Lexical and Structural Ambiguity Resulting in Humor Found in Comedy Movie

A Thesis by

Muhammad Yusuf Ibnu Sina

Student Number: 06011281823035

English Education Study Program

Department of Language and Art Education

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Approved by

Advisor,

Drs. Muslih Hambali, M.LIS.

NIP. 195708261984031001

Certified by

Head of English Education Study Program,

Hariswan Putera Jaya, S.Pd., M.Pd.

NIP. 197408022002121003

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This thesis was defended by the writer in the final program examination and was approved the examination committee on:

Day: Thursday

Date: April, 21st 2022

1. Chairperson   : Drs. Muslih Hambali, MLIS   (   )

2. Member   : Fiftinova, S.S., M.Pd.   (   )

Palembang, 21st April 2022

Certified by,

Coordinator of English Education Study Program,

Hariswan Putera Jaya, S.Pd., M.Pd.

NIP. 197408022002121003

ii

DECLARATION

1, the undersigned,

Name   : Muhammad Yusuf Ibnu Sina

Student Number   : 06011281823035

Study Program   : English Education

Certify that thesis entitled "Lexical and Structural Ambiguity Found in Comedy Movie Resulting in Humor" is my own work, and I did not do any plagiarism or inappropriate quotation against the ethics and rules commended by the Ministry of Education of Republic Indonesia Number 17, 2010 regarding plagiarism in higher education. Therefore, I deserve to face court if I am found to have plagiarized this work.

Palembang, April 11th 2022

The undersigned

Muhammad Yusuf Ibnu Sina

06011281823035

THESIS DEDICATIONS

Every difficult task requires self-efforts as well as the guidance of adults, particularly those who were dear to our hearts.

My humble effort I dedicate to my sweet and loving:

- My beloved parents, Fendi and Yamsi. To my sisters Putri Ramadhan Prima Sari and Zakiya Dwi Putri, and to all of my family and friends who have stood by me through the highs and lows of my journey.

MOTTO

﴿فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ٥ اِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًاۗ ٦ ﴾ (الشرح/94: 5-6)

5. For indeed, with hardship [will be] ease.

6. Indeed, with hardship [will be] ease. (Asy-Syarh/94:5-6)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Palembang, April 11th 2022

The researcher,

Muhammad Yusuf Ibnu Sina

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on lexical and structural ambiguity found in comedy movie resulting in humor. The objectives of this study were to find out the words and phrases/sentences that were lexically and structurally ambiguous in the comedy movie "Dumb and Dumber To" and to determine how the lexically and structurally ambiguous words and phrases/sentences resulted in humor. This study used descriptive qualitative approach. The data of this study were the ambiguous words, phrases, and sentences which were taken from comedy movie, "Dumb and Dumber To". The source of data was transcribed dialogue where the ambiguity occurred. In analyzing the data, the researcher incorporated all of related theories such as Crystal's theory of lexical and structural ambiguity, and Shade's theory of humor. The findings showed that there were 16 dialogues in "Dumb and Dumber To" movie that have the ambiguous words, phrases, and sentences. From the data, there were 14 sentences containing lexical ambiguities and 2 structural ambiguities from 2 sentences. There were 8 lexical ambiguities caused by homonymy (50%), 4 by polysemy (28.5%), and 3 by homograph (21.5%). In structural ambiguity, the researcher found one caused by modification scope (50%) and the other by prepositional phrase (PP) as modifier or sentence adjunct (50%). In addition, the researcher also concluded that the ambiguous words, phrases, and sentences might result in humor. From 16 dialogues, all humors were based on Incongruity theory. Superiority and Relief/Release also used to strengthen the already humorous power in some dialogue. Based on this study, all ambiguous words, phrases, and sentences could be used in jokes due to their ambiguity. To summarize, multiple meanings on words, phrases, and sentences can lead to varying interpretations and expectations. It is amusing that not everyone agrees to one single meaning.
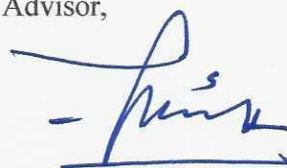
Keywords: Humor, Lexical Ambiguity, Structural Ambiguity, Comedy Movie

Coordinator of English Education
Study Program

Hariswan Putra Jaya, S.Pd., M.Pd.
NIP. 197408022002121003

Advisor,

Drs. Muslih Hambali, MLIS.
NIP. 1957082619824031001

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes (1) background, (2) problems of the study, (3) objectives of the study, and (4) the significance of the study.

1.1. Background

Laughter is an expression of joy and happiness. Laughter has become an inseparable part of human life. Through laughter, an individual can alleviate pain and release accumulated stress. Laughter can be elicited by a variety of situations that are amusing, stupid, or unexpected. Humor, as one of the factors that contribute to laughter, can be found in a wide variety of contexts, including books, films, and even human interactions. According to Simpson & Weiner (1989, p. 486) humor is defined as the ability to perceive or express the absurd or humorous in speech, writing, or other compositions; a subject's humorous imagination or presentation. In other words, humor refers to everything viewed as funny and causes others to laugh.

Furthermore, there are two types of humor: non-verbal and verbal. Non-verbal humor refers to a situation that is amusing but is not created or described by a text. It is frequently encountered in silent movies, such as Charlie Chaplin's or Mr. Bean's Show, where the actor creates a funny situation without even talking by emphasizing the funny act, gesture, and appearance. By contrast, verbal humor is concerned with utterance or language. As stated in Ortega (2013), a verbal remark with a hilarious effect in dialogue is referred to as verbal humor. Verbal comedy or humor can be found in any content that includes dialogue, such as a play, film, or literary work. According to Seewoester (2009) sentences containing humorous sense or jokes often found their strength within the ambiguity in interpreting the sentence meaning. It is because ambiguous sentences tend to have several meanings. The difference and multiple-meaning in ambiguous sentences lead to different and amusing senses depending on particular contexts.

In analyzing the ambiguities in language, it is possible to apply the semantic theory of ambiguity. As stated by Bucaria (2004), there are three types of semantic ambiguity: lexical, syntactic or structural, and phonological. However, the researcher focused on lexical ambiguity and structural ambiguity as to the source of humor. Lexical ambiguity is the presence of multiple meanings in a word. According to Petrus (2004) a word refers to as

ambiguous if it has two or more meanings that are not coherent to each other. When it comes to ambiguous words, homonymy and polysemy are occasionally distinguished. The distinction is primarily based on the similarity or relatedness of the meanings of the ambiguous words. In the case of homonymy, it is the different meaning of multiple meaning words that are far apart from each other and do not share any relation in any way. For example, the word "bank" can have two different meanings: *a land on the side of a river* and a *financial department*. The example demonstrates a clear case of homonymy, as there appears to be no theoretical connection between the two meanings. While polysemy is a case in which a single word has several closely related meanings. For example, the word "cup" can mean *a drinking vessel* or *brassiere cup*. The two meanings have the same related sense of container with a particular round shape. In contrast, syntactic ambiguity, mainly referred to as structural ambiguity, happens when a phrase, clause, or sentence can be interpreted in two or more ways due to the arrangement of words (the structure). Following Petrus (2004) structural ambiguity might occur even if there are no ambiguous words in the structure. In other words, an ambiguous phrase or sentence can have two or more paraphrase meanings that are not coherent paraphrases with each other. In analyzing Structural ambiguity, the syntax approach can be applied. Syntax deals with types of words, types of phrases, and the sentence pattern. It is important to know all these in analyzing structural ambiguity to better distinguish the possible interpretation from a sentence or a phrase. Using square brackets around the important elements of the sentence (or phrases) is one diagramming technique possible to analyze the possible interpretation from the sentence (or phrases). In this study however, Tree Diagramming technique was chosen as it gave clearer explanation on where the structural ambiguity takes place in a sentence.

In this world, people tend to search for entertainment to amuse them. Those entertainments can be found in music, dance, travelling, movie, and many more. Movie, as one of the sources of entertainment, provides so many genres for people to choose to their liking. Comedy is one of the many genres in movies where the purpose of this type of genre is to stimulate laughing acts from the audience and bring up humor into someone's life. According to Jaya (2014) movie is one of the types of authentic learning materials where the audios and/or videos taken from any resources specifically not created for use in the teaching and learning materials. In other words, the content and language used are a real language. In a comedy movie, humor is created from the dialogue between the characters, where those

dialogues involve the audience's interpretation of words, phrases, or sentences to create a funny situation. One example found in the movie Dumb and Dumber:

Table 1 Dialogue 1: Dumb and Dumber: When Lloyd meets Harry, 00:32:48 – 00:33:11

Data Code	Character	Utterance
C1/L.A1	Jessica	This is a much bigger story than four-colored pens
	Ms Heller	You want a **scoop?** I'll give you a scoop
	Lloyd	You think we're gonna stop for ice cream?
	Harry	No. maybe ;)
	Lloyd	Ahahaha

C1/L.A1 "you want a scoop? I'll give you a scoop". According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 9th Edition, the word scoop can be interpreted in two meanings. there are: "*a tool like a large spoon with a deep bowl, used for picking substances like powder form like flour, or for serving food like ice cream*" and "*a piece of important or exciting news that is printed in one newspaper before other newspaper knows about it* (p. 1342)". To understand the intentional meaning and how the word became funny, the word must be seen in the contextual setup. In this case, the context was Jessica trying to uncover the wrongdoings of Ms. Heller by following her. In exchange for that, Ms Heller challenged Jessica by saying, "you want a scoop? I'll give you a scoop", meanings that the intentional meaning of the word was the piece of important news or information. However, the word suddenly became funny because of the sudden interference from Lloyd and Harry that referred to the word as the ice cream spoon.

Some researchers have done research about ambiguity, such as Bucaria (2004), who conducted the study about lexical and structural ambiguity resulted in humor, aiming to understand the phenomenon in newspaper headlines; Aprila (2018) also conducted the study about lexical and structural ambiguity, aiming to analyze the phenomenon in Articles; In

addition, Puspitasari and Beratha (2019) also conducted a study about lexical and structural ambiguity, aiming to analyze the phenomenon in local articles. Unlike the previous studies, this undergraduate thesis attempts to identify lexical and structural ambiguity found in Comedy movies. Comedy Movie is one of the humorous materials that can be used to analyze lexical and structural ambiguity because it is one example of literary works containing verbal humor. The dialogue between the characters can be analyzed whether or not it contains lexical and structural ambiguity. As the audience, the researcher may witness and study the two notions or points of view between the characters, allowing him to recognize the words and phrases and analyzing why they become amusing.

The Comedy Movie chosen was Dumb and Dumber To (2014). It is an American buddy comedy film that first premiered in Cinema on Nov. 14, 2014. It was directed by Peter Farrelly, who co-wrote Bobby Farrelly and Bennett Yellin. It is the third film in the Dumb and Dumber trilogy and the sequel to the 1994 film Dumb and Dumber. The film follows Lloyd Christmas and Harry Dunne (Carrey and Daniels, respectively), two dimwitted but good-natured people who embark on a cross-country road trip searching for Harry's adoptive daughter. The movie's humor is produced by the words used in communication between the characters. The communication becomes humorous when two concepts or interpretations are at odds with one another. This alternative interpretation of word meaning implies that the words contain lexical and structural ambiguity, which can lead them to humor.

This study identified the words or phrases that contain lexical or structural ambiguity in the Dumb and Dumber To Movie. Additionally, this study determined how those words that contained lexical or structural ambiguity result in humor. This study is essential for EFL students, language teacher, and future researchers in providing information about the lexical and structural ambiguity in a movie medium and how the characters and audiences perceived the lexical and structural ambiguity as humor.

1.2. Problems of the Study

The problems of this study were formulated in the following questions:

1. What words and phrases/sentences were lexically and structurally ambiguous in the comedy movie "Dumb and Dumber To"?

2. How did the lexically and structurally ambiguous words and phrases/sentences result in humor?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

Based on the problems above, the objectives of this study were:

1. To find out the words and phrases/sentences those were lexically and structurally ambiguous in the "Dumb and Dumber To" movie.

2. To determine how the lexically and structurally ambiguous words and phrases/sentences resulted in humor.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The result of this study was expected to give theoretical and practical benefits, as follows.

1. Theoretical Benefit

The writer hopes that this study will be helpful for the English Education Students of Sriwijaya University as a reference that will assist them in understanding and appreciating the works of linguistics, more importantly in lexical and structural ambiguity cases. For lecturers, the writer hopes the result of this study can be helpful input and example in teaching their linguistics classes.

2. Practical Benefit

For readers, the writer hopes that this study will provide helpful information regarding the lexical and structural ambiguity found in the movie that can result in humor. Hopefully, the scientific information provided in this study will benefit the readers to be more careful in interpreting words or sentences and/or using the words or sentences that can result in ambiguity. This study study also hopes to provide valuable references and information for future researchers interested in conducting the same or related topic to this study.

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