

# **دراسة تداولية للتعدي في اشرطة الفكاهة الانجليزية**

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## **A Pragmatic Study of Aggression in Some English Comic Strips**

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**Abstract**

Aggression can be detected in speakers' language for many purposes such as criticism, refusal, delivering unpleasant messages or even solidarity among people. To cover the disagreeable consequences of such aggressions, speakers usually utilize humour as the appropriate way to go about it. Thus, humour is considered the 'smooth' way to deliver messages that might hurt the hearer. However, it seems that this kind of language use is still unexplored and has not been given its due attention despite its importance. One of the interesting forms of media that include "humour-coated" aggression is comic strips. The study is intended to answer the following questions: 1) What is the pragmatic structure of aggression in comic strips? 2) What are the types of aggression utilized in comic strips? and 3) How does aggression function in comics? The data are taken from Rudy Park, Candorville, and Pickles comic strips which are syndicated in The Washington Post. The findings of the analysis show that: 1) aggression is a process that has three pragmatic stages that mainly employ non-observance of Grice's maxims and impoliteness strategies. 2) Aggression in comic strips serves some functions such as criticism, showing power, amusing and annoying. 3) Aggression in comic strips has two main types: direct (hostile) and indirect (instrumental)

**Key words** : aggression ; comic strips ; cooperative principles ; speech act theory ; presupposition .

**المستخلص**

التعدي هو ظاهرة يمكن ان توظف لعدة اغراض حيث يمكن ان يُستخدم لتوجيه انتقاد او كلام غير مرغوب فيه للآخرين ويمكن ان يُستخدم في احيان اخرى للتقارب بين الاشخاص. وهذه الثنائية في استخدام التعدي يمكن ان تُدرس في الفكاهة لانها الاسلوب الامثل لطرح ماهو مؤذي للآخرين بأسلوب مقبول وسائغ. لم تحظ هذه الظاهرة بالاهتمام الكافي على الرغم من اهميتها الامر الذي يستدعي الكثير من البحث العلمي المكثف. وبناءً على هذا جاءت هذه الرسالة في محاولة لدراسة التعدي في اشربة الفكاهة الانكليزية. وهي تتناول التعدي تناوولا تداوليا في تلك الاشربة. وتهدف الدراسة الى بلوغ الغايات الاتية: (١) تحديد التركيب التداولي للتعدي في اشربة الفكاهة الانكليزية (٢) تحديد انواع التعدي الاكثر شيوعا في اشربة الفكاهة الانكليزية (٣) تحديد اهم وظائف التعدي في اشربة الفكاهة الانكليزية. وقد اخذت البيانات التي تم تحليلها من اشربة الفكاهة ( رودي بارك و كاندور فايل وبكلز) التي يتم تحريرها في جريدة واشنطن بوست الاميريكية. ومن اهم ما جاء في الدراسة من استنتاجات الاتي: التعدي هو عملية تمر بثلاث مراحل: مرحلة الاثارة ومرحلة التعدي ومرحلة الاستجابة مكونة الهيكل الاساسي للتعدي . يتم التعدي في الفكاهة بخرق مبدأ التعاون واستخدام الادوات البلاغية المعروفة كالتعبير الساخر والتهكم.

**الكلمات الدالة** : التعدي ، اشربة الفكاهة ، مبدأ التعاون ، نظرية أفعال الكلام ، الافتراض المسبق

### **1. Introduction**

This study makes an attempt to pragmatically analyze aggression in some English comic strips by mainly employing Grice's theory of the Cooperative Principle and Conversational Implicature (1975), Culpeper's theory of impoliteness (1996), Yule's presupposition types (1996) and some rhetorical devices. The following are some questions that intended to be answered in this study:

1. What is the pragmatic structure of aggression in comic strips?
2. What are the types of aggression utilized in comic strips?
3. How does aggression function in comic strips?

The notion of aggression embraces different meanings, ranging from an overt response to an interior state. To give comprehensive definition of aggression, one must include all kinds of intrusive and attacking behaviour (Ramirez, et. all. 2003: 126). There are certain pinpoints that are important if a given behaviour is to be regarded as being aggressive: there must be (1) intention by the aggressor to do harm or injury; (2) performance of a particular act or response sequence; (3) and harm or injury to the target (Duncan and Hobson, 1977: 34). Human aggression can be defined as any behaviour directed to others with the intention of making harm and the aggressor must be certain that his aggressive behaviour must cause harm to the target and that target should be motivated to behave in a way that makes him avoid the aggression (Anderson and Huesmann, 2003: 298).

In relation to its types, Buss (1961: 43) proposes three dimensions of aggression types: physical-verbal, active-passive, and direct-indirect. The physical-verbal dimension distinguishes between whether one uses physical means or words to harm others. The active-passive dimension refers to the extent to which the aggressor is (in)actively involved in a behaviour aimed at harming someone. Direct-indirect aggression involves (or avoids) face-to-face confrontation between the aggressor and the target. (Feshbach, 1969: 337).

Additionally, aggression can be used to criticize others or to express solidarity. This dualistic feature of aggression gives it a pragmatic suit

which enables it to achieve different functions in interaction. It can be used as a tool to criticize others (Haugh, 2010: 44) or else to maintain and enhance relationships between interactants. It can also achieve the function of exclusion. By means of aggressive words we can exclude anyone from a certain group. This twofold nature of aggression can achieve two pragmatic functions: amusing others, on the one hand, and harming them on the other (Marra and Holmes, 2007: 159).

As for comic strips, they often found in newspapers, intended to provide readers with amusement, through which different political, social, and familial issues are tackled. They are defined as one of the types of cartoon told by means of a series of drawings arranged in horizontal lines, or strips, or rectangles called 'panels' (Jaufillaili, et al.2017: 66). They typically portray the experience of the characters in a limited time sequence. The discussion in the panel is called 'a balloon', which is issued from the mouth or head of the characters whose turn it is to speak or think (ibid).

## **2. Methodology and Analysis**

This study analyzes three comic strips taken from Rudy Park, Candorville, and Pickles comic strips which are syndicated in The Washington Post (Web Source 2).

Rudy Park is made by the cartoonist Darrin Bell. Rudy Park is the barista at the House of Java Café (an internet café), the place where people compete to annoy Rudy the most, while Cadorville is an insightful comic strips filled with nervous dialogue and thoroughly modern situations. Candorville, by Darrin Bell, is made for today's world. It fearlessly covers bigotry, poverty, personal responsibility, and more while never losing sight of the humor behind these weighty issues, whereas Pickles tell the story of Earl and Opal Pickles as they enjoy their golden years surrounded by friends and family (ibid).

As mentioned in the Introduction, two main theories are going to be utilized in this study to analyze the data. Figure (1) below illustrates the three proposed pragmatic stages which are believed to be found in the comic strips. The proposed stages are the triggering stage, the aggression stage, and the response stage.

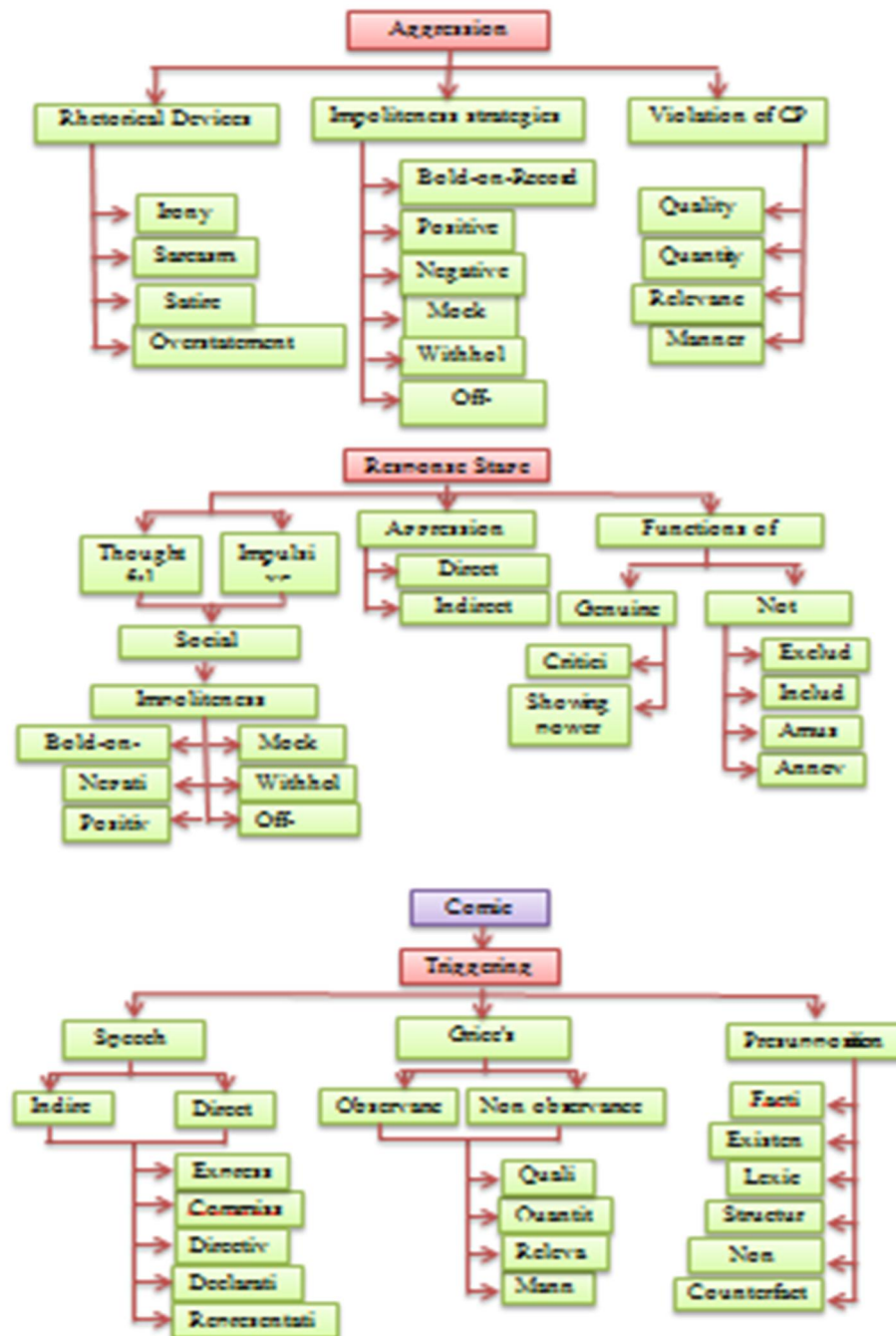
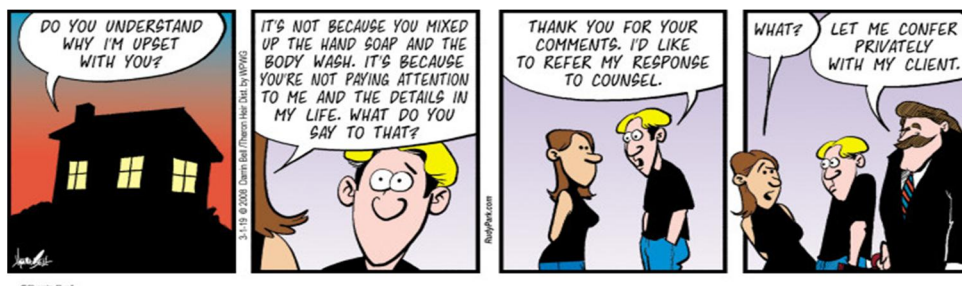


Figure (1): The Pragmatic Proposed Model of Analyzing Aggression  
Comic strip 1



**General context:** the location of this conversation is the house. It takes place between Rudy, his wife and the counsel, where Rudy's wife is discussing with him why she is upset in an attempt to find a solution and fix up the inconveniences happens. Thus, Rudy's solution is bringing a counsel to defend him as if he is in a court not a house.

To start with the first stage, the triggering stage. The situation begins with a rhetorical question "Do you understand why I'm upset with you?". This question is an indirect expressive speech act. It is forceful statement used to express strong feelings which is "being upset" because of something. Laurel presupposes that Rudy does not know why she is upset, that is why she continues her speech to clarify the reasons of being upset. The type of presupposition is structural where the assumption is associated with certain structure which is the rhetorical question. Then, she explains that she is upset because he does not pay attention to her life asking him to give an answer. Laurel's speech is not cooperative as she violates the manner maxim by using question to state that she is upset, so she is not clear and not brief. Laurel's speech implicates that she is not satisfied with Rudy's behaviour attempting to fix up his inconveniences.

Accomplishing the first stage paves the way to the second, which is the aggression stage. His answer to her question is impolite, ironic, and not cooperative because there is a negative effect that is triggered from the previous stage causes Rudy to realize that effect as offensive and he felt agitated. He evaluates her speech in a negative way since she talked too much to tell him that she is upset because of him. Thus, he behaves aggressively as he uses mock impoliteness strategy. He adopts insincere politeness strategy "mock impoliteness" which is "Thank you for your comment. I'd like to refer my response to a counsel". At the same time,

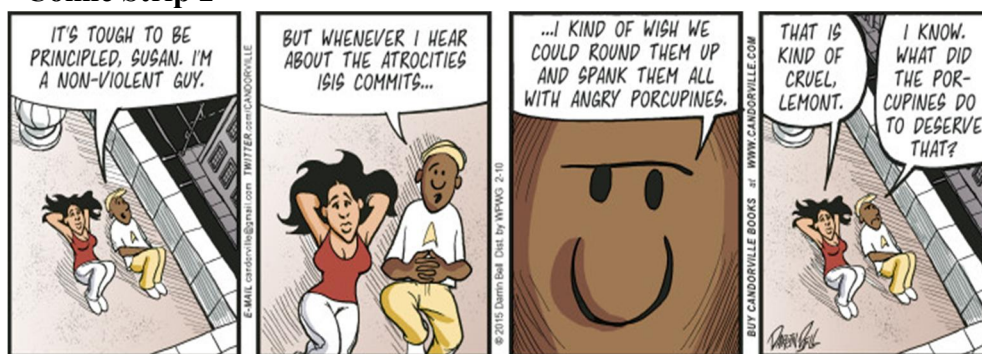


he is employing irony in his speech with her since irony occurs when the expressed words is the opposite of what is intended, so his thanking indicates his annoyance. He violates the maxims of quality and relevance as he is untrue and not relevant in what he is stating. Saying "thank you ..." seems not relevant and untrue answer to Laurel's question. The implicature, which arises from Rudy's words of thanking, is that Rudy is implicitly ridiculing his girlfriend.

Now it is the time for issuing the third stage. It is the response stage where responses are issued to answer what is said earlier. The response is accomplished by Laurel as well as the counsel. Laurel's response is done by impulsive action since she is astonished of Rudy's behaviour, while the counsel's response is a thoughtful action as he is calmly preparing himself to "confer privately" with Rudy. So, the social encounter will be between Laurel and the counsel who uses negative impoliteness strategy to belittle Laurel and to emphasize his relative power (superiority). Aggression functions as genuine to exclude Laurel and showing power. While, the type of aggression is an indirect aggression as Rudy uses irony and mock impoliteness which are indirect strategies to offend the victim.

For humour, the situation conveys spontaneous conversational humour which is created intentionally during the course of social interaction. In the above mentioned situation, the humorous effect is done at the aggression as well as the response stage, when Rudy and the counsel use mock impoliteness, irony and violate the maxims of quality and relevance as they are untrue and not relevant of what they are stating. In relation with humour theories, this is called incongruence. This means that what is expressed by the speaker is the opposite of what is expected by the listener to create humorous atmosphere.

## Comic Strip 2



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**General Context:** The situation is between Lemont and Susan at a place where they used to meet in. While they are speaking, Lemont tells Susan that " It's tough to be principled, Susan. I'm a non-violent guy". He is expressing his feelings to her saying that although I am a not violent person, whenever I hear the atrocities ISIS commits, I wish to gather them all and spank them with angry porcupines (an animal with defensive spines or quills on the body and tail). She replies that "This is cruel, Lemont" and he agrees with her saying that "What did porcupines do to deserve that". He declares that it is cruel for the porcupines not for the ISIS.

The first stage is the triggering stage. The situation begins with a statement uttered by Lemont in an attempt to announce or express his emotion, so it is a direct expressive speech act with emotional effect to initiate empathy with Susan "It is tough to be principled, Susan. I'm a non-violent guy". He presupposes that it is difficult to have principles and one of his principles is that he is a non-violent person. The type of presupposition is factive because of the use of the verb "to be" to express a fact "It is tough to be principled, Susan. I'm a non-violent guy ". Lemont's speech is cooperative as he is informative, true, relevant, and clear. Lemont's speech has no implied meaning as the intended meaning is expressed explicitly.

Achieving the first stage paves the way to the second, which is the aggression stage. Hearing about ISIS and the atrocities they commit provokes Lemont and causes him to be agitated and aggressive as he says "I'm a non-violent guy, but whenever I hear about the atrocities ISIS commits, I wish we could round them up and spank them all with angry porcupines". Lemont's speech to Susan is impolite, sarcastic, and not cooperative because there is a negative effect that is triggered from the previous stage, thus, he behaves aggressively as he adopts bold on record impoliteness strategy by which a threat is performed in a direct and clear way to minimize the others face "I wish we could round them up and spank them all with angry porcupines". Lemont uses sarcasm as a rhetorical device to show his rage bigotry for ISIS in an acceptable manner. He is cooperative and violates no maxim as he is informative, true, relevant and clear in what he is stating.

The third stage is the response stage where responses are issued to answer what is said earlier. The response is accomplished by Susan as well as Lemont. Susan's response is made by thoughtful action since she



just gives a comment to what Lemont says, while Lemont's response is an impulsive action as he aggressively states that porcupines do not deserve to hit ISIS. He feels sympathized with porcupines more than ISIS. So, he uses negative impoliteness strategy to damage the other face by ignoring and ridiculing them. Aggression functions as genuine to criticize ISIS. While, the type of aggression is a direct aggression as Lemont uses negative impoliteness strategy which is a direct strategy to offend ISIS.

For humour, the situation conveys spontaneous conversational humour which is created intentionally during the course of social interaction. In the above mentioned situation, the humorous effect is done at the response stage, when Lemont, at the response stage, uses negative impoliteness strategy and sarcasm to mock and ridicule ISIS by making inferior to animals. In relation with humour theories, this is called incongruence. This means that what is expressed by the speaker is the opposite of what is expected by the listener to create humorous atmosphere. The incongruence happens when Susan tells Lemont that it is cruel to hit ISIS by porcupines and he says porcupines do not deserve such bad treatment.

### Comic Strip 3



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**General Context:** This situation takes place between Earl and his grandson, Nelson at the house, when Nelson asks Earl about the colour of his grandma's hair when they first met "What colour was grandma's hair when you first met her?". Earl answers him in a sarcastic way saying "Blond! it wasn't until after we were married that I found out she was really a brunette. That's what we call deceptive packaging". As a result of his speech, she feels so aggressive and says "Yes, and Grampa had a full head of thick, wavy hair. That's what we call vanishing packaging".

The first stage is the triggering stage. The situation begins with a question that is asked by Nelson to know the colour of his grandmother's hair, when she is young "What colour was gramma's hair when you first met her?". Nelson's question is a directive speech act, where it is an attempt by the speaker to inspire the listener to accomplish something "a need for an answer". Nelson presupposes that his grandmother's hair is different now than before that is why he is asking. It is a structural presupposition as the assumption is associated with the use of certain structure which is the WH-question. Nelson's speech is cooperative as he violates none of the maxims by being informative, true, relevant, and clear.

Accomplishing the first stage paves the way to the second, which is the aggression stage. This stage begins when Earl gives his answer about the colour of Opal's hair when she is young saying "Blond! It wasn't until after we were married that I found out she was really a brunette. That's what we call deceptive packaging". As the main hobby of Earl is to drive Opal crazy, there is usually an offensive effect that causes them to realize each other's speech abusive. As a result of that, Earl's answer has a sarcastic tone as he makes fun of her "That's what we call deceptive packaging". He uses mock impoliteness strategy which is the use politeness strategies that are obviously insincere to poke fun of her. He violates the maxim of quality as he seems untrue in his words. The implicature, which arises from Earl's words of sarcasm, is that he is implicitly ridiculing her.

The third stage is the response stage where responses are issued to answer what is said earlier. The response is accomplished by Opal as result of Earl's sarcastic answer. Her response is done by a thoughtful action as she wants to return his abusive comment towards her back "Yes, and Grampa had a full head of thick, wavy hair. That's what we call vanishing packaging". So, Opal uses mock impoliteness strategy which is the insincere speech of politeness to damage the other's face. Aggression functions as genuine to criticize Opal. While, the type of aggression is an indirect aggression as Earl uses mock impoliteness strategy which is an indirect strategy to offend the other.

For humour, the humourous effect is done at the aggression as well as the response stage, when Earl uses mock impoliteness, sarcasm and violates the maxim of quality to criticize the Opal "Blond! It wasn't until after we were married that I found out she was really a brunette. That's

what we call deceptive packaging". Besides, when she responds aggressively and says "Yes, and Grampa had a full head of thick, wavy hair. That's what we call vanishing packaging". In relation with humour theories, this is called disparagement humour. According to this concept, funniness of a situation depends on the identification of the person that disparages and the victim of the disparagement. In the above strip, aggressive content is very clear especially when Earl sarcastically talk about Opal and also when she returns it back.

### **Overall Analysis**

#### **The pragmatic structure of Aggression**

As far as the pragmatic structure is concerned, the analysis shows that aggression is a process composed of three stages: the triggering stage, the aggression stage and the response stage. Each of these stages is composed of components forming the pragmatic structure of aggression.

#### **The pragmatic strategies of issuing aggression**

To consider the statistical analysis of the pragmatic strategies of aggression, each stage will be analyzed fully with its strategies and rates.

#### **The Pragmatic strategies of the first stage**

The first stage is composed of three pragmatic components: speech acts, Grice maxims and presupposition. The speech act strategies used at this stage are the following: expressive 66%, commissive 0%, declarative 0%, directive 11% and representative 0% consider the following table:

**Table (1): Speech Acts**

Speech acts				
Expressive 66%	Commissive 0%	Declarative 0%	Directive 11%	Representative 0%

Time to insert the rates of the cooperative principle (CP); the cooperative principle is adopted through the following: quality 0%, quantity 0%, manner 100% and relevance 0%. CP at this stage is sometimes observed and sometimes not. The rate of observance is 34% whereas the rate of non-observance is 66%.

These percentages are illustrated in the table below:

**Table (2): Cooperative Principle**

Cooperative Principle			
Observance 30%		Non observance 70%	
Quality 0%	Quantity 0%	Manner 100%	Relevance 0%

## A Pragmatic Study of Aggression..... (542)

As for presupposition, it is of different types at this stage: factive 34%, existential 0%, lexical 0%, structural 66%, non factive 0%, and counterfactual 0%. These frequencies are illustrated in the table below:

**Table (3): Presupposition**

Presupposition					
Factive	Existential	Lexical	Structural	Nonfactual	Counterfactual
34%	0%	0%	66%	0%	0%

### The Pragmatic Strategies of the Second stage

The second stage is composed of three components: rhetorical devices, impoliteness strategies and violation of CP. To start with the rhetorical devices, the aggressor at this stage employs one or more of the following devices: irony 34%, sarcasm 66%, satire 0%, and overstatement %. Consider the table below:

**Table (4): Rhetorical Devices**

Rhetorical Devices			
Irony	Sarcasm	Satire	Overstatement
34%	66%	0%	0%

Impoliteness is also resorted to by the aggressor at this stage and it is expressed with the following strategies: bald-on-record (BOR) 34%, positive 0%, negative 0%, mock 66%, withhold 0%, off-record(OR) 0%. These rates are shown in the table below:

**Table (5): Impoliteness Strategies**

Impoliteness Strategies					
BOR	Positive	Negative	Mock	Withhold	OR
34%	20%	0%	66%	0%	0%

The aggressor also tends to violate the cooperative principle at the stage by violating its maxims: quality 66%, quantity 0%, relevance 34%, and manner 0%. Consider the table below:

**Table (6): Violation of Cooperative Principle**

Violation of CP			
Quality	Quantity	Relevance	Manner
66%	0%	34%	0%

### The Pragmatic strategies of the third stage of aggression

This stage is composed of different components: responsive action, which is expressed through impoliteness strategies, aggression

types and aggression functions. To start with the responsive action, it is either thoughtful 60% or impulsive 40%. The impoliteness strategies used at this stage are: BOR 0%, negative 66%, positive 0%, mock 34%, withhold 0%, OR 0%. See the table below:

**Table (7): Impoliteness Strategies**

Impoliteness Strategies					
BOR	Negative	Positive	Mock	Withhold	OR
0%	66%	0%	34%	0%	0%

The frequencies of the types of aggression are as follows.

**Table (8): Aggression Types**

Direct (Hostile)	Indirect (Instrumental)
34%	66%

The frequencies of the functions of aggression are as follows:

**Table (9): Aggression Functions**

Functions of Aggression			
Genuine 100%		Non genuine 0%	
To criticize	Show power	To include or exclude	To amuse or annoy
66%	0%	34%	0%

## Conclusions

This study has come up with the following conclusions:

1. Aggression, in English comic strips, is a process structured of three stages. The triggering, stage embraces three pragmatic components which are: speech acts, presupposition, and cooperative principle. The speech act strategies used at this stage are the following: directive 34%, expressive 66%, declarative 0%, commissive 0%, and representative 0%. Time to insert the percentages of the strategies of the cooperative principle; the cooperative principle is adopted through the following strategies: quality 0%, quantity 0%, manner 100% and relevance 0%. CP at this stage is sometimes observed and sometimes not. The rate of observance is 34% whereas the rate of non-observance is 66%. As for presupposition, it is of different types at this stage: structural 66%, factive 34%, existential 0%, lexical 0%, non factive 0%, and counterfactual 0%.
2. The aggression stage embraces the pragmatic structure of aggression which is: rhetorical devices, impoliteness strategies, violation of CP. Concerning the rhetorical devices, the aggressor at this stage employs one or more of the following devices: sarcasm 66%, irony 34%, satire 0%, and overstatement 0%. Impoliteness is also resorted to by the aggressor at this stage and it is expressed with the following



## A Pragmatic Study of Aggression..... (544)

- strategies: bald-on-record (BOR) 34%, positive 0%, negative 0%, mock 66%, withhold 0%, off-record(OR) 0%. The aggressor also tends to violate the cooperative principle at the stage by violating its maxims: quality 66%, quantity 0%, relevance 34%, and manner 0%.
3. The response stage embraces: type of action, aggression functions, and aggression types. To start with the responsive action, it is either thoughtful 60 % or impulsive 40%. The impoliteness strategies used at this stage are: BOR 0%, negative 34%, positive 0%, mock 66%, withhold 0%, OR 0%. The frequencies of the types of aggression are as follows: Direct (hostile) 34%, indirect (instrumental) 66%. The frequencies of the functions of aggression are as follows: genuine to criticize 66%, genuine to show power 0%, not genuine to include 0%, not genuine to exclude 34%, not genuine to amuse 0%, not genuine to annoy 0%.
  4. As a result, humour in comic strips is achieved through out disparagement or incongruence strategies. Disparagement strategy is 34%. Incongruence strategy is 66%.

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