

AMBIGUITIES IN VERBAL LINGUISTIC JOKES AND DEVALUATION OF GRICE'S MAXIMS OF CONVERSATION AS INGREDIENTS IN VICE GANDA'S TOP-GROSSING FILMS

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ABSTRACT

Lexical and structural levels of language abound ambiguities that are good source of humor. Consequently, violations of the maxims of conversation are leeway to induce humor in any type of discourse. Adding these two precepts and considering pragmatics as its foundation became the bases in analysing the top-grossing films of Vice Ganda. It sought to identify the verbal linguistic jokes and ambiguities present in the top-grossing films of Vice Ganda; determine on how these ambiguities create devaluation of Grice's maxims of conversation; and determine on how the ambiguities in verbal linguistic jokes and devaluation of Grice's maxims of conversation were used as ingredients in Vice Ganda's top-grossing films. Discourse analysis was used in the study and the analytical framework to induce humor by Taghiyev (2018) was used in analysing the corpora. A priori coding was used to identify the recurring ambiguities and devaluation of maxims in the films. Findings show that lexical-semantic and structural-syntactic ambiguities were present in the films. It was intentionally used in order to create humorous effect in the dialogues of the films. Moreover, the devaluation of the maxims of conversation quietly and unostentatiously, opting out, coping with a clash between maxims, and flouting was deemed an effective ingredient to make the films become comical and appealing to the audience.

Keywords: Development; ambiguities, verbal linguistic jokes, Grice's maxims, Vice Ganda's films

INTRODUCTION

One attribute attached to Filipinos is being optimistic amidst struggles in life. One of the best ways to show this attribute is on how they handle difficult situations. Most often, they just make fun of the burdens they carry and laugh about the problems they face. This, for most of the Filipinos, is best projection they can use to make problematic situations become lighter (Macabenta, 2015). Due to this characteristic, there is no doubt that Filipinos love the exchanges of funny statements and making of jokes. As a result, there are jokes randomly selected and compiled into books

written in both English and Filipino. Aside from written materials, the easiest way where jokes can be observed is through mass media. Filipinos love watching films, especially comedy and once they talk about this genre, the first name that may enter in their mind is none other than Vice Ganda.

Vice Ganda's stardom started in 2009 when he was introduced as one of the judges of a noon-time show. His funny segment "May Na Text" hooked the audience due to its hilarious and sarcastic contents. His movie titled "The Revengers' Grice's maxims of conversation, it will create humorous effect. Paul Grice (1975)

proposed the idea of cooperative principle which states that people involve in a certain conversation observes cooperation in order to sustain communication. Upon the observance, maxims of conversation should be observed. These are the maxims of 1) quantity, 2) quality, 3) relevance and 4) manner. The violation of these maxims can cause misinterpretation and misunderstandings that can be a good source of linguistic jokes. Though verbal humor can be found in all languages and in all cultures, little has been written about the analysis of verbal humor on the lens of Filipino culture, specifically in the realm of mainstream comedy films in the country. In this regard, this paper attempts to explore how humor is achieved in a Filipino mainstream comedy so that the outcome obtained can be used to better understand the humorous phenomenon of the Filipino culture, thereby contribute to literature on Filipino comedy films.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study investigated the ambiguities in verbal linguistic jokes and the devaluation of Grice's Maxims of Conversation as ingredients in Vice Ganda's top-grossing films. Specifically, it sought to achieve the following:

1. identify the verbal linguistic jokes and ambiguities present in the top-grossing films of Vice Ganda;
2. determine on how do these ambiguities create devaluation of Grice's maxims of conversation; and
3. determine on how the ambiguities in verbal linguistic jokes and devaluation of Grice's maxims of conversation were used as ingredients in Vice Ganda's top-grossing films

METHODOLOGY

Discourse analysis was used to analyse the content of the three top-grossing films of Vice Ganda. The framing analysis style and the basic approach of coding, comprehending,

synthesizing, theorizing and re-contextualizing to identify the recurring verbal linguistic jokes were used. Each scene of the selected movies was analysed and coded. The analysis of the ambiguities parallel to the devaluation of Grice's maxims of conversation was treated using ambiguities and humor analysis framework proposed by Taghiyev (2018). Effects of these elements to the films were underscored afterwards. The data primarily came from three top-grosser films of Vice Ganda. These films were purposively selected to ensure its appropriateness in the scope of the study. These movies were: "Petrang Kabayo" which gained P115.4 million in 2010, Sisterakas which gained P393.4 million in 2012 and "Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy" which gained P421 million in 2013.

The procedure followed in conducting this research had three phases. Phase 1 included the process of watching the three movies, coding, comprehending, synthesizing, theorizing and re-contextualizing to identify the recurring verbal linguistic jokes. Phase 2 included the analysis of the data through highlighting the ambiguities and humor analysis of the verbal linguistic jokes. A *priori* coding was used because the researcher just looked into the different verbal linguistic jokes and the devaluated maxims of conversation present in the movies. Moreover, analysis on the devaluation of Grice's maxims of conversation was also underscored in this phase. The last stage included the deepening and explanations regarding the effects of these elements as ingredients in the top-grossing films of Vice Ganda.

The framework of ambiguities and humor analysis proposed by Taghiyev (2018) was used to analyse the verbal linguistic jokes present in the films. Humor analysis occurs upon identifying the two categories of linguistic jokes based on its structure. These were lexical-semantic jokes and the structural-syntactic jokes. Adding these precepts to Grice's maxims of conversation, how the films devaluated the maxims in order to create humor was also analysed and evaluated; the adding of these two concepts, through the consideration of pragmatics as its foundation, in

order to induce humor build up the framework in analysing the films of Vice Ganda.

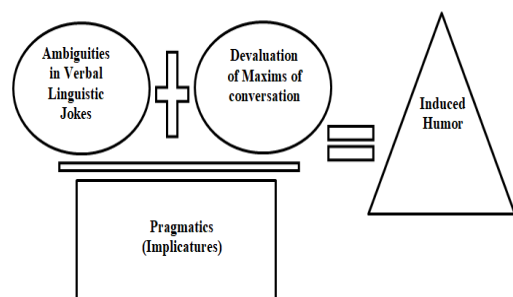


Figure 1. Analytical Framework of Induced Humor

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Verbal Linguistic Jokes and Ambiguities in Vice Ganda’s Top-Grossing Films

In the creation of comedy films, to make it effective and sell to the audience, consideration for an auspicious environment for laughter was a crucial thing. To achieve such, the role of language plays a vital part. In identifying the verbal linguistic jokes and ambiguities present in the selected movies of Vice Ganda, scene-framing analysis was used.

The dialogues in the different scenes of the movies were coded. A *priori* coding was used because of the nature of the study, capturing the verbal linguistics jokes, ambiguities and devaluation of Grice’s maxims of conversation. According to Taghiyev (2018) in his analysis of linguistic jokes, humorous effect can be achieved through lexical-semantic and structural syntactic ambiguity. In the selected movies of Vice Ganda, verbal linguistic jokes were categorized based on the ambiguities it carries. Linguistically speaking, jokes carry ambiguities that induce humor. It takes in many forms and may occur in all levels of language (phonological, morphological, semantic and syntactic levels).

In this study, lexical-semantic and structural-syntactic ambiguities were considered as point of reference for humor analysis. Below is the table of number of lexical-semantic and structural-

syntactic ambiguities present in the selected movies of Vice Ganda.

Table 1
Lexical-Semantic and Structural-Syntactic Ambiguities in the Top-Grossing Films of Vice Ganda

Movies	Number of Lexical-Semantic Ambiguities	Number of Structural-Syntactic Ambiguities
Petrang Kabayo	6	5
Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy	11	3
Sisterakas	5	7

It can be gleaned in the table that *Petrang Kabayo* had six lexical-semantic ambiguities; 11 ambiguities for *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy*; and five ambiguities for *Sisterakas*. Meanwhile, the structural-syntactic ambiguities found in *Petrang Kabayo* is 5, 3 ambiguities for *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy*, and 7 ambiguities for *Sisterakas*. The most numbered ambiguity in lexical-semantic level is *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy*. This means that the said movie used words, hence lexical per se, that have multiple meanings or usually have two meanings that can be misinterpreted if the receiver of the message will not get the intended meaning of the speaker. In the movie, the dialogues were usually framed in exchanges of lines wherein words which have double meanings were used in order to induce humor to the viewers. This linguistic phenomenon is called as polysemy whereby a word can have multiple meanings and misused of such can create ambiguous statements that may lead to the creation of humorous effect (Abraham, 2014). Below are some of the examples of lexical-semantic ambiguities present in the three movies.

Lexical-Semantic Ambiguities

Film 1: Petrang Kabayo

Scene 3 (6: 22:49): In the hospital

Vice: (holding the hand of Eugene) *Huwag ka nay bumitaw.* (Don’t let go mother)
Eugene: *Bumitaw ka.* (Let go)

Vice: (Sobbing) *Ayoko nay. Huwag kang bumitaw.* (I don't want to. Don't let go)

Eugene: *Bumitaw ka kasi hindi ka pwedeng pumasok sa operating room.* (Let go of me because you are not allowed to go in the operating room.)

The word “bumitaw” as used by Vice means to continue fighting and do not let go of life. While Eugene Domingo literally used the word to ask Vice to let go of her because Vice was not allowed to enter the operating room. In this case, the word “bumitaw” which means to let go had several meanings, hence ambiguous and this created confusion to the character of Vice Ganda that leads to humorous scene.

Film 2. *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy*

Scene 12 95:48:48): In the cellphone stall

Seller: *Ang ganda ganda ninyo naman po ma'am. Para po kayong star.* (You're so beautiful ma'am. You look like a star)

Vice as Girlie: *Star? Bakit, lima ba ang kanto ng mukha ko kaya mukha akong star?* (Star? Why, do I have five corners in my face which make me look like a star?)

While this given example seemed sarcastic in nature, it basically falls under lexical-semantic ambiguity for the word “star” has several meanings and this was used to induce humor. It was meant to refer to an artist yet it was taken literally to a shape by Vice.

Meanwhile, structural-syntactic ambiguity happens when two or more different syntactic structures can be assigned to one string of word (Taghiyev, 2018). These structural-syntactic ambiguities can be presented in every discourse that a person is involved in and are good source of verbal linguistic. The comedy films of Vice abounded of these ambiguities. Below are some of the examples of structural-syntactic jokes in the three top-grossing films of Vice.

Structural-Syntactic Ambiguities

Film 2. *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy*

Scene 9 (5:45:35): Inside the hospital (USA)

Vice as Girlie: *What? Buhay pa ang nanay namin?*(What, our mother is still alive?) *Why didn't you tell that to us?? Why??*(Shouts) *Why???Why???*

Joey: *Don't shout at me!!!*

Vice as Girlie: *Why?????* (in whisper mode)

The implicated meaning of the statement “Don't shout at me” was to keep Vice in silence; however, due to its structural ambiguity, it was taken literally by Vice, hence he asked his father through whispering.

Film 3. *Sisterakas*

Scene 8 (0: 08:27)(outside the house of Aiai)

Von: *Ang aga mo naman ata te?* (Why are you so early?)

Aiai: *Ay oo ok lang yun alam mo kasi Von, sa negosyo dapat ang unang nakikita MAGAGANDA, para lalo tayong dagsain ng customer. Kaya nga maaga akong nagising e, kasi maganda ako. Ikaw, mukhang tinaghali ka ata ng gising?*

(Yes, Von because in business, the ones that must be seem first are the beautiful. That's why I wake up early because I am beautiful. You, it seems you wake up late.)

Von: *Alam mo te, buti na lang alas siete palang ng umaga pa. Hindi pa ako naka-schedule na sumagot sa amo ko ng pabalang.*(You know what, sis, it's good that I wake up at 7:00. It's not yet the schedule for me to bad mouth my boss.)

Aiai: *Ah ganon, bahala ka swelduhan ngayon. Baka mamaya, magsakit-sakitan ako hindi ako makawithdraw, ikaw din.*(Oh, really? It's pay time now. I might be having sickness, you might not get your salary.)

Von: *Wow te, kung makapg sabe kanaman ng withdraw, kala mo naman above minimum ang sahod* (Wow, the. As if my salary is above the minimum.)



The ambiguities in this dialogue were framed by the following statements: “Ay oo ok lang yun alam mo kasi Von, sa negosyo dapat ang unang nakikita MAGAGANDA, para lalo tayong dagsain ng customer. Kaya nga maaga akong nagising e, kasi maganda ako. Ikaw, mukhang tinaghali ka ata ng gising?” It can be observed that the statement used by Aiai was ambiguous in the sense that it produced several interpretations, one was a sarcastic remark embedded on how she uttered the line. From this, the flow of the conversation became more ambiguous, sharing implied meanings of verbal ironies.

2. Devaluation of Grice’s Maxims of Conversation

In any type of discourse, if a listener heard and interpreted correctly what a particular speaker uttered devoid from ambiguities, there will be an absence of linguistic jokes (Taghiyev, 2018). American philosopher Paul Grice (1975) proposed the cooperative principle which states that in order to create substantial interaction in any speech situation, people must be able to understand and support their exchanges of thought regardless of the linguistic features used. As a result, Grice suggests four maxims of conversation: maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner.

Violation of any of these maxims can result to misunderstanding caused by ambiguities and will eventually lead in the impregnation of humor in linguistic jokes. There are four ways on how these maxims are violated: 1) quietly and unostentatiously, 2) opting out of a maxim, 3) coping with a clash between maxims, and 4) flouting a maxim in order to exploit it (Grice, 1975). In the three selected top-grossing films of Vice Ganda, the devaluation of Grice’s maxims of conversation was presented below.

Table 2 shows the list of maxims of conversation that were devaluated in the three top-grossing films of Vice Ganda. The devaluation of maxims happens either deliberately or accidentally. Although Grice (1975) said the maxims must be observed in any communication situation, it still poses some

Table 2
Devaluation of Grice’s Maxims of Conversation in the Top-grossing Movies of Vice Ganda

Movies	Maxim of Quantity				Maxim of Quality				Maxim of Relevance				Maxim of Manner			
	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
A. Petrang Kabayo																
Scene 13																/
Scene 14	/															
Scene 17							/									
Scene 17			/													
Scene 21																/
Scene 22																/
Scene 23																/
Scene 24											/					
Scene 25																/
Scene 31		/														
Scene 37	/															
Scene 51																/
Scene 56																/
Sub-Total	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	5	1	0	1
B. Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy																
Scene 5																/
Scene 12																/
Scene 15			/													
Scene 17																/
Scene 25																/
Scene 27																/
Scene 30																/
Scene 35																/
Scene 36																/
Scene 44																/
Scene 51				/												
Scene 51		/														
Sub-Total	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	1
C. Sisterakas																
Scene 2																/
Scene 8																/
Scene 11	/															/
Scene 11																/
Scene 15																/
Scene 17			/													
Scene 18																/
Scene 22																/
Scene 22																/
Scene 31			/													
Scene 44	/															
Scene 49																/
Scene 56		/														
Scene 57			/													
Scene 61																/
Sub-Total	2	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	1	0	0	1	1
Total	4	2	5	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	20	2	0	1	2

Legend: A- Quietly and unostentatiously devaluation of maxim
 B- Opting out of a maxim,
 C- Coping with a clash between maxims
 D- Flouting a maxim in order to exploit it

restrictions by which the interlocutors regulate their conversations and when they are caught in a situation where meanings and intentions are

not explicitly conveyed (Tupan, 2008). In the three selected top-grossing films of Vice Ganda, devaluation of these maxims was intentionally done in order to induce humorous effect. In the first film of Vice Ganda, "Petrang Kabayo", out of the 58-scenes, there are 13 scenes where devaluation of the maxims were observed. Four violations were observed for the maxim of quantity; one for the maxim of quality; six for the maxim of relevance; and two for the maxim of manner. The most numbered violation is the maxim of relevance where devaluation was categorized as flouting and the least violated is the maxim of quantity having one under flouting.

Meanwhile, the second film "Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy" has a total of 52 scenes. There are 12 scenes that violated the maxims. Under these scenes are: two for maxim of quantity; one for maxim of quality; eight for maxim of relevance; and one for maxim of manner. The most numbered violation is the maxim of relevance which falls under flouting. Lastly, the third movie which is "Sisterakas" has 62 scenes. The total number of scenes that violated the maxims is 15: six for maxim of quantity; seven for maxim of relevance; and two for maxim of manner. The most numbered violation is maxim of relevance under flouting.

It must be understood that devaluations of the maxims of conversation in the three selected films of Vice Ganda were intentionally done to create humor for the audience. Combining the three films, the table shows that the most numbered violation among the maxims of conversation is relevance and the type of violation is flouting having 20. The following are some dialogues taken from the movie which showed the devaluation of the four maxims.

Violation of Maxim of Quantity

Film 1. Petrang Kabayo

Scene 37: In the mansion of Vice

Maid 3: *Ano ba ang iniisip mo? (What's in your mind?)*

Younger sister of Vice: *Marami po. Kung bakit ako nandito?. Kung bakit ganun si kuya Peter.*

Kung nasaan na kaya sya. Kung kumusta na kaya ang Presidente. Kun mataas na ba ang ekonomiya ng bansa. (A lot of things. Why I am here? Why my brother Peter is like that? Where is he now? If how well the president is? If the economy of the country is doing good?)

In this conversation, violation of maxim of quantity was framed by the response given by younger sister of Vice Ganda. The maid only asked one question and the question asks for specific details, yet the given answer of the younger sister of Vice was more than what was required and the details were no longer connected to the questions; hence, violated the maxim of quantity quietly and unostentatiously.

Violation of Maxim of Quality

Film 2. Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy

Scene 51: In the cemetery

Maricel: *Sino ba talaga ang namatay? Closed ba ako sa taong ito? (Who really died? Am I really closed to this person?)*

Angelou: *Ay oo te, very closed. Very very closed. (Yes, the. Very very closed)*

Bobby: *Basta ang importante te' naandito ka, nakikiramay. Kapitbahay natin yan. (What is important is that you are here, mourning. She is our neighbour).*

In this scene, the maxim of quality was violated via coping with a clash between maxims. The question of Maricel sought for details, especially that she wanted to know who the death person is; however, to cover the agenda of the two other speakers, they violated the maxim of quality by not being truthful and not giving adequate information if who was inside the coffin. Doing so, it will ruin their plan and Maricel will find out that the person inside the coffin was Vice Ganda who was just acting dead to help her patch-up things with her husband, Joey.

Violation of Maxim of Relevance

Film 3. *Sisterakas*

Scene 2 (0:14:17) Mansion

Little Girl (Aiai delas Alas): “*bakla ka ba?*”
(Are you gay?)

Totoy (vice Ganda): “*Mahaba ba ang baba mo?*” (Is you chin long?)

Little Girl: OO (Yes)

Totoy: *Eh di oo rin ang sagot ko.* (So my answer is yes as well.)

The conversation between young Aiai Delas Alas and young Vice Ganda shows the devaluation of maxim of relevance via flouting. Young Aiai asked a sensitive question that requires an answer, but young Vice instead of giving an answer posed also a sensitive question. His interrogative remark had no connection to the query asked earlier by Aiai, however it was a sarcastic point that served as a counter-act on the sensitive question asked by Aiai. Nevertheless, the implied meaning in this conversation was not to ask questions if the answers were obvious.

Violation of Maxim of Manner

Film 1. *Petrang Kabayo*

Scene 25 (7:05:56): In the mansion of Vice

Vice: *Turuan ninyo yang batang yan ng lahat ng gawaing bahay.* (Teach that kid all the household chores)

Servant 1: *Sir, saan po galing ang batang ito?*

Kamag-anak ninyo? (Sir, where does that child come from? Your relative?)

Younger sister of Vice: *Sa kasamaang palad.* (Unfortunately)

Servant 2: *Ha, kapatid ka ni sir?* (Ha ? You are the sister of sir ?)

Younger sister of Vice : *Sa kasamaang Palad.* (Unfortunately)

The conversation explicitly shows the violation of maxim of manner quietly and unostentatiously. The answer of the younger

sister of Vice showed obscurity of expression; the answer was not clear and direct to the question. Moreover, to avoid the involvement in the conversation, violation of the maxim of manner was taken.

3. Effects of Ambiguities and Devaluation of Grice's Maxims of Conversation in Creating Vice Ganda's Comedy Films

In the three top-grossing films of Vice Ganda, the ambiguities in the lexical-semantic and structural-syntactic aspects of language were used in order to create humor. The role of language has its big contribution in the creation of the movies. Aside from the exaggerated actions and conversational puns, the linguistic elements embedded in every dialogue made the movies appealing to the audience. The humors created were attributed to the ambiguities of these linguistic elements. As what Taghiyev (2017) said, the ambiguities of the language can be considered as the most productive source of linguistic jokes. Meanwhile, the devaluation of Grice's maxims of conversation was intentionally used in the movies of Vice.

To evade from the maxims entails creation of confusion that is a good source of humor. The characters of Vice, along with the rest of the cast of his movies intentionally misused the maxims to induce humor in their exchange of conversation. This is parallel with the findings of Abraham (2014) when he studied and analysed TV sitcoms. In his analysis, he found out that humor in most of TV sitcoms is an intentional misuse and violation of the maxim of manner and quality is highly observable. Accordingly, these violations gave rise to language using techniques which include absurdity, sarcasm, insults, lies and wordplays. All of these were also observable in the movies of Vice, especially sarcasms, insults and absurdity.

Consequently, the hit-American TV series *Desperate Housewives* was analysed by Tupan (2008) and his purpose was to determine the purpose if why violations take place in the movie. Her major finding revealed that the violations of the maxims are intentionally done to cover the truth, which was a major element of the

series. In the movies of Vice, though he intentionally misused the maxims, its primary purpose was to induce humor and make it appealing to the audience. It was not used to cover anything, rather merely in the creation of humorous effect which was true to the nature of Vice Ganda's films.

CONCLUSION

The lexical-semantic and structural-syntactic ambiguities are all present in the movies of Vice Ganda. Both are primarily and intentionally used in order to create humorous effect in the dialogues and in the movies as a whole. Consequently, the devaluation of the maxims of conversation of Grice (1975) became an effective ingredient to make his movies become funny and appealing to the audience. Most of the language uses in his movies are in the form of absurdities, insults and sarcasms. Amidst criticism as to the content and quality of Vice's movies, he was still able to sell it to the general audiences. His slapstick comedies glazed by its ambiguities and devaluation of maxims was deemed appealing to the moviegoers, making his movies as top-grossers.

RECOMMENDATION

The ambiguities in lexical and structural levels of language served as the bases in analysing the top-grossing films of Vice Ganda. Consequently, violations of the maxims of conversation to induce humor were also analysed in the discourse. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The findings may serve as a basis to further the analysis about the nature and elements of jokes, particularly its use in the mainstream comedy movies in the Philippines.
2. The findings may serve as a basis to deepen the understanding between the relationship between linguistic ambiguities and Grice's maxims of conversation.

3. The findings of the study may be a source for future studies in terms of exploring other possibilities where linguistic ambiguities can be applied aside from verbal linguistic jokes.
4. Language researchers, especially those who venture in pragmatic studies may adopt the result of this research in actual discourses aside from scripted ones.

IMPLICATIONS TO LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

1. Language teachers may use this study as a point of reference in discussing similarities and differences (comparative linguistics) between Filipino and English language in framing linguistic jokes.
2. Language teachers may use the finding of the study in allowing the learners to deepen their understanding about language ambiguities and its relation to correct usage of the language.
3. Language teachers may use the findings of the study as a basis in crafting lessons that will develop the pragmatic competence of the students, specifically in the applicability of the maxims of conversation.

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