

# Universal Signals of Humor in the Live Adaptation and Cartoon of Mr. Bean

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## Abstract

This study aims to examine the universal humor signals in the *Mr. Bean* series, both in the live-action and cartoon versions. The main focus of this research is how humor is conveyed through non-verbal communication such as facial expressions, body movements, and comical situations without dialogue. This research employs a qualitative descriptive method with a semiotic approach and uses encryption and relevance theories as the analytical framework. The data were taken from selected episodes in both versions and analyzed using Spradley's four-stage analysis: domain, taxonomy, componential, and cultural theme. The results of this study show that both versions rely on non-verbal humor signals, but with different approaches. The live-action version tends to display a more realistic style and subtler expressions, while the cartoon version uses exaggerated movements and expressions. These stylistic differences show that the visual medium affects how humor is delivered. Nevertheless, both formats remain widely accessible due to their use of humor signals that are understandable across cultures and languages.

**Keywords:** Mr. Bean; Humor Signals; Non-Verbal Communication; Encryption; Relevance.

## Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji sinyal humor yang bersifat universal dalam serial *Mr. Bean*, baik dalam versi live-action maupun kartun. Fokus utama penelitian ini adalah bagaimana humor disampaikan melalui komunikasi non-verbal seperti ekspresi wajah, gerakan tubuh, dan situasi-situasi lucu tanpa dialog. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan semiotika, serta menggunakan teori enkripsi dan relevansi sebagai landasan analisis. Data diambil dari beberapa episode pilihan pada kedua versi, dan dianalisis menggunakan empat tahap analisis Spradley, yaitu domain, taksonomi, komponen, dan tema kultural. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa kedua versi sama-sama mengandalkan sinyal humor non-verbal, tetapi dengan pendekatan berbeda. Versi live-action cenderung menampilkan gaya yang realistis dan ekspresi yang lebih halus, sedangkan versi kartun menampilkan gerakan yang lebih berlebihan dan lebih ekspresif. Perbedaan gaya ini menunjukkan bahwa medium visual berpengaruh terhadap bentuk penyampaian humor. Namun, keduanya tetap dapat dinikmati secara luas karena menggunakan sinyal humor yang dapat dipahami lintas budaya dan bahasa.

**Kata Kunci:** *Mr. Bean*; Sinyal Humor; Komunikasi Non-Verbal; Enkripsi; Relevansi.

## INTRODUCTION

Rowan Atkinson's portrayal of Mr. Bean, a figure renowned for his nonverbal physical and visual humor, has made him a global comic star. His ability to communicate comedic situations without spoken dialogue makes his humor easily accessible to people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This reflects what scholars call universal signals of humor nonverbal cues such as exaggerated facial expressions, gestures, and physical absurdities that transcend verbal language (Flamson & Bryant, 2013; Savage et al., 2017). These signals are termed universal because they rely on

shared human experiences like surprise, awkwardness, or confusion, which can be understood regardless of cultural context.

A number of classic theories of humor allow a deeper comprehension of the functioning of Mr. Bean. In this perspective, the Incongruity Theory-in its most updated version by Morreall 1983- states that humor is created through violations of expectations, one of the basic techniques in Mr. Bean's skits where the ridiculous is made possible by ordinary activities turning into bizarre situations. The Relief Theory, originally presented by Freud, qualifies humor as a release of psychological tension that is mostly felt in Mr. Bean's socially awkward encounters. Furthermore, Superiority Theory (Hobbes in Berger 1997) is based on the idea that humor appears out of observing someone else's mistakes which fits the description of Mr. Bean's constant buffoonery and clumsiness.



Figure 1. Mr Bean's MASSIVE Turkey!, Romantic THANKSGIVING DINNER  
(Youtube Mr.Bean Official)

For example, in an iconic live episode, Mr. Bean gets his head stuck in a turkey while preparing Christmas dinner. His over-the-top expressions and movements create a moment of physical comedy that is inherently funny without dialogue. The animated episode basically runs with the same cooking disaster; however, instead of a turkey, it features a pigeon that gets inflated and flies away after Mr. Bean mistakes it for a turkey. The cartoon exaggerates and uses visual gags to show a very different medium translation of the same comic concept. The cartoon puts the emphasis on slapstick and surrealism, while the live-action relies on believable reactions and timing.

While both versions retain the basic essence of Mr. Bean's humor through universal signals, they have each adapted differently to their modes. The live-action series is more subtler regarding gestures and expressions, which makes it apt and appropriate for adult audiences. On the other hand, the cartoon does this with greater exaggeration of visual effects, reaching towards youths more. This paper explores how these signals operate across both formats and seeks an answer to the query: How do the live-action and cartoon series of Mr. Bean deliver universal signals of humor?

Previous studies on non-verbal humor have proposed subjects such as nonverbal cues (Nurhidayanto, 2024), role emphasis in humor snippets (Nurhidayanto, 2023), and silent characters (Shoukat, 2019) media learning (Rulia and Al-Hafizh, 2014) humor as a medium of entertainment (Akanmu, 2023) humor as a central aspect of expressive culture (Candria, 2023), to existentialism (Varghese, 2022). Previous studies left a gap in the discussion of signals of humor. The existence of both live-action and cartoon versions of the Mr. Bean series allows for distinct signals of humor, attributable to the differing platforms on which they are presented. This article focuses on signals of humor and the difference in live adaptation with the cartoon of Mr.Bean. We formulate the question of this study: How do the live-action and cartoon series of Mr. Bean deliver signals of humor?

Equally important in this context, the theory of humor encodings espoused by Flamson and Bryant (2013) proposes that humor operates as a communicative mechanism of encryption, whereby speaker-listener implicit meanings are construed. This theory is essential for interpretation of how visual and situational cues in Mr Bean affect humor-by which indeed, comprehension without much explicit reference is required.

Flamson (2008) proposes the concept of a "signal of humor" suggesting that humor and laughter act as subtle indicators of shared knowledge conveyed through intentional and often

disguised humor. These signals play a crucial role in various social interactions such as cooperation, mate choice, and the creation of a societal setting by indicating a common understanding on the part of individuals. According to him, signals of humor serve several key social functions. First, it may foster cooperation by indicating an inclination toward positive mutual benefit. With regard to mating strategies, sense of humor is often synonymous with intelligence and creativity, which are traits that can increase mating value. That laughter can also be uniting power is somewhat obvious since it binds individuals into a group and makes them feel a part of something shared, hence assisting in group formation and bonding (Savage et al., 2017). It may also be defused in tensions as well as conflict resolutions without aggression included. Lastly, a person who is good in making and understanding humor usually signals increasing social status or prestige, hence showing the importance of an individual in social hierarchies. In summary, it is one of the major constituents shaping relationships and social interactions.

Flamson (2008) concludes that humor could be viewed through various signals which perform functions like ones to maintain the social connections, reduce tensions, or even capturing ideas verily in a humorous way. Play signals use fun parts with language as word play or irony to create some relaxed atmosphere thereby also bonding socially. Incongruity uses surprise elements or contradictory evidence with humorous intention. Tension relief signals-theart of sarcasm-self-deprecating to relieve awkwardness in such situations Helps-seventh signals relate inside jokes or cultural references that show belonging, such as membership in particular groups. Four real signals are intellectual with his humor-involving much complex ideas such as satire and on intellectual grounds appeals. Finally, teasing signals are friendly light teasing, which helps facilitate connections and intimacy by friendly humor. These signals typically span various contexts to help maintain social ties and effectively convey messages through laughter.






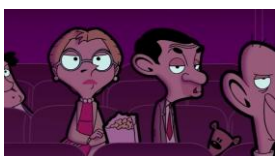






Some studies have shown that comedy films are the most popular produced films in Indonesia and they also have some importance in the history of cinema. From a film practitioner's point of view, comedy films are chosen due to their high-profit potential and relatively low production costs. Analysis of comedy film synopses identified that verbal comedy is the most dominant type, with 241 film titles (46%) in the period 1950-2017. This finding suggests that "verbal comedy becomes a social representation of Indonesian society where physical, sexual innuendos that demean others become potential joke material in people's daily lives" (Briandana & Dwityas, 2018). Correspondingly, another study highlighted humor strategies in improvisational theater fiction, which also provided new insights into the characteristics of humor in social contexts. In improvisational theater fiction, humor serves as a tool to create dynamic interactions between performers and the audience. The three main humor strategies identified are metafictional frame breaking, which creates surprising moments of humor by disrupting audience expectations; unforced humor, which arises naturally in the interaction and creates authenticity and spontaneity; and co-construction of humor exchanges, where collaboration between performers results in mutually supportive humor situations. As Landert (2021) explains, "These humor strategies are strongly linked to the communicative framework that distinguishes improvisational theatrical fiction from programmatic fiction, reflecting the unique dynamics of direct communication between performers and audience and the simultaneous process of text creation." Thus, both comedy films in Indonesia and improvised theater fiction show how humor can serve as a tool to reflect and shape social reality. Both are not only entertaining but also offer significant social commentary through the diverse use of humor. Well to say in context it makes humor turn out a bridge from the immediate experience of audience into external social problems and strengthens our understanding of the workings of social interaction and it intensifies the very work of culture in everyday lives.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach that combines visual and textual analysis. The data consist of selected scenes from both the live-action and animated versions of *Mr.*

*Bean*, focusing on how humor is conveyed through non-verbal expressions and supporting dialogue. The analysis covers five pairs of episodes/scenes with similar themes or situations: (1) *Mr. Bean Goes to Town* and *Mr. Bean The Wildlife Photographer!*, (2) *Bean Returns to School* and *Mr. Bean Becomes a Teacher!*, (3) *At the Cinema* and *Hot Date*, (4) *Goldfish in Mr. Bean's Mouth* and *Goldfish!*, and (5) *The Trouble with Mr. Bean (Dentist Scene)* and *Dentist*. The scenes were chosen for the enormous degree of physical and nonverbal humor they espouse and their similar storylines to therefore afford a meaningful comparative analysis.

Table 1. Comparison of Live-Action and Cartoon Mr. Bean Episodes Based on Similar Story Themes

Episode & Name Film	Live-Action	Cartoon
Mr.Bean Goes to Town & Mr.Bean The Wildlife Photographer!		
Bean Returns To School & Mr.Bean Becomes a Teacher!		
At the Cinema & Hot date		
Goldfish in Mr.Bean's Mouth & Goldfish!		
The Trouble with Mr.Bean & Dentist		
The Trouble with Mr.Bean & Dentist		

The research is executed using Spradley's (2016) four phases of analysis, namely domain analysis, taxonomy analysis, componential analysis, and cultural theme analysis. Domain analysis identifies types of humor signals based on Flansburg's (2008) theory of humor signals. Taxonomy analysis involves categorizing the types of human-animal-object humor interactions. Componential analysis examines the precise differences between the humor styles found in the live-action version

and the animated version, while cultural theme analysis deals with the general and universal appeal of Mr. Bean's humor and the cross-cultural impulse behind it. This affords an insight into how humor works in various situations and presents the distinguishing characteristics incorporated in both formats.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research suggests that humor represents a complex matrix of social communication that connects persons together, evokes relief from psychological stress, and improves group dynamics through intricate psychological and physiological effects (Savage et al, 2017). In this regard, humor consists of two essential elements its encoding (Flamson & Barret, 2008) and relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). Encoding refers to the intentional gesture of humor for the purpose of communicating some information from the senders to the receiver; instead, relevance refers to the common context and knowledge through which the two individuals would be able to understand each other's humor and appreciate it. An example of such an idea is displayed in Rowan Atkinson's Mr. Bean-the whole work is built around facial expression, gestures, and sound effects-the very nonverbal media for this concept. This paper will address all these features in live-action and cartoon worlds respectively and respective communication theory humor.

### Facial Expressions

Facial expressions refers to the spontaneous expression that appears on a person's face as a manifestation of their state (Buck et al., 1972,). Facial expressions are one of the most effective non-verbal signals in conveying emotions and conveying humor. The live-action version features Rowan Atkinson's very realistic and detailed facial expressions, able to express a variety of emotions ranging from confusion, shock, to disgust in even simple situations. This is in accordance with Fatima (2015) who asserts that non-verbal elements such as facial expressions enrich communication and enable deeper communication between individuals. Meanwhile, the cartoon version uses exaggerated and dramatic expressions to emphasize the comedic condition, making it highly recognizable especially to children audiences who like a more surreal and explosive visual style. These exaggerated facial expressions allow the cartoon to extend its humorous reach to younger audiences and reinforce the instant sense of humor. However, the core humor of these facial expressions retains the principle of encryption where the signals require a shared non-verbal code understanding between sender and receiver (Flamson & Barret, 2008).

Table 2. Facial Expressions as Humor Signals in Live-Action and Cartoon Mr. Bean Scenes

Live Action	Cartoon
	
In this scene, it shows Mr. Bean having a dinner with his girlfriend, Irma. Irma is seen showing an expression of annoyance as she assumes that	In this scene, it shows Mr. Bean having a picnic with his girlfriend, Irma. Irma is seen showing an expression of annoyance as she assumes that Mr.





Mr. Bean is about to give her a ring, but it turns out to be a picture frame keychain instead. This is categorized as a form of facial expression based on the Encryption theory and Relevance theory, as it conveys humor to the audience through facial expressions.

Bean is about to give her a ring, but it turns out to be a candy instead. This is categorized as a form of facial expression based on the Encryption theory and Relevance theory, as it conveys humor to the audience through facial expressions.

### Body Movements

Body movement is another aspect of non-verbal communication that is important in conveying Mr. Bean's humor. In the live-action version, body movements are natural, realistic and subtle, reflecting Mr. Bean's awkward and quirky behavior when he faces everyday situations. His sometimes slow, clumsy and unusual movements create situational humor that is highly relatable to adult audiences who appreciate social nuance and depth (Flamson & Barret, 2008). In contrast, the cartoon version uses exaggerated and sometimes unrealistic body movements, with fast and slapstick movements to bring the character of Mr. Bean to life in a fantastical animated form. This approach prioritizes visuals and humor effects that are simpler in nature and easily captured by a child audience that enjoys explicit movement and humor and vivid images. This is in line with relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) which places context and audience as the main determinants of humor effectiveness.

Table 3. Body Movements as a Medium of Non-Verbal Humor in Live-Action and Cartoon Mr. Bean



Live Action	Cartoon
	
In this scene, it shows Mr. Bean playing golf in a park. The scene shows Mr. Bean bending down and attempting to pick up a golf ball lying on the grass, intending to put it into the hole. This falls under the category of body movement according to the theories of encryption and relevancy, as the scene is conveyed through gestures and body positioning rather than through spoken words.	In this scene, it shows a moment where Mr. Bean is playing golf inside his room. In this particular scene, Mr. Bean is shown bending over and attempting to retrieve a golf ball on the floor that cannot go into the hole because the floor has no opening. This action falls under the category of body movement according to the theories of encryption and relevancy, as the scene is conveyed through gestures and body positioning rather than spoken words.

### Sound Effect

Sound effects provide an additional dimension to strengthen the communication of humor. In the live-action version, sound effects are realistic and supportive, such as reaction sounds, object sounds, and Mr. Bean's spontaneous voices that add depth and make the humor feel more authentic and integrated into the situation (Nurhidayanto, 2024). For example, the sound of surprise or Mr. Bean's distinctive voice when interacting with the environment enriches the non-verbal messages

conveyed. In contrast, in the cartoon version, the sound effects are exaggerated with a dramatic and humorous tone to emphasize the slapstick element and visual imagination. This makes it easy for young audiences to immediately associate the sound with humor and certain feelings, reinforcing the message quickly and effectively. This use of exaggerated sound effects is actually a form of encryption of humor in the audio medium that must be interpreted by the audience in order to get the effect of laughter (Flamson & Barret, 2008).

Table 4. Sound Effects as Reinforcement of Situational Humor in Live-Action and Cartoon Mr. Bean

Live Action	Cartoon
	
<p>In this scene, it shows Mr. Bean painting his room. It can be seen that Mr. Bean attempts to paint the walls of his room using a firecracker to explode the paint, which results in a loud explosion sound. This falls under the category of sound effects according to the theory of encryption and the theory of relevancy, as it emphasizes the use of sound effects to help the audience immediately associate the sound with humor and certain emotions.</p>	<p>In this scene, it depicts Mr. Bean painting his room. It can be observed that Mr. Bean is attempting to paint the walls of his room, which produces the sound of a wall being painted. This falls under the category of sound effects based on the encryption theory and the relevance theory, as it emphasizes the element of sound effects, thereby allowing the audience to easily associate the sound with humor and certain emotions.</p>

The discussion above reinforces the idea that Mr. Bean's humor is a clear example of humor as a complex and multi-faceted non-verbal communication (Savage et al., 2017). The concept of encryption according to Flamson & Barret (2008) is apparent where humor is conveyed through non-verbal codes in the form of expressions, movements, and sounds that require a decoding process from the audience to be understood and enjoyed. For example, in an iconic scene, Mr. Bean attempts to dine at a fancy restaurant but ends up in a mess by using his hands instead of cutlery, leading to a series of exaggerated facial expressions and comedic mistakes that resonate universally. This shows how humor can be a form of communication laden with social and psychological meaning without having to use words. Relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) is also manifested in how effective humor relies on the similarity of context and information between the comedian and the audience. Mr. Bean brings up universal and relatable everyday situations, ranging from social interactions to daily activities, thus building a close emotional connection between the characters and audiences from different cultures (Sartika & Pranoto, 2021). Regarding the cultural dimension, although non-verbal signals have the potential to become a universal language of humor, the perception and acceptance of humor is still influenced by the norms and values of each culture. For example, Western cultures are more inclusive and positive towards humor integrated in social interactions; for example, in a

memorable scene, Mr. Bean's clumsy attempt to impress a woman in a park leads to a series of humorous misunderstandings that reflect a deeper national attitude and spirit (Bradley, 1936/1937). Meanwhile, Eastern cultures that emphasize seriousness and strict social norms may have different interpretations and acceptance of humor with certain characteristics (Yubo Hou, 2019). Therefore, the effectiveness of Mr. Bean's humor is also influenced by the cultural context and target audience. In addition, the adaptation of the Mr. Bean character in live-action and cartoon formats also demonstrates the flexibility of humor in adjusting the medium and target audience, ranging from adults to children, from subtle to slapstick humor, as seen in the cartoon where Mr. Bean's antics with a mischievous teddy bear create laughter across generations. Mr. Bean's humor is thus not just light entertainment, but a means of non-verbal communication rich in psychological and social nuances, capable of bridging cultural and linguistic differences through the "shared key" of expressions, gestures, and sounds as the universal language of humor.

## CONCLUSION

In short, Rowan Atkinson's character Mr. Bean serves to point towards the intricacies and universality of humor as an interaction mode that connects people together, relieves them of stress, and improves interhuman relationships. The largely dependent funny action of a wonderful facial expression or gesture and the normal absurdity with which Mr. Bean presents a routine scenario of life shows how humor transcends language and cultural differences. Encryption and relevance are going to be the two most important concepts for understanding Mr. Bean's humor. According to Flamson & Barret (2008), encryption constitutes coding the humorous messages intensive relying on that common understanding between speaker and hearer. The interesting point is that Mr. Bean's performance with silent dialogues can tickle audiences around the world, both by presenting Mr. Bean's comedy through live-action and animated formats. Further relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1995) elaborates how contextuality and shared perspectives would exist in humor. Most common are the real-life situations that Mr. Bean humorously represented versus improbability or unpredictable scenarios, increasing audience ability to correlate with that sense of humor and with the incidental unpredictability of reality. Real-life series communicate using more realistic movements and subtle expressions that appeal to adults, while the animated series convey more longer and slapstick humor, appealing to kids. This quality has made Mr. Bean a timeless figure in comedy and has made it possible for him to adapt across media.

Future explorations of humor signals in stand-up comedy would further enrich the existing knowledge in all likelihood involving within-culture variations in the decoding of such signals (Scarpetta & Spagnoli, 2009). Even though previous studies have emphasized non-verbal visual symbols of humor, the verbal dynamics at play during delivery, timing, and interaction in front of an audience during performance still beg fruitful research. Finally, a study that looks into how comedians use verbal signs with premeditated timing to elicit reactions from their audiences via bodily gestures can unravel the rich alternative forms of adaptive communication in which humor operates. The humor of Mr. Bean speaks beyond cultures and generations, bringing forward the power such as a connector lends to humor without ignoring the deep and coalescing strands that present it. Dynamics are understood, enhancing how much better we can enjoy humor, yet it also positions an understanding of how social interaction and cultural expressions are made and embodied. The dynamic nature of human communication is of current and future importance, running through connections and insights into social life complexities.

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