Conversational Implicature Found while Trevor Noah Criticizes the Government in Stand-up Comedy Show

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Abstract

This research deals with conversational implicature and flouted maxim found in stand-up comedy. This descriptive qualitative research, analyzed 12 utterances of Trevor Noah from YouTube video entitled "Trevor Noah COMPLETE REMARKS at 2022 White House Correspondents' Dinner (C-SPAN)" using Grice's conversational implicature theory. The finding shows that from 12 utterances, every utterance can contain more than one type of flouted maxims; the details are as follows, 10 manner, 9 quality, 7 relevance, 6 maxims of quantity. The researcher also finds that, Noah applied Particularized Conversational Implicature more frequently than Generalized Conversational Implicature, with a ratio of 11:1. Noah has done this to make his satire is less offensive. As a result of the research, comics used the theory of implicature by flouting the maxim to make every criticism and satire that he conveys does not sound too offensive. To convey the hidden message of the comic, listeners need more effort to understand the implicit meaning of the comic. They need to know the specific context to get the point the speaker is trying to make.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Implicature, Cooperative Principle, Flouting Maxims, Stand-up Comedy

INTRODUCTION

At present, Stand-Up Comedy has become one of the entertainment phenomena around the world. Yamazaki (2010, in Rolesta, 2016) states that stand-up comedy is a comedy style that performed by comedians who directly present humorous stories to the audience from the stage. The people who perform stand-up comedy are usually called as comics. Comics are totally different from other comedians in the way they make the audience laughs. Comedians usually make the audience laugh by performing funny acts, cracking jokes or wearing unique costumes. Comics, however, make their audience laugh by giving funny satire stories containing implicature: hidden meanings in the comics' utterances about their aspirations, anxieties, or opinions

based on facts and personal experiences. As stated by Puspasari & Ariyanti (2019), they stated that the stand-up comedian, which also known as the comic, must humorously describe their restlessness to the audience in stand-up comedy. One of the most familiar techniques in Stand-up Comedy is called roasting, which is a series of insulting jokes about certain people (Toplyn, 2022). As comics, they need to be careful when they are roasting people, since it may become too offensive, and cause unwanted things to happen. One of such case is the incident involving Chris Rock and Will Smith in the 94th Academic Award ceremony in 2022. At that time, Chris Rock happened to offend Will Smith's wife with a satirical joke, which in turn made the actor got enraged and slapped him directly on stage.

Since it is practically essential to crack jokes without offending any party, this study aims at analyzing another infamous comic, Trevor Noah, who often criticizes the government without enraging the criticize d party. It seems that there are lots of statements which fall to the category of implicature. Implicature is a branch of pragmatics that studies implied meaning. According to Cohen (2010 in Cakrawati, Laxmi Mustika & Wijayanti, Lely Tri, 2023) Pragmatic can be defined as the ability to use language and communicate properly in various contexts. This is related to the listener's ability to understand and interpret what the speaker says. It also includes one's ability to interpret the meanings, assumptions, goals, and types of actions performed by speakers of the language.

According to Grice, a statement is categorized as an implicature when the speaker has a different meaning from the actual sentence said. According to Thomas (1995), implicature is intentionally spoken by the speaker and listeners with proper background knowledge, often also referred to as a context, may understand by the listener. It is also possible, however, for the listeners to miss notion mentioned by the comic. Thus, a proper context plays an important role to help the listener determining the notion of the comic's jokes.

Further, Grice divides implicature into conventional implicature and conversational implicature. Grice explains conventional implicature when an utterance states an explicit meaning which is conventionally and generally accepted by everyone. Therefore, everyone with common general knowledge present in the society can directly understand the message, such as the mythical beliefs of the respective local society. On the other hand, conversational implicature usually appears during a conversation. Conversational implicature is 'temporary' and 'non-conventional'. In other words, to interpret the implied meaning in a conversational implicature, people need to pay attention to the context and the cooperative principles (Levinson, 1983), such as when someone mentions that the weather is pleasant during a picnic, implying an invitation for others to enjoy the good weather and join them outdoors. Thus, this

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study would focus more on the conversational implicature, because it is more applicable than conventional implicature in cracking jokes in a Stand-up Comedy.

In implicature, what is said is different from what is intended. It requires cooperation between the speaker and the listener. Grice formulates the principle of cooperation in the act of conversation as to *"make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of talk exchange in which you are engage"*. Grice also classifies Cooperative Principle into four maxims, namely maxim of quality, maxim of quantity, maxim of relation, and maxim of manner. Grice believes that the conversation will run smoothly only if these four maxims are obeyed. However, there are certain conditions where people fail to observe the maxims; they may intentionally or unintentionally fail to follow the maxims due to the purpose of their interaction. This is related to Mulyana (2015), he states that violation of maxims does not mean that a conversation has been failed, but that is intentionally done by the speaker to create an implicature effect in his utterance. Grice also states that conversational implicature is an implicit meaning of an utterance and flouting maxims as the way or process in producing a conversational implicature.

Grice (in Levinson, 1983) split conversational implicature into two part which are Generalized Conversational Implicature and Particularized Conversational Implicature. Grice (1975) and Levinson (1983) also state that the difference between the two lies on the existence of a special context. Generalized conversational implicature do not require special context, while particularized conversational implicature require a special context. Safitri, R.N. (2020) stated that generalized conversational implicature refers to the implied meaning that arises from an utterance regardless of the specific context. Unlike particularized conversational implicature, which relies on contextual factors, generalized implicature is not tied to any specific feature of the context. Instead, it is associated with the proposition being expressed and can be inferred based on general principles of conversation and language use.

Besides that, multiple previous studies served as references for this research. First is by Izah (2016) focused on conversational implicature in the movie "Aladdin" finding that the majority of utterances fell under the category of Generalized Conversational Implicature. Another study had done by Susan Marbun, Dumaris E. Silalahi and Herman Herman (2021), which analyzed about implicature in Covid-19 Public Service Announcements, revealing that conversational implicature was predominantly used to convey messages. The third was a study on stand-up comedy Indo Malang by Rolesta (2016), this study analyzed two performances of Fajar Ardiansyah as one of the Indonesian comics who

performed Stand-up Comedy in English. The findings of this research found that Fajar as the comic used implicature when he wanted to make the audience easier to understand his ideas and criticisms of social phenomena in a funny way. She also concluded that if the audience did not understand the context, they would find it difficult to understand the implied meaning.

From the background above, the researcher stated that the aim of this research was to understand how to convey criticism without offending the person concerned and at the same time entertain the audience with the use of implicature in Stand-up Comedy. Besides that, the study also aimed at interpreting the implied meaning of the comic's utterances by making use the theory of implicature. As comics, besides they had to make the audience understand the implied meaning that they wanted to convey, they also had to be able to use roasting techniques well without making the person being satirized and feeling offended. Or if not, this thing will be something dangerous, like the incident that happened between Chris Rock and Will Smith years ago. Chris Rock as a comic offended Will Smith's wife with his satirical jokes, which in the end made Will Smith also offended and slapped Chris Rock in front of the stage. In fact, when other comics try to roast, even roast President Biden, he doesn't feel offended, like Trevor Noah. Therefore, researchers used Trevor Noah as research material. So, the data source of this research is from the Stand-Up Comedy recording on

YouTube entitled "Trevor Noah COMPLETE REMARKS at 2022 White House Correspondents' Dinner". This video is recording of WHCD Annual Dinner 2022 which was held on Saturday, 30 April 2022. The researcher thought that this video is interesting to study, because nowadays it is quite difficult for the public to be able to express their opinions and criticisms directly to the people who has power especially the government, but through stand-up comedy it would be easier.

METHOD

This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze Trevor Noah's use of conversational implicature in his stand-up comedy to criticize the government. Creswell (2013) states that qualitative research is usually used as a tool to help the researcher analyzing more specific topics, such as, a phenomenon. Other than that, the researcher used qualitative approach because it dealt with data, that were in the form of words not in number or statistics. The researcher used this method, because she wanted to give explanations about Stand-up Comedy that used as media to convey critics. So that, this method was very applicable to this research.

The data were collected from a video of Noah's performance at the 2022 White House Correspondents' Dinner and the transcription of the speech that cited from (https://scrapsfromtheloft.com/comedy/trevor-noah-white-house-correspondents-dinner-2022-transcript/). The transcription is served

to help the researcher and make her easier to analyze the data.

At beginning, the researcher watched the video, she corrected the transcription, and then categorized Noah's utterances that directed to the government, they are Joe Biden as the President of America, Jill Biden as the First lady, and Ron De Santis as Florida's Governor. The next step, the researcher would classify those utterances which contained conversational implicature.

For the analysis, the researcher reviewed the literature theory about conversational implicature. This study focused on identifying the flouting of maxims and the implied meaning within the context. Thus, the researcher also searched about the "truth condition" of Noah's utterances, the problems which happened on the society especially in America. then, the researcher separated the lines that contained conversational implicature by analyzing the cooperative principle and identifying the flouting maxim that used by Noah. Then, the researcher categorized the data into a table based on the type of the flouted maxims to know how Noah used conversational implicature to convey criticism to the government without making them upset, yet entertaining. After that, the researcher analyzed the implied meaning of Noah's utterances based on the context. She also classified the types of conversational implicature, whether it was generalized or particularized based on the need of the specific context. Then, the researcher described the implied meaning which is found after doing the analysis about the flouting maxim and the context. Last step, based on the results of the analysis, the researcher drew conclusions into a shorter explanation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
This research focused on analyzing how Trevor Noah effectively utilized conversational implicature to criticize the government during his performance, all while keeping the audience entertained and without causing offense. The findings of the study revealed that Noah deliberately flouted Grice's maxims, including quantity, quality, relevance, and manner, in his utterances.

In order to convey his satire subtly, Noah employed various techniques such as using clues, ambiguous words, exaggerated expressions, and introducing unrelated topics. By doing so, he created an atmosphere where his criticism could be understood implicitly, without directly attacking or upsetting the individuals in power. The researcher wanted to emphasize the importance of shared background knowledge between the speaker (Noah) and the listener (the audience) to fully grasp the intended meaning behind his utterances. This shared context provided the necessary clues for the audience to draw assumptions and understand the underlying criticism.

From the collected data, consisting of 12 utterances from Noah's performance at the White House Correspondents', there were 28 times Noah had flouted four types of maxims. This indicated that each utterance could contain more than one

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flouted maxim. This confirmed the statement of Grice (in Thomas, 1995) highlighting that "Conversational Implicature is an implicit meaning of an utterance and flouting maxims as the way or process in producing a conversational implicature". This means that conversational implicature is produced by flouted maxims. Thus, the conversational implicature is practically depended from the intention of the speaker when they flouted the maxim. The maxim of manner was the most frequently flouted by Noah which is 10, then followed by the maxim of relevance with total used 7 times, the maxim of quantity 6 times, and the maxim of quality 5 times.

By flouting the maxim of manner, that require the speaker to say something directly and straightforwardly, and avoid ambiguity or obscurity as in Grice (1989), Noah used ambiguous language, phrases, or idioms as clues to make his statements open to multiple interpretations. This allowed him to convey his criticism in a more subtle and less harsh manner, creating a lighthearted and humorous atmosphere. In example when he uttered *"I'm actually surprised that he found the time",* he intentionally gave the audience some clues to make his statement more ambiguous, and led them to have several interpretations, when listened to his statement. He intentionally turned his criticism into joke by flouting the maxim of manner.

Noah also flouted the maxim of relevance by mentioning unrelated topics or utilizing parables. As Grundy (2000) had been stated, in maxim of

relevance, speaker and listener must be relevant in responding and their response must be appropriate to the topic in the conversation. Thus, to be able to understand his intended meaning specific contextual knowledge is required. As in the sentence, *"You see, what I like about Ron DeSantis is if Trump was the original Terminator, DeSantis is the T-1000",* he purposely mentioned the terminator that was actually not related to the topic (not even talk about politics and media) and also likened it to Ron and Trump, to create jokes. In other hand, this unrelated topic would also make the audience confused about Noah's intention. Therefore, a specific context is needed here to lead the audience understanding Noah's intentions.

Then, Noah occasionally flouted the maxim of quantity by providing excessive or unnecessary information, while it was required him to contribute as informatively as needed and not allowed to make contributions that are too informative than what is necessary, as in Grice (1975). However, he actually did it on purpose, his wordiness helped him establish rapport with the audience and alleviate tension during his satirical remarks. In one of his utterances, he was deliberately being wordy when he greeted Biden, he said, *"You know, sir, can I just say, I think everyone will agree that it's actually nice to, once again, have a president who's not afraid to come to the White House Correspondents Dinner and hear jokes about himself. I'll be honest. I'll be honest. I'll be honest. If you didn't come, I totally*

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would have understood, because these people have been so hard on you, which I don't get, I really don't", this was used to relieve the tensions before he started to criticized him. Other than that, he also provided more information to lead the audience to have the same perception/background knowledge as him (as a special context), so the audience did not fail to understand the implied meaning that he tried to convey.

The maxim of quality was infrequently flouted, Noah did it by frequently made false statements (that was lack of evidence) or contradicted the truth-condition to satirized the government and to create humorous effects. In the show, he once said, *"until someone explained to them that none of the stuff Biden wants actually gets done"*, the word *someone* here had been made this statement was lack of evidence. It was hard to trace who someone he was referring to, consequently it made his utterance was hard to prove. This is in line with what was being stated by Grice (1975), "Flouting maxim of quality occurs when the speaker's utterance which contain lies and false information, also has no supporting evidence".

Trevor Noah often flouted the maxims when he was on-stage, but the conversation between him and audience was keep going well, it was proven from the audience's responses, they laughed, they clapped their hands, etc. This supported statement of Mulyana (2001) who stated that, flouted of maxims does not mean that a conversation has been failed, but that is intentionally done by the speaker to create an implicature effect in his utterance. So, when the speaker flouted the maxim, the conversation would be going well only if the speaker and the listener have the same knowledge about the context or background.

Despite flouting the maxims, Noah's implicit criticisms were well-received by the audience, evident from their laughter and positive responses, which indicated that the audience was able to understand the underlying messages and appreciate the satirical nature of his remarks. The researcher also discussed the types of conversational implicature used by Noah, highlighting the prevalence of particularized implicatures that required specific context and the understanding of the whole utterance.

From Noah's utterances, the researcher had been found 2 types of Conversational Implicature in Noah's utterances that contained criticism toward the government which were Generalized Conversational implicature, that did not need special context or Particularized Conversational Implicature, that needed the knowledge of special context to understand the intention of the speaker. As could be seen in one Noah's utterance, that said "But, despite some hiccups, President Biden has led the country through some really dark times since he took office, the COVID pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the launch of CNN+", to understand the meaning of this utterance, the audience didn't need special context. In other hand, when Noah stated, *"So, personally, I think that President Biden could do a better*

job of taking credit for the things that are going right. Unemployment is currently at 3.6%. Think about that, people, 3.6%. 2% if you don't count the Cuomo family", the audience needed special context understand Noah intention. Especially, when he mentioned the Cuomo Family, the audience needed to listen to the whole utterances. They also required to know the special context behind his utterance, what he had said before and after this utterance.

The researcher found that the type of conversational implicature that mostly used by Noah was particularized, he deliberately used some terms which only could be understand by the audience when they listened to his whole utterance (as the special context), with a ratio of 11:1. He had done this on purpose, because he wanted to make his criticisms less harsh and not offensive to the government. Sometimes, he also seemed to be long-winded just to make the audience understand about the background context of his utterance, so that he could lead the audience to have same knowledge and understand his intention.

Overall, this research sheds light on how Trevor Noah effectively employed conversational implicature to criticize the government while entertaining the audience. His ability to flout the maxims in a calculated manner allowed him to convey his intended meaning implicitly, avoiding direct confrontation or offense. The findings underscore the importance of shared background knowledge and context in understanding implicit criticism and appreciating the comedic elements of Noah's performance

CONCLUSION
In conclusion, Trevor Noah intentionally flouted the maxims to produce implicature in his stand-up comedy performances to make the audiences laugh while he, at the same time, sends his satirical messages to the government; all these are done without offending any party involved. This practice, however, is in no way hindering a successful communication as long as the speaker and the listener share the same background knowledge or context; this enables the audience to still understand the notion that Noah Trevor tries to convey. Noah predominantly flouted the maxim of manner by employing ambiguity and unclear language to deliver criticism in a less offensive manner. This ambiguity prevented direct offense and kept the audience engaged. The study also manages to identify the imbalance in the types of conversational implicature used, with only one instance of generalized implicature and 11 instances of particularized implicature. Most of Noah's implicatures required specific context for proper interpretation, this is used to make the criticism less offensive as well. Nonetheless, this requires the audience to make an effort to understand his intended meaning by identifying the background context of his utterance.

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APPENDIX
Flouted Maxim Categorization

No	Time	Utterances	Type of Conversa-tional Implicature (GCI/PCI)	QN	QL	RE	MA	
				Cooperative Principle				
1	5.06-5.15	Yeah, one of my favorites Ron DeSantis is here. Yeah, oh man, I'm actually surprised that he found the time. You know? He's been so busy trying to outmaneuver Trump for 2024.	PCI		V		V	Noah statement is lack of evidence and ambiguous.
2	5.15-5.50	Yeah, I've seen what you've been doing. Blaming Trump for the lockdowns, distancing yourself from the vaccines that Trump created with his own two hands. [as President Trump] Nobody knew how to make vaccines until I made them, beautiful, beautiful vaccines. Nobody know how, not even Fauci.	PCI		V			This statement cannot be proven and lack of sufficient evidence.
		But, Ron, Ron is playing it coy, man. He won't even tell people, if he got the booster.					V	Noah used an idiom to implicate and emphasize his satire.
		Yeah, or as they say in Florida, don't ask, don't tell. Am I right? I see you Ron		V		V		It provides too little information
3	5.53-6.04	You see, what I like about Ron DeSantis is if *Trump was the original Terminator, DeSantis is the T-1000.*	PCI			V	V	This statement is flouting the maxim of relevant and manner because Noah analogized Ron and Trump as Terminator.
		You're smarter than him. You're slicker than him. You can walk down ramps, yeah.					V	Noah used other words to implicitly tell the audience about the cunningness of Ron.

No	Time	Statement	PCI					Explanation
4	6.04-6.18	Because you see? No, Trump said he won the election, but everyone was just able to look at the numbers and see that he was wrong.	PCI	V				Noah shared too much information, to make the audience understand about his hidden meaning
		That's why, Ron DeSantis is one step ahead. First, you ban the math textbooks, then nobody knows how to count the votes.				V	V	This statement is combining two unrelated things, and ambiguous.
5	7.42-8.05	Interesting fact, even as First Lady, Dr Biden continued her teaching career. Yeah, the first time a presidential spouse has ever done so, ever. Congratulations. Now, you might think it's because she loves teaching so much, but it's actually because, um, she's still paying off her student debt.	PCI	V				This statement is lack of evidence.
		I'm sorry about that, Jill. Yeah, I guess you should have voted for Bernie.					V	Noah intentionally exaggerated thing that made the audience might confused.
6	8.11-8.38	You know, sir, can I just say? I think everyone will agree that it's actually nice to, once again, have a president who's not afraid to come to the White House Correspondents Dinner and hear jokes about himself. I'll be honest. I'll be honest. I'll be honest. If you didn't come, I totally would have understood, because these people have been so hard on you, which I don't get, I really don't.	PCI	V				This statement is too long-winded
		I think ever since you've come into office, things are really looking up. You know? Gas is up, rent is up, food is up, everything.			V	V		This statement is classified as ironic sentence, which contained contradiction.
7	8.53-9.16	And as you all know President Biden's lack of a filter, does get him into hot water sometimes.	PCI				V	This statement contains idioms and metaphor that creates ambiguity.

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		Last month he caused a huge international incident, saying that, Vladimir Putin should be removed from power. It was very, very, upsetting to Russia, yeah, until someone explained to them that <u>none of the stuff Biden wants actually gets done.</u>		V	V			Noah's statement is too exaggerated and lack of evidence.
8	9.23-9.35	But, despite some hiccups, President Biden has led the country through some really dark times since he took office, the COVID pandemic, the war in Ukraine, *the launch of CNN+,*	GCI				V	The words 'the launch of CNN+' make this statement irrelevant.
9	9.39-9.55	and don't forget, don't forget, don't forget, he's also had some major legislative successes, you know? In his first year in office, I might add.	PCI	V				Noah was overstating his utterance.
		He got a bipartisan infrastructure bill passed, <u>that would do everything from fixing America's roads and bridges to modernizing school buses, which Matt Gaetz's girlfriend is very excited about.</u> Don't boo love!				V		Noah deliberately combined two different things.
10	10.02-10.15	Not to mention, no president in my memory has given more marginalized groups opportunities. And <u>I'm talking about women, the LGBTQ community, the Taliban, the list goes on and on</u>.	PCI			V		This utterance contained contradiction.
		And I know, I know, Mr President, that the left is super upset at you, you know?					V	The use of the word 'the left' here, makes this sentence difficult to understand and ambiguous for the audience who does not understand the implied meaning of 'the left'

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11	10.24-10.38	And, I will say, President Biden, that you were a big man here, a really big man. You could have targeted Donald Trump, but instead you chose to only raise taxes on billionaires. That was big of you. Really nice. Prove me wrong, show me the taxes.	PCI				V	This statement contained some clues that made the audience confused and had some perception about Noah's hidden meaning.
12	10.40-10.54	So, personally, I think that President Biden could do a better job of taking credit for the things that are going right. Unemployment is currently at 3.6%. Think about that, people, 3.6%. 2% if you don't count the Cuomo family.	PCI	V			V	This statement is being too long-winded and not concise, that made this utterance ambiguous.
	Total			6	5	7	10	