A Comparative Study of Cooperative Principal Violation in How I Met Your Mother and Phua Chu Kang

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ABSTRACT

This comparative study examines how non-observance of Grice's Cooperative Principle generates humour in How I Met Your Mother and Phua Chu Kang, aiming to map breach types to strategies. The framework integrates Grice's maxims (Quality, Quantity, Relation, Manner) with incongruity, superiority, and relief theories to explain how pragmatic choices cue audience inferences. The problem addressed is the lack of cross-show, cross-cultural evidence about which maxims are breached, why they are not observed, and how such breaches translate into coherent humour mechanisms. Using comparative content analysis, the sample comprised the three highest-rated season-one episodes from each sitcom, restricted to main-cast utterances that show non-observance. Data were collected through close reading and human coding, then analyzed via frequency profiling of breach types and discourse analysis of implicatures and joke functions. Findings show distinct breach profiles: one series favors information play and misdirection, the other strategic ambiguity and politeness-tinged vagueness. Across both shows, incongruity leads most laughs, while superiority and relief vary with character dynamics and situational tension. Overall, pragmatic design—not merely topics or punchlines—shapes laugh timing and social meaning audiences quickly recognize. Implications include writer, translator, and educator guidance; future work should use multi-season corpora, test audiences, and model multimodal cues robustly...

Keywords: maxims, humor, discourse analysis

INTRODUCTION

The Background of The Study

Communication is the exchange of meaning between interlocutors, enabling shared understanding across contexts. In everyday communication, speakers typically conform to Grice's Cooperative Principle, which organizes conversation through four maxims: Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner. These maxims guide speakers to be truthful, informative, relevant, and clear to ensure an effective and successful communication. While simple in formulation, the principle encapsulates how participants manage expectations about meaning and implicature in interaction (Hu, 2024). Ultimately, this highlights that misaligned contributions are not merely errors, but often indicate deeper issues, as intent plays a crucial role in how actions are interpreted.

Non-observance of these maxims happens when speakers do not adhere to the four maxims of Cooperative Principle whether intentionally or accidentally. Recent research identifies categories of maxims breach such as flouting, violating, opting out, suspending, and infringing, each linked to intentions and contexts (Rachmah, Widya, & Putri, 2022). This study focuses on violating and flouting as flouting differs from violating in the sense of it is an obvious breach where speaker has no intention to mislead but give cue implicature to hearer,

whereas violating is a breach that intentionally misleads the hearer (Essentials of Linguistics, 2022). Consequently, there are several motives and intentions including sarcasm, secrecy, or playfulness underlying these breaches performed by a speaker.

Taken together, the Cooperative Principle explains how communication is supposed to work, while non-observance explains how deeper meaning are conveyed when a speaker flouts or violates the maxims. In this study, both lenses help compare comedic dialogue across distinct cultures, so we can trace how different maxim breaches shape humour, characterisation, and audience inference and timing effects.

Problem Statement

According to Ghani (2018), despite the growing interest in humour studies, there is a lack of comparative research on how humour is created through the non-observance of conversational maxims in Western and Eastern sitcoms. Most studies have focused on single cultural contexts only, such as American sitcoms like *Friends*, without exploring cross-cultural differences in humor strategies. This gap limits our understanding of how cultural norms influence the pragmatic choices that generate laughter. Therefore, examining both Western and Eastern sitcoms is essential to reveal how cultural variation shapes humor through maxim breaches.

Another challenge lies in identifying which maxims are most frequently breached and the reasons behind these non-observances. Previous research shows that violating and floutings often occur for purposes such as sarcasm, face-saving, or avoiding sensitive topics (Arbain et al., 2023). However, these studies rarely provide systematic comparisons across genres or cultures. Without such analysis, it is difficult to determine whether certain frequently breached maxims, like Quality or Quantity, are universally exploited for humor or if their use reflects cultural communication styles. This lack of clarity indicates the need for a more focused investigation.

Finally, while humor theories such as Incongruity, Superiority, and Relief have been widely discussed, few studies have examined how these theories interact with maxim breaches in sitcom discourse. Humor often arises from unexpected contrasts, feelings of superiority, or emotional release (Wieczorek, 2022). Yet, the extent to which these mechanisms operate differently in Western and Eastern sitcoms remains questionable in a gray area. Understanding this relationship is crucial for explaining why certain jokes work differently across audiences and how pragmatic strategies align with cultural humor norms.

In summary, the absence of cross-cultural humor analysis, the limited exploration of reasons for non-observance, and the insufficient integration of humor theories with maxim breaches create a significant research gap. Addressing these issues will provide deeper insights into the pragmatic and cultural dimensions of humor studies in academia of English Language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Cooperative Principle by Herbert Paul Grice (1975)

The Cooperative Principle, coined by Herbert Paul Grice in 1975, is an effective conversation framework between interlocutors that generate implicature through four maxims: Quality (be truthful), Quantity (be appropriately informative), Relation (be relevant), and Manner (be clear) (Grice, 1975). Later applications emphasize that non-observance—whether flouting or violation—conveys inferable meanings that audiences usually perform, and that these choices carry social consequences beyond mere semantics (Hu, 2024). In media discourse, researchers show that sitcom frequently exploits strategic breaches of these maxims, making the inference process a part of the joke structure (Xu, 2022; Rachmah et al., 2022). Accordingly, this study leverages the Cooperative Principle to quantify breach frequency in *How I Met Your Mother* and *Phua Chu Kang* and to interpret the characters' discourse that results in humor. Simply put, the Cooperative Principle outlines how conversation is expected to work, and its violation often leads to comedic effect. This interaction provides a valuable perspective for examining cross-cultural communication.

B. Non-Observance of Maxims for both Sitcoms in Frequency and Discourse Analysis

A growing body of work applies the Cooperative Principle to humorous texts and performances, showing that maxim breaches are patterned and interpretable across languages and genres (Al-Zubeiry, 2020). Building on this idea, it is argued by researchers that incorporate social context that the pragmatics of cooperation—and non-cooperation—should be interpreted considering cultural norms and audience knowledge, as both can shape the likelihood of a breach and how it is understood (Hu, 2024). For the present comparative topic, these insights are mainly derived from the analysis of Western (*HIMYM*) and Eastern (*PCK*) sitcoms, where different breach types can determine different implicatures and laughter intensity. Thus, this research integrates frequency analysis with close discourse reading: counting what is the most and least breached maxims, whereas discourse analysis explains how the humor are generated through the humor theories; Incongruity theory of humor, Superiority theory of humor and Release theory of humor (Ghani, 2018).

A review of Grice's Cooperative Principle and its application in humor studies shows several key patterns and gaps. The theory presents conversation as guided by rules, but intentional violations of these rules can serve creative or cultural functions—particularly in scripted media like sitcoms. This helps explain how sitcoms use flouted maxims to create humor while still being understood by audiences. However, applying these strategies across cultures remains difficult, as there are few studies that compare Western and Eastern sitcoms. Additionally, many researchers examine maxim violations without linking them to humor theory, leaving their relationship largely unexamined. These gaps highlight the need for cross-cultural studies that combine quantitative data on frequency with qualitative analysis on discourse to better understand how humor arises from pragmatic rule-breaking.

C. Past Studies on Cooperative Principle Violation

Recent studies highlight how sitcom humor systematically exploits the non-observance of maxims, yet up-to-date comparative work on *Desperate Housewives* versus *That 70's Show* is scarce. For instance, a cross-cultural study sampled 200 utterances from two U.S.–China sitcoms and, using qualitative coding under the Cooperative Principle and Politeness frameworks, found frequent maxim breaches with culturally inflected purposes (e.g., false statements for effect) (Changchao, 2024). Similarly, a 2023 thesis surveying American sitcoms (Friends, HIMYM, TBBT) used episode sampling and qualitative discourse analysis to show maxim manipulation as a core humor device (Reljac, 2023). Together these studies signal viable designs and coding schemes while underlining a gap: neither targets Desperate Housewives alongside That 70's Show directly. Methodologically, comparable research details how episode-level sampling enables frequency counts and discourse explanations of flouts and violations. For example, an analysis of 12 episodes of The IT Crowd identified 102 floutings, with Quality maxim the most frequent, through qualitative coding and simple tallies (Krisdwiyani & Hanidar, 2022). According to Maulida (2022), humorous effects in Friends are frequently created through the violation of all four of Grice's conversational maxims—quantity, quality, relation, and manner—with each maxim's breach contributing to different joke structures and comedic outcomes. These designs and findings can transfer to a Desperate Housewives vs. That 70's Show comparison; however, without show-specific recent studies, claims about genre (drama–comedy) differences remain tentative and should be tested with balanced sampling across seasons and characters.

Several recent studies analyze The Big Bang Theory (TBBT) with explicit counts and discourse interpretation. According to a qualitative pragmatic study conducted by Udeze & Udeze (2024), the characters' dialogues frequently breached the maxims of Quantity, Relation, and Manner using conversational implicature to trigger humor. The study's sampling focused on selected scenes and interpreted Sheldon's breaches as a comedic tool. Additionally, Liu (2023) also examined Season 1 of TBBT and researched on how implicatures emerge when characters intentionally violate maxims in her conference paper. Complementing this, a season-11 study coded 140 violations across 12 episodes (Quantity 31.4%; Relation 27.8%; Manner 20%; Quality 17.1%), offering a frequency profile of breach types (Novebry & Rosa, 2023). Collectively, the abovementioned studies examine the non-observance of maxims with frequency analysis and discourse analysis but vary in sampling depth. Beyond frequency analysis, researchers highlight rhetorical techniques and reasons for non-observance. A journal article argues that sarcasm, hyperbole, and metaphor recurrently cue implicature in TBBT, explaining why audiences infer unstated meanings even when maxims are not observed (Qiu, 2023). The conference

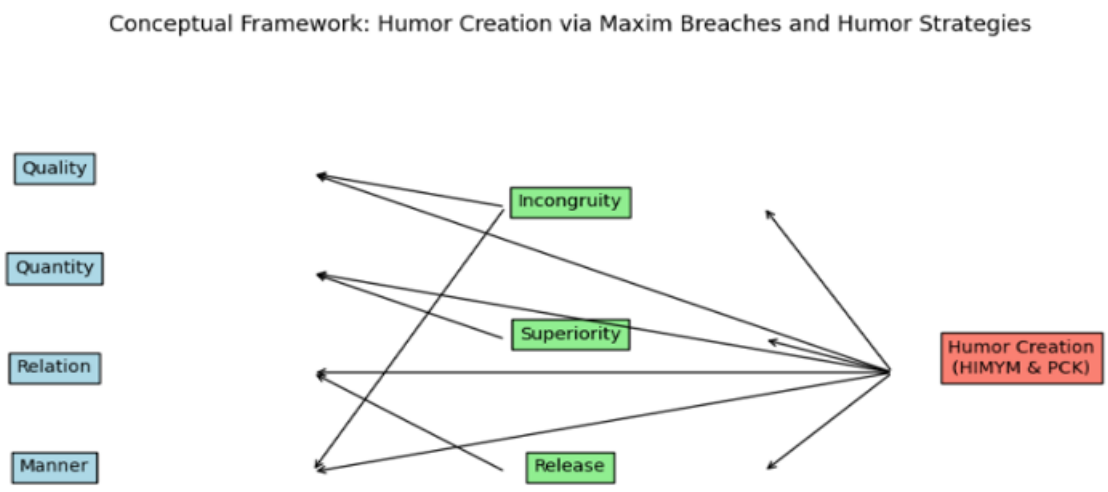
analysis similarly links violations to humor construction through context-driven inferences (Liu, 2023). Qualitative interpretation further shows how characters' pragmatics (e.g., Sheldon's literalism) interact with breaches to heighten comedic result (Udeze & Udeze, 2024). These studies agree on mechanism but differ in unit of analysis; thus, a combined frequency-plus-function approach is preferable.

From a methodological perspective, studies based on small or single-season samples limit generalizability, and some focus too narrowly on specific character interactions. Although the season 11 dataset is relatively large, it excludes the character development seen in earlier seasons (Novebry & Rosa, 2023). Scene-based qualitative studies provide detailed insights but involve fewer examples (Udeze & Udeze, 2024). Recent discourse analysis also recommends linking maxim use to changes in plot and relationships, but more extensive, multi-season data is still lacking (Ganaden, 2025). Therefore, future research on TBBT would benefit from stratified sampling across seasons and storylines, combining frequency analysis with close examination of discourse functions.

Recent studies on *HIMYM* examine how non-observance shapes verbal humor, though samples are often narrow. A 2023 article used a documentation-based qualitative design on selected episodes to identify flouting across all maxims, then linked flouts to verbal-humor types (Aritorang et al., 2023). A bachelor's thesis written by Ako (2020) analyzed four episodes, contrasting male and female characters' humor through Grice's maxims and three humor theories, and reported gendered tendencies in how flouts/violations were deployed. A 2023 thesis on American sitcoms that include *HIMYM* verify the maxim manipulation for sitcom humor but does not isolate show-specific frequencies (Reljac, 2023). These designs demonstrate feasibility, yet small, convenience samples limit robust cross-episode claims. Adding tighter episode control, another project analyzed Season 2, Episodes 1–5 qualitatively and showed that humorous moments often stem from violations and floutings that cue implicatures (Rasbi et al., 2022). While such studies converge on mechanism, they differ in coding breadth and the integration of humor theory; for instance, some pair Grice analysis with verbal-humor taxonomies, whereas others stop at maxim identification (Aritorang et al., 2023). Consequently, a next step is scaling up to multi-season corpora and pairing frequency analysis with discourse-pragmatic explanation to compare character- or plot-specific humor patterns more reliably.

The review of past studies reveals several recurring patterns and unresolved issues. First, most research confirms that sitcom humor relies heavily on maxim flouting and violation, yet the scope of analysis often remains narrow, focusing on single shows or limited episodes. This creates a methodological gap in terms of sample size and cross-cultural comparison. Second, while some studies integrate humor theories, many stop at identifying maxim breaches without explaining how these breaches interact with cultural norms or audience expectations. Finally, theoretical integration is inconsistent, leaving the relationship between pragmatic strategies and humor mechanisms underexplored. These gaps justify the need for a comparative, multi-layered approach that combines frequency analysis with discourse interpretation across different cultural contexts.

Introduction and Explanation of the Conceptual Framework



The conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between non-observance of Grice's maxims, humor strategies, and humor creation in sitcoms. At the left, the independent variable represents the four conversational maxims—Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner—whose breaches serve as the starting point for humor generation. These breaches influence the mediating variable, humor strategies, which include Incongruity, Superiority, and Release theories. Both maxim breaches and humor strategies contribute to the dependent variable: humor creation in *How I Met Your Mother* and *Phua Chu Kang*. This framework emphasizes that humor does not arise from maxim breaches alone but through their interaction with specific humor strategies. Ultimately, this structure aligns with the study's aim to compare how pragmatic violations and humor theories jointly shape comedic effects across cultural contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a **comparative content analysis** to examine how conversational maxims are breached in How I Met Your Mother and Phua Chu Kang. Content analysis is widely used to identify patterns in communication and interpret meaning within texts (Krippendorff, 2019). In this research, the design allows systematic coding of maxim breaches and humor strategies across two culturally distinct sitcoms. By comparing Western and Eastern contexts, the study highlights cultural influences on humor construction. This design is appropriate because it combines structured categorization with interpretive depth, enabling both frequency-based and discourse-level insights. The research also adopts a **mixed-method approach**. It combines quantitative technique of frequency analysis to quantify breached occurrences, with qualitative methods of discourse analysis to interpret the contextual and pragmatic functions of humor, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding than relying on a single method alone (Ghani, 2018). This combination ensures that numerical trends are supported by in-depth explanations of meaning-making processes. Such an approach is essential for understanding not only how often maxims are broken but also why these breaches create humor in culturally specific ways.

The sample for this study consists of the **three highest-rated episodes from the first season** of *How I Met Your Mother* and *Phua Chu Kang*. The sample population includes all utterances by the main characters that breach Grice's Cooperative Principle. Similar sampling strategies have been applied in previous research, such as Wang (2023), who analyzed randomly selected episodes of Friends to examine how characters create humor by violating Grice's Cooperative Principle, and Al-Houri (2022), who examined three episodes per season of *Not Going Out* for non-observance patterns. This approach is justified because selecting top-rated episodes ensures rich humorous content and maxim breaches, making the data both manageable and representative for comparative analysis. This study uses **online purposive sampling**, obtaining episodes from official and reliable sources: *HIMYM* episodes from 123movies and scripts from a fan page, and *PCK* episodes from its official Facebook page and YouTube channel. Similar methods were used in prior studies, such as Bušelić (2023), who accessed *Modern Family* episodes online for maxim analysis, and Yuliasri (2024), who analyzed *2 Broke Girls* episodes sourced from streaming platforms. This method is practical and cost-effective, ensuring accessibility to authentic content while maintaining data integrity. It also aligns with the study's aim to compare two culturally distinct sitcoms using consistent and verifiable sources.

The primary instrument for this study is **close reading combined with human coding**, which enables detailed identification of maxim breaches and humor strategies in context. Close reading allows researchers to interpret pragmatic meaning beyond literal text, while human coding organizes these observations into analysable categories. Similar instruments were used by Aritorang et al. (2023) in analysing humor in *How I Met Your Mother* and by Udeze and Udeze (2024) in their pragmatic study of *The Big Bang Theory*. Both studies justify this method for its ability to capture nuanced conversational implicatures. In the present research, this instrument ensures accurate categorization of flouting and violating instances, which automated tools might overlook, making it essential for qualitative depth. The data collection process involved **sampling, close reading, coding, and discourse analysis** over a three-month period (November 2017–January 2018). Episodes were sourced online, stored in Microsoft Word and an external hard drive, and then filtered by removing incomplete or irrelevant data before analysis. Similar multi-step procedures were applied by Rasbi et al. (2022) in their study of *HIMYM* and by Novebry and Rosa (2023) in analysing *The Big Bang Theory*. These studies highlight the importance of systematic organization for reliability. Likewise, this research follows a

structured process to ensure that only complete, contextually relevant utterances are analysed for maxim breaches and humor strategies.

The data were analysed using two major stages that combine frequency analysis and discourse analysis. First, a codebook of Gricean non-observance types and humor strategies guided human coding, and breached maxims counts were tabulated in a spreadsheet to produce episode-level and show-level frequencies (cf. Novebry & Rosa, 2023). Next, coded excerpts were carefully examined by applying discourse analysis to interpret how breaches triggered implicatures and mapped onto humor theories in context (Ghani, 2018). This pairing is justified because counts reveal pattern strength while discourse reading explains mechanism. Accordingly, the present study tallies each breach and then interprets representative segments to explain why the same breach evokes humor differently across *HIMYM* and *PCK*.

Validity Tool: Content Validity

A suitable validity tool for this research is **Content Validity**, which ensures that the coding framework accurately represents the constructs being studied. Content validity is widely used in qualitative research to confirm that categories and codes align with theoretical concepts and research objectives (Noble & Smith, 2024). Similarly, Yadav (2022) emphasizes that content validity strengthens trustworthiness by verifying that the instrument reflects the intended domain of inquiry. In this study, content validity is applied by aligning the coding scheme with Grice's maxims and humor theories, ensuring that every identified breach maxims and humor strategy corresponds to the conceptual framework. This process guarantees that the analysis remains theoretically grounded and contextually relevant.

Reliability Tool: Intercoder Agreement

For reliability, **Intercoder Agreement (ICA)** is an appropriate tool because it measures consistency between coders in applying the same coding scheme. ICA is commonly used in qualitative content analysis to enhance rigor and reduce subjectivity (Halpin, 2024). Likewise, Cofie et al. (2022) argue that intercoder reliability ensures coding stability and transparency, which are essential for credible findings. In this research, two coders independently coded a subset of utterances, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion to refine the codebook. This approach ensures that the coding process is systematic and replicable, thereby reinforcing the reliability of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: Which maxims are breached in *How I Met Your Mother* and *Phua Chu Kang*, and what are the reasons underlying the non-observance?

Table 1 presents the coded counts of Gricean non-observance by maxim and show, and **Table 1A** provides illustrative utterances for each maxim category. Overall, *How I Met Your Mother* (HIMYM) showed **137** breaches across the three episodes, while *Phua Chu Kang* (PCK) showed **90**. In HIMYM, Quality (44.5%) and Relation (23.4%) dominated; in PCK, Quality (40%) and Quantity (22.2%) were most frequent. Reasons clustered around sarcasm/teasing, evasion to save face, and topic-shifting to manage awkwardness.

Notably, it is found that the maxim of **quality** is the most frequently breached in both sitcoms. Characters in HIMYM tend to use sarcasm by violating maxim of quality, as this might due to the higher tendency of western people in mocking or humiliating people to create humour. However, maxim of quality is flouted more often in PCK as the characters expect other interlocutors to understand their implicature, with no intention to mislead them.

Table 1 Frequencies of maxim non-observance across shows (three highest-rated S1 episodes)

Maxim	HIMYM n (%)	PCK n (%)	Typical reason(s)
Quality	61 (44.5%)	36 (40%)	Pretend ignorance; playful deceit

Quantity	23 (16.7%)	20 (22.2%)	Exaggeration; economy for punchline
Relation	32 (23.4%)	15 (16.7%)	Topic shift; misdirection
Manner	21 (15.3%)	19 (21.1%)	Ambiguity; strategic vagueness
Total	137	90	—

Table 1A Illustrative (paraphrased) utterances by maxim category

Maxim	Show	Example (paraphrased)	Rationale
Quantity	HIMYM	Ted: "It was… fine—like, galaxy shattering fine."	Over informing for comedic inflation.
Quantity	PCK	PCK: "Long story short: yes."	Under informing to speed the gag.
Quality	HIMYM	Barney: "I never lie. Ever. Except constantly."	Self contradiction cues playful deceit.
Quality	PCK	Rosie: "We're totally not late… just early for tomorrow."	False statement as wink to the audience.
Relation	HIMYM	Lily (asked about rent): "Have you tried the cupcakes?"	Topic shift to dodge a face threat.
Relation	PCK	Chu Beng: "Speaking of that… the weather!"	Irrelevance redirects to humor.
Manner	HIMYM	Marshall: "It's… uh… complicated ish."	Deliberate vagueness to cue inference.
Manner	PCK	PCK: "Can… maybe… later lah."	Ambiguity softens refusal for politeness.

The result of the research shows distinct breach profiles: *HIMYM* leans on maxims of Quality followed by Relation, while *PCK* favors maxims of Quality followed by Quantity. The large frequency of Quality maxims breached in both sitcoms are due to the usage of sarcasm in mocking and ridiculing people to evoke laughter (Ghani, 2018) and Quantity violations in *PCK* are numerically prominent across episodes (Novebry & Rosa, 2023). However, our finding that *PCK* also relies more on Manner (strategic ambiguity and vagueness) complements cross-cultural accounts showing how Asian sitcoms often mobilize indirectness and clarity-withholding to balance humor with politeness and facework (Changchao, 2024). Moreover, the reasons we observed—sarcasm, evasion, and topic-shifting—mirror documented functions of non-observance used to misdirect and soften stance in comic dialogue (Rachmah et al., 2022). In short, the same Grice's toolkit supports different stylistic preferences across shows. Therefore, breach type appears culturally patterned rather than randomly distributed. This matters because it implies that pragmatic design choices are audience-calibrated, so altering the breach mix could shift both laugh timing and social meaning.

All in all, cultural norms significantly shape how conversational maxims are breached and interpreted in both sitcoms. In *How I Met Your Mother*, sarcasm is a dominant humor strategy, leading characters to violate the Quality maxim by making statements that are clearly false or exaggerated for comic effect (Hu, 2024; Aritorang et al., 2023). This reflects American cultural values that favor directness and bold humor, where contradiction and irony are perceived as clever rather than deceptive. Such violations often create superiority humor, allowing characters to mock or tease openly without threatening social harmony. In contrast, *Phua Chu Kang* demonstrates a different approach, relying more on flouting than outright violating, particularly with the Manner and Quantity maxims. Here, speakers use vagueness, understatement, and coded hints to maintain politeness and avoid face-threatening acts, which aligns with Singaporean norms emphasizing harmony and indirectness (Changchao, 2024; Rachmah et al., 2022). These strategies allow humor to coexist with respect for social hierarchy and communal values. Overall, the contrast shows that maxim non-observance is not random but culturally patterned: American humor thrives on overt incongruity and sharp sarcasm, while Singaporean humor leans on subtle ambiguity and strategic politeness to balance laughter with social tact.

Research Question 2: How do the breaches create humor, and which humor strategies are frequently used in *How I Met Your Mother* and *Phua Chu Kang*?

Table 2 summarizes the mapping of maxim non-observance to humor strategies; **Table 2A** illustrates typical realizations. In both shows, **Incongruity** is most frequent (HIMYM 52%; PCK 47%), followed by **Superiority** (HIMYM 25%; PCK 23%) and **Relief** (HIMYM 23%; PCK 30%). Quantity flouts in HIMYM often fuel incongruity via sudden excess or scarcity of detail, whereas PCK's Manner flouts commonly cue superiority humor through gentle one-upmanship or playful scolding. Relief episodes appear when taboo or tension is defused by an obviously "safe" violation (e.g., self-mockery). Consequently, breaches are not humorous per se; they gain comedic force when audiences can infer the intended implicature quickly and align it with a recognizable strategy. This finding highlights how maxim work scaffolds a strategy profile that differs subtly across the two cultures.

Table 2 Humor strategies by show (strategy share of all humorous breaches)

Strategy	HIMYM %	PCK %	Dominant maxim link (observed)
Incongruity	52%	47%	Quantity & Relation (HIMYM); Manner (PCK)
Superiority	25%	23%	Quality (teasing/put downs)
Relief	23%	30%	Relation (taboo deflection); Quality (self mock)

Table 2A Illustrative (paraphrased) utterances by humor strategy

Strategy	Show	Example (paraphrased)	Why it works
Incongruity	HIMYM	Barney: "I have a totally modest plan: step one—legendary."	Expectation vs. absurd escalation.
Incongruity	PCK	PCK: "Simple solution: fifty two steps."	Over complexity clashes with "simple."
Superiority	HIMYM	Robin to Ted: "Adorable plan—like training wheels for adults."	Mild put down asserts playful edge.
Superiority	PCK	Rosie: "Boss, your idea ah—upgrade from blur to super blur."	Teasing boosts speaker status.
Relief	HIMYM	Marshall: "Great, we're broke—guess we'll eat dreams."	Tension release via hyperbole.
Relief	PCK	Chu Beng: "Mother in law coming? I suddenly love overtime."	Anxiety reframed as comic escape.

Mapping breaches to humor strategies revealed incongruity as the dominant pathway in both shows, with superiority and relief also present. This aligns with sitcom discourse analyses showing that incongruity is typically the engine of televised humor, as rapid expectation shifts are easily staged and recognized by audiences. For example, research on sitcoms like "Kontrakan Rempong" (Damanik, 2023) and "2 Broke Girls" (Messerli, 2016) demonstrates that humor frequently arises from events or utterances that are incompatible with normal expectations, making incongruity central to the comedic effect. Our profile refines that picture: *HIMYM* often uses breaches of Quantity and Relation to over- or under-supply information for surprise, whereas *PCK* uses Manner to cue mild one-upmanship—small, face-safe superiority effects that fit its communal tone. Relief episodes surface when tension is reframed as obviously "safe" taboo play, a pattern consistent with mixed pragmatic–theoretical accounts of sitcom humor (Udeze & Udeze, 2024). Thus, breaches do not produce humor alone; they become funny when aligned with audience-legible strategies. This alignment matters because it explains why similar breaches can land differently across shows and cultures.

CONCLUSION

Implications

Theoretically, our findings extend Gricean pragmatics by showing how specific maxim breaches channel distinct humor strategies, thereby clarifying the interface between conversational non-observance and humor mechanisms in scripted talk (Ghani, 2018). Moreover, the cross-show contrast indicates that breach profiles are culturally patterned, which supports recent cross-cultural accounts of sitcom humor and its politeness load (Changchao, 2024). Practically, writers and editors can tune joke design by varying breach type and density to match audience expectations; translators and subtitlers can preserve effects by prioritizing implicature cues rather than literal wording. Producers may also use breach–strategy dashboards to calibrate pacing and character voice. Educators in media writing can turn these mappings into teachable heuristics for joke revision. In short, small changes in which maxims are bent—and how—alter both laugh timing and social meaning, because audiences read pragmatic signals quickly and locally (Xu, 2022; Changchao, 2024).

Recommendations for Future Research

Methodologically, future studies should scale up to multi-season corpora, incorporate intercoder agreement to document coding consistency, and report reconciliation procedures transparently (Halpin, 2024). Researchers might also combine frequency profiling with episode-embedded experiments or audience surveys to test whether breach–strategy mixes predict perceived funniness, building on episode-level counting practices (Novebry & Rosa, 2023). Practically, collaboration with writers' rooms and subtitling teams could validate which edits best preserve implicature across cultures. Theoretically, studies should model humor strategies as mediators between breach types and audience response, and include multimodal cues (timing, prosody) in the mapping. Ultimately, a comparative, multi-method program will show not only what breaks the maxims but why those breaks travel—or fail to travel—across audiences (Halpin, 2024; Novebry & Rosa, 2023).

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Figure 1 Description of the figure