HUMOR IN RESEARCH PROPOSAL SEMINAR: BRINGING PLURILINGUALISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

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Abstract

Plurilingualism practices in Indonesia are unique for its richness of local-vernacular linguistics capitals. The purpose of this study is bringing conversational jokes where the local-vernacular languages used by the speakers in an English Language Study Graduate Program exist. This study employed descriptive qualitative method. The data was analyzed through discourse analysis. The focus is exploring the sense of humor performed by advisor and examiner in research seminar and to find out the intentions of humor performed by lecturers as examiners or supervisors in research seminar. As results, the types of humor that emerged during the observation are teasing and banter. This study is an important contribution for the study of speech act in the case of conversational jokes in research proposal seminar.

Keywords: Humor, Conversational Jokes, Plurilingualism, Higher Education.

INTRODUCTION

Getting and holding students' attention every day in class is both a challenging and daunting task. Curricula are rigorous and students lead busy lives. They arrive in class after having been in other classes, having done fieldwork, or having been at work. As they sit down in overheated and crowded classrooms furnished with uncomfortable seats, even the most disciplined students may struggle to maintain attention (Skinner, 2010). But humor can help. Students cannot laugh and snore at the same time (Berk, 2003).

Defining humor is little bit difficult to overcome. Humor is a quintessentially social phenomenon, since every joke requires both a teller and an audience (Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001). Numerous studies on humor in the classroom acknowledge the important role it plays in the learning process. Humor has been reported to increase motivation, enhance the retention of new information, advance problem-solving skills, encourage creativity and critical thinking, facilitate a positive learning environment, and decrease exam anxiety (Martin (2007) in (Rieger, 2014).

In the college classroom, teaching should move beyond transmitting facts to encouraging students to think critically and creatively about the subject matter. Humor is about allowing oneself to be intellectually playful with ideas. Individuals like Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, and Beatrix Potter have made major contributions to the world because they were persistent and mentally playful.

As an effort to encourage and transmit the knowledge better, humor is used. Instead of saying something that's a little bit straightforward, humor allows oneself to be intellectually playful with ideas. Especially for the context of teaching English in Indonesian EFL Classrooms, various languages are potentially used by each of the collegians. Therefore, this study is aimed at investigating a series of humor in a setting of research proposal seminar, where tension is commonly felt by students.

THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

Plurilingualism situation is where a person has competence in more than one language, can switch between them,

according to the circumstances, social context. It does not refer to native-like ability of certain languages, but how to use linguistic knowledge and skills to communicate with others in many different situations. It's the ability to effectively function multinational and multicultural (Martinez, 2018).

In the Indonesian context, Indonesian is the national language and lingua franca and is highly valued as the dominant language in all official settings, such as school, government, religious practice and is the main language for informal interaction in urban contexts as well (Jafar, 2010).

The common forms of plurilingualism practices are code-switching, code-mixing, and translanguaging. In intercultural business and interaction, humor can affect the process of translation (Gauchia Beltran, 2016) although the effect was only seen from the literal process of understanding.

The categorizing of humor types has been criticized, because of the difficulty of distinguishing between different forms of humor. For example, according to Norrick (1993), forms of humor tend to "fade into each other in conversation, which makes it impossible to get a clear distinction between various humor types. Nevertheless, in the present study categories of humor are presented in order to distinguish what types of humor are most typical in a specific social situation of an EFL classroom.

The term irony can refer to multiple issues, but here the term will be used only in reference to verbal irony, excluding for example situational irony. First of all, no one clear definition of irony exists but some characteristics can be pointed out on the basis of previous research. The use of ambiguous or implicit statements, which often entail double meanings, is referred to as irony in various forms, since when someone is being ironic they say the opposite of what is meant. In effect, certain closeness between the one who uses irony in his/her speech and the target(s)

is beneficial in terms of understanding that irony is used for humorous effect. Furthermore, a subtype of irony referred to as sarcasm is often differentiated from the term irony; however, the differentiation of the two terms is not unproblematic.

Teasing is "intentional provocation accompanied by playful off-record markers that together comment on something relevant to the target"(Keltner, Capps, Kring, Young, & Heerey, 2001). This definition by Keltner et al. intends to give a neutral view of teasing. Nevertheless, teasing can easily act both as a positive and a negative type of humour. The difference between what is considered to be good natured teasing and when teasing starts to resemble bullying is difficult to differentiate (Keltner et al., 2001). One reason for this might be that teasing has a clear target (Lilja, 2010), which means that it is directed at a certain individual and thus, is highly personal. Even when teasing is intended as positive, the recipient can choose to interpret the tease in a negative manner and be offended.

Banter is a term for a more specific type of teasing where the teasing happens back and forth. It might be called "a match of verbal ping-pong played by the two (or more) interlocutors within a jocular mode" (Dynel, 2009). Likewise, when the banter stops when one of the participants "runs out of ideas to outdo the other", Dynel added.

Language play can be defined in various ways. However, in relation to interaction, Lilja (2010) defines language play as paying particular attention to a certain feature of language and then targeting the feature humorously. In the present data, interaction and humor are key words and thus, the term language play is presented through the latter definition. Language play has a significant role in classrooms and particularly in language learning, since it can increase the awareness and knowledge of different

structures of a language (Lilja, 2010) and as a result, enhance language learning.

Joking is the most abstract of the types of humor. It can be divided in to two categories: conversational jokes and canned jokes. The term conversational joking could be used as an umbrella term for all the different types of humor presented here (irony, teasing, banter, language play), since it includes all different "forms and strategies" that result in laughter from the target(s) (Norrick, 1993). By contrast, a canned joke uses a familiar joke frame to create amusement. One clear example of canned joking is a knock-knock joke, where the target knows the intention of the speaker, since it is produced in a familiar frame. Canned jokes are used less freely than conversational jokes, since they are often considered to be inappropriate in formal contexts (Attardo, 1994).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed descriptive qualitative method. The data was analyzed through discourse analysis. The data source was taken from the recordings of research seminar.

Conversation analysis was chosen as a data analysis method, since it seemed ideal for studying the interactional phenomenon of humor in classroom. In other words, the results of the current study are based on an analysis of the interaction and activities of the participants. Different categories of humor are analyzed based on the participants' verbal and nonverbal actions, which reveal how the specific sequences of humor develop in interaction in the specific context of a language classroom.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results and findings of this research are presented descriptively. There are five extracts that contain the uses of teasing and banter in research seminar. They will be presented orderly from the first supervisor until the last supervisor in the research seminar.

Extract 1: The First Supervisor supervised the thesis proposal writing mechanism

Q : Ok good. Ini juga halaman 7, kasih naik itu judulnya. Tidak usah bergaya begitu. [@X@]

P : Oh yes

Extract 1 shows the use of teasing by the first supervisor when he said, "Tidak usah bergaya begitu" (You should not have to be that classy) followed by his laugh. The sentence does not mean that the presenter had a certain writing style, but there was actually something wrong with the way she typed the title placed on the page 7 of her thesis proposal. Extract 1 is categorized as conversational joke in the type of teasing, referred to Lilja (2010). Q had P as his clear target in the conversation. Then the presenter slightly said "yes" which indicates that she already got the point the first supervisor wanted to tell.

Extract 2 (The Second Supervisor Session before starting to supervise the presenter)

B : Makin banyak lipatannya, ditambah juga gajinya katanya (memandangi K).

Q : @@

Extract 2 shows teasing by B when he said: Makin banyak lipatannya, ditambah juga gajinya katanya (The more the folding pages, the more the payment, I wonder). The utterance was supported by the way B looked at K. The message of the teasing was even realized by Q although B did not intentionally say it to get Q's response. Extract 2 also belongs to teasing, but different with the previous extract, the teasing that occurred in this extract is supported by the way the speaker see someone he addressed the statement. Instead of P as his target to state the utterance, B "came inside" of the K's

session of supervision by saying "Makin banyak lipatannya, ditambah juga gajinya katanya" (The more the folding pages, the more the payment, I wonder.) B simply changed the direction of the conversation.

Extract 3: The Second Supervisor Session in supervising conceptual framework

B : [X Aii? ta' banyak ini X]
K : Banyak. Dalam conceptual frameworknya, ini saya ujungnya lihat kamu ada itu jawaban, ujungnya conceptual juga ada language attitude, ya? Halaman 22. Kemudian yang di kanannya itu panah berikutnya students' bilingual achievement.Itu kata-katanya bilingual.. Mana yang satu kasian? Ya kan ada tiga di situ harus ada tiga di sini. Ku bacakan ki di? How do you.. @@. how do the teachers impact the students' bilingual interaction? Dimana ujungnya nanti itu?.. Tidak ada di?Jadi kalau saya ku bilang, kasih ki di situ. Di Pak di?
A : @@

Extract 3 shows banter and teasing from B and K. Firstly, B starts the banter by saying "[X Aii ta' banyak ini X]" [X Aii? it should be much (to be corrected) X]. After that, K replied by saying "Banyak" (It should be much). The interaction between B and K is categorized as banter since both of them did not run out of ideas to outdo the other (based on Dynel's theory, 2008). However, this banter stopped and did not continue since K turned his focus on supervising P by giving teasing in some parts of his utterance. The first in when he said, "Ku bacakan ki di? How do you..@@" (Should I read that for you? How do you… @@). In this part he tried to make clear what he wanted to tell to the presenter but he also couldn't help to laugh because of his own jokes.

Extract 4 (The Second Supervisor supervised the writing mechanism)

P : Salah di situ? @@
K : Yang mana salahnya kasian? Yang mana salah di situ? Ya? The te… the instruments are used in this research are as in the following. Yang mana yang salah? Are-nya.Seharusnya?

Extract 4 shows that K was trying to give effective teasing to P when he said: "Yang mana salahnya kasian?" (Then where is it (the mistake)?) In this case, K seems trying to beg for the presenter's answer. In fact, it was like his own style to lead the presenter to explain the answer of his question. Like the previous extracts that belong to teasing, in this fourth extract, K also had P as his clear target without any following teasing.

Extract 5 (The Second Supervisor gave the last comment)

K : Nah. Ini caranya sama dengan yang tadi. Yang mana mau disalahkan dan mana mau dibenarkan.Ya? Kalau kita katakan instrument mau dijamakkan, oke.Are-nya itu boleh benar loh. Bagaimana caranya membenarkan supaya –are benar? .. The instruments… that are used. Ya..Itu 'kan anak kalimat. Kalau tidak mau -ki, reduce –ki. Jadi katakana saja the instruments used. Tapi kalau mau jadikan anak kalimat, the instruments are, the instruments are as in the following. Itu kalimat induknya. Tapi karena itu ada anak kalimatnya, the instruments that are used, misalnya, tapi boleh di-reduce: the instruments used. Aa baru pakai –are. Okay? Itu.. Dan lipatannya sudah habis juga.Ya, saya kira cukup sekian. Ya, tidak boleh melewati batas batas lipatan.
B : Jadi, banyak lipatan memenuhi syarat untuk dibayar.
K, Q : @@

It seems like there was no such a conversational joke appears in this extract. However, at the end of K's utterance, he put a

twist of teasing again when he said: "Ya, tidak boleh melewati batas batas lipatan." *(Yes, I should not pass the folds limit.)* Then B respond the teasing by saying: "Jadi, banyak lipatan memenuhi syarat untuk dibayar." (So, lots of folds lead to a wage to pay.) Finally, K and Q also gives their responses in laughter. The interaction between K and B can be categorized as banter since there's a teasing and teasing responses in the conversation.

Research proposal seminar is an oral examination where students have to show the quality of a proposed research project and determines whether the proposed research project is acceptable. As part of academic requirements which precede the process of conducting research, students are recommended to pay attention to the supervisors and examiners' suggestion and surely to prepare themselves better that they may answer the questions given by the supervisors and examiners. This study especially focuses on the way the lecturers as both supervisors and examiners give their comments, offer questions, or give suggestions.

Based on the findings, four lecturers were observed and they were confirmed to produced various senses of humor respectively in the types of teasing and banter. Code-mixing and code-switching of English, Indonesian, and Makassarese Malay are found.

Among the four speakers observed, K and B are the most to produce teasing and they were involved in banter (see extract 3). This is in line with Dynel (2009) said that where the teasing happens back and forth, it becomes banter. Besides, one thing that is also underlined here is the fact speaker K who speak the most during the interaction was the presenter's supervisor. Speaker K might have given lots of suggestions as the sign of the responsibility in guiding the student.

CONCLUSION

Conversational jokes presented in this study are plurilingually brought by the speakers through the process of mental and direct translations.

The intentions of humor performed by the speakers are to review, to evaluate performance, and to response the counterparts.

This study has limitations on its data sources. Therefore, other researchers are recommended to study by not only referring to the participant observation but also taking in-depth interview into account.

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