

# Violation of Grice's Maxims in American Sitcoms

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UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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## **VIOLATION OF GRICE'S MAXIMS IN AMERICAN SITCOMS**

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the M.A. in English Language and  
Literature and Croatian Language and Literature

Supervisor: Dr. Branka Drljača Margić, Prof.

Rijeka, 2023

SVEUČILIŠTE U RIJECI  
FILOZOFSKI FAKULTET  
ODSJEK ZA ANGLISTIKU

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# **VIOLATION OF GRICE'S MAXIMS IN AMERICAN SITCOMS**

## **Diplomski rad**

Diplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i hrvatskog jezika i književnosti

Mentor: dr. sc. Branka Drljača Margić

Rijeka, rujan 2023.

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Silvia Reljac

Rijeka, rujan 2023.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to analyze humorous situations in American sitcoms *Friends*, *How I Met Your Mother* and *The Big Bang Theory* in terms of their comedic effect. Prior to the analysis, a thorough theoretical background on humor consisting of several chapters is provided. The chapters describe several theories on what we find amusing and why we are sometimes predetermined to enjoy certain ideas. They also discuss the degree to which the social aspect is involved into the process of creating humorous content. Furthermore, a detailed timeframe of sitcoms from the 1950's to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with special emphasis on *Friends*, *How I Met Your Mother* and *The Big Bang Theory* is given. Grice's contribution to the world of pragmatics was discussed in the fifth chapter, focusing on the cooperative principle, conversational maxims and the theory of conversational implicatures. The analysis of the violation of Grice's conversational maxims was arranged through four distinct categories: the maxim of quantity, the maxim of quality, the maxim of relation and the maxim of manner. Each of the categories was explained in terms of three examples, one from each of the series. The examples were followed by a short analysis referring to the transcribed text, the characters involved, the contextual information and the overall atmosphere of the situation. Next, the discussion summarizes the key points of this work. Moreover, it adds onto the maxim violation analysis and refers to the literature discussed in the previous chapters. The last chapter provides a short conclusion.

Key words: *sitcoms, humor, pragmatics, violation of conversational maxims*

# 1. Introduction

The aim of this M.A thesis is to analyze humor in three well-known American sitcoms *Friends*, *How I Met Your Mother* and *The Big Bang Theory* based on the pragmatic influences of Paul Grice's conversational maxims. The theoretical foundations discussed prior to the analysis will indulge in explaining the complexity of humor and its sociological aspect. In addition to that, the theoretic aspect of this research will present several theories of humor proposed by Attardo following the works of philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato. Sitcoms will be explained in terms of their characteristics and origin, discussing their established position in the American entertainment industry. Moreover, the thesis will cover the developmental stages of sitcoms focusing on the time period from the middle to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It will provide the reader with a brief historic and political overview of America which is directly linked to the invention of television and the spread of digital devices around the country. Accordingly, the growth of public interests in sitcoms and television in general will be discussed as well. Furthermore, this thesis will review similarities and differences between popular American sitcoms and introduce the reader to the three series that will be analyzed in its main part. In order for the analysis to be clear and comprehensible, sitcoms *Friends*, *How I Met Your Mother* and *The Big Bang Theory* will be described in terms of their most important features – characters and the relationships between characters. The following chapter will be devoted to the work of Paul Grice and will offer a thorough evaluation of his most important ideas – the cooperative principle, the conversational maxims and the theory of conversational implicatures. Since Grice's contribution to pragmatics is considered to have heavily influenced the linguistic field, his ideas will pose a backbone to the analysis that this thesis conducts. The analysis will be divided into four distinct categories, each of which will be explained in terms of three examples. The examples will be obtained from a variety of humorous situations and will be contextualized in terms of setting, involvement of the characters and arbitrary information I deem relevant to a specific scene that is being analyzed. The humorous situation will be analyzed on the basis of violating Grice's conversational maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner. Additionally, violations will be determined by conducting extensive research on each of the individual examples. The discussion will aim to broaden certain parts of the analysis and compare findings with the literature that was consulted for providing the theoretical portion of this thesis.

## 2. What makes us laugh?

In order to answer that question, we must first acknowledge the fact that humor is very personal. Since every person has their own opinions, values and beliefs, we cannot talk of one, universal humor. Moreover, our surroundings tremendously affects our perception of what we find amusing or funny. Accordingly, humorous content varies. What one person finds hilarious might be the reason somebody else is offended. Truly, the possible outcomes are endless. For example, while some humorous content is intended to be educational, another might exclusively aim to be provocative. Also, depending on the recipient, humor can be perceived as dark, insulting, childish, ambiguous etc. What makes humor so interesting is the fact that it comes in an unlimited amount of shapes and sizes. However, while there is no *one-size-fits-all*, there is always *one-size-fits-someone*. Above all, various humorous content is created in order to fit the consumer. Accordingly, the consumer decides what they want to indulge in and what they do not.

To be able to further explore the concept of humor, we will try to define it first. According to the renowned British sociologist Michael Mulkey (1988), agreeing on one unanimous explanation of the nature of humor is quite unfeasible. Given that humor is something we are subjected to from an early age, it is quite difficult to provide a suitable all-encompassing definition that will perfectly describe it. Additionally, what we found funny as children probably will not be the reason we laugh as adults. Also, something that entertained us yesterday may not be as humorous the next time we encounter it. Mulkey (1988, p 13) provides a relatively vague definition of humor in which it is defined as “one of the few basic social phenomena which occur in all groups throughout the course of human history”. He goes on to argue that when compared to more serious communication, humor is “a kind of controlled nonsense” (Mulkey, 1988, p. 26). Similarly, Attardo (1994) states that defining humor is simply impossible. In order to demonstrate the term’s complexity, Attardo mentions several different positions on defining humor in his work *Linguistic Theories of Humor* (1988). Overall, in order to formulate a concise and satisfactory opinion blend shared by linguists, psychologists and anthropologists, humor can be defined as “an all-encompassing category, covering any event or object that elicits laughter, amuses, or is felt to be funny” (Attardo, 1988, p. 4).



## 2.1 Theories of humor

Even though there is no formula for explaining why something is humorous, certain theories of different variants of humor have been proposed. Attardo (1994) successfully integrates the most commonly accepted theories of humor further classifying them into three groups. In other words, by following Victor Raskins's depiction of interconnection of humor and modern linguistics, Attardo managed to carry out an extensive work classifying the most prominent theories of humor. He groups a considerable number of theories that share certain features under three diverse categories: *incongruity theories*, *hostility or disparagement theories* and *release theories*.

*The incongruity theories* assume that humor occurs when there is a difference between what is expected and what actually transpires. The first substantial mentions of *the incongruity theories* of humor date back to philosophical works by Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer. However, the underlying idea that humor is inherently surprising is something that was discussed by Aristotle (Attardo, 1994). Aristotle implied that the best way to entertain an audience was to deliver something unexpected. Furthermore, he argued that the smallest adjustments like changing the letters of a word is enough to make people laugh. Accordingly, Kant formulated his definition of laughter on Aristotle's premise by saying that "laughter is an affection arising from sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing" (Kant, 1790, p. 177).

*The hostility or disparagement theories* of humor date back to works of Aristotle and Plato. According to Attardo (1994), the said theories relate to the negative aspects of humor, depicting its aggressive side. While containing the prevalent element of superiority (Hobbes, 1650), *hostility or disparagement theories* depict humor as a result of witnessing humiliation, disparagement, or ridiculing others' inferiority or misfortune. In the case of television, sitcom creators tend to devise characters that depict different character traits. For example, certain characters are intended to be the ones humiliating others in regards to appearance, intelligence, clumsiness or whatever other isolating feature they aim to be portraying. Furthermore, even though characters are intended to be as similar to "ordinary" people as much as possible, sitcoms often extenuate one particular feature that is present during the entire series. Specifically, according to Savorelli (2010, p. 26), sitcom "thrives on highly stereotyped characters". For example, *The Big Bang Theory's* pivotal

antagonist Wil Wheaton always wants to outdo anything his main rival Sheldon does. In order to stay relevant, he often humiliates others, makes derogatory remarks and tries to assert dominance over the protagonists of the show. Furthermore, the humorous content involving this character stems from his underlying jealousy, malice and ever-present negativity, therefore truly embodying *the hostility theory* of humor. Even though it cannot be considered as harsh as humor coming from Wil Wheaton, a character with a similar superiority complex is one of the protagonists of the sitcom *How I Met Your Mother*. Specifically, the seemingly delightful bachelor Barney Stinson often plays upon other people's feelings and embarrasses them, hiding his arrogance under the cloak of confidence. Although the majority of his comments are in fact not ill-natured, most of Barney's short snarky remarks, jokes and puns create humorous content based on his superiority over others.

The third and final classification of humor theories comprises several *release theories*. The main proponent of one of the first *release theories* was the founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud. However, in order to be able to understand Freud's perspective on humor, it is important to observe the said concept from a linguistic standpoint. *Release theories* encompass characteristic linguistic choices that result in humorous situations and "account for the 'liberation' from the rules of language, typical of puns and other word-play" as well as the violation of Grice's cooperation principle (Attardo, 1985, p. 50). Accordingly, humor resulting from ambiguity or usage of homonyms indicate that the conversational maxim of manner, which will be further explained in the forthcoming chapters, is being flaunted or violated. Interestingly, ambiguity can be considered one of the more frequent occurrences when it comes to humor appearing in sitcoms. With that said, the ambiguity uttered by the characters results in humorous situations such as misunderstandings, inappropriate sexual humor and blatant incomprehensibility. It often becomes their recognizable style of banter.

## 2.2 *The social aspect of humor*

Humor implies a multiplicity of opposing meanings (Mulkay, 1988). Accordingly, what makes humor diverse is the fact that the interpretations of humorous content vary depending on the person. However, as a possible way of diminishing the possibilities of misunderstanding or incomprehension, creators of humorous content sometimes opt for standardized jokes. According

to Mulkay (1988, p. 30), standardized jokes “create narrative expectations which are subsequently confounded and overthrown”. Moreover, such an approach to humor directly correlates to the previously mentioned *incongruity theories* which claim that in order for a joke to be successful, it has to be unexpected. Mulkay (1988, p. 30) goes on to explain that standardized jokes “first establish a reality and then undermine it”. With that said, it is important to note that the phrase standardized joke mainly refers to the joke’s organisation, not its content. In order for the joke to be understood, it must consist of two items followed by an unexpected punchline. The unexpected punchline relates to its divergence from the previously introduced narrative while still being able to maintain overall coherence. Accordingly, if any of the mentioned elements are omitted, the joke “ceases to be a joke” (Mulkay, 1988, p. 29).

The most frequent reaction to humor is laughter. Even though laughter is “essentially a physiological/psychological process which occurs when people are amused”, its underlying source is social in character (Mulkay, 1988, p. 92). Yet, uncovering more about the social aspect of laughter is relatively difficult due to a small amount of systematic research. Nevertheless, greatly founded on the basis of work carried out by the writer Arthur Koestler and philosopher John Morreall, Mulkay (1988) provides an exhaustive analysis of laughter by classifying it under several different categories. However, due to the extensiveness of Mulkay’s work, this thesis will be limited to providing only the necessary theoretical background on the topic. Primarily, Mulkay discusses the physical aspect of laughter based on Koestler (1964), who defines laughter as an uncontrollable physical reflex to an amusing stimuli. In the following chapter, Mulkay elaborates on Morreall’s (1983) theory of laughter in order to explain the pleasure shift that occurs while partaking in the said act. More precisely, Morreall (1983) formed his theory of laughter on the basis of its three essential characteristics. Firstly, laughter is always associated with the change of one’s psychological state. Secondly, it is the result of the said change being too unexpected. Thirdly, in order for the laugh to occur, the overall experience must be pleasant. Moreover, to be able to further expound on the social aspect of laughter, Mulkay cites the sociologist Gary Alan Fine (1983) explaining the correlation between interlocutors and humor by saying that “humorous discourse necessarily requires a teller and at least one recipient” (Mulkay, 1988, p. 108). What is more, Mulkay (1988) further corroborates this statement by equating the participant’s direct and indirect involvement in the humorous discourse. He argues that “laughter is social in the sense that it normally arises out of a real or imagined dialogue” (Mulkay, 1988, p. 108). Therefore, it can be

argued that the social aspect of laughing can also be discernible in the indirect social relationship between the consumer or the watcher and the on-screen characters in sitcoms. Thus, the consumer is indirectly involved in the social interaction between the television characters, demonstrating their active participation by laughing.

### 3. Sitcom – a mirror of society

A sitcom is the most famous subgenre of comedy series. The term itself is derived from the words *situation comedy* and can be defined as a half-hour entertainment program with humorous content that is segmented into episodes. Sherman (2003, p. 38) defines a sitcom as a funny show in which every episode “exposes the same central characters in the same setting to a new comic situation.” Sitcom episodes are finite, meaning all events happening during one episode are completed and explained in the span of thirty minutes. However, possible deviations include segmenting one plot into two episodes, which is often an acceptable solution for a season finale or the completion of overall series production. Furthermore, depicting relatable everyday situations, sitcoms could be considered a reliable source of authentic language when it comes to referring to a certain characters’ culture, intellect or origin. Berman (1987, p. 6) believes that the creators of sitcoms assume that the audience will be able to identify with the content of the series, which is why they opt for characters choices similar to the “ordinary man”. Due to the fact sitcoms aim to portray real people in everyday laughable situations, we could consider them a mirror of society.

Sitcoms follow the same characters in the same environments. The characters are most often friends, colleagues or family members, while places such as a family home, an apartment, an office or a classroom are only a few possible locations where a sitcom might be set. Due to both the nature of their humor as well as the character choice, it can be said that each sitcom has its own target audience. That is not to say that they are limiting, but rather that their underlying intention is to portray certain relatable situations for the specific groups of people watching. For example, series such as *The Big Bang Theory*, *The Office* and *Scrubs* make for the perfect examples of workplace sitcoms that follow along a group of colleagues in their everyday lives. However, sitcoms like *How I Met Your Mother*, *Friends* and *Seinfeld* owe their global success to being relatable and enjoyable for people of all ages and occupations. What is more, to make them more engaging for the consumer, sitcoms are most often situated in the present, with only a few exceptions when it comes to recollections, dreams or fantasizing about the future.

Watching comedy content can be considered as one of the most common ways to relax. Accordingly, sitcom airing time is usually late afternoon or evening hours, perfect for relishing after a stressful workday or before going to bed. Furthermore, given that sitcoms are often less

dynamic than, for example, drama series, there is a possibility that they sometimes serve as background noise while some other action is taking place. In order to try and avoid that, sitcom creators developed a recognizable feature which captivates the viewers' attention – recorded laughter. Recorded laughter has the function of emphasizing humorous situations and engaging the viewer, so it is important to differentiate between sitcoms that use it and sitcoms that do not (Markanović, 2015, p. 3). Even though the majority of sitcoms have a distinct recorded laughter, sitcoms such as *The Office* or *Modern Family* decided against such a feature. Furthermore, the mentioned series are also well known for the unconventional storytelling element of *breaking the fourth wall*.

### *3.1 Stylistic devices*

Originally developed by the German dramatist Bertolt Brecht for the modernist theatre, the breaking of fourth wall is still a well recognizable stylistic device when it comes to both theatre and television. As Monaco (1982, p. 51) points out, Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Arnaud revolutionized dramatic performance with “concepts of theater that depended on the continuing interaction between the audience and cast”. In order to involve the audience into the experience of watching a play, Brecht developed a stylistic device of breaking the fourth wall. In the case of theatre plays, the fourth wall is the imaginary border between the actors and the audience. With that said, Brecht's idea was to disregard the imaginary wall and make the audience a part of the play. The cast was therefore expected to directly address the spectators by asking questions or by using non-verbal communication such as body language. However, adopting the technique of breaking of the fourth wall into digital media turned into a far more complex endeavor than it seemed to be for theatre (Markanović, 2015). Since there is often no live audience when it comes to filming a sitcom, the closest thing to a fourth wall is the audience's television screen. Due to the fact that actors are unable to directly address the people watching, the effect of breaking the fourth wall is most commonly achieved through non-verbal communication with the camera. Furthermore, the previously mentioned sitcoms *The Office* and *Modern Family* base the majority of their humorous content on the fact that the characters acknowledge the presence of both the camera as well as the camera crew. In fact, we can differentiate between the actors addressing the camera during, for example, a conversation with another character, and addressing the camera while alone in a “confessional”. Additionally, the use of confessionals as safe spaces intended for

addressing certain issues or providing further insight into the thought process of the cast can be directly linked to reality television (Markanović, 2015, p. 11). However, the adoption of such a technique into the world of sitcoms seems to be both innovative and well accepted. In the confessional, the cast member(s) express their feelings or thoughts, as well as provide additional commentary on the act that is currently taking place or that will be happening in the near future. Since the characters are breaking the fourth wall while in the confessional, the audience gets a further glimpse into their personality and thought process, which can often result in the viewer's feelings of identification or empathy.

Another stylistic device developed by Bertolt Brecht is the alienation effect or the *a*-effect (Germ. *Verfremdungseffekt* or *V*-effect). According to Markanović (2015, p. 9), the alienation effect is achieved when an actor “interrupts the narration and reminds the audience of the fact that they are only watching a fictional play”. The twentieth century dramaturgs implemented the aforementioned ways to reject realism and naturalism, having their actors directly indicate the artificial environment that are the stage and the audience. Moreover, Brecht “intended to encourage the people to actively deal with the staging to make them understand what was happening and why” (Markanović, 2015, p. 9). Brecht's idea was avoid the feelings of compassion or identification that the audience usually developed during a performance. Instead, his intention was to persuade the spectators to critically approach the situation happening before them. Finally, the concept of television that we know today would not exist without theatre plays dating back to the Ancient Greeks in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. With the civilization progression and further development of the theater it is no surprise the media industry adopted numerous stylistic devices from its predecessors (Markanović, 2015).

## 4. American sitcoms

American sitcoms developed as televised versions of existing radio programs created by the major radio networks NBC, CBS and ABC. Given that the overall concept of television was a relatively new phenomenon, sitcoms “did not immediately dominate television programming” (Morreale, 2003, p. 2). Specifically, the first American situational comedy *Mary Kay and Johnny* (1947-50) was quickly outshined by the development of the comedy-variety show, a program incorporating comedy and live musical performances. Due to the overwhelming success of the comedy-variety shows, the years from 1948 to 1952 were the time when “television overtook radio as the dominant entertainment medium in the United States” (Morreale, 2003, p. 2). The trends of the following decades directly impacted the development of sitcoms. Specifically, the overwhelming political success of the Democratic Party paved the way for the issue of racial integration in television by the late 1940s. Due to racial activism, CBS announced its production of the sitcom *Amos ‘n’ Andy*, a program starring African American actors depicting “stereotypical racial traits” (Cripps, 2003, p. 25).

With the exception of shows such as *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show* (1950-58) and *I Love Lucy* (1951-57) that focused on women portraying “humorous rebels who wanted or had a paid job”, sitcoms airing during the 1950s and 1960s depicted conservative family-oriented housewife characters (Mellencamp, 2003, p. 43). Acknowledging the difference between the female characters, Wright Wexman (2003, p. 60) describes the humor of Gracie Allen and Lucy to be “a rare and precious gift”, that is, a “women’s weapon and tactic of survival”. The author goes on to argue that these characters opted for comedy in order to compensate for the anger caused by the repressive climate in America in the 1950s. The trend of broadcasting sitcoms that focused on an idealized suburban family life emerged in the 1950s and continued until the 1970’s. The established middle class family hierarchy consisted of the householder father, a homemaker mother and several children depicting different age groups (Haralovich, 2003, p 69). Since programs such as sports or music started to become televised, the sitcom had to find a way to stay relevant. Therefore, according to Morreale (2003, p. 152), “the networks began to rely more heavily on audience demographic as the key to a program’s success”. With that said, by the 1970s, sitcoms intended to create a variety of characters in order to cater to different audiences.



According to George Lipsitz (2003, p. 20), the 1970's critics argued against sitcom narratives that assumed "real social problems and gave the appearance of openness but allowed only one possible solution, in fact teaching inevitability". With the audience's growing dissatisfaction with certain sitcoms, it was no surprise that the television content created in the 1970s started to become uninteresting and obsolete with the start of the new decade. Additionally, the introduction of cable television, the videocassette recorder and the remote-control device to nearly half of all American homes at the beginning of the 1980s posed a great challenge to the overall entertainment industry. Due to the fact that people were now able to record their favorite programs or switch between channels pressured creators to come up with an innovative story depicted in the form of a situational comedy (Morreale, 2003).

Released on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 1984, the sitcom *The Cosby Show* restored the previously existing popularity of situational comedies. In the following years, series such as *The Golden Girls* (1985-92), *Full House* (1987-95), *Married with Children* (1987-97) and *Seinfeld* (1989-98) continued to be an unlimited source of entertainment for audiences of all ages. Accordingly, the 1990s sitcoms were created based on the pattern of their successful predecessors. Specifically, nineties sitcoms "took place in urban environments and featured either young professionals or dysfunctional nuclear families" (Morreale, 2003, p. 248). By 1995s, traditional values of *Full House* were replaced with *Ellen* (1994-98), a sitcom that paved the way towards openly talking about homosexuality. However, due to the controversial nature of the show, *Ellen*, "often referred to as *Seinfeld with women*", received a significant amount of backlash (Morreale, 2003, p. 248). The same year the show was cancelled, *Will and Grace* released its first season. When it came to comparing *Will and Grace* to its forerunner, Morreale (2003, 248) came to a perplexing conclusion that this "show was accepted without major controversy" although the main character was also openly gay.

Since the seventies, sitcom creators have tried to implement a variety of characters and content in order to cater to a younger audience. Therefore, it is no surprise that by the 1990s sitcoms managed to establish their desired market – Gen X (Kutulas, 2005, p. 58). Morreale (2003, p. 249) described the desirable demographic as: "young, sophisticated, urban viewers weaned on television, who appreciate parody and complexity of representations". With the exception of, for example, *Everybody Loves Raymond* (1996-05), most sitcoms were based on following the

everyday lives of a close family like friend group. Furthermore, in order to be relatable, the characters had to be charming, funny people in their twenties. Henry (2003, p. 263) states that what the sitcoms aimed to achieve was a “shared cultural experience in which important issues are addressed and through which the viewer is engaged”. The viewer’s engagement is achieved through identifying with the people on screen. Therefore, it was important for the sitcom to portray realistic situations that the audience can relate to, such as breaking up with a significant other, getting a job, having a fight with a family member, having a rough day at work etc. Hence, Attallah (2003, p. 91) described television as “a technology producing both social and psychological effects”.

#### *4.1 Friends*

Created by David Crane and Marta Knauffman, the first episode of *Friends* debuted on NBC on September 22, 1994. The show ran for ten seasons and consisted of 236 episodes depicting the lives of six inseparable friends: Rachel Greene (played by Jennifer Aniston), Ross (played by David Schwimmer) and Monica Geller (Courtney Cox), Chandler Bing (played by Matthew Perry), Joey Tribbiani (played by Matt LeBlanc) and Phoebe Buffay (played by Lisa Kudrow). The show gained its popularity due to a variety of events that viewers could relate to. Specifically, it remained humorous and lighthearted through characters learning life lessons, rekindling relationships with family, falling in and out of love, and getting involved in drama. The series illustrates the importance of support, friendship and love which is why the theme song *I’ll Be There For You* by The Rembrands perfectly describes its underlying message.

All six characters are introduced to the audience in the pilot episode. Rachel Greene is an attractive girl born into a wealthy family. When she is forced by her father to become financially independent, Rachel accidentally comes across her childhood friend Monica and her older brother Ross, who introduce her to their friends Chandler, Joey and Phoebe. Eventually, the group becomes inseparable. After Rachel and Ross become romantically involved in season 2, the couple faces multiple obstacles during their time together. One of the most popular quotes of the show is Ross saying: “We were on a break!” when trying to justify his reckless infidelity during the challenging times of their relationship (Calhoun et al., 1997). Although the series offers more than just a love story between Rachel and Ross, their dynamics can be considered a crucial aspect of

the series. Specifically, Knox and Schwindt (2019, p. 91) describe the two as “significant to the show’s strategy of intimacy, especially in the early seasons”.

Even though “the coupling of established characters is always considered a risk”, creators decided on having Monica and Chandler become romantically involved in season 5 (Adalian, 2016). Until season 6 when the two decides to move in together, friends are most often found in one of the group member’s apartments or in the Central Perk café. According to Savorelli (2010, p. 23) “space is a core component of situation comedy”. While the exterior segment of the series is set and filmed in Manhattan, New York City and can be visited in real life, the studio depicting the group member’s apartments was located in Los Angeles. When it comes to the studio space in which the filming takes place, sitcom creators often follow the same patterns in arranging the position or choosing the color of the furniture on set. For example, Knox and Schwindt (2019, p. 137) describe Monica’s apartment to have textures such as “wicker furniture and fabrics, as well as a couch arranged perpendicularly to the fourth wall”. Furthermore, the authors argue that the filming studio is adjusted according to the nature of the show. Taking into account Monica Geller’s character in the sense of her always trying to be the motherly figure of the group, her apartment had to radiate a feeling of presence, a place where people would feel at home (Knox and Schwindt, 2019).

#### *4.2 How I Met Your Mother*

Premiering on CBS on September 19, 2005, the sitcom *How I Met Your Mother* tells the story of a hopeless romantic Ted Mosby (played by Josh Radnor) and his friends Barney Stinson (played by Neil Patrick Harris), Robin Scherbatsky (played by Cobie Smulders), Marshall Eriksen (played by Jason Segel), and Lily Aldrin (played by Alyson Hannigan) depicted through nine seasons and 208 episodes. This innovative situational comedy created by Craig Thomas and Carter Bays depicts a love story in reverse. Specifically, the show focuses on Ted meeting the love of his life through two intertwined narratives: the “future” during which the father Ted (narrated by Bob Segel) recalls the events that lead to meeting his kids’ mother, and the “past”. The past refers to the nine year long journey of Ted’s unsuccessful attempts of romance with women that he thought would be the mother of his children. Moreover, except for its unconventional narrative,

the series is mostly known for its eccentric humor and catchphrases such as “Legen-dary!” (Bays et al., 2005).

According to Knox and Schwind (2019, p. 120) “*Friends* has offered a ‘blue print’ for the multi-camera situation comedies” such as *How I Met Your Mother*. Specifically, the inclusion of multiple camera angles contributes to identification of the audience with the characters and broadens their experience of watching television. Accordingly, there are several similarities when it comes to the shows in question. For example, the same way *Friends* claim the central spot in their local café Central Perk, Ted and his friends always sit at the same booth at McLaren’s Pub, a bar located below Ted’s apartment. The other similarity is the attention to detail when it comes to set design. Specifically, while the interior of Monica’s apartment contributed to her characterization of being a protective, family-oriented woman, the set design of *How I Met Your Mother* “takes the bachelor pad aesthetic to the point of excessive, performative parody” when it comes to creating Barney’s apartment in New York City (Knox and Schwind, 2019, p. 134). Although there are only several occasions when the viewer gets to see the interior of Barney’s apartment, its design seems to match the aesthetics of a young, rich bachelor. As opposed to the relaxed atmosphere Monica’s home conveys, Barney’s dark and minimalistic home décor appears distanced and cold. Accordingly, throughout the series, Barney comes across as the most mysterious character of the group. For example, when asked what he does for a living, he simply answers “Please” (Bays et al., 2014). Furthermore, on several occasion, Barney implies that he might be in danger because of how much he knows. Due to the overall lightheartedness of the show, we could say that Barney’s sarcasm and nonchalance sometimes serve the purpose of contrasting Ted as “he is portrayed as desperate to find *the one*” (Kocak, 2022, p. 4).

### 4.3 *The Big Bang Theory*

*The Big Bang Theory*, a sitcom created by Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady, made its first appearance on CBS on September 24, 2007. The show tells the story of four introverted scientists, Leonard Hofstadter (played by Johnny Galecki), Sheldon Cooper (played by Jim Parsons), Howard Wolowitz (played by Simon Helberg) and Raj Koothrappali (played by Kunal Nayyar). Even though the show was introduced as being male-dominated, the inclusion of distinct female characters such as Penny (played by Kaley Cuoco), Amy Farrah Fowler (played by Mayim Bialik)

and Bernadette Rostenkowski (played by Melissa Rauch) provided viewers with more relatable content. Having broadcasted twelve seasons with overall 279 episodes, *The Big Bang Theory* remains as one of the most watched American sitcoms to this day (Knox and Schwind, 2019).

The story is set in Pasadena, California. Leonard and Sheldon share an apartment across the hall from Penny, a waitress working at The Cheesecake Factory in order to be able to pursue a career in acting. Similarly to sitcoms such as *Friends* and *How I Met Your Mother*, the characters of *The Big Bang Theory* tend to hang out at their favorite places. Specifically, except for The Cheesecake Factory, the group often socializes at Leonard's and Sheldon's apartment or The Cafeteria, a canteen located as part of the Caltech University where they work. In comparison with Monica's and Barney's apartments, Leonard's and Sheldon's shared home "features a multitude of props (such as books, CDs and merchandise toys) articulating the inhabitants' 'nerdy' fandom" (Knox and Schwind, 2019, p. 134). Given that set design is a crucial aspect of sitcom creation, specific pieces of furniture such as the couch has a central role when it comes to arranging the overall filming space. Specifically, Savorelli (2010, p. 24) argues that "space is not only dominated by the couch, it is also defined and designed by it". The most important couch in *The Big Bang Theory* is the one in Leonard's and Sheldon's living room. Due to Sheldon's stubbornness and childishness, the said couch is often the reason behind his and Penny's immature bickering. According to Kowalski (2012, p. 59), "every week is the same, and that is how Sheldon likes it". With that said, Sheldon claims his spot on the left side of the couch and does not explore other possibilities. Even though Sheldon's meticulousness often gets misconstrued for craziness, he always disputes it by saying "I'm not crazy, my mother had me tested", making it one of the most recognizable quotes of the show (Lorre et al., 2009).

## 5. Grice's cooperative principle

Language is a social phenomenon. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity argues that there is an undeniable link between language and culture in that language directly influences one's perspective on reality. On the grounds of this hypothesis, the said connection has been studied from a variety of disciplinary and methodological perspectives (Kramsch, 1998). Furthermore, linguistic disciplines such as pragmatics, sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology take their unique approaches in terms of further analyzing the relation between language and culture. One of the questions that arises is: "how do they [people] know how to evaluate the social situation in which they find themselves and act appropriately?" (Kramsch, 1998, p. 31).

In order to provide further insight into the complexity of social interactions, it is inevitable to refer to the work of the notable language philosopher Paul Grice. Referring to Grice's research on communication, Grady (1989, p. 516) explains that "conversations are not random, unrelated remarks", but rather purposeful utterances that assume a degree of cooperation between interlocutors. On the assumption that the interlocutors are consciously participating, certain cooperation is needed in order for the conversation to occur. Given that communication is a synergy between interlocutors, Grice formulated the cooperative principle which expects the participants to contribute to the conversation with necessary input according to the purpose and direction of the communication process of which they are a part of. According to Lunenberg (2010, p. 1), communication can be defined as "the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another". Furthermore, in order to establish communication, the sender must first encode their idea into a message which is then sent through a medium such as an e-mail, telephone call etc. After the receiver receives the message, they have to decode it. However, occurrences such as "different perceptions of the message, language barriers, interruptions, emotions, and attitudes" can distort the message and affect the overall process of communication (Lunenberg, 2010, p. 2). With that said, Grice emphasizes the importance of selecting a particular utterance in order to communicate a message, arguing that "the speaker is choosing that sentence rather than a number of alternatives" (Grady, 1989, p. 516). Keeping in mind that the sender aims to select the appropriate utterance to transmit the information to the receiver, the message is expected to be clear and intelligible. The final stage of the communication process is feedback. Feedback implies the receiver's response to the sender's message and determines whether the

message is clearly understood. Furthermore, according to Grady (1989, p. 514), sending messages through language is possible “only through cooperation with others”, so in order for communication to be effective, the interlocutors must comply with the rules of the communication process. Since messages can be sent through various mediums, it is important for the sender to take into consideration how the message will be perceived by the receiver. Accordingly, when we refer to the medium of television, we can distinguish between two different kinds of communication – the one between interlocutors on screen and the one between the sitcom and the spectators. When it comes to on screen communication, sitcoms often demonstrate how an imprecise message can result in a misunderstanding. Misunderstandings are most often caused by the sender’s usage of ambiguous or inappropriate words which are then wrongly decoded by the receiver. Accordingly, the discrepancy between what was meant and what was understood results in a humorous situation. However, when it comes to the transmission of information between the sitcom and the viewer, we are talking about unidirectional communication (Lunenbergh, 2010, p. 3). Since the viewer is not able to respond directly, we cannot consider the receiver’s feedback a feedback in the true sense of the word. Thus, we can classify laughter to be an acceptable response to the humorous message on screen.

### *5.1 Conversational maxims*

When it comes to the communication process and the importance of mutual participation between interlocutors, Grice argues that there should be certain rules that both the sender and the receiver must conform to when it comes to engaging in a conversation. Specifically, Grice systemizes message encoding and decoding by explaining that “participation in talk exchanges will be fruitful only if the exchange conforms to the maxims” (Grady, 1989, p. 517). Each element of a conversational exchange can be viewed in relation to conversational maxims and whether they were in accordance with them or not. Specifically, Grice (1975, p. 48) describes his conversational maxims as “something that is reasonable for us to follow, that we should not abandon”. The maxims are classified under four distinct categories, some of which suggest the existence of a supermaxim followed by several specific maxims that further modify it. The first out of four Grice’s (1975, p. 45-46) maxims is the **maxim of quantity**, which is described in terms of two statements: *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.* The following maxim is **the maxim of quality**, consisting of a supermaxim: *Try to make your contribution one that is true*, followed by two specific maxims: *Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.* The third maxim is **the maxim of relation** which simply instructs the interlocutors to *be relevant*. Lastly, **the maxim of manner** consists of a supermaxim: *Be perspicuous*, which is further explained by the following statements: *Avoid obscurity of expression. Avoid ambiguity. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity). Be orderly.* Even though Grice (1975, p. 47) acknowledges the presence of other possible maxims such as being polite, he finds the maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner to be “specially connected with the particular purposes that talk is adapted to serve and is primarily employed to serve”. Specifically, his idea was to formulate maxims that would serve a purpose of effective information exchange.

## 5.2 *The theory of conversational implicatures*

Except for Grice’s cooperation principle and conversational maxims, it is also important to recognize the significance of his theory of conversational implicatures. Specifically, what interested Grice was how the recipient understood an utterance when one or more conversational maxims were violated. He came to a conclusion that what is said does not have to reflect the intended meaning (Saul, 2002). Therefore, Grice proposed a theory of conversational implicatures that differentiates between what is said and what is implied. What is interesting about implicatures is the fact that they are an everyday occurrence which seems to often be imperceptible. For example, in order to exemplify the theory, Saul (2002, p. 228) includes a fictional conversation between two people in which the person A asks “Can you pass the salt?” and the person B responds “Yes”. What the person A meant by their question is to ask the person B to pass them the salt, not if they are able to pass it. Under the assumption that the person B wanted to be humorous, they ignored the implicature and answered the question with “Yes”. Since the answer presumed that there is no implied meaning behind the question, the implicature is considered to be deliberately ignored. What is important to note is that, according to Saul (2002, p. 229), “if a speaker implicates something, she has thereby made it available to her audience”. However, speakers are not always successful in their attempts of implying something. Specifically, when it comes to language, sitcoms as well as other humorous programs rest on both violating the conversational maxims as



well as ignoring implicatures. Accordingly, the following chapter of this thesis includes several examples of implicatures being ignored in order to create a humorous situation.

## 6. The violation of Grice's conversational maxims in American sitcoms

The following chapter will provide an analysis of the violation of Grice's conversational maxims in American sitcoms *Friends*, *How I Met Your Mother* and *The Big Bang Theory*. The examples of maxim violations will be categorized according to the aforementioned maxims of quantity, quality, relation and modality. This thesis will present several examples of maxim violations for each of the categories. Analysis will contain the following information: the name of the series (season, episode title and number), the context, the transcription of the spoken text and its in-depth analysis. The contextual information will include the description of setting or location, the names of the characters involved, as well as the overall atmosphere depicted on screen. Additional information such as relationships between characters or brief explanations of relevant events that preceded the given situation will be provided accordingly. The analysis following the transcription will aim to explain the violation of conversational maxims by referring to the transcribed text as well as contextual information. Additionally, it will provide the reader with possible variations of the spoken text in order to demonstrate responses that would be in accordance with Grice's rules on conversation.

### 6.1 *The maxim of quantity*

#### **Example 1**

Friends (Season 8, Episode 22: The One Where Rachel Is Late)

*Friends are having coffee at Central Perk. Joey, Monica and Chandler are sitting on the couch while Ross and Phoebe are sitting on chairs. Pregnant Rachel enters the Central Perk.*

Rachel (irritated): "That's right! Still no baby! Come on, people, please make some room!"

Ross (getting up from his chair): "Uh... Sweetie, maybe you'd be more comfortable here."

Rachel (resentfully looking at Ross): "You... Like you haven't done enough."

Ross (sympathetically): “Look, I know how miserable you are. I wish there was something I could do. I wish I were a sea horse.”

*The group shares a confused look. Rachel squints and continues to look at Ross.*

Ross (nervous): “Because with sea horses, it's the male. They carry the babies.”

*Rachel continues to look at Ross.*

Ross: “And then also, um, I'd be far away in the sea.”

*Ross sits back down.*

This scene depicts a conversation between Rachel and Ross. Rachel enters the café announcing that she did not have the baby yet, implying that everyone is expecting the big news whenever she arrives. Her statement could be considered a violation of Grice's maxim of quantity since nobody actually asked Rachel anything, she just assumed everyone would care about whether she had the baby. When Rachel arrives at the table and asks for a place to sit, Ross wants to be helpful and offers her his chair. Given that Rachel is near the end of her pregnancy, she is irritated and eager for it to be over. Therefore, it is no surprise that when Ross, the father of the baby, tries to be supportive, Rachel squints at him saying: “Like you haven't done enough”, implying that he is the reason she is pregnant and feels miserable. Ross continues to be kind and tries to comfort Rachel by saying: “I wish I were a sea horse.” By saying that, Ross violates Grice's maxim of relation, since sea horses do not have anything to do with the conversation that was taking place. The group shares a confused look, so Ross assumes he needs to explain further on the basis of their body language. However, since nobody asked Ross for clarification, Ross violates Grice's maxim of quantity by explaining the notion of male pregnancy in sea horses.

## Example 2

How I Met Your Mother (Season 3, Episode 15: The Chain of Screaming)

*Ted, Barney, Marshall and Lily are at a Halloween party when they bump into Randy, Barney and Marshall's former work colleague. Barney pressured Marshall into firing Randy because he thought he was clumsy and slow. However, Marshall regretted that decision and now wants to rehire Randy.*

Marshall (nervous): "Hey, Randy! Would you like a beer?"

Randy: "Oh, no, thank you, I brew my own."

*Ted and Barney share a confused look.*

Randy (excited): "At the risk of bragging, my hazelnut pilsner won 4<sup>th</sup> prize of the Weehawken retirement home clambake and wheelchair maintenance picnic."

This short conversation is taking place at a Halloween party. Given that Marshall offered Randy an alcoholic beverage, we can assume the overall atmosphere was relaxed. Since we know Marshall wanted to rehire Randy, his question aimed to soften him up in order to accept the request to come back to the firm. Marshall's question was closed-ended, meaning it supposed only two predetermined answers, in this case: "Yes" or "No". Given that Randy did not want a beer and the question did not require further explanation, his answer should have been limited to "No, thank you". However, since Randy followed his polite refusal with "I brew my own" immediately after responding with "No, thank you", this presents an example of the violation of Grice's maxims. Although it is not explicitly depicted in the scene, we can assume the reason behind Randy's refusal of the beer is that he brought his own. Therefore, if Marshall were to ask: "Why not?", Randy's response would be considered more appropriate. Given that Randy provided more information on his brewing endeavors even though Marshall did not even have the opportunity to question his reason behind declining a beer, we consider Randy's response to be a violation of Grice's maxims of quantity and relation. Specifically, Randy's contribution to the conversation was both irrelevant as well as more informative than it was required.

### Example 3

The Big Bang Theory (Season 3, Episode 17: The Precious Fragmentation)

*Leonard, Sheldon, Howard and Raj are eating in the cafeteria where they often have lunch after work. Howard is talking about his latest project when Raj suddenly interrupts him.*

Raj: “Sheldon, is there ketchup on that table?”

*Sheldon turns to the table Raj is pointing at.*

Sheldon: “Yes, there is. Here is an interesting fact! Ketchup started as a general term for sauce typically made of mushrooms or fish brine with herbs and spices. Some popular early main ingredients included blueberry, anchovy, oyster, kidney bean and grape.”

Raj (confused): “That’s okay, I’ll get it.”

*Raj gets up and goes to get the ketchup from the nearby table.*

This situation depicts a group of friends having lunch at their favorite cafeteria. Raj asks Sheldon what seems to be a simple question: “Is there ketchup on that table?” and Sheldon answers: “Yes.” Since the ketchup was on the nearby table, we can assume that everyone was able to see that the condiment in question really was ketchup. Therefore, Raj’s question was unnecessary, especially taking into consideration that he interrupted Howard’s story to ask it. However, since the entire group including Raj was eating lunch, we can assume he wanted to add some ketchup to his food. What could be concluded was that Raj actually wanted to ask Sheldon to pass him the ketchup, not to ask him if there is ketchup on the table. Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that Raj wanted to be polite, therefore omitting the part of the question where he actually requests something from Sheldon. In a situation where the intended meaning is different from what is actually said, we talk of implied meaning. Implied meaning assumes that both parties of a conversation understand what is meant and act accordingly. In this case, Raj presumed Sheldon would understand that he wanted some ketchup, but unfortunately, Sheldon was clueless. Due to Sheldon’s short but logical response, it was expected from Raj to clarify. Clarification could have been provided by Raj through simply further asking Sheldon: “Great! Do you mind passing me the ketchup?” to which Sheldon could have responded: “Sure!” or “I don’t feel like getting up.” or “Take it yourself.”

However, due to Sheldon being an extremely smart but quite socially unintelligent character, he proceeded to provide the group with more information on ketchup and how it originated before Raj even had the chance to clarify what he wanted. Thus, by contributing to the conversation with a statement that was more informative than necessary, Sheldon violated Grice's maxim of quantity. What is more, even if we do not interpret Raj's question as a polite request, Sheldon still answered a question that nobody asked – how was ketchup invented. Therefore, by providing information that was irrelevant to the question, we can conclude that Sheldon also violated Grice's maxim of relation.

## 6.2 *The maxim of quality*

### **Example 4**

Friends (Season 10, Episode 2: The One Where Ross is Fine)

*Rachel and Joey are kissing when Ross suddenly enters the apartment and sees them. While Rachel and Joey are embarrassed, Ross is heartbroken and in shock.*

Rachel (sympathetic): "Ross, this is not how we wanted you to find out about this. You have every right to go nuts..."

Ross (softly, shocked): "I'm not going nuts. Do you see me going nuts?"

Rachel (sympathetic): "No, but... You know what I mean."

Ross (exaggerating): "Hey, hey, hey! If you two are *happy*, then I am happy for you. I'm *fine!*"

Joey (confused): "Really?"

Ross (exaggerating, squeaking, high-pitched): "Absolutely! I'm *fine!* Totally fine! Ha, I don't know why it's coming out all loud and squeaky cause really, I'm FINE! I'm not saying I wasn't a *little* surprised to see you guys kissing, I mean at first I was like AAAA, but now that I've time to absorb it... *Loving* this!"

Joey: "Ross..."

Ross (exaggerating): "It's all working out! Me and Charlie, you two... You know what we should do?!"

Rachel (confused): “Calm ourselves?”

Ross (high-pitched): “No!!! We should all have dinner! Yes, we should do it tomorrow night! I’ll cook!”

Joey (concerned): “Look, don’t you think that would be a little weird?”

Ross (exaggerating, high-pitched): “Weird?! What? Why weird?! The only thing weird would be if *someone* wouldn’t like Mexican food because I’m making *FAJITAS!!!*”

Prior to analyzing this scene, it is important to disclose that Ross and Rachel were romantically involved in the second and third season of the show. Since the two remained close friends, their complicated relationship never ceased to be awkward, especially when it came to their love life. Up to season 10 Rachel and Ross were dating other people and were open to each other about it. However, after Rachel and Joey unexpectedly got together, the two had a hard time publicizing their relationship. Ultimately, they were caught kissing by Ross. Due to the fact Joey was one of his closest friends and Rachel was still his secret crush, Ross was heartbroken. However, Ross was also in a romantic relationship at the time, so he wanted to give off an impression that he is completely fine with seeing his friends get together. Although Rachel gave Ross the freedom to react however he wanted, he assured her of the fact he felt at peace. Moreover, he stated that he is fine several time during the conversation, making it more obvious that he is, in fact, the opposite. Also, his body language gave of an impression of nervousness and his high-pitched voice indicated that he is tense. Given that the audience is aware of the backstory of Ross and Rachel, it is obvious that Ross was hurting. His insincerity was mostly evident from the way he stressed words such as: “happy”, “fine”, “little”, “loving”, “someone”, “fajitas”. Moreover, his suggestion of a double date dinner party seemed weird and out of place rather than warm and welcoming. Even though Ross masked his true feelings during this conversation, he eventually came clean to Joey saying that he is not fine, but he wants to be. Therefore, we can say that Ross violated Grice’s maxim of quality by pretending to be fine and assuring everyone that he did not mind Rachel and Joey’s relationship.

## Example 5

How I Met Your Mother (Season 7, Episode 17: No Pressure)

*Barney learns of an extremely valuable videotape hidden somewhere in Marshall and Lily's bedroom. In order to blackmail them later, Barney hires two maids to help him find it. While the maids are looking for the videotape, Barney kneels on the floor, folds his hands, looks up to the ceiling and starts praying. Spiritual music starts playing in the background.*

Barney (desperate): "God, if you help me find this videotape, I am going to make some changes in my life. I am going to devote my entire life to doing good deeds and praising your name."

*One of the maids finds the videotape and hands it to Barney.*

Maid: "Is this what you were looking for, Mister Barney?"

Barney (relieved, talking to God): "Never mind, bro! Found it!"

In his short monologue, Barney violates the Grice's maxim of quality. Since Barney is eager to find a valuable videotape, he goes to great lengths in order to achieve it. Specifically, he does not look for the tape himself, but rather hires two maids to do it for him. As well as that, he turns to praying. Even though his desperate attempt to ask God for help might seem genuine in the beginning, Barney's true intentions are revealed after the tape is found, specifically, with the last line of the scene: "Never mind, bro! Found it!". By saying "never mind", Barney annuls the sincerity of his prayer, making the first line of the scene a violation of maxim of quality.

## Example 6

The Big Bang Theory (Season 2, Episode 8: The Lizard-Spock Expansion)

*Howard falls in love with a girl from work thinking she is the love of his life. However, Leonard likes the same girl, but Howard does not know about it. Leonard is about to leave the apartment to meet with her when Sheldon stops him at the door.*

Sheldon (concerned): "Leonard, a moment. If someone, and of course we don't know who this could be, does ask where you've gone, what should I say?"



Leonard (confused): “I don't know, just tell them that I went to the office.”

Sheldon: “Are you going to the office?”

Leonard: “No.”

Sheldon: “Then how can I say it convincingly?”

Leonard (casually): “Just say: Leonard went to the office.”

Sheldon (overdoing it): “Alright... Leonard went to... the office.”

Leonard (frustrated): “No, not like that! Just: Leonard went to the office.”

Sheldon (frustrated): “This would have worked a lot better if you just told me you were going to the office!”

Leonard (smiling): “I’m going to the office.”

Sheldon: “See, why don’t I believe you?”

*Leonard leaves. The following scene depicts Penny, Howard, Raj and Sheldon in Sheldon and Leonard’s living room. The group is eating dinner and watching TV. They are focusing on what is happening on screen. Sheldon is nervous.*

Sheldon (nervous): “Doesn’t anybody want to know where Leonard is going?”

Penny (confused): “Okay... where is he going?”

Sheldon (overdoing it): “Leonard is going to...the office.”

*Howard, Raj and Penny share a confused look.*

The two scenes depict several violations of Grice’s maxim of quality. Initially, even though Sheldon is aware of the truth behind where Leonard is going, he still insists that Leonard comes up with a cover up for his immoral endeavors. Interestingly, although Sheldon is aware of his untruthfulness and therefore violates the maxim of quality by saying: “Leonard went to the office”, his delivery of the statement is what makes this situation humorous. Over the course of the series, Sheldon is portrayed as nerdy, socially awkward and brutally honest. Therefore, actions that are

not in accordance with the nature of his character seem forced and out of place. For example, being untruthful is something that Sheldon does not know how to deal with. Since the statement about Leonard's whereabouts are not inherently funny, the humorous situation derives from Sheldon's unnatural behavior, tone of voice and exaggerated body language. After an unsuccessful attempt of instructing Sheldon to lie for him, Leonard decides on convincing Sheldon that he is actually going to the office. Although Leonard is lying and is therefore violating the maxim of quality, his delivery seems more believable and natural than that of Sheldon. However, if Leonard's believable lie came about at the beginning of their conversation, Sheldon would be unaware of the untruthfulness of his statement and would not be violating the maxim of quality later on. In the later scene Sheldon, Penny, Raj and Howard are the only ones hanging out. Unprovoked, Sheldon unnecessarily sets himself up for lying by suddenly breaking the silence: "Doesn't anybody want to know where Leonard is going?". Confused, Penny asks Sheldon about Leonard's whereabouts to which Sheldon responds: "Leonard is going to...the office.", therefore violating the Grice's maxim of quality. Since Sheldon's behavior heavily suggests that he is not telling the truth, the scene ends with the group sharing a confused look.

### *6.3 The maxim of relation*

#### **Example 7**

Friends (Season 3, Episode 9: The One with the Football)

*Rachel, Monica, Ross, Chandler, Joey and Phoebe are playing American football. They are divided into two teams – one led by Monica and the other led by Ross. Both teams want to win. During the game, Monica calls up her teammates Joey and Phoebe.*

Joey: "Alright, huddle up, huddle up, right over here!"

Phoebe (excited): "Wait for me, wait for me! Oh, cool, this is my first huddle! Ok, so what do you guys really think of Chandler?"

Monica (confused): "Phoebe, you know what you're doing, right?"

Phoebe: "Yeah."

Monica: “Ok, Joey’s going to catch it, and you and I are going to block.”

Phoebe (confused): “What’s *block*?”

Monica (frustrated): “Phoebe, I thought you said you know what you’re doing.”

Phoebe: “I thought you meant in life!”

Monica (sarcastically): “Great!”

Since Monica and Ross are siblings who were heavily involved in playing sports as children, it is no surprise that their ongoing rivalry is what prompted this American football match. Given that both Monica and Ross wanted to win, they were named team captains. The captains chose their teammates based on their experience in football. The scene opens with Monica calling up Joey and Phoebe. After the team is huddled up, Phoebe seems very excited to be involved. Given that the purpose of huddle is discuss tactics during the match, the group is expected to talk about football. However, Phoebe starts the discussion by asking Monica and Joey about their opinion on Chandler, therefore violating Grice’s maxim of relation. Monica and Joey are confused, as that they had much to say about the game that was taking place. Monica brushes off Phoebe’s question and asks her if she knows what she is doing, to which Phoebe responds with: “Yeah”. Since Monica was the team captain, she wanted to instruct her teammates to play a certain way. Therefore, what Monica implied was: “Do you know what a purpose of a huddle is? Do you know the rules of American football?”. In order to be certain that Phoebe understood what she wanted her to do, Monica continues to give instructions about her team’s roles during the match. Specifically, Monica wants her and Phoebe to block the opposing team while Joey tries to catch the ball. However, Phoebe is confused by the word *block*, so she asks Monica for clarification. Annoyed, Monica reminds Phoebe that she said she knew what she was doing, to which Phoebe answers: “I thought you meant in life!”. While Monica’s sarcastic response “Great.” exhibits dissatisfaction, Phoebe is left confused. Given the fact that the siblings were eager to win this American football match, we can assume they have seriously approached the task of assembling their teams. What is more, Monica’s response “I thought you said you know what you’re doing.” to Phoebe during the match suggests that the two have already talked about football. Since Phoebe stated she misunderstood Monica’s question during the game, we can assume that Monica asked an unclear

question regarding Phoebe's qualifications for football prior to the game as well. Therefore, we can assume Phoebe's misinterpretation of Monica's question lead to Monica choosing her for the team. If Monica asked Phoebe: "Do you know how to play American football?", Phoebe's response would have been "No, I have never played it." By asking such a specific question Monica would be able to decide whether she wants to indulge in instructing Phoebe or whether she wants to choose someone who is already familiar with the sport. Therefore, we can conclude that this situation depicts the importance of asking unambiguous questions.

### **Example 8**

How I Met Your Mother (Season 6, Episode 4: Unfinished)

*Lily, Robin, Marshall and Barney are sitting in McLaren's Pub debating the fastest route to the restaurant that Woody Allen is supposedly at.*

Barney (bragging): "You're all wrong! I could get there so fast I could beat all of you! Even if I sat down and ordered a big juicy steak first!"

Marshall: "How?"

Barney: "Medium rare, but that's not important right now."

This short conversation depicts a humorous situation caused by a violation of Grice's maxim of relation. Since there was a rumor that Woody Allen is in town, Lily, Robin, Marshall and Barney are discussing the fastest way to get to the restaurant he is supposedly at. Given that Barney is the conceited and overconfident member of the group, he is always trying to have an advantage over his friends. Specifically, in this example, Barney is exaggerating his ability to reach the restaurant first. He argues that if the group were to decide to race to get there, he would have so much spare time that he could order a steak and still be in the lead. Hearing Barney be so confident in his route, Marshall asks him: "How?", meaning: "How would you get there?", to which Barney responds "Medium rare, but that's not important right now." Even though Marshall's unspecific question was in regard to the route and not the food preference, ordering a steak was the last piece of information Barney gave to the group, so it is understandable that he understood it in a different manner. Moreover, ordering a steak suggests the waiter's question: "How do you like your stake?",

so Barney seems to have connected the two. Therefore, the funny situation arises from Barney's response that was unrelated to Marshall's question.

### **Example 9**

The Big Bang Theory (Season 2, Episode 10: The Vartabedian Conundrum)

*Leonard is in the kitchen preparing breakfast for his girlfriend Stephanie. Penny barges into Leonard's apartment wearing revealing pajamas.*

Penny (in a robotic voice): "Out of coffee. Need coffee."

Stephanie (shocked): "Oh, hello."

Penny (kindly): "Hi! Stephanie, right?"

Stephanie (confused): "Mhm, and, and, and, you are?"

Penny (points at her apartment door): "Penny, I live across the hall."

*Stephanie continues to judgmentally look at Penny.*

Penny (kindly): "Heard a lot about you!"

Stephanie (looking over at Leonard): "Really? I haven't heard a thing about *you*."

*Leonard looks away from Stephanie and continues to nervously mix pancake batter.*

Stephanie (passive aggressive): "Leonard? Why haven't I heard a thing about this woman who lives across the hall and comes into your apartment in the morning *in her underwear*?"

Leonard (awkwardly): "Um, she heard about you because we're, you know, involved, and you haven't heard of her because..."

*Leonard and Penny awkwardly look at each other.*

Leonard (looks at Stephanie): "I've never slept with her, I swear."

Sheldon (casually): "In Leonard's defense, it wasn't the lack of trying."

This scene depicts Leonard's girlfriend Stephanie meeting his neighbor Penny. Prior to the analysis, it is important to provide some contextual information on Leonard and Penny's relationship. Leonard had a crush on Penny ever since he had met her in season 1. Eventually, he invited her out and they shared a kiss. However, the two agreed that they would be better off as friends, so they agreed that there was no point in going on a second date. With that said, season 2 depicts Leonard and Penny openly dating other people. Specifically, in the tenth episode of season 2, Leonard invited his girlfriend Stephanie to spend the night at his place. In the morning, in order to impress her, Leonard decided to make pancakes for breakfast. A few moments after Stephanie got up from bed, Penny walked into the apartment. Although Leonard was used to Penny barging in asking for something in her pajamas, Stephanie was shocked to see a good-looking blonde woman enter her boyfriends' apartment without him flinching. To Stephanie's surprise, Penny kindly introduced herself by saying: "Heard a lot about you", to which Stephanie responded in a passive aggressive manner while judgmentally looking at Leonard. Leonard tried to defend himself by saying that Penny knew of her because she was his girlfriend, but had a hard time of explaining why she had no idea of who Penny was. Moreover, due to them going on a date and kissing, he did not know how to introduce Penny in a way that would sound appropriate and unsuspecting. While Leonard was trying to think of something smart to say to his defense, Stephanie continued to glare at him. Nervous and uncomfortable, the only thing he could think of was: "I've never slept with her, I swear", therefore violating Grice's maxim of relation. What Stephanie implied was that she had a problem with Leonard being around half-naked women, not asking him whether they were involved. Even though that information could have been a topic of later discussion, at this point it was irrelevant. Moreover, while Leonard's statement was true and did not violate Grice's maxim of quality, Sheldon quickly joined the conversation to clarify that Leonard tried to sleep with Penny several times, making the entire room feel even more uncomfortable. By adding fuel to the fire, Sheldon violated the maxim of quantity and relation, i.e. his contribution to the conversation was both more informative than necessary, as well as irrelevant.

## 6.4 *The maxim of manner*

### **Example 10**

Friends (Season 5, Episode 5: The One With The Kips)

*Chandler came back from a trip and is catching up with Joey in their living room. Monica enters the apartment.*

Monica (nervously): “Hi.”

Joey (happy): “Hey, you are back too!”

Monica (unenthusiastic): “Yeah... Um, Chandler, can I talk to you outside for just a second?”

Joey: “Hey, how was your chef thing?”

Monica (passive aggressively looking at Chandler): “Ugh, awful. Guess some people just don’t appreciate *really* good food.”

Chandler (passive aggressively): “Well, maybe it was the kind of food that tasted good at first, but then... made everybody vomit and have diarrhea.”

Monica (fake smiling and pointing outside): “Chandler?”

Chandler (mockingly, heading outside): “Monica?”

*Joey is confused. Monica and Chandler leave the apartment.*

In this scene, Monica interrupts Joey and Chandler catching up after Chandler’s trip. Joey is surprised to see Monica as she was supposed to be on a trip as well, so he asks her about it. Monica passive aggressively metaphorizes the chef event that she attended by saying: “Guess some people just don’t appreciate *really* good food” to which Chandler responded: “Well, maybe it was the kind of food that tasted good at first, but then... made everybody vomit and have diarrhea.” What Joey doesn’t know is that Monica and Chandler recently got romantically involved but decided on keeping it a secret for a while. With that said, the couple was actually on a trip that had nothing to do with their jobs. Therefore, the two were obviously not bickering about food, but rather about something that happened between them. In order to be able to discuss what happened in front of

Joey, Monica opted for metaphors. She described herself as “*really* good food” that was underappreciated (by Chandler). Chandler then defended himself by saying the food (the relationship with Monica) tasted great at first (was fun at first), but then made everybody sick (he got a negative experience out of it). While Monica and Chandler understood each other perfectly, Joey was oblivious. By using metaphors, the two managed to secretly talk of their romantic relationship while actually talking about food, therefore violating Grice’s maxim of manner.

### **Example 11**

How I Met Your Mother (Season 4, Episode 8: Woooo!)

*Robin thinks that she and Lily don’t have enough time by themselves because Marshall, Lily’s long-term boyfriend, is always with them. Robin recollects a specific time when Marshall interrupted their conversation in order to prove to Lily that they are never able to hang out alone. Robin and Lily are sitting on the couch in Ted’s living room. Robin is telling Lily about a date she had recently.*

Robin (excited): “So, that’s when the story gets really good. So, we go to the...”

*Marshall enters the room and casually sits next to Robin.*

Marshall (casual): “Hey.”

Robin (confused, fake smiling, reluctant): “Hey...”

*Robin continues her story.*

Robin (excited): “...place. And then that guy asks about the thing with the stuff that I told you about at that place that time. Long story short, events transpired.”

Given that Robin and Lily rarely have a chance to talk alone, it is no surprise that Robin wants to make the most out of their limited time together. Specifically, in the depicted scene, Robin is talking to Lily about a recent date she had and is extremely excited to share all the details. However, when Marshall walks into the room, Robin seems hesitant to continue her story. After they say hi and Robin understands that Marshall is not leaving, she talks to Lily in a way which seems to lack crucial information about the story. Although Lily has the background knowledge which enables her to decipher Robin’s incomprehensible messages, other people are unable to



understand what is being said. Phrases such as “that guy”, “the thing with the stuff”, “at that place that time” suggest that Robin does not want to share her story with anybody else but Lily. Since Robin is using obscure expressions whilst talking to Lily, she is considered to be violating Grice’s maxim of manner.

### **Example 12**

The Big Bang Theory (Season 5, Episode 13: The Recombination Hypothesis)

*Sheldon, Raj and Howard are playing Catan. Since the goal of this board game is construction, the players have materials such as stone and wood at their disposal. In order to build as many settlements as possible, the players can exchange materials.*

Sheldon: “I want to build a road, but I need wood. Do either of you fellows have wood?”

*Raj and Howard start laughing.*

Sheldon, Howard, Raj and Leonard enjoy playing a variety of board games and are always very invested in coming up with the best tactic to win. This situation depicts Sheldon, Raj and Howard playing Catan, a board game based on construction. Since Catan players are able to exchange materials with their opponents, Sheldon asked Raj and Howard if they had any wood to share. What is humorous about this situation is the fact that Raj and Howard understood the ambiguity of the word *wood*, which can be interpreted as a slang term for an erection. Given that Raj and Howard are depicted as having an inappropriate sense of humor during the course of the entire series, it is no surprise that Sheldon’s genuine question resulted in their intentional misinterpretation of the word. Moreover, Sheldon’s cluelessness is what makes this situation even more humorous. Therefore, due to Sheldon’s ambiguous question, we can say the overall situation resulted in a violation of Grice’s maxim of manner. However, it is important to note that Sheldon’s question was not inappropriate or incomprehensible. Moreover, there was no other way to ask Raj and Howard for wood. In conclusion, the misinterpretation which led to a humorous situation was caused by Raj and Howard, not Sheldon.

## 7. Discussion

Attardo (1994) explained the notion of humor in terms of three theories: the incongruity theories, the hostility or disparagement theories and the release theories. The analysis of the twelve sitcom examples of Grice's maxim violations suggests that certain humorous content could be associated with the said theories. Furthermore, after careful consideration, incongruity theories could be classified as somewhat superior to theories of hostility and release, meaning that they could be considered an all-encompassing instance of comedic content. Attardo argues that incongruity theories assume the difference between expectations and reality. It could be said that creating humorous dialogues in sitcoms probably has unexpectedness as its underlying thought no matter whether the humor is actually ridiculing others or not conforming to the rules of language, as the other two theories propose. With that said, the analysis of the twelve examples of maxim violations of this thesis show that the majority of humorous content was, in fact, unexpected.

The dialogue between Rachel and Ross in Example 1 takes an unexpected turn when Ross states that he wishes he was a seahorse, therefore conforming to the incongruity theories. Similarly, Example 2 depicts Marshall offering Randy a beer, to which Randy responds that he does not want one because he brews his own. As discussed in the short analysis of the Example 2, if Randy were to say: "No, thanks", that would be the expected answer that the audience would probably not find funny. Example 3 is somewhat different. Due to the fact Sheldon often does not understand social cues, his response in which he provides additional information on ketchup is something that could be expected of him. Although Sheldon's response could have been expected by the audience that is familiar with his character, those who have not seen the show might be surprised by this answer. Therefore, the audiences' laughter could be explained as follows – some laughed because Sheldon's response was exactly what they expected, and others laughed because they were surprised. In Example 4, everybody assumes that Ross would freak out over finding out about Rachel and Joey. However, Ross's reaction translates to having a high-pitched voice and an overly dramatic body language. Therefore, we could argue that body language contributes to the factor of unexpectedness as well. Similarly, Example 5 depicts the self-centered character Barney praying to God over a videotape. Even though one might assume that Barney does not actually live by the rules of the Bible and is not religious, the final line in which he calls God "bro" is something unexpected and makes for humorous content. Lastly, Example 9 provides us with two unforeseen

responses, Leonard's "I've never slept with her, I swear" and Sheldon's "In Leonard's defense, it wasn't the lack of trying."

When it comes to hostility or disparagement theories, Example 8 is the only one that corresponds to it. In this example, Barney gloats over his friends' inability to arrive at a certain place fast enough. Although he is not explicitly rude, Barney's statements suggest that he finds himself superior to others. In addition to that, he even claims that he would be able to eat his dinner and still arrive at the said restaurant before his friends, probably wishing that they feel slow and stupid. Similarly to Sheldon, Barney is a specific character that is flawed in a charming and recognizable way. When it comes to Barney, bragging is something expected. However, going so far to equate Marshall's question to ordering a steak was somewhat surprising and resulted in audiences' laughter. Furthermore, comedic content corresponding to release theories can be seen in Examples 10, 11 and 12. As stated in the chapter dedicated to theories of humor, it was not surprising for release theories to be present when it came to violating Grice's maxim of manner. Since humor of release theories is reliant on homonyms, puns and other kinds of word play, we can say that it corresponds to all three examples that depict the violation of Grice's maxim of manner. However, all of the examples show a different side of the manner maxim. Specifically, in Example 10, Monica and Chandler are having a conversation only using metaphors. During their conversation, Monica equates herself with delicious food that was served to Chandler. Chandler immediately understands Monica's metaphor and uses it in his own response by saying that the food looked great at first, but later made everybody sick. When it comes to Example 11, Robin is talking to Lily about her date. However, when Marshall sits next to them, Robin decides on swapping or removing certain words from her story in order for him to be clueless about what she was saying. Lastly, Example 12 uses word play to create a humorous situation. Specifically, due to Raj and Howard's childish sense of humor, they intentionally misinterpret the word *wood* as erection.

When it comes to humor, Mulkay (1988) finds it important to analyze the idea of a standardized joke. He explains the term by saying that the word *standardized* does not refer to the content of the joke, but rather to its organization. Specifically, Mulkay discusses the value of a punchline, saying that it has to be unexpected in order to be considered good, therefore also corresponding to the incongruence theories of humor. Even though sitcoms such as *Friends*, *How*

*I Met Your Mother* and *The Big Bang Theory* do sometimes opt for standardized jokes, I would not say that the majority of their humor derives from them. Specifically, it was difficult to find an appropriate standardized joke that I could incorporate into my work. Moreover, given that standardized jokes consist of two liners followed up by the punchline, I was unable to find one that can be analyzed in terms of conversational maxims. In view of this, standardized jokes were not a suitable choice for the analysis of Grice's maxims that I wanted to conduct.

Mulkay (1988) also argues that humor is a social phenomenon. What he means by social is that any kind of message has to be recognized and deciphered in order to cause an appropriate reaction. The idea of humor lies in the fact that the cooperation between interlocutors must be successful in order to be interpreted in the right way. What was discussed in the second chapter is the relationship between the sitcom and the audience. In simple terms, the social interaction happening on screen must be deciphered by the people watching. In the case of sitcoms, that social interaction is inherently funny and the audience is expected to react to it. Therefore, since the spectators cannot influence the conversation happening on screen, they participate in the communication process by laughing. Given that laughter is the appropriate response to humorous content, it is no surprise that sitcom creators often opt for the use of recorded laughter. According to Markanović (2015), recorded laughter functions as a reminder for the audience to engage in what is happening on screen.

The chapter dedicated to analyzing the violation of Grice's maxims was divided into four categories: quantity, quality, relation and manner. Each of the categories was thoroughly explained through three examples, alternating between sitcom *Friends*, *How I Met Your Mother* and *The Big Bang Theory*. The examples were primarily analyzed in terms of Grice's work on conversational maxims and implicatures and were occasionally enriched with data referencing Knox and Schwind (2019). The analysis aimed to explain the comedic effect the violation of Grice's maxims has when it comes to situational comedies. The information that was retrieved shows that all the chosen examples had a significant humorous effect that was almost exclusively based on violation of one or more Grice's maxims. Additionally, the analysis suggests that the comedic effect was majorly alleviated by the accompanying body language, facial expressions as well as pitch and tone of the actors' voice, e.g. Examples 4 and 6. While the majority of examples exhibit instances of single maxim violation, thorough analysis allows us to take into account the possibility of several maxims

being violated in a single conversational setting. Although the categories within the chapter dedicated to the analysis of maxim violation were aimed to be well defined and unambiguous, the results have shown several situations in which there were more than one maxim violations. In order for the chapters to remain organized, those examples with more than one maxim violations were placed under categories depending on the order of maxim violations and whether there were two or more of certain maxim violations in one example, e.g. Example 1 (quantity (Rachel) – relation (Ross) – quantity (Ross)). Similarly, Examples 3 and 9 depict humorous situations resulting from violations of quantity and relation maxims. Since the only instances of two maxims violations in a single setting were those that violated quantity and relation, we could say that the two are the most logical and appropriate maxim violation pairing when it comes to creating humorous content, at least on the basis of twelve examples chosen for this analysis. Therefore, it is important to look back on the explanations of the two maxims and see their possible interconnection.

Grice introduces the maxim of quantity as the way of appropriately contributing to a conversation in terms of recognizing the appropriate amount of information that needs to be provided in order for the conversation to flow. According to Grice, the conversation should be as informative as is required. When it comes to the maxim of relation, Grice simply instructs interlocutors to be relevant. Given that the violation of Grice's maxim of relation is a common way to introducing a new topic to a conversation, it is no surprise that interlocutors often follow it up with providing more information on it, therefore also violating the maxim of quantity. What is important to note is that the maxim of relation can be violated intentionally or accidentally. Specifically, when it comes to *The Big Bang Theory*, Sheldon is the person that violates the maxims of quantity and relation most often. However, due to the nature of his character, it is typical of Sheldon to be the person that provides unrelated information or fun facts, making it a recognizable humorous device present in the overall sitcom. In the Example 1, Ross mentions sea horses to Rachel in order to come across as a supportive partner and a good father to their unborn child. Although one might not consider Ross's contribution to the conversation irrelevant because he provides an explanation a few moments later, my approach during the analysis was to disregard my background knowledge and focus on what is actually being said. We could go so far to argue that Rachel never even asked Ross to empathize with her because they both knew he could not do anything that would make her feel better, let alone carry their baby. Nevertheless, in terms of discourse analysis, Ross made an unnecessary contribution to the conversation by saying he wishes

to be a sea horse to his pregnant partner, therefore violating Grice's maxim of relation. Additionally, Ross violates the maxim of quantity by further explaining his thought process – male sea horses are those carrying babies, meaning he would carry their baby if he could. Even though the explanation of the notion of pregnancy in sea horses does provide additional information of the topic that was previously introduced, Rachel did not ask Ross to clarify. If she did, Ross' response would be considered appropriate and would be in accordance with Grice's maxim of quantity.

When it comes to Example 3, we can say Sheldon violates the maxims of quantity and relation at the same time. What is interesting about this example is that it exactly corresponds to Saul's (2002) example in which a person asks for salt by saying: "Can you pass the salt?", which was analyzed in the chapter titled *The theory of conversational implicatures*. Even though thorough analysis of the situation from *The Big Bang Theory* suggests that Raj tried to make a polite request instead of asking for clarification, we could say that Sheldon either misunderstood him or blatantly ignored him. Specifically, this conversational setting expected of interlocutors to understand social cues and implied meaning. Interlocutors were meant to act accordingly – in this case, hand the ketchup. However, instead of handing Raj the ketchup, Sheldon provided his friends with irrelevant information on the origin of ketchup. Due to the fact that Sheldon needlessly decided on giving more information than necessary, he violated the maxim of quantity. Moreover, his overall misinterpretation of Raj's request resulted in Sheldon violating the maxim of relation.

Example 9 depicts a conversation between Leonard and his girlfriend Stephanie. Leonard was under a lot of pressure to maintain his relationship with Stephanie, so he had a hard time coming up with a good cover story for Penny, his former love interest. After several snarky remarks, Stephanie passive aggressively looked at Leonard until he came clean about his association to Penny. However, instead of saying: "I'll explain later", Leonard panicked and said: "I've never slept with her, I swear", therefore violating Grice's maxim of relation. Even though the possible options for avoiding Stephanie's question would probably be suspicious, they would be more appropriate than disclosing a person's sexual history in a room full of people. Nevertheless, even though Leonard wanted to provide Stephanie with the answer she would deem as the most appropriate, he did the exact opposite. In fact, Stephanie frowned and looked at Leonard in a way that read: "This is not the last time we talk about this." Although the conversation

was supposed to end there, Sheldon interjected with a comment that violated both the maxim of relation as well as the maxim of quantity. Since Leonard wanted to come across as uninterested in his attractive neighbor, he tried separating himself by implying that he never had anything to do with Penny, moreover, that he never slept with her. Even though Leonard was interested enough to ask Penny on a date and kiss her a few months prior to this situation, we cannot really consider his statement to be a violation of Grice's maxim of quality because the two actually never slept together. However, Sheldon decided to provide additional information on the topic of Penny and Leonard's relationship by disclosing that the two actually had a history, that is, that Leonard was interested in Penny and tried to sleep with her on several occasions.

## 8. Conclusion

Situational comedies have captivated the viewers' attention since the beginning of television and remained relevant to this day, providing us with some of the most recognizable characters in television history. Accordingly, the unceasing infatuation with sitcoms set off a variety of researchers such as Attalah (2003), Berman (1987), Dalton and Linder (2005), Morreale (2003) and Savorelli (2003) to tackle the issue of what made watching them so enjoyable for such a long period of time. Therefore, this thesis discussed the perpetual interest for comedy in terms of explaining the basis of humor and its social aspect. However, with the exception of Mulkey (1988), it was relatively difficult to find a study that explored the sociology behind humor in great detail. Hence, it could be beneficial to consult more research on the same topic for a variety of approaches on the objective. The works referenced in this study provide the reader with not only the theoretical aspect of understanding sitcoms as a genre, but the underlying intent of humorous content that occurs on screen. Since *Friends*, *How I Met Your Mother* and *The Big Bang Theory* could be considered as a few of the most popular television programs in the entertainment history, deciding on which series to analyze was not a challenging task. The analysis was based on the pragmatic ideas of the late Paul Grice with emphasis on conversational maxims and their violations in terms of the chosen examples. Accordingly, the collected material aimed to demonstrate the violations of conversational maxims and the humorous effect that it results in. While the majority of the findings suggest that humor is derived from dialogues rather than monologues, several examples indicate that body language and tone of voice also play a crucial role in carrying out certain jokes. Furthermore, the study demonstrated the possibility of multiple maxim violations during a single scene, emphasizing the importance of appropriate word choices and evaluating settings in which the conversation is taking place. Finally, since the chosen series all center on a friend group of young adults navigating through life, it would be interesting to look into sitcoms with a more diverse set of characters and compare the humor that they depict.



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