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**VERBAL IRONY AND HUMOR IN *HOW I MET YOUR MOTHER*,
SEASON 9**

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ABSTRACT

Humor plays an essential role in human life, especially in communication. Researchers study about humor on a wide range of topic, ranging from psychology, sociology, and linguistics. In the linguistics field, there have been many theories developed on the origin and the classification of humor. One type of humor is irony, which receive a considerable amount of attention from researchers. This study is an attempt to apply available theories into practice by analysing humorous ironic language of the characters. The study aims at analysing the way script writers use language to make their audiences laugh. The analysis of utterances by characters in the sitcom series *How I Met Your Mother* indicated four types of irony. In addition, the act of flouting conversational maxims by the characters in the series has led to the incongruity in the utterance, which helps explain the process of humor generation by verbal irony.

Key word: *verbal irony, humor, How I Met Your Mother, film analysis, pragmatics*

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HIMYM:	How I Met Your Mother
ep	episode
s09	season 9

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Humor has always played an important role in our society. A quick look through social media may give us a view on the broad range of humor. Different genres like sitcom, comedy or short stories on radio are great source for scholars to conduct research on this intriguing subject. Humor has been studied extensively in not just one but various fields including psychology and linguistics. There exist several theories to explain the origins of humor.

On a linguist's view, humor is created using languages. Speakers skillfully piece together the lexical items to create the utterance and with the context, they make people laugh. This study focuses on one of the ways language users create humorous utterances – verbal irony. The core theory behind this paper is the neo-Gricean theory where irony is believed to be the incongruity between the literal meaning and the intended meaning which carries a negative evaluation by flouting the first maxim of Quality. The practicality of this theory will be tested through the process of analyzing the episodes in the series *How I Met Your Mother*, season 9.

The content of this thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction into the topic, discusses the purpose of the study. Chapter 2 moves to the definition and previous research on humor, types of humor, its functions together with irony, types of verbal irony, and the relationship between irony and humor. Moreover, information about sitcom genre and the series *How I Met Your Mother* will also be provided in this chapter. The methodology of this thesis will be justified in Chapter 3. The next two units will present the data and the implications resulted from the data collected. Limitations of the study and suggestion for future research are also discussed in the last chapter.

1.1 Statement of research problem and research questions

As an undergraduate in the English Language Department of University of Languages and International Studies – Hanoi National University, I am interested in pragmatic and language uses. I have participated in the student research program while being a junior in college; thus, I have some experiences with the process of conducting a research. The topic that gives me the most excitement is humor, especially humorous language.

It is a popular approach for English language learners like me to learn spoken English through TV series for its entertaining feature. Under my personal observation, one of the most common TV series among English learners in Hanoi is the American sitcom series *How I Met Your Mother*. While watching the film for enjoyment, I have noticed that many times during the film, irony is used to create humor. This leads to this paper focusing on the relationship between verbal irony and humor in the series. Hence, this paper is designed to answer the following questions:

1. What types of verbal irony are utilized to cause humor in *How I Met Your Mother*, season 9?
2. How does verbal irony lead to humor in *How I Met Your Mother*, season 9?

1.2 Scope of the study

The research is confined to *verbal irony* used in conversations by characters in the American situational comedy or sitcom *How I Met Your Mother, season 9*.

1.3 Significance of the research

Theoretically, the research is hoped to add more to the study of humor in general and to the study of verbal irony in specific.

Practically, to students of linguistics, it is hoped that this research would help them understand deeper about how irony and humor is related. This can also act as an example of analyzing an authentic media material

Moreover, this study may be attractive to people who is into investigating about humor and irony as they can both have an overview of the literature and application of theories into practice.

Lastly, it is of significant role for movie, especially sitcom, producers. By reading this research, they open themselves different approaches to using irony in creating humor through language of the script.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Irony

1.1.1 Definition

Verbal communication is a complicated process. It is personalized in the way people choose to exchange information. In fact, in some situation people prefer not to express their intention directly. They would say the something and expect the hearer to understand that they mean the opposite. This is an example of people's use of *irony* in the communication process. To explain this interesting phenomenon, there has been a controversy among authors in the intellectual battle field. The simple definition would be the one by Colebrook "saying what is contrary to what is meant". The contradictory of the literal meaning of the utterance and the intended meaning is central to the classical view of irony. For example, Clark & Gerrig (1984, p. 121) stated that "an ironist's uses a figurative meaning opposite to the literal meaning of the utterance. However, a more recent view on irony would not agree totally with meaning inversion/negation/reversal/opposition. Instead, irony is understood as the incongruity of the implied meaning with the literal meaning. "Irony understanding involves recognition of incongruity between what speakers semantically state and what they ironically imply" (Gibbs et al, 2014, p.575). This paper agrees with the view of irony being the incongruous relationship between the literal and implied meaning.

1.1.2 Types of verbal irony

Dynel (2013, p.404) followed the Gricean approach, which believes "irony is intentionally produced by the speaker in the form of overt untruthfulness, based on flouting the first maxim of Quality, to generate conversational implicatures, which to be duly recognized by hearers", to distinguish four types of irony namely

propositional negation irony, ideational negation irony, verisimilar irony and surrealistic irony.

1.1.1.1. Propositional negation irony

Dynel took Grice's example "X is a fine friend" as the clear example for this type of irony. As the name suggest, the subject of meaning contradiction is the propositional meaning. The two ways in which such meaning reversal may emerge is "verbal negation" and "lexical opposition" (Dynel, 2013, p. 409). It is also noted that this type of irony may seem very similar to metaphor in the cognitive aspect due to the fact that it impose the listener to interpret two layers of meaning. However, the interpretation may differ between metaphor and irony as ironic utterance always carries negative evaluation while it is not the case for metaphor.

1.1.2.1 Ideational negation irony

Ideational or conceptual reversal is quite different from propositional meaning negation. While this type of irony also bases on flouting the first maxim of Quality, it does not involve proposition of the whole utterance. Rather, it focuses on the reversal of *semantic meaning* of a lexical element or the reversal of the *pragmatic meaning* of the utterance.

"As I reached the bank at closing time, the bank clerk helpfully shut the door in my face" (Wilson, 2006, p.1722)

In the above example, the speaker ironically expresses his/her disappointment with the bank clerk's action using the word "helpfully" to actually imply an unhelpful action.

Dynel (2013, p.410) noted that this type of irony also involve interjections. Despite not being considered a complete proposition which carry true value, interjections are used to show speaker's attitude before they utter the main points. For instance, a person exclaimed "Wow!" which stands for "That's amazing" after seeing a terribly decorated cake would mean "That's terrible".

Other utterance types such as questions or imperatives that manifest untruthfulness can be considered pragmatic meaning opposition, which thus create ironic speech acts.

1.1.2.2 Verisimilar irony

Verisimilar irony is not similar to other types of irony due to the fact that speaker does express a truthful utterance or what he/she think is true. The maxim of Quality is followed in this case. However, it is the maxim of Relation that gives rise to the implicatures. The intended meaning is implied and can only be understood when given the context and some involvement of propositional and/or ideational negation. Verisimilar irony is “grounded on a mismatch between the contextual factors [...] and the truthful proposition” (Colston and O’Brien 2000, as cited in Dynel, 2013, p.414). The example for this irony is by a mom who enters her son’s messy room.

“I like children who keep their rooms clean”

This is the truthful expression, but what she means is the opposite “I don’t like children – you – who can’t keep their rooms clean”.

1.1.2.3 Surrealistic irony

Explaining this type of irony, Dynel (2013, p.421) has expressed clearly its definition. “A surrealistic ironic utterance usually displays inherent absurdity, conveying a meaning that is impossible or highly unlikely under real-world assumptions, flouting the first maxim of Quality”. Surrealistic irony often concerns the preceding utterance in the conversation. Hearers cannot simply imply the intended meaning base on solely the literal meaning.

“Perhaps this problem will resolve itself.”

“Perhaps Superman will arrive to solve your problem.”

1.1.3 Irony and similar phenomena

Bearing in mind the two characteristic of irony: overt untruthfulness and negative evaluation of the referent, some authors distinguished irony with other humor generating phenomena which are often misclassified with irony. Dynel's work (2014) is the core literature behind this section in this paper.

1.1.3.1 Teasing

Quite similar to irony, teasing does involve overt untruthfulness with the purpose of amusing the interactants. However, this overt untruthfulness does not base itself on flouting the maxim of Quality since there is no implicatures implied. Moreover, there is no evaluative attitude toward any referent, which is typical in irony.

1.1.3.2 Absurd humor

Absurdity not only convey untruthfulness (what the speaker believe false) but also untruth (what is not real). Absurd humor is typically mistaken with surrealistic irony, for both involve usage of absurdity. However, the difference lies in the fact that overt untruthfulness in absurd humor does not generate any evaluative implicatures like surrealistic irony. Moreover, absurd humor cannot be considered a flouting of maxim of Quality because it is not conducive to implicatures.

1.1.3.3 Parody

Parody is poking fun at, ridicule or mock an individual (or a group) by imitating, mimicking the behavior of the target. Thus, there is certain negative evaluation conveyed via parody. However, according to Dynel (2014, p.631), parody and irony differ in terms of how the speaker's dissociation from the meaning conveyed manifest itself. It is understood that the evaluative implicatures does not arise in parody. Other authors who support the pretense view of irony would argue for the similarity between these terms. Nevertheless, Dynel argued that the object being mimicked is different in a way that in parody the object exists, while in irony, the object is imagined.

1.1.3.4 Humorous metaphor

It is observed that, similar to irony, the rhetorical figures also render untruthfulness. This is the result of flouting the first maxim of Quality. Hence, it is possible that these rhetorical figures coincide with irony. However, this can only happen when there appear to have a negative evaluation from the speaker, which is not their typical feature. What sets irony and humorous metaphor apart is that it is not necessary for metaphor to have any meaning negation in order for the listeners to understand the implied meaning. In general, humorous metaphor may present in irony, support ironic utterance, but does these two should not be used synonymically.

1.1.3.5 Humorous bald-faced lying

When bald-faced lying is performed, both speaker and listener know that the speaker is expressing untrue statement, which forces the listener to seek for a more appropriate alternative understanding. The bald-faced lying is meant to sound superficial. Although this humorous phenomenon does involve flouting the first maxim of Quality and an implied message behind the utterance, it does not entail evaluative implicatures.

1.1.3.6 Sarcasm

Sarcasm is an arguable phenomenon with irony. Some linguists see sarcasm as a subtype of irony. However, sarcasm, sometimes overlap with irony, should be treated as a distinguished type. Generally, sarcasm's characteristic is its biting and hurtful nature. Its goal is to cause verbal harm, as indicated by many authors. In short, although inherent with negative evaluation, sarcasm does not necessarily depend on overt untruthfulness to meet its goal, as seen in irony.

1.2 Humor

1.2.1 Definition

There has been a considerable attempt to define humor from authors of different fields ranging from psychology to linguistics. Veatch (1998) noted that humor is a mysterious and interesting phenomenon and no disciplinary bounded theories can inclusively define humor. A very common way humor is understood as a positive characteristic. This view is supported by many authors including Martin (2007, as cited in Scheel, 2017) who divided humor into several components which are “(1) the ability to understand jokes and other humorous stimuli, (2) an expression of humor and cheerfulness, (3) the ability to make humorous comments or have humorous perceptions, (4) the appreciation of diverse types of jokes, cartoons, and other humorous material, (5) the active seeking of sources that elicit laughter, (6) the memorizing of jokes and funny anecdotes in life and (7) the tendency to use humor as a coping mechanism.”

Another definition that is the core of many intellectual works on humor is humor as an international form of communication (Robert & Yan, 2007, as cited in Scheel, 2017). It can be verbal or nonverbal behavior that can elicit positive responses such as laughter. Martin (2007, as cited in Scheel, 2017) proposed four components of humor among which he included an emotional response and the vocal-behavioral expression of laughter. In short, this communicative phenomenon is intentional, used to evoke positive reactions from listeners or receivers.

1.2.2 Linguistic theories of humor

Humor has been of interest of linguists for thousands of years, yet researchers still find this battle field attractive. The origin of humor is one of the wonderlands for them. Different authors have their own theories about humor. Mulder (2002) summarized different theories of humor over the history of this field and claimed that the three most basic and widely used theories are the Superior Theory

(hostility, aggression), Relief Theory (release) and Incongruity Theory (incongruity-resolution).

1.2.2.1 The Superior theory

As the name suggests, Superior theory advocates assume that we laugh over others' misfortune. This theory focus on the negative dimension of humor because it explains that laughter is the result of the moment we realize we are better than others. Attardo (1994, as cited in Savkanicova, 2013) stated that "humor is a social corrective used by society to correct deviant behavior". In short, this approach puts emphasis on laughter produced as the result of the awareness of one's superiority.

1.2.2.2 The Relief theory

The second theory puts more focus on how humor acts as a tension relief factor in different situations. This theory was introduced by Freud who believed "Humor released by 'excess' nervous energy which actually masks other motives and/or desires". Scheel (2017, p.15) take an example of a tense meeting in which the manager use his sense of humor and help loosen the atmosphere of the meeting.

1.2.2.3 The Incongruity theory

The Incongruity theory is one of the first linguistic theories on humor which dated back to the 18th century (Savkanicova, 2013). Researchers of the Incongruity theory believe that humor is created when two different contents which "seems mutually incompatible but also include a certain common part which makes the shift from one to another possible" (Kirkmann, 2006, p. 1). On this theory, Attardo (1994, as cited in Savkanicova, 2013) stated that people laugh when they realize "the incongruity between a concept and the objects which have been thought through it in some relation". Hence, incongruity theory emphasizes cognition or the ability to perceive and understand incongruous patterns of the situation.

1.3 Cooperative Principle

1.3.1 Definition

In order to communicate successfully, participants need to regulate their speech acts in the most sufficient way that helps them reach the communicative goals. This is put by Yule (1996, p.35, as cited in Smilauerova, 2012) as “This sense of cooperation is simply one in which people having a conversation are not normally assumed to be trying to confuse, trick, or without relevant information from each other”. The famous philosopher of language Herbert Paul Grice has coined the term Cooperative Principle to show the assumption of cooperative behavior in conversation.

1.3.2 Gricean Maxims

Grice broke the Cooperative Principle into four sub-principles which he called *maxims*.

Maxim of Quality: make your contribution true; do not convey what you believe false or unjustified.

Maxim of Quantity: Be as informative as required.

Maxim of Relevance: Make your contribution relevant to the purposes of the exchange.

Maxim of Manner: be perspicuous; avoid obscurity and ambiguity.

1.3.3 Failure to fulfill a maxim

Speakers may fail to observe the maxims by different ways, namely: flouting, violating, clashing, and opting out.

1.3.3.1 Violation

When the speaker violates the maxim, the addressee may understand that there is something wrong in the utterance, yet cannot sort out (Marmaridou, 2000, as cited

in Smilauerova, 2012). However, if the maxim violated is the maxim of quality, the addressee may not know that he/she is being deceived.

1.3.3.2 Opting out

Opting out of the cooperative principle means that the speaker refuses to provide the requested information and refuse to fulfill the requirement of the cooperative principle. For example, the speaker may say “*My lips are sealed.*” or “*I choose to remain silent over this issue.*”

1.3.3.3 Clashing

A Maxim clash can arise when a speaker choose to violate one maxim in order to follow others.

A: When is her birthday?

B: Sometime in July.

In the example, B is aware that the information he/she provided is less informative than required by A; thus, he/she is violating the Maxim of Quality. However, B cannot provide a more detailed answer; otherwise, he/she may violate the Maxim of Quantity. In this case, B chooses to violate the Maxim of Quantity to follow the Maxim of Quality

1.3.3.4 Flouting

In the case of humor, violating and flouting are the most referred way to create ironic utterance. However, it seems that some researchers have over used these terms. The difference between flouting and violating lies on the purpose of the speaker. Mey (1996, p.70, as cited in Raceanu, 2013) proposed the definition of flouting in which she addressed that the speaker intended for the listeners to look for the implied meaning. However, when violating a maxim, the speaker “discourages the hearers from seeking for implicatures and encourages their taking utterances at face values”. Humor is a way of using figurative language to meet a

specific communicative purpose; therefore, when communicators create multi-layered humorous utterance, it is understood that the speaker intend the hearers to recognize his/her purpose. As a result, the term “flouting” should be used in this context, rather than “violating”.

Flouting the Maxim of Quality

The maxim of Quality requires speakers to make their contribution true, to convey what they believe justified. One common view among researchers is that speakers say the opposite of what they mean when they communicate using irony, or by other words, they are not making a true contribution. This means that, expressing irony, a speaker is flouting the maxim of Quality. The example for this would be when one talk about the recent awful weather by saying the opposite “What a nice weather!” However, some authors argue only for the flout of Quality Maxim and overlook the possibility of other three Maxims.

Flouting the Maxim of Quantity

A speaker flouts the Maxim of Quantity when he/she gives too much or too little information of what is expected. An obvious example of this is posited in the work of Savkanicova (2013, p. 34) when she observed the film Black Books. The situation for this conversation is that Manny ask Bernard, who doesn't like his beard, about his opinion whether he should wash it and received a very ironic reply.

Manny: “You think I should wash my beard?”

Bernard: “I think you should wash it, yeah. And shave it off, nail it to a Frisbee, and fling it over a rainbow.”

Flouting the Maxim of Relevance

Grice expressed this maxim as “making your contribution relevant”. Alba-Juez (1995, p.27) discovered that, not only the Quality Maxim but also other three maxims, including the maxim of Relevance that can create ironic remarks. Brown

and Levinson (1978, as cited in Alba-Juez, 1995, p.27) argue that this violating this maxim can include behaviors like giving hints, associative clues and presuppose. The example that Colston (2000, as cited in Vance, 2012, p.28) used to illustrate this flouting of Relevance Maxim is “I just love when people use their turn signals”. It cannot be considered flouting of Maxim of Quality due to the fact that the speaker is being truthful about his or her preference and this remark on people using their turn signals is said to be irrelevant in this situation where people are not. However, it can be rebutted that comments about turn signals have already contain some relevance to the situation at hand. This idea is supported by authors such as Wilson and Sperber (1981, p.121) whose argument is “relevance can be achieved by expressing irrelevant assumptions, as long as this expressive behavior is in itself relevant”. Nevertheless, Alba-Juez (1995) still found Brown and Levinson’s Theory applicable with respect to verbal irony so the Relevance Maxim can be flouted sometimes.

Flouting the Maxim of Manner

The main requirement of the Maxim of Manner was clearly stated by Grice (1975, p.45, 46, as cited in Raceanu, 2013) as: Avoid obscurity of expression; Avoid ambiguity; Be brief; Be orderly. It is safe to say that in the majority of verbal irony case speakers are not trying to avoid obscurity and ambiguity. In fact, obscurity and ambiguity may be the goal of speakers. The following example of a people saying “This is not the best meal I’ve ever had”, the speaker is criticizing the awful meal without directly and clearly say “It’s a terrible meal”. Apparently, flouting or violating the Manner Maxims is considered a politeness strategy or a way to minimize face threatening act or to avoid responsibility.

1.4 Sitcom

1.4.1 Definition

Situation comedy or sitcom is a type of comedy where there is a relatively fixed number of main characters whose stories are carried over episodes to create humor. This type is very popular for its narrative form, telling the stories in a humorous manner. Analysis of humorous potential in sitcoms will depend on the humorous potential of the situation. However, whether the situation is perceived as funny will require audiences to be familiar with the knowledge conveyed. This is due to the fact that humor strongly reflects cultural conditions. Some of the most recent famous sitcoms come from the United States; for example, *Friends*, *How I Met Your Mother*, and *Modern Family*.

One pattern typically seen in sitcoms is the laugh track. The term for this track is “canned laughter”, which is pre-recorded human laughter usually used as a cue during the show to indicate humorous situation and prompt the audience to laugh. Ross’s justification for canned laughter explains clearly why it is used in situation comedy. “[...] it’s important to sense other people responding to humor. Like other aspects of language, humor is a way in which people show their allegiance to a group. If someone signals their intention to say something humorous, the listeners are immediately ready to laugh.”

1.4.2 How I Met Your Mother

The 18 times award winning American sitcom *How I met your mother* was an enormous hit in the early 2000s. The film was aired in many countries and received a lot of attention. The first episode was aired in September 2005 and the last one was in March 2014. Divided into nine seasons, each seasons contain roughly 23 episodes, the film is a story told by one of the main characters Ted Mosby about him and his group of friends living in Manhattan, New York City. The events are connected together by the idea that Ted tells his children of how he met his wife – their mother. The sitcom revolves around the life of five characters

– Ted Mosby (Josh Radnor), Marshall Eriksen (Jason Segel), Lily Aldrin (Alyson Hannigan), Robin Scherbatsky (Cobie Smulders) and Barney Stinson (Neil Patrick Harris) as they pursue happiness and career. The setting of the film is around their apartments or the pub where they have a fixed table.

The ninth and the last season of this comedy series cover the 56 hours of preparation for Robin and Barney’s wedding. Twenty four 20-minute episodes portrait the events during the weekends before the wedding will be the source of data for the author.

1.5 Previous research

There were many research on humor and/or verbal irony. Grice’s pragmatics and the application of his proposal is considered one of the classical views on verbal irony. He formulated the Cooperative Principle of Conversation in which he proposed that speakers must follow certain maxims to produce normal discourse. It is stated that “the understanding of verbal irony stems from a recognition that the maxim of Quality has been flouted by the speaker.” (Vance, 2013, p.21)

With the attempt to extent and improve Grice’s work, Alba-Juez (1995) argued that flouting the maxim of Quality is not the only strategy to create verbal irony. She discussed that a speaker can flout all four Gricean Maxims to create humour.

Marta Dynel, whose works are referred many times in this paper, is also an advocate to Gricean approach to verbal irony. Dynel (2014) distinguished between irony and other potentially humorous figurative language phenomenon. In another article Dynel (2013) pointed out the subtypes of irony: propositional negation irony, ideational reversal irony, verisimilar irony and surrealistic irony.

Some researchers study verbal irony and humour from psychology perspective. Gibbs et al (2014) claimed that ironic understanding are not always a process of drawing conversational implicatures. It was suggested in their work that people

laughs at various places in conversation, not necessarily at the end of speakers' utterances.

There were also research that use movies, comedies to analyze the language with pragmatic approach. Anggraini (2014) shown that all four types of maxim flouting are employed to create humor. The types of humor represented in the film *Modern Family Season 4* are jokes and spontaneous conversational humor. Another research is by Maria Savkanicova (2013) who named her work as "Pragmatic Analysis of Ironic Humor in *Black Books*". The work is the analysis of verbal humor from the perspective of Cooperative principle and Implication Theory by Paul Grice. The finding is the non-observance of breaking of conversational maxims taken from the sitcom *Black Books*.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

1.1. Research design

According to Ritchie et al (2013, p.3), qualitative research is an interpretative approach which mainly concern with the understanding of the studied phenomena and has long been used to gain insights to the social structures, behaviors ad cultures. One key aspect of qualitative research is that it allows researchers to investigate on the form, the reasons of the phenomenon as well as provide explanation and generate new ideas. In other words, this method help authors dig deeper into the problem. Meanwhile, quantitative research is more concerned with the levels of the phenomenon. It gives the authors basic insights to the extent of the problem studied.

Bear in mind the characteristics of each method, the researcher decided to combine qualitative and quantitative research. This was because the researcher would like to examine the extent to which verbal irony was utilized in the series HIMYM, season 9 as well as the way verbal irony in characters' language can help increase humor of the film.

1.2 Data collection method

Ritchie et al (2013, p.34) has divided data into two types namely “natural occurring data” and “generated data”. As the name suggest, while naturally occurring data are the object in its natural settings, generated data involve “reconstruction” such as re-telling, re-processing, or reporting. As for naturally occurring data like a film, many data collecting methods have been developed. Among them, the researcher chose observation of documents (documentary analysis) as the main data collection method.

Observation has some advantages over other methods. First, the data validity is enhanced as the researcher does not have to rely on others' answer. Second, regarding the purpose of this research as film analysis, the available source of data

is the film and its script, observation of documents is needed. The content of the language used in the film need to be investigated to reveal the use of verbal irony in current sitcom-making field.

The data collection procedure is straightforward. The researcher watched each episode and examined the transcript retrieved from the website: *springfieldspringfiled.co.uk* to identify ironic speech acts in each episode. The script is closely compared to the actual audio document to ensure its correctness. The ironic utterances collected are then organized in a data sheet adapted from the data sheet developed by Puspita (2017, p.33) The design of this data sheet is provided in Appendix 1. This process is repeated twice to raise the validity of the data.

1.3 Data analysis method

Content analysis is said to be one of the most commonly used method to analyse qualitative data. It is a research technique first used to analysing messages in the media such as newspaper article, news report, speeches made by politicians etc. Recently, it has become more prevalent among social researchers as it can be used to interpret and code textual material.

Researchers use Content Analysis to study the meanings, contexts and intentions contained in messages. It is considered as an “unobstrusive or non-reactive” (Prasad, 2008, p.2) research method because instead of interviewing people, it utilises the produced communication and analyse it. According to Prasad (2008), there are many definitions for content analysis; however, after comparing several definitions, he concluded as below:

“...content analysis is all about making valid, replicable and objective inferences about the message on the basis of explicit rules. The material for the content analysis can be letters, diaries, newspaper content, folk songs,

short stories, and messages of Radio, Television, documents, texts or any symbols.”

The process of doing Content Analysis may involve six steps (Prasad, 2008, p.9):

1. Formulation of the research question or objectives
2. Selection of communication content and sample
3. Developing content categories
4. Finalizing units of analysis
5. Preparing a coding schedule, pilot testing and checking inter coder reliabilities
6. Analyzing the collected data

Several steps in this process can be flexibly repeated without affecting others. Therefore, this data analysis process was employed in this research.

The data analysis coding scheme in this research is constructed based on the type of verbal irony and the cooperative maxims flouted.

No	Data	Types of irony				Humor		Maxims broken				Number of maxims broken			
		PPI	INI	SI	VI	H	NH	QL	QT	R	M	1	2	3	4

Table 1 Data analysis sheet

1

2

3 Abbreviation:

4

5 PPI: Propositional negation irony

NH: Non-humorous

6 INI: Ideational negation irony

QL: Maxim of Quality

7 SI: Surrealistic irony

QT: Maxim of Quantity

8 VI: Verisimilar irony

R: Maxim of Relation

9 H: Humorous

M: Maxim of Manner

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1.1. Reseach findings

Situational comedy is a good source for humor analysis. The language of the script plays an important role in the humorous factor. However, humor, as simple as it seems, is a broad and complicated phenomenon that differ among cultures and individuals. Researchers have gathered the potentially humorous language form, among which the author is interested in irony, especially verbal irony.

Dynel (2013) has followed the infamous neo-Gricean approach and divided verbal irony into four types: propositional negation irony, ideational negation irony, surrealistic irony and verisimilar irony.

The researcher found that in the conversational interaction between the characters, all four types of irony are observed. These ironic utterances found are of important factor that leads to humorous instances in the movie. The usage of each type to create humor is presented in the pie chart below.

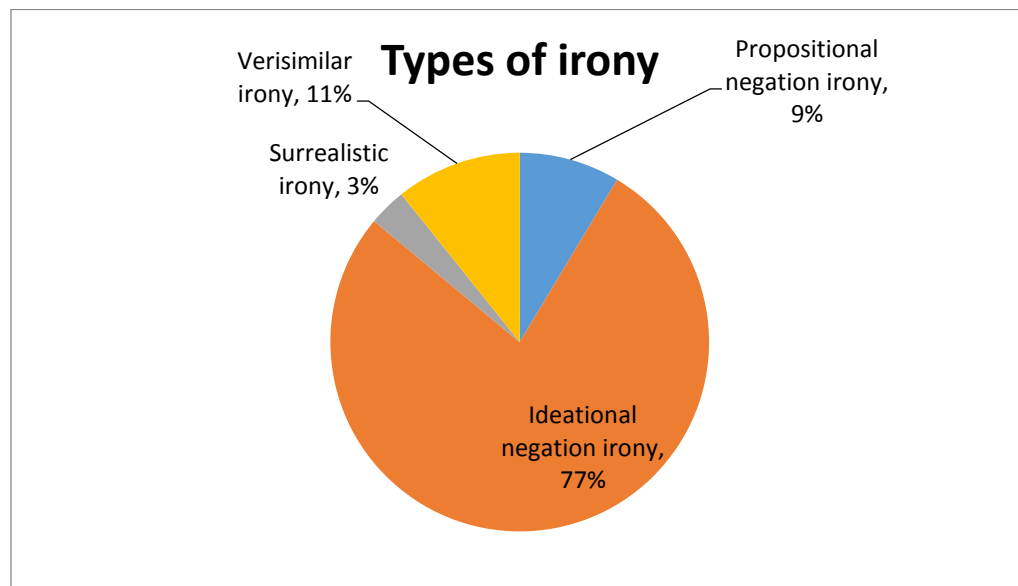


Figure 1 Types of irony

Figure 1 show that the types of irony in terms of propositional negation irony, ideational negation irony, surrealistic irony and verisimilar irony are employed by

the characters in How I Met Your Mother to create humor. Among these types of irony, the most prominent one is ideational negation irony. It occurs in 144 utterances among 187 utterances. In other words, out of the total 100%, its percentage is 77%. The second rank is verisimilar irony, which occurs 20 times or 11%. Following this type of irony is the propositional negation irony which occurs 16 times or 9%. In the last rank, there is surrealistic irony which only occurs 6 times or 3%.



Figure 2 Humorous effect of irony

It is observed that the majority of ironic utterances in the movie can elicit laughter from audiences. Only 6% of them happen in more serious situations which are not meant to be humorous.

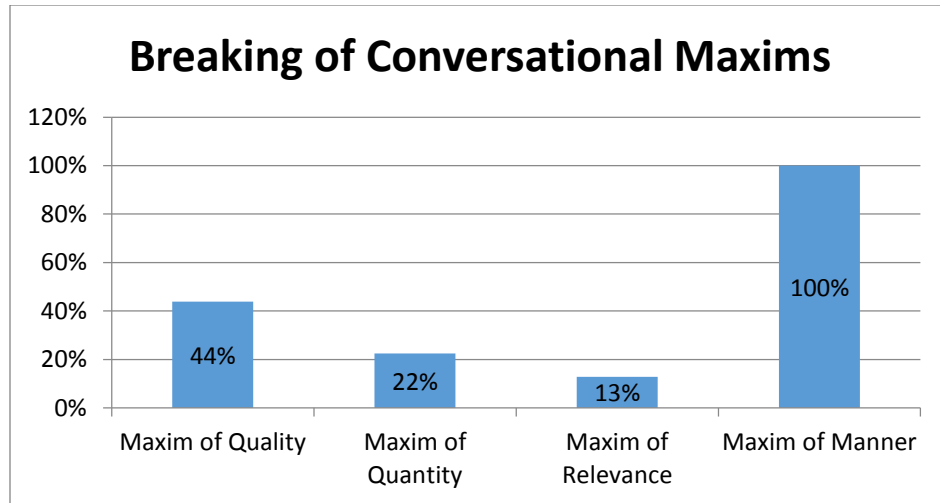


Figure 3 Breaking of conversational maxims in ironic utterance in HIMYM

The above figure shows the maxim flouting pattern in the ironic utterance collected from the series. It can be seen that characters flout all four types of Maxim to create irony in their conversations with each other. Maxim of Manner is believed to be flouted in every utterance due to the fact that being ironic means the speaker is not stating their intended meaning in a clear way. The second most flouted maxim is the Maxim of Quality with 44% in total 187 utterances. This is followed by the Maxim of Quantity and the Maxim of Relevance.

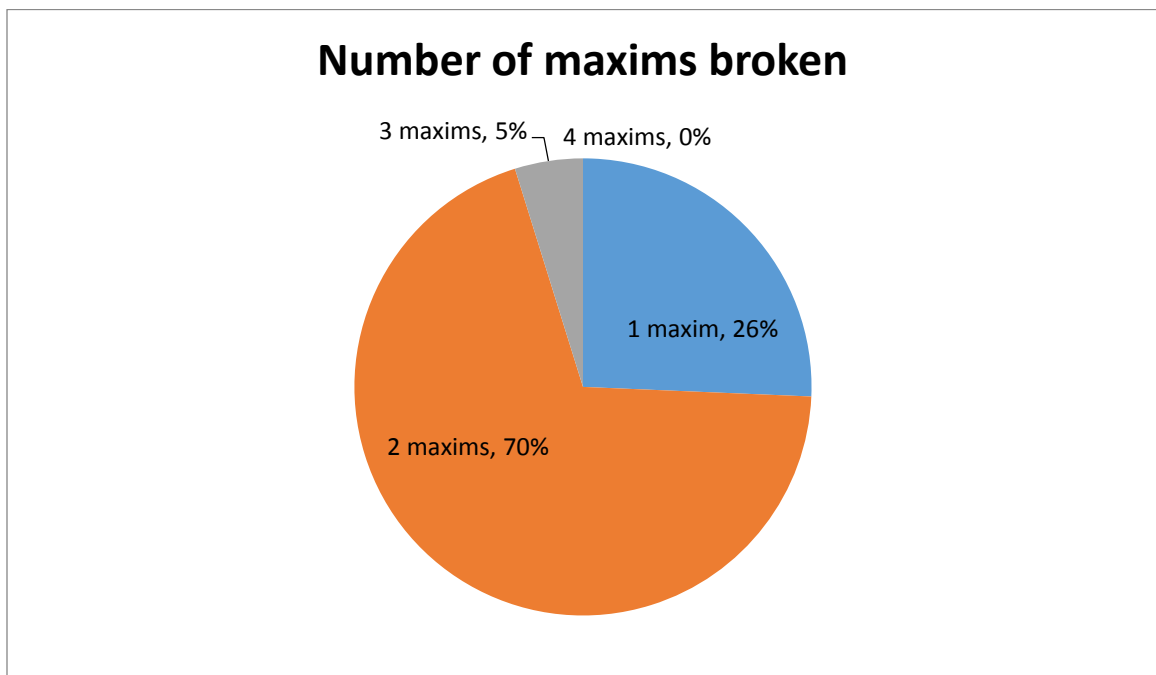


Figure 4 Number of maxim broken in each ironic utterance

Figure 4 is a pie chart that shows the number of maxims flouted in each utterance. Overall, the characters flout from one to three maxims in one ironic utterance. From the graph it is clear that the majority of the utterances flout two maxims with 70%. A quarter of the total proposition collected flout only one maxim. Only a small minority flout three maxims at the same time.

1.2 Discussion

1.2.1 Research question 1

The researcher found out that all four types of irony are employed in this season of *How I Met Your Mother*. The discussion of this section will be organized into four parts in the order of the type which is used more frequently.

1.2.1.1 Ideational negation irony

This is the most used type of irony in season 9 of *How I Met Your Mother*. Irony that is based on ideational or conceptual negation is the result of *semantic meaning reversal of an untruthful lexical element* or the result of *pragmatic meaning of the whole utterance*.

Considering the former, the speaker may choose to manifest irony in only one word in the sentence. The example for this is abundant in this series. Consider the following examples:

Barney: How do you keep winning anyway?

Robin: Well, to the keen observer, all of you Stinsons have the same very *subtle* tell. Whenever you're bluffing, you say the word "bluff".

(*HIMYM – s9-ep05*)

Before the wedding between Robin and Barney, they play board game together and Robin is always the winner. Being asked about how she can win, Robin ironically point out that they have been giving hints to each other in a not

very subtle way. Here, the word “subtle” mean “not subtle”. Another example is found in the narrator’s speech.

Narrator: Kids, as you know, Lily and Marshall had decided to move to Rome after Barney and Robin’s wedding. [...] But without telling Lily, Marshall had then accepted a judgeship in New York. [...] Until his *always-helpful* road trip companion Daphne had *selflessly* come to his aid.

(HIMYM-s9-ep07)

In this example, the narrator is implying that Daphne’s action is not helpful and very selfish. Her action can lead to a big fight between Marshall and Lily which he is doing everything to avoid.

This type of irony also applies to *interjections* which are words or expression that convey emotion. Examples of interjections are “aha”, “wow!”, “oops”, etc. Ironic interjections are also found in this season of How I Met Your Mother.

Lily: We’re getting them a gift.

Marshall: But Lily this is the dream. This is the whole reason we wanted Ted to get married. So we could not give him a wedding gift. And he would know exactly how it feels!

Lily: Baby, I’m as pissed as you are, but we’re getting them a gift.

Marshall: *Fine*, we’ll get them a gift. A gift that’ll send the message loud and clear. A gift-wrapping station!

(HIMYM-s9-ep05)

In this situation, Marshall and Lily is discussing about whether or not to give Ted a wedding gift. When Marshall finally agree with Lily that they are getting Ted a gift, he says “fine”, which, in his opinion, is not fine at all.

Loretta: Pancakes and eggs, Robin? I guess that blouse won't be loose and flowy for long.

Barney: Mom.

Robin: Keep talking, Loretta. I've been waiting all morning to ketchup.
Oops! (dipping the sleeve of the blouse into the bowl of ketchup)

HIMYM-s9-ep08

The situation is that, Robin has won Loretta in the poker game and she took her favorite blouse as the prize. Robin and Loretta are having a fight with each other and the next morning, they mock each other overtly. Robin intentionally wears Loretta's blouse and pretend to accidentally dip the sleeve of the blouse in ketchup, which ruins the blouse. Her overt untruthfulness is shown by the exclamation "oops!"

Barney asks Ted to redo the hand-painted cards and he enthusiastically agrees

Robin: So now the best man is painstakingly handwriting but my maid of honor forgot to click "send" on an Evite.

Lily: I didn't forget to invite the girls to your bachelorette party. You have no girls.

Robin: (chuckle) what? What? What? I...All my girls. I gave you a list.

Lily: This list? Yeah. "Tall girl from work", "mouth-breather from coffee shop", "average-sized girl from that place". *Ooh.* Sorry I didn't track her down. She sounds great.

HIMYM-s9-ep04

At her bachelorette party, there was only her and Lily, which she thought was Lily fault for having forgotten to send invitation to the girls. Robin ironically mentions

the fact that Lily did not fulfill the mission of a maid of honor. Lily then revealed that she did not forget but it is because Robin has no girlfriends. The list of girlfriends she gave to Lily was not only short but also very vague, which Lily mention ironically. The exclamation “ooh” literally means “that’s great”; however, in this situation it means opposite “that’s terrible”.

Besides conversion of one lexical item, imperatives and questions can also form ideational negation irony. This is formed when their pragmatic meaning is negated.

In the following example, Daphne is helping Marshall practice telling his wife about his judgeship in New York.

Daphne: Now, what exactly are you gonna say to lily When you walk through that door?

Marshall: Okay. Hey, baby. So, listen, I got this phone call

Daphne: Whoa, whoa, whoa! You haven't seen her in a week. *Where's the "I missed you. How about a kiss?" Nothing about her new hairstyle?*

HIMYM-s9-ep06

Here, Daphne is not actually expecting an answer for these questions, but she is conveying the criticism of Marshall’s way of starting conversation with his wife.

In another example, Barney keep accepting challenges that he makes up himself.

Barney: What? Get that blond girl’s phone number? Challenge accepted.
(Leave the table)

.....

Barney: (come back with the blond girl’s phone number) Challenge completed.

Robin: I'm sorry. I missed the first half of this. Um, *why is picking up a drunk chick sitting alone and rubbing a tan line on her finger where a wedding ring used to be, a challenge?*

HIMYM-s9-ep09

Robin's criticism here is the fact that what Barney did was not a challenge at all. A challenge should be of high difficulty level, while a sad and fragile girl who might have just divorced is not a hard target.

In addition, some characters occasionally use ironic imperatives.

Marshall asks Ted to come to Lily hotel room to delete the text in her phone. Her hotel room is believed to be haunted with the spirit of a pirate. Ted decided to climb up the window. Lily woke up and saw his shadow, carrying a hanger that makes him look exactly like a pirate, which scares her.

Lily: *Remind me to call you next time Marvin has a nightmare-- you can calm him by bursting into his room with a chain saw and a hockey mask!*

Ted: Sorry, I didn't want to knock in case you were already asleep, so I just climbed the drainpipe up to your window.

HIMYM-s9-ep07

Lily is implying that Ted should not have done that because it was very scary.

1.2.1.2 Propositional negation irony

Propositional negation irony is based on the standard view of Grice who saw irony as the utterance where the literal meaning is opposite the intended meaning. Speaker negates the proposition to form irony. In the following conversation between Robin and Barney, in reply to Barney's proposal to fire without bullets, Robin express her irony to imply that his proposal is not romantic.

Barney: When we leave the church, they're gonna release a hundred doves. It's gonna be avi-wait-for-it-ary. Aviary!

Robin: Oh. That might be a problem.

Barney: Why?

Robin: Because when we leave the church, a few of the gun enthusiasts in my family are gonna fire a 21-gun salute.

Barney: Can't you guys just fire blanks?

Robin: At a wedding? (laughing) Yeah, *that's romantic*.

HIMYM-s9-ep07

1.2.1.3 Verisimilar irony

This type of irony is different from the rest because it is form based on truthful proposition and the mismatch between the context and the utterance. It is said that examples for this irony can only be intermittently found (Dyrel, 2014). In this season of How I Met Your Mother, there are some times when characters employ this type of irony in conversations. For example:

Barney: I promise I won't leave. So I left. And what do you know; the ice store is right next to a laser tag place!

Robin: No, it isn't! It's six miles away in the opposite direction. And I told you not to go!

Barney: *Yeah, well, you also told me didn't want a ring bear at the wedding.*

HIMYM-s9-ep12

Here Barney's reply doesn't match the context and flout the maxim of Relation. It is suggested that Barney is implying that Robin doesn't always mean what she

said as the last time she said she didn't want a ring bear about which later she changed her mind.

1.2.1.4 Surrealistic irony

Surrealist irony does not involve propositional or ideational meaning negation. In fact, the intended meaning cannot be rendered by contrasting the literal meaning. This is because the surrealistic irony utterance is inherently absurd and impossible. It is contrast to real-world assumption.

Ted: (phone rings) Unknown caller, stop calling me.

Lily: Are you gonna answer it?

Ted: *Yeah, 'cause it's 1994 and I'm gonna pick up a phone without knowing who's on the other end.*

HIMYM-s9-ep09

1.2.2 Research question 2

It is conveyed in the data the majority of ironic utterance in this series are humorous. The author can notice the canned laughter in the background sound during or shortly after the utterances. This is not of surprise to the author since irony is one major source for humor to appear. However, as the previous research has shown (Dynel, 2014a; Dynel, 2014b; Gibbs et al, 2014), not all ironic utterances are humorous. In some more serious situation, the ironic utterances convey heartbroken or bitter emotions.

Ted: Barney, wait, wait! Your friendship is important to me. I swear on my mother's No, I swear to God. No I swear to Hef.

Barney: (gasps) Don't take that name in vain. *If someone is important to you, you tell them you're moving. I'm just some guy you used to know back in New York.*

This situation has no potential for humor to arise. Ted and Barney's friendship is having trouble because Ted doesn't tell Barney that he's moving to Chicago. This upsets Barney since it is not until one day before he leaves that he knows about this.

The findings show that, in ironic utterances, all types of conversational maxim are flouted by the character to create humor in *How I Met Your Mother*, season 9. Moreover, most speech act is uttered flouting not only one but two or three maxims. This can be explained by the fact that when the speaker chooses verbal irony as a strategy he/she does not avoid obscurity and ambiguity. Therefore, the majority of the cases of verbal irony violate the Maxim of Manner.

Maxim flouting allows speakers to convey their intended meaning indirectly. The literal meaning is seen as being incongruous with the context. This forces the hearers to use their knowledge to draw an alternative inference from the literal meaning to suit the context. Once the intended meaning is realized, the audiences will be able to understand the verbal humor of the film.

Barney asked Ted to keep the picture of the Gretzky photo and he placed it on the table. When he was out the bath, he saw his calligraphy ink has spilled over it.

Ted: I will solve this case. Now, there were three people nearby when Barney gave me that head shot: Karate Kid bad boy Billy Zabka, a shifty-eyed bellhop, and Robin's cousin Claude from Quebec with the neck trouble.

Lily: *Right, 'cause an elaborate conspiracy is much more likely than you leaving the photo next to an open ink bottle.*

In the above example, Lily flouts two maxims to show her irony. Lily thinks that the likely situation here was that Ted has placed the photo close to the ink bottle that it is ruined by the ink. However, she says the opposite, which is the evidence for flouting of Maxim of Quality. The way she expresses her irony is off record, so she is flouting the Maxim of Manner. What makes this situation amusing is that we know Lily does not agree with Ted about the possibility of someone else destroying the photo, but she does not state this directly. Instead, she expresses the opposite, which allows her to show her criticism toward Ted's idea.

Robin and Barney is in the car, Ranjit is the driver.

Robin: So you and I share no DNA whatsoever.

Barney: Let's change that. (lean toward Robin to kiss)

Ranjit: Don't hold back. *This divider is totally soundproof.*

HIMYM-s9-ep10

Above is an example where three maxims are flouted. When Robin and Barney who are sitting in the back seat were going to kiss, Ranjit has expressed indirectly (flout the Maxim of Manner) his irony by referring to the divider (flouting the Maxim of Relation) saying it is "totally" soundproof when it was not (flout the Maxim of Quality). The moment when the audience realizes that the divider is not soundproof at all is when humor arises.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

1.1 Conclusion

This paper aimed to contribute to the studies on verbal irony and humor by applying theories into analyzing a situational comedy, specifically the season 9 of the American sitcom series *How I Met Your Mother*. The process of analysis involves analyzing the utterances in conversational interaction among characters in the film.

It is found that there exist all four types of irony in this series. Among those types, ideational negation irony appears to be the most prominent kind. This result can be explained by the fact that there ideational negation irony has two sub-types namely lexical element negation and pragmatic meaning negation, which is more diverse.

Most ironic utterances found in this season are believed to be humorous. Therefore, it can be concluded that irony is one of the powerful tool to deliver laughter from audiences. The characters flout all four conversational maxims to create irony. By this way, two layers of meaning emerge with the literal meaning mismatch with the intended meaning. This is followed that humor is experienced when the incongruity of these two meanings is realized.

1.2 Limitation and suggestion

Although the researcher has carefully eliminated the subjective factors that can affect the result reliability, it is important to acknowledge the shortcomings of this research. First of all, in the process of collecting data, it would be better if the data is checked by more scholars. The author has watched each episode twice with the script being looked over the same amount of times. However, the reliability of the ironic utterances collected would be higher if there were other scholars to proofread. Second of all, the fact that the researcher is only a language learner instead of a native speaker has limited her ability to fully understand the humor

behind the jokes presented in the film. Nevertheless, this does not affect the result much as the researcher did not depend on her personal judgment. Lastly, while analyzing the data, the author wished that she had narrowed her data scope and dug deeper into analyzing each episode. The vast amount of data and the restricted time have not allowed the author to investigate more. It is suggested for future research to focus on a smaller sample size.

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