

# INVESTIGATING HUMOR IN NEWSPAPER COMIC STRIPS USING CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE ANALYSIS

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**ABSTRACT** - Comics, through their blend of conversation and visual effects, play a crucial role in conveying humor and fostering common understanding among readers. Conversational implicature is a key technique for achieving the desired tone within comic strips, making humor a potent tool for engaging readers and encouraging regular consumption. This research employs conversational implicature analysis to assess humor in comic strips, particularly focusing on humour generated through dialogues. Data was gathered from Peanuts comic strips published in the Manila Bulletin, with Grice's theory and other implicature theories supporting the analysis. The study adopts a descriptive qualitative method, as outlined by [1], to facilitate the analysis and description of conversational implicature within newspaper comic strips. The results reveal that dialogues in these strips often imply expected responses humorously and may include sarcastic humour, such as in the statement, "I have a very sarcastic mother!" While this humour engages readers, it may not always suit casual conversation. The dialogues convey meaning through a combination of visual and semantic elements, though sometimes the conversational style may overlook politeness norms by not providing appropriate responses. Overall, the findings of this study are significant for literature education, offering insights to create instructional materials and methods that help students evaluate and understand humor in literature. A concrete approach to analyzing and comprehending the linguistic and pragmatic components of humor will be valuable for educators applying these concepts to a broader range of literary texts.

**Keywords:** conversational implicature, comic strips, humor, Peanuts, Manila Bulletin

## INTRODUCTION

Comics serve as a form of storytelling that integrates both words and visuals to represent people, places, objects, or concepts [2]. The Oxford English Dictionary, as cited by [3], categorizes comics not as tragedy but as comedy. This redefinition establishes comics as a medium primarily designed to present humor, aligning them with the goal of effective communication through comedic elements.

In contemporary media, comic strips act as a mode of communication that conveys information and evokes empathy for societal issues within specific cultural contexts. When crafted skillfully, humor in comic strips becomes a powerful tool for engaging audiences. Consequently, creating specialized columns infused with humor is a popular choice among journalists in mass media, including newspapers, to enhance the quality of their publications.

Comic strips are characterized by a series of drawings organized in single or multiple panels with text in balloons or captions [4]. Their popularity is evident in various communication platforms, such as newspapers and magazines. While some comics focus on themes like adventure or relationships without a comedic tone, political comic strips often incorporate humor to critique individuals, institutions, or groups, providing both ethical and moral commentary [5]. These strips are expected to deliver humor and amusement within their context.

In addition to the three functions of language outlined by Halliday—textual, ideational, and interpersonal— [6] introduces a fourth function: the recreative function. This function emphasizes entertaining people, bringing pleasure and joy. This role is evident in works such as novels, short stories, and humorous discourses like comic strips. Lent [7] highlights the Philippines' rich tradition in cartoons and comics, while [8] advocates for recognizing cartoonists and comic creators with prestigious awards.

This study will investigate whether editorial cartoons effectively serve as tools for social critique and explore

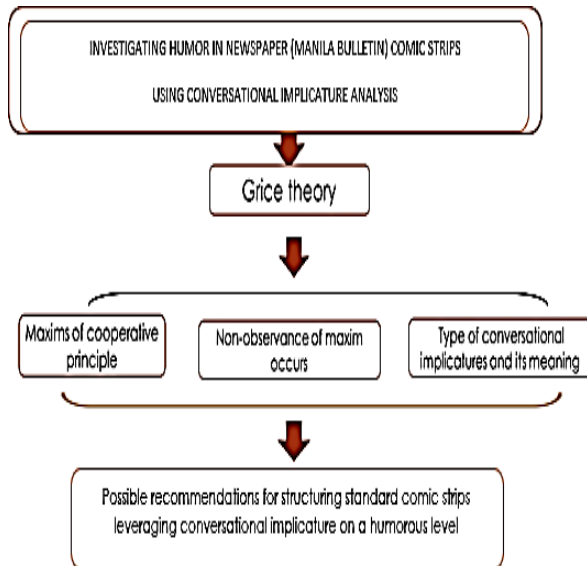
how dialogues in comics adhere to Grice's Cooperative Principle and conversational maxims, focusing on how implicatures contribute to humor in comic strips..

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper explores conversational implicature within comic strips, applying Grice's theory along with other implicature theories to analyze humor. Grice's theory of conversational implicature is based on two main components: the Cooperative Principle and conversational implicatures. The Cooperative Principle involves four maxims—quantity, quality, relation, and manner—that guide effective communication. This research uses Grice's theory to infer the real intentions behind each utterance and illustration in the comic strips, aiming to understand how these elements contribute to humor.

[9] further elaborates on Grice's Cooperative Principle, highlighting its significance in language use. According to Levinson, the Cooperative Principle provides a framework of overarching assumptions that guide conversational interactions. Both speakers and listeners engage in conversations with the expectation of cooperation, aiming to make the exchange as efficient as possible. Speakers rely on this cooperative effort to ensure their contributions are informative, truthful, and clear, which in turn facilitates effective communication.

By applying Grice's theory and related implicature theories, this study seeks to uncover the underlying intentions in comic strip dialogues and illustrations. The analysis aims to reveal how conversational implicatures function to create humor and how cooperative principles influence the interpretation of the content. This approach provides a deeper understanding of how humor is constructed in comic strips through the interplay of verbal and visual elements.



This paper examines conversational implicature in the Manila Bulletin newspaper, focusing on its humorous content as perceived by its readers. Specifically, this study aims to address the following inquiries:

1. What are the maxims of the cooperative principle that are not observed in the dialogues within the comics?
2. How does the non-observance of these maxims occur humorously in the dialogue through conversational implicature, based on the interplay of image and meaning?
3. What types of conversational implicatures are present in the dialogues?
4. What is the meaning of each conversational implicature identified in the dialogues?
5. Based on the findings, what recommendations can be made for structuring standard comic strips to effectively leverage conversational implicature for humorous effect?

### RELATED LITERATURE REVIEWED

Comic strips are an effective communication tool in modern society, used to share information and express empathy toward social issues. When employed strategically, humor in comic strips can attract and engage audiences, making them a valuable feature in mass media, such as newspapers. Journalists often create specialized humorous columns to enhance the quality and appeal of their publications.

Pragmatics, as defined by others examined the interaction between language and context, serving as a foundation for understanding spoken communication [9]. Further explores pragmatics, focusing on how linguistic forms relate to their users [10]. Pragmatic research includes four key areas: deciphering the speaker's intended meaning, studying meaning in context, investigating indirect communication, and analyzing how representation varies based on speaker-listener proximity.

In addition to Halliday's three language functions—textual, ideational, and interpersonal introduces a fourth function, the recreative function, which focuses on entertaining and bringing joy to people through language, as seen in novels, short stories, and comic strips [6].

[7] highlights the Philippines' deep legacy in cartoons and comics, while [8] suggests recognizing cartoonists and comic book creators for the National Artist Awards due to their potential influence on society. However, the effectiveness of editorial cartoons as tools for social critique is debated.

In the digital age, editorial cartoons face challenges in staying relevant amidst new media technologies and information overload. Despite this, their ability to condense complex ideas into visually impactful single panels makes them essential in conveying messages. Capistrano describes editorial cartoons as a "summary" of a publication's stance on issues, and Calinawan emphasizes their importance due to readers' limited attention spans.

Cartoons, especially those addressing politics and social issues, are recognized as a distinct genre delivering political commentary aimed at reorienting audiences [16]. Editorial cartoons leverage their visual nature to summarize and clarify messages, making them a powerful tool for societal critique. However, their effectiveness depends on the cartoonist's ability to balance social affairs, identifiable issues, and ethical considerations.

Studies elsewhere [17, 18, 19], analyzed the social commentary in humorous comic strips. They concluded that while cartoons aim to question authority and highlight social issues, they often fail to deliver their messages effectively [20]

Others, [21] and [22], suggest that if we view cartoons as part of a conversation between the cartoonist and the audience, their effectiveness can be measured by how well the intended message is conveyed. However, [23] argues that many cartoonists do not effectively communicate their messages, often lacking clarity, fairness, and ethical considerations.

In the Philippines, editorial cartoons have been a staple in newspapers, from historical publications like *Kalayaan* and *La Solidaridad* to contemporary ones like the Manila Bulletin and the Philippine Inquirer [24]. However, the success of these cartoons in transmitting their messages and remaining relevant is questionable.

Research on local mainstream publications indicates that the final meaning of editorial cartoons is shaped by a complex process, influenced by both internal and external forces, including editorial policies and institutional pressures [25];

These factors can lead to the generation of deliberately manipulated meanings, as cartoonists' personal opinions are often "screened" and "packaged" to align with the publication's stance [26;13; 27]..

### RELATED STUDIES REVIEWED

Through content and semiotic analysis, examined editorial cartoons from the Manila Bulletin and *Philippine Daily Inquirer* between 2004 and 2007[27]. He found that while some cartoonists remain true to their personal opinions, the prevailing trend is for cartoonists to align their illustrations with the worldview of the publication they work for, even if they disagree. Further, some argued that editorial policies should not distort a message but should instead make it comprehensible to the public,

acknowledging the challenge of condensing complex ideas into a single panel and highlighting the role of editorial policies in this process [28].

Some contended that publications do not directly censor their cartoonists' opinions, supporting the idea of cartoonist autonomy. This claim was based on her comparative content analysis of cartoons from the Bulletin Today and the Daily Express[14].

Others noted that editorial cartoonists have significant authority in shaping and interpreting meaning [29]. Their study on the portrayal of President Benigno Aquino III in cartoons from the Philippine Daily Inquirer, Philippine Star, and Manila Bulletin found that while cartoonists exert considerable influence in their satire, editorial policies still impact their work. For instance, the Manila Bulletin adheres to a "progress-oriented"

and "conflict-avoidant" stance and the Philippine Daily Inquirer refrains from attacking the Roman Catholic Church. Others [11], also focusing on the portrayal of President Aquino in Philippine Daily Inquirer cartoons, explored the aesthetics and creative processes involved. He emphasized that the artistic choices of cartoonists are often driven by personal perspectives, underscoring the role of editorial cartoons as a reflection of individual ideation and societal commentary.

Adrido, R. suggested that editorial cartoons serve as a gauge of public opinion, with some readers viewing them as a glimpse into a newspaper's stance [12]. Elsewhere, [13], also highlighted the role of cartoons as indicators of a publication's editorial evolution.

Some authors, [14], observed that editorial cartoons function as "attention-getting devices" by depicting familiar scenes and faces related to current issues. However, Batnag, M. C., raised concerns about the accuracy of editorial cartoons as representations of public sentiment [15]. His research concluded that while cartoons can gauge public opinion, they often fail to accurately reflect it, challenging the perception that they are an "official" illustration of public sentiment.

**LINGUISTIC RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative research approach, which is well-suited for examining linguistic phenomena in their natural context. [1] describes qualitative research as a method where the researcher develops open-ended questions and flexible procedures, gathering data directly from the participants' environment. The analysis in such research is inductive, moving from specific observations to broader generalizations, allowing for the emergence of patterns and themes. The researcher then interprets these findings to derive meaningful insights. This method was selected for its effectiveness in capturing the nuances of conversational implicature within newspaper comic strips, where context and subtlety are key.

**SOURCE OF DATA**

The study utilizes comic strips from the Manila Bulletin Newspaper as its primary data source to evaluate the role of humor through conversational implicature. By analyzing selected comic strips, the research aims to assess how well

the images and accompanying text work together to create humor. This involves examining whether the visual elements and the implied meanings align effectively to generate a cohesive humorous effect. Two specific images are chosen for this analysis to ensure a focused examination of how visual and verbal components interact to convey humor.

Through this approach, the study explores whether the interplay between images and their associated meanings adheres to the principles of conversational implicature, thereby contributing to the overall comedic value of the strips. By evaluating the harmony between the visual and textual elements, the research seeks to understand the effectiveness of the comic strips in engaging readers and eliciting humor. This detailed analysis will provide insights into the mechanisms of humor in comic strips and how conversational implicature is employed to enhance the reader's experience.

**GATHERING OF DATA**

The data for this research is drawn from comic strips featured in the Manila Bulletin newspaper, with a specific focus on dialogues identified as humorous. The selected comic strips are analyzed through the lens of Grice's Cooperative Principle [30], which serves as a framework for understanding conversational implicature. This approach includes a detailed examination of particularized conversational implicature, where the meaning inferred goes beyond the literal content. Each instance of implicature within the dialogues is carefully underlined and scrutinized to understand how it contributes to the overall humorous effect of the comic strips.

To ensure a thorough analysis, the research meticulously reviews every word and phrase that carries implicature. This process involves identifying and interpreting how conversational implicature functions within the context of the comic strips, thereby revealing the mechanisms through which humor is generated. By applying Grice's principles, the study aims to uncover the subtleties of how humor is constructed and perceived, providing a comprehensive understanding of the interaction between dialogue and imagery in generating comedic content.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

This paper presents the results and discussions focusing on the conversational implicature in the newspaper Manila Bulletin as to humorous level from the perspective of its readers.

The maxim of the cooperative principle that non-observance in the dialogue in the comics.

**Image 1**



The conversation above subtly suggests an implied meaning in the expected response. This is illustrated by the following dialogue:



A: "I won't be able to play ball for a week, Charlie Brown. The doctor said I have 'washer woman's elbow."  
 B: "Waah!"

In this exchange, B's response of "Waah!" indicates an understanding of the situation and a deliberate withholding of certain emotional information. By doing so, B is flouting the Maxim of Quantity, which requires that a speaker be as informative as necessary. The implication in this context is, "I feel sorry for you, as much as I wanted you to play." This exchange exemplifies how the Cooperative Principle, when maxims are not strictly observed, can lead to a deeper implied meaning.

While the Cooperative Principle, proposed by the linguistic philosopher Paul Grice, is a fundamental guideline that most people follow in everyday interactions, it is not always strictly adhered to. In actual conversations, speakers may deviate from these maxims, sometimes intentionally, due to a lack of information, an attempt to deceive, or a desire to end the conversation. However, not all violations of these maxims lead to conversational implicature. For an implicature to arise, a maxim must be "flouted"—openly violated with the understanding of both the speaker and listener.

Grice's theory suggests that conversational exchanges are guided by the Cooperative Principle and four maxims: Quality (truthfulness), Quantity (informativeness), Relation (relevance), and Manner (clarity and brevity). These maxims help ensure that communication is cooperative and effective. While Grice acknowledges that these maxims may not cover all conversational assumptions—such as politeness—they are crucial in understanding how implicatures go beyond the literal content of utterances, allowing listeners to infer additional meanings based on the context.

**Image 2**



The previous exchange suggests an implicit response where the meaning of the statement provides a humorous interpretation of the scenario. By examining the context, the meaning can be understood in this nuanced manner. However, it's important to recognize that sarcasm, while effective in certain contexts, may not be appropriate in casual conversations. In the field of pragmatics, conversational implicature refers to an indirect or implicit speech act—what a speaker intends to convey beyond the literal content of their words. This concept contrasts with "explicature," which involves explicitly communicated assumptions.

Jimoh, L. elaborates on this by noting that cartoons, unlike comic strips or books, condense meaning into a single panel [31]. Cartoons combine three key elements: visuals (symbols), captions (written words), and social criticism (spoken and unspoken words). While this format can make cartoons appear complex at first glance, it also allows for a "rich" conveyance of meaning. However, this richness does not always equate to effective communication, as noted by

[32]. As L.R. Horn observes in "The Handbook of Pragmatics," "What a speaker intends to communicate is characteristically far richer than what she directly expresses; linguistic meaning radically underdetermines the message conveyed and understood." This highlights the importance of understanding the deeper layers of meaning that may be present in both verbal and visual communication.

2. The non-observance of the maxim occurs humorously in the dialogue using conversational implicature based on the collaboration of image and meaning.

**Image 1**

Dialogue	Implied Meaning	Purpose
Girl: I won't be able to play ball for a week, Charlie Brown. The doctor I have a "washer woman's elbow". Boy: Waah! Girl: Don't cry... I'll be all right...	The girl explained to her incapacity to play in order not to insult the boy.	She justifies herself to avoid being insulted.
Boy: A good manager has to be able to cry real tears at a moment's notice.		

As illustrated in the table, the dialogue demonstrates a collaboration between visual elements and meaningful content. Conversational implicature suggests that both content and imagery are used to convey a humorous message to the reader. However, this method of communication can sometimes overlook politeness and fail to provide an appropriate response, potentially diluting the subtlety of the conversation.

This concept underscores the complexity of conversations, where individuals often use proverbs, idiomatic expressions, and symbolic language, which can render the dialogue ambiguous. The Cooperative Principle theory, as articulated by Grice, plays a crucial role in helping individuals navigate this ambiguity and communicate hidden meanings effectively. Grice's principle advises: "Make your conversational contribution as required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the conversation exchange in which you are engaged." This guidance helps ensure that even in complex or layered conversations, the intended message is conveyed clearly and appropriately.

**Image 2**

Dialogue	Implied Meaning	Purpose
Girl: I had to see this for myself. Mom said you were emptying the wastebaskets, and she had to ask you only twice. She said that like the average person doing without being asked at all! Boy: I have a very sarcastic, mother!	The girl observed her brother, as her mother had suggested.	She makes statements in the manner in which her brother would think.

Dialogue often involves the interplay of images and meanings, yet utterances can sometimes challenge the principles of conversational implicature. While these utterances may convey inferred meanings and add humor for the reader, they can also inadvertently violate the maxims of manner, potentially leading to misunderstandings or a communication

[23] discusseshow cartoons blend verbal and visual

elements to evoke specific responses from the audience. This response is shaped by the cartoonist's intentions and the reader's interpretation. In just a single panel, cartoons can express opinions, shape social perspectives, and communicate important information about current social issues.

Levinson, S. C., further elaborated on the concise nature of cartoons, highlighting that their three major elements are images (the symbols), captions (the written words), and social commentary (both spoken and unspoken words) [31]. Unlike comic strips or comic books, which use multiple panels, cartoons condense all this information into one panel. This concentration of content can make cartoons appear complex and difficult to interpret at first glance. While the medium has the potential to be "rich" in meaning, Some argued that this does not necessarily equate to effective communication, as the richness of meaning must also facilitate clear understanding [32].

3. The type of conversational implicatures found in the dialogue.

***I won't be able to play ball for a week, Charlie Brown. The doctor I have a "washer woman's elbow".***

In the statement, the implied meaning could be that she tends to express thoughts or opinions similarly to how her brother would express them.

***A good manager has to be able to cry real tears at a moment's notice.***

In the statement, the implied meaning could be: He does not prefer long conversations / He intends to conclude the conversation without more delay/ He just doesn't like to be persistent.

These are indirect interactions where the original information or inquiry is 'encoded' without being explicitly stated. Understanding exchanges like this relies on context, scenarios, and assumptions.

4. The meaning of each conversational implicature is found in the dialogue.

5. The preceding statements and their associated meanings align with the concept of conversational implicature, also known as implication. This phenomenon occurs when a speaker conveys information in a way that requires interpretation, representing an indirect method of communication.

[9] describes pragmatics as the study of the interaction between language and its situational context, which serves as a foundation for understanding spoken speech. [10] provides a complementary definition, stating that pragmatics investigates the relationship between linguistic forms and their users. According to [10], there are four key areas in pragmatic research:

Pragmatics is the study of the meaning underlying the speaker's words, focusing on deciphering the speaker's intended meaning behind the expressed words.

Pragmatics studies meaning in context, demonstrating how speakers structure their words in response to the context and situation in which they speak.

**Image 1**

Dialogue	Implied Meaning	Purpose
Girl: I won't be able to play ball for a week Charlie Brown. The doctor I have a "washer woman's elbow".	The girl explained her incapacity to play in order not to insult the boy.	Maxim of Quality
Boy: Waah!	He promptly displays a sympathetic nonverbal reaction.	Maxim of Relation Maxim of Quantity
Girl: Don't cry... I'll be all right...	She gives assurance not to worry.	Maxim of Quantity
Boy: A good manager has to be able to cry real tears at a moment's notice.	He intends to complete the conversation with no further explanation.	Maxim of Relation

**Image 2**

Dialogue	Implied Meaning	Purpose
Girl: I had to see this for myself. Mom said you were emptying the wastebaskets, and she had to ask you only twice.	The girl observes her brother, as her mother had suggested.	Maxim of Quality
She said that like the average person doing without being asked at all!	She makes statements in the manner in which her brother would think.	Maxim of Quantity Maxim of Relation
Boy: I have a very sarcastic, mother!	He views his mother with negative connotations.	Maxim of Relation

Pragmatics investigates how communication is sometimes not immediately conveyed by the speaker, exploring the subtleties of indirect communication.

Pragmatics describes how meaning might be represented depending on the speaker's and listener's proximity.

In addition to the three functions of language outlined by Halliday—textual, ideational, and interpersonal—[6] introduces a fourth function known as the recreative function. This function focuses on entertaining people, bringing them pleasure and a sense of joy. It is portrayed in works such as novels, short stories, and humorous discourses like comic strips.

**FINDINGS**

The following findings are summarized as follows:

1. Dialogues often offer an implied interpretation of what is expected in response, suggesting a humorous way of understanding the current situation where the statement's meaning may not be explicitly stated. By considering the context, the intended meaning can be discerned in this way.

However, it is advisable to avoid sarcastic thinking in casual conversations.

2. Dialogues convey meaning through the interplay of visuals and semantics. The concept of conversational implicature emphasizes that both information and imagery are crafted to deliver a humorous message to the reader. Nevertheless, this style of communication might breach civility by not providing an appropriate response, potentially compromising the nuanced nature of the dialogue.
3. Indirect encounters depict situations where the initial information or inquiry is "encoded," implying something without directly stating it. Understanding such exchanges relies on the context, scenarios, and underlying assumptions.
4. Conversational implicature pertains to statements that carry implicit meanings, where the speaker conveys something that necessitates interpretation and is communicated indirectly.

### CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it is concluded that visuals and images in humorous discourse closely adhere to the conversational implicature principle, where meanings often extend beyond the literal interpretation of words. In this context, images and meanings work together to achieve specific aims, such as evoking humor or conveying satire. Dialogues within this discourse often carry indirect meanings, requiring readers to infer the underlying intent. These utterances are intentionally discreet, ensuring that the humor remains subtle while preserving the overall meaning and coherence of the discourse.

### RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings and conclusions, this study holds significant value in the field of literature education.

1. English Language Teachers may develop instructional materials and methods that help students assess and understand humor within literary works.
2. English Language Teachers may conduct a practical framework for analyzing and comprehending the linguistic and pragmatic elements underlying humor would be particularly valuable to educators, as it can be applied to a broader range of literary texts.
3. English Language Teachers might consider the vitality in integrating the usefulness of the comics in every activity for the students become creative in analyzing their workpiece.

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