

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

People are social creatures; thus, they express their feelings, emotions, thoughts, and ideas by interacting with their fellow beings. They use language to interact with others and it is undeniable that they use language in almost every aspect of their lives. Therefore, it can be considered that language is a very important part in people's lives, which cannot be separated from communication. Anna Wierzbicka (3), in her book, *Semantics: Primes and Universal*, states that the function of language is an instrument for conveying meaning.

Ideas and meanings can be expressed both in spoken and written language. However, there is a possibility that the hearer or the reader gets a message that the speaker or the writer does not really mean. This is so because the speaker or the writer sometimes does not state his or her meaning clearly and explicitly, with the result that the hearer or the reader interprets the meaning in a different way than is intended by the speaker or the writer.

Furthermore, understanding written language is more difficult than spoken language. If the hearer does not understand what the speaker says in his or her utterances or speeches, the hearer can directly ask the speaker what he or she actually means. However, if the reader does not understand what the writer has written, he or she most probably cannot directly ask the writer. Because of the different views and interpretations between the two sides, misunderstanding in spoken and written language is likely to occur.

One of the sources of misunderstanding is ambiguity. Ambiguity means a word or a phrase or a sentence that has more than one meaning (Bach). In other words, a word or phrase or sentence can be interpreted in more than one way. The ambiguity in a word or a phrase or a sentence usually creates confusion or uncertainty of meaning for the reader. In support of this view, according to Geoffrey Leech (30), an expression is said to be ambiguous when more than one interpretation can be assigned to it. This ambiguous expression can happen in a word, a phrase or a sentence.

In this thesis, I would like to discuss ambiguities in written riddles which are taken from the Internet, I have selected the written riddles from five websites: *Enchanted Learning*, *Funology*, *Jokes in English for the ESL/EFL Classroom*, *Reading Rockets* and *RinkWorks*. The reason for choosing these websites is the riddles are suitable as my data as they can be analysed by using particular linguistic theories. A riddle is most probably quite confusing and it has an unexpected answer. Since many riddles contain ambiguity, and ambiguity is part of linguistics, they can also be analysed by using some theories of linguistics. In this case, language serves an important function, not only as a means of

expressing people's ideas, but also as something which gives pleasure to the writer or speaker and the reader or hearer. On top of that, riddles are one of the examples of a creative way of using language for fun. Besides this, ambiguity plays a significant role as a technique which is commonly used to create humour, and it is also one of the causes of misunderstanding in communication. Riddles, then, use the misunderstanding from the ambiguity to create humour.

The title of my thesis is "Analysis of Ambiguity in Humorous Riddles." The reasons for choosing this topic are, firstly, ambiguity is one of the language aspects which abound in many languages, including in the English language. Moreover, people cannot avoid ambiguity, although there are many theories to help people avoid it. When an ambiguity occurs in a statement, it can create a misunderstanding. Secondly, the misunderstanding does not usually refer to a bad thing. The misunderstanding which results from the ambiguity can be used for something pleasant, as the ambiguity has an important role in producing humour. Thirdly, riddle is a form of language which uses ambiguity to create a humorous effect.

When doing my analysis, I used the ambiguity theory based on Charles W. Kreidler. He divides ambiguity into three types: lexical ambiguity, referential ambiguity, and syntactic ambiguity (Kreidler 55, 151, 169). My analysis also applies the theory of script incongruity by Victor Raskin to explain the producing of humour in the riddles. Raskin uses the term *script* and adopts the view that words and sequences of words in a text act as triggers in activating particular scripts for text processing (Cook 75).

I believe this topic is significant to analyse. It is commonly known that people might think that riddles are just for fun. Yet riddles have an academic side too, as one of the significant aspects is ambiguity, which belongs to linguistics. Therefore, the readers are expected to be able to realize and also explore how the theoretical understanding of linguistics contributes to language patterns in English riddles.

(810 words)

Statement of the Problem

The problems which I would like to analyse in this thesis are stated below:

1. What word or phrase makes the riddle ambiguous?
2. What kind of ambiguity can be found in the riddle?
3. What is the cause of the ambiguity?
4. How does the ambiguity in the riddle contribute to the script incongruity?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this thesis is to answer the problems of this research which are mentioned above. They are as follows:

1. To show the word or phrase that makes the riddle ambiguous.
2. To show the kind of ambiguity found in the riddle.
3. To show the cause of the ambiguity.
4. To find out how the ambiguity in the riddle contributes to the script incongruity.

Method of Research

First of all, I choose the topic of this thesis, which is ambiguity in riddles. Then I begin to do some library and Internet research by reading some books and searching for other materials needed which relate to the theory of ambiguity and script incongruity. After that, I gather and choose some riddles from different websites in the Internet which can be analysed by using some ambiguity theories and also the theory of script incongruity. Finally, I write the research report.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is presented in four chapters and is preceded by the Abstract. The first chapter is Introduction, containing Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two is Theoretical Framework, presenting the approach for analysing the data. The next part is Chapter Three, which consists of the data analysis and the results. The last chapter is Chapter Four, which is Conclusion, which includes some personal comments on the findings. After this, the thesis ends with Bibliography and Appendix.