

**Research Article**

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**Speech Acts and the Common Problems Involved in a Humor Text**

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**Abstract**

People need humor for enjoying entertainment and amusement. Its function is getting wider not only to make people laugh but also to make social activity. This article aims to figure out kinds of speech act people generally used to show their intention in humor. The data were collected from *Reader's Digest magazine* using no-participatory. The data are utterances that become the punch line of humor as units to analyze. The result shows that there are two speech acts of humor texts, that is, representative and commissive. They are uttered in form of indirect speech in which the function and the mood of utterances are not in line. The punch lines of humor are triggered by some topics, namely the characters or bad traits of someone, marriage issues which cover the anxiety of getting old, passing by the time of living together as husband and wife, job and position at workplace, public services which include mistake, satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and complaint people met when having the service in public places, and other problems related to various aspects of life.

Keywords: humor text, indirect speech, representative, commissive, punch lines of humor

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**1. Introduction**

Humor in daily conversation becomes more important as people like to enjoy amusement and entertainment. The development in language use makes it possible to create humorous text for such aims. Now, humor text is not just to provoke laugh while entertaining others. People also tend to have a humor text to convey their criticism or mockery on what happens as a social phenomenon. To reach the aim of criticizing,

humor text can be created in many different forms. Commonly, humorous text can be performed into riddles, kidding, teasing, joking, slipping, and anecdotes [1].

A humor can emerge by two reasons. It could be intentionally or unintentionally created [2]. The coincidental one is the real event, which happens in the real life as a fact. On the other hand, designed humor could be stated as a creation, thought, or an idea coming from people's mind. From this intentional creation, the 'weapon' or the 'tool' that people used to show humor can be traced from the expression depicted in the humor. In the written humor, the expression can be observed from the speech of the actor in the story.

Jokes and anecdotes are two kinds of humor text that shows clear differences in creation. As can be found in *Reader's Digest Magazine*, joke is the story created by people intentionally to provoke laughter while anecdote is a true story that is created unintentionally. A joke is a short story or ironic depiction of a situation communicated with the intention of being humorous. It is usually a story created by someone while an anecdote is always based on real life. Anecdotes could be an incident involving actual persons, whether famous or not, in real places. These two kinds of humor are found in different part of headings in the magazine.

Jokes as a funny story are usually made to make people laugh. But actually, someone does not always make a joke so clear by words, he sometimes produces an utterance that contains an implicit meaning to show what he really intended. Thus, when someone makes a joke and others are listening to the joke, there are many different interpretations could come to listener's mind. Different understanding on joke can imply to the response that is expected by joke-teller. There are many implied meanings in the utterance of the joke-teller that listener must interpret in order to get the intention of the speaker and presumably bring into laughter.

Humor, like joke and anecdote in *Reader's Digest*, frequently contains an unexpected and often sudden shift in perspective. Nearly anything can be the object of this perspective shift. The most usual means to exhibit the perspective shift is language use. When there is an utterance produced in humor, it is not only containing grammatical structures and words but also performing actions for example teasing, insulting, and mocking. The actions performed via utterances are generally called speech acts [3]. Unfortunately, not all of speech act that is produced in the utterance is exhibited explicitly. People are accustomed to say what they really mean implicitly in their utterance especially in humor. For instance, someone tends to ridicule other people but the utterance he produced did not contain a mockery but praise.

The other essence of humor lies in two ingredients, which are the relevant factor and the surprising factor. In language, or situation with a relevant factor, an audience has a certain expectation. If these expectations fail in a way that has some credulity, humor is resulted. That is why the interpretation on humor is very important in order to bring laugh into the punch line of humor. The interpretation on the punch line of humour might bring the explanation on the kinds of speech acts that are usually showed by joke teller and the intention of people saying utterance in the punch line of humour.

In this research, the writer is interested in analyzing what kind of speech act people generally used to show their intention in humor. By knowing the utterance that becomes the punch line of humor, speech acts could be analyzed. Overall, the writer is intended to identify the common problems involved in humor that become the sources of being humorous. Joke and anecdote in *Reader's Digest Magazine* are interesting to be compared in this analysis since both are different in the idea.

## **2. Underlying Theory**

[4] in his book *Folklore Indonesia: Ilmu Gosip, Dongeng dan lain-lain* explained briefly that humor is one kind of folklore and it is usually called fairy tale. According to his theory of folklore, humour consists of two sub-categories which are joke and anecdote. The difference between both is that joke is related to the fictive funny story of a part of group in society whether anecdote is related to fictive funny story of personal or famous figure that really exists in a society [5].

Danandjaya as cited by [6] in *Sociolinguistik Kajian Teori dan Analisis*, defines anecdote as a part of person's 'fictive-biography' whether joke as a collective's 'fictive-trait or character'. That theory describes the similar 'treatment' to joke and anecdote as a fictive story. In this case, since the data are obtained from magazine, the theory is not appropriate since joke and anecdote have much clear distinction. Joke tells much more about the story coming from someone's mind as his own creation while anecdote comes from the real event or occurrence that is funny and written by someone as a story.

In the linguistic-relation of the study, joke and anecdote imply the theory of semantics and pragmatics. [7] explained that semantics view treat humour by exploiting ambiguity of word, group of words or sentence. It studies humour in where a sentence could be true in two different context of communication. Meanwhile, pragmatics treat humour by its violations on *politeness principles* and *co-operative principle* since pragmatics does not study humour conventionally by its linguistic-form but it studies humour in the principle of speech act.

The writer uses the theory of performative hypothesis proposed by [8] to describe the term of speech act. Mood and types of sentence is going to be discussed in order to know the relation between speech function of the utterance and speaker's intention in the joke or story. Searle classifies five basic types of utterance which are representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations [9]. These five types of speech act is the basic classification to describe the act performed by the utterance of the actor in humor.

The five types of speech acts according to Searle [9] can be seen as follows:

1. **representatives**, which commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition (asserting, concluding)
2. **directives**, which are attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something (requesting, questioning)
3. **commissives**, which commit the speaker to some future course of action (promising, threatening, offering)

4. **expressives**, which express a psychological state ( thanking, apologizing, welcoming, congratulating)
5. **declarations**, which effect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and which tend to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institution (excommunicating, declaring war, firing, christening)

In addition, the writer also uses the theory of inferences proposed by [3] to infer the speaker's intention by uttering words in humor text. In his book *Pragmatics*, he sums up that interpretation can be drawn from the utterance by using four means of inferences that are presupposition, entailment, conventional implicature, and conversational implicature. Yule also gives a brief explanation that differentiates the understanding of the text pragmatically and semantically.

In conversation analysis, the most common act of speech that must be interpreted to show the speaker intention is illocutionary act. Even though listener could not find some performative verb (Vp) in (5), but in the real event, how speaker said that utterance can be interpreted by listener as a warning or just a statement based on speaker's intonation or face appearance. Sentence that has a performative verb indeed makes someone is easier to interpret the utterance of the speaker. But, the performative verb is just one device to show the occurrence of *illocutionary force*. Some performative verbs (Vp) like 'promise', 'warn', 'tell', etc, that occur in the utterance is a kind of IFID (*Illocutionary Force Indicating Device*). Other IFIDs that also can be used to show *illocutionary force* such as word order, stress, and intonation.

Furthermore, discussing the speaker's intention in a conversation or via speech acts in the utterance, it should be known that there are many interpretations that could come to listener's mind. A different approach to distinguishing types of speech acts can be made on the basis of structure [3]. In his book, he proposed three general communicative functions which are statement, question, and command/request, and three structural forms that are declarative, interrogative and imperative. The relationship between them will be different and create speech acts as direct or indirect.

Formally, declarative, interrogative and imperative can also be stated as moods of sentence. Declarative sentence is used to tell about something (an information), interrogative sentence is to ask about something, and imperative is to tell someone to do something (order, command, request, etc). When the mood and function of an utterance show direct relationship, it is called direct speech act. On the other hand, if the function shows indirect relationship with the mood it is called indirect speech act.

### **3. Methods**

In analyzing jokes and anecdotes, the writer uses Descriptive Qualitative Research since it will describe the facts or data factually. Descriptive method is giving description and explanation of a situation briefly without taking any action to the object that is being observed [10]. By using a descriptive method, it intends to identify the facts about the research objects, i.e. the utterance in the story which performs speech act in humor text and that it is important as a punch line to understand humor.

For the object of the research is the speech acts inferred from the humor text, the writer chose *Reader's Digest* magazine as the source of data. The data obtained directly from its source named Primary Data [11]. The source which is the magazine itself contains many jokes and anecdotes and the writer puts some of them as sample of data without any consideration on the person who wrote the story. For the data are put from written source, it is considered as written data and not the spoken one.

The method of collecting data used in this research is *Metode Simak Bebas Libat Cakap* (SLBC). According to [12], *Metode Simak* is used while we have to pay good attention at the use of language. The technique of *Simak Bebas Libat Cakap* is the method of paying good attention in the use of language without being participated in the conversation directly. Therefore, the author uses the documentation methods that are seeking, collecting, classifying and then analyzing the data. This technique then is continued with *Catat* method.

The population of this research is the entire story of joke in the heading "*Laughter, the Best Medicine*" and anecdote in the heading "*Life's Like That*" in *Reader's Digest Magazine* published by the period of January up to December 2007. All stories in those two heading is the population of this research. In this research, the samples were taken by using a purposive sampling method. It means that the samples are taken from the population according to particular criteria based on the purposes of the research. The story that does not contain any important utterance from the actor is excluded. Therefore, only the jokes and anecdotes which have utterances contained speech act triggers on its punch line were analyzed.

The method of analyzing data used in this research is Pragmatic Identity method since the referent of this analysis is outside and does not include as a part of the language [12]. Although this research analyzes written text, but it does not mean that the analysis is based on syntactical or grammatical approaches as the point of analysis is the language itself. Therefore, this research uses pragmatic identity and referential identity methods. Referential Identity method is used according to the need of analyzing the fact that is shown by language itself. The data is formed in written text so that the writer needs to collect which one is having the utterance that perform speech act in its important point (punch line) of the joke and it could not be placed or omitted.

#### **4. Discussions**

Although the data of joke and anecdote are put from different headings, most of the data show the biggest occurrence of the same speech act. In joke, there are three kinds of speech act found that are representatives, commissives and directives. Almost the same, in anecdote are also found those three kinds of speech act but there is an addition of expressives that is not found in joke. Both joke and anecdote do not contain any utterance which use declaratives speech act. Most of the utterance in joke and anecdote shows representatives speech act in the punch line.

Mostly, joke-teller in this magazine uses representative speech and asserts an utterance. The simple analysis of this type of speech act is that 'speaker believes utterance'. Every word that was said by the speaker insisted what the speaker believes to be true. The data are shown in many purposes of the speech such as to boast, to acknowledge, to confess, to reassert, to guess etc. The utterances showing directives speech acts are mostly used to ask question, some others are used to give command and request. But in anecdote, directives speech acts are used for more purposes than in joke such as to invoke, to invite, to suggest and to discourage.

Other speech act is commissives. These speech act concerns with the commitment of the speakers with something they assert in their utterances. The commitment can be intended to the speaker or to the hearer instead. The act of making commitment of doing something occurs in a few numbers of joke and anecdote. The examples of data are shown with the purposes like assuring, promising and rejecting. In anecdote, commissives are used to threaten, to assure and to guarantee. The expressives speech acts are only found in anecdote and are used to apologize, to extol, to acclaim of surprise and preference.

In the point of describing mood and function of the speech, the writer only describes the occurrence of speech acts in jokes and anecdotes that have an indirect relationship between its mood and function. Meanwhile, other utterances which have direct relationship are analyzed to describe its problem involved by knowing the speech acts used in the punch line. Based on the data, the writer found that only one utterance which is an indirect speech in jokes and there are six anecdotes in which having an indirect speech.

Indirect speech act occurs when the mood of the utterance or sentence which becomes punch line is functioned as different as its mood. From the samples of jokes and anecdotes that are being analyzed as an indirect speech, most utterances occur in declarative and interrogative sentences. The utterances which are showing indirect speech can be observed in the following:

1. *"Do you want to get us both fired?" (UJ5)*
2. *"Can you do me a favor? If you see anyone you know in your dreams tonight, just wave." (UA19)*
3. *"Could it be the TV?" (UA6)*
4. *"I'm the bigger tipper." (UA17)*
5. *"I'd rather an A." (UA27)*

Joke-tellers did not use declarative sentence to make statement and they did not use interrogative sentence to ask a question directly. In this kind of speech, they put the declarative and interrogative sentence functioning as command or request. Moreover, they also make the function in opposite; interrogative sentence to make a statement (UJ5), a command (UA19) and a request (UA6), and declarative sentence to give command (UA17) and request (UA27). Off course, the analysis on speech acts always concerns with the context of situation that is drawn in the story.

Many problems which are influencing the writing of joke and anecdote in this magazine are still congruent to the common experiences which appear in daily life. One problem that often appears in humour talks about the relationship between husband and wife in a marriage. The problems in marriage are especially about the attitude of husband or wife that is inconvenient to others, about the anxiety of getting old, or about passing by the time of living together as husband and wife. There is a story tells that the domination of a man on marriage is now decreasing because man and woman can have the same opportunities to make rule. And there is also humour tells about desperate husband in marriage that it could be his wife or the marriage-life itself that becomes the problem.

Other problems emerge in humour tell much about the characters or bad traits of someone. There are many characters of people that can be identified as the sources of humour emerge in joke. The traits are also found in anecdote so it can be concluded that people are pretended to use someone's trait, personality or character as one way of producing laughter. The characters are various like ignorance, caginess, misery, drunk-men and other traits because of getting old.

Problems about job and position in work also become a source of laughter both in joke and anecdote. In real life, conversation on the subject of job and personal position emerges in daily life and can be between parents and kids or in neighborhood relationship. Different status or job in society sometimes produces a little kind of 'mistake' in conversation or in understanding which is turning into amusement.

The other problems found in humour are about services in public places. Mistake, satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and complaint that are all people usually met when they faced the service in public places like in restaurant, office, hospital, department store, and saloon. Mostly, anecdotes happen in public places talk about these problems because people tend to connect with many different people while having services in public places. Through many problems in public places' services, people tend to say their mockery or teasing direct or indirectly to others.

There are still many other problems found in humour and tell about various aspects of life. The problems tell much about the relationship of many people as a part of human life. There are stories with the problems in neighborhood relationship, problems within children and adults, problems or different understanding between doctor and patient, and many falsities in understanding that could come in daily conversation. Funny stories also emerge much in the relationship between man and woman and seldom tell about the problem with their family. In addition, the more serious topic like criminality and people who become criminals can be the source of emerging problems in funny way.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Understanding speech act on humour text is very much needed since the speech is also the way of people showing intention on speaking. Moreover, speech act becomes the important point of people getting the punch line in humour text. If the speech act occurs in humour or the speaker's intention in the story cannot be understood by reader,

then the amusement of humour will not arise.

In analyzing humour text, the writer sums up that jokes and anecdotes in *Reader's Digest* magazine are mostly use representatives speech act. Nevertheless, representatives imply to several purposes as other speech in humour. Representative speeches are often used as an answer of a riddle, mostly as a statement that becomes surprise factor in humour. In addition, various kinds of speech also become the key to provoke laughter in different way.

Speech act in humour enables speaker to say something in different way such as insulting by saying praise. This can be studied by analyzing the mood and function of speech in humour. As the result, indirect speech in which the speech has function as different as its mood, are found in anecdote more than in joke. Since jokes are the story created by people, the speech on it should not be written more politely to keep the 'face' of the object of amusement. Different from the stories in anecdotes in which they based on true actions. In true life, the tendency to keep saying in polite way, including in producing amusement, is still happen.

The common problems that occur in humour, represented by jokes and anecdotes in this magazine, are mostly talking about the relationship between two or more people in daily life. Humour text in anecdote implies the real problems while humour in joke can be the depiction of the real problem in life to be implied as funny story. Thus, it can be said that on the whole, jokes include much moral values than anecdotes. Readers might see more fact of what happens in a real life through written jokes. By the result of this analysis on jokes and anecdotes, speech act is able to help us to catch on to the problems involved in humour so that readers can enjoy amusement especially in humour text.

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