



A Discourse Analysis Study of Comic Words in the American and British Sitcoms

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Abstract

*This paper investigates discourse analysis and its role in studying comic words and their meaning in different contexts. This study aims at showing the relation between discourse analysis and comedy or comic words, presenting the types of comedy and comic words and how they give the meaning of mocking, teasing and sarcasm, presenting the difference between mocking, teasing and sarcasm, displaying interjections and their relation with comic words, in addition to analyzing the data in terms of tables. It is hypothesized that many people do not know the meaning of discourse analysis and comedy. Second, they do not have the capacity to differentiate between comedy, mocking, sarcasm and teasing. They also do not know how to use comic words in expressions. Above all, many of them cannot analyze a particular episode properly and people cannot know the intentions of the speaker concerning comic words. The value of this study is for people who are interested in linguistics. The data used in this study are the American sitcom friends and the British one which is bottom. The theory used for analyzing data is the Cooperative Principle and Tafflinger model. There are many questions concerning this study, for instance, is comedy considered as a type of discourse? How many main types of comedy and are they considered as types of comic words? Is there any relation between comedy and discourse? What are comic words and their types? What is the relation between comedy, mocking, teasing and sarcasm? Is there any relation between interjections and comic words? The results of "Friends", the American sitcom and "Bottom", the British one, show that there are many comic words. The characters use interjections or onomatopoeia to communicate laughter and excitement. The use of teasing is also emphasized by the use of other comic words like: a*s, breasts, and idiot for presenting jokes and laughter sense.*

Keywords: *discourse analysis, comic words, mocking, teasing and sarcasm;*

Section One Introduction

1.1 Preliminary Remarks

This paper highlights the correlation between comedy and discourse analysis, or the analysis of comic words in American and British sitcoms. Comedy is considered as a type of discourse that is used for the sake of humor in order to amuse the hearers or the participants in the discourse. It introduces laughter that is characterized as a human behavior which makes humans elucidate their purposes, intentions and opinions in social interaction. Comedy is presented in any medium of entertainment. For instance, theatre, television, film, stand-up comedy, sitcoms, etc.

Many issues are tackled in this study. First, people misunderstand what is meant by discourse analysis, comedy, comic words in specific and the use of comic words in American and British sitcoms. Second, many people do not know how to analyze a piece of discourse and show how the comic words are used. Third, presenting and recognizing comic words are somehow a problematic matter for people, because they sometimes cannot decide the exact use of words or from which type they belong. Moreover, a great number of people may misunderstand the communicative intentions behind saying a specific comic word and they might use such kind of words with the wrong people and wrong situations.



Section Two

Discourse Analysis: A Literature Review

2.1 Preliminary Remarks

To begin with, the term discourse is defined by Matthews [1] as any combination of sentences in written form or any series of speech events in which sequential sentences or utterances come together. This term is used for both spoken and written language, or for any model of language used for any study. According to Johnstone [2], discourse, denotes actual patterns of communicative action that is occurred in the medium of language, or it is the “meaningful symbolic behavior”. So, discourse analysis is the analysis of language in use, [3]. Jaworski and Coupland [4] state that discourse analysis falls into three classes: (1) what is beyond the sentence pattern, (2) the use of language, and (3) the variety of social practice and behaviour which consists of instances of language that are non-linguistic and nonspecific.

There is a relation between relevance theory and discourse. Relevance theory concentrates on the connection between meaning and context, both text-external and text-internal context. Discourse analysis adds structure to this connection but focuses on text-internal context. Discourse is not an unorganized mass; it has both structural and conceptual patterns, and readers and hearers use both for the sake of delivering contextual assumption to interpret the text, (ibid).

2.2 Comedy

A comedy can be defined as a work in which the materials are chosen and ordered so as to amuse and interest people: the characters attract the persons' delighted attention because the latter feels that no disaster will happen and the action is happily done. The term 'comedy' is usually applied to plays and the comic form also occurs in narrative poetry and prose fiction, [5]

Laughter creates laughter; this means that a little thoughtless laughter creates thoughtful laughter. Almost always comedy presents different situations that are more potential, serious, and believable than farce. The laughter of comedy can be “warm laughter” in which people pass through problems with one another. It can also be “corrective laughter” of satire which is directed from a gentle to a savage one. The comedy of ideas uses situations and employs characters to create “thoughtful laughter”. All comedy, as the branches of a tree that are related to the trunk, is related with the sense of humor or comic vision, [6]

2.3 Types of Comedy

There are different main types of comedy that are listed under the comedy type: **Comedy of Errors, Comedy of Manners, Sentimental Comedy, Comedy of Humors, and Farce Comedy**

2.4 Comics

The modern comic artist Chris Ware as mentioned in Cohn [7], states that, “Comics are not a genre, but a developing language.” In fact, comics are a social matter which is created as a result of two human behaviors: writing and drawing. The images that are arranged in a logical order and used in comics shape their own visual language. The term comics is the way of expressing ideas and attitudes by images and usually joined with texts that are frequently characterized for being funny. Comics by themselves are not a language, but they are written in visual languages such as the ways which novels or magazines are written in English.

Section Three

The Adopted Models

The adopted models are so helpful in analyzing the data. In this study, the models used for analysis are the theory of Cooperative Principle which consists of Grice maxims and Taflinger's Model. These two models are significant in analyzing comic words.

3.1 Grice Maxims' Model

Grice [8] discusses the cooperative principle which is considered as a guide for communication between two participants within a conversation. He explains four maxims that are existed as a component for any conversation: **The Quality Maxim, The Quantity Maxim, The Maxims of Relation, and The Maxims of Manner;**



3.2 Taflinger’s Model

Taflinger’s [9] states the following three elements are required for something to be humorous:

- 1) **It must appeal to the intellect rather than the emotions;**
- 2) **The situation and its parts (the actions performed and the dialogue spoken) must be inconsistent or unsuitable to the surrounding or associations.**
- 3) **It must be perceived by the observer as harmless or painless to the participants.**

Section Four Data Analysis

4.1 Data Collection

The data for analysis is the American sitcom ‘friends’ and the British one which is ‘bottom’. Both of them are chosen as a data for comic words, because they are sitcoms or funny series which are considered as a helpful tool to be dealt with.

4.2 Friends

The American television sitcom ‘Friends’ is created by David Crane and Marta Kauffman. It is aired from September 22, 1994 to May 6, 2004.

Table (1) The Comic Words and their Categories

Comic word	Category	Meaning	Season	Episode	Line
A*s	Teasing	Bad meaning	1	101	11
Awww	Primary interjections	Disgust	3	321	19
B*****s	Mockery	Shows breasts	1	113	21
breasts	Teasing	-	1	113	26
Huh	Primary interjections	Relief	1	113	39
Idiot	Teasing	Expresses stupidity	3	321	4
oh	Primary interjections	Emotions to pleasure	1	101	8
Oooh	Primary interjections	Emotions to pleasure	1	101	4
Oops	Primary interjections	Astonishment	1	113	7
Precious	Sarcastic	Expresses the opposite	1	101	8
Uhhuh	Primary interjections	understanding	1	113	42
Whoah-whoah	Onomatopoeic word	laugh	1	113	34
Woo-hoo	Onomatopoeic word	Excitement	3	321	22
Wow	Primary interjections	Excitement	3	321	14
Wow	Primary interjections	Excitement	3	321	26

In the American sitcom ‘Friends’, the results show that there are many comic words. The characters use mostly primary interjections (like ooh, oh, oops, whoah-whoah, huh, uhhuh, wow. etc.) to reflect the characterization and the essence of laughter. The use of teasing is also emphasized by the appearance of other comic words like: ass, breasts, and idiot. The purpose behind such appearance is for presenting jokes and laughter sense. There is a use of sarcastic category such as precious to imply an opposite meaning for the sake of amusement. Furthermore, there is a sense of denoting mockery by the use of boobies to depict the spectacle of the unkind laughter or to make fun of someone.



4.3 Bottom

The second sitcom is Bottom which is a British television sitcom produced by Adrian Edmondson and Rik Mayall that originally aired on BBC2 from 17 September 1991 to 10 April 1995 across three series.

Table (2) The Comic Words and their Categories

Comic word	category	Meaning	Season	Episode	Line
Ah	Interjection	Expresses joy	1	1	9
bastard	Secondary interjections	Mocking	2	6	29
Da-la da-la	Sarcasm	laughter	2	6	1
Ha ha ha ha	Onomatopoeic word	Communicates laughter	1	1	3,15
Ha-ha-ha	Onomatopoeic word	laughter	2	6	17
Hoh	Interjection	surprise	1	1	16
Shit	Secondary interjections	-	2	6	4
Shit	Secondary interjections	Violence	2	6	28
stupid	Secondary interjections	Mocking	2	6	29

For the British sitcom 'Bottom', the results exhibit also the frequent use of comic words. Being in the visible scene, the characters use considerably interjections or onomatopoeia such as (ha ha ha ha, ah, hoh, da-la da-la, shit, ha-ha-ha, stupid and bastard) to communicate laughter, humour, and excitement. In addition, the characters use sarcasm to display humorous sense during the episode and the repetition of ha-ha word to communicate laughter.

Section Five The Adopted Models

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Section Seven Conclusion

7.1 Major Findings

In both sitcoms, "Friends", the American one and "Bottom", the British one, the results show that there are many comic words. The characters use mostly primary interjections or onomatopoeia (like ooh, oh, oops, whoah-whoah, huh, uhhuh, wow, ha ha ha ha, ah, hoh, da-la da-la, shit, ha-ha-ha, stupid and bastard) to communicate laughter, humour, and excitement. The use of teasing is also emphasized by the appearance other comic words like: ass, breasts, and idiot, the purpose behind such appearance is for presenting jokes and laughter sense. In addition to the use of sarcasm to display humorous sense during the episode as "precious" for implying opposite meaning in order to amuse the hearers.

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