

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The topic of this thesis is “Misunderstandings Caused by Different Interpretations of Speech Act Classifications and Ambiguities in The Naked Gun Trilogy.” Misunderstandings sometimes happen when we are having a conversation. We may misunderstand what people are trying to say because we misinterpret it. We misinterpret what people say probably because they say it implicitly; they do not say directly what they want to say. For example, when we want to go to the restroom, we do not say, “I need to piss.” because we would be considered impolite. So, instead, we say, “I need to powder my nose.”, “I need to drain the dragon.”, and so on. This, of course, can confuse someone who does not understand the implicit meaning of the utterances, which then leads to misunderstanding or misinterpretation.

My topic belongs to Pragmatics, Syntax, and Semantics. Pragmatics deals with speaker meaning and contextual meaning (Yule 3). The theory I use to analyze the data of my topic is speech acts, which exists in Pragmatics.

Speech acts are actions performed via utterances (Yule 47). When we say something, we are not only saying it but also doing something. In interpreting

what a person really wants from us or what she or he wants us to do, speech act has five classifications. They are declaration, representative, expressive, directive, and commissive.

Different interpretations of speech act classifications happen normally because a sentence can be categorized into more than one classification. Some people may be unable to determine what classification of speech act the speaker intends to say. For example, when we say, “You’re drinking too much.”, it can be interpreted as a representative: the speaker only says what he or she believes to be true, or as a directive: the speaker says it as an order or a suggestion that the hearer should stop drinking. However, misunderstanding can still happen even though we already understand the speech act classifications, that is when we misinterpret the type of the speech act classification. For example, when we offer something, the hearer may interpret it as a question. In this case, the speech act classification interpreted by both the speaker and the hearer is directive, but the types of directive are different. The type of directive intended by the speaker is an offer, but the type of directive interpreted by the hearer is a question. For example, the utterance “Soda?” can be interpreted as a question or an offer.

Another linguistic area that my research belongs to is Syntax. Syntax is “the study of the relationships between linguistic forms, how they are arranged in sequence, and which sequences are well-formed.” (Yule 4). In Syntax, there is a potential source of misinterpretation, namely syntactic ambiguity, which means ambiguity caused by different interpretations of a structure of a sentence.

My research also belongs to Semantics. Semantics is “the study of meaning of a word and a phrase.” (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English

1491). In Semantics, one potential factor of misunderstanding is semantic ambiguity or lexical ambiguity; it means ambiguity caused by the different interpretations of meanings of a word, a phrase, or a sentence.

To avoid ambiguities in a conversation, we need context. Context is “the situation within which something exists or happens, and that can help explain it.” (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 263). People talk with a lot of other people, such as friends or family every day. We talk at different time and place. In general, we talk in different contexts. Regardless of how many contexts we are in, we can understand what our friends or family talk about because the context is clear. For example, when we are in one’s house and the owner of the house offers us a drink, we either accept or reject it. In this case, we understand what he or she is trying to do, which is offering us a drink; we do not think that he or she is trying to mock us. However, there are times when the context is not clear, which leads to confusion, misunderstanding, and misinterpretation of the context. For example, when we want to offer someone a cigarette, it can be interpreted as an insult or an offer; it depends on the context.

My sources of data are the movies The Naked Gun: From the Files of Police Squad!, The Naked Gun 2 ½: The Smell of Fear, and Naked Gun 33 ⅓: The Final Insult. The Naked Gun is a series of three comedy movies from 1988 to 1994. The Naked Gun trilogy is a story of a policeman named Frank Drebin. In the first movie, he has a job to protect Queen Elizabeth II. In the second movie, Frank has a job to stop a fraud from making a speech on what energy source the government should support. In the third movie, Frank has a job to stop the bombing of a building where the 66th annual Academy Award will be held. In

these movies, Frank often misinterprets what people say, even though the context is clear. I also surf the Internet to get the scripts for each movie; therefore, I can save my time. I choose these sources of data because in these movies, I can find a lot of misinterpretations of speech act classifications, and syntactic and semantic ambiguities.

The significance of my topic is to show how speech acts, syntactic and semantic ambiguities are misinterpreted in these movies to build the comical scenes. As a matter of fact, the misinterpretations of those linguistic features are what we usually do every day. However, this can make The Naked Gun trilogy very comical. In short, by analyzing the topic, I would like to prove that something as ordinary as the misinterpretations of speech act classifications, syntactic and semantic ambiguities can be an extraordinary source of the comical scenes in The Naked Gun.

Statement of the Problem

In this thesis, I would like to discuss two things:

1. What utterances lead to misunderstanding in the movies?
2. How are the speech act classifications or syntactic and semantic ambiguities misinterpreted so as to create misunderstandings leading to the comical scenes?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of discussing the problems above is:

1. To find out the utterances that lead to misunderstanding in the movies.

2. To find out how the speech act classifications or syntactic and semantic ambiguities are misinterpreted so as to create misunderstandings leading to the comical scenes.

Method of Research

In gathering the data, I go through five steps. First, I watch the movies. Second, I surf the Internet to find the scripts of the movies. Third, I choose the conversations which contain misunderstanding in the movies. Fourth, I write the conversations down. Last, I analyze the conversations by applying the theories of speech act, syntactic and semantic ambiguities.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1, Introduction, consists of Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter 2 contains the theory which I use to analyze the data. In Chapter 3, I put forward the analysis of the data. Chapter 4 contains the conclusion of the thesis. Finally, the thesis ends with the bibliography and the appendices.