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Pragmatic Strategies of Humor in English Comic Texts: Implicature, Presupposition, and Speech Acts

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Abstract. Humor is a complex communicative phenomenon in which meaning often extends beyond the literal interpretation of an utterance. In English comic texts, humorous effects are frequently created through conversational implicature, presupposition, speech acts, contextual information, speaker intention, and hidden meaning. This article examines the pragmatic strategies through which humor is constructed and interpreted in English comic discourse. The study applies a qualitative descriptive approach to representative humorous utterances and dialogues. The analysis demonstrates that humor often emerges from the contrast between literal meaning and pragmatic interpretation.

Keywords: pragmatics, humor, comic texts, conversational implicature, presupposition, speech acts, context, speaker intention, hidden meaning.

Introduction. Humor is an important form of human communication because speakers frequently use language not only to entertain but also to express criticism, disagreement, irony, evaluation, and interpersonal attitudes. In comic texts, the intended meaning of an utterance may differ considerably from its literal meaning. Consequently, understanding humor requires attention to contextual information, shared knowledge, communicative intentions, and the ability of the hearer to infer meanings that are not directly expressed. From a pragmatic perspective, humor can therefore be considered a phenomenon in which linguistic form and contextual interpretation interact to produce a humorous effect (Attardo, 2008).

Pragmatics focuses on how speakers communicate meaning and how hearers interpret that meaning in particular contexts. Yule (1996) emphasizes the importance of context, presupposition, implicature, and speech acts in explaining how communication extends beyond literal linguistic content. These categories are especially relevant to humorous discourse because comic utterances frequently depend on indirectness, ambiguity, contradiction, and unexpected interpretation.

Methodology. The study employs a qualitative descriptive and interpretive approach. Representative humorous utterances and short dialogue patterns are examined from a pragmatic perspective. The analysis focuses on six categories: conversational implicature, presupposition, speech acts, context, speaker intention, and hidden meaning.

Results

Conversational Implicature. The analysis shows that conversational implicature is one of the most productive strategies for creating humor. A speaker may provide a statement whose literal meaning appears positive or neutral while the implied meaning communicates criticism or negative evaluation.

For example:

A: How was your presentation?

B: Well, nobody fell asleep.

The literal statement suggests that the presentation was successful. However, the hearer may infer that the presentation was sufficiently boring for falling asleep to have been expected. The humorous effect results from the difference between the explicit statement and the implied

evaluation. Such examples demonstrate Grice's distinction between what is said and what is implicated (Grice, 1975).

Humorous discourse frequently depends on this interpretive gap. The speaker does not explicitly state the negative evaluation but provides enough information for the hearer to infer it. Attardo (1993) argues that jokes may exploit conversational expectations and produce humor through deliberate manipulation of conversational principles. Thus, implicature makes humor indirect and requires active pragmatic interpretation.

Presupposition. Presupposition provides another mechanism through which comic meanings are constructed. A speaker may present an assumption as established information even though that assumption is unexpected or contradictory in the given context. Yule (1996) identifies presupposition as a central pragmatic phenomenon because utterances often contain information that is assumed rather than directly asserted.

Consider the following example: “When did you decide to become responsible?”

The question presupposes that the addressee has become responsible. In an appropriate context, however, the speaker may actually be implying that the person is normally irresponsible. The humorous effect arises from the contrast between the apparent assumption and the contextual reality.

Presupposition therefore allows speakers to express criticism indirectly. Instead of directly stating that someone behaves irresponsibly, the speaker constructs a question that treats the opposite situation as established. The hearer recognizes the contradiction and interprets it as humorous.

Speech Acts. Speech acts are also closely connected with humorous communication. An utterance may have one grammatical form but perform a different communicative function. A question, for example, may function as criticism or sarcasm rather than as a genuine request for information.

For example: “Could you possibly make any more noise?”

Although the sentence is grammatically a question, its pragmatic function is not necessarily information-seeking. In context, it may function as a complaint or criticism. When exaggerated appropriately, the utterance may also produce a humorous effect. This demonstrates that humor frequently depends on the difference between sentence form and communicative function. Dynel (2009) emphasizes that conversational humor includes various pragmatic forms and functions and may simultaneously entertain, criticize, establish solidarity, or express disagreement.

Context and Humorous Meaning. Context is essential to humor interpretation because the same expression can have different meanings in different situations. Consider: “Excellent timing.”

When a person arrives exactly on time, the expression may represent genuine praise. However, when someone arrives thirty minutes late, it may function ironically and produce humor.

The words themselves remain unchanged, but their pragmatic meaning changes because the contextual circumstances are different. The hearer compares the utterance with the actual situation and recognizes the discrepancy. Humor consequently emerges from contextual inference rather than from the lexical meaning of the expression alone.

This supports the broader pragmatic view that humorous meaning is constructed through interaction between linguistic expressions and contextual knowledge. Attardo (2008) emphasizes that the semantic and pragmatic dimensions of humor should be considered together because humorous interpretation often depends on contextual and inferential processes.

Discussion. The findings demonstrate that humor in English comic texts is strongly dependent on pragmatic interpretation. The six examined categories are interconnected rather than independent. Conversational implicature provides a mechanism for communicating additional meaning, while presupposition establishes assumptions against which the utterance is interpreted. Speech acts reveal the communicative function of an expression, while context enables the hearer

to select an appropriate interpretation. Speaker intention then helps reconstruct the hidden meaning responsible for the humorous effect.

The analysis confirms that humor cannot be explained adequately through vocabulary and grammar alone. An utterance may be completely ordinary at the semantic level but humorous at the pragmatic level because of contextual contradiction or unexpected inference. This supports Attardo's (2008) argument that humor should be approached through both semantic and pragmatic perspectives.

The results also indicate that humor comprehension requires pragmatic competence. Readers and listeners must recognize implicit meanings, interpret contextual clues, understand interpersonal relationships, and identify the speaker's communicative intention. This is particularly important for learners of English because humorous expressions may depend on cultural knowledge and conversational conventions that are not immediately accessible to non-native speakers.

Another important finding is that humorous communication is fundamentally interactive. A comic utterance does not automatically produce humor merely because of its linguistic structure. The hearer must successfully reconstruct the intended interpretation. Therefore, humor may be interpreted differently by individuals with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Dynel (2009) similarly emphasizes the diversity and interactional nature of conversational humor.

Overall, the results demonstrate that pragmatic analysis provides an effective framework for explaining how English comic texts create multiple layers of meaning. Humor frequently appears precisely where literal interpretation becomes insufficient and the hearer is required to make additional contextual inferences.

Conclusion. The study has examined the pragmatic strategies involved in the construction and interpretation of humor in English comic texts. The analysis shows that conversational implicature, presupposition, speech acts, context, speaker intention, and hidden meaning play interconnected roles in producing humorous effects. Conversational implicature allows speakers to communicate meanings beyond their explicit words, while presupposition provides assumptions that can be manipulated for humorous purposes. Speech acts demonstrate that grammatical form does not always correspond to communicative function. Context determines how an utterance should be interpreted, while speaker intention guides the hearer's understanding of hidden and non-literal meanings.

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