



## **FLOUTING OF GRICE'S MAXIM IN CHRIS ROCK 'SELECTIVE OUTRAGE' STAND-UP COMEDY SHOW ON NETFLIX**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research aims to analyze the types and how flouting maxims are used in creating humor in Chris Rock's 'Selective Outrage' Stand-up Comedy Show on Netflix. It focuses on Chris Rock's stand-up comedy entitled Selective Outrage, which addresses social phenomena. It was nominated for a Golden Globe Award for Best Performance in Stand-Up Comedy on Television. The data was utterances displayed for 1 hour and 10 minutes in a script spoken or English subtitle in his comedy performance. The data was collected through a documentary method, using videos of Chris Rock's performance on Netflix. The

study uses a descriptive-qualitative design to analyze the linguistic components of the material pragmatics in Chris Rock's comedy performances. The findings demonstrate that the comedian applies every type of maxim, including quality, quantity, relation, and manner to create humor, with maxims flout of quality being the most frequently used. The study also reveals that Chris Rock uses various strategies to flout his maxims, and irrelevant strategies are used more regularly than metaphor and understatement.

**Keywords:** *Flouting Maxims, Flouting Strategies, Stand-up Comedy, Pragmatics*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Humor is a global phenomenon that seeks to provoke laughter and joy (Al-Sawaer et al., 2022). It occurs in our daily encounters, at work, on television, in theaters, in newspapers, in magazines, in commercials, and, more specifically, in stand-up comedy performances, which are the primary concern and subject of this study article (Berger, 1993).

In stand-up comedy, the comedians must tell the audience their restlessness to create a humorous situation (Puspasari & Ariyanti, 2019). Chiaro (1992: 43-44) defines a humorous situation as one in which linguistic characteristics, have a two-faced or ambiguous meaning in a discourse. These two meanings exist if the listeners do not comprehend what the speakers are saying, which means they might be unable to laugh at their jokes. Therefore, cooperative principles are expected to be followed in stand-up

comedy performances by the comedians.

Stand-up comedians use various techniques to provoke their audience's laughter (Al-Sawaeer et al., 2022). One of these techniques is flouting Gricean Conversational Maxims (1975), which consist of the maxims of quality, quantity, relevance, and manner. As defined by Grice (1975), cooperative speakers may purposefully flout the maxims as long as a person or the context provides sufficient signals for the listener to recognize; this intentional disobedience is called flouting a maxim. This flouting is used to deliver information indirectly, as highlighted by Rafika et al. (2020), and can contribute to evincing humor (Raskin, 1985).

Chris Rock's comedy show "Selective Outrage" was nominated for three Primetime Emmys. Chris Rock aims for the idea of selective outrage in this comedic show, investigating how society frequently selects specific subjects to get genuinely concerned. It navigates sensitive topics like race, gender, and identity politics, using humor as both a shield and a weapon to address these issues. Flouting of maxims serves as a comedic tool, allowing Chris Rock to indirectly comment on societal behaviors and contribute to evoking humor. Through his adept use of flouting maxims, Chris Rock not only entertains and provokes laughter but also prompts his audience to think critically.

One of the flouting maxims that Chris Rock uses to create comedy is as follows:

'Them Rock girls are fucking spoiled. I remember my youngest, Zahra, when she was in kindergarten. One day, the teacher said, "Today, we are gonna learn about the four seasons." And Zahra said, "That is my favorite hotel."

As we can read from the utterances spoken by Chris Rock above, while Rock explains that his kids are spoiled, he flouts the relevance maxim. Flouting the maxim of relevance occurs when the speaker says an irrelevant statement. (Grice, 1975). The speaker flouts it by adding information about Zahra that answers it, "That is my favorite hotel," which is irrelevant to the teacher's question about the four seasons adding humor that she is in fact being spoiled.

Although several studies have investigated different kinds of discourse on the flouting maxim, little attention has been paid to the stand-up comedy context. As such, this present study determines the following study questions:

1. What are the types of maxims flouted by Chris Rock in the 'Selective Outrage' stand-up comedy on Netflix?

2. How are flouting Grice's maxims realized in Chris Rock's 'Selective Outrage' stand-up comedy on Netflix?

## METHOD

This research uses a descriptive-qualitative design. Vanderstoep and Jhonston (2009) state that descriptive research characterizes the attitudes and behaviors seen during the observation. This study's main reason for using a qualitative research design is the need for in-depth descriptions of the data to be analyzed to fulfill the research objectives. The data in this research is from a stand-up comedy on Netflix titled Chris Rock Selective Outrage, released on March 4, 2023. It was chosen because it addresses many social phenomena in societal behaviors and was nominated for a Golden Globe Award for Best Performance in Stand-Up Comedy on Television.

The documentary method is used to acquire most of the data in this study by watching the performances on Netflix and then gathering the script spoken. Some steps were used to collect the data required for this study. It consists of; watching stand-up comedy performances multiple times in which humor exists. Taking notes on what Chris Rock says during his stand-up comedy performances from [Netflix](#). Filter and determine which utterances contain flouting maxims based on the theories contained in Chris Rock's script. The last step is to organize the data in tables to make it more systematic.

After the data is collected, the writer then analyzes the data using Cutting's (2002) theories in four steps. First, the writer sought data from utterances in the video, and then identified and categorized them using the table. Second, the table is used to classify the utterances into types of maxims flouting to answer the first research question. Third, the writer analyzes each utterance from Chris Rock's stand-up comedy based on the strategies of flouting he used to answer the second research question. Last, in reporting data, the writer presents the data, describes the results, and establishes the Conclusion briefly to describe the final research that has been carried out.

## RESULT

After collecting the data using the documentary method, the researcher found 25 pieces of data to address each of the research questions in Chris Rock's "Selective

Outrage" on Netflix: the types of maxims he flouts and the strategies he uses in creating humor.

### 1. Types of Flouting Maxim

The findings demonstrate that the comedian applies every type of maxim that can be flouted in stand-up comedy, including the maximus of quantity, quality, relation, and manner.

***Table 1. The Types of Flouting Maxims***

No	The Types of Flouting Maxim	Frequency	Percentage
1	Flouting Maxim of Quality	11	44%
2	Flouting Maxim of Quantity	5	20%
3	Flouting Maxim of Relevance	6	24%
4	Flouting Maxim of Manner	3	12%
<b>TOTAL</b>		25	100%

As shown in table 1, the most frequently used maxim is the flouting maxim of quality gains a high percentage of 44% because it is flouted 11 times, followed by relevance, quantity, and manner. The flouting maxim of manner is the least common type of flouting that Chris Rock used, occurring in 3 out of 25 data, which constitutes 12% of the total.

#### a. Flouting maxim of quality

In this situation, the speaker may employ sarcastic language to convey the implied meaning to the hearer (Cutting, p. 37, 2002).

*"Me, my mother, and my brothers, we went to Disney as poor people. On a church trip. Sad already, ain't it? On a church trip New York to Orlando, in August, on a bus with no AC. It was so hot, I thought we were going to see the Devil."*

Chris Rock described his trip from New York to Orlando when he was poor on a church trip and a hot bus with no air conditioning. While the situation might be unpleasant, it is highly unlikely that the heat was so intense that one would expect to encounter the Devil. The speaker is flouting the maxim of quality by

saying they thought they would "see the Devil". The humor arises from the absurdity of the image of encountering the Devil on a bus ride since it is clearly untrue and the speaker is just exaggerating the discomfort caused by the heat to create humor.

b. Flouting maxim of quantity

*"She is so fine that if she worked at Burger King, she could still marry Jay-Z. Now if Jay-Z worked at Burger King..."*

In this humor, "Now if Jay-Z worked at Burger King..." flouts the maxim of quantity by providing too little information. The speaker absurdly ends the sentence, leaving the audience hanging and expecting a punchline or a conclusion that never comes. This absurd ending creates a comedic effect by generating a sense of surprise and anticipation. The audience is left wondering what would happen if Jay-Z worked at Burger King, and the lack of information about this hypothetical scenario adds to the humor. The speaker intentionally leaves the thought unfinished to create a humorous effect and leave the audience to assume and imagine itself.

c. Flouting maxim of relation

*"You go out with a 45, 50? They want more than shoes. You go out with a 45, 50-year-old, she's like, 'Can you help me fix my roof?'"*

The context of the humor above is that the speaker is making a humorous observation about the expectations of dating someone older (aged 45 or 50) compared to dating a younger person. The statement "They want more than shoes" implies that older individuals have more significant or practical expectations in a relationship. When the speaker mentions the older woman asking for help fixing her roof, "Can you help me fix my roof?" It highlights the contrast between the reckless expectation of a younger person which is easier to please with material gifts like shoes and the practical expectation of an older person that the needs of assistance with household tasks. It creates an unexpected and humorous connection between a woman's age and her expectations on a date.

d. Flouting maxim of manner

*"You all know what happened to me. Getting smacked by Suge Smith."*

In this humor, Chris Rock flouted the maxim by using the nickname "Suge Smith," which refers to Will Smith and refers to Suge Knight, the infamous figure in the music industry known for his violent and intimidating behavior. The humor arises from the double meaning and the unexpected comparison between Will Smith and Suge Knight. It creates a humorous shock factor, as the audience is forced to make a connection between two seemingly disparate figures. The maxim of manner expects clarity and brevity in communication, avoiding ambiguity and obscurity. Therefore, by calling Will Smith "Suge Smith," the speaker intentionally uses an obscure reference to create humor.

## 2. Strategies (The Flouting of Conversational Maxims that Cause Humorous Effect)

Cutting (2002) categorizes the strategies into eight categories to flout maxims: using hyperbole, irony, banter, metaphor, giving too little or too much information, being irrelevant, and obscure. The analysis result can be seen in table 2.

*Table 2. Strategies of Flouting a Maxim*

No	The Flouting Maxim Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Hyperbole	4	16,67%
2	Irony	5	20,83%
3	Banter	0	0%
4	Metaphor	2	8,33%
5	Overstatement/Understatement	4	16,67%
6	Irrelevant	6	25%
7	Obscure	3	12,5%
<b>TOTAL</b>		24	100%

As shown in table 2, the difference in the data results is slight, with irrelevant being used six times, irony five times, hyperbole four times, overstatement and obscure three times, metaphor two times, and understatement two times as well. The most often used strategies are irrelevant; Chris Rock used them six times, while metaphor

and understatement are less frequently used strategies. In addition, Banter was not found because the speakers didn't use it to flout the maxim.

a. Hyperbole

The hyperbole statement claims the heat was so intense, that they thought they *might "see the Devil."* This is a clear exaggeration. People don't literally see the Devil due to hot weather. It means that traveling by bus from New York to Orlando in August without air conditioning would undoubtedly be an uncomfortable experience. The humor arises from the hyperbole that makes the situation relatable and funny by using a relatable fear (seeing the Devil) in an unrelated context (hot bus ride). By mentioning the Devil, the speaker highlighted the extreme discomfort caused by the heat, almost like hell's scorching depths. It's a more vivid and impactful way to express the awful experience rather than simply saying it was hot.

b. Irony

The irony lies in the contrast between the exaggerated praise and the reality of the situation. It's unlikely that the Kardashians genuinely love Black people more than Black people love each other. The humor becomes even more ironic when the speaker adds, *"Shit, the father freed O.J."* Robert Kardashian was one of the defense attorneys in O.J. Simpson's murder trial. O.J. Simpson, a Black former football player, was accused of killing two white people. The irony is that the Kardashians, who are associated with Black culture, have a connection to someone who defended a Black man accused of killing white people.

c. Metaphor

By saying, *"I am zebra. He's a shark."* Chris Rock uses metaphorical language to compare with Will Smith. They obviously are not zebras or sharks; these animals are used figuratively to highlight his point. Rock uses a metaphor to imply that when he voices a zebra, he feels overshadowed by someone else who voices a more dominant and significant character, represented by a shark. As we know, Zebras and sharks are very different creatures with different connotations. A zebra, often seen as a prey animal, represents being less intimidating or less dominant. In contrast, a shark is a predator, symbolizing power, and dominance.

d. Overstatement

The speaker begins by stating the fact that Will Smith is bigger than them. They then overemphasize this point by repeating it and adding unnecessary details about Will Smith's shirtless movies and their aversion to taking their shirt off on screen. The speaker further overstates the difference between them by contrasting Will Smith's role as Muhammad Ali with his role as Pookie in *New Jack City*. It provides additional information that emphasizes the vast differences in physical appearance and the types of characters they portray. These details are unnecessary to understand the essential point, but they add humor through their specificity and exaggeration.

e. Understatement

The understatement "*Now if Jay-Z worked at Burger King...*" is less informative than expected because it doesn't complete the thought or provide the expected information about what would happen if Jay-Z worked at Burger King. The speaker deliberately withholds this information, creating an implicature that the listener is invited to fill in. This is a common technique in humor, where the listener's imagination is engaged to complete the joke.

f. Irrelevant

The humor in this statement comes from the unexpected and seemingly irrelevant request made by the older woman in the joke. The speaker initially suggests that going out with someone who is 45 or 50 years old might involve buying them shoes, a relatively small and common gift or expectation in a relationship. However, the punchline reveals that the older woman doesn't just want shoes; she wants help fixing her roof. The comment about fixing the roof has no logical connection to the discussed age range. It plays on stereotypes about age and expectations in relationships. The surprise of the request for roof repairs creates humor.

g. Obscure

The use of the nickname "*Suge Smith*" suggests that Will Smith's actions were unexpectedly aggressive, akin to the reputation of Suge Knight. By using "Suge", Chris Rock introduces a layer of complexity and obscurity that requires the audience to make the connection between Suge Knight's reputation and the unexpected act of violence by Will Smith. The intentional obscurity of the



reference adds to the comedic effect, as the audience members who understand the reference feel included in an inside joke, while others are left curious and intrigued.

## DISCUSSION

From the data analysis, it can be concluded that Chris Rock flouts all four of Grice's conversational maxims – quality, quantity, relation, and manner throughout "Selective Outrage." He does this strategically to generate humor and provoke thought.

It was discovered that flouting the maxim of Quality is the most prominent Chris Rock use in the 'Selective Outrage' Stand-up Comedy Show on Netflix. He uses irony and hyperbole as primary strategies to achieve this. He employs irony to say the opposite of what he means and hyperbole to exaggerate situations. Similar to the previous studies, this study discovered that comedians flouted the maxim of quality by using exaggerated, ironic, and hyperbolic comments. This result validates the findings of Al-Aadili & Hammood (2022) who demonstrated the use of exaggeration and irony to flout the Maxim of Quality.

Besides, the least type of flouting in Chris Rock's performance is flouting the maxim of manner. Chris Rock flouted this type only three times with 12 %. Similarly, Al-Sawaer, Rabab'Ah & Power (2022) found the least flouted maxim was the maxim of manner, which registered only two instances, accounting for 2.3%. The comedians relied on this type by saying vague and ambiguous statements to create a humorous effect. The violation happens as the comedian tells his narrative with unclear language.

In Nancy & Kandagor's (2023) study, analyzing the flouting maxim on Churchill Show in Kenya, banter was found to be a strategy that speakers use to intentionally violate the maxim of quality, which states that utterances should be truthful and based on warranted beliefs. However, this research yielded different results, finding no evidence of such strategies being employed in banter. This suggests that there may be differences in the way joking occurs across different contexts or social groups.

Flouting maxim in humor is helpful in surprising and engaging audiences. By exaggerating (quantity), being untruthful (quality), or going off-topic (relevance), Chris Rock can strengthen the ridiculousness of a situation or point of view. This makes the ordinary seem absurd; thus, it is funny and provokes laughter. Moreover, the flouting of

the maxims is not random; it is strategically employed to achieve specific comedic effects. Rock's flouting of the maxim of quality often results in shock and laughter due to the absurdity of his statements. In contrast, his flouting of the maxim of quantity creates anticipation and surprise. The flouting of the maxim of relation allows him to connect seemingly disparate topics and create unexpected punchlines. Finally, the flouting maxim of manner allows him to deliver jokes unexpectedly and engagingly with ambiguous words.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis result, some conclusions can be drawn in this research based on two research questions in this study. They are:

1. This study focuses on the types of flouting maxim used by Chris Rock in the 'Selective Outrage' stand-up comedy on Netflix. It concludes that Chris Rock flouts all four of Grice's conversational maxims – quality, quantity, relation, and manner. He does this strategically to generate humor and provoke thought. In Chris Rock's "Selective Outrage," the most frequently flouted maxim type is the maxim of quality with 44% which was flouted 11 times, primarily through irony and hyperbole. This flouting enhances the comedic effect by presenting statements not meant to be taken literally. The maxim of relation is also commonly flouted by introducing irrelevant related comments that surprise the audience and create humor through unexpected associations. The maxim of quantity is often flouted through over-explanation and detailed comparisons that add humor through their excessiveness. Finally, the maxim of manner is flouted the least, but when it is, it often involves ambiguity and indirectness, contributing to the humor through a deliberate lack of clarity.
2. This study also focuses on how flouting is realized through strategies that Chris Rock used to create humor. Most strategies being used are irrelevant; Chris Rock used them six times (24%), while metaphor and understatement are the less frequently used strategies with 8%. Through these strategies, Chris Rock effectively uses the flouting of Grice's maxims to enhance the comedic impact of his stand-up comedy performance.

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