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MA THESIS

**SUPERIORITY THEORY OBSERVED ON THE
SATIRICAL NEWSPAPER *THE ONION***

**TEORIJA SUPERIORNOSTI NA PRIMJERU
SATIRIČNIH NOVINA *THE ONION***

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November, 2023

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of Grice's cooperative principle maxims in creating humor within newspaper headlines. A diverse set of headlines, ranging from political and social issues to everyday scenarios, is analyzed to investigate how these maxims are followed, bent, or violated to convey humor. The results demonstrate that while humorous headlines can adhere to these maxims, they often employ irony, exaggeration, and unexpected juxtaposition to subvert them, generating amusement and engagement. Furthermore, the study explores whether humor can be achieved without relying on irony and highlights that clever wordplay, puns, absurdity, and unexpected combinations also contribute to humor in headlines. This research sheds light on the multifaceted nature of humor in journalism and provides insights into how headlines effectively engage readers while addressing critical issues.

Keywords: Humor, Grice's Cooperative Principles, The Theory of Superiority, newspaper headlines, irony, *The Onion*.

APSTRAKT

Ovaj rad istražuje upotrebu Griceovih maksima kooperativnosti u stvaranju humora novinskih članaka. U cilju istraživanja načina kako funkcionišu maksime, te da li se one poštuju ili pak krše, analiziran je raznovrstan skup naslova koji obuhvata političke i društvene teme, kao i svakodnevne događaje. Rezultati pokazuju da, iako humoristički naslovi mogu slijediti ove maksime, često koriste ironiju, preuveličavanje i neočekivanu kontradiktornost. Nadalje, rad istražuje može li se postići humor bez oslanjanja na ironiju i ističe da pametna igra riječima, kalamburi, apsurd i neočekivane kontradikcije također doprinose humoru u naslovima. Ovo istraživanje se fokusira i na višeslojnu prirodu humora u novinarstvu i pruža uvide u to kako naslovi koji se bave ključnim pitanjima uspješno privlače pažnju čitatelja.

Ključne riječi: Humor, Griceovi principi kooperativnosti, Teorija učtivosti, naslovi novinskih članaka, ironija, *The Onion*.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, many studies have focused on humor, and experts from various fields have attempted to clarify and comprehend this concept. Linguistics is no exception, and linguists have developed various methods to investigate humor and analyze its different forms and expressions. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of what humor is and what it can entail. This paper will focus on an interesting form of humor and the idea that humor arises from the mockery of others or oneself. We will attempt to explore this phenomenon thoroughly by resorting to multiple linguistic theories, including the Superiority Theory, the pragmatic theory of Politeness, and Grice's Cooperative Principles.

This will be applied to a corpus comprising satirical headlines found in The Onion. This news organization uses satire to create humorous articles that parody current events and popular trends. Known for its use of exaggeration, irony, and sarcasm, The Onion covers a wide range of topics including politics, culture, and entertainment. Founded in 1988 as a print publication, The Onion has since expanded to include a website and various social media channels.

The aim of this paper is to attempt to find answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: Can humorous headlines follow Grice's cooperative principle maxims?

RQ2: Can newspaper headlines achieve humor without irony?

OUTLINE OF THE PAPER

Although humor is a familiar concept to everyone, approaching it from a scientific perspective requires prior knowledge of relevant theories. This is particularly true for the specific type of humor examined in this study. Thus, the first section of this paper will provide readers with the necessary theoretical framework and linguistic theories to understand and conduct the corpus analysis. The second section will explain the methodology of the analysis and describe the newspaper and its analyzed topics. The third section will present an analysis of the corpus using the theories presented in the first section to answer the research questions posed. In the fourth and

final section, the paper summarizes the previous sections and presents the main conclusions drawn from the analysis. In addition, it will offer recommendations for future research based on the findings of this study.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

ABOUT HUMOR

From a linguistic standpoint, humor is the use of words to make people laugh and find it amusing. It includes various language devices, such as wordplay, inconsistency, ambiguity, exaggeration, irony, and sarcasm. Scholars and linguists have investigated a various ideas and viewpoints on humor, frequently looking at the language components that contribute to humorous effects. Crafting a succinct definition of humor has proven to be a complex endeavor, given the challenge of arriving at a universally accepted explanation. Humor has dual significance, both in form and content (Gaut,1998).With regard to the humorous content, Gaut emphasizes semblance of truth and the interplay between such beliefs. In regards to form, humor can manifest itself in verbal and non-verbal (written) forms. For this study, our focus will be on written humor, specifically the notion of mockery of others or oneself. Salvatore Attardo in his book “Linguistic Theories of Humor” (1994) suggests that a pragmatic definition best encapsulates humor, asserting that humor is the textual expression that elicits laughter as its intended response. However, laughter can arise from various other situations, such as fear, discomfort, or embarrassment. Another eminent philosopher, Morreall, in “Taking Laughter Seriously” (1983) categorizes humor theories into three main classes:

- The Theory of Superiority – suggests that humor can be considered as a means of conveying one’s sense of being superior over others.
- The Relief Theory – mainly focuses on the psychological impact of humor on the recipient and views laughter as a release of pent-up nervous energy (p. 20).
- The Incongruity Theory – this theory suggest that humor comes from the presence of two conflicting elements, and that amusement is an occurrence of something that is unexpected, illogical, or inappropriate in some way (p.15).

The above-mentioned classes/theories have been only briefly explained because, this paper mainly focuses on the Theory of Superiority.

NEWSPAPER HEADLINES AND HUMOR

Humorous newspaper headlines are a delightful aspect of journalism that often captures readers' attention and provides a moment of levity among the seriousness of news reporting. These headlines are crafted to be witty, clever, or even absurd, and they use language to create humor. Some characteristics of newspaper headlines can be further dissected into the following:

- **Wordplay and Puns:** Humorous headlines often use puns, playing with words that have multiple meanings or phonetic similarities to create a comedic effect.
- **Double Entendre:** headlines have a hidden, humorous or risqué meaning.
- **Unexpected Pairings:** Headlines that use humor often combine unexpected elements, resulting in absurd or comical outcomes.
- **Exaggeration:** These headlines use exaggerated hyperbole to create humor.
- **Situational Humor:** Some headlines derive humor from real-life situations that are unusual or absurd.
- **Parodies and Satire:** From time to time, newspapers release satirical headlines that mock actual news events, political situations, or social issues. These headlines amuse and stimulate reflection.

Humorous headlines play multiple roles in journalism. They catch the reader's eye, offer a break from serious news, and display the fun and imaginative aspects of reporting. Although they are not the primary focus of a newspaper, these headlines add to a rich reading experience and provide a moment of pleasure among the daily news intake. (Jaki, 2014)

Lexical substitutions in newspaper headlines are examined in this chapter. These substitutions involve replacing a word or phrase in a well-known headline or idiom with a related term, often resulting in humorous or unexpected meanings. Lexical substitutions are a form of wordplay and can be classified as manifestations of disparagement theories. (Jaki, 2014)

Notably, not all lexical substitutions are inherently humorous, but they can evoke amusement through the establishment of a feeling of superiority. This feeling arises when readers recognize the incongruity between the original and substituted elements, allowing them to feel clever or superior for understanding the humor. (Jaki, 2014)

In "*Phraseological Substitutions in Newspaper Headlines*", Sylvia Jaki (2014) argues that the perception of humor in newspaper headlines is subjective and context-dependent. Several factors influence whether a headline achieves a humorous effect:

- **Formal Incongruity:** Humor often arises from a formal discrepancy between the substituens (the modified element) and substituendum (the canonical form), creating a cognitive surprise for readers. For example, consider the headline: "New Study of Obesity Looks for Larger Test Group." The incongruity lies in the notion that a study on obesity would require a "larger" test group in a physical sense, when, in fact, it refers to a broader sample size for research purposes. This incongruity between physical size and research scope is what triggers the humor. (Jaki, 2014)
- **Script Opposition:** Lexical substitutions activate two opposing scripts, contributing to the perception of humor. In this context, readers may experience a sense of superiority by deciphering the incongruity. For example, consider the headline: "Cents and Sensibility." Initially, readers may interpret it in the context of Jane Austen's novel "Sense and Sensibility." However, the unexpected substitution of "Sense" with "Cents" introduces a financial script, creating incongruity and humor. (Jaki, 2014)
- **Taboos and Controversial Topics:** Headlines that touch upon societal taboos or controversial subjects may elicit stronger reactions from readers. The recognition of these taboos can make readers feel superior in understanding the underlying humor. For instance, a headline like "Prostitutes Appeal to Pope" employs a double entendre and touches on a

taboo subject matter. Humor arises from the playful interpretation of the word "appeal" in both a legal and a more provocative context. (Jaki, 2014)

- **Simplicity vs. Complexity:** Simpler substitutions may be perceived as funnier than complex ones, as they are more accessible to a broader audience. Readers may feel superior for quickly grasping the humor. In contrast, overly complex substitutions or those requiring extensive background knowledge may not resonate with a broader audience. Simplicity often wins regarding humor in headlines because it allows a wider range of readers to engage with and enjoy the humor. (Jaki, 2014)

Humor in newspaper headlines is a nuanced blend of various elements, including formal incongruity, script opposition, the use of taboos, and striking the right balance between simplicity and complexity. Skillfully composing headlines that incorporate these factors allows writers and editors to captivate readers, evoke laughter, and offer a sense of intellectual satisfaction when readers unravel the clever wordplay and incongruity.

Newspaper headlines serve as a dynamic fusion of serious news delivery and have the potential for linguistic creativity. The theory of superiority, rooted in disparagement theories of humor, plays a pivotal role in both crafting and appreciating humor in headlines. While the perception of humor in headlines is subjective and context-dependent, it remains a potent tool for engaging readers, conveying information effectively, and enabling readers to feel a sense of superiority by grasping clever wordplay and incongruity. As readers encounter witty and unexpected headlines, the dynamic interplay between language and humor in journalism continues to evolve, offering fresh avenues for exploration and research.

SUPERIORITY THEORY

In the realm of philosophical inquiry, the intricate relationship between humor and philosophy has often been overlooked, despite the underlying affinity that connects these seemingly disparate domains. The origins of this neglect, as proposed by John Morreall (1987) in his work "The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor," trace back to the historical development of a theory known as the Superiority Theory.

The Superiority Theory asserts that laughing is essentially directed toward others as a sort of mockery or as a display of one's perceived superiority over others. It was first popularized by Plato and Aristotle and has its origins in Greek thought. According to this idea, humor is a potentially malicious behavior that draws attention to the flaws of others for personal amusement. It also places humor in an unethical context. Even wit is seen from this perspective; Aristotle described it as "educated insolence" (Morreall, 1987). As a result, this perspective creates an ambiguous attitude toward humor, defining it best as a risky endeavor that necessitates restraint.

The Superiority Theory associates humor with unworthiness, which has historically caused it to be disregarded within the philosophical canon. However, it does not explicitly prohibit inquiry into philosophy. Despite being based on few examples and sometimes ignoring nuances, the theory's lasting supremacy over millennia is an example of how it has influenced societal views about humor.

Morreall's analysis reveals the gradual unraveling of the superiority theory's dominance over time. The recognition that laughter need not invariably be tied to scorn or feelings of superiority emerged only relatively recently, marking a significant shift from the previously entrenched perspective (Morreall, 1987). This discovery invites a reevaluation of the link between laughter and scorn, and consequently, the true essence of humor, centuries after the theory's origin.

It is crucial to emphasize the demand for clarity in the definition of important terminology. The term "laughter," which refers to a complex interplay of physiological reactions, is unique in that it frequently results from sensory or perceptual cues and is involuntary or semi-voluntary. The

broader category of "amusement" encompasses the agreeable occupation of attention, while "humor" emerges when amusement is directed toward a specific conceptual shift. This distinction highlights the interconnected yet distinct nature of these terms, preventing the conflation of different laughter scenarios and ensuring a more nuanced exploration (Morreall, 1987).

Furthermore, great thought must be given to historical and semantic problems. Given that the meanings of words like "humor" and "amusement" have changed over time, it is important to acknowledge pre-seventeenth-century variations in their definitions. Modern interpretations express a broader, all-encompassing perspective that modern philosophers use in their pursuits, departing from past literary contexts.

In light of these considerations, this thesis endeavors to unravel the complexities of the superiority theory and its impact on the philosophical discourse surrounding humor. With a clear understanding of the terminology and foundational concepts, subsequent chapters will delve into the nuances of the theory itself and its implications for our understanding of humor's intricate relationship with philosophy.

IRONY

The examination of irony involves understanding its characteristics, comprehension, and utilization, revealing recurring aspects such as opposition, contradiction, and incongruities. However, the complexity arising from the various forms of irony and the mechanisms employed to create these contrasts makes it challenging to establish a clear definition.

Scholars have observed distinctions between irony in real-life events and its manifestation in language or human communication, with greater scholarly focus on the latter. Situational irony refers to contradictions or coincidences within situations. For example, a news story recounted an incident in which a woman stole a Bible from a Walmart store, an act contradictory to the Bible's teachings against theft (Colston, 2017). Conversely, verbal irony, which has garnered more

attention, involves expressing ironic contradictions through spoken or written language in relation to actual events (Colston, 2017).

Various forms of irony encompass sarcasm, ironic praise, ironic criticism, hyperbole, understatement, ironic analogy, and ironic restatement. Sarcasm, a type of negative verbal irony, often amplifies negativity. Other forms, such as ironic criticism and ironic praise, convey negativity through seemingly positive or negative statements, respectively. Hyperbole exaggerates the magnitude of a subject, while understatement downplays it. Ironic analogy involves employing analogical constructions to convey irony (Colston, 2017).

Verbal irony serves multiple purposes, including managing the expression of negativity. Sarcasm, a prominent form, aligns with negativity management because of its negative connotations. Verbal irony and sarcasm convey nuanced meanings for speakers, addressing concerns related to face among interlocutors, achieving social and interactional objectives, and balancing conflicting communicative intentions and requirements (Colston, 2017). Speakers can manipulate nuances of expression through humor, contrast, and other tools inherent in figurative language.

GRICE'S COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE AND MAXIMS

In the realm of linguistics and pragmatics, conversation is not a random sequence of utterances but a cooperative effort guided by implicit rules and shared intentions. Grice (1975) introduced the concept of the cooperative principle (CP) and its associated maxims to explain the cooperative nature of conversations. The CP suggests that participants in a conversation strive to align their contributions with the accepted purpose or direction of the exchange. This principle is supported by four categories of maxims: Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner.

Quantity Maxim: This category focuses on the quantity of information provided in the conversation. Two key maxims are highlighted:

"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." (Grice, 1975, p 308)

Quality Maxim: The quality category emphasizes truthfulness and accuracy in communication. It encompasses two maxims:

"Do not say what you believe to be false."

"Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence." (Grice, 1975, p 308)

Relation Maxim: This category focuses on relevance in conversation, which may seem simple but can present complexities. Grice acknowledges that problems arise because of the differing types of relevance and shifts between them during dialogue. (Grice, 1975, p 308)

Manner Maxim: Unlike the content-oriented categories, the manner category pertains to how things should be said. The supermaxim here is "Be perspicuous." This category is subdivided into four maxims:

"Avoid obscurity of expression."

"Avoid ambiguity."

"Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)."

"Be orderly." (Grice, 1975, p 309)

These maxims direct participants in conversations to create coherent meaningful interactions. Grice's maxims are specifically intended for conversational purposes, whereas other maxims about moral or social aspects of communication may be postulated.

The violation of maxims, as outlined by Grice (1975), leads to potential misunderstandings or misleading information. However, the intriguing case of humor challenges the notion of cooperation. In humorous exchanges, the speaker raises expectations that are subsequently crushed by an unexpected punchline, violating the maxims. This incongruity often misleads the listener initially, yet humor is ultimately resolved, implying a cooperative nature (Grice, 1975).

An alternative perspective proposed by Raskin (1985) suggests the existence of a distinct cooperative principle for humor. Raskin's humorous CP comprises four maxims:

Maxim of Quantity: "Give exactly as much information as is necessary for the joke."

Maxim of Quality: "Say only what is compatible with the world of the joke."

Maxim of the Relation: "Say only what is relevant to the joke."

Maxim of Manner: "*Tell the joke efficiently.*" (Raskin, 1985, p 104)

TEASING

Teasing, a form of interpersonal communication often laced with humor, can be understood within the framework of the superiority theory of humor in linguistics. This theory posits that humor arises from the perception of being intellectually, morally, or socially superior to a subject or situation. Teasing aligns with this theory by leveraging perceived superiority to create amusement through playful interactions. This section delves into the connection between teasing and the superiority theory of humor.

Teasing has been extensively investigated across a range of contexts, encompassing diverse social interactions such as those within families, among friends, in communities of practice, schools, workplaces, public encounters, and initial interactions (Haugh, 2017). These inquiries have highlighted the multifaceted nature of teasing, categorizing its functions into affective, instrumental, and interpersonal dimensions.

Affective functions are related to the elicitation of both positive and negative emotional responses among participants. This includes playful teasing for amusement, and more covertly aggressive forms intended to irritate, annoy, or embarrass. Some instances amuse the audience while causing discomfort to the target (Haugh, 2017).

Instrumental functions involve teasing's role in signaling moral transgressions, socializing group norms, promoting conformity, and facilitating sensitive social actions such as compliments and criticisms (Haugh, 2017).

Interpersonal functions encompass the accomplishment of relational and identity-related tasks. Teasing contributes to both the establishment of interpersonal solidarity and the formation or maintenance of in-groups, while also excluding others through implicit claims of superiority (Haugh, 2017).

POLITENESS THEORY

In sociocultural situations, communication is essential to form relationships and transmit information. Through the prism of politeness theory, it is possible to understand the complexity of sustaining these connections. By exploring the interdisciplinary significance of politeness theory, we gain a better understanding of the intricacies of interpersonal communication.

Politeness theory goes beyond the simple exchange of information to explore the complex dynamics of interpersonal interactions. Its fundamental idea is the concept of "face," which refers to a person's sense of value or the ideal public persona they like to convey (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This concept has both positive and negative aspects, with the desire for validation and freedom from overwhelming responsibilities. Although these dimensions have common characteristics, their applicability to other cultures varies (Kadar & Haugh, 2013).

Positive face is concerned with the self-image one wants to present and the need for approval, whereas negative face is focused on autonomy and the absence of restrictions. Face-threatening acts (FTAs), which go against to the discussion participants' intended results regarding faces, are what put someone's face at risk. Depending on the objectives of the participants and the surrounding circumstances, several tactics are in use to mitigate these dangers and maintain harmony. The coordinated effort to maintain face is rooted in the interdependence of all parties (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

There are four main categories in which to classify the strategies for maintaining face:

- When goals are explicit, bald on-the-record strategies are used, involving straightforward communication when expediency outweighs worries regarding face implications.
- Off-Record Strategies: These are used when intentions are ambiguous, and these tactics use of subliminal cues such as metaphors or irony to imply intended meaning.
- Positivity in Politeness: These techniques, which are based on building rapport, emphasize shared interests and view the listener as an essential part of an in-group.
- Negative Politeness Strategies: These strategies acknowledge the hearer's autonomy and dislike of imposition by employing formal language or hedging. They are characterized by restraint and reverence.

Scholars such as Lakoff and Leech have made significant contributions to the study of politeness. Lakoff's introduction of guidelines for politeness, behavioral patterns, and language techniques, along with Leech's explanation of the politeness principle and maxims, broadened the theory's scope. However, because of cultural differences and contextual constraints, the use of universalism in politeness theory has been called into question (Ide, 1989).

Politeness is a complex concept that can be influenced by various factors such as changes, maintenance, or improvement. The key is to strike a balance between the needs of the participants, the context, and the end goals. The chosen tactics should be based on these factors, whether they pertain to positive or negative face.

METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative study, which means we will not rely on numerical data or statistics to support or refute the concepts discussed in the theoretical framework and research questions introduced earlier. Instead, our main goal is to clarify these questions by providing examples from the texts we've gathered. These examples are meant to show what we are talking about and hopefully provide a foundation for future research on the topics in this paper. Our analysis will mostly focus on the theories we've outlined in the theoretical framework, especially Grice's Cooperative Principle Maxim, the Theory of Superiority, and the use of irony in the selected headlines.

CORPUS

Because of the nature of this paper, this research will not include any participants nor will any instruments be used to gather the data. The corpus will comprise examples of satirical headlines from the US newspaper, *The Onion*.

The Onion is an American satirical newspaper that has been in publication since 1988. It is known for its humorous and often absurd commentary on current events, politics, and culture. The publication's articles and headlines are intentionally exaggerated and often use irony, parody, and sarcasm to lampoon contemporary issues and trends.

The Onion is a unique blend of social commentary and comedy, offering readers a humorous perspective on news and popular culture. The newspaper's editorial voice is irreverent and subversive, frequently challenging mainstream media narratives and political correctness. It is often described as a "fake news" outlet, but its satire is meant to critique and expose the absurdities of contemporary society rather than deceive readers.

The Onion's style of satire often involves taking a kernel of truth and pushing it to its logical, ridiculous conclusion. The paper's headlines are a hallmark of its style, with many featuring a play on words or a clever twist on a familiar phrase. The newspaper's writers and editors have a reputation for sharp wit and incisive social commentary and have won numerous awards for their work.

While The Onion's humor may not be to everyone's taste, it has become an important cultural touchstone and a significant voice in contemporary political and social discourse. Its

impact has been felt beyond the world of humor, with many of its articles and headlines being widely shared on social media and even cited in academic research.

POLITICS

- Biden Meets With Turkeys Who've Lost Loved Ones To Thanksgiving
- Victorious Senator Vows To Still Fight For Billionaires Who Didn't Funnel Dark Money Into Campaign
- Kamala Harris Loses Benefits After Hours Get Cut At Work
- Republican Voters Given Toll-Free Number To Call If They Witness Legitimate Vote
- Texas Launches Outreach Program To Provide Troubled Teens With Assault Rifles
- Desperate Biden Announces Halloween Will Now Happen Every Month
- Conservatives Warn Watching Drag Shows Could Turn Children Into Attention Seekers
- U.S. Announces It Will Allow Ukrainian Refugees After Deporting 100,000 Central Americans Seeking Asylum
- Biden Vows That If Russia Invades Ukraine, U.S. Will Invade One Country Of Equivalent Value
- Democrats Face New Hurdle After Republicans Gerrymander All Left-Leaning Voters Into Single House District
- Dan Snyder Willing To Sell Washington Commanders To Whitest Bidder

ENTERTAINMENT

- Bouncer At L.A. Club Checking IMDB Pages At The Door
- NFL Owners Announce Secret Meeting To Make Sure They Aren't Colluding Against Lamar Jackson
- Report: 84% Of Super Bowl Ads Specifically Intended To Distract From Human Rights Violation
- NFL Medical Personnel Race For Quickest Ligament Repair During Pro Bowl Surgical Skills Challenge

LOCAL NEWS

- Disappointed Man Reaches Bottom Of Ice Cream Carton Right When He Was Hitting His Stride
- Raceless, Noncorporeal Police Officer Still Brutalizes Black Man

CORPUS ANALYSIS

Headline: *“Conservatives Warn Watching Drag Shows Could Turn Children Into Attention Seekers”*

The headline follows the Maxim of Quantity by providing adequate information to communicate the primary message: "Conservatives warn that watching drag shows could turn children into attention seekers." However, the statement "may cause them to seek attention" lacks specificity and leave room for interpretation, which may intrigue the reader.

The Maxim of Quality states that the headline accurately attributes a statement to conservatives. However, the idea that drag shows could influence children to become attention seekers is presented as a warning based on speculation. This creates a surprising effect and adds humor by exaggerating the relationship between the two.

According to the Maxim of Relation, the headline adeptly links concerns within the conservative community regarding drag shows with their possible influence on children's actions. This introduces an element of surprise and generates a humorous effect by exaggerating the cause-and-effect relationship between the two.

The Maxim of Relation states that the headline is relevant because it connects conservatives' concerns regarding drag shows with the potential behavioral impact it could have on children. The concise wording also contributes to the unexpectedness of the connection, as the simplicity of the statement contrasts with the complexity of the assumed cause-and-effect relationship.

The headline "Conservatives Warn Watching Drag Shows Could Turn Children Into Attention Seekers" effectively utilizes Grice's CP maxims to create humor. The humor in this situation comes from the warning being exaggerated and unexpected. The idea that watching drag shows can cause children to become attention seekers is presented in an overly dramatic way. This creates a feeling of intellectual superiority for those who recognize that such a direct influence is unlikely.

Headline: *“Biden Meets With Turkeys Who’ve Lost Loved Ones To Thanksgiving”*

The headline follows the Maxim of Quantity by providing enough information to convey the main message. It lets the reader know that President Biden is meeting with turkeys who have suffered a Thanksgiving-related loss. However, it intentionally excludes certain details, prompting the reader to explore the content further.

The Maxim of Quality is upheld in the headline, which ensures the veracity of the report by presenting the scenario of President Biden meeting with turkeys who have suffered losses because of Thanksgiving. This approach preserves the accuracy of the information presented to the readers.

The Maxim of Relation is effectively employed in the headline, as it establishes a connection between two seemingly disparate elements: President Biden's meeting and the turkeys' losses. By situating these elements within the context of Thanksgiving, the headline maintains relevance and stimulates a cognitive process in which readers seek to comprehend the relationship between the two.

The Maxim of Manner is observed in the composition of the headline, which is characterized by clarity and concision. The presentation of information is straightforward, thereby facilitating the reader's expeditious comprehension of the intended message.

This headline's humor can be comprehended through the prism of the superiority theory. This theory posits that humor frequently emerges from a feeling of superiority over someone or something. In this instance, the humor arises from the incongruous combination of two elements: President Biden, a human political figure, and turkeys, which are conventionally associated with Thanksgiving dinner. The reader perceives the absurdity of turkeys having "loved ones" and attending a meeting with the president, which generates a sense of intellectual superiority or amusement.

Headline: *“Victorious Senator Vows To Still Fight For Billionaires Who Didn’t Funnel Dark Money Into Campaign”*

First, the Maxim of Quantity is satisfied as the headline provides sufficient information. It communicates that a senator who emerged victorious in an election intends to continue supporting certain billionaires who did not contribute dark money to their campaign. However, the headline excludes specific details, thereby encouraging readers to seek further context.

Secondly, the Maxim of Quality is upheld as the headline maintains truthfulness in its reporting. It presents the scenario as if a senator, despite winning, is pledging support for billionaires who adhered to campaign finance regulations by not funneling dark money into the campaign.

Thirdly, the Maxim of Relation is established as the headline that connects the senator's victory to their commitment to supporting particular billionaires. Although this relationship may appear unusual, it remains relevant within the context of campaign finance and political contributions.

Finally, the Maxim of Manner is satisfied as the headline is structured clearly and concisely, conforming to this maxim. It effectively conveys key information without unnecessary complexity.

This headline's humor can be comprehended through the lens of the theory of superiority. It draws its comedic effect from the incongruity that arises from the juxtaposition of two ostensibly contradictory concepts. On the one hand, there is the idea of a triumphant senator who would ordinarily be anticipated to prioritize the interests of their constituents or address more extensive societal concerns. On the other hand, the senator's pledge to endorse billionaires who refrained from channeling illicit funds into the campaign introduces an element of unexpectedness and irrationality. This incongruity stimulates the reader's sense of intellectual superiority or amusement.

Headline: *“Kamala Harris Loses Benefits After Hours Get Cut At Work”*

This headline adheres to the Maxim of Quantity, which means that it provides sufficient information that, is clear and with an appropriate amount of details for a reader to understand.

The Maxim of Quality is also being adhered to, because the headline implies that Kamala has lost her benefits due to changes in her work hours. Although it may raise some questions, it does not provide false information (to our knowledge).

The Maxim of Manner and the Maxim of Relation are also adhered to. The information provided in the headline is straightforward and concise, and it is relevant and pertinent to the context.

The humor in this headline arises from the incongruity created by juxtaposing two ideas that are usually not associated with high-profile political figures like Kamala Harris (Vice President of the United States of America). On one side, we do have the expectation of political news and actions, which are related to the Vice President, while on the other side, we are introduced with a mundane and relatable topic – having work hours cut and losing benefits, that most people can empathize with. The incongruity between these two seemingly expected topics is what triggers the sense of amusement in the reader.

Headline: *“Republican Voters Given Toll-Free Number To Call If They Witness Legitimate Vote”*

The headline adheres to all four Maxims (Quantity, Quality, Manner and Relation), meaning that the reader does in fact have enough information to make a conclusion upon reading the headline. The information provided can be identified as situational irony, which occurs when there is a contrast between what is expected and what will actually happen. In this headline, the irony lies in the fact that it is highly unexpected for any voter, regardless of their political affiliation, to witness an "illegitimate" vote during a legitimate election. Elections are typically designed to be fair and free of fraud. Therefore, the idea of Republican voters being given a toll-free number to report witnessing "legitimate" votes is ironic because it suggests a scenario that is contrary to what is expected in a democratic election.

Headline: *“Texas Launches Outreach Program To Provide Troubled Teens With Assault Rifles”*

The headline itself is very special, because it violates all Maxims and is considered to be very controversial. The Maxim of Quantity is being violated by stating that troubled teens will be provided with rifles, which is seen as excessive and unnecessary.

The Maxim of Quality is also being violated because, it is stated that the unnecessary government is providing teens with assault rifles, perceiving this statement as false or misleading.

The Manner and Relation Maxims are also being violated because the information provided is shocking and absurd, and the government providing assault rifles to teens is a highly unlikely and unrelated scenario. This absurdity is intended to provoke amusement and make the reader question the logic behind such action, thus creating humor through the violation of expectations.

Headline: *“Desperate Biden Announces Halloween Will Now Happen Every Month”*

This is another example of how Grice’s CP maxims can be violated. The Maxim of Quantity is being violated by suggesting that Halloween occurs every month, which is excessive and contrary to what has been already established (once a year), thus violating the reader’s expectations.

The Maxim of Quality is, once again, seen as a violation because Halloween happening every month is not probable and there is a significant departure from reality.

Again, the headline does not adhere to Manner and Relation Maxims because, the idea does not contribute to any relevant ongoing debates, nor does it have an appropriate structure with clear and concise ideas.

The headline incorporates elements of the theory of superiority by presenting an absurd and shocking scenario. The idea of Halloween happening every month is intentionally exaggerated and unexpected, aiming to provoke amusement and make the reader question the logic behind such an announcement. This creates humor through the violation of expectations.

Headline: *“U.S. Announces It Will Allow Ukrainian Refugees After Deporting 100,000 Central Americans Seeking Asylum”*

It seems like the Maxim of Quantity has been adhered to here because, the headline has provided specific information, such as 100,000 Central Americans. However, this headline lacks additional context or information, which might be considered a violation of the sub-max, which states, “Do not make your contribution more informative than is requested”.

There may also be a violation of the Maxim of Quality, because we are here presented with a contradiction between allowing Ukrainian refugees and deporting Central Americans seeking asylum – this can be seen as conflicting of false information.

The Maxims of Manner and Relation are somewhat followed in this headline. Again, there might be some implications of how the provided information could be seen as misleading and its overall clarity and accuracy.

The headline incorporates elements of the theory of superiority by presenting a situation that is intentionally absurd and contradictory. The idea of allowing Ukrainian refugees after deporting several Central Americans seeking asylum is unexpected and paradoxical. This intentional exaggeration and absurdity provoke amusement and highlight the ironic contrast in U.S. immigration policies.

Headline: *“Biden Vows That If Russia Invades Ukraine, U.S. Will Invade One Country Of Equivalent Value”*

This headline seems to adhere to the Quantity and Quality Maxims, however, the context itself may raise some questions about its truthfulness. The promise to invade a country of “equivalent value” is likely hyperbolic.

The Manner and Relation Maxims are adhered to, the headline is relevant to the hypothetical situation of the U.S. responding to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and the information is presented in a straightforward manner, without unnecessary prolixity.

The idea that the U.S. would invade a country of "equivalent value" in response to an invasion by Russia is humorous because of its extreme and unlikely nature. It emphasizes the irony and absurdity of this response.

Headline: *“Democrats Face New Hurdle After Republicans Gerrymander All Left-Leaning Voters Into Single House District”*

This headline seems to follow all four Maxims, but the Maxim of Quality may have been somewhat violated. This can be seen as a violation because it raises concerns about the accuracy of the claim, as it is highly unlikely that all left-leaning voters have been gerrymandered into a single district.

The theory of superiority is hereby presented by an exaggerated scenario and absurdity. Although gerrymandering is a real and contentious issue in politics, the idea that left-leaning voters would have been placed into a single district is perceived as extreme and unlikely. This exaggeration serves to highlight the absurdity and unfairness of the situation, adding a humorous and satirical element to the headline.

Headline: *“Dan Snyder Willing To Sell Washington Commanders To Whitest Bidder”*

Although controversial, this headline adheres to all Grice’s CP maxims, with slight concerns with regard to the Maxim of Quality because it raised ethical and discriminatory concerns, which would further impact the truthfulness of the headline.

The headline employs irony, specifically dramatic irony, by suggesting that Dan Snyder is willing to sell the team to the "whitest bidder." This ironic twist highlights the absurdity of making such a decision based on race, as it would be widely considered unethical and discriminatory. The audience is expected to recognize the irony and question the morality of such a hypothetical scenario.

The humorous effect is hereby presented in a shocking and provocative scenario, suggesting that the ownership of the team is being determined by racial criteria, which is highly

controversial and socially unacceptable. This exaggeration serves to highlight the absurdity and ethical concerns surrounding the situation, adding a satirical and critical element to the headline.

Headline: *“Bouncer At L.A. Club Checking IMDB Pages At The Door”*

The Maxim of Quantity is hereby satisfied, because it offers sufficient information for the reader. However, regarding the Maxim of Quality, we may be seeing a violation here. The scenario of a bouncer checking IMBD pages at the door is highly unlikely, considering that bouncer only check for groups with IDs. The Manner and Relation Maxims have been seen as relevant, as they suggest a connection between the bouncer’s action of checking IMBD pages in Los Angeles, which is the world’s center of the entertainment industry.

The headline uses situational irony, emphasizing the contrast between the bouncer's seemingly mundane role and the glamorous context of Los Angeles, where actors and celebrities abound. It is ironic that someone in such a location would be focused on IMDb pages, which are unrelated to club entry but highly relevant to the entertainment industry.

Headline: *“NFL Owners Announce Secret Meeting To Make Sure They Aren’t Colluding Against Lamar Jackson”*

The adherence of all four Grice’s CP Maxims are met, with a slight possibility that the Maxim of Quality may be violated. Although the presented information could be seen as factual, it is highly unlikely. The notion that NFL owners would openly announce a secret meeting to address concerns about collusion is paradoxical. This suggests that NFL owners are acknowledging potential wrongdoing in a public and transparent manner, which is an unusual and ironic situation.

The headline uses situational irony by highlighting the contradiction between a "secret meeting" and the openness of the announcement. Secret meetings are, by definition, not supposed to be publicly disclosed. The irony arises from the fact that the meeting's secrecy is compromised by the public announcement, creating a humorous and ironic effect.

Headline: *“Report: 84% Of Super Bowl Ads Specifically Intended To Distract From Human Rights Violation”*

Again, almost all of Grice’s CP maxims have been adhered to, except the Maxim of Quality. The statement that Super Bowl ads are specifically intended to distract from human rights violations can be seen as a factual statement, but it is highly unlikely, because Super Bowl ads are traditionally associated with entertainment, humor, and consumer products rather than addressing serious issues such as human rights violations. The irony arises from the contrast between the expected purpose of Super Bowl ads and the alleged intent described in the headline. This implies that these ads are being used for a purpose opposite to what viewers would typically anticipate.

The notion that a significant percentage of Super Bowl ads might have a specific intent to distract from human rights violations is unexpected and raises questions about the ethics of advertising during such a high-profile event. This element of surprise engages readers and prompts them to think critically about the issue.

Headline: *“NFL Medical Personnel Race For Quickest Ligament Repair During Pro Bowl Surgical Skills Challenge”*

Practically all Grice's CP Maxims were followed, except for the Maxim of Quality. The headline’s humor is being introduced by a surprising and somewhat absurd concept. The idea of NFL medical personnel competing in a "Surgical Skills Challenge" to repair ligaments as quickly as possible during a Pro Bowl event is unexpected and humorous. It plays on the notion that professional athletes' injuries are being treated like a competitive sport, which can be seen as humorous in a dark or absurd way.

The Pro Bowl is an NFL exhibition game where the league's top players showcase their skills, but it does not typically involve medical personnel competing in a surgical skills challenge. The irony lies in the contrast between the expected purpose of the Pro Bowl and the unusual scenario described in the headline. It highlights the absurdity of the situation.

Headline: *“Disappointed Man Reaches Bottom Of Ice Cream Carton Right When He Was Hitting His Stride”*

The headline adheres to all of Grice’s CP Maxims, meaning that it provides sufficient information that, is not false or misleading. Adherence to the Maxim of Relation is a straightforward cause-and-effect relationship between the man’s action (reaching the bottom of the ice-cream carton) and his emotional state (disappointment).

The humorous scenario introduces a situation most people can relate to – the feeling of disappointment of running out of a delicious treat when they are enjoying it the most. It plays on the idea of life’s small frustrations, which can be seen as amusing lightheartedly.

On the other hand, irony lies in the timing: the man reaches the bottom of the carton just when he is hitting his stride. This suggests that in his most joyous moment, his satisfaction was cut short, thereby conveying a lighthearted humorous narrative.

Headline: *“Disappointed Man Reaches Bottom Of Ice Cream Carton Right When He Was Hitting His Stride”*

The headline provides sufficient information to convey its primary message. It introduces the concept of a "raceless, noncorporeal police officer" and their involvement in an incident of brutality against a black man. It provides readers a basic understanding of the situation without going into excessive detail.

It does not violate the maxim of quality. It makes no false claims or presents inaccurate information. However, it does introduce a highly speculative and hypothetical scenario, which is essential for the satire conveys.

The headline effectively links two seemingly contradictory concepts: a "raceless, noncorporeal police officer" and brutality against a Black man. This connection is thought-provoking and unexpected, making readers question the implications and commentary behind such a scenario. It adheres to the maxim of relation by being relevant to current discussions about police brutality and racism.

The headline is clear and concise in its presentation, adhering to the maxim of manner. It does not use unnecessary complexity or convoluted language. However, it intentionally introduces an element of absurdity by describing a "raceless, noncorporeal police officer," which adds a layer of satire and irony to the message.

The humor and critique in this headline stem from the juxtaposition of two contrasting ideas: a police officer who lacks physical form and racial identity brutalizing a Black man. The absurdity of this scenario serves to highlight the persistent issue of police brutality faced by Black individuals in society. Furthermore, it can be seen as a commentary on the dehumanization often associated with police brutality cases. By portraying the police officer as "noncorporeal," it emphasizes the detachment and dehumanization that can occur in instances of police violence.

CONCLUSION

Humor in communication has always been a powerful tool for conveying messages, generating engagement, and sparking critical thinking. This study explored the application of Grice's Cooperative Principle Maxims in headlines from various domains to uncover the ways in which humor is employed to convey messages and create unexpected juxtaposition. The theoretical framework, consisting of Grice's Maxims and theories of humor, provided the basis for our analysis, allowing us to dissect how these principles are used to create humorous headlines.

The corpus analysis of a diverse range of headlines revealed several patterns and techniques employed to evoke humor. Through a close examination of these headlines, we have observed how violations of Maxims, such as Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner, contribute to the creation of humor and satire. These violations often involve the presentation of unexpected or exaggerated scenarios, which, in turn, lead to intellectual superiority, amusement, or critical reflection among readers.

One prevalent form of humor identified in headlines is irony. Situational irony, in particular, was frequently used to highlight the disparity between what is expected and what is presented. This technique allowed headline writers to draw attention to critical issues while simultaneously amusing or engaging the audience. In several instances, headlines juxtaposed serious matters with seemingly unrelated or trivial elements, fostering a sense of intellectual superiority as readers decoded the irony.

Exaggeration and absurdity were also prevalent in the headlines. By amplifying scenarios beyond what is reasonable or by introducing entirely unlikely situations, these headlines provoked laughter and invited readers to ponder the underlying issues. In these cases, humor served as a vehicle for social and political commentary, drawing attention to incongruities and contradictions in society.

In addition, some headlines used humor as a means of critique and commentary. They took advantage of the Maxims to present information that, while adhering to the letter of

communication, intentionally misled readers, forcing them to question the integrity or logic of the presented situation. This form of humor effectively highlighted concerns and challenges within the contexts they addressed.

The theoretical background and corpus analysis presented in this study offer valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of humor in communication. By applying Grice's Maxims and theories of humor to real-world examples, we have demonstrated how humor can be a powerful tool for conveying messages, challenging perceptions, and promoting critical thinking. Humorous headlines, when crafted skillfully, can captivate audiences, provoke thought, and drive conversations on various topics.

This exploration of humor in headlines extends beyond mere amusement; it underscores the importance of effective communication and the ability to engage and inform readers, even in the context of serious or complex issues. By understanding the mechanics of humor in communication, individuals and organizations can harness its potential to foster engagement and facilitate discussions on matters of significance.

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the intricate interplay between Grice's cooperative principle maxims and humor in headlines. It has showcased how humor, when used thoughtfully and strategically, can transcend mere entertainment and become a potent vehicle for conveying messages, encouraging reflection, and sparking dialogue. As humor continues to be a fundamental aspect of human communication, its role in headlines and other forms of discourse should not be underestimated but rather embraced for its unique ability to captivate, inform, and challenge.

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The Onion | America's Finest News Source. (2023, July 31). Retrieved September 8, 2023, from The Onion website: <https://www.theonion.com/>