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Humor: The Other Way of Delivering Message

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Abstract

Humor can be regarded as one of the unique ways of communicating ideas and delivering messages. It can be easily found in the daily use of language in various contexts and situations. This short writing is an attempt to analyze humor to find the systems or patterns of humor of human language. The data for this study are taken from some collections of humor in the Indonesian and local languages, recorded or noted from the field. The result of the analysis indicates that humor is created by colliding with two opposite events or logic. Humor is also constructed by using collocation, the figure of speech, modification of the structure of language. In terms of sense, humor can be categorized as soft and hard senses of humor.

Keywords: language; humor; language games; meaning

1. Introduction

Part of the essential roles of language in the life of a human being is delivering messages. The communication contents are probably something that has value, sociocultural and political importance. Showing messages is done in many ways. One of them is through humor. Humor can be regarded as an essential part of human life. A sense of humor belongs to all people and ethnic groups in the world. It does not matter how small it is the sense of humor they have. Being funny is part of human fun. By joking, people release tension and hardship in their life. Humor is the capacity to perceive actions as amusing, respond to an amusing stimulus, or create something that elicits amusements. It is difficult to imagine life without humor – and what a dry, tragic life that could be (Meyer, 2015:1). Abdurrahman Wahid is colloquially known as Gus Dur even stated that “*Dengan lelucon, kita bisa sejenak melepaskan kesulitan hidup. Dengan humor, pikiran kita jadi sehat* (Gus Dur in Wiguna, 2010.)

Furthermore, Meyer (2015:1) stated that humor could be put to many communicative uses to persuade, ingratiate, influence, and even to mock other people. When we sit in the coffee shop, when we meet people in the streets, markets, and other public places, we can easily hear humor and jokes from them. In terms of written language, short notices, slogans, and different types of language use in public places, T-Shirt, cars, trucks, buildings, and advertisements contain senses of humor. Some examples of humor at public areas are as follows:

- (1) *Cintamu tak seberat muatanku*
- (2) *Hidup tentu banyak cobaan. Kalau banyak cucian itu namanya laundry.*

Example (1) is writing at the back of the truck. It is humor in the form of personification in which the truck is projected as an animate object like a human being as if it can say something. Example (2) is categorized as collocative humor in which the word *hidup* is juxtaposed with the word *cobaan* and the word *cucian* is juxtaposed with the word *laundry*.

In Minangkabau language – the local language spoken by Minangkabau people in West Sumatera, soft humor is commonly found in daily communication. In the streets, coffee shops, markets, and other public places, we hear people say expression containing a sense of humor as in the following examples.

(3) *Apak tu nyo ambaik anaknyo ka bininyo.*

(4) *Bini rancak, mintuo kayo*

Source: Noted and recorded from the field, 20012020

There are two possible meanings of (3) – the father takes his daughter from his wife, or the father married to his daughter. Humor is created through ambiguity. Example (4) means the wife is beautiful, and the parents-in-law are rich. It is possible this situation exists in reality, but the expression of *bini rancak, mintuo kayo* was not openly expressed. If it is openly expressed, then it becomes humor. Examples (3) and (4) are humor used to relieve tension and keep social channels open.

Referring to the importance of humor in human life, as stated above, this short writing is an attempt to discuss humor as one of the ways to deliver messages in daily communication. The construction of humor in delivering messages is discussed here. It is expected that this writing can show us the rules of humor as one of the types of language use, which can mostly be found in daily communication.

2. Methods

This study is an attempt to analyze humor as one of the genres of language use. This study is done qualitatively by observing the phenomena of using humor in society. The data for this study are taken from several sources, such as a collection of humor, social media, and the use of humor in public places. The analysis of the data is done by applying referential and distributional methods (Sudaryanto, 2018). Analysis of data is also done by exploring the structure of the meaning of text projected as humor. Besides, lexical configuration and logical construction in the structure of the text of humor are also considered.

3. Result and Discussion

Humor is expressed in the form of storytelling, question and answer, and puzzle. In terms of sense and meaning, humor contains hyperbole, sarcasm, irony, and satire. In Indonesia, at the end of New Order, there is a collection of humor entitled "*Mati Ketawa daripada Cara Soeharto*". This collection of humor portrayed the situation during the era of Soeharto's administration for more than 30 years. The duration of the power of Soeharto is quipped in the following humor.

(5) *Seorang murid TK Kecil kecewa pada ayahnya. Karena saat si anak tanya, "Waktu ayah kelas nol, siapa presiden kita?" Jawab ayahnya, "Soeharto."*

Pertanyaan meningkat waktu si ayah SD, SMP, SMA, kuliah, siapa presidennya - jawabannya tetap: "Soeharto."

Si anak menyergah, "Ah, ayah payah dah, Apa nggak ada nama lain?"

Source: Mati Ketawa daripada Cara Soeharto, 1998.

Humor in the above examples is the conversation between a kindergarten pupil and the father. The kindergarten pupil is asking who the president is when his father was at kindergarten, elementary school, junior high school, and senior high school. The answer to the father is always the same that is "Soeharto." Consequently, the child is disappointed because the president is the same during his father's school time. It seems that this humor is the reflection of the feeling of boring because the president is always the same for a long time. The above text becomes humorous because of the collision of two events or things – real and unreal things. The real thing is something that exists or occurs. The unreal thing is something that does not exist or occur. In this context, the real thing is the power of Soeharto for 30 years. The unreal thing is the dialogue between the kindergarten pupil and the father.

Abdurrahman Wahid colloquially known as Gus Dur is well known for his humor. Gus Dur tends to insert humor in his speech. People also create humor about Gus Dur, his life, his perspectives, and his interaction with other people. Below is one of the humors related to Gus Dur created by Guntur Wiguna in the year 2010.

(6): *Setelah diturunkan dari jabatan Presiden, konon diberitakan Gus Dur untuk beberapa waktu lamanya tak mau manunaikan ibadah sholat. Usut punya usut, ternyata Gus Dur betul-betul ngambek sama Amin Rais dan Akbar Tanjung. Jadi, setiap kali menyebut Allahu Akbar, dia pasti teringat Akbar Tandjung. Dan setiap menyebut Amin, pasti teringat Amin Rais.*

Source: Guntur Wiguna (Koleksi Humor Gus Dur, 2010)

The above example is humor that describes a situation in which Gus Dur is discharged as the president. After discharging from his presidency, Gus Dur does not want to do *sholat* because when he pronounced Allahu Akbar, he always remembers Akbar Tandjung. When he pronounced *Aamiin*, he always remembers Amin Rais. Akbar Tandjung and Amin Rais are two influential people in discharging Gus Dur from his presidency. The above text becomes humorous text because of two things. First, there are collisions of two events or things – the unreal and the real things. The unreal thing is that Gus Dur does not want to do *sholat* for sometimes. The real thing is Gus Dur sulked at Akbar Tandjung and Amin Rais. Second, humor is created through wordplay or language games. The word akbar in Allahu Akbar is juxtaposed with the word tanjung so it becomes Akbar Tanjung— the name of public figure in Indonesia. The word aamiin is juxtaposed with the word rais so it becomes Amin Rais – the other public figure in Indonesia.

Humor in the above examples can be categorized as hard humor. It deals with the personal aspects of the former presidents of Indonesia. Humor can function both to unite and divide (Meyer, 2015:7). The effects of humor in this context can be both to unite or divide. It depends on the acceptance and response of the target of humor. This kind of humor can be regarded as superiority humor from the perspective of superiority theory. Based on the superiority theory, humor results from the sense of triumph and winning (Gruner, 1997). It, then, becomes the act of laughing at someone else. Humor addressed to Gus Dur can be regarded as an act of laughing or making fun of someone.

Pak Jokowi also has a sense of humor. When delivering his speech or was interviewed by a journalist, he inserted humor and jokes in his speech as in one of the following examples.

- (7) A : *Apa makanan favorit Bapak ?*
 B : *Saya suka semua makanan asli Indonesia,.....*
Tapi yang paling penting harus ada perlakuan khusus dulu..
 A : *Perlakuan khusus seperti apa itu ? Tanya A*
 B : *“Yang paling penting dimasak dulu. Kalau ndak mau makan daging mentah? Mau makan ikan mentah?” jawab B*

Source: Heri Setiawan. Liputan6.com, 30 Mei 2019. Retrieved in 10 November 2020

Humor in the above examples is created through the violation of maxims. Grice (1975) proposed four maxims; be informative; say something true; be relevant, and do not be obscure. A asks the favorite food of B. However, B answer the question of A by giving unnecessary additional information, as illustrated in the following examples:

- (7a) A : *Apa makanan favorit Bapak ?*
 B : *Saya suka semua makanan asli Indonesia,.....*
Tapi yang paling penting harus ada perlakuan khusus dulu..
 A : *Perlakuan khusus seperti apa itu ? Tanya A*
 B : *“Yang paling penting dimasak dulu. Kalau ndak mau makan daging mentah? Mau makan ikan mentah?” jawab B*

Source: Heri Setiawan. Liputan6.com, 30 Mei 2019. Retrieved in 10 November 2020

The additional information, "which is not relevant to the question of A" is *tapi yang paling penting harus ada perlakuan khusus dulu*. The maxim violated here is the maxim of relevance. A is only asking what your favorite food is. The answer should be, "I like all Indonesian food." B does not need to add information that is not asked by A. This kind of humor is categorized as gentle humor. It creates a relaxed situation and triggered people to laugh. In this context, humor is created to relieve tension.

It is commonly found in Indonesia that some humor is ethnic oriented. Humor about ethnicity portrayed cultural identity, character and attitude, food, geographical condition, and origin of the ethnics. The following examples are humor about ethnics:

- (8) The traffic accident happened in one of the main streets of Palembang. A young policeman came to the location of the accident. He found the victim dead and no identity at all. Then, the young policeman reported to his commander.
 A : *Siap Komandan. Laporan ! Ada kecelakaan. Korban meninggal di tempat. Tak ada identitas sama sekali.....*

B : *Kamu injak aja perutnya. Kalau yang keluar cabe, itu orang Padang. Kalau yang keluar tempe, itu orang Jawa. Kalau yang keluar empek-empek, itu orang Palembang.*

.....

Source: Noted from the informant in the field, 05032019

The above example is humor about ethnicity. *cabe*, *tempe* and *empek-empek* are associated with food of particular ethnic in Indonesia, namely Padang, Java, and Palembang. *Cabe*, *tempe* and *empek-empek* are regarded as the cultural identity of certain ethnic in Indonesia. Because *cabe*, *tempe* and *empek-empek* are associated with certain ethnic, the humor of this type is categorized as associative humor. Humor is formed by colliding two events, namely a traffic accident resulting in the death in one hand and treading on the stomach of the death by the police on the other hand. In these two events, one is logical, and the other is illogical. Traffic accident resulting in death is logical. Treading on the stomach of the death by the police is illogical.

The uniqueness of one ethnic group seems to be used as humor too. Balinese skills in painting, Padang people with their restaurant, and *rumah makan* inspire people to create humor. One of the examples is as follows.

(9) A : *Mengapa orang Padang tidak pernah menang balapan ?*

B : *Karena di setiap persimpangan jalan dia akan selalu berhenti untuk melihat apakah di sini cocok didirikan rumah makan Padang....*

.....

Source: *Direkam dari informan di lapangan*

In the above example, humor is created and addressed to Minangkabau people and *Rumah Padang*. It happened because *Rumah Makan Padang* is well known and can be found easily not only in Indonesia but also abroad. Most people like Minangkabau culinary (Oktavianus, 2019). The existence of so many *Rumah Makan Padang* in many regions in Indonesia and abroad inspires people to create humor, as illustrated in the example above.

4. Conclusion

At the end of this writing, it can be concluded that humor as a part of language creativity was created by contradicting the logic that is the logical things and the illogical things. Besides, humor was also expressed by modifications of the structure of language through the figure of speech, collocation, and ambiguity. In terms of the senses, humor can be categorized as soft and hard humor.

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