SIKHAY

Nag-usap, Kinileg, Nabasa: An Analysis
of Humor and Gay Representation
in Karlo Victoriano's Online Comic Series,
Sari-Sari Story

Kyle Patrick De Guzman [a]

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic paved the way for the emergence of the Boys' Love (BL) theme and genre throughout various media platforms, causing disruptive visibility to the narratives and representation of gays (Andrada in an interview by Antonio, 2021; Ting, 2020). This disruption may have started a dialogue in social media, but this dialogue was only a limited attempt given that most of the discussions have stereotypical representations of gay men (Celso, 2020). This study analyzes how humor was applied in the online comic, *Sari-Sari Story,* and how humor is used in the portrayal of the gay characters in this online comic. The analysis uses Grice's (2012) pragmatic framework of conversational maxims: quality, quantity, manner, and relation. Humor was indicated in the non-observance of one or more maxim(s), which, then, caused the implicatures. The study found that the most non-observed maxims were quantity, manner, and relation. The prominent type of humor present in the comic was the Freudian slip, where the slips contained sexual metaphors mostly associated with the characters' sexual desires towards each other. As an example of the BL genre, the *Sari-Sari Story* online comic stereotyped its presentation of gay characters as hypersexual in their relationships with each other. In this, it deviated from the conventions of the *Pinoy* BL present in the mainstream media.

Keywords: boys' love (BL), sari-sari story online comics, conversation maxims, humor, gay representation

Introduction

The genre of BL(BL) emerged in various media platforms in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic and caused disruptive visibility to the narratives and representations

---

[a] **CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:** deguzmankptrck@gmail.com

of gay people (Andrada, in an interview by Antonio, 2021; Ting, 2020). Dr. Ver Reyes stated in an interview with Marinel Cruz (2021) that the increasing number of boys' love-themed media consumed by Filipino audiences could help normalize same-sex relationships and break the harmful stereotypical perception of same-sex relationships. However, contrary to the generally positive reception of BL in the Philippines, Patrick Ernest Celso (2020) pointed out that BL may have gained visibility in the Philippine and international social media space and started an important dialogue that could benefit gays, yet, this dialogue was only a limited attempt given that most of the discussions still featured stereotypical representations of gay men as "eye candy" with hyper-masculine features or characteristics. Thus, BL does not represent the whole spectrum of gayness but is selective and limited in its depiction (Celso, 2020, para. 2). Andrei Gines (2020) warns that "Representation is vital, but it also should be [done] right" (para. 11).

Given the issues involved in media representation of gay portrayals in the boys' love genre, this paper aims to explore (1) how and what type of humor was applied in the conversations of the characters in the BL online comic series, *Sari-Sari Story,* using Grice's (2012) pragmatic framework of conversational maxims, and (2) how humor contributed to the portrayal of the characters in the comics series This study hopes to provide an understanding of gay portrayals in comics studies and how humor can maintain and/or challenge the present discourse on the LGBTQIA+ community in the Philippines.

The BL phenomenon in the Philippines

The BL genre has its roots in Japan (*yaoi* literature) and was "created by women for the consumption of women" (Mizoguchi, 2022) as a mechanism of escapism "from the social realities of gender suppression and the avoidance of sex (quality" (Yukari, 2007, as cited in McLelland & Welker, 2015). In BL literature, the traditional positionality of females, and narratives of women were placed instead on the male character. This allows women readers to fetishize or fantasize the male characters as gentle, caring, and vulnerable in their personalities and behavior towards others. This contrasts with the characteristics and behavior of dominant males in the patriarchal society in which the women readers live (McLelland & Welker, 2015).

In the Philippines, BL was popularized through boys' love-themed films and serials during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first Philippine writers were influenced by the BL genre in other East and Southeast Asian countries, such as Japan, China, and Taiwan (Abueg,

2021). Building on this influence, Bengan (2020, as cited in Abueg, 2021) argues that the majority of Pinoy boys' love literature was particularly influenced by Thailand's boys' love literature.

As the BL genre spread worldwide, Mizoguchi (2010) saw the transformative capabilities of the BL genre as a form of activism, advocating realistic homosexual narratives and struggles, even at the basic level of representation as a start (p. 159). This was something that Petersen Vargas, the Filipino director of *Hello Stranger*, agreed with (Casal, 2020). Vargas further explained that if he was to define the Pinoy BL that flourished during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was a genre that can drive "… healthy discourse on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and not just tiptoe around it," and that it portrays love "… just as real, relatable, and essential as all the love stories *Pinoys* have already seen in heteronormative counterparts" (para. 12).

Despite the positive reception of BL literature, some critics argued that the representation presented in BL was too idealistic and fictional, which just increased the discrimination towards gay men who do not subscribe to what was portrayed in media (Zsila & Demetrovics, 2017, pp. 8-9). In Japan, Masaki Sato criticized "Yaoi*"* fans for overly fantasizing or fetishizing "young and beautiful Yaoi characters", which do not depict the full scale of gay men in real life (Mizoguchi, 2008, pp. 180). Andrei Gines (2020) confirmed this by pointing out an existing issue prevalent in Thai BL where *cishet* male actors were cast as queer characters because of their masculine appearance and capital, allowing the audience to fantasize about love more easily. He emphasized that "[p]roper representation entails that queer people are not only shown as characters on media but are also played by queer people themselves," and not be "… restricted to playing the comedic roles" (para. 11). Juan Miguel Severo, the Filipino writer of "*Gaya sa Pelikula"* (Just Like in the Movies), also shared similar sentiments. Severo stated in his tweets that it was "'systemic homophobia' that discourages gay actors from pursuing gay roles, for fear of being boxed or their personal lives scrutinized" ("Why gay actors", 2020). Even Filipino film director, Petersen Vargas, pointed out that the conventions of BL content tend to pose more problems for LGBTQIA+ visibility and representation (Casal, 2020, para. 11).

Dela Cruz (2022) critically differentiates the first wave of Pinoy BL which was greatly influenced by its predecessor, Thai BL from more current BL writing. In the evolution from its early days, the Pinoy BL genre liberated itself from the established tropes questioned

by international critics, such as the vilification of women and the rejection of queerness. Instead, it portrayed women characters positively, as supportive allies of queer characters. Additionally, queer characters in the first wave of Pinoy boys' love emancipated themselves by openly coming out as homosexual as the story progressed.

Abueg (2021) pointed out that there are generally no sexual undertones in the current Pinoy BL genre. Instead, it follows the plot conventions of romantic comedy ('romcom') movies, attempting to normalize the view of gay relationships by portraying them in the same way as heterosexual couples (p. 41). This supports the stated objectives of Petersen Vargas and Juan Miguel Severo: to make the Pinoy boys' love genre more inclusive and provide a realistic reflection of the LGBTQIA+ lived experiences.

The current Pinoy BL genre formula incorporates elements from traditional romantic comedy: it shows intimacy between two male queer characters, but not overt erotica. Predominantly including social backgrounds and struggles, it more realistically narrates the lived experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community (Abueg, 2021).

Thus, Pinoy BL created its conventions which deviated from its BL roots from Japan and Thailand written by and for women, and confined by their heterosexual fantasies; now, Pinoy BL has evolved into a transformative genre that advocates inclusivity and equality, providing realistic visibility of the struggles of the LGBTQIA+ community.

KarVic: The Auteur of *Sari-Sari* Story Online Comics

Karlo Emmanuel Victoriano, publicly known as KarVic, is a sought-after motion graphic artist, video editor, art director, and content creator. He works both as a freelancer and as an employee of ABS-CBN. KarVic is also a well-known comics illustrator and the author of *Sari-Sari Story* online comics. Additionally, he has contributed to *Thirsty: A Filipino boys love anthology* (2022). KarVic's talent and creativity are widespread in the multimedia space. KarVic produced several graphic and motion designs for popular television series in the Philippines, such as the 2016 romantic dramedy *Till I Met You*, the 2018 drama fantasy *Bagani*, Coco Martin's FPJ's *Ang Probinsyano,* 4th year's icon logo, and the Official Opening Billboard (OBB)/Intro of *RuPaul's drag race Philippines*, both Seasons 1 and 2. Throughout his career, he has also produced various illustrations for women empowerment and, especially, for the pride month.

KarVic is active in advocating gay rights, especially during the Pride month celebrations. His advocacy can be seen in his social media posts. The numbers of his current followers on Facebook (7,546 followers), Instagram (15.9k followers), X, formerly known as Twitter, (76.8k followers), and TikTok (47.3k followers and 781.5k likes) show the popularity of KarVic and his works in the media production landscape.

Other than his graphic designs seen on television and social media, KarVic's most iconic work is his very own *Sari-Sari Story* online comic series, which can be accessed through the Penlab site. Penlab provides a creative platform for Filipino comic creators and was founded by the Kalabaw Kolektib in September 2020 (Yap, 2020). It also caters to the Filipino readership. As Mercado shared in an interview with Yap (2020), readers now have the opportunity to find their favorites and discover new ones—all for free" (para. 17). Through Penlab's online platform, as Mercado added, the "...website hopes to develop a space where the entire community can do what we do best: Create, read, and share komiks" (Yap, 2020, para. 19). Other than being an avenue for both comic creators and their readership, Penlab's online platform also provides an avenue for discourse to emerge and be mainstreamed so the Filipino community can spread their responses and opinions on the comics published in its platforms.

The story of *Sari-Sari Story* revolves around its three main characters, Sean, Mon, and Dipper, and is set inside the Big Dipper *Sari-Sari* mall. As of writing, *Sari-Sari Story* already has 28 episodes, including the first episode zero, and a special episode. It has one million reads on Penlab. With 21 episodes released in English and Filipino on Web Toon, readership is reported as almost 500,000 readers combined, 7,037 subscribers, and a strong 9.8 rating. It is interesting to note that the Filipino episodes have the highest readership and subscribers.

KarVic released the *Sari-Sari Story* book in June 2022, containing "96 pages of *kilig, hugot, and kalat*!". It has fifty chapters/episodes and it has been dubbed "*Ang Aklat na puro Kalat!!!*" (The Book Full of Sensuality) (Victoriano, 2022). In this, the "*Sari-Sari Story*" online comic series differs from other Filipino BL literature that traditionally lacks any sexual undertones (Abueg, 2021). Instead, KarVic's "*Ang Aklat na puro Kalat*" (The Book Full of Sensuality) is also known for containing playful puns and humor, making his works famous among its Filipino readership, especially the members of the LGBTQ+ community.

This makes KarVic's *Sari-Sari Story* particularly interesting to study. The very title contains an allusion to the Filipino term "*sari-sari*" (a small local shop that sells multiple

goods). The title may imply that a "variety" or plurality of representation is needed in the gay narratives to pave the way for increased gay visibility in the realm of digital comics.

The politics of humor

"Humor is a quintessentially social phenomenon" (Kuipers, 2008, p. 361). Humor is experienced by everyone, however, people have different responses and ideas with regard to what is humorous for them (Fluri, 2019, as cited in Bowd, 2019). Humor is both culturally and socially dependent on the individual's construction and perception (Bowd, 2019).

Humor and laughter are always associated with power, where they exist in duality as they both function: to sustain the existing hegemonic system and/or to relieve or vent the social anxieties of the marginalized (Korhonen, 2015, p. 134). In the study done by Coser (1960, as cited in Kuipers, 2008), she discovered that humor and laughter exist in a social hierarchy manner through the process of "joking down". Coser also elaborated that joking has the function of maintaining social orders by putting people "in their place" (p. 365). Also, research shows a direct relationship between social power/status and the enjoyment of uttering derogatory jokes (Knegtmans et. al., 2018). Parallel to this, "stereotypical masculinity is positively related to the enjoyment of aggressive humor while femininity is negatively related to it" (Martin et. al., 2003, as cited in Weitz & Koc, 2022).

Humor, according to Morreall (2009), can highlight the social divide present in the system: class, minority-majority groups, and other social categories that could enforce and sustain negative stereotypes that exist already in the level of social consciousness (p. 6). Howard and Hollander (1997, as cited in Mauldin, 2002) explained that "stereotypes are primarily descriptive" (p. 83). Mauldin (2002) explained that gender stereotyping is maintained in society because it is disseminated through homophobic humor done by men. He added that gay men were framed by heterosexual males for being sexually fixated (always ready to have sex wherever they are). Stereotypical humor tends to overtly impose masculine dominance of the male heterosexual in the social system (Mauldin, 2002).

As stated above, humor and laughter have a dual ability both to oppress and to provide relief. Kramer (2020) referred to this site as "subversive humor", a form of humor that emancipates minority groups from systemic oppression (p. 154). Berys Gaut (1998) posits the concept of jokes having emancipatory capabilities to "its hearers from the narrow bonds of prejudice, getting them to see a situation in a better moral light and respond

accordingly" (p. 66). There are cases where subversive humor is utilized by minority or marginalized groups by displaying the minority-majority relationship in society as a means to challenge stereotypes and prejudices present in their system (Miller et. al., 2019). Humor can elevate and depreciate one's status or social power depending on the appropriateness of their humor (Bitterly, 2022).

Understanding types of humor in conversations

Conversational humor happens in almost all everyday interactions and could take in different forms or types like wordplay, puns, teasing, and sarcasm (Norrick, 2003). According to Hadiati (2018), the categorization of humor still exists in terms of degree: high and low humor. High comedy or humor, including dark humor, usually contains the social reality issues of mankind, revolving around politics, social structures, and discrimination. Low comedy or humor, on the other hand, depicts social issues on romance, misfortune, and sex, which are usually done through slapstick or situational comedy approach (p. 2). Humor can be both intentionally or unintentionally done by a speaker in a given conversation, given that some are prepared to initiate humor in a conversation or it can be utterly done out in the open (Ibraheem & Abbas, 2019).

Puns, as defined by the Oxford Dictionary, means "the use of the word in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings, or the use of two or more words of the same sound with different meanings, to produce a humorous effect; a play on words" (Delabastita, 1993, p. 57, as cited in Ibraheem & Abbas, 2019). Puns usually happen unintentionally given that some have an "imperfect command of language" (Ibraheem & Abbas, 2019, p. 17) or could happen because of uncontrollable stuttering due to an expression of aggression, causing slips in the conversation (Kuczok et. al, 2020).

Sigmund Freud was able to make sense of accidental utterances during a conversation that whenever the '*superego*' breaks down (public face), allowing '*id*' (repressed thought) to slip in, was, therefore, gave birth to the so-called "*Freudian slips*" (Nilsen, 1998). This was further explained by Billig (2002), understanding Freud with the language of humor stating that: "Jokes, like dreams and slips of the tongue, bear the traces of repressed desires. Sexual and aggressive thoughts, which are forbidden in polite society, can be shared as if they are not serious" (p. 452). These kinds of joke are referred to as 'tendentious humor' and, for Freud, this provides an understanding of people, and their tendencies (Nilsen, 1988).

Tendencies could also be intentional just like teasing, which is not repressed unlike the '*slips*' of Freud.

Teasing, as described by Salvatore Attardo (2014), is a more aggressive form of conversational humor that could bond or break relationships because of the nature of its directiveness. However, teasing may not be intended to insult the hearer of the humor, but it depends on how the hearer perceives the conversational teasing (Gibson, 2019). Teasing could mean that the speaker and the hearer have a very close relationship; thus, teasing could symbolize a form of intimacy (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006, as cited in Dynel, 2008). However, teasing could also be sexually provocative in nature where it can be "construed as a form of flirtation, it usually involves a combination of both antagonistic and playful behavior" (Mills, 2018; Keltner et al., 1998, as cited in Meston & O'Sullivan, 2007). Freud (1960, as cited in DiCioccio, 2012) also explained that teasing can be characterized as a "hostile humor as "disguised aggressiveness"' (p. 94). Samuel Sperling (1953) explained that sexual teasing can be expressed as strip teasing or cock teaser, which are very sexual and aggressive in nature.

It is said that most conversational humors contain metaphorical expressions that could be literal or referential to another object (innuendos), which are very evident in puns and slips (Attardo, 2015). Given that in conversational humor we present or stylize ourselves towards others, it just shows that we are showing a part of our nature or behavior. It is relative to how we use metaphors where, according to Loughann and Pacilli (2014), "Sexual objectification can be meant as an attitude—a way of seeing another person as an object—and as behavior— a way of acting with another person treating her as an object" (p. 312). Metaphors were closely associated with the so-called gaze, where the gaze has the power to associate one thing with another, and the body that was perceived by the gazer becomes a material to the eye and can be reconstructed depending on the cognitive behavior of the gazer towards the object. This gaze between both males is referred to as the gay male gaze, where the body is perceived to be a sex object, a material that can be sexualized through the mind (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002, as cited in Wood, 2004, p. 49).

Maxims of conversation

According to Paul Grice (2012; 1989), both the speaker and the listener must get to understand the purpose of their discourse, including the equal contributions they make through the exchange of their dialogues the direction of the topic, and the flow of their

conversation. To ensure that there is a consistent and efficient exchange of information or flow of conversation, Grice came up with the so-called maxims of conversation which have four (4) categorical characteristics: quality, quantity, relation, and manner.

Quality pertains to the truthfulness of the information presented by the speaker. The speaker must not provide any information that is false, or they do not believe in the first place. The maxim of *Quantity* pertains to the amount and degree of information provided by the speaker. The speaker must not withhold information that is necessary to keep the conversation going; however, too much information must be avoided, bombarding the listener with unnecessary or irrelevant information in the conversation. The maxim of *Relation* pertains to the context of the conversation information that the speaker is providing, and it includes the feedback of the listener as well. With this maxim, the conversation between both the speaker and the listener must be connected based on their exchange of dialogues. Lastly, the maxim of *Manner* pertains to the way the information is delivered; message must be clearly delivered on both ends of the speaker and the listener.

In the field of pragmatics, there is a concept called 'implicature' under the study of conversational structure, where it provides context beyond the literal meaning of the speech (Levinson, 1983, as cited in Noertjahjo et al., 2017). An implicature pertains to the possible meaning created by the listener based on how the speaker delivered the information or the message (from the verb, to imply; noun, implication). According to Grice (1989), implicatures happen because of a person's non-observance of the maxims of conversations, and this non-observance can be intentional by the speaker. However, Grice further explained that there are instances when people may not observe the maxims of conversations given that they are nervous, afraid, stuttering, and such which make them flout or violate the maxims. *Flouting* and *violating* are the two most common non-observance of the maxims (Cook, 1992). *Flouting* happens when a speaker fails to observe a maxim but has no intention to deceive the hearer. This, then, creates a conversational implicature that the hearer (aware of the situation) must make sense of what the speaker has uttered (Grice, 1989). *Violation* of a maxim, unlike *flouting*, is intentionally done to mislead the hearer; so, the hearer will not try to make sense of the implicatures present in the utterance (Grice, 1989).

Methodology

This research is qualitative and descriptive in nature. According to Kamar (2005, as cited in Trinidad, 2018), qualitative research explores, describes, and/or interprets given

phenomenon or situation. This study will analyze the whole comic strips of *Sari-Sari Story* online comics in Penlab, containing the 28 episodes originally written in Filipino as of writing, to fully contextualize how humor was presented in the text, and how humor depict its gay characters based on their conversations. The primary element analyzed in the comics was the dialogue which can be identified through speech bubbles or balloons. Along with the dialogue element, the visual element will also be utilized solely as a guide in providing context for the analysis.

The conversations present in the episodes will be analyzed using Grice's (2012) pragmatic framework of conversational maxims: quality, quantity, manner, and relation. The non-observance of the maxims, flouting and violating, done by the characters during their conversation will be analyzed to identify and understand how humor was used in the comics and, especially, how humor depicted the gay characters in the whole comic series based on the humor types they have uttered and committed.

The Filipino episodes in Penlab were purposively chosen given that KarVic, as a Filipino writer and illustrator, wrote *Sari-Sari Story* online comics originally in the Filipino language to reach his Filipino readership. This corresponds to Penlab's goal to cater to Filipino creative artists, their works, and, especially, its readership—the Filipinos. The *Sari-Sari Story* comics, in this study, are referred to as visual material and categorized as a 'site' in qualitative study (Creswell, 2014). Also, Pink (2001, as cited in Creswell, 2014) explained that "creative data collection procedures that fall under the category of visual ethnography…", contain lived experiences and metaphors (Clandinin, 2007 as cited in Creswell, 2014). The visual digital document/materials, which is the *Sari-Sari Story* Filipino online comics, can be accessed and viewed publicly through Penlab.

Figure 1

Sample Episodes of Sari-Sari Story Online Comics

Findings and Discussion

From the analyzed episodes of the *Sari-Sari Story* online comics, only nine (9) episodes out of the twenty-eight (28) contained violations based on Grice's (2012) conversational maxims. However, not all episodes that contain violated maxims lead to humor. Therefore, only those episodes containing both violated maxims and humor will be presented.

Episode 1 – Kalabasa

MON	: *Mukhang masarap 'tong talong mamaya*
SEAN	: *Mas masarap yung sayo…*
SEAN	: *-te! Sayote! Mas masarap yung sayote!*
MON:	*Kalabasa yan*

The setting of this episode is inside a supermarket, where both the characters can be seen at the vegetable station of the said market. Mon and Sean can be seen interacting with each other.

There were two maxims violated and one maxim flouted in this episode: "relation", "manner", and "quality". The maxim of relation was flouted in the line "*Mas masarap yung sayo*" that was stated by Sean, showing an implicature given that the context was broken based on Mon's dialogue stating "*Mukhang masarap 'tong talong mamaya*", where Mon referred to the '*talong*' (eggplant) that he saw worth eating later that day. The implicature on the line "*Mas masarap yung sayo*" was a metaphor, associating the *talong* (eggplant) to the male private part which can be directly referred to Mon.

Along with this, Sean violated the maxim of manner where he said "*sayote*" (chayote) instead of "*sayo-*" (you), about Mon, to cover up the utterance he did. Another, the maxim of quality was violated at the same time given that Sean was holding a "*kalabasa*" (squash) and not a "*sayote*" (chayote), which directly implied wrong information because of the wrong naming of vegetables.

Episode 8 – Wax

MON	: *O, Sean nagpagupit ka ba?*
SEAN	: *Ah, hindi. Triny ko lang yung sample na wax.*

| MON | : *Bagay sayo. Cute mo lalo.* |
| ATE | : *KUYA O! MAY BASA PO DITO* |

This episode shows Sean who used a "wax" to fix his hair. But when Mon saw Sean, he thought Sean had his hair cut. Therefore, Mon complimented Sean for having great hair and that it suits him.

Three maxims were violated in this episode, and they were all committed by a single character named "ATE" (sister) because of her line:

| ATE | : *KUYA O! MAY BASA PO DITO* |

The first maxim violated was relation given that her line shouting "*KUYA O! MAY BASA PO DITO*" was not, in any sense, related to the conversation between Sean and Mon. Another violated maxim was manner, where she shouted her line to attract attention and called for maintenance because she saw something wet. Lastly, the maxim of quantity was violated given that "ATE" (sister) was not able to give context on what she was referring to be wet, and where it was located.

An implicature was present given that the context of "*basa*" (wet) may pertain to the giddy feeling expressed by Sean in the situation because he felt flattered by what Mon stated: "*Bagay sayo. Cute mo lalo*" (It suits you. You look cuter). The concept of being wet seen in this episode was a metaphorical sexual response to the excitement of the situation.

Episode 10 – Meet Dipper

ANNOUNCER	: *Say hello to our store mascot.*
	: *DIPPER!*
DIPPER	: *Ugh. Init ng mascot. Alisin ko nga muna.*
SEAN	: *Dipper,*
	Uhhh…
	May. Uhhh *gulp*
	Uhmm… May..
	Staff meeting daw.
	Punta ka mamaya.

This episode presented the new character of the story, and the store mascot–Dipper. Dipper was changing at the staff lockers when Sean went in to remind Dipper that there would be a staff meeting.

The maxim of manner was flouted in this episode, where Sean was stuttering as he called the attention of Dipper to explain that there would be a staff meeting later. The non-observance of the maxim happened the moment Sean peaked at the staff locker, where, as of the moment, Dipper was undressing the mascot suit.

Episode 11 – Shave

SEAN	: *Ayan, closed na, tara?*
MON	: *Sorry, 5 minutes mag-shave lang ako.*
SEAN	: *Ok!*
MON	: *Game, tara?*
SEAN	: *O, kala ko mag-shave ka?*
MON	: *Nag-shave nga ;)*

This episode centralized on Mon's shaving after their shift.

Two maxims were violated in this episode, and only Mon committed the said violations with his line:

MON	: *Nag-shave nga ;)*

The two maxims violated were "quantity" and "relation". Sean thought that Mon would be shaving his facial hair – beard; however, when Mon came back his facial hair was not trimmed at all. With that, Mon was not clear on the context of what he was about to shave which was a clear violation of the maxims of quantity and relation, for not providing enough context or information to the conversation.

Episode 12 – Manifesting

DIPPER	: *Kung bibigyan nyo po ako ng jowa. Gusto ko yung MABAIT, CUTE, AT MASARAP.*
DIPPER	: *BALE. Tatlo po silang lahat.*

This episode focuses on the character named "Dipper" who he was currently praying to have a partner.

In this episode, only the maxim of quantity was violated given that his prayer lacked context because the qualities he was referring to pertain to separate individuals, not to a collective characteristic of an individual. In this episode, Dipper was not clear on what he was asking for specifically on what he meant about the qualities he stated if it was for a single person or separate qualities of individuals.

Episode 13 – Hotdog

> SEAN   : *Dipper. Bilhan na kita ng lunch. Anong gusto mo? Hotdog?*
>
> DIPPER   : *Salamat! Mas gusto ko yung SAU-*
>
> DIPPER   : *- SAGE! SAUSAGE!*
>
> SEAN   : *Haha OK!!*

The context of this episode revolves on the two characters, Sean and Dipper, where Sean asks Dipper whether he wants to eat a hotdog for lunch.

Two maxims were not observed in this episode specifically in the dialogues uttered by Dipper, these were maxims of relation and manner. The non-observance of the maxims present in this episode was similar to the 1st episode titled "*Kalabasa*" (Squash), where the response of Dipper "*Salamat! Mas gusto ko yung SAU-*" can be associated with the word "*sayo*" (you) as an implicature, flouting the maxim of relation. The maxim of manner was violated because Dipper was redundant on the word "Sausage", as he tried to clarify and cover-up what he first uttered to Sean.

Just as in the 1st episode, the "sausage" here was metaphorically a signification to the male private part, which, in this situation, was about Sean. Sexualizing Sean in the situation implicitly.

Episode 14 – Pares

> MON   : *Kain muna tayo?*
>
> SEAN   : *Sige, gutom na din ako*
>
> ATE   : *DALAWANG PARES.*
>
>   *DALAWANG KANIN*

> *ANONG DRINKS?*
>
> [SEAN: *Tubig lang]*
>
> MON   : *Pineapple juice*
>
> MON   : *Dalawa na para sure*

In this episode, Mon and Sean will be eating Pares in a small eatery.

In this episode, maxims of manner and relation were violated, and can be found on the lines where both Mon and Sean were replying to the question of the saleslady of the eatery: "*ANONG DRINKS?*"

> [SEAN: *Tubig lang]*
>
> MON   : *Pineapple juice*
>
> MON   : *Dalawa na para sure*

The maxim of manner was violated because of Mon's reply "*Pineapple juice*", butting in on the conversation of Sean and the food custodian (ATE), as a replacement to the first order uttered by Sean, which was "*tubig lang*" (just water). The additional reply of Mon "*Dalawa na para sure*" (Make it two just to be sure), referring to Sean as the receiver of the beverage, contained an implicature, a metaphor, where the "pineapple juice" was an indicator that they may have sexual encounter later that day. Therefore, the maxim of relation was violated.

Episode 17 – Basang-basa sa Ulan

> SEAN   : *O, Dipper basang-basa ka*
>
> DIPPER   : *Inabutan ako ng ulan, basa pati sa loob ng mascot.*
>
> SEAN   : *Sige. Magpatuyo ka muna sa lockers.*
>
> DIPPER   : *Sige.*
>
> SEAN   : *Ito, dinalahan kita ng MA-*
>
> *- LAKING*
>
> *T-……*
>
> **gulp**
>
> *T…. towel*

This episode centralizes on the event where Sean found Dipper soaking wet because of the rain and offered Dipper assistance to dry out.

Only the maxim of manner was violated in this episode, where Sean was stuttering. With this, he kept on repeating the letter "T" that he unknowingly was stating the word "*titi*" (penis), male reproductive organ, as he handover the towel to Dipper. So, to cover up his utterance, he stated the word "towel" as the complementary term to what he was referring to as "*malaki*" (huge).

Episode 23 – VC

> SEAN   : *Gusto ko mag SUC-*
>   *- CEED in life.*
>   *Ay? Na-disconnect pala ako.*

This episode shows Sean's phone call conversation with Mon.

Sean unintentionally violated the maxims of relation and quantity when his phone lost its Wi-Fi connection during a conversation with Mon. The disruption occurred just as Sean was expressing his aspirations with the phrase "Gusto ko mag SUCCEED in life" (I wish to succeed in life), resulting in the Wi-Fi disconnection cutting off his statement at "Gusto ko mag SUC-". This interruption created an implicature, suggesting the word "suck" instead of "succeed" due to the truncated sound of "SUC-". The simultaneous breach of the maxims of relation and quantity, caused by the Wi-Fi connectivity issue, led to a humorous play on words that might have amused both readers and Mon. Consequently, the misinterpretation could have given the impression that Sean was engaging in a flirtatious or suggestive conversation with Mon over the phone.

Humor depicted by the characters

The Freudian slips, which were also associated with the puns, were committed solely by two characters of the comics, Sean and Dipper. The Freudian slips can be seen in four episodes: episode 1 "*Kalabasa*" (Squash), episode 10 "Meet Dipper", episode 13 "Hotdog", and episode 17 "*Basang-basa sa Ulan*" (Soaking wet because of the rain), which depict the suppressed nature or behavior of the characters toward the other characters they are conversing within the comics. The slips were relatively associated with flouting the maxims of relation and manner, which means that the speaker accidentally or unintentionally committed an implicature because of stuttering, being surprised, or excited (Ibraheem & Abbas, 2019; Kuczok et. al, 2020).

On the other end, Mon is depicted to have a hypersexual nature which can be seen in two episodes: episode 11 "Shave", and episode 14 "*Pares*" (Beef Stew), for sexually teasing Sean in their conversation. Mon violated the maxims of relation, quantity, and manner given that most of the implicatures were born out of context, and were all associated with sexual preparation and aggression.

Other than what was already stated about Dipper, in episode 12 "Manifesting", Dipper was shown to be polyamorous because he prayed to have a partner by stating three qualities; however, these qualities are not attribute to a single person but rather to three separate individuals. In the said episode, Dipper did not provide enough context, which was a clear violation of the maxim of quantity.

Implicatures: Sexual metaphors present in the sari-sari story comics

Sexual puns and metaphors were evident in the *Sari-Sari Story* online comics, where the implicatures containing metaphorical meanings were associated with objects like "*talong*" (eggplant) (Santos et al., 2017), "hotdog" (Tampos-Villadolid & Santos, 2019), and "sausage" (Mastellari, 2022; see also Cameron, 1992; Gilula, 1995) as a signification of the male reproductive system, "*titi*" or "*ari*" in Filipino, penis in English, and to sexual activity due to the unintentional truncation of sound. The metaphorical signification shows that the fantasizer (gazer), which in our case is the speaker, craves physical contact with the hearer (object) of the conversation (Santos et al., 2017), and mostly connotes fellatio activity, such as licking and sucking (Cameron, 1992). Another, the "pineapple" beverage, which was present in episode 14, was an implicature connoting a preparation for sexual engagement between Sean and Mon to improve the quality of semen and performance (see Zdrojewicz et al., 2018).

Sari-sari story as BL

It can be said that the *Sari-Sari Story* online comics, despite being a *Pinoy* BL, was not transformative in terms of providing diverse and positive portrayals or representation of its queer characters. The *Sari-Sari Story* delves out of the *Pinoy* BL culture that was being developed by the early setters, such as Juan Miguel Severo and Petersen Vargas in their films *Gaya sa Pelikula* (Just Like in the Movies) and *Hello Stranger* respectively, providing diverse representations and realistic narratives or struggles of the queer community that would pave ways and means of acceptance in the Philippine society through the use of media.

The said comics, being one of the first BL comics to be produced and distributed in the online media platform of Penlab, may have created an attempt to provide an avenue of queer representation in the digital comics sphere.

With this, the *Sari-Sari Story* online comics may have provided presence of gayness through its characters in the storyline, specifically to its main characters; however, its depiction of gayness was not diverse enough to adhere to its title "*sari-sari*" (variety) in nature. The story of the comics revolving on its three main gay characters, Sean, Mon, and Dipper, were stereotypically portrayed to be hypersexual gays, presenting negative stereotypes towards the gay community. This, then, shows that the *Sari-Sari Story* online comics subscribe to the Japanese traditional boys' love-themed manga or comics text under the category of "*yaoi*", depicting stories that delve into homoeroticism, hypersexuality, and fetishism of the male characters (Grady, 2018; Welker, 2015) or the queer relationships (Brownworth, 2010; Ketaki, 2022).

Conclusion

The analysis, presented in this research, has shown how humor was applied in the *Sari-Sari Story* online comics, and how humor portrayed the gay main characters in the comics. There were intentional and unintentional humor present in the comic strips, which are all caused by flouting or violating the conversational maxim(s) of Grice. The study found that Freudian slip was the most prominent type of humor utilized in the comics, where the slips were also associated with the unconscious creation of sexual puns. This, then, entails that the gay characters who committed Freudian slips of humor have repressed sexual desires towards the other characters they are conversing with. This is followed by teasing, where one character, Mon, creates intentional humor through implicatures having contexts of sexual preparation and aggression towards Sean. May it be intentional or unintentional, the humors present in the comics portray the gay main characters as having hypersexual tendencies or nature and, one, willing to engage in a polyamorous relationship.

The *Sari-Sari Story* online comics having a BL theme may have provided presence to its gay characters, especially for being its main characters in the comics. However, it is a must to highlight the word "presence" given that the comics portrayed negative stereotypes towards its gay characters, which were all evident based on the humor presented in the comics. Therefore, *Sari-Sari Story* online comics still follow the traditional BL given that the

comics did not subscribe to the culture of *Pinoy* boys' love, presenting transformative narratives and representation of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Limitations and Recommendations of the Study

Further study can be done by analyzing the other forms and types of comic strips (paratexts) that can be found on the Facebook page, X page/account (formerly known as Twitter), the Webtoon English translated episodes, and the *Sari-Sari Story* comic book—to holistically understand how humor was applied and how humor depicted the gay characters in the comics. Given the limitations of Grice's pragmatic framework on conversational maxims in analyzing humor on how humor gendered and portrayed the gay characters in the *Sari-Sari Story* comics, future researchers may consider the frameworks of Erving Goffman's (1959) *Gender as a Performance* and Judith Butler's (1990) *Gender Performativity* by analyzing both visual and textual elements present in the comics. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MDA) may also be used by future researchers in analyzing the comics given that discourses could be performed and seen in visual images.

Also, the BL genre and culture have undergone so many transformative changes from a genre made by and for women into a genre that advocates equality and resistance towards the hegemonic norms of the patriarchal society. Therefore, exploring the production and consumption process of the genre by and for the LGBTQIA+ community is highly recommended.

Both comics and humor are underexplored fields, they both have huge terrains and domains to explore; especially, on the critical traditional side of human communication with the means to represent, emancipate, and/or suppress people or certain communities.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Kyle Patrick De Guzman is the newly appointed program chair for education and liberal arts at Our Lady of Perpetual Succor College (OLOPSC). Currently, he is a graduate student in the Communication program of the Institute of Arts and Sciences at Far Eastern University, Manila, and is simultaneously the president of the Graduate Studies Student Council. His research interests include gender and inclusivity studies, queer representation studies, spatial studies, and behavior change communication.

References

Abueg, L. (2021). What can gender economics learn from the Pinoy BL genre of the COVID-19 pandemic? *Review of Women's Studies, 31*(1), 35-62.

Antonio, J. (2021, February 26). '*Reclaiming our narrative': BL genre opens up avenues for queer representation in PH media*. ABS-CBN News. https://news.abs-cbn.com/life/02/26/21/reclaiming-our-narrative-bl-genre-opens-up-avenues-for-queer-representation-in-ph-media

Attardo, S. (2014). *Encyclopedia of humor studies.* Sage Publication.

Attardo, S. (2015). 5. Humorous Metaphors. In G. Brône, K. Feyaerts, & T. Veale (Ed.), *Cognitive Linguistics and Humor Research* (pp. 91-110). De Gruyter Mouton. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110346343-005

Billig, M. (2002). Freud and the language of humour. *The Psychologist, 15*(9), 452-455.

Bitterly, T. B. (2022). Humor and power. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 43*, 125–128. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.06.017

Blum, L. (2004). Stereotypes and stereotyping: A moral analysis. *Philosophical Papers, 33(3), 251-289.*

Bowd, J. (2019). *Laughter for development: An explorative study into humor's potential role in stereotypical representation*. (Dissertation). https://www.diva-portal.org/ smash/ get/diva2:1481863/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Brownworth, V. (2010). *The fetishizing of queer sexuality: A response*. Lambda Literary. https://lambdaliterary.org/2010/08/the-fetishizing-of-queer-sexuality-a-response/

Cameron, D. (1992). Naming of parts: Gender, culture, and terms for the penis among American college students. *American Speech, 67*(4), 367-382. https://doi.org/10.2307/455846

Casal, C. (2020, July 1). *Director Petersen Vargas wants to redefine BL for Filipinos*. CNN Philippines Life. https://www.cnnphilippines.com/life/culture/Creatives-Questionnaire/2020/7/1/petersen-vargas.html

Celso, P. E. (2020). [OPINION] *Pinoy BL, censorship, and problematic LGBTQ+ representation.* Rappler. https://www.rappler.com/moveph/265904-opinion-pinoy-boys-love-censorship-problematic-lgbtq-representation/

Cook, G. (1992). *Discourse: Language teaching*. Oxford University Press.

Creswell, J. W. (2014) *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.* Sage Publication.

Cruz, M. (2021, December 9). *Pinoy Boys' Love: A rising phenomenon in time of COVID-19 explained.* Inquirer.net. https://entertainment.inquirer.net/429257/pinoy-boys-love-a-rising-phenomenon-in-time-of-covid-19-explained#ixzz7j2i0ul7v

dela Cruz, E. J. (2022). Raikantopinoy: Glocalization of the Boys' Love genre in the Philippines. *Southeast Asian Media Studies Journal, 4*(1), 77-98.

Dynel, M. (2008). No aggression, only teasing: The pragmatics of teasing and banter. *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics, 4*(2), 241-261. https://doi.org/10.2478/v10016-008-0001-7

Gaut, B. (1998). Just joking: the ethics and aesthetics of humor. *Philosophy and Literature, 22*(1), 51-68. https://doi.org/10.1353/phl.1998.0014

Gilula, D. (1995). Food: An effective tool of amatory persuasion. *Athenaeum, 83*, 143-156.

Gines, A. (2020, December 4). Boys' love in the Philippines: An evolving phenomenon. *UPLB Perspective*. https://uplbperspective.org/2020/12/04/boys-love-in-the-philippines-an-evolving-phenomenon/

DiCioccio, R. L. (2012). Humor as aggressive communication. In R.L. DiCioccio (Ed.) *Humor communication: Theory, impact, and outcomes.* (pp. 93-108). Kendall Hunt Publishing.

Gibson, J. M. (2019). *An introduction to the psychology of humor.* Routledge.

Grice H. P. (2012). Implicature. In Archer, Aijmer, & Wichmann (Eds.), *Pragmatics: An advanced resource book for students* (pp. 47-61). Routledge.

Grice, H, P. (1989). *Studies in the way of words*. Harvard University Press.

Ibraheem, S. D., & Abbas, N. F. (2019). Pun and (un)intentional humor. *Journal of American Academic Research,* 1-14.

Ketaki. (2022, June 1). *Boys' love : The curious case of queer romance and representation.* Ground Report. https://groundreport.in/boys-love-the-curious-case-of-queer-romance-and-representation/

Kimie, I. (2020, September 24). *The evolution of "Boys' Love" culture: Can BL spark social change?* Nippon. https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/d00607/

Korhonen, A. (2015). Laughter, sex, and violence: constructing gender in early modern English Jestbooks. In A. Foka & J. Liliequist (Eds.) *Laughter, humor, and the (un)making of gender: Historical and cultural perspectives.* (pp. 133-149).

Kuczok, M., Stwora, A., & Swierkot, M. (2020). Introduction to explorations in humor studies: Humor research project. In M. Kuczok, A. Stwora & M. Swierkot (Eds.) *Explorations in humor studies: Humor research project* (pp. 1-15). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Kuipers, G. (2008). The sociology of humor. In V. Raskin (Ed.) *The primer of humor research.* (pp. 361-397).

Knegtmans, H., Van, D., Van, L., Rintjema, S., Wassink, A., & Mooijman, M. (2018). The impact of social power on the evaluation of offensive jokes. *Humor, 31*(1), 85-104. https://doi.org/10.1515/humor-2017-0106

Kramer, C. A. (2020). Subversive humor as art and the art of subversive humor. *The philosophy of humor yearbook.* https://doi.org/10.1515/phhumyb-2020-0012

Loughann, S., & Pacilli, M. G. (2014). Seeing (and treating) others as sexual objects: Toward a more complete mapping of sexual objectification. *Testing, Psychometrics, Methodology in Applied Psychology, 21*(3), 309-325. https://doi.org/10.4473/TPM21.3.6

Mastellari, V. (2022). Food and parties: Seduction, erotic and sexual metaphors in Greek comic fragments. In C. Soares, & C. Ribeiro (Eds). *Mesas luso-brasileiras alimentação, saúde and cultura* (Vol. 2). (pp. 23-34).

McLelland, M., & Walker, J. (2015). An introduction to "Boys Love" in Japan. In M. McLelland, K. Nagaike, K. Suganuma, & J. Welker (Eds.) *Boys Love manga and beyond: History, culture, and community in Japan* (pp. 3-20). University Press of Mississippi.

Meston, C. M., & O'Sullivan, L. F. (2007). Such a tease: Intentional sexual provocation within heterosexual interactions. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 36,* 531-542. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-006-9167-7

Miller, S. S., O'Dea, C. J., Lawless, T. J., & Saucier, D. A. (2019). Savage or satire: Individual differences in perceptions of disparaging and subversive racial humor. *Personality and Individual Differences, 142*, 28–41. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2019.01.029

Mills, C. B. (2018). Child's play or risky business? The development of teasing functions and relational implications in school-aged children. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 35*(3), 287–306. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407516683557

Mizoguchi, A. (2022, May 13). Theorizing BL ("Boys' Love") as a transformative genre: Women's pleasurable discursive space with feminist and queer potential. In *Boys' Love: The history and transformation of BL in Asia* [Panel Discussion]. The Japan Foundation, New York. https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=JFPIMjr-w8g&ab_channel=TheJapanFoundation%2CNewYork

Mizoguchi, A. (2010). Theorizing comics/manga genre as a productive forum: Yaoi and beyond. In J. Berndt (Eds.). *Comics worlds and the world of comics: Towards scholarship on a global scale* (pp. 145-168).

Mizoguchi, A. (2008). Representation, reception, and the matter of qualification: Or struggles towards female subjects of *yaoi* representation. In *Reading and living yaoi: Male-Male fantasy narratives as women's sexual subculture in Japan.* (pp. 180-181).

Morreall, J. (2009). *Comic relief: A comprehensive philosophy of humor*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Nilsen, D. (1988). The importance of tendency: An extension of Freud's concept of tendentious humor. *Humor, 1*(4), 335-347.

Noertjahjo, E., Arifin, M. B., & Ariani, S. (2017). Analysis of flouting and violating towards maxim of quality in my sister's keeper novel. *Ilmu Budaya*, *1*(3), 193–206.

Norrick, N. R. (2003). Issues in conversational joking. *Journal of Pragmatics (35),* 1333–1359. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(02)00180-7.

Pamitan, G., Amado, C., Amante, V., & Demeterio, F. (2017). Kaloka, Keri, Bongga: Pakahulugan at pahiwatig ng gay language sa mga piling pelikula ni Vice Ganda. *Plaridel*, *14*(1), 95–124. https://doi.org/10.52518/2017.14.1-06dmpmvi

Rohrs, L. (2019). The homosexual male gaze: Normalizing homosexuality through the use of heteronormative narrative techniques in film. *CINEJ Cinema Journal, 7*(2), 5–22. https://doi.org/10.5195/cinej.2019.177

Sanchez, L. J. (2022). Ang Boys' Love bilang papausbong na Telebiswalidad. *Akda: The Asian Journal of Literature, Culture, Performance, 1*(3), 59-67. https://www.dlsu.edu.ph/research/publishing-house/journals/akda/articles/boys-love-telebiswalidad/

Santos, K. M. (2022, May 13). BL in the Philippines. In *Boys' Love: The history and transformation of BL in Asia* [Video, Panel Discussion]. The Japan Foundation, New York. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFPIMjr-w8g&ab_channel=TheJapanFoundation%2CNewYork

Santos, R., Jacob, R., & Sumayo, R. (2017). Eroticism & queer attraction: A grounded theory. *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, *5*(3), 22-35.

Sperling, S. J. (1953). On the Psychodynamics of Teasing. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, *1*(3), 458-483. https://doi.org/10.1177/000306515300100304

Tampos-Villadolid, M. , & Santos, A. (2019). Euphemisms for taboo words: Iliganon's sociolinguistical approach for social harmony. *Journal of Education & Social Policy*, *6*(4), 50-57. https//doi.org/10.30845/jesp.v6n4p7

Trinidad, J. E. (2018). *Researching Philippine realities: A guide to qualitative, quantitative, and humanistic research.* Bluebooks.

Victoriano, K. E. [@karvic]. (2022, June 8). *Booking Reveal!!! Ay Book Reveal pala! My online comic "Sari Sari Story" is now published as a Book!!! Book1 Compilation* [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/ p/CeiKnpQLqgj/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

Weitz, B. & Koc, Y. (2020). The effect of relational status on perceptions of gay disparaging humor. *Current Psychology.* https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-03712-9

Why gay actors won't pursue gay roles in PH: BL project opens eyes of writer Juan Miguel Severo. (2020, June 16). ABS-CBN News. https://news.abs-cbn.com/entertainment/06/16/20/why-gay-actors-wont-pursue-gay-roles-in-ph-bl-project-opens-eyes-of-writer-juan-miguel-severo

Wood, M. J. (2004). The gay male gaze. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services, 17*(2), 43–62. https://doi.org/10.1300/j041v17n02_03

Yap, J. (2020, December 18). *Pinoy komikeros are building an online home at Penlab*. GMA News Online. https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/lifestyle/hobbiesandactivities/768535/pinoy-komikeros-are-building-an-online-home-at-penlab/story/

Zdrojewicz, Z., Chorbińska, J., Bieżyński, B., & Krajewski, P. (2018). Health-promoting properties of pineapple. *Pediatria i Medycyna Rodzinna, 14*(12), 133-142. https://doi.org/ 10.15557/PiMR.2018.0013

Zsila, A., & Demetrovics, Z. (2017). The boys' love phenomenon: A literature review. *Journal of Popular Romance Studies,* 8-9. https://www.jprstudies.org/2017/04/the-boys-love-phenomenon-a-literature-reviewby-agnes-zsila-and-zsolt-demetrovics/