

Chandler Bing's Sarcasm in the TV Series *Friends*: A Pragmatic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of sarcasm by the character Chandler Bing in the American sitcom *Friends*, focusing on Seasons 1 through 3. Through a pragmatic lens, the analysis identified 134 sarcastic utterances and classifies them based on the Gricean conversational maxims they flout as well as the communicative functions they serve. The findings reveal that the maxim of quality is the most frequently violated, with 91% of sarcastic utterances exhibiting a deliberate contrast between literal meaning and intended implication. Additionally, sarcastic functions are grouped into three categories: negative evaluation, positive evaluation, and other purposes. While no utterances were found to express positive evaluation, 36% delivered negative assessments of the hearer, and 64% fulfilled other functions, such as teasing, expressing frustration, or asserting social bonds. The study underscores the complexity of sarcasm as a pragmatic phenomenon and highlights its central role in character development and humor in scripted media. Limitations include the use of a single source and broad functional categories, which future research may refine by incorporating more diverse datasets and nuanced classifications.

Keywords: *Chandler Bing, conversational maxims, flouting, implicature, pragmatic analysis, sarcasm.*

INTRODUCTION

Sarcasm is often expressed through a deliberate contrast between the literal meaning of an utterance and the speaker's intended meaning, or implicature (Grice, 1975; Gibbs, 2000; Kreuz & Glucksberg, 1989). It can generally be categorized as a subcategory of verbal irony, wherein the speaker uses linguistic expressions (words, sentences, or phrases) whose literal meanings starkly contrast with the actual intent communicated to the hearer(s). Sarcasm is considered a universal feature across languages, though each community or nation has distinct languages and dialects. When delivering sarcasm, speakers typically employ visual cues (body

language and facial expressions), intonation, and culturally relevant lexical choices. These signals vary depending on the language and cultural background. Moreover, speakers tend to convey emotions, attitudes, and intentions that may differ across linguistic communities. The contexts in which sarcasm is used and the speakers' communicative goals also vary across cultures.

For learners of foreign languages or those with limited proficiency, identifying and interpreting sarcastic utterances can be particularly challenging (Bryant, 2010; Deliens et al., 2018; Filik et al., 2015). To comprehend sarcasm, a hearer must detect verbal and nonverbal cues indicating sarcasm and accurately infer the speaker's motivation (Attardo,

2000; Bryant & Fox Tree, 2005). Speakers may use sarcasm to provoke laughter or to insult the hearer or a third party (Dews & Winner, 1995; Gibbs, 2000).

In American English, speakers frequently rely on both verbal and nonverbal strategies to convey sarcasm in everyday spoken interaction (Bryant, 2010; Rockwell, 2000; Kreuz & Roberts, 1995). These strategies include prosodic cues such as vowel lengthening, nasalization, exaggerated articulation, and even intentional mumbling. Nonverbal markers may include eyebrow raises, eye-rolls, smirks, or head tilts. The degree to which a speaker employs these cues depends on how overtly they wish to convey their sarcastic intent. Sometimes, speakers intentionally obscure their sarcasm to avoid accountability if the hearer takes offense, thus reducing the number or clarity of cues.

In addition to verbal and nonverbal markers, contextual cues—such as the interpersonal history between interlocutors or background knowledge about the hearer's personality, profession, or physical condition—may be used to support sarcastic interpretations (Yus Ramos, 1998, 2000).

Understanding sarcasm from a pragmatic perspective requires a solid grounding in foundational theories. A key concept is implicature, as introduced by Grice (1975), who described it as non-natural, non-conventional meaning conveyed indirectly through contextual cues. Grundy (2000) defines implicature as implied meaning, which must be interpreted by disregarding the literal content of the utterance. Sarcasm, which typically arises in verbal interaction, is closely linked to Grice's Cooperative Principle. This principle holds that conversational participants are expected to contribute appropriately to the communicative goals of the exchange by observing four conversational maxims: quality, quantity, relevance, and manner.

In practice, however, speakers do not always adhere to these maxims. Sarcasm is one notable form of deliberate maxim violation, referred to as “flouting.” As Cutting (2002) explains, a speaker flouts a maxim when they intentionally appear to violate it, assuming that the hearer will still understand the underlying intended meaning.

Sarcasm is never purposeless; speakers use it with specific communicative goals. According to Attardo (2002), sarcastic utterances may serve six

functions: to display sophistication, evaluate others, serve as a politeness strategy, persuade, allow for retractability, or foster group affiliation. A speaker may use sarcasm for one or more of these purposes. For instance, a speaker may convey an indirect speech act to demonstrate sophistication, express criticism, mitigate face threats, persuade, avoid direct responsibility, or assert group membership or exclusion (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Gibbs, 1994; Holtgraves, 2005; Haugh, 2010). However, for the purpose of this study, sarcastic utterances are broadly categorized into three types: negative evaluation, positive evaluation, and other functions, following the functional classifications proposed by Dews and Winner (1995) and Lee and Katz (1998).

Building on this framework, the present study aims to analyze sarcastic utterances produced by the character Chandler Bing in the American sitcom *Friends* through the lens of Gricean pragmatics. Specifically, it seeks (1) to identify which conversational maxims are most frequently flouted in Chandler's sarcastic utterances and (2) to determine the communicative functions these utterances perform within their situational contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly interest in sarcasm has spanned multiple disciplines, including pragmatics (Gibbs, 2000), discourse analysis (Clift, 1999), cognitive linguistics (Kreuz & Glucksberg, 1989), and media studies (Dynel, 2014). Within pragmatics, sarcasm is frequently analyzed as a form of indirect speech that involves the deliberate flouting of conversational norms. As a subtype of verbal irony, sarcasm is typically marked by a mismatch between the literal surface form of an utterance and the speaker's actual intent (Gibbs, 2000). The recognition and interpretation of sarcasm depend heavily on context, shared background knowledge, and the speaker's perceived communicative goals.

Grice's (1975) theory of implicature remains foundational to much of the research on sarcasm. According to Grice, speakers who flout one or more of the conversational maxims—quality, quantity, relevance, and manner—do so in a way that encourages hearers to infer unstated meanings.

Numerous studies have shown that sarcasm often arises from flouting the maxim of quality, whereby a speaker makes an obviously untrue statement to imply a critical or humorous evaluation (Camp, 2012; Kreuz & Glucksberg, 1989). However, sarcasm may also violate the maxims of relevance, quantity, or manner, especially when speakers wish to mask their intentions or create social ambiguity (Colston, 2007).

Attardo (2002) expands upon Gricean pragmatics by identifying six communicative functions of sarcasm: sophistication, evaluation, politeness mitigation, persuasion, retractability, and group affiliation. These functions underscore the strategic use of sarcasm in managing interpersonal relationships and navigating social norms. Sarcasm can both reinforce in-group solidarity and demarcate social boundaries, depending on whether it is perceived as humorous, critical, or exclusionary (Gibbs & Izett, 2005). Similarly, Dynel (2011) emphasizes sarcasm's role in scripted dialogues, where it often enhances character identity, comedic effect, and audience engagement.

Other scholars have focused on the cognitive and contextual mechanisms underlying sarcasm interpretation. Yus Ramos (1998, 2000) argues that sarcasm requires varying degrees of contextual accessibility and processing effort. The hearer must resolve a pragmatic incongruity between the literal utterance and the communicative context. Sarcasm thus imposes a specific inferential burden, which is reduced when visual, prosodic, or situational cues are present—as in audiovisual media.

In media discourse, sarcasm is a particularly salient feature of character construction. Research by Claridge (2010) and Utsumi (2000) has demonstrated that characters who use sarcasm recurrently—such as Chandler Bing in *Friends*—create a recognizable persona marked by wit, cynicism, or emotional distance. These stylistic traits not only provide entertainment value but also serve important narrative and relational functions within the dialogue. Sarcasm can signal intimacy, mask vulnerability, or provide a face-saving strategy, especially in social situations where direct criticism would be inappropriate (Pexman & Zvaigzne, 2004).

Despite the robust body of research on sarcasm, empirical studies focusing specifically on sarcasm in scripted media—especially through the lens of

Gricean pragmatics—remain relatively limited. While sarcasm in natural conversation has been examined in detail (e.g., Dews & Winner, 1995; Kreuz et al., 1991), studies that systematically classify sarcastic utterances based on maxim violations and communicative intent in fictional contexts are still underrepresented. This study contributes to that gap by analyzing Chandler Bing's sarcasm in *Friends* using a dual framework of maxim flouting and communicative function, thereby enriching our understanding of sarcasm's role in both character discourse and pragmatic meaning-making.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study investigates sarcastic utterances through the lens of pragmatics, grounding its analysis in Grice's (1975) theory of implicature and the Cooperative Principle, with further support from subsequent elaborations by scholars such as Grundy (2000), Cutting (2002), Attardo (2002), and Yus Ramos (1998, 2000). The framework combines both structural and functional perspectives, enabling the identification and interpretation of sarcasm based on its deviation from conversational norms and its communicative intent.

Implicature and Indirect Meaning

Sarcasm operates fundamentally through implicature, a core concept introduced by Grice (1975), which refers to meaning that is implied rather than explicitly stated. Grice distinguishes between conventional implicatures (arising from fixed linguistic forms) and conversational implicatures, which rely on context, shared knowledge, and the assumption of cooperative interaction. Sarcasm belongs to the latter, requiring hearers to recognize that the speaker does not intend the literal interpretation of an utterance.

Grundy (2000) emphasizes that conversational implicatures are central to understanding nonliteral meaning, including irony and sarcasm. These forms of meaning require listeners to override the default assumption of sincerity and instead draw on contextual cues, prior discourse, tone, and cultural expectations. In sarcastic communication, the hearer must detect that the speaker's literal words are

intentionally incongruous with reality and infer a different, often opposite, interpretation.

The Cooperative Principle and Flouting

The mechanism through which implicature arises is articulated in Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, which asserts that interlocutors are expected to contribute to conversation in ways that are appropriate to its purposes. This principle is guided by four conversational maxims:

- a. Quality: Do not say what you believe to be false or lack evidence for.
- b. Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as required.
- c. Relevance: Be relevant.
- d. Manner: Avoid obscurity and ambiguity; be orderly.

Sarcasm typically involves flouting one or more of these maxims. As Cutting (2002) explains, flouting occurs when a speaker intentionally appears to violate a maxim in a way that is overt and recognizable. Rather than resulting in communication breakdown, such flouting serves as a cue to the hearer to look for an alternative, nonliteral meaning. In sarcastic utterances, this often involves saying something patently untrue (flouting quality), irrelevant (relevance), under- or over-informative (quantity), or ambiguous (manner), with the expectation that the hearer will infer the speaker's actual stance or emotion.

Pragmatic and Social Functions of Sarcasm

Sarcasm is not merely a rhetorical deviation but a socially meaningful act. Attardo (2002) proposes six pragmatic functions of sarcasm: sophistication (displaying wit), evaluation (expressing judgment), politeness (mitigating directness), persuasion, retractability (plausible deniability), and group affiliation (reinforcing in-group boundaries). These functions highlight sarcasm's utility as a communicative strategy that blends indirectness with interpersonal positioning.

Clark and Gerrig (1984) argue that irony (and by extension sarcasm) operates through "echoic mention," where the speaker echoes a prior belief or expectation only to mock or reject it. This echoic

mechanism is especially relevant in scripted media, where sarcasm often targets not just characters but also shared cultural scripts or assumptions.

Yus Ramos (1998, 2000) further emphasizes the role of contextual accessibility and processing effort in recognizing irony and sarcasm. The hearer's ability to detect sarcasm depends on access to relevant contextual cues and the cognitive effort required to resolve the apparent mismatch between form and intent. Sarcasm may become more opaque or ambiguous when such cues are subtle, minimized, or culturally specific.

Sarcasm in Media and Characterization

In fictional discourse, sarcasm contributes significantly to character development and humor. Dynel (2011) notes that sarcasm and irony are frequently employed in scripted television dialogue to create humorous effects, establish character traits, and shape audience perception. Characters like Chandler Bing, from the American sitcom *Friends* (1994–2004), exemplify this use, as sarcasm becomes a signature speech style reflecting underlying personality traits such as cynicism, insecurity, or wit (Dynel, 2016; Recchia, 2021).

Television dialogue affords multi-layered pragmatic interpretation, as viewers, unlike participants in real-life interaction, can perceive and evaluate exaggerated prosodic, gestural, and contextual cues that enrich the interpretation of utterances. While this study analyzes only the verbal and situational aspects of sarcasm, the scripted nature of *Friends*, an American sitcom that aired from 1994 to 2004 and follows six friends living in New York City, allows for heightened contrasts between literal form and pragmatic function, making it an ideal corpus for sarcasm research.

METHODS

The data for this study were drawn from the first three seasons of the American sitcom *Friends*. Seasons 1 and 2 each consist of 24 episodes, while Season 3 contains 25 episodes. In total, *Friends* spans ten seasons, but this research focuses specifically on the first three. *Friends* is an American television

sitcom created by David Crane and Marta Kauffman in collaboration with Warner Bros. It originally aired on NBC from September 22, 1994, to May 6, 2004. The series features six main characters, Rachel Green, Monica Geller, Phoebe Buffay, Joey Tribbiani, Chandler Bing, and Ross Geller, and centers on a group of friends in their twenties and thirties living in Manhattan, New York City. For the purpose of this study, only utterances produced by the character Chandler Bing were selected for analysis.

The dataset comprises sarcastic utterances spoken by Chandler Bing. During data collection, the time stamps and conversational contexts—including situational descriptions and dialogic interactions involving other characters—were also recorded. The data collection followed several steps and was conducted episode by episode. First, each episode was watched to understand the storyline. Then, the episode was reviewed again with subtitles to identify sarcastic utterances by Chandler. When a sarcastic utterance was encountered, the playback was paused, and the relevant dialogue—along with surrounding lines for context—was transcribed into a word processing document. In this document, character names, contextual descriptions, and time stamps were added. Each utterance was coded according to the conversational maxim it flouts (e.g., Qual = flouting of the quality maxim) and Chandler's intended function (e.g., NE = negative evaluation). Once fully transcribed and annotated, the episode playback resumed to identify additional sarcastic utterances.

To address the two research questions outlined in the introduction, the collected data were subjected to a two-stage analysis. First, each sarcastic utterance previously identified during data collection was classified according to the specific Gricean maxim it flouted. Second, the same utterances were analyzed in terms of their communicative functions—namely, negative evaluation, positive evaluation, or other functions. The results from both stages were tabulated to illustrate the distribution of sarcastic utterances across these categories. Finally, a descriptive analysis was conducted to interpret the findings and compare them with those of previous studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Flouting of Grice's Conversational Maxims

From the 73 episodes across the first three seasons of *Friends*, this study identified 134 sarcastic utterances delivered by Chandler Bing. Of these, 118 flouted only one of Grice's four conversational maxims, while the remaining 16 violated more than one maxim simultaneously. Table 1 presents the classification of sarcastic utterances according to the flouted maxim.

Across the three seasons, Chandler produced an average of 39.33 sarcastic utterances, with the highest number found in Season 3 (45 utterances). Among the four maxims, Chandler most frequently flouted the maxim of quality, approximately 91% of sarcastic utterances involved this maxim. The remaining utterances involved violations of the maxims of quantity, relevance, and manner, though far less frequently. Notably, Season 2 contained no examples of sarcasm that flouted any of the three less frequent maxims.).

Table 1. Sarcasm classified by the flouting of a single conversational maxim

No.	Maxim	Season 1	Season 2	Season 3	Total
1.	Quality	26	39	42	107
2.	Quantity	3	0	0	3
3.	Relevance	3	0	3	6
4.	Manner	2	0	0	2
Total		34	39	45	118

The overwhelming dominance of quality maxim violations, constituting approximately 91% of all sarcastic utterances, demonstrates that Chandler's sarcastic style is primarily rooted in overtly false or implausible statements. This finding strongly aligns with Grice's (1975) assertion that flouting the maxim of quality is the most direct pathway to creating implicature through irony. By stating what is blatantly untrue, Chandler invites his hearers (and the audience) to reject the literal meaning and search for a deeper, oppositional interpretation. Such utterances often take the form of exaggerated praise, absurd claims, or fictional scenarios, all of which are designed to be recognized as intentionally insincere.

Here's an example of Chandler's sarcasm flouting the Maxim of Quality.

(1) [00:20:31,688-00:20:33,689] Season 1 Ep. 3

Context: After returning from her date with her boyfriend Alan, Monica gathers her friends at her apartment. She announces that she has decided to end her relationship with Alan. This makes Ross, Joey, and Chandler upset because they had already grown comfortable hanging out with Alan. Monica apologizes to them, saying she is sorry. Chandler then responds.

Ross: "Yeah, well, who wants fair? I mean, I just want things back, you know, the way they were."

Monica: "I'm sorry."

Chandler: "**Oh, she's sorry. I feel better.**"

In this example, Chandler's utterance, "Oh, she's sorry. I feel better," flouts the Maxim of Quality. The statement is intended sarcastically and is not truthful, as Chandler does not actually feel better about Monica's decision. By saying something he knows to be false, Chandler creates a humorous implicature that reveals his real frustration.

In contrast, violations of the maxims of quantity, relevance, and manner were notably scarce. This disparity suggests that Chandler's sarcasm does not typically rely on conversational ambiguity, excessive detail, or irrelevance. Instead, his ironic style favors semantic dissonance, saying something obviously false, over structural or contextual disruptions. In other words, his sarcasm is most often encoded in what is said rather than how much, how clearly, or how appropriately it is said. This stylistic preference helps ensure that his ironic intent is clear and quickly grasped, a pragmatic move that aligns well with the pacing and accessibility demands of a sitcom format.

Here's an example of Chandler's sarcasm flouting the Maxim of Quantity.

(2) [00:06:05,656-00:06:17,834] Season 1 Ep. 15

Context: Ross is talking with his friends and tells them that he is seeing a woman named Celia. When asked about their date plans, Ross explains that he intends to take Celia to dinner, then invite her back

to his apartment and introduce her to his pet monkey, Marcel. Chandler overhears this and responds with a short comment, emphasizing that Ross literally means introducing his monkey, not as a metaphor. His remark triggers reactions from his friends, as Ross's plan sounds unusual for a romantic date.

Monica: "So, what are you guys gonna do?"

Ross: "Well, I just thought we'd go to dinner, then bring her back to my place and I'd introduce her to my monkey."

Chandler: "**And he's not speaking metaphorically.**"

In this scene, Chandler flouts the Maxim of Quantity. When Ross mentions that he plans to "introduce [Celia] to [his] monkey," Chandler humorously adds, "And he's not speaking metaphorically." The additional clarification is unnecessary, as the meaning is already clear to the group. By providing more information than required, Chandler deliberately flouts the maxim to highlight the potential double entendre and create humor. The implicature derived is that Ross's literal statement unintentionally sounds suggestive, and Chandler's comment draws attention to that ambiguity for comic effect.

Interestingly, Season 2 revealed no instances of sarcasm involving flouting of the quantity, relevance, or manner maxims. This absence could reflect a subtle narrative or stylistic shift. For instance, sarcasm in this season may have been deployed more overtly—through simple irony rather than layered or complex violations—perhaps to suit faster-paced plotlines or more explicit comedic timing. Alternatively, this trend may suggest a deliberate simplification of Chandler's sarcastic persona during that season, reinforcing his role as a source of comic relief through easily interpretable irony rather than ambiguous or experimental forms of sarcasm.

The infrequency of non-quality violations also reinforces the notion that Chandler's sarcastic persona is defined by verbal precision rather than vagueness. He rarely relies on confusing statements, long-winded overstatements, or thematic irrelevance to convey sarcasm. Instead, he delivers succinct, direct remarks that are immediately recognizable as ironic. This aligns with scripted media constraints, where sarcastic utterances must be accessible to a

broad audience—often in real time and without reliance on intonation, facial cues, or prior conversational history.

These findings echo prior research by Cutting (2002) and Dynel (2011), who argue that sarcasm in scripted television is designed for rapid comprehension. Scriptwriters often privilege flouting of the quality maxim over others to ensure clarity, especially when visual or prosodic irony cues may be limited or absent for viewers. In Chandler's case, this strategy contributes to his role as a sharp-tongued, quick-witted character whose sarcastic remarks punctuate conversations with humor, judgment, or playful provocation.

Finally, the relatively consistent use of single-maxim sarcasm across all three seasons suggests a stable stylistic foundation in Chandler's ironic speech. While the tone, content, and targets of his sarcasm may evolve with context, the form of delivery, most often through a single, exaggerated falsity, remains constant. This consistency supports the development of his character as predictably sarcastic, while leaving space for variation in function, which is further explored in the next section.

Following the quantitative analysis, this section presents representative examples for each maxim, along with contextual explanations and justification for how each utterance constitutes a flouting of that particular maxim. These examples demonstrate how Chandler's sarcastic remarks violate expectations of truthfulness (quality), informativeness (quantity), relevance (relevance), or clarity (manner), while still conveying meaning implicitly understood by the hearer.

Additionally, the study identified 16 sarcastic utterances that flouted more than one maxim. These were grouped according to the number and combination of violated maxims, forming three categories: flouting of two maxims, three maxims, and all four maxims.

The identification of 16 sarcastic utterances that flouted multiple conversational maxims reveals a more complex and layered use of irony in Chandler Bing's discourse. While the majority of his sarcastic remarks relied on flouting a single maxim, most often quality, these multimaxim cases demonstrate that sarcasm can become increasingly nuanced when

multiple principles of cooperative conversation are simultaneously violated. Rather than being incidental, these occurrences highlight intentional, stylized deviations from conversational norms that serve rhetorical and interactional purposes.

Table 2. Multimaxim flouting in sarcastic utterances

No.	Maxims Flouted	Season 1	Season 2	Season 3	Total
1.	Quality+ Quantity	0	0	1	1
2.	Quality+ Relevance	1	2	0	3
3.	Quality+ Manner	1	1	1	3
4.	Relevance+ Manner	1	0	2	3
5.	Qual+Quant +Manne	1	1	1	3
6.	Qual+Rel+ Manner	0	1	0	1
7.	Qual+Quant +Rel	0	0	1	1
8.	Four maxims	1	0	0	1
Total		5	5	6	16

Sarcasm involving the simultaneous flouting of two or more maxims, such as quality and relevance, or quantity and manner, demands greater inferential effort from the hearer. These utterances often require the audience to process not only the implausibility of the statement but also its ambiguity, irrelevance, or insufficiency in relation to the conversational context. The cognitive complexity involved in such interpretations aligns with Yus Ramos' (1998, 2000) notion that sarcasm increases processing effort as contextual cues become less direct or more layered. In the context of scripted television, this form of "dense" sarcasm can enhance comedic timing, deepen character complexity, or inject subtle narrative critique.

Interestingly, the most frequent types of multimaxim flouting in the data involved combinations that still included a violation of the quality maxim. This finding suggests that while Chandler often escalates the intricacy of his sarcastic delivery, the foundation of his irony still lies in a performative falsity or absurdity. However, the addition of violations of relevance or manner introduces elements of incoherence, exaggeration, or

surrealism that shift sarcasm away from straightforward mockery and into the realm of absurdist humor or social commentary.

Here's an example of Chandler's sarcasm flouting the Maxim of Quality and Relevance.

(3) [00:16:58,684-00:17:01,936] Season 1 Ep. 14

Context: Even though his relationship with Janice has ended, Chandler still cannot completely detach himself from her. Unexpectedly, they meet again at Central Perk. Janice cheerfully approaches Chandler and excitedly tells him that she brought him something. She then hands him a small object that appears to be a gift. Chandler looks at it for a moment and immediately responds by asking what's inside.

Janice: "I brought you something."

Chandler: "Is it loaded?"

In this scene, Chandler's utterance flouts both the Maxim of Quality and the Maxim of Relation. When Janice cheerfully says, "I brought you something," Chandler sarcastically replies, "Is it loaded?" The question is clearly untrue and irrelevant in the context of receiving a gift, thus violating both maxims simultaneously. By saying something false and contextually inappropriate, Chandler implies his discomfort and reluctance to reconnect with Janice. The humor stems from this incongruity between expected politeness and sarcastic irrelevance, illustrating how flouting conversational maxims can serve as a comedic strategy to express hidden emotions.

In some cases, sarcasm that flouted three or four maxims appeared deliberately stylized to create confusion or to disrupt expected conversational logic. These utterances tended to occur in emotionally or socially complex scenarios—where Chandler either attempts to withhold his true feelings, respond to perceived irrationality, or lampoon the situation itself. As such, multimaxim sarcasm may function not only as a response to the preceding utterance but also as a disruption of the interactional script, inviting the hearer to re-evaluate both content and tone.

From a pragmatic standpoint, these findings underscore the elasticity of sarcasm as a communicative strategy. When Chandler flouts multiple maxims at once, he leverages the full

interpretive range of irony—not only to veil his intent but also to control the terms of engagement in the conversation. Rather than cooperating conventionally, he cooperates by way of conspicuous non-cooperation—a move that foregrounds his ironic voice and supports his function as both insider and outsider within the group.

Moreover, multimaxim flouting reflects Chandler's increasing reliance on sarcasm as a multifunctional tool. Whether used to express disapproval, challenge assumptions, or assert social distance, these utterances exemplify how sarcasm can operate simultaneously on cognitive, emotional, and relational levels. This finding expands the understanding of sarcasm beyond isolated maxim flouting, showing how the strategic violation of several conversational norms can produce richer, more layered interpretations that are central to the comedic and interpersonal rhythm of Friends.

Functions of Sarcasm

In addition to categorizing sarcastic utterances by the maxims they flout, this study also examined the communicative intentions or functions underlying each of Chandler's sarcastic remarks. These functions were grouped into three broad categories: negative evaluation, positive evaluation, and other purposes.

Table 3 summarizes the results. Of the 134 sarcastic utterances identified, 48 (36%) were intended to deliver negative evaluations of the interlocutor. Interestingly, none of the utterances were found to express positive evaluations. The remaining 86 utterances (64%) served other purposes, such as teasing, mocking, expressing disappointment, or asserting social alignment.

Table 3. Functions of sarcastic utterances by Chandler Bing

No.	Sarcasm Function	Season 1	Season 2	Season 3	Total
1.	Negative Evaluation	10	20	18	48
2.	Positive Evaluation	0	0	0	0
3.	Other Purposes	29	24	33	86
Total		39	44	51	134

Sarcasm functioning as negative evaluation often serves to criticize or ridicule another

character's behavior, statements, or appearance. Meanwhile, sarcasm with "other" functions may be used to diffuse tension, signal frustration, or reinforce Chandler's signature style of humor that is often through exaggeration or absurdity.

This evaluative function is evident in several of Chandler's remarks given earlier. When he responds to Monica's apology with "Oh, she's sorry. I feel better," his sarcasm mocks her attempt at consolation and implicitly conveys annoyance. Likewise, his comment "And he's not speaking metaphorically" ridicules Ross's peculiar dating plan, exposing its absurdity. In another instance, his reaction to Janice's gift—"Is it loaded?"—expresses aversion and distrust under the guise of humor. In each of these cases, sarcasm operates as a vehicle for negative evaluation, enabling Chandler to criticize or belittle others indirectly while preserving his characteristic wit and comedic detachment. The complete absence of sarcastic utterances intended to convey positive evaluation is particularly revealing. It suggests that Chandler's sarcasm consistently functions within a framework of critique, distancing, or self-defense, rather than reinforcement or praise. This finding reinforces the long-standing view in pragmatic theory that sarcasm is characteristically antagonistic or contrastive in nature, relying on a deliberate incongruity between literal content and intended meaning. Chandler's utterances rarely seek to affirm; instead, they mask approval through irony or bypass it altogether.

More notably, the majority of sarcastic utterances in this study—approximately 64%—fall into the category of "other purposes," a functional grouping that encompasses a broad spectrum of pragmatic intentions beyond straightforward negative evaluation. This category includes instances where Chandler's sarcasm serves to deflect emotional vulnerability, redirect conversational tension, or engage in socially strategic ambiguity. In these cases, sarcasm is not used to target others directly, but rather to manage Chandler's own positioning within the conversational dynamic. For instance, when expressing frustration or discomfort, Chandler often adopts a sarcastic tone to maintain social composure, conceal sincerity, or avoid overt confrontation. Such uses illustrate how sarcasm can function as a protective strategy, allowing the speaker to convey meaning without full accountability.

Here's an example of Chandler's sarcasm serving that falls under the Other Purposes category.

(4) [00:06:18,757-00:06:39,574] Season 3 Ep. 16

Context: Ross faces a moral dilemma after cheating on Chloe and feels conflicted about whether to confess the truth to Rachel. Chandler advises him to withhold the information, reasoning that honesty would only hurt Rachel and worsen the situation. Joey supports Chandler's view, emphasizing that while honesty is admirable, it can sometimes do more harm than good. In the end, Chandler adds a sarcastic remark to conclude his advice.

Joey: "Ross, look, I'm onboard about the total-honesty thing. I am. Just not about stuff that's gonna get you in trouble."

Chandler: "He's right. Nobody's gonna benefit, and you're just gonna hurt her."

Joey: "Yeah, and there won't be a relationship left to rebuild."

Ross: "Don't you think?"

Chandler: "**Look, if you absolutely have to tell her, at least wait till the timing's right. And that's what deathbeds are for.**"

Chandler's sarcasm in the above scene is a clear example of one of the "Other Purposes" category, specifically when sarcasm is used to give a suggestion or advice. Rather than expressing direct criticism or hostility, his remark serves to soften the seriousness of Ross's dilemma and to convey his advice in a humorous, indirect manner. The sarcasm helps Chandler navigate a sensitive situation without sounding overly moralistic or confrontational. Through this strategy, Chandler's sarcasm functions less as an attack and more as a socially adaptive tool to manage tension and emotional vulnerability.

Furthermore, sarcasm in this "other" category frequently operates as a form of pragmatic negotiation—facilitating humor, marking in-group alignment, or subtly challenging conversational expectations. In group interactions, Chandler's sarcasm often strengthens solidarity with certain characters while simultaneously distancing himself from others. This dual function echoes Attardo's (2002) argument that sarcasm may simultaneously express affiliation and exclusion, depending on

context and intent. It is through such layered functions that Chandler constructs his identity as both socially embedded and emotionally detached.

Another important dimension is the strategic use of sarcasm to maintain Chandler's narrative role as an ironic commentator. His sarcastic remarks often reflect not only personal reactions but also implicit evaluations of the broader social situations unfolding within the sitcom's storyline. By flouting maxims and employing indirect critique, Chandler performs a quasi-narrative function—reframing or subverting what is happening on-screen through sardonic commentary. This metadiscursive quality aligns with Dynel's (2011) observation that sarcasm in scripted media frequently serves to reinforce a character's self-awareness and inject commentary that transcends the surface plot.

Lastly, the range of sarcastic functions identified in this study highlights Chandler's linguistic agility. Rather than relying on a single sarcastic mode, he adapts his style according to social context, speaker-hearer relationships, and interpersonal goals. His frequent use of sarcasm to express disappointment, discomfort, or disbelief without resorting to directness illustrates the pragmatic efficiency of this strategy, offering indirectness with interpretive richness. In this way, sarcasm becomes not only a comedic tool but also a communicative resource that enables Chandler to participate, protest, and perform within the conversational fabric of *Friends*.

CONCLUSION

This study identified 134 sarcastic utterances produced by Chandler Bing across Seasons 1 to 3 of *Friends*. Of these, 118 involved the flouting of a single Gricean maxim, while 16 flouted multiple maxims simultaneously. Among the four conversational maxims proposed by Grice (1975), the maxim of quality was the most frequently violated, with approximately 91% of sarcastic utterances hinging on some form of overt untruth or implausibility. These findings align with previous research by Kreuz and Glucksberg (1989) and Camp (2012), which identified violations of the maxim of quality as the most prototypical marker of sarcasm.

Thus, the results reinforce the central role of semantic-pragmatic contrast in the production and recognition of sarcasm, confirming that sarcastic meaning often emerges from deliberate violations of conversational norms.

Notably, the study's analysis of multimaxim flouting revealed that sarcasm can take on increasingly complex forms when more than one maxim is violated. These multi-layered utterances, though smaller in number, often required higher cognitive effort to interpret and were strategically deployed in emotionally charged or socially ambiguous situations. This observation resonates with Yus Ramos's (1998, 2000) claim that the processing of sarcasm depends on contextual accessibility and inferential effort. Chandler's use of combined maxim violations demonstrates how scripted dialogue can exploit these complexities for both humor and nuanced interpersonal critique.

In terms of communicative intent, the majority of Chandler's sarcasm (64%) served purposes other than direct negative evaluation. These utterances were used to tease, deflect, obscure sincerity, or indirectly comment on social dynamics. The complete absence of sarcastic utterances intended for positive reinforcement underscores sarcasm's inherently contrastive nature. However, it also highlights the stylistic and pragmatic flexibility of sarcasm as employed by Chandler, not merely to criticize, but to perform humor, manage face-threatening acts, and construct a persona rooted in wit, guardedness, and social navigation. These findings extend the frameworks proposed by Attardo (2002) and Dews and Winner (1995) by illustrating how communicative functions of sarcasm can intertwine within a single character's speech style in scripted media.

Together, the findings suggest that sarcasm in scripted media like *Friends* is not a monolithic phenomenon but a dynamic, multifunctional resource. Chandler's sarcastic utterances reflect a sophisticated use of indirectness that adapts to context, interlocutor, and emotional stance, supporting Dynel's (2011, 2016) argument that television dialogue magnifies pragmatic contrasts to shape character identity and audience engagement. Thus, this study contributes to the growing body of research that examines sarcasm as both a linguistic

and performative tool, offering new insights into its role in character construction and mediated humor.

This study is not without limitations. First, the dataset was limited to three seasons of a single sitcom, constraining the generalizability of its findings across genres, characters, or real-life discourse. Future research should incorporate broader and more diverse corpora, including natural conversation, to explore how sarcasm functions across media and cultural contexts. Second, while this study employed a tripartite classification of sarcastic intent (negative evaluation, positive evaluation, and other purposes), the “other” category encompassed a wide range of nuanced functions. Future studies would benefit from developing finer-grained typologies of sarcastic motivation to capture the full pragmatic diversity of this phenomenon.

In sum, this study demonstrates that sarcasm, particularly in the form of maxim flouting, is a salient and complex feature of television discourse. It plays a vital role not only in humor and critique but also in revealing how language can be used strategically to negotiate meaning, emotion, and identity.

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