

A Sociopragmatic Study of Insinuation in "The Daily Show"

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Abstract

This study explores the sociopragmatics of insinuation in the context of "The Daily Show". Drawing from speech act theory and various pragmatic strategies, this study examines how insinuation is activated in the context of "The Daily Show" by making critiques of political figures, media narratives, and societal issues. Insinuation is particularly selected for the reason that it has not been given a deep analysis by researchers from a sociopragmatic perspective, as much as the researcher could investigate. Consequently, this knowledge gap needs to be bridged by sociopragmatically examining insinuation in the context of "The Daily Show". This study, therefore, is an attempt to achieve the following aims: identifying the sociopragmatic criteria that indicate the activation of insinuation; pinpointing the pragmatic strategies used to reflect insinuation in the context of "The Daily Show"; and showing how insinuation in "The Daily Show" is shaped by social factors which influence how utterances are constructed, interpreted, and received. In line with its aims, this study hypothesises that: insinuation is characterized by the activation of certain sociopragmatic criteria including indirectness, humor, contextual cues, and audience interpretation; insinuation is pragmatically demonstrated in the triggering of the pragmatic strategies of assertive, directive, and expressive speech acts along with the strategies of irony, satire, sarcasm, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, personal analogy, and rhetorical question; and social factors like political ideology, audience knowledge, power dynamics, social class, cultural context, and media bias shape how insinuation is constructed and interpreted in "The Daily Show". Through a qualitative analysis of selected extracts, this study concludes that insinuation in "The Daily Show" is a sociopragmatic process which challenges dominant ideologies while maintaining plausible deniability.

Keywords: Sociopragmatics, Insinuation, The Daily Show.

1. Introduction

Generally speaking, insinuation is a powerful means of social and political critique which allows speakers to challenge authority, expose hypocrisy, and engage their audiences in critical discussions. Among trendy satirical TV shows, "The Daily Show" stands out as influential due to its combination of comedy and political discourse in order to insinuate a negative or critical view without stating it explicitly (Website Source 1). Some studies have investigated the intersection of language, pragmatics, and media discourse to explore the use of insinuation. Van Dijk (1998), for example, has examined insinuation in political discourse, where it is often utilized to mask face-threatening acts. This study highlights the significance of context, speaker intention, and audience interpretation. Baym (2005) claims that the TV show; namely "The Daily Show", redefines political discourse by combining journalism with satire through insinuation in order to critique mainstream narratives. Haugh (2010) and Dynel (2011) examine the function of insinuation as a form of an indirect act and a powerful tool for conveying criticism, humor, and ideology without overt confrontation. While existing literature recognizes the TV show's pragmatic complexity, few studies have obviously focused on insinuation as a distinctive sociopragmatic strategy. By analyzing some extracts from "The Daily Show", the present study attempts to reveal the pragmatic strategies used to create insinuation. Consequently, this study makes an attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What are the sociopragmatic criteria of insinuation in the context of "The Daily Show"?
2. What are the pragmatic strategies triggered by speakers to activate insinuation in the context of "The Daily Show"?
3. How is insinuation in "The Daily Show" shaped by social factors?

2. Sociopragmatically Theorizing Insinuation "The Daily Show"

Typically, sociopragmatics investigates how social context influences language use by concentrating on the interplay between pragmatic meaning, societal norms, and power structures. Insinuation, as a sociopragmatic process, is activated within this scope by indirectly conveying the intended meaning whose interpretation depends on the audience's shared knowledge and socio-political stance.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) discuss the view that indirectness makes insinuation active and operative in political and media discourse. Likewise, Fairclough (1995) explores the view that media figures activate indirectness to trigger insinuation in their attempt to influence their audiences. Insinuation, as Fraser (2001:327) puts it, enables the speaker to indirectly convey a derogatory utterance and to avoid taking responsibility for the negative outcome since his utterance can be deniable. Colletta (2003; 10) argues that insinuation is mainly used to critique social issues in a humorous and satirical manner. In media, Baym (2010) asserts, insinuation is principally used to challenge mainstream narratives using political satire. To activate insinuation, Kinoshita (2023: 189) affirms that speakers must avoid any direct reference or explicit utterance in favor of avoiding face violation.

3. Sociopragmatic Criteria of Insinuation in "The Daily Show"

Insinuation is a communicative process where a speaker implies something without explicitly stating it in an attempt to avoid being held responsible for a particular issue. In the context of "The Daily Show", insinuation is often used to provide satire and critique. Insinuation, in this context, can be characterized by the next criteria:

3. 1 Indirectness

Insinuation is mostly reflected in the use of indirect utterances to criticize political figures or social issues. Thus, it allows the audience to interpret the intended meaning without it being overtly stated.

3. 2 Humor

Generally, a key tool in the activation of insinuation is the use of humor because it enables the speaker to use clever wordplay that engages the audience while dealing with critical issues (Rahi and Mubarak, 2021).

3. 3 Contextual Cues

Picking up certain contextual cues such as tone, body language, and cultural references by the audience is crucial in the validation of insinuation.

3. 4 Audience Interpretation

The audience's ability to interpret and appreciate the use of insinuation contributes to the success of the insinuated utterances used in a particular context, and such interpretations vary according to the cultural and social backgrounds of the audience.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative sociopragmatic approach to analyze the use of insinuation in "The Daily Show" where five extracts are selected to represent the data of this study. "The Daily Show" is a satirical news program, often categorized under the genre of satirical news and political comedy. It is aired on Comedy Central, a television network in the United States. The most iconic host was Jon Stewart (1999–2015), who helped to define the modern identity of the show. Trevor Noah hosted from 2015 to 2022. In 2023, Jon Stewart returned to host the show again. The present study applies Searle's (1976) taxonomy of speech acts and other appropriate pragmatic strategies such as irony, satire, sarcasm, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, personal analogy, and rhetorical question. The model has two phases; namely, identification and analysis. First, it starts with the identification of the indicators of insinuation. Hence, insinuation is characterized by the criteria of indirectness, humor, contextual cues, and audience interpretation. Second, it moves to the analysis of these extracts where insinuation is activated by means of some pragmatic strategies. The proposed model is clearly sketched in Figure (1) below:

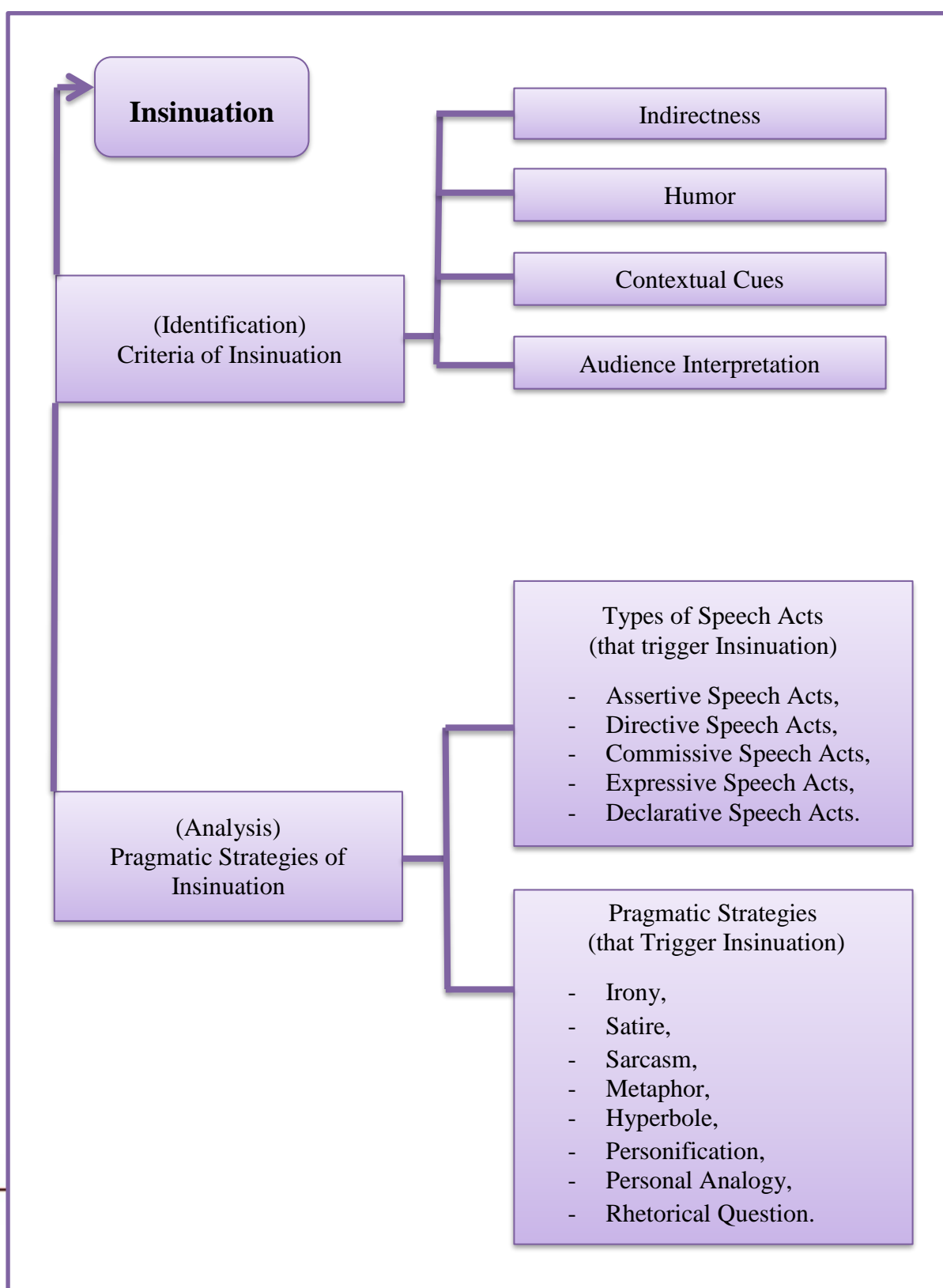


Figure (1): A Pragmatic Model of Insinuation

5. Data Analysis

In this section, five extracts are sociopragmatically analyzed using the model developed in this study for this purpose.

Extract (1)

"Oh, sure, he accidentally deleted those emails. Just like I accidentally eat an entire pizza every night".

Speaker and Context: The speaker is Jon Stewart who is an American comedian presenter of "The Daily Show". In this extract, he talks about the controversial issue over the selection of thousands of emails by Hillary Clinton when she served as Secretary of State.

Analysis: In this extract, Stewart intends to insinuate that Hillary Clinton lies about the emails being accidentally deleted. Stewart uses the representative speech act of asserting when asserts, indirectly, that the deletion of emails was not accidental. He intends to criticize dishonesty in politics while entertaining his audience. His utterance is also an expressive speech act in the sense that he conveys his emotions, opinions, or attitudes. Thus, he mocks the idea that the deletion was unintentional using a sarcastic tone to convey his skepticism and disbelief. Stewart uses the strategy of sarcasm in the utterance "Oh, sure" which is a sarcastic marker that indicates doubt. He also uses the strategy of personal analogy when he makes an exaggerated and sarcastic comparison between the act of deleting emails and the act of overeating pizza to emphasize the improbability of both being accidental. Irony is also used by Stewart when he pretends to accept the claim of accidental deletion. He also employs hyperbole in his utterance "eating an entire pizza every night" to mock the view that the deletion was accidental.

Extract (3)

"Fox News is just asking the tough questions. Like why does Obama hate America?"

Speaker and Context: In this extract, Jon Stewart comments on Fox News bias. He has frequently commented on Fox News's bias as part of his broader critique of American media. His criticism stems from both ideological and journalistic concerns and fits within his role as a satirical commentator who uses humor to expose misinformation in the media.

Analysis: In this extract, Stewart uses a representative assertive speech act as he sarcastically asserts that Fox News presents itself as objective and critical. Nevertheless, the real implication is that Fox News is biased and pushes loaded questions. Stewart's utterance is also counted as an expressive speech act to express criticism and ridicule toward Fox News, especially in the utterance *"just asking the tough questions"*. Sarcasm is activated by Stewart in the utterance *"just asking the tough questions"* to sarcastically imply that Fox News is engaging in serious journalism. Nonetheless, the next question *"Why does Obama hate America?"* is not a tough question but a biased and misleading one. Such use of sarcasm is intended to insinuate how Fox News presents loaded questions to push certain agendas. Also, Stewart uses irony in his utterance *"tough questions"* which are actually unfair and misleading, but literally, he appears to praise Fox News. Hyperbole is also triggered in his utterance *"Why does Obama hate America?"* which is an exaggerated misrepresentation of the questioning tactics used by Fox News. As for satire, it is also used by Stewart when he satirizes how Fox News constructs news through leading and biased questions. Overall, Stewart insinuates that Fox News disguises bias as journalism to expose its media manipulation.

Extract (3)

"America is like that friend who doesn't like drama but somehow always ends up in the middle of every fight".

Speaker and Context: Trevor Noah is an American comedian and host of "The Daily Show". In this extract, Noah comments on the USA foreign policy.

Analysis: Noah, in this extract, resorts to representative speech acts of asserting and criticizing to affirm and criticize the fact that America claims to avoid conflicts but

actually involves itself in such conflicts. His utterance also serves as an expressive speech act to convey his disapproval about the USA foreign policy and to ridicule the contradiction. Metaphor is used by Noah when he compares the USA to a "friend who doesn't like drama but is always in fights" to highlight the idea that America portrays itself as neutral or peace-seeking but it continually confronts global conflicts. Furthermore, irony is activated since Noah's utterance suggests that America does not like drama, but the ironic implication is that it frequently gets involved in conflicts regardless of this claim. Moreover, personification is utilized when the USA is personified by Noah as a "*friend*" with emotions and social behavior.

Noah also makes use of the strategy of hyperbole in the utterance "*always ends up in the middle of every fight*" to exaggerate the frequent involvement of the USA in conflicts and global disputes. Noah makes use of satire as his utterance is humorous but carries a strong critique of the USA foreign policy by portraying America as a "drama-prone friend" to mock how the USA presents itself versus how it actually behaves.

Extract (4)

"Yeah, the planet's heating up, but maybe it's just going through a phase like when teenagers dye their hair and listen to punk rock".

Speaker and Context: In this extract, Trevor Noah comments on climate change deniers.

Analysis: Noah, in this extract, makes use of a representative speech act when he utters "*Yeah, the planet's heating up*" to assert that climate change is happening. His utterance can also be interpreted as an expressive speech act to indicate his dismissive attitude toward climate change deniers. Noah activates irony in his utterance "maybe it's just going through a phase" which makes the issue of climate change appear less important than it really is by comparing it to a temporary teenage trend. Such irony is used as a result of the fact that climate change is scientifically proven to be a long-term crisis, not a passing phase. Metaphor is also used when Noah compares the planet to a rebellious teenager to suggest that global warming is just a natural temporary fluctuation rather than a human-made crisis. Sarcasm is triggered by Noah to criticize climate change denial and to mock the way some people downplay climate change. Also, the strategy of downplaying is used by Noah when he compares climate change to a teenage phase

which makes it seem trivial rather than an existential threat. Using all these strategies, Noah intends to insinuate that climate change deniers want to trivialize a serious issue.

Extract (5)

"Changing your profile picture is basically the same as solving world hunger. Right?"

Speaker and Context: In this extract, Trevor Noah comments on Social Media Activism.

Analysis: Noah employs an assertive speech act which pretends to equate changing a profile picture with solving world hunger. His utterance can also be an expressive speech act to express his frustration and disapproval toward people who engage in social media instead of taking real action towards critical issues in their country. Noah

also uses a directive speech act in his utterance *"Right?"* to challenge the audience to reflect on the absurdity of the claim and inspire them to recognize the aim behind his ironic comparison. The use of the strategy of sarcasm is demonstrated by Noah when he equates the trivial action of changing a profile picture with solving the global issue of world hunger. He, of course, does not actually believe the two are equivalent; instead, he wants to mock those who think symbolic actions are enough. Moreover, Noah activates the strategy of hyperbole when he places "changing your profile picture" on the same level as "solving world hunger" to exaggerate the significance of the former.

Rhetorical question is also triggered by Noah in his utterance "Right?" to prompt the audience to reflect on the false equivalency. However, the expected answer is "No" to reinforce his critique of symbolic activism in social media.

6. Results and Discussion

After sociopragmatically analyzing the data of this study, the results demonstrate that insinuation in "The Daily Show" is an intricate sociopragmatic process that can be seen as a mixture of humor, indirect criticism, and audience engagement. The results also reveal that insinuation in "The Daily Show" is often operated by the activation of indirectness through the use of the pragmatic strategies of indirect speech acts, sarcasm, irony, hyperbole, and parody. The analysis also shows that insinuation in "The Daily Show" has numerous sociopragmatic functions such as softening direct criticism, creating in-group solidarity, and challenging power structures. By analyzing speech acts, pragmatic strategies, and social variables, the results display that insinuation can shape political discourse and influence the audience's perception.

7. Conclusions

This study ends up with the following conclusions:

1. In the context of "The Daily Show", insinuation serves both social and pragmatic functions as it enables the speakers to challenge power structures and authority while underestimating any kind of direct confrontation.
2. Due to its indirectness, insinuation allows the speakers to criticize individuals, institutions, and ideologies while maintaining plausible deniability. It also allows speakers to deliver biting social commentary in a way that is often humorous, thought-provoking, and resistant to direct refutation.
3. Insinuation in "The Daily Show" enables the speakers to engage their audience through humor by relying on shared knowledge and cultural references.
4. Insinuation in "The Daily Show" influences public discourse by framing how the audience perceives political and social issues.

5. Social factors like cultural context, power dynamics, political ideology, audience awareness, and media bias remarkably affect the way in which insinuation is constructed and interpreted.
6. Insinuation is a context-dependent process whose effectiveness relies on the context in which the insinuated utterances are delivered and the audience's ability to interpret the implied meanings of these utterances.
7. Insinuation is activated by the availability of the criteria of indirectness, humor, contextual cues, and audience interpretation.
8. Insinuation is pragmatically triggered by the use of the pragmatic strategies of assertive, directive, and expressive speech acts accompanied by the strategies of irony, satire, sarcasm, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, personal analogy, and rhetorical question.
9. Social factors like political ideology, audience knowledge, power dynamics, cultural context, and media bias shape how insinuation is constructed and interpreted in "The Daily Show".
10. Insinuation in "The Daily Show" is a sociopragmatic process that can be described as both comedic and effective as it blends entertainment with discourse. It operates within the intersection of language, media, and society.

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دراسة تداولية إجتماعية للتلميح في برنامج "العرض اليومي"

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المستخلص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة الجوانب التداولية الإجتماعية للتلميح في سياق برنامج "العرض اليومي". وبالإستناد إلى نظرية أفعال الكلام إستراتيجيات تداولية متنوعة، تبحث هذه الدراسة في كيفية تفعيل التلميح في سياق برنامج "العرض اليومي" من خلال نقد الشخصيات السياسية، والسرديات الإعلامية، والقضايا المجتمعية. وقد تم إختيار التلميح تحديداً لأنه لم يخضع لتحليل معمق من قبل الباحثين من منظور تداولي إجتماعي، بالقدر الذي استطاع الباحث دراسته. وبالتالي، يجب سد هذه الفجوة المعرفية من خلال دراسة التلميح في سياق برنامج "العرض اليومي" دراسة تداولية إجتماعية. لذا، تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تحقيق الأهداف التالية: تحديد المعايير التداولية الإجتماعية التي تشير إلى تفعيل التلميح؛ وتحديد الاستراتيجيات التداولية المستخدمة لعكس التلميح في سياق برنامج "العرض اليومي"؛ وإظهار كيفية تشكيل التلميح في برنامج "العرض اليومي" من خلال العوامل الاجتماعية التي تؤثر على كيفية بناء العبارات وتفسيرها وتلقيها. تماشياً مع أهدافها، تفترض هذه الدراسة أن التلميح يتميز بتفعيل معايير تداولية إجتماعية معينة، بما في ذلك المراوغة، والفكاهة، والإشارات السياقية، وتفسير الجمهور؛ ويتجلى التلميح تداولياً في تفعيل الاستراتيجيات التداولية لأفعال الكلام الحازمة والتوجيهية والتعبيرية، إلى جانب إستراتيجيات السخرية والهزاء والاستعارة والمبالغة والتشخيص والتشبيه الشخصي والسؤال البلاغي؛ وأن العوامل الاجتماعية، مثل الأيديولوجية السياسية، ومعرفة الجمهور، وديناميكيات القوة، والطبقة الاجتماعية، والسياق الثقافي، والتحيز الإعلامي، تُشكل كيفية بناء التلميح وتفسيره في برنامج برنامج "العرض اليومي". ومن خلال تحليل نوعي لمقتطفات مختارة، تخلص هذه الدراسة إلى أن التلميح في برنامج برنامج "العرض اليومي" هو عملية تداولية إجتماعية تتحدى الأيديولوجيات السائدة مع الحفاظ على مبدأ الإنكار المعقول.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التداولية الإجتماعية، التلميح، برنامج "العرض اليومي".