

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background of the Study**

Language is an important part of a human's life. Humans use language almost every moment in their lives. Language primarily functions as an essential tool for communication because it facilitates people to express their ideas. When ideas are expressed, both orally and in writing, there is a possibility that the receiver will get a message that the sender does not really mean.

This problem may occur for the reasons that, firstly, listening is meaning-based. The receiver combines the message from the sender with his own ideas and experiences and then creates the meaning in his own mind (Nunan 24). It has to be noted that each person may have different background knowledge, opinions and experiences that influence the way a person interprets the meaning of a message. The same principle also applies to reading. According to Nunan, listening and reading are the two language skills which are commonly categorized as the receptive skills of language (24).

Secondly, a word may have numerous meanings. This can happen in Bahasa Indonesia, but such possibilities are more often found in the English language. The word *old*, for instance, according to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* has more than two different meanings. If someone says or writes, "My *old* friend will visit me this afternoon," the word *old* in the sentence can mean (1) having lived a long time; advanced in age; no longer young ("Old," def. 2) or (2) known for a long time ("Old," def. 4). Thus, this word is likely to cause a misunderstanding between the sender and the receiver, particularly if the context is unclear to the receiver. I borrow the terms "sender" and "receiver" from a linguist named John Lyons (33).

Thirdly, in written communication, misunderstandings may happen when the readers are confused with some expressions which are unclear in the text. In such cases, most of the time they cannot ask the writer of the text to clarify such expressions, which means that they have to determine the meaning of the unclear expressions by using their own understanding, which is not always the same as the writer's intention.

Lewis Carroll, in his book entitled *Through the Looking-Glass*, also suggests that there are possibilities of different meanings generated between the sender and the receiver in communication based on the sender's element of choice about the meaning which he attaches to certain expressions. This element of personal choice can cause the sender to even be unaware that he has used ambiguous language. In one dialogue, we read, "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less" (168).

According to Jeff Gray, Humpty Dumpty represents individuals who fail to realize that words can have many meanings and that the receiver may not always be able to understand the sender's intention of the words used. The

variance of word meanings can sometimes pose problems in communication because ambiguity is likely to occur.

A word or a sentence that is said to be ambiguous has more than one sense (Hurford and Heasley 121). In using language, we often find that certain expressions which are used by the sender can be confusing. This is due to the fact that language has a tendency to be ambiguous.

Ambiguities can occur both in oral and written language. Ambiguities in oral language are found in people's utterances or speeches, while ambiguities in written language can occur in any kind of writing, such as newspapers, novels and letters.

In this thesis, I would like to discuss ambiguities in some written jokes which are taken from the Internet. Jokes are, in fact, part of language; therefore, they can also be analyzed by using the theory of language. Language serves many important functions in people's life. It does not only function as a means of expressing people's ideas, but it also has several other important functions, one of which is to give pleasure, both to the speakers and the receivers. The use of language for our enjoyment is based on our ability to manipulate language in a creative way (Wiśniewski). A good example of this is a joke. Jean Paul states that "joking is merely playing with ideas" (qtd. in Freud 41).

Ambiguity plays a significant role as a technique which is usually used to create humor. According to Robert Lew, ". . . the presence of two interpretations makes it possible for the joke to produce a humorous effect, arguably the most essential property of a joke" (24). Furthermore, ambiguity can cause misunderstandings in communication, whereas jokes employ the misunderstandings to create humor. Thus, ambiguity in jokes is viewed as something to be employed rather than avoided.

The title of my thesis is “Role of Ambiguity in Producing Humor in Jokes Taken from the Internet.” I choose this topic because, first of all, the use of Internet has increased in this era of technology. People tend to choose the Internet rather than other sources because it is easier to find information on the Internet. For my thesis also, Internet has provided jokes from many kinds of genre, such as school jokes, blonde jokes, animal jokes, and lawyer jokes. Secondly, ambiguity abounds in the English language. It is not always easy for us to avoid ambiguity, and when it occurs, misunderstandings and humorous effects are likely to be produced. Thirdly, humor is generally a part of a person’s daily life. People are fond of making jokes and hearing them. Based on these reasons, I find it interesting to analyze jokes and the ambiguities which make the jokes funny. By analyzing ambiguity in jokes, people may improve their vocabulary, learn more about English syntax and grammar in a fun way, and learn about ambiguity as well. The study of ambiguity is important for people to have good communication. On the one hand, it reminds us not to use ambiguous language, in order to avoid miscommunication, whereas on the other hand, it teaches us to acknowledge the positive, or humorous, side of ambiguity in playful communication. The study of jokes is also important because it may bring learners of English to a perspective of humor of those whose mother tongue is English.

In doing the analysis, I will use some theories of ambiguity, especially that which is espoused by Charles W. Kreidler in his book entitled *Introduction English Semantics*. According to him, ambiguity is divided into three types. I will discuss each of these types further in the following chapter.

The field of my thesis belongs to **semantics**. According to John Lyons, semantics is “generally defined as the study of meaning” (1). In semantics, we study how language and people interact to produce and express meaning. It

includes the study of how meaning is constructed and interpreted. Besides ambiguity, it has also many other branches, such as synonym, antonym, hyponym, hyperbole, and tautology.

I hope this analysis can benefit future researchers, especially for those who are interested in analyzing jokes by using theories of ambiguity.

1.169 words

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problems to be analyzed in this thesis are as follows:

1. What kind of ambiguities is found in each sample of jokes taken from the Internet?
2. What are the different possibilities of meaning that can be interpreted from each ambiguous expression?
3. How do the ambiguities in the jokes contribute to the production of humor?

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study has the following purposes:

1. to show the kind of ambiguities found in each sample of jokes taken from the Internet.
2. to show the different possibilities of meaning that can be interpreted from each ambiguous expression.
3. to find out the way the ambiguities in the jokes contribute to the production of humor.

## **Method of Research**

Firstly, I decide the main topic of this thesis, namely, ambiguity in jokes. Then I begin to do some library research by reading some books and other materials related to the theories of ambiguity, humor, and jokes.

Secondly, I search on different websites on the Internet for some jokes which can be analyzed by using some theories of ambiguity. Then, from four websites, I gather nine jokes and read them several times to identify the kinds of ambiguity used in the jokes and to perceive different possibilities of meaning that can be interpreted from each ambiguous expression. Lastly, I analyze the data and draw a conclusion based on the analysis.

## **Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis is presented in four chapters. The first chapter is Introduction, which contains Background of the Study, Statement of the Problems, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two is Theoretical Framework, which is used to present the approach for analyzing the data. Chapter Three contains the data analysis and the findings. Chapter Four, as the conclusion, includes some comments on the findings. The bibliography and the appendices are found at the end of the thesis.

