



Jurnal Bastra (Bahasa dan Sastra)

Journal homepage: <https://bastra.uho.ac.id/index.php/journal>

A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF DARK HUMOR IN *THE END OF THE F***ING WORLD* SERIES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the characteristics of dark humor in the dialogues of the series *The End of The F***ing World*, directed by Jonathan Entwisle. Dark humor is defined as a form of aggressive humor that derives amusement from taboo or sensitive subjects and often functions as both emotional release and social commentary. Employing a pragmatic approach based on Yule's (1996) pragmatics framework, Attardo's (1994) General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), and Grice's (1975) theory of maxim violations, the data were collected from selected dialogues and analyzed using a descriptive qualitative method. The findings indicate that character interactions in the series frequently feature hyperbolic and social dark humor to comment on extreme or socially sensitive situations, while deadpan and cynical humor are commonly used to convey acceptance, resignation, and coping in stressful or unconventional circumstances. From a pragmatic perspective, these forms of dark humor serve multiple functions as coping mechanisms, social commentary, and expressions of complex emotions such as frustration, empathy, and resignation, and overall, the study suggests that dark humor in the series functions not merely as entertainment but as a strategic communicative tool that enables characters to manage emotional tension, navigate sensitive social issues, and reflect on social and psychological dimensions of their experiences.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Submitted: 21 Nov 2025

Reviewed: 3 Dec 2025

Published: 21 Dec 2025

Pages: 350-360

Keyword:

*Dark humor; Pragmatics; Speech Act; The End of The F***ing World; Violation of Maxims*

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a primary means of human communication. In addition to conveying messages, it also reflects the speaker's social and cultural identity. Language used as a media to communicate (Andy & Ambalegin, 2019) and mirrors social relationships among community members. This diversity of social and cultural background leads to various forms of language use, including those that deviate from conventional norms. One of the most intriguing phenomena arising from such linguistic creativity is humor, which functions not only as entertainment but also as a social and psychological expression.

Humor is an essential aspect of human interaction that reflects how individuals perceive and respond to reality. Humor is a stimulus that elicits laughter or smiling associated with happiness (Risnawati *et al*, 2024). According to Attardo (1994), humor involves linguistic and pragmatic mechanisms that generate amusement through peculiarity, irony, or violation of expectations. From an early age, humans interact with humor. The game *Peek-a-Boo*, for example, uses surprise and unexpected events, indicating that even young children respond to the cognitive process involved in humor.

Dark humor is a type of humor that challenges social norms yet remains amusing due to its fictional, ironic, or hyperbolic context (Norrick, 2003). It transforms discomfort into laughter, often serving as a coping mechanism or as a form of social critique. Dark humor has been described as a form of humor that addresses serious, frightening, or painful subject matter in a light or satirical manner, thereby transforming distressing experiences into sources of amusement (Watson, 2011, as cited in Yoshimura, 2024). Typically conveyed through sarcasm, irony, or deadpan delivery, dark humor cannot be interpreted literally. Its effect is best interpreted by analyzing the implied meanings behind the words or expressions used. Pragmatic analysis provides the tools to interpret these meanings, as dark humor contains communicative intentions and moral stances that audiences decode within social contexts (Dynel, 2013).

Pragmatics, as a branch of linguistics, studies how meaning is constructed and interpreted in real communicative contexts. According to Yule (1996), pragmatics examines how meaning in spoken or written expressions is produced by the communicator and understood by the receiver. Applying pragmatic theory to humor enables the identification of implicit meanings, speaker attitudes, and communicative intentions within context. Two key concepts of pragmatics applied in this study are implicature and speech acts. Implicature refers to the hidden meanings implied by the speaker, and Grice (1975) identifies four conversational maxims: Quantity, Quality, Relevance, and Manner. When these maxims are violated, whether deliberately or accidental, it signals to the listener that additional meaning is intended. Speech acts, defined by Searle (1969), are actions performed through utterances, categorized as Assertive, Directive, Commissive, Expressive, and Declarative.

Pragmatic analysis is particularly relevant for dark humor due to its reliance on implied meaning, irony, and sarcasm. By examining implicature and speech acts, researchers can uncover the intentions, attitudes, and social functions embedded in dark humor (Kurniati & Kamalia, 2025). Such analysis allows for a more nuanced understanding of the communicative

purpose behind the humor.

One of the *Netflix* series that shows the use of dark humor is *The End of The F***ing World*, directed by Jonathan Entwistle. This dark comedy tells the story of two teenagers, James and Alyssa, whose sarcastic and complex personalities are shown through dialogues filled with dark humor. The series is unique because it honestly and cynically portrays youth alienation and trauma, using irony and moral ambiguity. The first episode is chosen as the object of this study because it introduces the main tone, character psychology, and language style of the whole story.

This study aims to examine dark humor in the first episode of *The End of The F***ing World* using a pragmatic approach, specifically implicature and speech acts, to identify implied meanings, communication strategies, and maxim violations employed by the main characters. Previous studies on the series, such as *Analisis Karakter James dalam Series The End of The F***ing World dari Sudut Pandang Psikologi Film* (Febrianto, 2022), *The Use of Swear Words in "The End of The F***ing World" TV Series* (Safitri, 2021), and *Self-Diagnosis of Psychopathy Portrayed in the End of The F***ing World Series* (Karimah, 2025), have explored character psychology and language use. However, none have examined the series using a pragmatic approach, which allows for a deeper understanding of how dark humor functions in social and communicative contexts. Given that *The End of The F***ing World* is a dark comedy rich in dark humor, it provides a compelling opportunity for pragmatic analysis.

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with a pragmatic approach, collecting data in the form of spoken dialogue, written expressions, and observable behaviors rather than numerical information. Qualitative research emphasizes rich, descriptive understanding of phenomena through non-numeric data (Oranga & Matere, 2023). Dark humor will be analyzed in terms of implicature, violations of conversational maxims, and speech acts, as well as their social and communicative functions.

2. METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach focusing on a pragmatic analysis of speech acts, implicatures, and maxim violations to provide an in-depth description of the characteristics of dark humor in the utterances of *The End of The F***ing World* series. The series *The End of The F***ing World* serves as the data source of this research. The data consist of utterances spoken by the two main characters, James and Alyssa. James is a teenage boy who claims to be a psychopath, as he takes pleasure in killing animals and feels no emotion afterward. His boredom eventually drives him to consider killing a human, and he chooses Alyssa as his target. Alyssa, on the other hand, is impulsive, rebellious, and emotionally scarred by her family background. Their contrasting personalities and shared alienation lead to frequent interactions marked by dark humor.

The researcher acts as the primary instrument in this study. As suggested by Sugiyono (2018), in qualitative research the researcher functions as the key instrument who directs both data collection and analysis. The researcher's role includes watching, observing, recording,

classifying, and analyzing the data. The data were collected through observation and note-taking techniques. Episode 1 of the series was repeatedly watched to understand the context of the dialogues and the situations in which the humor appears. Relevant dialogues were then transcribed and documented. The selection criteria for the data include: (1) containing elements of humor, (2) involving maxim violations, (3) including speech acts, (4) containing implicatures, and (5) serving specific social functions in the interactions between the characters.

The data analysis was conducted through several sequential stages. First, the researcher identified all utterances that potentially contained elements of dark humor. The elements of dark humor were determined based on indicators such as hyperbole, cynicism, deadpan delivery, social taboo, and maxim violations, in accordance with the theoretical frameworks of Attardo (1994) and Grice (1975). Second, the identified data were categorized according to types of humor, speech acts, maxim violations, and implicatures. Third, the categorized data were analyzed pragmatically to interpret their communicative functions and social implications. To ensure data validity, the researcher conducted repeated observations and rechecked the selected utterances against the original context of the scenes.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis conducted on *The End of The F***ing World Series*, the study examines the use of pragmatic features found in the characters' utterances. The analysis focuses on the types of dark humor, implicatures, speech acts, and maxim violations identified in the dialogues.

A. Pragmatic Analysis

Dark humor is a form of humor that arises from subjects generally considered inappropriate to laugh at. It provides a sense of freedom for both the speaker and the audience.

Data 1

Social dark humor draws on taboo or societal issues for amusement and subtle critique, while deadpan humor relies on flat delivery, creating comedy through the contrast between content and presentation. A violation of the Maxim of Quality occurs when a speaker provides untrue or exaggerated information, requiring listeners to infer meaning (Grice, 1975). In practice, this appears when speakers exaggerate, fabricate, or present statements hyperbolically. Verbs like claiming, exaggerating, or fabricating indicate such violations (Grice, 1975; Yule, 1996).

Representative speech acts convey the speaker's beliefs or viewpoints, such as stating facts or presenting opinions (Searle, 1969). Verbs like state, explain, conclude, report, suggest, admit, or accuse help identify these acts. Based on this theoretical framework, the following are examples of utterances that can be classified as representative speech acts in dialogue

analysis.

Dialogue	Type of Dark Humor	Violation of Maxims	Implicature	Speech Act
<p>James's Dad: "I thought probably he was gay. Which is... That's fine. Like... Obviously. James's"</p> <p>Dad: "But, uh, here you are".</p> <p>Alyssa: "Maybe I'm gay". "Maybe he's asexual. We're dealing with a really broad spectrum these days".</p>	Social Dark Humor and Deadpan	Relevansi	Alyssa implies that it's acceptable to have any sexual orientation, and that issues of sexual identity are complex	Representative

In the first data, humor emerges during a lunch interaction between James, Alyssa, and James's father. James's father says, "I thought probably he was gay. Which is... That's fine. Like... Obviously. But, uh, here you are," expressing subtle disapproval of James's sexual orientation. Alyssa responds, "Maybe I'm gay. Maybe he's asexual. We're dealing with a really broad spectrum these days," unexpectedly redirecting focus and generating humor. This dialogue shows social and deadpan dark humor, as Alyssa introduces a sensitive topic neutrally (Shabrina et al., 2024).

Alyssa also violates the Maxim of Relevance by shifting the conversation from James to broader social issues, implying that diverse orientations should be accepted (Grice, 1975). Her utterance reflects her perspective, marking it as a representative speech act used to convey beliefs or viewpoints (Yule, 1996). This example demonstrates how social and deadpan dark humor highlights sensitive issues, aligning with the research objective of identifying pragmatic features of humor.

Data 2

Hyperbolic dark humor emphasizes deliberate exaggeration of sensitive or taboo issues, creating comedy through the contrast between reality and overstated expression. Social dark humor, meanwhile, draws on societal or taboo topics to highlight norms and convey subtle critique (Martin, 2007).

A violation of the Maxim of Quality occurs when a speaker provides untrue or exaggerated information, requiring listeners to infer meaning (Grice, 1975). This often appears when speakers exaggerate, fabricate, or present statements hyperbolically. Verbs like claiming, exaggerating, or fabricating indicate such violations (Grice, 1975; Yule, 1996).

Representative speech acts reflect the speaker's commitment to the truth of a proposition, describing situations, providing evaluations, or expressing beliefs. Levinson (1983) notes that representative acts reveal how the speaker interprets reality through assertions or evaluations. Verbs such as estimate, evaluate, affirm, inform, justify, or deny help identify these acts.

Dialogue	Type of Dark Humor	Violation of Maxims	Implicature	Speech Act
<p>Alyssa: "She's the only cool person in this town".</p> <p>James: "Her?"</p> <p>Alyssa: "Yeah. She's done stuff".</p> <p>Alyssa: "She was probably a spy and had, like, 15 abortions when it was illegal or something. She's lived".</p> <p>James: "Really?"</p> <p>Alyssa: "Whatever".</p>	<p>Hyperbolic and Social Dark Humor</p>	<p>Quality</p>	<p>Alyssa implies that living boldly outside societal norms is impressive, even if extreme</p>	<p>Representative</p>

In the second data, humor emerges during a walk as Alyssa notices a woman across the street. She says, "She's the only cool person in this town. ... She was probably a spy and had, like, 15 abortions when it was illegal or something. She's lived," exaggerating the woman's past. James responds, "Really?" and Alyssa says, "Whatever," reinforcing a playful tone. This is hyperbolic and social dark humor, as Alyssa exaggerates and touches on a sensitive topic while maintaining casual delivery (Najamudin et al., 2024).

Alyssa's statement also violates the Maxim of Quality, exaggerating and fabricating details about someone unknown (Grice, 1975). Her hyperbole implies that living boldly outside norms can be admirable. This utterance reflects her perspective, marking it as a representative speech act used to convey beliefs or opinions (Yule, 1996). The example demonstrates how hyperbolic dark humor emphasizes exaggeration and tension, aligning with the research objective of analyzing pragmatic features in humor.

Data 3

Cynical dark humor is rooted in a pessimistic or distrustful view of human nature and reality. Its comedy arises from highlighting human flaws, selfishness, or absurd tendencies, often through dry, bitter, or mocking remarks (Martin, 2007; Dionigi, 2021). Humor emerges from the audience recognizing the gap between ideal expectations and harsh realities, producing irony.

A violation of the Maxim of Quantity occurs when a speaker gives insufficient or excessive information relative to the conversational context (Grice, 1975). Listeners must infer the implicit meaning behind this imbalance, which can conceal information, create effect, or elicit a response. Such violations appear through brief statements, overly long explanations, or extra details added deliberately. Verbs like explaining, elaborating, concealing, adding, or reducing information indicate such violations (Grice, 1975; Cutting, 2002).

Representative speech acts reflect the speaker's commitment to the truth of their statements, showing responsibility for the information conveyed. Bach and Harnish (1979) note that these acts include statements, reports, assumptions, and evaluations, each reflecting belief in the proposition. In analysis, verbs such as assert, explain, identify, clarify, consider, or conclude signal representative speech acts.

Dialogue	Type of Dark Humor	Violation of Maxims	Implicature	Speech Act
Alyssa: "Your dad's a prick" James: "Yeah, I know".	Cynical	Quantity	James implies that he knows his dad is weird and that he's used to it; he wants Alyssa to understand this.	Representative

In the third data, humor arises following the previous awkward lunch. Alyssa says, "Your dad's a prick," and James responds, "Yeah, I know," without defending his father. This is cynical dark humor, as James uses sarcasm and irony. Kathrin et al. (2021) note that cynical humor can function as a positive coping strategy under stress.

James's response also violates the Maxim of Quantity, as he provides no additional explanation. By acknowledging briefly, he implies awareness of his father's behavior and expects Alyssa to understand. This utterance reflects his perspective, marking it as a representative speech act conveying belief or opinion (Yule, 1996). The example shows how James uses cynical dark humor to implicitly express attitudes, aligning with the study's aim of identifying pragmatic features in humor.

Data 4

Deadpan dark humor is a type of dark comedy delivered with a flat expression and minimal emotional emphasis, creating humor through the contrast between the dark content and its neutral delivery. Double (2014) explains that deadpan delivery works by minimizing emotional cues, prompting the listener to interpret irony or tension. From a pragmatic perspective, deadpan dark humor can be recognized by flat intonation, minimal emotional responses, and straightforward word choice. Based on this framework, the following are examples of utterances classified as deadpan dark humor.

A violation of the Maxim of Quality occurs when a speaker provides untrue or exaggerated information, requiring the listener to infer the intended meaning (Grice, 1975). Such violations appear when speakers exaggerate, fabricate, or present inaccurate statements humorously. Verbs like claiming, exaggerating, fabricating, or expressing something hyperbolically indicate such violations (Grice, 1975; Yule, 1996).

Representative speech acts show how the speaker presents the world based on their beliefs, serving to report, describe, or interpret a situation. Finch (2000) notes that representative acts include expressions of attitude, evaluation, and interpretation reflecting the speaker's perspective. Verbs such as reporting, describing, evaluating, stating, explaining, interpreting, or asserting signal representative speech acts (Finch, 2000).

Dialogue	Type of Dark Humor	Violation of Maxims	Implicature	Speech Act
James: "Sometimes I feel like punching him in the face". Alyssa: "You should definitely do that".	Deadpan	Quality	Alyssa implies that she understands James' feelings, James should infer it as darkly humorous encouragement rather than an actual command.	Representative

In the fourth data, humor emerges after the third dialogue, when James expresses strong dislike toward his father. James says, "Sometimes I feel like punching him in the face," and Alyssa responds, "You should definitely do that," with a flat expression. This is deadpan dark humor, as Alyssa encourages James's extreme statement sarcastically while keeping a neutral demeanor. Bercovitch (2002) explains that deadpan comedy is humor expressed without noticeable changes in behavior, attitude, or facial expression.

Alyssa's response also violates the Maxim of Quality, as she does not truly intend for James to act. Her sarcastic reply implies empathy for James's frustration while keeping the interaction humorous. This utterance reflects her perspective, marking it as a representative speech act conveying belief or viewpoint (Yule, 1996). The example illustrates deadpan dark humor in dialogue, aligning with the study's aim of analyzing pragmatic features of humor.

Data 5

Hyperbolic dark humor is a type of dark comedy that uses deliberate exaggeration to highlight taboo or sensitive issues. By amplifying the absurd or moral aspects of a situation, the speaker exploits the gap between reality and the overstated expression to create comedy through dissonance (Colston, 2000). Social dark humor, meanwhile, uses socially sensitive or taboo topics—such as corruption, abuse of power, or moral hypocrisy—as a source of comedy, often serving as subtle social critique (Colletta, 2003).

A violation of the Maxim of Quality occurs when a speaker provides untrue or exaggerated information, requiring the listener to infer the intended meaning (Grice, 1975). Such violations appear when speakers exaggerate, fabricate, or present inaccurate statements for humorous or rhetorical effect. Verbs like claiming, exaggerating, fabricating, or expressing something hyperbolically indicate these violations (Grice, 1975; Yule, 1996).

Representative speech acts are utterances in which the speaker conveys what they believe to be true, including statements, descriptions, conclusions, or viewpoints. These acts reflect the speaker's stance and commitment to truth, serving to report, depict, or evaluate a situation (Searle, 1969; Finch, 2000). Verbs such as state, explain, conclude, report, suggest, admit, or assert can signal representative speech acts.

Dialogue	Type of Dark Humor	Violation of Maxims	Implicature	Speech Act
<p>Alyssa: "Places like this are all run by the Man".</p> <p>James: "What man?"</p> <p>Alyssa: "The Man" man. "The Man who, you know, owns all the oil, forces Chinese children to make smartphones and hates Palestine".</p>	Hyperbolic and Social Dark Humor	Quality	Alyssa presents an exaggerated and immoral portrayal of someone who run the restaurant, which prompts James to respond with daring defiance rather than fear, ultimately allowing them to leave without paying.	Representative

In the fifth data, humor arises during a conversation about the restaurant owner. Alyssa says, "Places like this are all run by the Man," and adds, "The Man who, you know, owns all the oil, forces Chinese children to make smartphones and hates Palestine," exaggerating the absurdity of her description. This scene demonstrates hyperbolic and social dark humor, as Alyssa overstates traits of a socially relevant figure for comic effect (Colston, 2000; Dynel, 2009).

Alyssa's statements also violate the Maxim of Quality, as the exaggerated content is clearly not literal (Grice, 1975). Her hyperbolic and morally provocative description prompts James to respond boldly rather than fearfully. The intended meaning reflects her perspective, marking it as a representative speech act conveying beliefs or viewpoints (Searle, 1969; Finch, 2000). This example shows Alyssa using hyperbolic and social dark humor to create comedy through exaggeration and socially sensitive topics, consistent with the study's pragmatic analysis objective.

B. Function of Dark Humor in Character Interaction

In *The End of The F***ing World*, the characters use dark humor as a pragmatic tool to cope with social and emotional tension, express perspectives, and address sensitive issues. Alyssa frequently employs hyperbolic and socially oriented dark humor to comment on extreme or taboo situations. For example, her exaggerated description of the woman across the street draws attention to social norms while allowing her to maintain emotional distance. In contrast, James relies on deadpan and cynical humor, reflecting his resigned acceptance of his father's unusual behavior and the stressful circumstances he faces. Through this humor, James communicates indirectly, conveying emotions in a detached yet meaningful manner.

Pragmatically, these forms of dark humor serve multiple functions. First, they act as

a coping mechanism; the implicatures in James's and Alyssa's remarks often signal discomfort, helping them manage emotions without direct confrontation. Second, Alyssa's hyperbole and James's cynicism function as social commentary, highlighting societal expectations and family dynamics while keeping a humorous tone. Third, dark humor allows the characters to express complex emotions. Through irony, exaggeration, and deadpan delivery, they convey frustration, resignation, or empathy, even if the expressions may appear ambiguous to outsiders.

Alyssa and James strategically use dark humor to reflect the social and emotional pressures they face. This demonstrates that humor functions both as a communicative tool and a coping strategy. Dark humor thus operates not only as entertainment but also as a form of social critique, a coping mechanism, and a way to challenge societal norms (Shabrina et al., 2024). Overall, the analysis shows that dark humor serves to cope, comment, and express complex emotions, aligning with the research objective regarding its role in character interactions.

4. CONCLUSION

In the pragmatic analysis of *The End of The F***ing World*, dark humor is used by the main characters to cope with social and emotional pressures, convey their perspectives, and address sensitive topics. Alyssa employs hyperbolic and social dark humor, while James uses deadpan and cynical humor, allowing them to express complex emotions and comment on social norms indirectly. This study contributes to pragmatics, humor studies, and audiovisual discourse analysis by showing how dark humor functions as a strategic communicative device in dialogue. However, the research is limited to selected dialogues from the first episode, and future studies could explore additional episodes or cross-cultural interpretations of dark humor.

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