sacrificing themselves for love and marriage.
- 3) There is a need for a reader who can catch the intended meaning successfully, or the message would be lost if the reader is inadequate to arrive at the intended meaning.
- 4) Cooperative Principles provide helpful techniques to successfully exchange knowledge and information through the conversation.

## Resources

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