

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Humans smile or laugh if they are given something that makes them happy. It may be good things that happen to them, or they may receive good news, or maybe they simply hear or read something that is funny or hilarious like a silly story or a joke. A joke, which is “something that you say or do to make people laugh, for example a funny story that you tell” (“Joke,” entry 1a) can be in the oral or written form. Therefore, the manipulation or the exploitation of word sounds and word spellings can be very useful in creating a joke. The following is a joke I have created to explain how the manipulation works:

A father was concerned about the condition of his daughter who recently had become the victim of sexual abuse. His friend gave him a pamphlet and said to the father that the guy mentioned in the pamphlet would be able to help his daughter. So, the father went home and showed the pamphlet to his daughter. The father surely did not expect her reaction. She ran away from him, crying, and screaming at the top of her lungs. Shocked, the father then showed the pamphlet to his wife. His wife then proceeded to hit her husband and yell at him for scaring their

daughter. “Why?” asked the father. “Have you read the pamphlet carefully?” shouted his wife, “It says: ‘Dr. Fred Lawrence, THERAPIST!’”

The joke above may not be understood by some people, unless they observe it more carefully. In the joke above, the writer uses language play by manipulating linguistic features of a particular word and presents it in such a way that it concludes the joke and eventually makes it funny. The word that is played is *therapist*, and the linguistic feature that is manipulated creates a **homograph**. Homograph is a word that has the same spelling as that of other words but it has different meaning and pronunciation. The word *therapist* in the joke above means “a specialist who treats a particular type of illness or problem, or who uses a particular type of treatment” (“Therapist,” def. 1). However, the daughter misunderstands it and she reads it as *the rapist* which means a person who rapes someone (“Rapist”). From the condition of the daughter that is presented in the joke, it is not strange that she has mistaken the word and becomes terrified. She thinks that her father will take her to a rapist; but actually, her father is trying to help her by taking her to a therapist.

Through the language play like that in the example, the authors or the writers of jokes can give amusement and hilarity to their jokes and make people laugh. Playing with language means “we take some linguistic feature – such as a word, a phrase, a sentence, a part of a word, a group of sounds, a series of letters – and make it do things it does not normally do” (Crystal 1). Based on what Crystal said, we can see that even a word can play an important role in a joke to make people laugh if its linguistic features are manipulated.

I am really interested in analyzing this kind of joke in which the writer uses language play. Therefore, I have decided to choose the topic of this thesis “Language Play in Online Jokes.” My sources of data for this thesis are from

some websites in the Internet. These data are then sorted out so that the rest are only be the jokes that contain language play in them.

The reason for my choosing this topic is that I am always interested in words and how they can be manipulated in such ways that they give or show other meanings that are completely different from their actual meanings. Another reason is that jokes are fun to be read and analyzed, and jokes that contain manipulated words are more fun to be analyzed linguistically. Reading jokes that contain language play is quite interesting because the readers are challenged to understand and grasp the meaning of the joke and see the funny side of the joke through the play of the language. However, what is even more challenging is for the joke writers to write more jokes that contain language play. The writers of such jokes need to have a good mastery of the language so that they may be able to manipulate words, phrases, or sentences, and direct them to “do things it does not normally do” (Crystal 1).

This topic is significant because it would make people aware of the language play used in the jokes that makes people laugh. The discussion on this topic can also be useful for both other joke writers and joke readers. Other joke writers may be helped to write more jokes after learning the analysis of some jokes in this thesis, whereas joke readers will have a better understanding about the jokes.

As stated in the topic, I will analyze jokes based on the kinds of language play that are used in the jokes. The play on the language can be in many forms; for example, language play that deals with homonymy, which is “different words with the same form” (Lyons 55), or synonymy, which means “words or expressions that have the same meanings in some or all contexts” (O’Grady 269). Also, the play can make use of words or phrases that rhyme with others.

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1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the topic that I choose, I would like to discuss the following problems:

1. What type of language play is used in each of the jokes in the data?
2. How does the joke writer manipulate or exploit the linguistic feature of a word to create the language play?
3. How does the language play produce the humor?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is:

1. To know the type of language play used in each of the jokes in the data.
2. To find out how the joke writer manipulates or exploits the linguistic feature of a word to create the language play.
3. To find out how the language play produces the humor.

1.4 Method of Research

There are five steps that I used in writing this thesis. First I learned the theories of language play and the Theory of Incongruity to support my analysis later on. Second, I searched for the jokes on some websites in the Internet.

The reason for my choosing the Internet as the main source of my data is that nowadays the Internet is considered to be the place to find and obtain almost all kinds of information because of the convenience in accessing it. The information found in the Internet is provided by different types of people, either skillful in a particular field or less skillful. The same condition applies to jokes. Jokes found in the Internet are more varied and not all of them are written by professional joke writers. They can be uploaded to the Internet by regular people

with the intention simply to make the readers happy. These jokes may not contain manipulations or exploitations of linguistic features. To serve the purpose of this study, therefore, I looked only for the jokes containing linguistic feature manipulations or exploitations.

Third, after I found a joke that met the criteria, which is the manipulation or exploitation of linguistic features, I read it and predicted how the joke would end. If the end was not as predicted, then the joke was chosen to be analyzed. The next step is finding the rule in order to explain why the joke was funny. Finally, I wrote the research report.

1.5 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter One is Introduction, which is divided into five parts: Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two contains Theoretical Framework, which is the elaboration of the theories that are used to analyze the data. Chapter Three presents the analysis of the data. The last chapter, Chapter Four, is Conclusion. At the end of the thesis, there is Bibliography and Appendix.