

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Humor is a universal phenomenon that is exhibited by most cultures. As stated by Oring (2003), humor and laughter classified as cultural universal representing a condition of our humanity. Many people believe that humor brings positive effects for human's life, thus it is not surprising that funny people receive positive attention and admiration (McGraw, 2011). In this case, the writer needs to define what actually humor is. Ross asserts that humor is something that makes a person laugh and smile. Like all straightforward definitions, exceptions can be found. It is possible to claim that something is humorous, even though no one laughed at the time – and it can often happen that people laugh, but someone claim, 'That's not funny'. Despite these objections, the response is an important factor in counting something as humor. Examining the language can then help to explain why people laugh (2005, p.2).

Television and radio to a lesser extent have replaced books as the main source of verbal entertainment. This means that a lot of contemporary humor is spoken and that you are more likely to watch and listen to humor than read it. One of the examples of spoken humor in Ross's book in 2005 entitled *The Language of Humor* is stand-up comedy. In the 1990s stand-up has been called the 'rock and roll' of comedy. Stand-up comedy is the term for special genre of comedy in which the performer, who is called as comic

stands on the stage and speaks directly to the audience (Schwarz, 2010). The material in stand-up comedy is carefully scripted and edited; the performance is rehearsed and may involve a cast of actor. However, in the process of stand-up comedy performance, the comic delivers the material without a script and in informal talk, thus the language must seem spontaneous.

The context for humor is crucial for determining whether an individual finds something amusing or not. Even so, it is possible to examine the features of language that have the potential to make people laugh (Ross, 2005). Unintentional humor may well be caused by some lapse in expression, but deliberate humor is carefully planned, often to the exact wording and timing. In terms of language of humor, Ross (2005) says that humor can be caused by structural ambiguity in the language used. It can occur in the English language at various level, as follows: phonology – the sounds that make up the language; graphology – the way the language is represented in written form; morphology – the way words themselves are structured; lexis – the individual words of the language; and syntax – the way the words are structured into phrases, clauses, and sentences.

Apart from the possibly scripted and rehearsed material in stand-up comedy, any live act has to alter to the text on the spot, depending how well it is being received: material can be inserted or removed; the order can be changed; timing can be speeded up or vice versa. Even when comedian take an act tour, it is never exactly the same act. Some stick quite closely to the polished act, whereas others excel at the improvised material. It is, however,

difficult to assess whether material is improvised on the spot, or simply appears to be.

As proposed by Ross, the first concerns features of speech as would occur in unscripted, informal talk. Although it may be scripted and rehearsed, the language must seem spontaneous. As well as use of colloquialisms, there will be more fillers, like 'sort of'; ellipsis (shortened forms of words); redundancy and back-tracking (the repetition of words); and sympathetic circularity – phrases like 'isn't that right?' addressed to the audience (2005, p. 97).

In this study, the writer considers to take one comic as the subject of this study. One of the famous comic is Louis CK. He is not only a comic but also works as director, writer, television producer and also editor. Moreover, he got some awards related to his skill in comedy. In 1999, 'The Chris Rock Show' took him as the winner in the category of Outstanding writing for a Variety or Music Program 'The Chris Rock Show', in 2012 his performance 'Louie: "Pregnant"' as the Outstanding writing for a Comedy Series of Emmy Award and he also got the Best Comedy Album from Grammy Award. It becomes the consideration of the writer in choosing the comic. In addition, one website says that Louis CK occupies the fourth position of the ten best comedians in America in 2013 (Top 10 Funniest Stand-up Comedians, 2013).

Furthermore, the writer uses one video uploaded in YouTube entitled *Live at the Beacon Theater* which becomes the most viewed video among all of Louis CK's video performance. In addition, this video is the first stand-up

comedy performance that produced and directed by himself. Louis CK also earned Emmy Award from this video in the category of Outstanding Writing for a Variety, Music or Comedy Special in 2012.

By indicating the phenomenon of humor especially in stand-up comedy, the writer interests to analyze the features of spontaneous speech in Louis CK's performance in stand-up comedy show entitled *Live at the Beacon Theater* and to know what are the most features of spontaneous speech found in his performance. The writer chooses stand-up comedy because there is still a little attention for researcher to analyze spoken humor like stand-up comedy, especially in the features of spontaneous speech uttered by the comic such as the use of filler, ellipsis, redundancy, backtracking, and sympathetic circularity. By knowing those features of spontaneous speech in stand-up comedy, the comics can notice the strategy in delivering their material in front of the audience in order to improve their speech performance.

Considering the topic of humor analysis, there has been several studies that have addressed the topic. Schwarz (2010) has been investigated the linguistic aspects of verbal humor in stand-up comedy. She found that in stand-up comedy performance, the comic used certain linguistic features such as repetition, formulaicity, disfluency, discourse marker, and intonation to get audience's laughter and attention. The next study is conducted by McIlvenny, Mettovaara, and Tapioin 1993 entitled *Stand-up Comedy and Audience Response*. In this study, they stated three problems, as follows: what

conversational devices does comic use to elicit laughter and other audience response; in what ways can a comic continue after eliciting an audience response; and how can the comic focus on the audience members in the construction of audience identity and response. It shows that this article not only focuses on the comic, but also from the point of view of the audience. However, my study only concerns to the comic and omits the audience response, but it does not mean that the audience is ignored; the function of audience in this study is to identify the humorous effects resulted from the audience's laughter.

1.2. Statement of the Problems

By indicating the gap in the previous research and providing background information about the topic, it raises two questions, as follows:

1. What are features of spontaneous speech uttered by Louis CK in Stand-up comedy Show Live at the Beacon Theatre?
2. Which features of spontaneous speech do frequently appear in stand-up comedy performed by Louis CK?

1.3. Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to find out the features of spontaneous speech uttered by Louis CK in stand-up comedy show entitled *Live at the Beacon Theater*. In addition, this study aims to know which features that are mostly used or frequently appear in stand-up comedy performed by Louis CK.

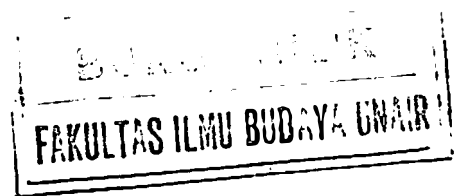
1.4. Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this study is expected to give contributions for further research, especially in the field of Sociolinguistic study about humor analysis. Moreover, practically this is expected to help other stand-up comedians to consider the features of their jokes that should be included in their material in order to create humorous effects to the audience especially the features of spontaneous speech in stand-up comedy.

1.5. Definition of Key Terms

1. **Humor:** Humor is something that makes people laugh or smile. Though no one laughed at the same, it is possible to claim that something is humorous (Ross, 2005)
2. **Stand-up comedy:** Stand-up comedy is the term for special genre of comedy in which the performer, who is called the stand-up comedian, stands on the stage and speaks directly to the audience. In general, stand-up comedians are individual performers who plant themselves in front of their listeners (Schwarz, 2010)
3. **Feature of spontaneous speech:** Spontaneous speech is the features of speech that would occur in unscripted and informal talk (Ross, 2005)
4. **Filler:** Words or sounds I spontaneous speech like 'sort of' that do not carry conventional meaning but allow time to think (Ross, 2005)
5. **Ellipsis:** Ellipsis refers to the omission of part of a structure (Ross, 2005)
6. **Redundancy:** Redundancy is a feature of spontaneous speech, where items are repeated even though this is normally unnecessary (Ross, 2005)

7. **Sympathetic circularity:** Sympathetic circularity is one of the spontaneous features in speech, when the speaker using some expressions like 'you know what I mean?' (Ross, 2005)
8. **Back-tracking:** Back-tracking is a feature of spontaneous speech where an utterance is repeated in order to improve or correct the speech (Ross, 2005)
9. **Comic:** someone who makes his or her living being funny by telling jokes in stand-up comedy (Ross, 2005)



CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW