Verbal humor in selected Indonesian stand up comedian’s discourse: Semantic analysis using GVTH

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Abstract: Humor is inevitable and can be found in many aspects of human life. In Indonesia, stand-up comedy (SUC) becomes a trend proven by the existence of some talent competitions in this area. This study attempts to investigate verbal humor in SUC discourse by implementing general verbal theory of humor (GVTH). This study employed content analysis as the research design. The data were obtained from five selected audio-video recording of SUC of Dodit Mulyanto (DM) in SUC4 program broadcasted by Metro TV. The data were in the form of utterances and transcription was processed and downloaded from Sonix.ai totaling to 29 data. The data were analyzed through some parameters namely script opposition (SO), logical mechanism (LM), situation (Si), target (Tar), narrative strategy (NS), and language (L). The findings reveal that logical mechanisms used in the data are various such as false analogy, fallacious reasoning, absurd neologism/interpretation, and word repetition. During his performance, simple narrative strategy is also used predominantly combined with dialogue style. As the target of the comedy, DM

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

As a daily life phenomenon, humor is subtle process. In Indonesia, stand-up comedy grows rapidly due to the demand of entertainment. This study explains how verbal humor in stand-up comedian’s discourse is constructed through general verbal theory of humor (GVTH) represented by knowledge resources namely logical mechanism, situation, target, narrative strategy, and language to support script opposition. The cleverness of stand-up comedian is critical to create funny joke and generate people’s laughter.
dominantly targeted himself/his life as the material delivered to the audience. This style is interpreted as a strategy to avoid insulting others and breaking someone’s face.

**Subjects:** Discourse Analysis; Language & Communication; Semantics

**Keywords:** humor; stand-up comedy; joke; GVTH; Dodit Mulyanto

1. **Introduction**

1.1. **The background**

Humor is an inseparable phenomenon in human life. It is also associated with acts of verbal communication that require a very simple narrative structure (Galiñanes, 2000) and with the expected meaning of speech or violation of expected conversational practices (Raskin, 1984). Other experts argue that it deals with process in brain that generates complex process of laughter (Damanik & Mulyadi, 2020) and it is possible to be applied intentionally for some communicative aims (Li, 2016). Therefore, humor is a subtle process and has various divisions based on different criteria.

Jokes are also part of humor. It is expressed through linguistic system. Since humor aims to entertain (Bernabéu, 2019), it also requires humans involvement. Human is functioned to make humor, and interpret funny things and interesting phenomena during the process of humor. Besides, humor should be funny and be a stimulus that is able to amuse people (Filani, 2015; Ma & Jiang, 2013). However, in some conditions, humor is also subjective. It is reasonable because with one joke in a while, one can catch the joke and laugh, but the other do not laugh (Bakar, 2018). Laughter can also be employed to invite other's laughter (Li, 2016).

Humor can be configurable in a variety of categories. In general, it is also divided into two, namely verbal and situational humor. Verbal humor is usually conveyed through rhetorical techniques. It can be in the forms of sarcasm, mockery, irony, puns, and other rhetorical skills in a particular context. Alternatively, situational humor is associated with comic designs such as imitation, impersonation and disguise (Ma & Jiang, 2013). Torok et al. (2004) divide this type of humor into positive humor and negative humor. The other classification is used by Wanzer et al. (2006) stating that humor is categorized into appropriate and inappropriate humor.

There are three theories that are developed related to humor researches namely Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH) (Raskin, 1984), General Verbal Theory of Humor (GVTH) (Attardo & Raskin, 1991), and Ontological Semantic Theory of Humor (OSTH) (Rayz, 2020). SSTH theory is a script-focused theory which deals with superiority theory, release/relief theory, and incongruity theory. The GVTH was popularized as a revision of the SSTH theory. In short, the GVTH theory is an extension of the SSTH theory. The last theory is OSTH. This theory provides a foundation for processing text of a joke in a more consistent manner.

Stand up comedy (SUC) shows verbal humor. Stand Up Comedy Indonesia (henceforth SUCI) is a programme broadcasted by Kompas TV as an initiative to bring a new nuance in humor performance in Indonesia. This programme was started in 2011 and has nine session. This programme shows the art of comedy in terms of speech that intends for the speech partner to laugh or the audience laughed at the humorous intent of the speech (Pratama & Utomo, 2020). High intelligence is critical to be possessed by comedians to perform this kind of humor through his language. Stand-up comedy materials should minimally comprise *setup* and *punch line*. If both items do not exist or there is only one in a joke, then the humor is not regarded as SUC (Ashari & Bayu Mahadian, 2020; Carter, 1989; Lestari, 2016).
Dodit Mulyanto (henceforth DM) is a phenomenal stand-up comedian. He was one of the participants of SUCI session 4 in 2014. During his performance, he consistently inserts local culture and music played by using violin. The other style that makes him remarkable is less of face expression and his revenge towards one of SUCI judges, Raditya Dika. His performance under the theme “woman” hits 30 million views, the highest achievement among other performances. Lestari (2016) states that the uniqueness and consistency performed by DM become his trademark and make him go viral.

Humor is widely studied by experts in the world through various perspectives. Humor in politics was discussed by Saftoiu and Popescu (2014) with critical discourse analysis approach, and Sapanti (2019) with phonological and semantic theory. Related to written humor, this research conducted by Asrini (2018) which looks at semantic relationships in Javanese-language humor in magazines. Other expert, Wijana (2017), observes representations of humor in funny story books. Rochmawati (2017) took different are related humor which deals with humor in English texts. The realization of humor in cartoons using the theory of semantic presupposition was done by Dewi (2008).

Looking at humor discourse in social media and the internet, it was discussed by Damanik and Mulyadi (2020) using the merger of SSTH and GVTH. They attempt to see the representation of Indonesian humorous status on social media (Twitter and Facebook). They applied SSTH to analyze seven statuses, and ten statuses by using GVTH. Hirsch (2017) explore 540 popular internet jokes (in English, Spanish, and Hebrew) through pragmatic approach. He concludes that different culture address different butt of Joke. Other research done by Fubara (2020) using GVTH theory only.

Some scholars have also observed SUC in their researches. Githubu (2015) analyze Kenyan SUC. Their study departs from stylistic analysis that concludes that various stylistic tools were applied by performers to trigger laughter. Afidah and Wahyudi (2014) analyze SUC by famous Indonesian SUC performers (Raditya Dika, Abdel Achrian, and Ryan Adyangdh) with conversational analysis theory (open-ending pattern). Applying Rutter’s pattern, they made conclusion that those performers in Indonesian SUC have the high similarity of pattern to Rutter’s pattern. From pragmatic view, Pratama and Utomo (2020) conducted a study to investigate speech act in SUC. Using Babe Cabita’s utterances as the data, they conclude that in Babe Cabita’s performance, there are various types of expressive speech act found (complaining, criticism, praising, blaming, and derogatory) found. Martynova et al. (2017) investigate humor through sociolinguistic aspect. Comparing American and Russian SUC performers brings them to conclusion that different cultural-national specificity is given out through numerous language resources.

In relation to humor-related studies stated in the previous paragraphs, those studies are clearly different from this research in terms of the object of the analysis and the theories used. This research observes the data from semantic perspective by using GVTH while previous studies use sociolinguistics, pragmatics, conversational analysis, and discourse analysis. In addition, this study explores SUC as the source of the data.

1.2. The objective of the study

This study attempts to investigate verbal humor in stand up comedy (SUC) discourse by implementing the general verbal theory of humor (GVTH). It is hoped that the findings of this study is theoretically beneficial for the development of theory of humor especially verbal humor. Practically, it can be reference for further research dealing with verbal humor and cultural semantic studies.

2. Review of literature

2.1. Humor

Humor is anything that triggers someone to laugh. Humorous discourse contains all forms of stimuli potentially provoking a response smiling or laughing connoisseur such as language play
(Fatonah & Riadi, 2017). Humor can reduce stress (Damanik & Mulyadi, 2020) as well as it is possible to be used for medication to improve immunity of our body. So, humor is used as media to amuse people by provoking them to laugh or smile.

The development of humor show in Indonesia is growing rapidly. During the decade of 1980–1990s, humor show used to be known by traditional art such as lenong, and lduk which was broadcasted by television (Lestari, 2016). There were some programmes to select and to bear new comedian such as Audisi Pelawak TPI, Stand Up Commedy Indonesia (SUCA), and Stand up Commedy Academy (SUCA). In stand up comedy field, there are some famous comedian in Indonesia who were the alumnus of those programs such as Dudit Mulyanto SUCA, Kiki Saputri SUCA, Bintang Emon SUCA, Oki SUCA, Cemen SUCA,

2.2. Theory of humor

Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH) is a script-focused theory. Raskin (1984) grouped this theory into three, namely Superiority Theory, Release/Relief Theory, and Incongruity Theory. Superiority theory explains that people generally laugh because of others’ bad luck, because this bad luck emphasizes one’s superiority to the shortcomings of others (Damanik & Mulyadi, 2020; Raskin, 1984). For example, there are some handsome young people riding Harley Davidson motorcycles and styled very proudly in front of passers-by. Then, a short time later, one of the bikers got into the sewer because it was too nice to see the beautiful woman they passed. She attracts his attention and made him lost his focus in riding. There was a hole and finally could not avoid. People seeing it laughed because they saw the bad things happen to the rider. Release/Relief Theory explains that humor is used to reduce or release emotional tension or stress (Green & Linders, 2016). The last one, incongruity theory, explains that laughter is generated from the inconsistency of something with the logic utilized in perceived an event (Damanik & Mulyadi, 2020; Lynch, 2002).

The SSTH theory is also inseparable from scripts. A script is mostly semantic information about a word or raised by it. Furthermore, it contains many other scripts and can be categorized as macro-script and/or complex scripts where they are chronologically organized script clusters (Attardo, 1994; Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Damanik & Mulyadi, 2020). The two overlapping and opposition scripts are two different semantic interpretations of the joke text. However, the existence of two overlapping scripts (script overlap) alone are not enough but also have to be opposite (script opposition) in the technical sense (Attardo, 1994; Raskin, 1984).

The GVTH theory aims to provide a model of joke representation, showing all aspects of the joke concept itself where things are still identified abstractly in SSTH, to the language being expressed (Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Damanik & Mulyadi, 2020). There are six parameters necessary to propose the construction of a joke into the text. These parameters are also regarded as Knowledge Resources (KRs) i.e. language, narrative strategies (NS), targets (T), situations (S), and logical mechanisms (LM). The nature of these KRs is as a supporting concept of opposition script.

The language criteria refers to linguistic choices made in jokes and is the verbal actualization of a joke, i.e. certain words, as there are a number of ways in which a joke can be inserted without changing its semantic content. Target refers to individuals or groups depicted in the spotlight poorly. This choice is governed by relevant stereotypes. However, not all jokes should be targeted at someone, and some may have an empty value for this KR. Narrative strategy is a genre or structure used in telling jokes. It is a collection of common strategies, such as simple narratives, dialogues, pseudo puzzles, etc. The situation explains what the joke really is about. In each joke several activities take place, and the activity, including all its participants, is described as a joke situation. However, some jokes rely on a greater degree on the situation, while others almost ignore it. The logical mechanism refers to the resolution of incongruity that is in the joke. This refers to how the two scripts are brought together, which can be, false analogies, and garden-path phenomena (Attardo, 1994; Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Hirsch, 2017; Saudee, 2018). In the data
analysis, GVTH theory was used to analyze the data due to the relevancy toward the data which are in the form of verbal humor.

2.3. Stand up comedy
Historically, SUC was first introduced to people in Europe and America in the 19th century (Puri, 2020). Papana (2012) explains that it is a performing arts intended to directly provoke laughter from the audience. These performers usually referred to as Comic, Stand Up Comic, or Stand Up Comedian. These comedians usually bring funny short stories. It is not humor that laughing at yourself with weird clothes, or stuttering (Sankey, 1998; Pragiwaksono, 2012) (Carter, 1989; Lestari, 2016; Pragiwaksono, 2012; Sankey, 1998).

3. Method
3.1. Design and data collection
This study employed content analysis as the research design. The data utilized in this study were taken from five selected recorded audio-video of Indonesian famous stand up comedian, Dodit Mulyanto, during his performance in SUCI season 4 in 2014. The videos cover stages from pre-show stage, show stage, and grand final stage. Those performances brought different topics for each performance. This programme was broadcasted by Kompas TV (one of private TV channels in Indonesia). The videos were downloaded from YouTube channel Stand Up Kompas TV. The reason why Dodit Mulyanto's videos chosen as the source of the data is due to his popularity and the massive viewers of his video as presented in Table 1.

3.2. Data analysis
The transcription of the utterances was processed through sonix.ai website. The procedures to make it work are firstly by uploading the videos or attaching YouTube link. Then, the writers selected “Indonesian language” as the language of transcription before it was processed automatically. Before being finalized, the transcriptions were re-checked by two lecturers from Indonesian department (since the language used in the video is in Bahasa Indonesia) in order to improve the reliability of the data. As the indication of the laughter position brackets “[]” are used for showing the overlapping of utterances, including laughter. The speaker’s name will remain written in real name since DM is a famous comedian in Indonesia. Then, the video can be accessed by everyone so that using pseudonyms is not necessary as a way to keep the confidentiality Table 2 and 3.

Table 1. Video title and viewers (updated on 7 December 2020)

| No | Title | YouTube Link | Viewers  |
|----|-------|--------------|---------|
| 1  | Java Rosa Erpa (Javanese but European style) | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qi625_d-AFU | 6,241,011 |
| 2  | Kesal sama Mantan (Fed up with ex-girlfriend) | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAw0wdRQ6ps | 2,017,834 |
| 3  | Koalisi Partai (Party coalition) | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_p3gUDLENc | 1,679,573 |
| 4  | Musik dan Makanan (Music and Food) | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5bshazKduKM | 1,366,758 |
| 5  | Broadcast Message | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SR_OjTGowwE | 4,374,652 |
The analysis was done systematically by following the stages proposed by Miles et al. (2014). The data were reduced by deleting the utterances obtained from the judges’ comments and hosts’ opening remark. Then, the transcribed utterances were placed into table, and coded. The analysis was undergone through implementation of GVTH. The codes used for analysis were Script Opposition (SO), Logical Mechanism (LM), Situation (Si), Target (Tar), Narrative Strategy (NS), and Language (L). The next step was interpreting the data before making the conclusion.

4. Result and discussion

4.1. Result

In analyzing the data totaling to 27 data, GTVH theory was employed by using six parameters which are called as knowledge resources (KR)s. These KRs are Script Opposition (SO), Logical Mechanism (LM), Situation (Si), Target (Tar), Narrative Strategy (NS), and Language (L). The findings show the variation of the use of those KRs in DM’s discourse as the following examples.

The humorous sentence was uttered by DM in order to trigger laughter. This humor is targeted to DM and (undefined) kids in villagers. The laughter is built through the use of false analogy as language mechanism of humor. It is a comparison between two things that are similar in some way (Pasaribu & Kadarisman, 2016). They more argue that when the comparable things are more illogical, the funnier things will appear.

In table manner, blade is not used as utensil. People know that knife is the best choice. DM attempts to compare blade [+SHARP, -LONG, -FOR TABLE MANNER] and knife [+SHARP, +LONG, -LONG, +SHARP, -FOR TABLE MANNER].
Table 3. Data analysis 2

| Datum of Verbal humour: No. 11 |
|--------------------------------|
| Video/Minutes in the video: Video 2/0:09–0:28 |

**Transcript:**
Saya pernah mengalami kendala saat open mic yaitu mantan saya membawa cowok baru-nya. Mantan saya tuh mirip kamu (menunjuk sesorang). [Penonton Tertawa]
I ever had problem during open mic that my ex-girlfriend brought her new boyfriend. My ex is like you (pointing a girl). [Audience laugh]

| KR | SO | LM | SI | Tar | NS |
|----|----|----|----|-----|----|
|    |    |    |    | Woman |    |
|    |    |    |    |      | Simple Narrative Strategy |
|    |    |    |    |      | Set-up |
| L  |     |    |    |      | saya pernah mengalami kendala saat open mic yaitu mantan saya membawa cowok baru-nya. I ever had problem during open mic that my ex-girlfriend brought her new boyfriend. |
|    |    |    |    |      | **Punch line** |
|    |    |    |    |      | Mantan saya tuh mirip kamu. (menunjuk sesorang) [Penonton Tertawa] |
|    |    |    |    |      | My ex-girlfriend is like you (pointing a girl). [Audience laugh] |

*FOR TABLE MANNER*. Semantically, both knife and blade have meaning component +SHARP, but it is radically different when the situation is in table manner. The knife can be found as dining utensil. Conversely, blade is not used in table manner (Anonymous, 2021). The incongruity successfully burst the laughter since most of audiences (dominantly Indonesian) know the differences of those concepts and life comparison among Westerners and Javanese. This is also supported by the elegant set up started from the explanation of how DM has meals as Javanese man who firmly holds European style/culture.

Table 4 shows the analysis of verbal humor that has SO of similar vs dissimilar. Simple NS was built to depict the unhappy situation faced by DM during his performance. Then, for this set up, he explained how it could happen. This is supported by the coding of LM that uses word repetition. Pasaribu and Kadarisman (2016) state that this mechanism employed word repetition exploitation to create unique and attractive expressions. DM repeats using the word ex-girlfriend in the set up by declaring that his ex-girlfriend came along with her new boyfriend and in punch line by pointing his finger to a girl to show that his ex-girlfriend is similar to her. This provokes audience to laugh at his joke by guessing the face of DM’s ex-girlfriend to be beautiful and not match with DM. It is reasonable since one of the characteristics or trademarks observed in DM’s discourse during his performance are he usually targets the beautiful woman to be involved in the situation he created.

Datum 24 in table 4 provides the situation of unpredictable action. In common sense, when a woman is crying, the man will attempt to make her calm as a form of attention and caring. The SO presented in this datum is anger vs silence. The anger shows by woman is reflected by crying while it is responded by the silence. This is the sign that DM as the performer shows his cleverness in constructing the set up.
The other parameters of KR s, the LM used in datum 24 is fallacious reasoning since the argument is invalid to support the thesis. The thesis is the woman is crying, but the argument is to make everyone knows he possesses girlfriend. The argument is invalid or rejected. It is acceptable if the reason is “I can’t afford to see you cry so that is why I remain silent”. This incongruity successfully stimulates people to laugh. Dealing with NS, DM employed dialogue. It is relevant since the target is woman and DM himself. The conflict among the participants in the dialogue is the set up. It is in line as stated by Zein et al. (2019) dialogue is beneficial to show the interaction of the participants in the story and one of ways to present the conflict.

4.2. Discussion
Looking at the analysis based on the variation of target, LM, and NS, the pattern of verbal humor by DM can be drawn. In relation to the target as KR parameter in the comedy, DM dominantly targeted himself through the use of first person singular pronoun such as I, my, me in his utterances. It can be comprehended that he played the comedy safely as the following utterances.

“Karena saya suka pamer, pacar saya itu marah sama saya”
(Since I love to show off, my girlfriend got angry with me)

Despite himself, DM also targeted others in his performance such as his parents, his grandmother, his girlfriend, the judge, audience, etc. Since humor is also subjective, there is a potency of being jailed because with one joke in a while, one can catch the joke and laugh and not laugh (Bakar, 2018). The problem is when the object or the target does not catch it as a joke and regard it

| KR   | SO   | L       |
|------|------|---------|
|      | Anger Vs Silence | Set-up |
|      | Fallacious reasoning | Karena saya suka pamer, pacar saya itu marah sama saya. Dia nangis saya diambur aku nangis kok kamu diemin? Since I love to show off, my girlfriend got angry. She cried but I remained silent. (She asks), “Why do you remain silent while I am crying”? (He replies), “This to make everybody knows if I have girlfriend”. [Audience laugh] |
|      | Unpredictable action | Punch line |
|      | Woman and Dodit himself | biar semua orang tahu kalau aku punya pacar. [Penonton Tertawa] (He replies), “This to make everybody knows if I have girlfriend”. [Audience laugh] |
|      | Dialogue |         |

| Datum of Verbal humour: No. 24 |
|--------------------------------|
| Video/Minutes in the video: Video 4/1:40–1:50 |

| Transcript: |  |
|-------------|---|
| Karena saya suka pamer, pacar saya itu marah sama saya. Dia nangis saya diambur aku nangis kok kamu diemin? Since I love to show off, my girlfriend got angry. She cried but I remained silent. (She asks), “Why do you remain silent while I am crying”? (He replies), “This to make everybody knows if I have girlfriend”. [Audience laugh] |  |
as an insult. The object can make a report to police and use ITE law in Indonesia since the programme is broadcasted online. The other point is when targeting specific gender as the material in SUC, it must be carefully considered. Research done by Pasaribu and Kadarisman (2016) suggest that as the prevention of harm, sexist joke needs to be avoided. The other fact from his performance, DM was quiet bald and also took a risk by insulting the judge, Indro, and make him as the target. There is a risk if Indro does not catch meaning in the joke such as getting eliminated from the competition. This fact also shows that DM is a clever comedian that he composed and constructed his material well through the use of good diction.

The next parameter of KRs is NS. The findings also show that DM employed some variations in this parameter such as simple narrative, dialogue, and music play. Using music in his performance is one of his trademarks. This becomes powerful to trigger laughter. This strategy was used when he should have played classic song, but he chose to play “Lingsir Wengi” song in his restaurant which is believed by many people as a song to invite the ghost existence. The fact is the audience did not get scared, but they laughed at all. This shows that being stand up comedian needs intelligence (Lestari, 2016).

The findings reveal that DM explores himself to be the source of materials to be delivered to the audience as the utterance below.

“Nama saya Dodit Mulyanto, Walaupun saya Jawa, keluarga saya itu memegang erat budaya Eropa” “My name is Dodit Mulyanto, even though I am Javanese, but my family firmly holds European culture”. (Datum 1, Topic: Javanese resembles to European)

The utterance above shows that DM explores about his cultural background. He claims that his family firmly holds European culture even though he is Javanese. Of course, there are some differences between Javanese and European culture that have been exemplified by him in his performance (Pre-show 1). He successfully build the set up (part of language parameter) that triggers the imagination of the audience related to Javanese and European culture even though he does not give specific area of Europe. Then, still related to culture, he also brought the material related to kentongan (traditional tool to send the sign related to certain action happening) as communication tool, and pecal (mixed vegetables with peanut sauce) when talking about the theme food and music. This is also supported by Lestari (2016) stating DM is much affected by Indonesian culture specifically Javanese culture.

5. Conclusion
Referring to the findings, it can be concluded that KRs parameter has been variously used by DM in his performances. Logical mechanisms used in the data are various namely false analogy, fallacious reasoning, absurd neologism/interpretation, and word repetition. Simple narrative strategy is also used predominantly combined with dialogue style. As the target of the comedy, DM dominantly targeted himself/his life as the material delivered to the audience. This is possibly employed as a strategy to avoid insulting others and breaking someone’s face.

6. Limitation and further studies
This study only discusses SUC discourse by DM through GVTH. There is possibility to expand the analysis by looking at the structure of stand up comedy such as from Rutter’s pattern. Still in semantic perspective, metaphor can also be explored in SUC performer. The findings also reveal that DM also put woman as the target in some occasion. Further research is suggested to explore discussion based on gender analysis to see the similarities and differences of joke target. Then, the writers also found that in some occasions in the video, the audiences’ laugh is triggered by non-verbal communication such as sign such as face expression. Further researchers can also observe how non-verbal communication plays role in stand-up comedy performance or through multimodal discourse analysis.
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Data availability statement
The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, MUL, upon reasonable request.

Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest
The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this study.

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