

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1. Background of the Study**

Comprehending a joke is not an easy thing to do. The writer has experienced how difficult it is to understand jokes, especially those, which are presented in a foreign language. As a second language learner the writer has found out that not all jokes, which are written and created by an English native speaker can be easily comprehended. Some jokes end up in confusion and some create amusement just after we read them. This phenomenon has stirred curiosity in the writer's mind. Thus, she decided to make a study on jokes.

Jokes have become one of the most popular language varieties developed widely for several purposes such as, entertainment, education, and to send messages or critics without directly offending the hearers. They also have the ability to communicate things, which sometimes cannot be expressed in a certain situation. Furthermore, jokes may work better than a harsh word or a direct critic. Generally, jokes or humours are created to entertain people and used in many situations and occasions. According to Brill, as cited by Soedjatmiko "Humour is an inseparable part of the human's life with which it is used as, a means of relieving tension, refreshing feeling, and criticizing people without causing a serious confrontation between participants."(1988:1) People make jokes or hear other people's jokes everyday in their lives. That is why, jokes are not only part of language, but they also part of human beings lives.

In our everyday life, jokes appear in written texts, spoken words, and action comedies. Some jokes emphasize their amusing parts on the words play and some emphasize their amusing parts on ridicules or silly actions. It is undeniable that the purpose of joke is to create laughter and the feeling of fun. Raskin states that joke is something that is appreciated, enjoyed, and shared by all people to be funny (1985:1-2). Although joke deals with funny stories, funny situations, or even funny thoughts, it has a special uniqueness that is how it makes something funny.

Jokes may appear in various forms, as Soedjatmiko suggests in her dissertation, there are five discourse type of jokes: one-liner jokes, two-liner jokes, short-text jokes, humour columns, and literary humour. One-liner joke contains a single speech act, for an example: *Did you hear about the goofy weatherman who took a ruler outside to see how long it was going to rain?* Two-liner joke usually takes the form of question and answer between two different people and the humour is obtained through the unexpected or irrelevant answer, for an example:

*COSTUMER: Waiter, what is this fly doing in my hamburger?  
WAITER: Looks like the cha-cha-cha.*

Short-text joke involves a short text, for example:

*A kindly old woman watched as a little boy tried to reach the doorbell of the house next door. Deciding she would help, the woman walked over and rang the bell for him.  
"Well, what now?" said the woman to the boy.  
"Run like a crazy," said the boy, "That's what I'm going to do!"*

Humour columns are journalistic critics, often satirical, and miscellaneous current news: social and political events. This type of humour usually presented in newspapers. Literary humours are humours that have the features of both literary work and humorous text.

*The Heritage of Illustrated Dictionary of English Language* defines joke as an amusing story especially the one with a punch line - the line which contains the core word (s) to make the joke funny. In accordance with the above definition, Crystal (1995: 404) argues that the word play in jokes arise in several different ways. Sometimes it is isolated and unpremeditated, as in the spontaneous wisecrack, a quick and clever remark as quip, or deliberate pun. Sometimes it is pre-planned and structured, as in cartoon, caricature, and in such literary genres as parody and satire. He also argues that humour can arise from unintentional use of language, resulting in such effects as howlers, misprints, slips of the tongue, and accidental pun. Subsequently, linguistic elements, such as semantics, pragmatics, syntax, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics have a great influence on the creation of a joke and determine the amusing part of it. Thus, many linguistic theories, such as cooperative principle, cohesive devise, schemata, conversational maxims, truth conditional semantics, lexical ambiguity, and structural ambiguity, can be used to analyse jokes.

Due to the fact that many linguistic theories can be used to analyse jokes, the writer decides to make use some of semantic theories, which are lexical and structural ambiguity, and truth conditional semantics in her study. The writer likes to analyse the application of those theories in American two-liner jokes in order to

find out whether those applications determine the funniness of the jokes. Thus, she chose a book entitled *Biggest Joke Book in the World* composed by Matt Rissinger and Philip Yates. The book contains American jokes, which includes the form of two–liner jokes. In discussing two-liner jokes, the writer would also like to clarify that in this case the writer considers that humours and jokes are the same thing. As Crystal states that humour is written in the form of jokes (1995: 404).

Understanding jokes, especially those which are written in foreign language is seemingly not an easy ‘job’ for non-native speakers even for second language learners because sometime, there seems to be no relevant relationship between the introduction sentence and the punch-line. Some jokes may end up in confusion when the readers, listeners, or audiences fail to catch the humour. In the reality, however, some jokes may fail in creating funniness and may trigger a quarrel or confrontation. On the contrary, when this language function is performed successfully, it can give rise to feelings of warmth, solidarity, and closeness between people. Jokes deal with meaning and as a consequence, in order to find out what makes a certain joke funny we should understand the meaning first. Therefore, the writer finds it important to conduct this study of jokes.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

1. Can some semantic theories, which involve lexical and structural ambiguity and truth conditional semantics be applied to American two-liner jokes to create humorous effect?

2. Which of those theories (lexical ambiguity, structural ambiguity, and truth conditional semantics) mostly apply to American two – liner jokes?

### **1.3. Objective of the Study**

The objective of the study is to find out whether some semantic theories: lexical and structural ambiguity and truth conditional semantics can be applied to American two-liner jokes to create humorous effect and which of those three theories mostly apply to American two – liner jokes.

### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

By doing this study, the writer wants to help the readers to understand jokes from point of view of linguistics. Moreover, the writer hopes this study will give a better understanding on jokes, which are written by English native speakers. The study and the findings are also expected to arise curiosity and interest of other linguists to make further study on jokes.

### **1.5. Scope and Limitation**

There are a lot of semantic theories, which can be used in analysing jokes, however, the writer has decided to make use of three semantic theories: lexical ambiguity, grammatical ambiguity, and truth conditional semantics. The study focuses on the application of those theories in American two-liner jokes. The form of joke studied consisted of a question and answer or dialog.

### **1.6. Theoretical Framework**

In conducting this study, the writer makes use of some theories, which are taken from semantic field. Those theories are ambiguity theories proposed by

Fromkin and Rodman, and Hurford and Heasley, and truth conditional semantics proposed by Tarski.

### **1.6.1. Semantic Ambiguity**

The semantic ambiguity has caused ambiguity in the meaning of sentences. Ullmann in Pateda (2001:201) stated, "Ambiguity is a linguistic condition which can arise in a variety of ways." The writer believes that some jokes apply this ambiguity theory to create funniness. As stated by Wilson, "Humour manipulates incongruity or ambiguity and the process of disambiguating the construction responsible for the cognitive imbalance." According to Hurford and Heasley (1983:121) a word or a sentence is ambiguous when it has more than one sense. In summary, ambiguous means having more than one meaning. They argue that there are two kinds of ambiguity:

- Lexical ambiguity happens when sentences contain one or more ambiguous words.
- Structural ambiguity happens when a sentence is ambiguous because its words relate to each other in different ways, even though none of the individual words are ambiguous

According to Fromkin and Rodman homonym and homophone may create ambiguity (1983:211). Hurford and Heasley also argue that lexical ambiguity depends on homonym and polysemy (1983:129). In this study, the writer would like to investigate the application of lexical ambiguity and grammatical ambiguity in creating humorous effect in-joke.

### **1.6.2. Truth Conditional Semantics**

Truth conditional semantics is concerned with the meaning of sentences and sets of conditions that guarantee the truth of sentence. Tarski proposed a complete theory of meaning for a language involves in matching procedure between sentences and sets of condition. Based on Tarski definition – ‘a true sentence is one which states that the state of affairs is so and so, and the state of affairs is so and so’ (Palmer, 1981:196).

In some jokes, the manipulation of truth conditional semantics is often applied in order to create funniness. When the joke begins to be told, the readers or listeners get their first interpretation about the meaning of the joke and at the end of it, they realize that their first interpretation is wrong because of the unexpected meaning.

### **1.7. Method of the Study**

This study uses a qualitative method for it provides description and analysis of the data, which are not in numbers.

#### **1.7.1. Definition of the Key term**

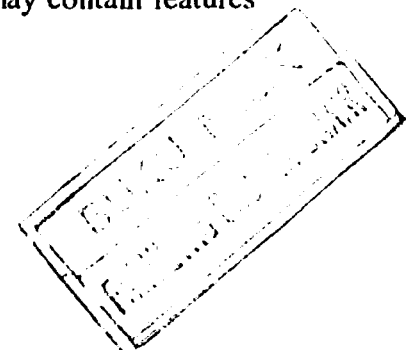
The writer uses several terms that are needed to be defined for the limitation of the study. Hence, this part provides brief definitions and description of the key terms, which are used in this study. These definitions are important, so that the readers have an idea about the theories used in the study.

1. **Joke:** An amusing story especially the one with a punch line-the line which contains the core word (s) to make the joke funny.
2. **Semantics:** The study of meaning in language.

3. **Verbal humour:** A humorous situation, which is created, described, and expressed by a text.
4. **Two-liner Jokes:** jokes that often take the form of question and answer
5. **Punch-line:** the climax of the humour in which the amusing part takes place
6. **Pun:** The humorous use of a word that has two meaning, or of different words that sound the same; a play on words.
7. **Ambiguity:** a word or a sentence that has more than one sense.
8. **Lexical Ambiguity:** an ambiguity on a word, which had two or more synonyms that are not synonyms of each other.
9. **Structural Ambiguity:** A sentence, which is ambiguous because its words relate to each other in different ways, even though none of the individual words are ambiguous, is structurally (or grammatically) ambiguous.
10. **Truth Conditional Semantics:** related to meaning of a sentence and sets of conditions that guarantee the truth of the sentence.

### 1.7.2. Source of Data

The data in this study are taken from a book entitled *Biggest Joke Book in the World* written by Matt Rissinger and Philip Yates. The book consists of 19 chapters. The writer chose four chapters: chapter 1, 8, 12, 17, which mostly contain two-liner jokes. There are thirty jokes, which are going to be analysed. The data are in the form of direct conversation texts, which may contain features of non-standard language.





### **1.7.3. Technique of Data Collection**

Data play an important role in this study. In collecting the data, the first step is choosing the chapters, which mostly consist of two-liner jokes. The second step is selecting thirty jokes to be analysed. The procedures of data collection are briefly stated below:

1. Choosing the chapters, which mostly consists of two-liner jokes
2. Selecting thirty jokes to be analysed

### **1.7.4. Technique of Data Analysis**

The writer analyses the data in order to show the application of the semantic theories: lexical and structural ambiguity, and truth conditional semantics to create the humour in American two-liner jokes. After collecting the data, the writer analyses each joke based on the application of the theories. After that, classifies the data based on Fromkin and Rodman, Hurford and Heasley, and Tarski's theories of semantic ambiguity and truth conditional semantics. Next, the writer tabulates the findings of the analyses into a table. Finally, the writer makes a conclusion. The process of analysis proceed in the following steps:

1. Analyzing each data based on the application of the theories
2. Classifying the data
3. Tabulating the findings of the analyses into a table
4. Making a conclusion

## **1.8. The Organization of the Study**

The study consists of four chapters. The first chapter contains background of the study, statement of the problem, the objective of the study, the significance

of the study, scope and limitation, theoretical framework, the methodology of the study, and the organization of the study. Chapter two contains the review of related literature, the related theories that will be used to analyse the data and the related studies. Chapter three contains the analysis of the data and the findings. Chapter four presents the conclusion.

**CHAPTER**

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

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