



Implicature as Social Criticism of Asian-American Stereotypes in Jimmy O. Yang's Stand-Up Comedy

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Received: 2026-04-26 Revised: 2026 05-02 Accepted: 2026 05-14</p> <p>Keywords: Asian American stereotypes; Conversational implicature; Flouting maxims; Social criticism; Stand-up comedy</p> <p>DOI: 10.24256/ideasv14i1.10318</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Dio Alif Dwitama dioalifdwitama8@gmail.com English Literature, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Jawa Barat</p>	<p><i>This study examines how pragmatic violations in stand-up comedy function as a strategy for social criticism, focusing on Jimmy O. Yang's performances in Good Deal (2020) and Guess How Much (2023). The research aims to identify the types of conversational maxims flouted and to analyze how the resulting implicatures challenge dominant Asian American stereotypes. Using a qualitative approach with a data condensation method, this study applies Grice's (1975) cooperative principle to classify maxim violations and employs intersectional sociological frameworks to interpret their critical meanings. The analysis identifies 79 utterances containing conversational implicatures that function as social critique. The findings show that the maxim of Quality is the most frequently flouted, with 56 occurrences, mainly through irony and hyperbole to produce cognitive incongruity. These pragmatic violations are consistently directed at four dominant stereotypes: the perpetual foreigner label (27 occurrences), economic stereotypes related to immigrant frugality (21 occurrences), the emasculation of Asian men (16 occurrences), and the model minority myth (15 occurrences). These results demonstrate that maxim flouting operates as a systematic linguistic strategy rather than a purely comedic device. Yang uses implicature to expose contradictions within hegemonic narratives and to challenge Eurocentric perspectives on Asian American identity. This study suggest that stand-up comedy can function as a form of socio-political discourse, where pragmatic non-observance serves as an effective tool for resistance and identity reconstruction.</i></p>

1. Introduction

Language functions not only as a tool for conveying information but also as a performative medium that shapes social reality and constructs meaning in interaction (Levinson, 1983). Through language, individuals negotiate identity, reinforce norms, and reproduce dominant ideologies within society.

Within this process, marginalized communities are frequently subjected to stereotypes that simplify and distort their identities. Stereotypes operate as cognitive shortcuts that can reinforce systemic bias and social inequality (Lippmann, 2024). In the context of Asian Americans, these stereotypes manifest in several persistent forms.

One of the most widely discussed is the model minority myth, which imposes expectations of academic and economic success (Thompson et al., 2016). Another is the perpetual foreigner label, which positions Asian Americans as outsiders regardless of their citizenship or cultural integration (An, 2016). In addition, economic stereotypes related to immigrant frugality continue to shape public perception (Guiheux et al., 2026). Gender-based representations also persist, particularly the emasculation of Asian men within dominant discourse (Liu & Wong, 2016).

These stereotypes influence identity formation and lived experiences across multiple domains. They affect how individuals are perceived in social interaction, media representation, and institutional structures (Yi et al., 2022). As a result, stereotypes do not only reflect reality but also actively construct and maintain social inequality. These issues highlight the need to examine how language both constructs and challenges such stereotypes in public discourse.

Stand-up comedy has emerged as a space where dominant narratives can be questioned and challenged. Comedians use language strategically to expose contradictions in social assumptions and to present alternative perspectives. In this context, humor functions as a form of social commentary that allows sensitive issues to be communicated in an indirect yet impactful way (Black, 2021).

From a pragmatic perspective, humor often relies on the deliberate violation of conversational norms. According to Grice (1975), communication is guided by the cooperative principle and its four maxims: Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner. In comedic discourse, these maxims are frequently flouted to generate implicatures, where the intended meaning differs from the literal expression (Yule, 1996). This mismatch produces cognitive incongruity, which becomes the basis of humor (Ibraheem & Abbas, 2016).

Previous studies show that maxim flouting plays a central role in producing humor across different contexts. Research on stand-up comedy demonstrates that violations of the maxim of Quality, especially through irony and exaggeration, are commonly used to create comedic effects (Chepkemoui et al., 2023). Other studies highlight that implicature enables comedians to communicate layered meanings beyond surface-level jokes (Sabila, 2024).

At the same time, cultural and sociological studies emphasize that comedy reflects the lived experiences of marginalized groups. Stand-up comedy can function as a platform to challenge racial stereotypes and dominant norms (Ferial & Rahma, 2022). In the Asian American context, it also addresses issues related to gender, identity, and representation (Meng & Literat, 2024).

However, existing research tends to treat maxim flouting primarily as a technical mechanism for generating humor. Pragmatic studies often focus on identifying types of violations without explaining their broader social function. On the other hand, sociological studies discuss stereotypes and marginalization but rarely examine how these ideas are constructed and challenged through linguistic strategies in performance.

Therefore, a gap remains in explaining how pragmatic mechanisms operate as structured forms of social criticism. Limited research explicitly positions maxim flouting as a deliberate and systematic strategy of social critique.

To address this gap, this study investigates Jimmy O. Yang's stand-up comedy performances in *Good Deal* (2020) and *Guess How Much* (2023). (1) what types of conversational maxims are flouted in these performances, and (2) how the resulting implicatures function as social criticism of Asian American stereotypes.

This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach by combining Gricean pragmatics with intersectional perspectives on race, gender, and immigrant identity (Liu & Wong, 2016; Min, 2024). It argues that maxim flouting is not only a linguistic deviation but also a systematic strategy of social critique. Through this approach, the study demonstrates how implicature in stand-up comedy functions as a counter-narrative to dominant representations of Asian American identity.

2. Method

Data Source

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to examine how conversational implicatures function as social criticism in stand-up comedy. A qualitative approach is appropriate because it allows in-depth interpretation of utterances within their social and situational contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The primary data sources are two stand-up comedy specials performed by Jimmy O. Yang, namely *Good Deal* (2020) and *Guess How Much* (2023). These performances were selected because they represent different production periods and consistently contain themes related to Asian American stereotypes. The data consist of spoken utterances, including words, phrases, clauses, and sentences taken from the transcripts of these performances.

The selection of data is limited to comedic segments that relate to four dimensions of Asian American stereotypes: the model minority myth, the perpetual foreigner label, economic stereotypes related to immigrant frugality, and the emasculation of Asian men. Utterances that do not involve maxim flouting or are not relevant to these themes are excluded from the analysis.

Data Collection

Data collection applies documentation and non-participant observation methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher repeatedly watches and listens to the performances to capture both verbal expressions and their contextual meanings. Relevant segments are transcribed into written form and organized into thematic categories based on the four stereotype dimensions.

The researcher acts as the primary instrument in this study. The process involves selecting, transcribing, and categorizing utterances while maintaining their original context to ensure accurate interpretation.

Data Analysis

The data analysis follows a structured qualitative procedure consisting of classification, implicature interpretation, and critical analysis. First, each utterance is identified and classified based on the type of maxim flouted, namely Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner, using Grice's (1975) framework. Second, the implied meanings are analyzed to determine their conversational implicatures (Yule, 1996). Third, these implicatures are interpreted using intersectional sociological perspectives to examine how they function as social criticism toward Asian American stereotypes (Min, 2024).

In cases where multiple maxims are flouted within a single utterance, the analysis focuses on the dominant maxim. The dominant maxim refers to the primary violation that drives the main implicature, even when multiple maxims are present.

To enhance analytical transparency, the following example illustrates the coding process:

Utterance: "Kumon Learning Centers, for you guys that do not know, are basically detention camps for young Asian children."

Maxim Flouted: Quality (The speaker uses an extreme metaphor. Equating tutoring centers with detention camps is objectively a false statement designed to trigger a humorous reaction).

Implicature: The obligation of extreme studying feels like a prison sentence. It critiques a society that restricts minority children's freedom to maintain the racial image of being an intelligent group.

Stereotype: Model minority myth.

Finally, to ensure credibility, this study applies peer debriefing. The researcher discusses selected data and interpretations with peers who have a background in pragmatics. This process helps evaluate the consistency of maxim classification and implicature interpretation and reduces subjective bias.

3. Result

Types of Flouted Maxims

This section presents the findings of the analysis of Jimmy O. Yang's stand-up comedy performances in *Good Deal* (2020) and *Guess How Much* (2023). A total of 79 utterances were identified as containing conversational implicatures. Each utterance was classified based on the type of maxim flouted, namely Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner. The classification focuses on the dominant maxim that drives the main implicature.

The findings show that the Maxim of Quality is the most frequently flouted maxim, with 56 occurrences. This is followed by the Maxim of Quantity with 18 occurrences, the Maxim of Relation with 4 occurrences, and the Maxim of Manner with 1 occurrence. The dominance of the Maxim of Quality indicates that exaggeration, irony, and deliberate falsehood are the primary linguistic strategies used to generate humor and social critique in the performances.

The following excerpts illustrate the classification of each maxim:

Excerpt 1 (Maxim of Quality)

"Jeremy Lin won a championship for doing nothing. He is the first Asian kid to receive a participation trophy."

Excerpt 2 (Maxim of Quantity)

"I still live in a one-bedroom apartment because that shit is rent controlled. And when the Asian people, when we find a good deal, we are never letting that shit go"

Excerpt 3 (Maxim of Relation)

"I grew up a Los Angeles Clippers fan. Most people ask why? My dad was like, 'Yeah, the tickets were half price.'"

Excerpt 4 (Maxim of Manner)

"And my dad named himself Richard. Not because he likes the name, but because he wants to be rich. Richard. Rich-ard."

Forms of Social Criticism

The utterances were also categorized based on the type of stereotype being addressed. Four main categories were identified: the perpetual foreigner label, economic stereotypes related to immigrant frugality, the emasculation of Asian men, and the model minority stereotype.

The distribution shows that the "perpetual foreigner" stereotype appears most frequently with 27 occurrences, followed by economic stereotypes with 21 occurrences, the emasculation of Asian men with 16 occurrences, and the model minority stereotype with 15 occurrences. The distribution of flouted maxims across these categories is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. The Distribution of Flouted Maxims as Social Criticism

Form of Social Criticism	Types of Flouted Maxims	Total Occurrences
Critique of the Model Minority Stereotype	Maxim of Quality	11
	Maxim of Quantity	3
	Maxim of Relation	1
	Maxim of Manner	0
Critique of the Perpetual Foreigner Label	Maxim of Quality	19
	Maxim of Quantity	6
	Maxim of Relation	1
	Maxim of Manner	1
Critique of Economic Stereotypes	Maxim of Quality	13
	Maxim of Quantity	7
	Maxim of Relation	1
	Maxim of Manner	0
Critique of the Emasculation of Asian Men	Maxim of Quality	13
	Maxim of Quantity	2
	Maxim of Relation	1
	Maxim of Manner	0
Total Data Analysed	:	79

To illustrate how a specific pragmatic violation functions as social criticism, consider the following excerpt:

Excerpt 5 (Maxim of Relation & Perpetual Foreigner)

Jimmy: "I am Chinese, sir. I've lived here since I was thirteen."

Man: "It doesn't matter, you're still a guest in this house."

Analysis: This interaction flouts the Maxim of Relation to highlight the "perpetual foreigner" label, where Asian Americans are treated as outsiders regardless of their citizenship or years of residence

This section has outlined the overall pattern of maxim flouting and its distribution across different forms of social criticism. A deeper interpretation and synthesis of these findings, particularly how they function as a counter-narrative, are provided in the Discussion section.

4. Discussion

This section interprets how Maxim flouting functions as a systematic strategy for constructing social criticism in Jimmy O. Yang's performances. The analysis suggests that the pragmatic gap between literal expression and intended meaning is deliberately used to question dominant narratives surrounding Asian American identity through cognitive incongruity (Raskin, 1985).

Critique of the Perpetual Foreigner Label

The "perpetual foreigner" label is frequently addressed in Yang's routines, primarily constructed through the violation of conversational maxims (Grice, 1975). In interactions where geographical and cultural corrections are met with dismissive responses, Yang highlights everyday microaggressions (Azhar et al., 2021). For example:

"I want to buy you a drink because I was stationed in Okinawa 4 years and you guys have been nothing but nice to me... I am like, Okinawa is in Japan. I am Chinese, sir. And he is like, it doesn't matter, man." (Yang, 2023, 04:46 - 05:27)

Pragmatically, the military man's response ignores Yang's specific ethnic correction. By providing a statement ("It doesn't matter") that is disconnected from the preceding factual premise, the interaction flouts the Maxim of Relation. The implicature here is that the white speaker views people of Asian descent as a single, interchangeable group. Rather than an isolated incident, this implicature suggests a broader sociological tendency where minority identity is often oversimplified by the dominant group, positioning Asian Americans as permanent outsiders regardless of their actual origins (Lippmann, 2024; Min, 2024).

Furthermore, Yang critiques this label at an institutional level by discussing seating locations in Hollywood award shows. He states:

*"Every year we knew we are going to lose because all the good shows have front row seats... We are way the f*ck in the back by the exit sign. But it is okay. Win or lose, I was there to represent"* (Yang, 2023, 09:33 - 09:52).

By volunteering excessive, self-deprecating details about his exact physical placement in the room, Yang flouts the Maxim of Quantity's principle of brevity (Grice, 1975). The implicature behind this over-informativeness points to a performative aspect of minority inclusion. It indicates a tendency within the media industry to treat Asian actors as diversity displays, invited into the room but often kept away from actual seats of cultural influence (An, 2016; Liu & Wong, 2016).

Reframing Economic Stereotypes

Yang also addresses economic stereotypes by reframing immigrant frugality from a negative trait into a rational survival strategy (Guiheux et al., 2026). This is frequently constructed through over-informativeness, flouting the Maxim of Quantity (Thomas, 2013). In describing his living situation, Yang states:

"I still live in a one-bedroom apartment because that shit is rent controlled. And when the Asian people, when we find a good deal, we are never letting that shit go." (Yang, 2020, 16:48 - 17:10)

From a linguistic standpoint, supplying the legal status of the apartment ("rent controlled") and detailing his community's habit of holding onto bargains is not conversationally required to simply answer why he lives there. This intentional over-informativeness flouts the Maxim of Quantity to emphasize a specific behavioral pattern. The implicature drawn here is that financial security is a paramount concern for immigrants, often overriding the desire for luxury. Consequently, the interpretation of "cheapness" is reframed as a strategic response shaped by structural economic conditions rather than a mere cultural flaw (Szklarz, 2024).

This financial anxiety is further illustrated when Yang's father interacts with a street vendor. Yang recounts:

"And my dad would go up and haggle with them. He will go and be like, Okay, I give you 5 dollars for two hot dogs... Dad, it is not buy one get one free at Costco. Just give him 10 bucks. And he was like, Shh, never pay full price" (Yang, 2023, 47:09 - 47:32).

Here, the father disrupts normative communication by applying wholesale negotiation tactics to a fixed-price environment. This contextual mismatch flouts the Maxim of Relation (introducing irrelevant economic logic) and the Maxim of Manner (creating a socially awkward exchange) (Grice, 1975). The implicature generated from this pragmatic failure suggests how financial anxiety, deeply rooted in the immigrant experience, can sometimes override normative social etiquette (Szklarz, 2024).

Challenging the Emasculation of Asian Men

The historical emasculation of Asian men is challenged through irony and the subversion of truth, effectively violating the Maxim of Quality (Hang & Ha, 2025). Yang constructs alternative representations of masculinity by playing with dominant expectations. For instance, describing Asian pop stars, he states:

"You are in a field of grass and a little puff of pink hair just pops up. You are like, 'What was that?' Is that a unicorn?" (Yang, 2023, 38:13 - 38:35)

Equating an armed military soldier to a brightly colored fantasy creature contradicts visual reality. By presenting a statement that is demonstrably false, Yang deliberately flouts the Maxim of Quality (Grice, 1975). This absurd comparison triggers cognitive incongruity, generating an implicature that satirizes the rigid boundaries of traditional Western masculinity. It suggests that mainstream audiences often struggle to process Asian men in roles of aggressive power, viewing their modern aesthetic expressions as non-threatening (Azhar et al., 2021). This comedic strategy can be interpreted as an attempt to challenge dominant representations of Asian male identity by normalizing diverse expressions of masculinity (Liu & Wong, 2016).

Similarly, Yang subverts masculine expectations by parodying hyper-masculine advertising tropes:

"He is the most Asian man in the world. And the Asian brother comes out... But when I do, my face turn red. Stay thirsty, my friends." (Yang, 2020, 55:08 - 55:38).

Twisting a familiar commercial script to state something biologically awkward (the Asian flush) clearly violates the Maxim of Quality's expectation of sincerity. This pragmatic subversion produces dark humor (Yule, 1996), leading to a critical sociological implicature: it challenges Eurocentric standards by repositioning a perceived biological flaw as a mark of authentic identity (Goffman, 1956).

Demystifying the Model Minority Myth

Yang critiques the "model minority" myth by indicating its internal pressures (Thompson et al., 2016). This is primarily achieved through hyperbole, which violates the Maxim of Quality (Hang & Ha, 2025). In the statement:

"Jeremy Lin won a championship for doing nothing. He is the first Asian kid to receive a participation trophy." (Yang, 2020, 01:27 - 01:50)

Claiming that a professional athlete achieved sports success without exerting any effort is a profound hyperbole. This deliberate distortion of truth functions as an ironic flouting of the Maxim of Quality. The implicature here is that society often sets an unusually high threshold for minority success to be recognized. By creating this cognitive clash, Yang indicates a double standard where minority achievements can be minimized or taken for granted in public discourse (Sabila, 2024).

Additionally, Yang addresses the emotional dynamics embedded within some immigrant families. He remarks:

*"I was raised by Asian parents. I have never heard one word of affirmation in my life. Nobody ever told me, Jimmy, you are so great. You can do it. They are like, Do not f*ck it up. Their love language is verbal abuse."* (Yang, 2023, 16:40 - 17:12).

Linguistically, the phrasing inherently contradicts itself; pairing the concept of affection ("love language") with psychological degradation ("verbal abuse") creates a logical contradiction. This semantic paradox simultaneously flouts the Maxim of Quality (factual absurdity) and the Maxim of Relation (juxtaposing incompatible concepts) (Grice, 1975). The implicature drawn from this paradox critiques the intense emotional pressures often normalized within immigrant parenting under the guise of guaranteeing success (Choi & Hahm, 2017).

Synthesis and Contribution

Overall, the findings indicate that maxim flouting operates as an interconnected system in Yang's comedy. The Maxim of Quality functions as the primary driver of irony and exaggeration, while the Maxims of Relation and Quantity support meaning in specific contexts. Each violation creates a gap between literal and intended meaning, and this gap becomes the space where social criticism emerges (Thomas, 2013). By linking pragmatic analysis with social context, this study illustrates how implicature can function as a tool for resistance, contributing to a more nuanced representation of Asian American identity (Black, 2021).

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the flouting of conversational maxims in Jimmy O. Yang's stand-up comedy specials, *Good Deal* (2020) and *Guess How Much* (2023), serves as a sophisticated linguistic strategy for socio-political resistance. The analysis reveals that the Maxim of Quality is the most frequently flouted, primarily through irony and hyperbole, to create the necessary cognitive incongruity for humor. However, these pragmatic violations are not merely stylistic; they generate layered conversational implicatures that critically deconstruct hegemonic Asian American stereotypes.

By consistently targeting the perpetual foreigner label, economic frugality myths, the emasculation of Asian men, and the model minority trap, Yang transforms the comedic stage into a discursive space that challenges the Eurocentric gaze and reclaims minority agency. Ultimately, this research indicates that stand-up comedy is a potent medium for cultural commentary where linguistic non-observance functions as a tool for ideological subversion.

Despite these findings, this research has several limitations. First, the analysis is strictly limited to the linguistic and sociological dimensions of two specific performances, which may not represent the entire spectrum of Asian American stand-up comedy or Yang's evolving comedic style in different contexts. Second, as a qualitative study, the interpretation of implicatures is deeply context-dependent and may be subject to different cultural perceptions. Lastly, this study does not account for audience reception or the real-world impact of these performances on public perception of Asian American stereotypes. Therefore, the findings should be generalized with caution, specifically within the realm of Asian American stage discourse.

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