THE REALIZATION OF THE CONVERSATIONAL MAXIMS
IN THE COMIC STRIP “THE BORN LOSER”
OF THE JAKARTA POST

A THESIS
Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Magister Pendidikan (M.Pd) in English Language Education

by
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GRADUATE PROGRAM
ENGLISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
SEMARANG STATE UNIVERSITY
2016
APPROVAL

This thesis entitled “THE REALIZATION OF THE CONVERSATIONAL MAXIMS IN THE COMIC STRIP “THE BORN LOSER” OF THE JAKARTA POST” has been examined by the Board of Examiners on February 2nd, 2016 in the English Department of Post-Graduate Program of Semarang State University and was decided acceptable.

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MOTTO AND DEDICATION

MOTTO

Conversational maxims of the cooperative principle are exploited in The Born Loser comic strip.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all people who enjoy reading comic strips as much as I do.
ABSTRACT


Keywords: Cooperative Principles, conversational implicature, conversational maxims, observance of maxims, non-observance of maxims, comic strip

Reading comic strip is fun. The conversation between the characters makes the readers laugh. The conversations sometimes imply something different from what is stated. In other words, the characters answer the questions shockingly and surprisingly. This makes the readers laugh at the end. However, if the readers do not know some sort of knowledge of culture, custom, and activities of the characters in comic strip, they seem to be difficult to enjoy the comic. This study was intended to describe, analyze, and explain types of observance and non-observance of Gricean Maxims, conversational implicatures and factors of non-observance produced by the characters of The Born Loser comic strip.

This research is a qualitative research. The data are all utterances of the characters of The Born Loser comic strip published in The Jakarta Post of 60 episodes from February to March 2012. The collected data are analyzed through several procedures of identifying, classifying, calculating and interpreting.

The findings show that the observance of maxims dominates almost all utterances and the non-observance of maxims is small in number. The way the characters do not observe the maxims are various, they are violation (36%), flouting (43%) and infringement (21%). While opting out and suspending the maxims, they are not found in the data. Furthermore, seen from the conversational maxims, the maxim of quality is not observed for 37% by the characters of the comic strip. They mostly violated the maxim of quality (23%) compared to flouting (9%) and infringement (5%). The maxim of quantity is not observed for 27%. It is mostly flouted for 19%, less violated and infringed for only 4% and 3% respectively. The maxim of relation is not observed for 21%. It is mostly infringed (13%) and also less flouted (7%) and violated (1%). The maxim of manner is not observed for only 13%. It is flouted and violated for 8% and 7% respectively. The characters has reasons for committing non observance of maxims namely hiding truth, cheering the interlocutor, mocking the interlocutor and saving face.

From the findings, it is suggested that breaking conversational maxims is one source to create humor. In order to enjoy a comic strip, a reader has to understand the implicature generated in the conversation and background knowledge of the culture or custom of the comic strip.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In the first place, allow me to extend my greatest praise to Allah S.W.T. for His blessing to keep me determined, for His blessing to keep me persistent, so that finally I could finish writing this thesis. I realize that in the process of completing this thesis many people have involved directly helping me, therefore my deep appreciation goes to:

1. Drs. Ahmad Sofwan, Ph.D and Prof. Mursid Saleh, M.A., Ph.D. as my supervisors for their patient support, valuable suggestion and expert guidance throughout all stages of this thesis writing.
2. All lecturers of Post-Graduate Program of English Department of Semarang State University (Prof. Retmono, M.A., Ph.D., Dr. Abdurrachman Faridi, M.Pd., Dr. Rudi Hartono, S.S., M.pd., Dr. Issy Yuliastrri, M.Pd., Dr. Januarius Mujianto, M.Hum, Dr. Dwi Anggani Linggar Bharati, M.Pd., Prof. Dr. Warsono, Dip. TEFL., M.A., and Prof. Dr. Dwi Rukmini, M.Pd), who have shared me a bundle of knowledge during my post-graduate study.
3. My husband, Ricky Hanafi, S.T. for his support, understanding, prayer, care, love, compassion, which is so countless that I can be strong like I am today.
4. My brilliant little angel, Hanna Aila Kinasih for her hilarious presence which will always be the energy of my life.
5. All my classmates, especially Maya, Kiki and Agung who always give support until the very end of my study.
6. All my colleagues in FKIP UMK: bu Ririn, bu Endang, bu Fitri, bu Titis, pak Farid, pak Agus for the pleasant chats during the break-time before class.
7. The copier shop attendants for their help and hospitality during the completion of my study.

Last, I would like to appreciate to everyone whose name is not mentioned, but they directly helped me. I do realize that this thesis is far from being perfect therefore I want to welcome every reader to give criticisms and suggestion for the improvement of this thesis by sending email to ambarsari2009@gmail.com

Semarang, 2016

Pipit Ambarsari
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF APPENDICES</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I INTRODUCTION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Background of the Study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Reasons for Choosing the Topic</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Statement of the Problems</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Objectives of the Study</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Significances of the Study</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Definitions of the Key Terms</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Organization of the Thesis</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Review of Previous Studies</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Theoretical Review</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1 The Concept of Implicature</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2 Grice's Theory of Implicature</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2.2.1 The co-operative principle ................................................................. 27
2.2.2.2 Observance of the Maxims ............................................................... 28
2.2.2.3 Non-observance of the Maxims ....................................................... 31
2.2.3 Reasons for Breaking the Conversational Maxims .............................. 38
2.2.4 The Notion of Comic Strip ................................................................. 40
2.2.5 The Born Loser Comic Strip ............................................................... 42
2.4.6 About the Cartoonist ........................................................................ 48
2.3 Theoretical Framework of the Study ..................................................... 49

III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design ...................................................................................... 50
3.2 Object of the Study .................................................................................. 51
3.3 Unit of Data Analysis .............................................................................. 51
3.4 Role of the Researher ............................................................................ 51
3.5 Method of Collecting the Data ............................................................... 52
3.6 Method of Analyzing the Data ............................................................... 52
3.7 Problems of Categorization ................................................................... 55
3.8 Verification of the Data .......................................................................... 56

IV FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Realization of Quantity Maxim ...................................................... 58
4.1.1 Observance ......................................................................................... 58
4.1.2 Flout .................................................................................................. 63
4.1.3 Violation ............................................................................................. 63
4.1.4 Infringement ................................................................. 66

4.2 The Realization of Quality Maxim ........................................ 68
  4.2.1 Observance ................................................................. 69
  4.2.2 Flout ................................................................. 69
  4.2.3 Violation ................................................................. 72
  4.2.4 Infringement ................................................................. 74

4.3 The Realization of Relation Maxim ........................................ 76
  4.3.1 Observance ................................................................. 76
  4.3.2 Flout ................................................................. 78
  4.3.3 Violation ................................................................. 80
  4.3.4 Infringement ................................................................. 81

4.4 The Realization of Manner Maxim ........................................ 81
  4.3.1 Observance ................................................................. 76
  4.3.2 Flout ................................................................. 78
  4.3.3 Violation ................................................................. 80
  4.4 Reasons for Maxim Realization ........................................ 89
    4.4.1 To Hide the Truth ..................................................... 89
    4.4.2 To Cheer the Interlocutor ........................................... 89
    4.4.3 To Mock or Insult the Interlocutor .............................. 89
    4.4.3 To Save Face ...................................................... 89
V CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

5.1 Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 91

5.2 Suggestion .................................................................................................................. 93

REFERENCES ................................................................................................................. 94

APPENDICES .................................................................................................................. 97
### LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 An episode of The Born Loser comic strip</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Comic as a sequential pictures conveying stories</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 The logo of The Born Loser</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 The present writer of The Born Loser, Chip Sanmon</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 The mechanism of analysis</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 The criteria of violation of maxims used as distinguished guidelines</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 The frequency of the observance and non-observance of maxims</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 The frequency and percentages of non-observance of maxims</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 The reasons of maxims exploitation</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Data sheets</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The characters of The Born Loser</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introduction of the research. It discusses background of the study, reasons for choosing the topic, statements of the problems, objectives of the study, significances of the study, definitions of terms and organization of the thesis. This chapter is the basic for the next chapters.

1.1 Background of the Study

Apart from the three functions of language proposed by Halliday such as textual, ideational and interpersonal, Wijana (2001: 121) adds one more function of language popularly known as recreative function. He further says that this function focuses its attention on entertaining, giving pleasure and feeling of joy to people. Such function of language is represented in the work like a novel, a short story and a discourse of humor like a comic strip.

In the middle of today’s society, a comic strip is a medium of communication such as transferring information and expressing sympathy of certain condition that occurs in certain society. Furthermore, if it is used properly, humor in a comic strip can also be used as a good medium to criticize the political absurdity or crime committed by government in a country. Thus, in Indonesian context, we have Panji Koming, and Oom Pasikom, that are published by Kompas as a medium to criticize the political condition or even corruption committed by the government.
Creating a special column, like the humorous one for instance, seems a popular choice for many journalists of mass media, such as newspapers, in order to improve their publishing quality. In line with this, *The Born Loser* in the Jakarta Post can be considered as an attempt by the journalists of the newspaper to maintain the quality of its publishing. It is a comic strip with stories more or less reflecting the situation that is covered under American culture. The culture is philosophically represented in a popular term that is popularly known as the *American Dream* particularly by being a loser or a winner, which is implied in every story.

Many of us know that there is no country on earth having population as diverse and culture as varied as America (USA). It is the diversity that makes American’s life as complicated as it is. In one angle, America is a nation but on other hand, even after four centuries, that nation is still a great experiment. Over the course of several centuries, immigrants from all over the world came to the country and brought their own cultures and traditions. Those traditions create new vital American communities. The blending of these traditions gives the America its great strength as a nation. But it also creates challenges and problems.

The biggest problem an American faces in his life is the competition. It is the competition that controls the American’s life. For this, the American Dream has given its contribution by giving the Americans guidance of the target of life namely success and money. People in the community who have a good life are named as the winners and those who do not are the losers.
The Born Loser is an American comic strip that seems created to depict a losing situation (Sandage, 2004). In an extreme way, it can be said that this comic strip is seemingly aimed to criticize the American Dream. The story is about the everyday life of Brutus P. Thornapple and other characters (Gladys, Wilberforce Thornapple, Hurricane Hattie, Veeblefester and Ramona Gargle) who are all named as losers. Brutus as the main character is described as The Lovable Loser in every conversation he does. His partner keeps belittling him. In other words, his life is full of miseries as a loser. Besides, his son, Wilberforce Thornapple is also described as a loser as his father is. He is called as Born Loser in Training for his life is the same as his father’s. Furthermore, Gladys—the wife, is also described as a loser even though she is the one who seems to control the family life and even the marriage.

As an object of reading, every reader is free to interpret this comic strip based on his/her knowledge and experience. However, in this study, the researcher does a pragmatic examination on the utterances of the comic strip. The theory of pragmatics is used to investigate the meanings of the utterances in the comic strip of The Born Loser because this theory is intended to study meaning in use or meaning in context (Levinson, 1983; Thomas, 1995; Yule, 1996) especially to examine the conversational implicature which is commonly used in a comic strip to elicit laughter although the message is sometimes very crucial. Thus, through the theory of pragmatics, this study also tries to seek the pedagogical implication of the conversational implicatures in The Born Loser comic strip. Eventually, by understanding the conversational implicature in the comic, the readers (or students
of English) can be more aware of the language phenomena happen that the meaning is not always presented explicitly but more often implicitly.

In order to discuss the conversational implicature found in the comic strip, Grice’s theory and the other theories of implicature are applied. Grice’s theory of conversational implicature has two main points. They are co-operative principles and conversational implicature itself. Using Grice’s theory this research tries to make assumptions of what might be the real intention of every utterance and drawing in the comic.

Related to the theory of conversational implicatures, Levinson (1983: 97) explains that Grice theory called Co-operative Principle is an essential theory about how people use language. They are made as a set of over-arching assumptions guiding to conduct a conversation. The speakers and listeners try to Co-operate in communicating with one another, and the speakers rely on this Co-operation to make the conversation efficient. They will then, in particular, attempt to be informative, truthful and clear.

There have been many researchers who are interested in conducting research using Grice's theory of Co-operative Principle. The first is Agung Budi Kurniawan, a student of English Education Department of post-graduate program of UNNES in 2011. He writes an unpublished thesis. The thesis is entitled “Conversational Implicature in the Film “The Lord of The Ring; The Return of The King written by Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens and Peter Jackson”. The focus of this study is to describe the conversational implicature in all of the utterances in that movie then divide them into flouting maxim, clash maxim, and without
breaking maxim. Moreover it analyzes the strategy of generating conversational implicature in the object of the study.

The second one is a journal of research article of which is entitled “Pragmatic Analysis of the Script of Kramer vs. Kramer –with Grice’s Conversational Implicature. The writer’s name is Xiao-Hong who identifies the flouting maxims of quantity, quality, relevance and manner. Those flouting are indications that the speakers are not only aware of the maxims but also want to show that they are trying to observe them.

The third study was conducted by a Nigerian named Oluyinka, Busayo Ifeolua in his essay entitled “A Pragmatic Study of Newspaper Comic Strips: An Example of Efe and Jude”. He examines the use of language in a newspaper comic strip and how the meaning can be interpreted by the reader. The principles of pragmatics such as Austin’s theory of speech act, Grice’s theory of implicature, Bayo Lawal’s theory of context and Bach and Harnish’s theory of Mutual Contextual Beliefs are employed altogether to decode the messages in Jude and Efe.

Himawati (2000) investigated conversational implicature in sitcom series "Friends". Her study was conducted to discover the role of conversational implicatures in creating humorous effects in a sitcom. The turn-takings to be analyzed are collected from "Friends" scripts, a weekly 30-minutes length sitcom which is broadcasted on NBC for six seasons. Grice's approach is used to discover the conversational implicature. The study concluded that a conversational implicature has one significant role in creating humorous effect in a sitcom. The
spontaneous way to produce conversational implicature is one potential to create humor especially if it is combined with other elements such as say something impossible, senseless or absurd and humiliating.

Ma'mun (2006) studied conversational implicature in written humors of 'reader's digest magazine". The findings showed that implicature by cooperative principle is brought about utterances by violating the maxims, namely maxim of quantity, quality, relation and manner. Furthermore, the implicature are found in assertive and declarative humors. From those written humor which consist of conversational implicature, most appear to violate the maxim of relation. The utterances of each written humor violating one or more of those maxims are potential as the support of humor creation because its implicature add to the humorousness of the discourse.

Nieto (2011) studied the role of conversational maxims, implicature and presupposition in the creation of humor in the movie of Woody Allen's Anything Else. The paper focuses on the analysis of humor in a specific realm, cinema, from a pragmatic perspective. The analysis covered various concepts such as implicature, conversational maxims and presupposition. There are also a concept of rhetorical figures and humorous theories on laughter. A qualitative analysis was carried out to figure out the use of those three resources. The result showed that the use of implicature and non-observance of conversational maxims and the combination with rhetorical figure is much more abundant than the use of presupposition.
Generally, the differences between this study and the first one are on the depth of analysis and the data treated as the object study. In contrast, this study analyzes deeply only on the utterances whether they flout, violate, infringe, opt out or suspend the maxims in the cooperative principles. Moreover, this study also tries to explain in detail all types of conversational maxims proposed by Grice namely maxim of quantity, quality, relation and manner. The utterances are taken from the comic strip in Jakarta Post entitled *The Born Loser*. Then, it explains why the characters of the comic strip do not observe the conversational maxims.

This research gets some benefits from those previous studies, in the way that those studies give much insight on how to analyze the data into some interpretations. Studying conversational implicature in the *Born Loser* comic strip needs much interpretation which is derived from the conversations among the characters of the comic strip. Somehow the researcher gets useful ideas in doing the analysis right after reading those studies.

However, to understand a conversational implicature is far more complicated than to comprehend the explicit meaning of an utterance. It has been mentioned earlier that every reader is free to interpret the comic strip based on the knowledge and experience. However, generally, in understanding a story in the form of comic strip, readers should perceive and integrate all kinds of information, which are explicitly or implicitly contained in the story of the comic strip itself, so as to develop the events described in the discourse. Thus, the important things to perceive are not only utterances, but also pictures, lines and
context of situation. By understanding the story as a whole, readers can possibly laugh unintentionally since the nature of stories in comic is creating laughter.

On the other hand, the conversations and the drawings presented in *The Born Loser* are actually simple. The situations created are usually things the readers face in daily life or sometimes the things they may never consider. Below is an example of a conversation between the characters of *The Born Loser* (Brutus, the husband and Gladys, the wife).

**BRUTUS** : You’ve been shopping!
**GLADYS** : I have not!
**BRUTUS** : I can tell – the credit card is still warm!
**GLADYS** : Oh..heh..that’s from yesterday.

In pragmatic perspective, the dialogue above seems to flout the Maxim of Quality, for both Brutus and Gladys say and tell something which is blatantly untrue. Gladys seems to tell a lie in what she says about the card and the shopping that she has done. In this case, the humor nuance is elicited as she says that she uses the card the previous day. This is in contrast with the fact that the credit card that is commonly known, not likely to be warm for a couple of minutes after being used. Here, Brutus might want to use a kind of metaphoric expression by regarding a credit card is like an electronic device.

Furthermore, Brutus also tells a lie as well by saying that the credit card is still warm whereas in fact the card is not warm. He might want to say that he does not believe in Gladys’ statement that she did not go shopping recently or he does not agree with Gladys’ habit of going for shopping a lot. However, he uses another way to come to this intended meaning.
1.2 Reasons for Choosing the Topic

Due to the phenomena presented above, this study tries to examine the conversations in The Born Loser comic strip series in The Jakarta Post. The study is important to conduct for many reasons. It may develop the sensitivity and awareness of the readers to the language phenomena, in this case, conversational implicature. This research is intended to discover information in detail about conversational implicatures found in the utterances uttered by the characters of The Born Loser based on the pragmatic perspective.

The researcher finds it important to conduct a research on English comics because the use of comics in teaching English has increased rapidly for its authenticity and special characteristic which other learning materials do not have. Through reading English comics the teacher can practice the pragmatic competence of the students. The development of L2 learners’ pragmatic competence plays a key role in the achievement of communicative competence. The idea is supported by Martinez and Fernandez (2008: 34)) in their journal paper which states that students of English should have pragmatic competence as one of the main components of the learners’ communicative competence, together with linguistic and sociolinguistic competences. Many studies support the teachability of pragmatics and report some benefits such as mastering speech acts, conversational implicatures, conversational management and pragmatic fluency.

On the surface, it seems so simple and easy to understand a story in the form of comic strip, but it is in fact more complex and insightful than expected. The complexity of the story due to some facts as follows.
First, the language used in the utterances of the characters is presented in a simple form. It is sometimes only presented in the form of ‘a single word’ or ‘letter’. This opens to some possibilities of creating a problem like misinterpreting the message conveyed in the story that the cartoonist intend to achieve.

The second problem is related to the incompleteness of the story in the comic strip form. This is due to the fact that the space provided is limited both for the pictures and language (utterance of the characters) that are used. As a result, the cartoonist makes the story as compact as he can. Such condition might elicit dissatisfaction for the readers since they cannot enjoy the story as a whole.

Finally, another crucial problem is related to the ‘language game’ done by the cartoonist. These phenomena will create misunderstanding if the readers are not aware of such language use. However, the language game can be solved with the conversational implicature since it provides some implicit account of how it is possible to mean more than what is actually said (Levinson, 1983: 97).

The problem related to the research can be identified as follows: how the Co-operative Principles are flouted in the utterances in *The Born Loser* comic strip, what implicatures are found in *The Born Loser* comic strip and to what extend the readers understand the implicatures in *The Born Loser* comic strip. The utterances are taken from the dialogues and the monologues of the characters in the comic strip. Some supporting elements in the discourse including the pictures, the context of the story are also considered in analyzing and making some inferences from the data of the research.
1.3 Statements of the Problems

The statements of the problems of this research could be formulated as follows.

1. How are the conversational maxims realized in The Born Loser comic strip of the Jakarta Post?
2. Why are the conversational maxims exploited by the characters in The Born Loser comic strip of the Jakarta Post?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

Based on the statements of the problem above, the objectives of the research are as follows.

1. To describe how the conversational maxims are realized in The Born Loser comic strip of the Jakarta Post.
2. To describe why the conversational maxims are exploited in The Born Loser comic strip of the Jakarta Post.

1.5 Significances of the Study

This research has three significances.

1. Theoretically, the result of this research can enrich the linguistic studies especially in giving scientific information about the realization of conversational maxims of the cooperative principle in language especially in a comic strip.
2. Pedagogically, this study can improve students’ awareness of conversational implicatures contained in a comic strip as well as exercise their reading comprehension, in this case, a comic strip. This awareness can help the students to develop English conversation which meets co-operative and politeness principle because by having the awareness means that the students obtain pragmatic competence. The students can get both the enjoyable learning materials and the real texts of English which contain much socio-cultural values different from their own culture where, of course, they can learn much from them. Moreover, the findings of this research can be useful materials in teaching reading in advanced level (university level). The lecturer can make use of the research findings to help them design different reading material (using comic) which is full of implicatures.

3. Practically, the results of this research can be used to understand English better in its real use. Furthermore, this research will give information to the next researchers who want to discuss related study.

1.6 Definition of the Key Terms

To avoid misunderstanding and misconception, some technical terms used in this study need to be clearly defined as follows.

1. Cooperative Principle

Cooperative principle is a set of rules which a speaker and a hearer should obey in order to be an effective communicator. It is proposed by Grice. He mentions that each speaker should give ‘enough’ contribution in
conversation. He divides the cooperative principles into four maxims (Levinson, 1995: 101-102). The first is maxim of quality. This maxim contains an advice for the speakers to make their contribution one that is true, specifically; do not say what you believe to be false and do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. The second is maxim of quantity. It includes the suggestion for the speakers to make their contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange and do not make contribution more informative than is required. The third is maxim of relevance. It involves the recommendation for the speakers to make their contribution relevant. Last but not least is maxim of manner. It consists of advice for the speakers to be perspicuous and specifically avoid obscurity, avoid ambiguity, be brief, and be orderly.

2. Conversational Implicature

Implicature according to Mey (1993: 99) is something which is implied in a conversation, which is left implicit in actual language use. Moreover, Yule (1998: 113) defines that term as an additional unstated meaning that has to be assumed in order to maintain the CP. He also adds that in communication, the speakers get unstated meaning by using implicature, because the hearers must infer every meaning being conveyed through the assumption of the use of cooperation.

3. Observance of the maxims

The term observance of the maxims refers to a condition when a speaker observes all the conversational maxims. S/he speaks clearly, truthfully, gives
just the right amount of information and directly addresses the topic of the speaking.

4. Non-observance of the maxims

The term "Non-observance of the maxims" is used Thomas (1995: 64) and she uses the term to refer to what Grice called as failing to observe a maxim. It also refers to the ways people fail to observe a maxim. They are flouting a maxim, violating a maxim, infringing a maxim, opting out a maxim, and suspending a maxim.

5. Comic Strip

In this study, a comic strip is defined as a series of pictures inside boxes that tells a story. In other words, we can define comic as a sequential pictures conveying stories.

6. Turn

The term turn used in this research refers to utterance/s of one comic character written in one space called balloon. See the following episode of The Born Loser comic strip for clearer understanding.

Figure 1.1 An episode of The Born Loser comic strip
The episode presented in figure 1.1 consists of three turns (three balloons), three panels or boxes and involves two comic characters.

1.7 Organization of the Thesis

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter presents the introduction which covers background of the study, reasons for choosing the topic, statements of the problems, objectives of the study, and significances of the study, definitions of the key terms and organization of the thesis. Chapter II presents the review of related literature that discusses some previous studies and some concepts or theories underlying this study. It covers the concept of implicature, Grice's theory of implicature which consists of the co-operative principle, observance of the maxims and non-observance of the maxims, the notion of comic strip, The Born Loser comic strip and its cartoonist and the last is theoretical framework of the study. Chapter III focuses on describing the research methodology. It includes research design, object of the study, unit of data analysis, role of the researcher, method of collecting the data, method of analyzing the data, problems of categorization and verification of the data. Chapter IV emphasizes on findings, and discussion. Finally, chapter V presents the conclusions and suggestions of this study. In addition, bibliography and appendices are attached at the end of this report study.