

Violating Norms: How Satire Shapes Societal Discourse

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Abstract

This study explores the use of satire as a means to critique and prompt reflection on societal and political issues, focusing on the deliberate breach of Grice's conversational maxims. Employing a qualitative analysis of a satirical text, we identify the maxim of Quality as the most frequently violated, highlighting the strategic use of untruths to expose absurdities within real-world scenarios. Results suggest that these violations are instrumental in engaging the audience and fostering critical examination of prevalent issues. This research advances our understanding of satirical communication's role in effecting social change, providing valuable insights for linguists, communicators, and sociologists.

Keywords: satire, conversational maxims, social critique, grice's maxims, media discourse

Introduction

In general, people prefer to express their opinions indirectly, first to reduce the potential negative impact of these opinions, and second to enable them to speak more freely. The social affairs are so sensitive ones, since they are directly related to the lives of people like education. Satire is a way to reflect the social faults by trying to improve and remedy a certain situation. So, many writers use this way to reach what they intend to.

Conversational cooperation is something speakers take for granted when they speak, even when they are not aware of it. (Grice, 1975) proposed a set of broad guidelines that participants in casual discourse should normally abide by. Grice defined it as the cooperative principle and provided four conversational maxims to support it. In order to communicate effectively and comprehend one another, Grice contends that interlocutors need to respect these rules. On the other hand, breaching Grice's maxims serves very important functions in keeping the conversation continue. In this study, the researcher chooses an article from (The Onion) which is entitled "Underfunded Schools Forced To Cut Past Tense From Language Programs". Then the researcher shows the form of satire, the features of the satirical text, the function that satire serves in the chosen article.

Research Questions

The researcher set the following questions to be answered throughout the study:

1. What is the form of the satirical text?
2. What are the features of the satirical comments?
3. What is the function of satire in the selected text?
4. What are the most conversational maxims that are breached by the writer of the satirical article?

Aims of the Study

The study aims to fulfill the following:

1. Identifying the form of the satirical text,
2. Showing the features of the satirical comments,
3. Knowing the function of satire,
4. and revealing the most Grice's conversational maxim which is breached by the satirist.

Literature Review

A. Definition of Satire

Satire is described as "a literary manner that blends a critical attitude with humour and wit to the end that human institutions or humanity may be improved" (Waston, 2011). As it is defined by Nilson and (Nilsen & Nilsen, 2018). Satire is "the use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues."

(Gibbs & Colston, 2007) affirmed that Satire is a kind of writing that criticizes persons, organizations, or societal conventions in the first person. Satirical writing often aims to highlight the absurdity of some ideas.

According to (W. D. Mohammed, 2023) satire is an attempt to critically communicate human behavior in which the text's or speech's arguments are purposefully constructed so as to absurdly critique certain human actions via the use of specific contextual elements.

Satire, as proposed by (Alberti, 2004), is a funny yet critical reflection on the pressures placed on individuals by society to adhere to established ideals that constitute popular culture.

B. Satire and Related Terms

Satire is not an isolated linguistic term. It is related to other phenomenon these are the following: humor, irony, and parody.

1. Satire and Humor

According to (Elshindy, 2019), "humor is a comic, absurd, or incongruous quality causing amusement". On the other hand, Humor is frequently assessed as a component of satire, understanding, and enjoyment (Skalicky, 2019).

2. Satire and Irony

(Watson, 2011) defined irony as a rhetorical device that, in general, creates incongruity and contrast to achieve its goals (Watson, 2011). While satire is a literary form that combines criticism, humor, and wit to enhance human institutions or mankind.

3. Satire and Parody

Parody is an excessive and humorous imitation of another form or subject, sometimes using irony to pervert the original while satire is political discourse that aims to elicit responses from people and the satirists employ parody to promote social change agendas (Marsh, 2020).

4. Satire and Sarcasm

While sarcasm remarks must always have a target that is the focus of the amusing interaction, satire, being a comedic form, does not demand this (Garmendia, 2018).

C. Features of Satire

1. The Public's Contextual Comprehension

When using satire there must be an audience that understands what is going on or what is said by the satirist and fully aware of the context of a specific event (M. H. Mohammed, 2021).

2. Targeting Object

According to (Feinberg, 1976), satire is effective when it addresses specific people and events. (Bogel, 2001) refers to this as a "necessary play of identification and division," and satirists can generate this kind of speech "attack" by setting themselves apart from this target.

3. Satire is Humorous

Satirical works frequently utilize "hostile humor" to communicate culturally inappropriate or illegal content (Stein, 2000).

4. Satire is Topical

According to (Feinberg, 1976), (Bogel, 2001), Knight, 2004), satire must be about specific places, events, times, and people.

5. Incongruity

Satire is a practical tool that applies an incongruous interpretation to events and transforms claims and pretensions into the antithesis. As a result, what is said is comparatively referred to as something else, and what is activated is positioned abusively (Lapp, 1992).

D. Functions of Satire

(Simpson, 2003) stated that satire is noteworthy because it performs no less than three functions concurrently and synthesizes them. First, the offensive function. It needs to be a target of criticism; in fact, satire cannot exist until it exhibits this ability to attack. Second, successful satire serves as a social function that consolidates inter-group relationships. Third, mental function is dependent on linguistic invention, which expands the complete range of the language system's resources.

According to (Sani dkk., 2012), the main objective of satire is to protect societal norms by exposing social injustices and elevating the standards of a community's values and customs.

E. Forms of Expressing Satire

(Hight, 2015) classified the forms of satire into three types. Some are monologues. These are direct speeches from the satirist, who often speaks in person or behind a mask that is hardly meant to conceal anything. The satirist explains his perspective on an issue, provides examples, disparages opponents, and tries to force his opinion on others. Some are parodies. In this form, satirists make situations or events seem absurd by adding contradictory concepts to them, or they make things appear silly by presenting them in an improper way. Finally, there are narratives. The satire is completely absent in this instance. Stories and theatrical fiction are

among this class. This can be considered the most challenging kind of satire since it is the easiest for the writer to make a mistake and the most complex for readers to comprehend and evaluate.

Methodology

A. Satire and Pragmatics

Generally, pragmatics is "the study of language use in context" (Huang, 2017). Put differently, the study of pragmatics aims to clarify how listeners comprehend what speakers are saying and how speakers communicate their meaning. But this definition is too general to take into consideration its complicated nature. (Gazdar, 1979), for instance, suggests that pragmatics is meaning devoid of a need for truth. Pragmatics is "the study of speaker meaning," as (Yule, 1996) puts it plainly. (Mey, 2001) highlights how social factors are determinants in pragmatics.

B. Grice's Conversational Implicature

(Grice, 1969) made significant contributions to pragmatics by putting out the idea of implicature, followed by the creation of the cooperative principle theory. According to (Porto, 2020), Grice's theory aims to clarify how the recipient understands meaning beyond the exact words; that is, moving from the stated meaning level to the intentional interpretation level. The preferred definition of that procedure in pragmatics is implicit, as it "denotes the action of suggesting information as opposed to stating information explicitly." "Grice's fundamental definition aimed to depict the pivotal function performed by the speaker (S) in communicating non-stated information to the hearer (H)."

C. The Cooperative Principle

According to (Grice, 1975), "interlocutors conversations don't typically consist of a series of fragmented statements." Each participant understands his or her objective, or at the very least, a mutually agreed-upon aim for the talk, and they are joint endeavors. Certain social standards must be followed in all spoken interactions so as to have an effortless discourse. Grice proposed four conversational maxims that serve as the foundation for a cooperative principle theory based on this supposition. Establishing accurate, truthful, instructive, and transparent dialogue is the primary objective of this idea. In the words of (Thomas, 1995), the cooperative principle's central premise is that individuals collaborate while they are having a conversation.

D. The Conversational Maxims

(Grice, 1975) suggested four conversational maxims to organize a well-constructed, successful and clear conversation process:

1. Quantity:

- a. Make your contribution as informative as required.
- b. Don't say more than it is required.

2. Quality: (Be Truthful).

- a. Don't say what you believe to be false.
- b. Don't say that for which you lack evidence.

3. Relation: (Be Relevant).

4. Manner: (Be Perspicuous).

- a. Avoid obscurity of expression.
- b. Avoid ambiguity.
- c. Be brief.
- d. Be orderly.

Grice was not trying to tell us how to behave as interlocutors. He was suggesting that:

1. Conversation is governed by certain conventions.
2. Hearers tend to assume speakers are conforming to these conventions.
3. If speakers aren't conforming, then they have a good reason not to (Porto, 2020).

E. Breaching Grice's Maxims

(Grice, 1975) declared that speakers sometimes purposefully ignore Grice's maxims in order to express meanings that are different from what are presented. Thus, a maxim is breached when the speaker believes that adhering to it will not be as beneficial.

As the conversation progresses, the listeners will be able to figure out the speaker's objective and arrive at a specific conclusion. Stated differently, he will have the ability to deduce an implicature. One method of not adhering to the maxims is to break them, which is the most important thing in expressing satire.

Results and Discussion

The data for the study consists of one satirical piece published by The Onion, an American satirical online media firm and newspaper agency that publishes details about worldwide, national, and regional news. The firm is situated in Chicago, but it began as a weekly print newspaper in Madison, Wisconsin, on August 29, 1988.

The first article is entitled: "Underfunded Schools Forced To Cut Past Tense From Language Programs". Published on November 30, 2007. (<https://www.theonion.com/underfunded-schools-forced-to-cut-past-tense-from-langu-1819569506>).

A. Data Analysis

In the article which is entitled "Underfunded Schools Forced to Cut Past Tense From Language Programs", the audience are fully aware of what is mentioned by the writer. They know it is something imagined to cut past tense from language programs it is not real to do something like that. The target here is schools administrations for their ignorance about the correct managements in the critical situations. Here, the writer attacks the target by setting himself apart from the target. Hostile humor is so evident in this article. The writer carries his satirical comments in a funny way to communicate inappropriate situations. The satirist is topical in this article since he talks about a specific situation which is the bad administration of the schools administrators in the cases of underfunding and crisis. Incongruity is clear in this article, because the writer discusses a sensitive topic related to the future of generations in a very superficial way, by presenting a solution to the issue of faltering in schools by proposing to delete the past tense from the English language.

For the function of satire, it serves an offensive function because the writer attacks the target but in a humorous way to criticize the way officials deal with sensitive problems in society.

The writer forms his article to be parody. Since the writer makes a situation or events that seem absurd by using contradiction (this is done by finding a superficial solution to a real problem). At the same time, the writer makes things appear silly.

Satire is mainly based on breaching Grice's maxims, so this article is full of breaching these maxims. From the very beginning of the article, exactly from the title itself, the writer breaches the maxim of relation when he puts the following title: "Underfunded Schools Forced To Cut Past Tense From Language Programs". There is no relation between underfunded schools and the measures taken to remedy this underfunding which is cutting past tense from language programs. Again, the relation manner is breached when the writer says "underfunded schools nationwide are increasingly left with no option to cut the past tense". After that quality maxim is breached when the writer says: "for more than 200 years, the past tense was deemed by school administrators to be too expensive". This information is not truthful. Past tense cannot be measured as expensive or cheap. Then quantity maxim is breached when the writer elaborates on the lack of importance of the past tense in the English language that when he says: "This was by no means an easy decision, but teaching our students how to conjugate verbs in a way that would allow them to describe events that have already occurred is a luxury that we can no longer afford," Phoenix-area high-school principal Sam Pennock said. "With our current budget, the past tense must unfortunately become a thing of the past". Quality maxim is breached when the writer claims that "the Tennessee Department of Education decided Monday to remove "-ed" endings from all of the state's English classrooms, saving struggling schools an estimated \$3 million each year". This is not true because past tense can't be removed. In addition, not using the past tense does not lead to saving money. This is an imaginary thing. Quality maxim is not followed by the satirist when he mentions unsaid information. That is when he says: "Officials say they plan to slowly phase out the tense by first eliminating the past perfect; once students have adjusted to the change, the past progressive, the past continuous, the past perfect progressive, and the simple past will be cut. Hundreds of school districts across the country are expected to follow suit".

After that, the writer says: "This is the end of an era". In this way the writer does not observe the manner maxim. There is a sort of ambiguity here. He indirectly expresses his point of view about the corruption in education. Then the writer wants to convey another idea about the effect of corruption on the education system as a whole when he says that dropping past tense will effect on other studies like history and social studies. That when he writes: "For some, reading and writing about things not immediately taking place was almost as much a part of school as history class and social studies." "That is, until we were forced to drop history class and social studies a couple of months ago," Reynolds added. In this situation he breaches quantity maxim because he gives more information than what is needed. The satirist indirectly reveals his objection against the superficial measures that taken by the administrators to face the education crisis in the country by saying: " Nevertheless, a number of educators are coming out against the cuts, claiming that the embattled verb tense, while outmoded, still plays an important role in the development of today's youth." By doing so, the writer breaches the manner maxim because he is not perspicuous in declaring what he wants. The manner maxim is breached again when the writer wants to say that the past of the nation is so important in its life. Its importance equals the importance of the present time. That is when he says: "Much like art and music, the past tense provides students with a unique and consistent outlet for self-expression," South Boston English teacher David Floen said. "Without it I fear many of our students will lack a number of important creative skills. Like being able to describe anything that happened earlier in the day." The writer criticizes the irrational measures of the government and the supporters of these measurements when he says: "a number of lawmakers, such as Utah

Sen. Orrin Hatch, have welcomed the cuts as proof that the American school system is taking a more forward-thinking approach to education". In this case the writer breaches the manner maxim. Quality is not observed by the writer when he mentions "Said Hatch, "I can't even remember the last time I had to use it". It is not true that the speaker doesn't use past tense. The writer then breaches the manner maxim when he says: "Past-tense instruction is only the latest school program to face the chopping block". The satirist here follows obscurity of expression to convey his criticism.

At the end of the article, the writer mentions more details than what is required when he criticizes the procedure of the government to face the educational crisis and how other will follow the same procedure like math department " cut addition and subtraction from their math departments" and foreign language courses by saying: "while nearly all high schools have reduced foreign language courses to only the most basic phrases, including "May I please use the bathroom?" and "No, I do not want to go to the beach with Maria and Juan". In addition to "Some legislators are even calling for an end to teaching grammar itself, saying that in many inner-city school districts, where funding is most lacking, students rarely use grammar at all". By doing so, the writer breaches quantity maxim.

B. The Results of the Study

This study shows the following results:

1. The form of the satirical text is parody.
2. The features which are appeared by analyzing the article are the following: public's contextual comprehension, the existence of a target which is a political one, humor is so vivid, the text is topical, and incongruity is showed in the article.
3. The function of satire is an offensive function.
4. The manner maxim is the most maxim which is breached by the writer to convey his views.

C. Underfunded Schools Forced To Cut Past Tense From Language Programs

Faced with ongoing budget crises, underfunded schools nationwide are increasingly left with no option but to cut the past tense—a grammatical construction traditionally used to relate all actions, and states that have transpired at an earlier point in time—from their standard English and language arts programs.

A part of American school curricula for more than 200 years, the past tense was deemed by school administrators to be too expensive t "This was by no means an easy decision, but teaching our students how to conjugate verbs in a way that would allow them to describe events that have already occurred is a luxury that we can no longer afford," Phoenix-area high-school principal Sam Pennock said. "With our current budget, the past tense must unfortunately become a thing of the past."

In the most dramatic display of the new trend yet, the Tennessee Department of Education decided Monday to remove "-ed" endings from all of the state's English classrooms, saving struggling schools an estimated \$3 million each year. Officials say they plan to slowly phase out the tense by first eliminating the past perfect; once students have adjusted to the change, the past progressive, the past continuous, the past perfect progressive, and the simple past will be cut. Hundreds of school districts across the country are expected to follow suit.

"This is the end of an era," said Alicia Reynolds, a school district director in Tuscaloosa, AL. "For some, reading and writing about things not immediately taking place was almost as much a part of school as history class and social studies."

“That is, until we were forced to drop history class and social studies a couple of months ago,” Reynolds added.

Nevertheless, a number of educators are coming out against the cuts, claiming that the embattled verb tense, while outmoded, still plays an important role in the development of today’s youth.

“Much like art and music, the past tense provides students with a unique and consistent outlet for self-expression,” South Boston English teacher David Floen said. “Without it I fear many of our students will lack a number of important creative skills. Like being able to describe anything that happened earlier in the day.”

Despite concerns that cutting the past-tense will prevent graduates from communicating effectively in the workplace, the home, the grocery store, church, and various other public spaces, a number of lawmakers, such as Utah Sen. Orrin Hatch, have welcomed the cuts as proof that the American school system is taking a more forward-thinking approach to education.

“Our tax dollars should be spent preparing our children for the future, not for what has already happened,” Hatch said at a recent press conference. “It’s about time we stopped wasting everyone’s time with who ‘did’ what or ‘went’ where. The past tense is, by definition, outdated.”

Said Hatch, “I can’t even remember the last time I had to use it.

Past-tense instruction is only the latest school program to face the chopping block. School districts in California have been forced to cut addition and subtraction from their math departments, while nearly all high schools have reduced foreign language courses to only the most basic phrases, including “May I please use the bathroom?” and “No, I do not want to go to the beach with Maria and Juan.” Some legislators are even calling for an end to teaching grammar itself, saying that in many inner-city school districts, where funding is most lacking, students rarely use grammar at all.

Regardless of the recent upheaval, students throughout the country are learning to accept, and even embrace, the change to their curriculum.

Conclusion

This study effectively demonstrates how satire, through the strategic breach of Grice’s conversational maxims, particularly the maxim of manner, facilitates a critical commentary on societal and political issues. By analyzing a satirical piece from *The Onion*, we observed that the deliberate incongruity and exaggeration not only serve to humorously critique underfunding in education but also engage the audience in reflecting on broader systemic failures. The findings underscore satire’s dual role: as a medium of entertainment and a catalyst for societal introspection and critique. The study advances the understanding of how satire functions within the framework of conversational pragmatics, providing insights relevant to linguists, communicators, and sociologists. Future research might explore comparative analyses of satire across different cultures to further elucidate its impact on public discourse and social change, potentially examining how varying breaches of conversational maxims affect audience reception and interpretation across cultural contexts.

Originality Statement

The author[s] declare that this article is their own work and to the best of their knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for the published of any other published materials, except where due

acknowledgement is made in the article. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom author[s] have work, is explicitly acknowledged in the article.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author[s] declare that this article was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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