Ambiguity in Indonesian Jokes on the Instagram “Dagelan”

Norma Pawestri & Unchalee Wongwattana
Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, Naresuan University, Phitsanulok 65000, Thailand

Email: normapawestri22@gmail.com

Abstract. This study aims firstly to capture some linguistic aspects of ambiguity-based jokes and secondly to identify and explain the types of ambiguity involved in each joke. The data are 100 ambiguous jokes found on the Instagram account, “Dagelan”. The result of the study is that jokes are formed with conversation, sentences consisting of independent clauses and subordinate/dependent clauses such as adverbial clauses, relative clauses, simple sentence from independent clauses, multiple independent clauses and even some jokes are just made from smaller linguistic forms such as words, and phrases. When it comes to the types of ambiguity involved, there are 10 types of jokes such as lexical ambiguity based jokes, around 38% of the total, followed by phonological ambiguity based jokes at 19%, and lexicalization of larger unit based jokes at 11%, pragmatic ambiguity based jokes at 13%, textual cohesion based jokes at 8%, syntactic ambiguity based jokes at 5%, orthographic jokes at 2%, multiple ambiguity jokes at 2%, type of modality jokes and deictic reference jokes at 1%.

1. Introduction
Humor is an inherently human quality found in our daily life[1]. When people joke, they use their ability to think in two sides of thought simultaneously and it proofs human creativity to perceive a situation or an idea, in two incompatible frames of reference resulting in the release of pent up emotion in laughter[2]. People also joke as a play on socially perceived forms as jokes propose something that deviates from commonly accepted norms and social levels within the society, and that way, jokes play a role in unifying people and either intensifying or removing social segregation[3]. However, recognizing a recipe for a funny story or a joke is always difficult and to discover a general theory of humor is probably still a long way from being attained.

As people nowadays use social media to access entertainment, meme [mim] has become a new way of delivering messages by combining verbal communication (expression) and visual communication where the creator can add text to images in order to produce a new meaning[4]. In Indonesia, there is this Instagram account ‘Dagelan’ which provides daily funny meme and jokes. This account, managed by Infia Mediatama, a multimedia company, is also a forum which is used for a variety of other purposes such as fund raising, news, advertising, etc. In most of the jokes, ambiguities are used to create humor. Ambiguity often generates funniness as it refers to a word or a sentence which expresses more than one meaning[5].

There are some previous studies involving ambiguity in humor such as Roura[6] with “Syntactic Ambiguity as a Device in British Humour” in which she studied the resourceful applications of ambiguity in the creation of jokes, Bucaria[7] with “Lexical and Structural Ambiguity in Humorous Headlines” who analyzed some forms of linguistic ambiguity in English in a specific register, i.e.
newspaper headlines and Bekinschtein, et al.[8] with their neural study “Why Clowns Taste Funny: The Relationship between Humor and Semantic Ambiguity” in which they compared semantically ambiguous verbal jokes with general unfunny ambiguous sentences, and non-semantically ambiguous verbal jokes in terms of in which part of the brain it will be processed. However, these studies have not involved the phenomenon of the ambiguity based joke in social media[9]. Hence, this study aims to capture some linguistic aspects of ambiguity-based jokes in such media and to identify and explain the types of ambiguity involved in each joke[10].

2. Research Methodology
The research data are 100 ambiguous Meme [mim] posts from “Dagelan”, a highly followed entertainment Instagram account in Indonesia. The posts collected were posted during 2016. The data obtained were captured as screen-shots in Jpeg form and transferred using android smartphone to a computer. In this study, some linguistic aspects of ambiguity-based jokes are captured to be later identified and explained for their types of ambiguity involved based on Robert Lew’s classification namely: 1) Lexical ambiguity based jokes, 2) Lexicalization of larger unit based jokes, 3) Decomposition of idioms based jokes, 4) Syntactic ambiguity based jokes, 5) Phonological ambiguity based jokes, 6) Orthographic ambiguity based jokes, 7) Deictic reference based jokes, 8) Specific versus non-specific interpretations based jokes, 9) Pragmatic ambiguity based jokes, 10) Type of modality based jokes, 11) Textual cohesion based jokes, and 12) Multiple ambiguity based jokes. Lastly, along with each type, frequency was given as a percentage.

3. Conclusions and Discussion
In this study, the linguistic aspects of the joke can be seen in several linguistic forms ranking from conversations, simple independent clauses/sentences, compound independent clauses/sentences, independent clauses with subordinate/dependent clauses such as relative clauses and adverbial clauses, simple adjective phrases and words were found as exemplified in figure 1. These linguistic aspects are found to be contained with 9 types of ambiguity as the basis of the jokes with the result of the study showed that lexical ambiguity based jokes are more likely to be found. Lexical ambiguity based jokes formed around 38% of the total, followed by, phonological ambiguity based jokes at 19%, and lexicalization of larger unit based jokes at 11%. Pragmatic ambiguity based jokes formed 13% and textual cohesion based jokes, 8%. Syntactic ambiguity based jokes formed 5% with orthographic ambiguity based jokes forming 2%, multiple ambiguity based jokes at 2%, type of modality based jokes, 1% and deictic reference based jokes also at 1%. Examples of captured data and the data analysis are shown in figure 2.

| Line 1 | “Yang mulia saya minta dia di hukum seberat beratnya” |
|--------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Indonesian | yang mulia saya minta dia di hukum seberat beratnya |
| English | the majesty I ask he Passive punish as heavy heavy |
| Free Translation | His majesty, I beg you to punish him with something as heavy as possible |
| the harshest sentence | |
| (a) | https://www.instagram.com/dagelan/ |
Figure 1. Linguistic aspects of the joke (a) In the form of Conversation Joke (b) In the form of Independent Clause Joke (c) In the form of Independent Clauses and Subordinate Clause Joke (d) In the form of Word and Phrases Joke
Similarly to this study, in the study “Linguistic Ambiguity in Language-based Jokes” by Sarah Seewoster9 225 jokes in English were analyzed for instances of phonological, lexical, or syntactic ambiguity. Of all the 225 jokes, 21 were eliminated for lack of phonological, lexical, or syntactical ambiguous elements. In analyzing the remaining 204 jokes, a total of 251 instances of linguistic ambiguity occurred. She found that almost half (41.4%, 104) of all ambiguity encountered relied solely on these mechanisms rather than phonological, lexical, or syntactic means. Of those, more than half utilized syllabic mechanisms while about a third (31.7%, 33) utilized morphological mechanisms. Also, in the work, “Ambiguity of Meaning in Russian Verbal Humor” by Hyunisa Rahmanadia10, 4 types of ambiguity were found which are phonetic ambiguity 25%, grammatical ambiguity (20%), lexical ambiguity (using homonym) 50% (using polysemy) 7.5%, ambiguity of sentence (20%). The data were based of 226 jokes, of which 40 were used as they represented ambiguity.

Many different linguistic mechanisms can be used in the creation of language-based jokes, but lexical ambiguity based jokes might be the most common in the creation of humor due the fact that in the scope of Lexical ambiguity, ambiguity can be generated from many more aspects such as morphology (affixation, compounding, etc.), phonology, and lexical relation (homonymy, polysemy, homograph etc.). As the data were taken only from one source, namely “Dagelan” an Instagram account, it can be said that the findings of this study might not be enough to be counted as representative of the nature of Indonesian jokes. We should also consider that the comprehension of some jokes will also be easier with the help of local knowledge. What has also been noted here is the fact that although the 3 languages (English, Russian and Indonesian) have their own nature and characteristics, the studies on ambiguity in humor show that the mechanisms for generating humor have similar characteristics as they use predominantly lexical ambiguity which supports Lew’s claim that if there is such a thing as the nature of humor, it should have a universal core throughout all languages.

References
[1] Lew 1996 An ambiguity-based theory of the linguistic verbal joke in English 5.
[2] Koestler A 1964 The act of creation (London: Hutchinson) p 35.
[3] Douglas M The social control of cognition: Some factors in joke perception Man 3(3) 361.
[4] Nugraha A, Sudrajat H R and Putri P S 2015 Fenomena meme di media sosial: Studi etnografi virtual posting meme pada pengguna media sosial instagram Jurnal Sosioteknologi 14(3)
237-245.

[5] Crystal D 2008 *A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics (6th ed.)* (Oxford: Blackwell) p 22.
[6] Roura M S 1995 Syntactic ambiguity as a device in British humour *Revista Alicantina De Estudios Ingleses* **8** 209-228.
[7] Bucaria C 2004 *Lexical and structural ambiguity in humorous headlines* (Unpublished master's thesis) (London: Youngstown State University).
[8] Bekinschtein T, Davis M, Rodd J and Owen A 2011 Why clowns taste funny: The relationship between humor and semantic ambiguity *Journal of Neuroscience* **31** (26) 9665-9671.
[9] Seewoester S 2009 *Linguistic Ambiguity in Language-based Jokes* (master’s thesis) (Chicago, USA: DePaul University).
[10] Rahmanadia H 2010 *Ambiguity of Meaning in Russian Verbal Humor* (Undergraduate) (Jakarta, Indonesia: Universitas Indonesia).