

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

It is not rare when somebody hears or sees something and laughs. This means that the person finds the audio or visual stimulus funny. This condition also indicates that the person has a sense of humor since he gives a positive response to a funny stimulus. Psychologists agree that there are two parts of a sense of humor. First, there is mental activity involved in discovering and appreciating events in humorous way. The mental exercise of understanding the punch line of a joke promotes laughter. Secondly, certain attributes of jokes or situations promote humor situations that surprise or are incongruent with one another have the potential to create laughter (Whitt & Prentice, 1997). Although there is a complex activity needed in comprehending humor, it doesn't mean that humor appreciation can be done by adults only.

A sense of humor belongs to everyone including children. Children have capacity to comprehend and enjoy humor. A child's sense of humor can be used as an indicator of their cognitive growth. According to Piaget (cited in Hurlock, 1978:355), cognitive ability, which makes understanding possible, develops in two major periods involving four stages-the sensory motor stage, the preoperational stage, the stage of concrete operations, and the stage of formal operations. Based on this statement, it can be seen that there is a significant difference on each level to understand humor, especially a verbal humor. Most of

preoperational thought children laugh for unusual activities, such as: they laughed when they found their friend slipped on a banana peel. It seems they find incongruity in this situation, but the cognitive process is not completely used.

As the years go by, the children's reasoning process become logical. This period is called concrete operational thought. They become able, between the ages of 7 and 11, to do all the cognitive operations that limit the intellectual activity of the preoperational children (Piaget cited in Wardsworth, 1971:35). Children in this period mostly have entered Elementary School. They have learnt about words, phrases, and sentences. All these factors can explain the changes in children's appreciation of humor. It means when children know language, they are able to understand the attributes of jokes.

Understanding of language doesn't not occur spontaneously, but starting from children language acquisition. Language acquisition is a process that happens in children's brain when they get their first language (Chaer, 2003:60). There are two process happened when children get their first language; competence and performance process. Competence refers to one's underlying knowledge of a system, event, or fact. According to Chomsky (1965:75), competency covers three grammatical components: syntax, semantics, and phonological. Those three components are acquired. Miller (cited in Brown, 1987:87) states that performance is the overtly observable and concrete manifestation of competence. Performance is actual production (speaking, writing) or the comprehension (listening, reading) of linguistic event. Children know and understand what people are talking about because of their linguistic ability. Understanding is the ability to

achieve a grasp of the nature, significance, or explanation of something and to have a clear or complete idea of it (Hurlock, 1978:354). Hurlock elaborated that understanding comes from the maturation of the intellectual capacities of the children and from knowledge acquired by learning over a long period of time.

Elementary school's logical operational abilities enable them to understand humor based on double meaning that are beyond the comprehension of the preschool children. Jokes require children to shift from the obvious meaning of some key word and consider on or more additional meaning (McGhee, 1971), whenever children can understand meaning of words used in several contexts, they can appreciate the jokes, such as:

“Belajarliah yang rajin agar kelak kamu menjadi orang besar”, kata seorang Ayah ke pada anaknya yang masih kecil. “Tidak dengan belajarpun saya akan menjadi orang besar asal tiap hari dikasih makan,” kata Anaknya.
 (“You have to study hard so you could be a big guy,” said a father to his little son. “Without studying I would be a big guy if you feed me everyday,” said his son).

Preoperational children may or may not laugh at this joke, but surely they cannot explain what is funny about it. In contrast, concrete operational children's capacity to reserve their thinking and go back and forth between several different meanings of key words permits them to understand that a joke or riddle can have two possible interpretations, a usual one and an unusual one, the latter of which is funny because it is incongruous (Shultz & Horibe, 1974).

The phenomenon becomes the basis of the writer's consideration to use children as the subject of the study. Conducting the research the writer chose 7-11 years old children. Piaget (Solso, 1985:380) states that obviously a great deal

language development and the ability to comprehend word have occurred by this age period.

1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1. How is the ability of 7-11 year-age in comprehending ambiguity of verbal humor?
2. What type of linguistic ambiguities is the most easily comprehended by children of the age of 7-11 years?

1.3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1. To find out the ability of 7-11 year-age children in comprehending ambiguity of verbal humor.
2. To find out the type of linguistic ambiguity, which is the most easily comprehended by children at the age of 7-11 year age.

1.4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is expected to broaden our horizon about the extending of concrete operational thought. The extent of concrete operational thought is expected to become our consideration to develop children ability to comprehend language and to increase their understanding of vocabulary and the meaning of words.

1.5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The writer uses two theories as the basic ideas to support the research. The first is cognitive development theory as psychology theory proposed by Piaget and the second is incongruity theory as linguistic theory proposed by Wilson.

Cognitive development theory, which is introduced by Piaget, is used as a basic idea to explain children language acquisition process. Language acquisition is a process that happens in children's brain when they get their first language (Chaer, 2003:60). There are two processes that occur when children get their first language; competence and performance process. Competence refers to one's underlying knowledge of a system, event, or fact. According to Chomsky (1965:75), competency covers three grammatical components: syntax, semantics, and phonological. Those three components are got simultaneously. Miller (cited in Brown, 1987:24) states that performance is the overtly observable and concrete manifestation of competence. Performance is actual production (speaking, writing) or the comprehension (listening, reading) of linguistic event. Jersild, Telford, and Sawrey (1975:313) purpose that children will pass some stages of language acquisition; the first is self-imitation process, in which they first learn to imitate through simple classic conditioning. The second is generalization process, in which the children's making the same sounds when they hear someone else make them. The last is reinforcement process, reinforcement (rewards or lack of them) produces a change in response area (shifting of pronunciations by a series of progressive approximations in the direction of correct speech). According to Piaget (cited in Jersild, Telford, and Sawrey,

1975:317) the development of humor follows much the same course as cognitive development. It proceeds from the sheer joy of sensory motor experience to the resolution of a moderate degree of departure from perceptual expectancies, and to humor, which depends on an understanding of abstract conceptual meanings. Piaget's theory is supported by Shultz and Horribe (1974). They assert that children's appreciation of humor will change. It starts from performing or participating the enactment of specific motor process through the stage where humor is largely the result of the recognition of perceptual discrepancies.

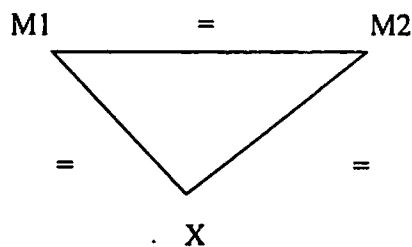
Incongruity theory proposed by Wilson (cited in Wijaya, 2003:23), is associated with cognitive explanation. It means incongruity occurs when there is a combination of two different meanings or interpretations in one's brain which are proposed to the same thing. Monro (cited in Raskin, 1985:31) says that incongruity is importing into one situation what belongs to another. Kant (cited in Raskin, 1985:30), says " the cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and the laugh it self is just the expression of this incongruity". The incongruity in each part is perceived directly by the listener or reader. For example they can elaborate that ideas, which are not congruent, can be united with the some sound and one of them can be inferred from another, or both of them can be imagined in reality.

Wilson (cited in Wijaya, 2003:23) asserts that all humor theories would have the same conclusion at the end. This means if humor is signed by 'X' and two

appropriate meaning are signed by 'M₁' and 'M₂', then humor situation can be explained in four steps:

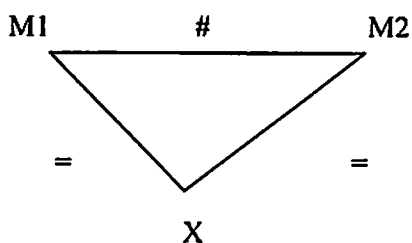
1. $M_1 = X = M_2$, and $M_1 \diamond M_2$ make cognitive structure unbalanced
2. Correlation $X = M_1$ stronger than $X = M_2$ so congruity in perception causes wonder.
3. The unbalanced condition can be coped with three alternatives:
 - a. $M_1 = X \rightarrow M_1 \diamond X$ (M₁ Wrong)
 - b. $M_2 = X \rightarrow M_2 \diamond X$ (M₂ Wrong)
 - c. $M_1 \diamond M_2 \rightarrow M_1 = M_2$
4. When the balanced condition is achieved, speaker and listener will not think over, just laugh....Wilson (cited in Soejatmiko, 1992:72).

Those steps above can be seen in the diagram below



Non-humor text has a conjunctive correlation ($M_1 = M_2$), while for humor text; the disjunctive correlation from M₁ and M₂ can form funniest situation. M₁ and M₂ in humor is function as a different alternation or opposite to each other.

The alternative correlation is signed by '#', so the entire can be drawn the diagram below



1.6. SCOPE AND LIMITATION

The study focuses on verbal humor that contains ambiguity and is in the form of simple dialogue. As Shultz and Pilon (1982) have noted, linguistic ambiguity can occur at any three different levels: lexical, phonological, and grammatical. Based on this definition over 20 published children's magazine containing humor are collected and analyzed. Humor will be eliminated if they are judged to be too difficult with respect to content for young children in the study of if there seems to be no way to create resolution. The remaining humor is then classified according to linguistic ambiguity.

1.7. METHOD OF THE STUDY

The writer uses qualitative approach since it is intended to know the ability of 7-11 years old children in comprehending ambiguity on verbal humor. As stated by Arikunto (2002:13) qualitative naturalistic shows that the research is done naturally, in normal condition, and no manipulation in situation and condition, intended to natural description. It means that the researcher has the main role in doing the research. The writer conducted her study by involving the respondents of the study.

1.7.1. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

1. **Humor:** the excitement of amusement, the expression of amusement, and temporary and habitual conditions of the mind
2. **Verbal Humor:** a funny situation, which is created, described, and expressed by a text.
3. **Incongruity:** elements that are unexpected and also impossible or possible given one's current knowledge of the world.
4. **Concrete Operations:** the period in which children develop the ability to apply logical thought to concrete problems between the age of seven and eleven years.
5. **Linguistic ambiguity:**
 - 5.1. **Lexical ambiguity:** a condition in which a given lexical item has more than one semantic interpretation in condition of polysemy.
 - 5.2. **Phonological ambiguity:** a condition in which a given phonological sequence can be interpreted in more than one way, or in the condition of homophony in which two historically distinct words happen to have similar pronunciation.
 - 5.3. **Grammatical ambiguity:** a condition in which a given phrase has more than one interpretation. It means the word of a phrase can be grouped in two different ways with each expressing a different semantic interpretation.

1.7.2. LOCATION OF THE STUDY

Surabaya was chosen as the location of the study because Surabaya is a big city, which has a lot of facilities that can influence children behavior and thinking. While in sub urban area, children are educated in authoritarian, and was lack of facilities in education will affect their way of thinking.

1.7.3. RESPONDENTS

Conducting the research, the writer chose five children who are in 7-11 year-age. Piaget theory (Wardsworth, 1971:35) asserts that children become able, between the ages of 7-11 years old, to do all the cognitive operations that limit the intellectual activity of the preoperational children. Considering that sex differences influence children thinking, male children are chosen as the respondents of the study. According to Raquel (cited in Chaer, 2003:135), male's and female's brains do the same job, but the ways they work are different. He elaborates that the number of neurons in certain part of brain causes male and female have different perception when they interpret information.

Moreover the respondents' parents' social, and educational background are observed so that the social class of the respondents do not interfere with the validation of the data.

Based on the above affecting factors the respondents of the study are to meet the following criteria:

1. Normal children

2. Aged 7-11 years old
3. Attending Elementary School
4. Able to speak Indonesian
5. Background of children's parents
 - Middle class, graduates of senior high school at the minimum
 - Speak Indonesian fluently

1.7.3.1. BACKGROUND OF THE RESPONDENTS

1.7.3.1.A. Background of Child A

Yusuf Ihsan is the first respondent of this study. He is 7 years old. He has a sibling. Both of his parents speak Indonesian as well as Javanese to him. His father works as a manager in Aliant Insurance and his mother is a housewife. Ihsan is in the second year of SD. Muhammadiyah XVI Surabaya.

1.7.3.1.B. Background of Child B

Erlangga is the second respondent of this study. He is 8 years old. He is often called Elang at home. He has two siblings. He is in the third year of SD. Muhammadiyah 15 Surabaya. His father works at PT. TELKOM in Surabaya, while his mother is a housewife. Both of his parents speak Indonesian to him.

1.7.3.1.C. Background of Child C

Dicky is the third respondent. He is 9 years old and in the fourth year class of SDN. Banyuurip IX Surabaya. He has no sibling. His mother is a Senior High

School teacher, while his father works as an employee in a private company. His parents use Indonesian as well as Javanese to communicate with him.

1.7.3.1.D. Background of Child D

Bisyamsi is the fourth respondent of this study. He is 10 years old. His family often calls him Wiwi. He has two siblings. His father is a doctor and his mother is a housewife. Both of his parents speak purely Indonesian to him. He knows Javanese after getting along with most of his Javanese friends. He is in the fifth year of SDN. Dr. Soetomo V Surabaya.

1.7.3.1.E. Background of Child E

Thoriq is the fifth respondent of this study. He is 11 years old. His nickname is Oyek. He has three siblings, and he is the last. He is in the sixth year of SDN. Dr. Soetomo V Surabaya. His father works as the Headmaster of SMK. Pelayaran Bhakti Samudera Surabaya and his mother is a housewife. Both of his parents speak Indonesian to him.

1.7.4. TECHNIQUES OF DATA COLLECTION

The data are collected through several steps. The first step is to choose the respondents who are in 7-11 year-age. The writer already knows most of the respondents. It means that the respondents and the writer have a good rapport. This condition is very important since it will help to get the data. Another reason

is that the research doesn't involve other people, so the writer has an important role during the research.

The second step, the writer tells a humor to the children. She gives individual test. During the test, she records the response of the children. She is interested in finding out what kinds of things the children consider funny. Since there are 12 items of humor, it takes maximally one month to finish comprehending humor. Basically, the duration and interval to converse is not limited.

The third step, the writer asks the children to explain what is funny (if anything) about the humor. If the children fail to fully explicate the humor, the writer asks certain questions which are designed to probe the child's understanding of the resolution. The questions focus on the two meanings of ambiguity.

In short, the procedures to collect the data are:

1. Visiting the children
2. Telling humor
3. Asking some questions
4. Recording the response

1.7.5. TECHNIQUES OF DATA ANALYSIS

To analyze the data, several procedures are used. First, the writer listens to the recording during the conversation. Second, all of the conversation results are classified based on the categories; age of respondents and type of ambiguity.

Next, she analyzes the data by using diagram of incongruity. This kind of analysis provides explanation for ambiguous words or phrases. The last, the writer provides an interpretation of the collected analysis data.

In short, the procedures of data analysed are:

1. Listening to cassette recorded
2. Classifying the conversation result
3. Analyzing the data
4. Interpreting the data
5. Drawing conclusion

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW