

# SEMANTICS OF HUMOR IN THE TELEVISION SERIES "TEEN WOLF"

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**Bilić, Daria**

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Daria Bilić

**Semantics of humour in the television series “*Teen Wolf*”**

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UNIVERSITY OF SPLIT  
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Department of English Language and Literature

**Semantics of humour in the television series “*Teen Wolf*”**

BA Thesis

Student:

Daria Bilić

Supervisor:

Mirjana Semren, Assistant Professor

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Humour is the essential part of our lives. It allows people to connect, communicate ideas and to unwind. Humour plays a great role in our mental and even physical health and penetrates every aspect of our life; from interpersonal relationships to entertainment. With this being said humour is a really interesting phenomenon for linguistic analysis.

The paper consists of two parts, the theoretical part and the analysis. Before diving into the analysis, it is essential to lay a theoretical foundation. The first part of this paper explains what humour is (see chapter 2). Furthermore, this paper focuses mainly on ambiguity which is important in the creation of verbal jokes. Therefore, the Cooperative Principle introduced by H. Paul Grice in 1975 will be discussed (see chapter 2.1.). Even though the Cooperative principle is the basis of Gricean pragmatics, it is explained how it relates to the semantics of humour further in the paper. Then, illustrated by some examples, the following literary devices will be explained: sarcasm (see chapter 2.2.), irony (see chapter 2.2.) and a special form of wordplay, also known as puns (see chapter 2.3.). Through a detailed analysis, this thesis aims to unravel the layers of humour embedded in utterances from the TV series *“Teen Wolf”*. *“Teen Wolf”* is an American drama TV series recognized for the distinct mixture of horror elements and humorous situations.

Besides the theoretical part, the crucial element and the main focus of this bachelor’s thesis is the second part which brings closer the sample (see chapter 3.1.), the data analysis (see chapter 3.2.) followed by the results (see chapter 4) and the discussion (see chapter 5). Then follows the conclusion (see chapter 6), which will provide a cohesive closure to this analysis. Finally, the thesis ends with a summary (see chapter 8).

## 2. WHAT IS HUMOUR?

As this paper focuses on the semantics of humour in the American TV show “*Teen Wolf*”, it is important to define what exactly humour is, if that is even possible. For this reason, mentioning a few most famous theories of humour and humour mechanisms is inevitable.

Humour has been acknowledged as a powerful and versatile tool in storytelling, capable of evoking both emotional and intellectual responses from the targeted audience, and over the years, numerous linguistic theories of humour have been proposed. Ross (2005), in “*The Language of Humour*”, defines humour as the ability or capacity of someone or something to be entertaining and funny. Smiling or laughing is a typical way of showing amusement. Similarly to Ross’ definition of humour, Raskin (1985: 1) establishes humour as the phenomenon which occurs when “*the person finds the audial or visual stimulus funny*”. According to Raskin (1985: 2), humour is a universal human attribute since he claims that “*responding to humor is part of human behavior; ability or competence, other parts of which comprise such important social and psychological manifestations of homo sapiens as language, morality, logic, faith, etc. Just as all of those, humor may be described as partly natural and partly acquired*”.

This bachelor’s thesis is mainly focused on Grice’s Cooperative Principle, his four proposed Maxims and the way in which they are flouted in American TV show “*Teen Wolf*”. The thesis also focuses on the use of sarcasm, irony and puns in the forementioned TV show. Even though the Cooperative Principle is the basis of pragmatics, this theory is important in the creation of semantic humour as “*semantic humour occurs when a word or a phrase in the sentence has more than one meaning causing ambiguity.*” (Taghiyev, 2017: 285).

## 2.1. GRICE'S COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE

In his article "*Logic and Conversation*" (1975), Herbert Paul Grice, the famous British language philosopher, established the Cooperative Principle. The idea of the Cooperative Principle is founded on the assumption that participants in a discussion work with one another and, to support good communication, try to be as truthful, informative, relevant, and clear as possible. Grice introduced the four Conversational Maxims. He thought that everyone who wishes to participate in meaningful conversations must adhere to these four Maxims and presume that others will do the same. For communication to be meaningful, he believed that cooperation is necessary. The four Conversational Maxims are listed and explained in the following section.

**The Maxim of Quality** (Grice, 1975: 46) refers to the truthfulness of the speaker's statement and evidence that backs up the said claim.

*"1) Do not say what you believe to be false.*

*2) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence."*

**The Maxim of Quantity** (Grice, 1975: 45) refers to the amount of information that the speaker is expected to provide.

*"1) Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange.*

*2) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required."*

**The Maxim of Relation** (Grice, 1975: 46) states that the speaker should "*be relevant.*" and say "*things that are pertinent to the discussion*".

**The Maxim of Manner** (Grice, 1975: 46) is concerned with the way in which the speaker's contribution was presented. It is different than the other Maxims because they focus on the content of the speaker's contribution. The speaker should:

*"1) Avoid obscurity of expression.*

*2) Avoid ambiguity.*

*3) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).*

*4) Be orderly."*

Even though the Cooperative Principle is a part of Grice's pragmatic theory, the concept is closely related to the semantic understanding of the creation of jokes and humorous situations

– as people very often fail to observe the Maxims. With this being said, the previously mentioned Maxims can either be violated or flouted.

Firstly, it is important to explain the violation of the Maxims. According to Andersen (2013: 5) “*violating a Maxim is when someone in a conversation fails to observe one or more Maxims with the intention to deceive the recipient, often using an implicature with the intention to mislead*”. Here is an example of how a Maxim can be violated.

*When a student is late for class and to excuse themselves, they say to their professor:  
“Sorry for being late, the bus got delayed for fifteen minutes!”.*<sup>1</sup>

In this case, the Maxim of Quality is violated, as the student is deliberately lying about the reason of being late. The truth is that the student overslept the class. Since the information is false, the student is violating the Maxim of Quality.

The previously mentioned flouting of the Gricean Maxims will now be explained in more detail. According to Thomas (1995), when a speaker purposefully states something false or for which there is insufficient proof, the Maxim of Quality is flouted. The speaker is not attempting to deceive the recipient in any manner; thus, the listener searches for another set of interpretations for the statement. Furthermore, the Maxim of Quantity is flouted when the speaker provides more or less information than it is needed, or expected, within a conversation.

Moreover, the Maxim of Relation is flouted when the speaker is purposefully giving a response that is not relevant to the discussed topic. So, the Maxim of Relation is flouted when the speaker does not stay on topic, or when they change the subject. Finally, when the speaker is purposefully not being brief and orderly, when they are being overly ambiguous and using obscure, cryptic language – the Maxim of Manner is flouted.

As previously explained, flouting of the four Maxims happens when one, or more of them, are deliberately not being observed. Flouting is often used in the creation of comic effect. In conclusion, the main difference between when the Maxim is flouted and when the Maxim is violated is when a speaker, who wants to flout the Maxim, chooses not to observe one of the Maxims. They do not intend on purposefully deceiving the listener, not seeking to be untruthful.

It is also important to explain the term coined by Grice – implicature. According to Grice, conversational implicature refers to the act of meaning one thing by saying something

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<sup>1</sup> Author's example



else. People create conversational implicatures, as stated by Grice (1989), when they do not observe one or more Maxims in such a flagrant way that it is evident to the listener that they are not observing the Maxim on purpose. This is referred to as flouting a Maxim by Grice. In creating humorous scenes and jokes, flouting of the Maxims is used very often. For example,

*RICHARD: "That cute girl that we have been talking about finally gave me her number; I think I have a chance with her!"*

*JOHN: "Yeah, and I am taking Irina Shayk on a date tomorrow." <sup>2</sup>*

In the example above John says that he is dating a famous supermodel, he is not being deceitful or trying to lie to his friend, he is simply flouting the Maxim of Quality. Furthermore, he is implying that his friend has no chance with the girl. In the next section of the paper, sarcasm, irony and puns will be introduced.

## 2.2. SARCASM AND IRONY

In the semantics of humour, sarcasm and irony are two essential linguistic devices. The accepted view of sarcasm "*was articulated by Quintilian roughly two millennia ago, as speech in which we understand something which is the opposite of what is actually said.*" (Quintilian, 95/1920 as cited in Camp, 2011: 1). The speaker's tone and context are often crucial for understanding sarcasm, it is typically more direct and used to ridicule others.

Irony is a much broader concept. In some situations it can convey humour while in other instances a deeper meaning. According to Betts (2022), there are different types of irony: situational, verbal and dramatic irony.

Situational irony occurs when the opposite outcome of the one you would expect happens in a situation. For example, a pilot who is afraid of heights. This situation is ironic because the pilot's profession involves spending most of their time flying at high altitudes.

There is also verbal irony or saying the opposite of what you mean. Here the example would be saying "*Thank you officer, you just made my day!*" <sup>3</sup> after receiving a speeding ticket.

In the end there is dramatic irony, where the audience knows something the characters are not aware of. It is used to add suspense to the story and the most famous example of dramatic irony

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<sup>2</sup> Author's example

<sup>3</sup> Weebly.com

can be found in Shakespeare's play "*Romeo and Juliet*". The audience is aware that Juliet is drugged and just sleeping, so when Romeo believes she is dead and kills himself (followed by Juliet doing the same), it heightens the audience's shock and the feeling of helplessness.

Even though they both entail saying one thing while meaning another, the distinction between the two is not always easy to make. The two differ in several ways, according to Betts (2022). Concepts of sarcasm and verbal irony sound the same by their definition and are easy to mix up, but the main difference between the two is negativity. Sarcasm is more personal; it is a witty mockery. Sarcastic remarks are intended to criticize and insult other people. On the contrary, verbal irony does not have a negative connotation.

Puns will be discussed in the upcoming part of this paper. They are a versatile and interesting component of language play since they appear in many different types of communication, such as literature, humour, and advertising.

### 2.3. PUNS

Bergson (1900: 38a), in his essay "*Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of Comic*" defines pun as an utterance or a sentence "*through which two different sets of ideas are expressed, and we are confronted with only one series of words; but advantage is taken of the different meanings a word may have, especially when used figuratively instead of literally.*"

As Attardo (1994: 138) states "*the best puns are those in which either the two senses coexist in a difficult balance, or in which the connotating sense brings a meaningful contribution to the global senses of the text*". Puns represent a form of wordplay, and can be categorized into the following three groups (Giorgadze, 2014):

#### **1. Lexical-Semantic Pun**

Lexical-Semantic pun can occur from homonyms (words of different meanings that are spelled and pronounced in the same way), homophones (words that are pronounced in the same way but are spelled differently or have different meanings), and polysemantic words (words that have several meanings). In the following example the pun is based on homophony:

*What do you call a deer with no eyes?*

*No idea.*<sup>4</sup>

The pun is based on the similarity in pronunciation of “*no idea*” and “*no eye deer*”.

## 2. Structural-Syntactic Pun

When a complex phrase or sentence may be interpreted in more than one manner, structural-syntactic ambiguity occurs. For example:

*Every calendar's days are numbered.*<sup>5</sup>

The one-liner joke can be parsed in two different ways because of ambiguous structural-syntactic constructions. By using the word “*numbered*” ambiguity is created with its different meanings. The previously mentioned word could be interpreted as a verb (past participle), or as an adjective.

## 3. Structural-Semantic Pun

Structural-semantic ambiguity occurs when a term or concept's meaning is intrinsically ambiguous due to extensive or informal usage. For instance:

*I do not trust stairs because they are always up to something.*<sup>6</sup>

In the example above, the literal meaning of the expression “*are up to something*” is that they lead to somewhere. But the mentioned expression informally means that you are doing something, usually something that you should not be doing, something mischievous.

Raskin (1985) suggests that a pun might be regarded a type of a joke, because its semantic structure is defined by the juxtaposition of two similar but opposing scripts. Puns have to be understood in order for them to produce the wanted, humorous effect.

Puns rely on semantic ambiguity, which occurs, according to Fike “*whenever one or more words within a sentence can be understood as having two or more distinct meanings*”, for example:

*A horse is a very stable animal.*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ask.metafilter.com.

<sup>5</sup> GotLines.com

<sup>6</sup> Givemejokes.com.

<sup>7</sup> GotLines.com

In the example above the word “*stable*” is ambiguous, the meaning of the word could either be the building in which livestock is kept, or someone who is sane and not easily upset. The different interpretation of the word creates ambiguity and causes laughter.

As Attardo (1994: 133) states, “*not every ambiguous word constitutes a pun*”. The pun must have an already established context, and be juxtaposed to it.

From the ancient times all the way to the 21st century, puns have had a long history in writing and generating humour. For this particular reason they are still a part of every linguist’s interest.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The thesis seeks to look into the humorous elements in the TV show “*Teen Wolf*” by analysing the use of Grice’s theory of Cooperative Principles, sarcasm, irony and puns. This paper is dedicated to answering the following research question: *How flouting of the aforementioned principle is employed to create a hilarious impact?*

#### 3.1. THE SAMPLE

Humorous situations and dialogues are chosen from the script of the supernatural teen drama “*Teen Wolf*”, from the Season 1 (2011) through Season 4 (2014). The corpus consists of 30 jokes, taken from 20 randomly chosen episodes of the show. The episodes were analysed by watching the show and writing down the utterances, and later by checking the script to make sure that they are correctly written. The analysis took about an hour per episode as a typical episode of “*Teen Wolf*” tends to run somewhere between 42 and 44 minutes. The finished analysis was given to a colleague, who has a BA in linguistics, to check the data. The majority of the examples are taken from the Season 2 (2012) and the Season 3 (2013-2014) as they are somewhat light-hearted; as the show progresses the themes are gradually getting darker and darker.

“*Teen Wolf*” is an American drama with supernatural elements, developed by Jeff Davis. The show is based on the 1985 movie of the same name. “*Teen Wolf*” premiered in 2011 and the last episode aired in 2017. The show was well received by the general public and won a variety of awards. “*Teen Wolf*” revolves around a supernatural group of friends and their token human, Stiles Stilinski. The main character, Scott McCall is just an ordinary guy living his, a bit boring, life in the fictional town, Beacon Hills – that is until he gets bitten by a werewolf. Now, by being bitten and suddenly gaining physical capabilities and senses far greater than those of a normal human being, he must manage his newfound animalistic tendencies and balance them with his day-to-day life.

It is important to introduce the other characters as well; the other werewolves of Beacon Hills are Ethan Steiner, Peter Hale, Isaac Lahey and Derek Hale. Jackson Whittemore is a jock who also gets bitten but instead of turning into a werewolf, he becomes a lizard-like creature, the kanima. Speaking of the creatures other than werewolves, there is Malia Tate – a werewolf struggling with her human identity. One of the funniest characters, by far is coach Finstock, the

lacrosse coach who is known for his witty remarks. Lydia Martin and Allison Argent are two best friends; Allison being a member of the Argent family who are a bloodline of werewolf hunters, and Lydia a popular and intelligent girl who later becomes a supernatural being, the banshee. Sheriff Stilinski is the father of the main character, Stiles and an army veteran often solving supernatural cases. After the introduction to the show and it's character the data analysis follows.

### 3.2 THE DATA ANALYSIS

Examples from the TV show "*Teen Wolf*" will be analysed in detail explaining the humorous intent of the writers of the said television series. The thesis uses qualitative approach to obtain information on the depiction of humour through flouting of Grice's four Maxims of Conversation which revolve around the relevance, quality and quantity of what is being said, as well as the manner in which it is said. Other common linguistic devices, i.e. sarcasm, irony and puns will also be discussed with examples. In the 20 episodes which were analysed, 17 examples were found of flouting the Gricean Maxims, 9 examples of sarcasm, an example of irony and 3 examples of puns. The following chapters will provide the results of the analysis.

## 4. RESULTS

This section provides a thorough examination of how humour is generated in the television programme “*Teen Wolf*”. A few examples are used to examine the generating mechanism of comedy, firstly via flouting of Grice’s Conversational Maxims. Secondly, the use of sarcasm, irony and puns in the creation of humorous situation in “*Teen Wolf*” will be explained.

### 4.1. FLOUTING THE GRICEAN MAXIMS

#### 4.1.1. FLOUTING OF THE MAXIM OF QUALITY

To start off, here are six examples of flouting the Maxim of Quality. They are taken from Season 1 (2011), Season 2 (2012) and Season 3 (2013-2014). There are three examples from Season 1, two from Season 2 and one from Season 3.

*JACKSON: Where are you getting your juice?*

*SCOTT: My mom does all the grocery shopping.*<sup>8</sup>

In this interaction, the Maxim of Quality is flouted. To give some context; when Scott turned into a werewolf, he developed superhuman strength, speed, agility, and senses – all of this made him the best lacrosse player in the whole school. As he was previously an unskilled player, Jackson asks him where does he get his “*juice*” – thinking of steroids. Scott, in fear of exposing his secret, answers with a witty remark, flouting the Maxim of Quality.

*STILES: Two joggers found a body in the woods.*

*SCOTT: A dead body?*

*STILES: No, a body of water.*<sup>9</sup>

In this example, Scott is well aware that it is a dead body that was found in the woods, his question is purely a reaction because of shock. Stiles again flouts the Maxim of Quality by stating that the body which was found was “*a body of water*”.

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<sup>8</sup> Season 1, Episode 1; Wolf Moon; 23:12-23:20 (IMDb)

<sup>9</sup> Season 1, Episode 1; Wolf Moon; 01:40-01:47 (IMDb)

*STILES: Maybe you caught a rabbit or something.*

*SCOTT: And did what?*

*STILES: Ate it.*

*SCOTT: RAW?*

*STILES: No, you stopped to bake it in a little werewolf oven.<sup>10</sup>*

The interaction between Scott and Stiles in the example above is flouting the Maxim of Quality by using sarcasm. The Maxim of Quality pertains to providing truthful and accurate information. Stiles flouts this Maxim by suggesting that Scott baked a rabbit in a “*werewolf oven*” instead of eating it raw. By intentionally being untruthful, Stiles injects humour into the conversation. He is engaging in playful, sarcastic banter with Scott.

*SIDE CHARACTER: Oh, yeah that’s... that’s right I learned a few things lately. werewolves, hunters, kanimas, it’s like a freaking Halloween party every full moon.*

*Except for you Stiles. What do you turn into?*

*STILES: An abominable snowman, but it’s more of a wintertime thing, you know, seasonal.<sup>11</sup>*

In the example above, the side character knows that Stiles is just an ordinary human with no supernatural abilities and is provoking him and when answering, Stiles deliberately flouts the Maxim of Quality by not being truthful.

*ALLISON: I can’t make you wait for me. I’m not going to do that.*

*SCOTT: You don’t have to. Because I know we’re gonna be together.*

*ALLISON: There’s no such thing as fate.*

*SCOTT: There’s no such thing as werewolves.<sup>12</sup>*

Scott’s statement, “*There’s no such thing as werewolves*”, flouts the Maxim of Quality since it clearly contradicts Scott’s whole existence. Because Scott is a werewolf, this claim is inaccurate. However, in this sentence he expresses a much more profound point regarding fate. By claiming that werewolves do not exist, he is emphasizing his belief that their love and

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<sup>10</sup> Season 1, Episode 3; Pack Mentality; 05:52-06:00 (IMDb)

<sup>11</sup> Season 2, Episode 10; Fury; 17:34-17:48 (IMDb)

<sup>12</sup> Season 2, Episode 12; Master Plan; 36:13-36:28 (IMDb)



connection are extraordinary and implausible, much like werewolves' existence – he hopes that they will reconnect again.

*LYDIA: Prada bit me.*

*STILES: Your dog?*

*LYDIA; No, my designer handbag*<sup>13</sup>

By purposefully not being truthful, Lydia is flouting the Maxim of Quality in the example above. Her statement that her designer handbag bit her is intentionally misleading. Even though it is impossible for a high-end bag to bite, and it has to be her pet who bit her, she answers in a manner that reveals her intention in misdirection Stiles for creating a humorous effect.

#### 4.1.2. FLOUTING OF THE MAXIM OF QUANTITY

In this part, flouting of the Maxim of Quantity will be analysed on two examples from Season 2 (2012).

*STILES: You're killing people. To death.*<sup>14</sup>

In this instance, Stiles flouts the Maxim of Quantity. It is sufficient to say “*you kill people*” to convey the message, adding “*to death*” is not necessary.

*ISAAC: Who is he?*

*SCOTT: That is Peter. Derek's uncle. Little while back he tried to kill us all and then we set him on fire, and Derek slashed his throat.*

*ISAAC: That's good to know.*<sup>15</sup>

Isaac's question: “*Who is he?*” is a straightforward request for basic information. Scott's response, on the other hand, includes more detail than is generally expected in response to such a question. Scott goes beyond a brief identification to provide more details about Derek's uncle,

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<sup>13</sup> Season 3, Episode 1; Tattoo; 22:35-22:39 (IMDb)

<sup>14</sup> Season 2, Episode 6; Frenemy; 21:08-21:11 (IMDb)

<sup>15</sup> Season 2, Episode 12; Master Plan; 05:23-05:31 (IMDb)

Peter. This surplus of information exceeds what is required to answer the original question and hence flouts the Maxim of Quantity by providing more information than needed.

#### 4.1.3. FLOUTING OF THE MAXIM OF RELATION

In the following four examples the flouting of the Maxim of Relation will be shown. The utterances are taken from Season 1 (2011), Season 2 (2012) and Season 3 (2013-2014) of the show. There is one example taken from Season 1 and Season 2 each and two examples from Season 3.

*ALLISON: Lydia do you think I made the wrong decision?*

*LYDIA: About that jacket with that dress? Absolutely.<sup>16</sup>*

In the example above, Allison is questioning her decision, she wants to hear her friend Lydia's opinion. Allison wants to know whether she made a mistake, or not, when she decided to break up with her boyfriend, Scott. However, Lydia avoids answering the question and instead answers with a humorous remark about Allison's fashion choice, flouting the Maxim of Manner.

*COACH FINSTOCK: Listen up! Anybody sees Isaac Lahey, you immediately tell the principal, get a teacher, or you call me. Except for you, Greenberg. Do not call me for anything. I am not kidding. Do not call me. You should not even have my number.<sup>17</sup>*

In the example above, coach Finstock starts off by giving clear instructions about what the students should do if they see Isaac Lahey. He then addresses Greenberg separately, suggesting that the student should not call him under any circumstances, nor should he have the coach's phone number. The coach makes this diversion and by not staying on topic of finding Isaac, he is flouting the Maxim of Manner. By calling Greenberg out the coach creates a humorous situation.

*HEATHER: Have you never done it before either?*

*STILES: Turned 17? Yeah, no, not yet, no.<sup>18</sup>*

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<sup>16</sup> Season 1, Episode 8; Lunatic; 06:58-07:03 (IMDb)

<sup>17</sup> Season 2, Episode 3; Ice Pick; 09:06-09:17 (IMDb)

<sup>18</sup> Season 3, Episode 2; Chaos Rising; 03:27-03:31 (IMDb)

In this exchange, Heather asks if Stiles has done “it” before, alluding to having sex, but Stiles intentionally misinterprets the question and comes up with an unrelated answer. This response flouts the Maxim of Relation by not directly answering the question, creating a humorous effect via means of miscommunication.

*HEATHER: Do you know what I want for my birthday?*

*STILES: Bike?<sup>19</sup>*

Once again, in the exchange between Heather and Stiles the Maxim of Relation is flouted in a humorous way; she asks Stiles whether he is familiar with her birthday wish., again alluding to having sex with him. Stiles, once again, intentionally tries to avoid giving her a direct answer and chooses to mention a bike, which is completely unrelated.

#### 4.1.4 FLOUTING OF THE MAXIM OF MANNER

In this paragraph, four examples of flouting the Maxim of Manner, taken from the first three seasons (2011-2014) will be analysed. There is one example from Season 1, two from Season 2 and one from Season 3.

*SHERIFF STILINSKI: So, you lied to me?*

*STILES: ...That depends on how you define lying.*

*SHERIFF STILINSKI: Well, I define it as not telling the truth. How do you define it?*

*STILES: Pff... inclining your body in a horizontal position.<sup>20</sup>*

In the example above, Stiles is flouting the Maxim of Manner. By straying from the usual norms of concise and simple language. The question asked by Sheriff Stilinski is simple, but Stiles answers with a clever and ambiguous explanation of lying, employing wordplay for hilarious effect.

*SHERIFF STILINSKI: What are you doing here?*

*STILES: What do you mean what am I doing here? What? It's a club. It's a club, we were clubbing, you know? At the club.*

*SHERIFF STILINSKI: Not exactly your type of club.*

*STILES: Uh- well, dad- There's a conversation that we...*

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<sup>19</sup> Season 3, Episode 2; Chaos Rising; 03:11-03:13 (IMDb)

<sup>20</sup> Season 1, Episode 2; Second Chance At First Line; 22:54-23:03 (IMDb)

*SHERIFF STILINSKI: You're not gay.*

*STILES: I could be!<sup>21</sup>*

The dialogue primarily involves flouting the Maxim of Manner. Instead of simply answering the question asked by the sheriff, Stiles once again uses humorous remarks while deliberately steering away from the main topic of the conversation. Through the whole interaction with the sheriff he continues being ambiguous and somewhat irrelevant in order to avoid answering the question.

*STILES: I'm playing? On the field? With the team?*

*COACH: Yes, unless you'd rather play with yourself.*

*STILES: I already did that today, twice.<sup>22</sup>*

In this interaction between Stiles and coach Finstock, coach's responds by intentionally not observing the Maxim of Manner. He uses a double entendre, implying that Stiles could choose to engage in self-pleasure instead of playing on the field.

*STILES: So you're asking me to tell you what I wouldn't not tell you?*

*FBI AGENT: First, I have no idea what you just said. Second, how about you just help me help you.*

*STILES: Well I don't know how to help you help me tell you something if I don't know it.<sup>23</sup>*

Stiles' original reply is purposefully ambiguous, and the FBI Agent's response reflects this by showing confusion. Stiles' subsequent remark uses wordplay and ambiguity in the creation of humour, deviating from the traditional principles of straightforward, orderly communication suggested by the Maxim of Manner.

#### 4.1.5. FLOUTING OF MULTIPLE MAXIMS

As it was already mentioned, flouting of two Maxims can also happen as in the following example from Season 2 (2012).

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<sup>21</sup> Season 2, Episode 6; Frenemy; 16:54-17:13 (IMDb)

<sup>22</sup> Season 2, Episode 11; Battlefield; 22:19-22:29 (IMDb)

<sup>23</sup> Season 3, Episode 11; Alpha Pack; 23:36-23:44 (IMDb)

*COACH: Stilinski! What the hell is wrong with your friend?*

*STILES: Well, he's failing two classes, he's a little socially awkward, and if you look closely his jaw line is a little uneven.*<sup>24</sup>

In this exchange, the coach wants to know what is wrong with Scott, as he is playing very badly all of a sudden. Even though the coach's question is very direct and unambiguous, Stiles chooses to intentionally fail to observe the Maxim of Quantity by providing more information than it is needed. With his quick wit, Stiles also flouts the Maxim of Relation by steering off topic with mentioning his friend's social skills and uneven jaw.

## 4.2. SARCASM, IRONY AND PUNS

In this section of the paper the results of the analysis for sarcasm, irony and puns will be shown, the utterances are taken from the episodes of the first three seasons (2011-2014) of the show. Fourteen examples will be analysed. In the first part of the section sarcasm will be analysed. There are nine examples taken from Season 2 (2012), Season 3 (2013-14) and Season 4 (2014), the most of them are derived from the Season 3 (2013-2014). Three examples are taken from Season 2, five from Season 3, and finally one from Season 4.

"Teen Wolf's" humour is mainly based on sarcastic remarks coming from one of the main characters, Stiles Stilinski. This dialogue from "Teen Wolf" between Scott McCall and Stiles is a prime example of the use of sarcasm for a comedic effect:

*SCOTT: Dude, everyone here's a dude! I think we're in a gay club!*

*STILES: (Surrounded by drag queens) Man, nothing gets past those keen werewolf senses.*<sup>25</sup>

In this exchange between Scott and Stiles, humoristic situation is created by sarcasm. Upon Scott's realization that they are in a gay club Stiles makes fun of him as his werewolf senses failed them.

*JACKSON: If Lydia wants to take a naked hike in the woods, why should I care?*

*SCOTT: Because we have a pretty good idea that she might be— you know, turning.*

---

<sup>24</sup> Season 2, Episode 2; Shape Shifted; 15:11-15:20 (IMDb)

<sup>25</sup> Season 2, Episode 6; Frenemy; 08:50-08:58 (IMDb)

*JACKSON: Turning?*

*SCOTT: Yeah. Turning.*

*JACKSON: Into—*

*STILES: A unicorn. What do you think, dumbass?*<sup>26</sup>

When Jackson asks why he should care if Lydia wants to take a naked hike in the woods, Scott suggests that they have a good idea she might be “*turning*”. This typically means turning into a supernatural monster, like a werewolf or in this instance, into a lizard-like creature, kanima. Stiles’ snarky answer stems from Jackson’s confusion about what “*turning*” means. Stiles jokes that Lydia is “*turning*” into a unicorn, which has nothing to do with the show’s supernatural elements. This is a classic example of Stiles’ sarcastic humour.

*SHERIFF STILINSKI: All right, fine. I’ll allow the remote possibility, but give me a motive. I mean, why would this kid want most of the 2006 swim team and its coach dead?*

*STILES: Isn’t it obvious? Our swim team sucks! They haven’t won in, like, six years.*<sup>27</sup>

In this exchange between Stiles and the sheriff, Stiles uses sarcasm and makes the audience laugh. In answering the sheriff’s question, he contemptuously points out the team’s unsuccessful campaign. He concludes that they have not won anything in the past six years and that this is the killer’s motive for the killings.

*RAFAEL MCCALL: Oh, just perfect. A Stilinski at the center of this whole mess. What a shocker. Think you can answer some questions without the usual level of sarcasm?*

*STILES: If you ask the questions without the usual level of stupid.*<sup>28</sup>

Rafael McCall expresses annoyance at Stiles, implying that members of the Stilinski family are frequently involved in problematic situations. His question about Stiles responding without sarcasm suggests that he anticipates a more serious and response. Stiles answers sarcastically, suggesting that he will match the amount of genius in Rafael’s questions with his level of sarcasm. This remark makes fun of Rafael’s criticism with sarcasm.

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<sup>26</sup> Season 2, episode 1; Omega; 23:01-23:20 (IMDb)

<sup>27</sup> Season 2, Episode 10; Fury; 04:40-04:54 (IMDb)

<sup>28</sup> Season 3, Episode 11; Alpha Pack; 02:21:02:30 (IMDb)

*SCOTT: Seriously, dude, human sacrifices?*

*STILES: Scott, your eyes turn into yellow glow sticks, okay? Hair literally grows from your cheeks and then will immediately disappear, and if I were to stab you right now it would just magically heal, but you are telling me that you are having trouble grasping human sacrifices?<sup>29</sup>*

In the interaction above, Scott shows surprise at the idea of human sacrifices, which is a reoccurring theme in the third season of the TV series “*Teen Wolf*”. Stiles reacts sarcastically, pointing out the ridiculousness of Scott scepticism about human sacrifices when their lives are controlled by supernatural forces, they themselves live in a paranormal world where unbelievable things happen. Stiles uses humour and exaggeration to stress the otherworldly features of their reality, emphasizing the absurdity of Scott’s reaction.

*ETHAN: In actual wolf packs, omegas are the scapegoat, the last to eat, the one who has to take the abuse from the rest of the pack.*

*STILES: So you and your brother were, like, the bitches of the pack?<sup>30</sup>*

In the example above, sarcasm is the main means of conveying humour. Stiles playfully mocks Ethan and his brother by calling them “*the bitches of the pack*”. He uses the derogatory term “*bitches*” as it is usually used to describe someone who is weak and subordinate.

*LYDIA: What’s wrong with him?*

*STILES: What’s wrong with him? I don’t... do I have a PhD in lycanthropy? How am I supposed to know that?<sup>31</sup>*

First, lycanthropy is a “*mental disorder in which the patient believes that he is a wolf or some other nonhuman animal*”<sup>32</sup>. Stiles creates a humorous situation, instead of just stating that he does not know what is happening, he adds a sarcastic remark about the forementioned mental illness.

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<sup>29</sup> Season 3, Episode 4; Unleashed; 10:40-10:54 (IMDb)

<sup>30</sup> Season 3, Episode 9; The Girl Who Knew Too Much; 11:33-11:42 (IMDb)

<sup>31</sup> Season 3, Episode 5; Frayed; 22:04-22:07 (IMDb)

<sup>32</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica.

*SCOTT: They're trying to help.*

*DEREK: These two. This one, who used me to resurrect my psychotic Uncle. Thank you. And this one, who shot about 30 arrows into me and my pack.*

*STILES: Okay, all right, now, come on. No one died, all right? Look, there may have been a little maiming, okay, a little mangling, but no death. That's what I call an important distinction.<sup>33</sup>*

Here, Stiles uses sarcasm in response to Derek's statement. By sarcastically saying "okay, a little mangling, but no death", he is downplaying the severity of the situation, he is minimizing the gravity of the injuries that might have happened and, overall, is not taking Derek's concerns seriously.

*STILES: You just wanna stay here in school, go to class? Never heard anything so irresponsible in my life.<sup>34</sup>*

In the example above, Stiles is snarkily implying that wanting to stay in school and attend class is the most irresponsible and foolish thing one can do, even though it's a common expectation.

In the following utterance, irony is the main linguistic device for generating humorous situations. The example is taken from Season 3 (2013-2014) of the show.

*STILES: Where do you live?*

*PETER: In an underground network of caves hidden deep in the woods.*

*STILES: Whoa, really?*

*PETER: No, you idiot. I have an apartment downtown.<sup>35</sup>*

In the dialogue above Peter's statement that he lives "in an underground network of caves hidden deep in the woods" contains verbal irony, he exaggerates to an absurd level, purposefully confusing Stiles.

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<sup>33</sup> Season 3, Episode 2; Chaos Rising; 11:37-11:58 (IMDb)

<sup>34</sup> Season 4, Episode 3; Muted; 15:31-15:35 (IMDb)

<sup>35</sup> Season 3, Episode 2; Chaos Rising; 33:51-34:00 (IMDb)



The following three examples from each of the first three seasons of the show (2011-2014) present the use of puns in humorous situations.

*STILES: Don't be such a sourwolf.*<sup>36</sup>

The utterance above is maybe one of the most recognizable sentences said in the show. By combining the words sour and werewolf, Stiles creates a pun “*sourwolf*” – provoking laughter once again.

*COACH FINSTOCK: McCall! The position's goalkeeper, not goal-abandoner!*<sup>37</sup>

In the utterance above, coach Finstock playfully criticizes Scott McCall. He is calling the student out for not fulfilling his goalkeeping duties by using a clever wordplay.

*COACH FINSTOCK: You ever run track? I mean you have excellent muscle definition.*

*MALIA: I sometimes run from cougars trying to eat me.*

*COACH FINSTOCK: I've got the same problem.*<sup>38</sup>

In the example above, Malia refers to wild animals, mountain lions, which were chasing her while she was living in the woods. Meanwhile coach makes an indecent joke, referring to older women who seek romantic and/or sexual relationship with younger men. They make a joke referencing two meanings of “*cougar*”, making the audience laugh.

The following part of the paper will be the discussion of the results above.

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<sup>36</sup> Season 1, Episode 6; Heart Monitor; 39:50-40:00 (IMDb)

<sup>37</sup> Season 2; Episode 2; Shape Shifted; 14:47-14:50 (IMDb)

<sup>38</sup> Season 3, Episode 24; The Divine Move; 35:09-35:16 (IMDb)

## 5. DISCUSSION

Humour is an essential part of the show's success. Linguistic devices, i.e. flouting of the Gricean Maxims, sarcasm, irony and puns are used for making the "Teen Wolf" characters more relatable to the public. They have the main role in creating group dynamics and relationships between the characters.

Firstly, humour is generated by the characters flouting Gricean Conversational Maxims. The two characters, Stiles Stilinski and coach Finstock, can frequently be heard flouting the Maxims. The most flouted Maxim is the Maxim of Quality with 6 examples and the least flouted one is the Maxim of Quantity with a mere 2 examples. Lastly, flouting of the Gricean Maxims is mostly used in the Season 2 (2012) of the show, while sarcasm is the means of generating humour in the Season 3 (2013-2014).

Secondly, the findings reveal that, from a semantic perspective, humour is mainly based on the use of sarcasm. Characters, especially Stiles Stilinski and Peter Hale, often utter something that is different from what they really think and they frequently using ridicule to mock others. While talking about Stiles Stilinski, it is important to notice that humour, especially sarcastic one is one of his main character traits, almost his whole identity – this can be seen as he is in every example used for sarcasm. Irony, contrary to expectations, is used on a much smaller scale. Similarly, puns, although occasionally used by coach Finstock who is famous for his witty remarks, do not occupy a prominent place in the humour repertoire of the series.

In conclusion, all of these devices, and especially sarcasm, are used for enhancing the personalities and adding depth to "Teen Wolf" protagonists, making them more multifaceted and relatable. This is observable on the characters of Stiles and coach Finstock, as they are often used for providing comic relief, which is very much needed in often intense situations. These comedic situations also significantly contribute to relationship dynamics of the characters. Humour creates moments of levity amidst the supernatural themes of the series and contributes to its unique appeal to viewers. It plays the main role in creating bonds between the characters, as the frequency of banter and inside jokes increases if the characters are in a closer relationship.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this thesis was to provide an analysis on how humour is generated in the television series “*Teen Wolf*” by flouting Gricean Maxims and by the use of sarcasm, irony and puns. As seen from the examples from the results, sarcasm is one of the main means in generating humorous situations in the series.

By incorporating comedy into its narrative, the series has left an indelible mark on the wider realm of television entertainment. This paper is supposed to give a better understanding of the show’s humour from a semantic perspective and hopefully serve in further research of the topic. But, this research has certain methodological shortcomings. The episodes for the analysis were chosen randomly which left the paper with a disproportionate number of utterances used for each of the linguistic devices. Because of this there are 17 examples of characters flouting the Gricean Maxims and 9 of them using sarcasm, meanwhile there is a single example of irony and 3 examples of puns. Future research may benefit from a more systematic selection of episodes, the corpus should be more extensive in order to get a more representative analysis of these linguistic devices.

## 7. SAŽETAK

Cilj ovog rada je objasniti humour u televizijskoj seriji „*Teen Wolf*” sa semantičkog gledišta. Rad započinje navođenjem nekoliko teorija humora. Potom je objašnjeno Griceovo načelo suradnje (1975), te pojmovi sarkazam, ironija te dosjetka. Zatim slijedi kvalitativno istraživanje koje je ostvareno analizom citata prikupljenih iz navedene serije. Korpus se sastoji od 30 primjera, svaki od njih podrobno je objašnjen na temelju lingvističkog izričaja. Proučen je način postizanje humourističnih situacija korištenjem sarkazma, ignoriranjem Griceovih razgovornih maksima, te nešto manje korištenjem ironije i igara riječima. Analiza je pokazala kako je u seriji humor baziran uglavnom na sarkazmu, koji igra glavnu ulogu u karakterizaciji pojedinih likova te u kreaciji interpersonalnih odnosa.

Ključne riječi: „*Teen Wolf*“, načelo suradnje, razgovorne maksime, sarkazam, ironija, dosjetka

## 8. SUMMARY

The aim of this paper is to explain the humour in the television series “*Teen Wolf*” from a semantic point of view. The paper begins by mentioning several theories of humour. Then, Grice’s Cooperative Principle (1975) and the concepts of sarcasm, irony and puns are explained. Then follows the qualitative research made by analysing utterances extracted from the show. The corpus consists of 30 utterances, each of them is explained in detail based on the linguistic expression. The way in which humorous situations are made - by using sarcasm, ignoring Grice’s Conversational Maxims, and somewhat less by using irony and puns - is studied. The analysis showed that the humour in the series is based mainly on sarcasm, which plays a major role in the characterization of the protagonists and in the creation of interpersonal relationships.

Keywords: “*Teen Wolf*”, Cooperative Principle, Conversational Maxims, sarcasm, irony, pun

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Obrazac A.Č.

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