

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

This chapter is meant to present the review of the related theories and of related studies. In the first part the writer describes some of the related theories, which she uses to analyse the data, to answer the statement of the problem as well as to classify the data, which she uses as her references. The second part the writer includes the related studies, which are needed to support her study.

2.1. Related Theories

In conducting this study, the writer makes use some semantic theories such as: semantic ambiguity, including lexical ambiguity and structural ambiguity and truth conditional semantics.

2.1.1. Semantics

Hurford and Heasley define semantics as the study of meaning in language (1983:1). Fromkin and Rodman define it as the meanings of language. Furthermore, they explain that learning a language includes learning the “agreed-upon” meanings of certain strings of sound and learning how to combine these meaningful units into larger units that also convey meaning (1978:205).

2.1.2. Semantic Ambiguity

The semantic ambiguity causes ambiguity in the meaning of sentences. A word or a sentence is ambiguous if more than one meaning can be assigned to it. In other words, as it states by Fromkin and Rodman

“a word or a sentence is ambiguous if it can be understood or interpreted in more than one way” (1978:167). For an example the sentence,

She cannot bear children

may be understood to mean,

“She is unable to give birth to children”

or

“She cannot tolerate children”

The sentence above is ambiguous because the word *bear* has two different meanings: 1. to give birth to (child), 2. to tolerate. Fromkin and Rodman argue that sometimes additional context can disambiguate the sentence (1978:167). Thus, the word *bear* in the sentences *She cannot bear children if they are noisy* and *She cannot bear children because she is sterile* are unambiguous. The fact that two words with different meanings may sound the same makes such words good candidates for humour, as well as for confusion (1978:168).

There are many other examples of ambiguous sentences, which are caused by the particular semantic properties, which belong to some of the words of the sentence. For example:

The girl found a book on Main Street

is ambiguous, since the sentence can mean either:

“The girl found a book which was lying on Main Street”

or

“The girl found a book while she was on Main Street”
or
“The girl found a book whose subject matter concerned Main
Street”

The ambiguity is caused by the particular semantic properties of the words *book*, *on*, and *street*. The meaning of *book* includes something like ‘contains writer information about.’ *On* is a homonym meaning ‘on the surface’ or ‘about’ (that is, ‘on the subject of’). *Street* has ‘surface on which things may be located’ among its semantic properties (1978:169).

On the contrary *The girl found a book on language*, is unambiguous since *language* does not possess any semantic property that would allow it to be used in a phrase of location, and consequently *on* can be interpreted only as meaning “about.” Thus, the semantic properties of these various words determine the ambiguity or lack of ambiguity of these sentences.

According to Hurford and Heasley (1983:121), a word or a sentence is ambiguous when it has more than one sense. They argue that a sentence is ambiguous if it has two (or more) paraphrases which are not themselves paraphrases of each other (1983:121). As an example the sentence *We saw her duck* is a paraphrase of *We saw her lower her head* and *We saw the duck belonging to her*, and these last two sentences are not paraphrases of each other. Therefore *We saw her duck* is ambiguous.

2.1.3. Lexical Ambiguity

Lexical ambiguity happens when sentences contain one or more ambiguous words (Fromkin and Rodman, 1978:212). In other words lexical ambiguity is resulting from the ambiguity of a word or a phrase. Hurford and Heasley argue that in the case of words and phrases, a word or phrase is ambiguous, if it has two (or more) synonyms that are not themselves synonyms of each other (1983:122). Therefore it is clear that the ambiguity happens because of a word or words in a sentence contain more than one meaning as an example,

Thomas Jefferson ate his cottage cheese with **relish**

the word *relish* causes ambiguity in the above sentence. Based on its lexical meaning, the word *relish* has two different meanings: *enjoy* and *sauce*. If we apply the first meaning then the meaning of the sentence will be: *Thomas Jefferson ate his cottage cheese with enjoyment* while when we apply the second meaning, it will form a meaning as *Thomas Jefferson ate his cottage cheese with sauce*.

2.1.3.1. Polysemy

According to Hurfourd and Heasley, polysemy is one where a word has several very closely related senses while Palmer (1981:100) defines polysemy as 'the case that some words may have 'a set' of different meaning' (one word with several meanings). The word *mouth* as an example has two related meaning 1. of a river and 2. of an animal. Based on its two related

meaning the word *mouth* can be classified as polysemy. Hurford and Heasley explained that the two senses are clearly related by the concepts or idea of an opening from the interior of some solid mass to the outside, and of a place of issue at the end of some long narrow channel (1983:123). Thus, in case of polysemy there are two closely related senses, something that they have in common or similarity. Another example of polysemy is the word *drive*; *drive* can either mean as in *drive a nail* or as in *drive a car*, both containing the concept of causing something to move in a particular direction.

2.1.3.2. Homonym

Another cause of lexical ambiguity is homonym. Subsequently, there is a slight difference between polysemy and homonym. Hurford and Heasley define homonym as one of an ambiguous word, whose different senses are far apart from each other in anyway. They also argue that cases of homonym seem very definitely to be matters of mere accident or coincidence (1983:123). On the contrary, in case of polysemy there are related senses of meaning while in homonym there are no related senses of meaning.

2.1.3.3. Homophone

Fromkin and Rodman argue that homonym is also can be called as homophone, which they define as a word with same

sound but has more than one meanings (1978:167). In fact homonym has a slight difference from homophone. Homonym did not only involve the same sound or pronunciation of the word, but also stress on the same spelling, as an example:

She cannot **bear** children,

lexically the word *bear* in the above example has various meanings, which can be either 'large animal with thick fur', 'carry', 'support', 'show', 'produce', 'give a birth to', or 'have (a particular feeling)' although the sound {b eə(r)} and the spelling (b e a r) are the same.

On the contrary, homophone has the same sound but different spelling, for examples the words *flour* and *flower*, involve two different words with different meanings and here where misinterpretation happens. Thus, homophone can also be applied to make humorous effects in jokes. Fromkin and Rodman give an example of the use of homophone in making humorous effects in a joke:

“How is bread made?”

“ I know that!” Alice cried eagerly. “You take some **flour__**”

“Where do you pick the **flower?**” The white Queen asked. “In a garden, or in the hedges?”

“Well, it isn't picked at all,” Alice, explained: “It's **ground__**”

“How many acres of **ground?**” said the Queen.

The humour of the above passage is not only based on homophones *flour* [flaʊə(r)] and *flower* [flaʊə(r)], but also homonyms *ground*, which have two meanings. Here, Alice means *ground* as the past tense of *grind*, while the white Queen is interpreting *ground* to mean *earth* (1978:168).

Finally, the writer sums up those polysemy, homonym, and homophone cause lexical ambiguities, which make good candidates for humour as well as for confusion. The application of lexical ambiguity in jokes can be also called as pun - the humorous use of a word that has two meaning, or of different words that sound the same; a play on words.

2.1.4. Structural Ambiguity

Hurford and Heasley argue that 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 (1983:128). For an example:

The chicken is ready to eat

is structurally ambiguous for it may result in two different meanings:

- a. The chicken is ready to be eaten by someone
- b. The chicken is ready to eat something.

The same case also happens in the following sentence

Mary and Joe or Bill frightened the dog

which may result into:

- a. Mary and Joe frightened the dog **or** Bill frightened the dog
- b. Mary and Joe frightened the dog **or** Mary and Bill frightened the dog.

They also argue that structural ambiguity is basically a question of 'what goes with what' in a sentence, and this can be shown by diagram of various sorts (1983:128). One way of presenting the structural ambiguity is by using square brackets around the relevant parts of the sentence (or phrase). As an example the phrase *old men and women* can be presented in square brackets diagram:

- a. [old men] and women
- b. old [men and women]

The first diagram indicates that 'old' modifies only men, and the second indicates that 'old' modifies the whole phrase 'old men and women'.

Thus, it can be concluded that this structural ambiguity has a role in creating humorous effect, as in the following example:

"Excuse me, waiter, but *does your chef have chicken legs?*"
 "I don't know – I can't see under his apron."

Based on the context, the conversation happens between a customer and a waiter. In this joke, the first sentence is ambiguous since it can be interpreted in two ways. The question can mean *does your chef cook or serve chicken legs?* or *does your chef have chicken's legs?*. The punch line of this joke occurs in the second sentence, which is a reaction to

the first sentence. Thus, the waiter say that he can't tell whether his chef's legs are chicken's legs for he cannot see anything under the chef apron.

2.1.5. Truth Conditional Semantics

Tarski proposed the truth conditional semantics, which the writer uses in her study of American two-liner jokes. This theory is related with meaning of a sentence and sets of conditions that guarantee the truth of the sentence. Based on Tarski's definition- 'a true sentence is one which states that the state of affairs is so and so, and the state of affair is so and so' (Palmer, 1981:196). As it has been mentioned, the theory of meaning of a language involves a matching procedure between sentences and set of conditions which when applied to each of the infinite sentences of a language automatically yields a sentence of the form

$$S \text{ is true if only if } p$$

where, as with the Tarskian formula for a theory of truth, *S* is the name of the sentence and *p* is the set of conditions under which that sentence is true (1981:196). Palmer called the connective as two-value logic that involves 'true' and 'false', the truth or falsity is relative to the world (1981:85).

The examples of the substitution of *S* and *p* to yield such formula are:

- *A boy hurried to his home* was true if and only if a male child quickly went to the place where he lived.
- *John killed Bill* was true if and only if John caused Bill to die.

Michael Devitt (1995:80) states that the core meaning of such a sentence is its truth condition: its property of being true if a certain

situation in the world obtains and not true if the situation does not, Devitt gives another example in explaining truth conditions,

- Reagan is wrinkled* is true if and only if
- a. there is some object that 'Reagan' designates and
 - b. 'wrinkled' applies to that object

The following example is the application of the truth conditional semantics in a joke:

'Sarah was carrying her baby in the baby carriage walking along the street when she met her old friend. While she is looking at the baby in the baby carriage, the old friend praising the baby; "How cute he is. He looks like his father."
"I think you are right," Sarah said. "Unfortunately this baby is not looked like my husband."

The joke above applies truth conditional semantics to create humorous effect; it is true that the baby looks like his father, but there is violation of its truth, which is out of what the readers or listeners expectation that unfortunately the father of the baby is not her husband. The punch line which lies on the last sentence gives a surprising effect to the readers or listeners and this unexpected meaning creates humorous effect. In accordance with the above example Fromkin and Rodman state that it does not matter that a subpart of the sentence is false. An entire sentence may be true even if one or more of its part are false and vice versa. Truth is determined by the semantic rules, which permit you to combine the subparts a sentence and still know under what conditions the sentence is true or false (1978:224).

They further argue that one can understand the sentence, or any sentence-one can assign meaning to it – even if one is unable to decide on its ‘truth value’ and the knowledge of the external world may help us decide if a sentence is true or false (1978:223). Therefore, its meaning partially depends on knowing what conditions would make it a true statement or a false one.

2.1.6. Two-liner Jokes

Soedjatmiko, in her dissertation *Linguistic and Cultural Analyses of American Written Verbal Humor and Its Pedagogical Implication*, suggested five-discourse type of humour: one-liner jokes, two-liner jokes, short-text jokes, humour columns, and literary humour. Two-liner joke is “The type of joke that of ten takes the form of question and answer or the riddle form, where funniness is created by making nonsensical answer.”(1988:75). For example:

Why can you never starve in a desert? Because of the sand which is there.

The joke above consists of two sentences and regarded as two-liner joke. It is funny because it is play between *because of the sand which is there* and *because of the sandwiches there*.

It is quite true that two-liners are considered simple to non-native speakers, especially if they contain references and indexical information which is cultural, specific to a certain time, person, or event. As two-liners are made or built up from questions and answers, the funniness is created

through the unexpected, irrelevant, and often witty or brilliant answer given to the question (1988:48).

2.1.7. The Biggest Joke Book in the World

The Biggest Joke Book in the World is one of jokes book, which was sold in Indonesia. It is written by Matt Rissinger and Philip Yates and illustrated by Jeff Sinclair and published by Goodwill Publishing House in New Delhi India. The book contains 19 chapters consisting of 702 jokes and 192 pages. The book consists of various kinds of joke, including one-liner jokes, two-liner jokes, and short-text jokes.

2.2. Related Studies

Milah Kresnawaty in her thesis *Flouted Maxims of Conversation that Arouse Humor in The Adventures of Tintin Comic Books (A Discourse Analysis Approach)* has made a study in the application of principles in communication, using the Conversational Maxims and focuses on the Maxims of Conversation that can be flouted to arouse humor. She found the flouting of Conversational Maxims could be counted as one of the ideas responsible for arousing humor. She also found that when one deliberately fails to fulfill a certain maxim in a certain maxim in a conversation, it does not mean that the communication meets an end. In fact there can be something else on purpose, such as for arousing humor.

Analisis Notoatmodjo developed his study *A Semantic Study of Indonesian Short-text Humor in Indonesia Humor Book: Lagi-lagi Hua...Ha...Ha...Ha...* from Dr. Wuri Soedjatmiko's research on American

humor, which was done in order to find out the semantic mechanisms that make a story sound funny, and has the sense of humor. In order to make a further study he tried to find out whether those semantic mechanisms violate Indonesian short-text humor. He uses Bergson's theory of humor as the main theory, which claims that the joke is made by confusing two apparently different meanings of the same pattern and something is funny when it belongs to two different ways. And from his analysis of Indonesian short-text humor, he found that all Indonesian short-text humors use unexpected meaning to surprise the readers.

CHAPTER 3

**The Presentation and
Analysis of the Data**

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