

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

After investigating the role of ambiguities in producing humor in nine written jokes which are taken from the Internet, I finally come to the conclusion which is drawn from the findings of the analysis concerned with the purposes of this study. I find that each of the nine jokes, which are taken from four different websites, contains ambiguity. The types of ambiguity which are espoused by Kreidler, Hurford and Heasley, and also by Crystal have been identified in the jokes.

From the entire data, I found that the type of ambiguity that is most frequently identified is lexical ambiguity, and the major cause of this type of ambiguity is homonymy. Referential ambiguity and syntactic ambiguity, on the other hand, are the two types of ambiguity that are less identified in the data.

I conclude that of the nine jokes there are seven jokes which use lexical ambiguity. A possible reason for lexical ambiguity to be the type of ambiguity that is most identified in my sample of jokes is that a word in English can have more than one meaning, and it is even possible for words to have numerous meanings. The word *on* in data 9, for instance, can have two different meanings, which may lead to the subjects of the lecture or the locations of the lecture. As a

matter of fact, the word *on* has more than two denotative meanings. This circumstance makes the tendency to misinterpret words increase and facilitates the creators of the jokes to use words as their objects of manipulation. Manipulation of words is the way we employ words that have tendencies to be interpreted in more than one way in sentences to create possibilities of misinterpreting the ambiguous words by making them interchangeable in the sentence. Thus, it is easier for the creators of the jokes to create possibilities of misinterpreting expressions by using ambiguous words and phrases than by playing with the structure of a sentence or with reference. This statement also gives an obvious reason for referential ambiguity and syntactic ambiguity being identified less in the data.

I also find that in the analysis findings, each ambiguous word, phrase, clause or sentence has an alternative meaning or an unintended meaning which arises from the receiver's misinterpretation of the ambiguous expression. It is proved that the alternative meaning which emerges from one's misinterpreting an ambiguous expression always leads to the response, which in most cases becomes the humor of the jokes. In data 1, for example, the ambiguous words are *toilet water* which can refer to either perfume or water from a toilet. The receiver of the conversation in the joke misinterprets *perfume* as *water from a toilet*. His reply "You could have had some from my *loo* for nothing," which signals this misinterpretation, generates humor in the joke. However, there are also some jokes, such as in data 2, data 3, and data 4, in which humor is produced by the ambiguous expressions which are revealed at the end of the joke. Data 3, for instance, is a joke about a panda that does the acts of *shooting* and *leaving* as a result of interpreting these words as verbs. The humor of the joke is conveyed when, at the end of the joke, the panda tells the manager and also indirectly informs the readers to look at the ambiguous definition of the word

panda in the dictionary. The ambiguous definition that states “A tree-dwelling marsupial of Asia origin, Eats *shoots* and *leaves*,” is in fact the source of the panda’s misunderstanding. Without knowing this definition, the readers will not know that the panda has misinterpreted the words *shoots* and *leaves*. A similar explanation also applies to data 2 and 4.

These findings of the research have led me to the conclusion that ambiguities play a significant role in causing misinterpretations that lead to humor. Lexical ambiguity appears to be by far the type of ambiguity that is most frequently used in jokes. Humor mostly lies in the inappropriate reply or response towards the ambiguous expressions. Therefore, ambiguity triggers a wrong interpretation, which then results in humor.

In relation to the theory of humor that has been mentioned in Chapter Two, humor can be perceived through two stages, which are the identification of incongruity and the resolution of the incongruity. In the nine jokes that I have analyzed, the incongruity lies in the reply or response resulting from one’s misinterpretation of an ambiguous expression, while the resolution is provided by firstly identifying the ambiguity and secondly by acknowledging the possible meanings of the ambiguous expression. In data 2, for instance, the student’s reply “Do not bite any” indicates incongruity. At first this reply may not make sense to the readers if they judge it only from the teacher’s question “How can you prevent diseases caused by *biting insects*?” However, this reply makes sense and becomes funny when the readers realize that the construction *biting insects* is ambiguous and it can also mean “to bite insects.” Thus, based on this theory, whether a joke is considered humorous or not depends on each reader’s ability to detect and resolve incongruity.

This leads me to the conclusion that there are possibilities that the jokes are not considered funny. Firstly, the readers who are still children may find some

jokes such as the jokes in data 2 or data 4, not humorous because the ambiguous expressions in the jokes are in the figurative language, which are probably rather difficult to be understood by children. Therefore, age factor also influences the ability of a reader to detect and resolve incongruity. Secondly, the readers, who are not familiar with Western culture, might find that the sample of jokes in the analysis are not humorous because there are cross-cultural differences in what is considered funny for Westerners. In view of that, the study of joke is important so that learners of English can share the native speakers' perspective of humor. Thirdly, ambiguity is not always easy to recognize, especially by those whose mother tongue is not English. This makes the study of ambiguity important for them so that they can have sufficient knowledge of ambiguity, not only to avoid miscommunication, but also to acknowledge its positive use in playful communication.

Finally, considering the significance of the study of joke and ambiguity, I hope that in the future, there will be other studies that discuss ambiguity in jokes that use theories espoused by other linguists. Seeing that lexical ambiguity can be explored more for analyzing jokes, I suggest that studies which simply focus on lexical ambiguity in jokes be conducted. The findings of my analysis, however, may not represent jokes in general; therefore, a further research on ambiguity in jokes by using the same theories may also be worth doing to verify the finding of this research analysis that lexical ambiguity is the type of ambiguity that is most frequently identified in English language jokes.

1.160 words

