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A Linguistic Analysis of Humor Found in It Crowd Sitcom

Annisha Dyuli Adha, Dwi Megista Putri, Rasmita

Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, FKIP, Universitas Putra Indonesia YPTK Padang, annishadyuliadha@UPIYPTK.AC.ID

Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, FKIP, Universitas Putra Indonesia YPTK Padang, dwimegista18@gmail.com

Teknik Informatika, FILKOM, Universitas Putra Indonesia YPTK Padang, mi2t.caem85@gmail.com

*Corresponding Author:

Annisha Dyuli Adha

Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, FKIP, Universitas Putra Indonesia YPTK Padang, annishadyuliadha@UPIYPTK.AC.ID

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the Semantic Mechanism of Humor in the IT Crowd sitcom, and also to find out the deviations of the linguistic elements contained in the humor. In this study, the sources of data were humorous dialogues contained in the IT Crowd sitcom using descriptive methods. The results of the study show that the linguistic elements found in all the conversations in the sitcom including lexical ambiguity (LA), causal fallacy (CF), presupposition (Pr), locutionary (Lc), and topic progression (TP). In addition, a semantic mechanism of humor is also needed in this study because from this mechanism one can understand what causes humor to be funny. After understanding this mechanism, then we can know what linguistic expectations deviations are contained in the humor, and research shows that most humor occurs due to the appearance of unexpected meaning [M2] from what is expected [M1].

Keywords: Pre-Assumption, Happy Ending

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I INTRODUCTION

Many days in our life we have been made busy by our daily routines; therefore we need something to make us amused as well as relaxed through laughing. In this case, humor that always offers the chance for us to laugh has become interesting thing to entertain us and refresh our mind. Besides, many people like humor to refresh their mind. Not only comedian,

but also ordinary people like to do that because they have sense of humor.

Wilson (2015:19) says that humor is a feeling that stimulates us to laugh, it can be a sense or consciousness in ourselves (senses of humor), and can be a reaction from inside or outside of ourselves. Humor happens because there is opposition between sense of seriousness and fun, happiness and sadness in ourselves.

Therefore, the uniqueness of humor is how it makes people laugh. However, some humor cannot be understood easily. It needs more understanding on the mechanism that arrange the humor so that people can find it funny. For example:

“Senator”, an aide called from the next room, “there’s someone on the phone who wants to know what you plan to do about the abortion bill”. Flushing the politician spluttered, “Er... tell them I’ll have a check in the mail by morning”. (Ravin, 1987: quoted in Soedjatmiko 2017: 70)

In this humor, what the caller asks is the senator’s planning in opposing abortion. Yet, the senator thinks the caller asks about the abortion bill of his unwanted baby. This humor might be rather difficult to understand because the senator’s answer does not seem relevant to the question. To understand it better, the reader may use the mechanism of humor which can be observed through Wilson’s synthesis.

Bergson in Wilson (2015:12) claims that something is funny when it belongs to two different ways. The first definition appears extremely restricted but it is not. When the humor begins to be told, the readers or listeners get their first definition about the meaning of the

humor. Suddenly (usually at the end of the humor), they realize that the definition is wrong because of the unexpected meaning. We can see from the example above.

Although humor deals with funny stories, funny situations, or even funny thought, it has special uniqueness, that is how it makes something sounds funny. That is why the writer is interested to analyze humor, especially humor that is found in *IT Crowd* sitcom. There are two reasons that support why the writer chooses this comedy program. The first reason is *IT Crowd* is a British sitcom that has run for 4 series of 6 episodes of each. It means that the program has enough quality to be analyzed in a thesis. The second reason is this comedy program contains a lot of humor that can be the data of the writer’s research. Hence, analyzing humor that is found in *IT Crowd* sitcom is interesting to be investigated.

The purposes of the authors of conducting this research are 1) to identify the semantic mechanisms of humor that are found in *IT Crowd* sitcom, and 2) to identify linguistic expectations are violated by humor that are found in *IT Crowd* sitcom.

II RESEARCH METHODS

This research belongs to the descriptive research because this research provides the data in the form of words. Here, the writer described about the mechanisms of humor based on Wilson’s theory and violation of linguistic expectations found in *IT Crowd* sitcom.

The data of the research were humor of *IT Crowd* sitcom. The source of data were taken from the script of each episode in the first series of that program. The taken episodes were episode 1, 2, 5, and 6.

Some data were analyzed by doing some techniques, they are: 1) Selecting the dialogue parts which contain humor used by the actors. After watching and reading the scripts of the sitcom, the writer selected the dialogue that contains humor. 2) Identifying audience’s laughter. The writer identified audience’s laughter which was symbolized “☺” to know the dialogue contained humor. 3) Identifying expected meaning of the humor. After selecting

the dialogue that contains humor, the writer identified the expected meaning [M1] from the actor (addressor). 4) Identifying unexpected meaning or surprising meaning of the humor. After identifying the expected meaning, the writer identified the unexpected meaning or surprising meaning [M2] from the actor (addressee). 5) Identifying the mechanism of humor. After identifying the expected and unexpected meaning of the humor, the writer identified the data through the mechanism of humor in order to know how the humor arised laughter. 6) Identifying the violation of linguistic expectations. The writer identified what linguistic expectations were violated by humor in that program, whether they were lexical ambiguity, structural ambiguity, truth conditional semantics, causal fallacy, presupposition, locutionality, topic progression, or background knowledge.

III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data were taken from dialogues of that sitcom which have been formed into script form that the dialogues were taken from four episodes in the first series of the sitcom. The writer took 50 data that exist in the dialogues of 4 episodes from the sitcom. The data were analyzed by using Wilson's theory (2015) about the semantic mechanism of humor, and violation of linguistic expectations, they were lexical ambiguity (LA), causal fallacy (CF), presupposition (Pr), locutionary (Lc), and topic progression (TP).

A. Lexical Ambiguity

For lexical ambiguity, Hurford and Heasley (2012:128) defines it as "any ambiguity resulting from the ambiguity of a word". They claim that lexical ambiguity depends on homonymy (senses related) and polysemy (senses not related).

Data 1:

Setting: in Denholm's room

Participants: Denholm and Jen

Relationship: Director and new employee

Topic: Job interview

Situation: Jen is being interviewed by Denholm, a director of Reynholm Industry, about her experiences in computer because he will put her in IT department.

Denholm: I'm gonna put you in I.T. because you said on your CV you have a lot of experience with computers.

Jen: I did say on my CV. I know the whole computer thing you know, the computer screen, the keyboard, hard drive, and....

Denholm: You know mouse?

Jen: Ahahah...Don't call me like that! ☺

Denholm: I didn't call you mouse, but it relates with computer. ☺

The conversation above occurs in Denholm's room where Jen is being interviewed and asked about what she knows about computer. While Jen mentions the whole computer thing, she forgets another kinds of computer equipment and she is silent for a moment. Then Denholm ask to her, "You know mouse?". It arises humor since there is misunderstanding from Jen toward

Denholm's question. Actually Denholm means to mention a computer equipment to Jen namely "mouse", which is a tool to run operation system on computer [M1]. On the contrary, Jen thinks that Denholm call her "mouse" because she forgets another kinds of computer equipment so that Denholm feels peevish and calls her like that [M2].

The semantic mechanism of this humor is:

$M1 = X = M2$

$M1 \neq M2$

$M1 > M2$

$M1 \neq X$

$X = M2$

Where:

M1 = mouse, as a computer equipment to run operation system on computer

M2 = mouse, as a kind of animal

X = mouse, kind of animal

The punchline of this humor is gained through the Jen's response, "Don't call me like that!", and replied by Denholm that he does not mean to call her "mouse". Based on the mechanism above, the linguistic expectation that is violated by this humor is *lexical ambiguity* which is a word has more than one meaning.

B. Causal Fallacy

Soedjatmiko (2017:34) mentions about causal fallacies which is a part of truth conditional semantics. Causal fallacy occurs when there is a false relationship between the cause and effect. It is because either the wrong cause or the wrong effect.

Data 1:

Setting: in IT room

Participants: Roy, Laura, and Jen

Relationship: Workmate

Topic: Laura hits Roy

Situation: Laura comes into IT room to meet Roy, but she suddenly hits him with a chair.

Laura: Hi.. is Roy around?

Roy: Hello there little lady. Are you lost? How can I help you? I'm Roy.

Laura: (hits Roy with a chair) Well here I am!

Roy: Ohh... no... no... no!

Jen: Whoa.... whoa... why you hit him with that chair?

Laura: I couldn't lift the table. ☺

The conversation above occurs in IT room where Laura wants to meet Roy there. When Roy welcomes Laura's arrival friendly, she instead hits Roy with a chair suddenly. This is a shocking attack for Roy. Jen that sees the incident, she tries to stop it by asking to Laura why she hits him with the chair. She wants to know the reason why Laura acts like that [M1]. It arises laughter when Laura just responds the question by saying, "I couldn't lift the table." It is an incredible reason and not suitable for Jen with what actually happens [M2]. Laura should explain why she hits Roy which maybe he makes a mistake to her.

The semantic mechanism of this humor is:

$$M1 = X = M2 \qquad M1 \neq M2$$

$$M1 > M2$$

$$M1 \neq X \qquad X = M2$$

Where:

[M1] = the reason why Laura hits Roy with a chair

[M2] = Laura giving incredible reason why she hits Roy with a chair

[X] = Laura hits Roy with a chair because she could not lift the table

Based on the mechanism above, the linguistic expectation that is violated by this humor is *causal fallacy* because Laura does not give logical reason to Jen why she hits Roy with a chair.

C. Playing Presupposition

In analyzing utterances, it is crucial to know the presupposition because before knowing the utterances in conversation has additional meaning there should be an background assumption called presupposition. According to Brown and Yule (2010:28), presupposition is what the speaker used as the basic assumption in conversation. It means that speaker and listener has their background knowledge before they utter something.

Data 1

Setting: in a lift of Reynholm industry

Participants: Roy and

Relationship: workmate

Topic: Congratulating George that will be a father

Situation: Roy enters to a lift in his office and meets his friend, George, there.

Roy: *Hi..*

George: *Hi..* (seems glum)

Roy: *You look troubled.*

George: *Yeah. I'm going to be a father.*

Roy: *But... that's wonderful.*

George : *What's wonderful? My wife doesn't know about it.* ☺

The conversation above occurs in a lift where Roy meets George there. George that seems glum, makes Roy wants to know what happens to his friend. Then he says, "You look troubled." Roy's attention is responded by George by saying, "Yeah. I'm going to be a father." From George's statement, it makes Roy surprised and thinks that it is a wonderful thing to be a father and get a baby soon [M1]. But it is not like what Roy is thinking about. It arises laughter when George says that his wife does not know that he will be a father. It means that George will be a father of the baby from other woman, not from his wife. It obviously means that George has affair, and his wife does not know about this case [M2].

The semantic mechanism of this humor is:

$$M1 = X = M2 \qquad M1 \neq M2$$

$$M1 > M2$$

$$M1 \neq X \qquad X = M2$$

Where:

[M1] = Roy thinks that George will be a father of the baby from his wife.

[M2] = George will be a father of the baby from other woman.

[X] = George has affair with other woman and will get a baby from her.

Based on the mechanism above, the linguistic expectation that is violated by this humor is *presupposition* because what Roy is presuming about George that will be a father of the baby from his wife is wrong.

D. Playing Locutionality

Locutionality is a kind of speech act which is the act of saying something. A speaker utters an utterance because there is a purpose from what he/she said. Chaer (2004:5) says that locutionality is a speech act that express something by telling something in the form of sentences which are meaningful and understandable. It means that this act is done to inform something to its adreesee based on the meaning and the purpose.

Data 1

Setting: in Jen's room

Participants: Jen and Moss

Relationship: Manager and employee

Topic: Asking for closing the door.

Situation: Jen feels ashamed because Moss knows that she lies and pretend to be talking with Denholm in the phone.

Jen: Could you close the door?

Moss: Yeah, sure. (He just stands without closing the door)

☺

Jen: Why you still stand there? I want you to leave me and close the door! ☺

From the conversation above, Jen feels ashamed because Roy and Moss knows that she has lied and pretended to talk with Denholm in the phone. She does not want to talk with them again and she says, "Could you close the door?" She wants Moss to close the door and go out, and does not disturb her anymore [M1]. But as Jen commands to Moss, instead he he still stands up in Jen's room without closing the door because he thinks that Jen asks whether he can close the door or not so that he just says, "Yeah, sure" [M2]. This makes Jen feels peevish and commands him clearly by saying, "Why you still stand there? I want you to leave me and close the door!" which means Jen wants Moss to go out from her room. The punch line of this humor is when Moss still stands in front of Jen and does not go out and close the door.

The semantic mechanism of this humor is:

$M1 = X = M2$

$M1 \neq M2$

$M1 > M2$

$M1 \neq X$

$X = M2$

Where:

[M1] = Jen wants Moss to close the door for her from outside of her room.

[M2] = Moss does not close the door from outside.

[X] = Moss closes the door from inside of Jen's room.

Based on the mechanism above, the linguistic expectation that is violated by this humor is *locutionality* because Moss just replies Jen command without doing something in which he just says, "Yeah, sure."

E. Playing Topic Progression

The success of a talk is based on the coherence or how it relates with the topic that is being talked. Writte in Renkema (1993) says that topical progression is how individual sentences cohere locally and how all sentences relate globally.

Sometimes, the people ignore the topic progression of their talk because there are some possibilities, the first one is caused by avoiding the topic so that they shift the talk, and the second is because they do not understand with the topic that is being talked. And in this case, it can arise funny in a humor.

Data 1

Setting: in IT room

Participants: Roy, Laura, and Jen

Relationship: Workmate

Topic: Laura hits Roy

Situation: Related to corpus 11, after Laura hits Roy with a chair, then she hits him with her shoes.

Laura: I must give him a lesson, Jen. (she takes off one of her Manolo Blahniks and beats Roy with it)

Roy: Stop it! Stop it!

Laura: Yeah well, maybe this'll teach you to treat people with a little bit of respect.

Roy: Is it 'cos we spoke on the phone earlier?

Jen: Oh my God. Are those Manolo's? ☺

Laura: Oh, yes. ☺

Jen: They are gorgeous. Were they expensive? ☺

Laura: No, no, no. Got them in the sale. ☺

Jen: Oh God, clever you. I'm never lucky enough to get a bargain like that. ☺

Laura: Well, I should take you shopping. ☺

Jen: Yeah, no that would be fantastic.

From the conversation above, Laura tries to hit Roy with her shoes after she hit him with a chair. Jen that sees that incident and feels pity to Roy, she tries to shift Laura's attention by praising her shoes by saying, "Oh my God. Are those Manolo's?" And her praise is also gained when she says, "They are gorgeous. Were they expensive?" It arises laughter when Jen's question is responded well by Laura so that she ignores Roy and forgets what she has done to him. Then, Jen and Laura start to discuss about Laura's shoes.

The semantic mechanism of this humor is:

$M1 = X = M2$

$M1 \neq M2$

$M1 > M2$

$M1 \neq X$

$X = M2$

Based on the mechanism above, the linguistic expectation that is violated by this

humor is topic progression because what Jen asks to Laura is not coherent with the real condition. Jen acts like that to shift Laura's attention that is being angry to Roy and wants her to stop to hit Roy.

IV CONCLUSION

The mechanism of the humor provides situations and conditions that enable the audiences to think ordinarily about the circumstances. Then they find something unusual in humor and they interpret them as funny things.

In analyzing a humor in a sitcom, one needs to look for what is the punchline of the

humor. After that, he has to consider what is the actor thinks about it or the actor's expected meaning [M1]. Then, he should find out what is the alternative or the unexpected meaning of it [M2]. And the last, he decides which meaning expresses the joke.

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