

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The research addresses the verbal humor in Stand-up Comedy by Yakov Smirnoff analyzed by using linguistic-stylistics approach. This chapter presents an introductory part of the research. It is broken down into six sub-chapters and includes: (1) background of the research, (2) statements of the problems, (3) purpose of the research, (4) significance of the research, (5) scope and limitation, and (6) definition of the key terms.

1.1 Background of the Research

Living things are social creatures. They need one another. Ants work together to look for the food. In addition, there are some plants need help of animals and humans in pollination process. As well as people who can not live alone. People all would require the intervention of others in life. Therefore, living things tend to interact every day with everything around them either inanimate or living things. To interact with these living things, they need a means for communication, namely language. Kramsch (1998: 17) comments that language is the principal means which is connected to culture in social lives of humans being whether when it is conducted for communication in multiple and complex ways.

Language is one of graces of God which has gigantic benefits. By producing language, people can communicate with the living things around them. The most important function of language is means of communication and interaction. Language acts as the glue in unifying the family, society and language socialization. Language

is unique. Language is able to convey intended meaning from one living thing to another living being not only through sound, but also movement (read: Body Language/Gesture). This is because there is a system in language itself, this parallels to Finochiaro's (1974: 3), is "that language is a system or arbitrary vocal symbols which permits all people, in a given culture or other people who have learned the system of that culture, to communicate or to interact". Wardhaugh notes that language is arbitrary vocal symbols system which is used in communication for humans (1972: 3). In short, it can be said that language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols which allows people to communicate or interact each other although they come from the different culture.

Moreover, Francis (1958 in Adisutrisno, 2008: 1) quoted by El-Fikri (2012: 1) states that "language is an arbitrary system of articulated sounds made use of by a group of humans as a means of carrying on the affairs of their society".

By means of a system of this language, the language tends to cause some emotional reactions of living things, such as angry, happy, and sad and even laughter. When discussing of "How Laughter Works", Marshall (1998) takes note that laughter is a response, such psychological, from people toward humor. Further, he states that it involves some acts i.e. a set of gestures and the production of sound. When people are laughing, there is an instruction from the brain to do those acts simultaneously. Even, when they laugh heartily, they will do more acts with their body.

On the other hand, people, sometimes hear or see something and they laugh. It is such usual or common phenomenon of human beings. Just like what Mashall has stated above, people laugh because they receive stimulus of funny, whether it is audile or visual incentive. Moreover, human, virtually is able to find kinds of funny stuff like funny situation, funny stories, even funny thoughts in their daily life since those stuff occur everyday for everybody. Nevertheless, the exact meaning of laughter may differ from occasion to occasion, sometimes, it also happens in different culture to culture.

Meanwhile, in Raskin (1985: 2) is stated that people laugh at mischief like laugh for something that they do not believe, laugh to reveal their satisfaction, or just to show their envy, ignorance and contempt. Further, he says that people laugh at fools too. Fools, in this case, mean to set up for being wise and hypocrite man.

Another view is, humor, in human life also has extremely significant roles (Riyono, 1979: 1) because humor, according to Abdalia, is a daily occurrence in which happens in all of humans' life (2005: 3). For example, if people are in trouble, trouble can be handed down by humor elegantly and softly, without disturbing someone's feeling (Riyono, 1979: 1). Even Sigmund Freud, the distinguished psychologist, cited by Bill (1938) makes a parable to humor. He states that "humor is like soul-emptiness filler. For communication, especially, humor may be easily used to express a social criticism"

Based on those definitions above, it can be deduced that humor can happen anywhere and anytime. People are easily able to find humor in their life like in teaching. By having humor, teachers can bring the class into interesting situation especially in teaching English. When the class laughs, students are easier to learn their new language. Also, both teachers and students are able to express English toward humor as humor produces kinds of funny ways like studying pun, combining English learning with gesture, and so on. So that, the students will learn English more creative and fun. Besides humor applies in English teaching, humor is also found in many kinds of show like in puppet show. Puppet show, commonly, is a show which mostly talks about social criticism. However, as stated by Freud above, “humor is like soul-emptiness filler”, so humor may be easily used by people to express a social criticism. In addition, when people have trouble with someone else, humor is definitely needed by them. It is due to humor can utter their argumentation or their opinion softly and elegantly. So, it will not hurt someone’s feeling as feeling whether empty or not, it can be filled by humor.

As Mark Twain said in Hu (2012), “humor is mankind’s greatest blessing”. In addition, he explains that humor colors the topic in communication of someone. So, humor delivers many benefits for people as it can bring happiness, make feeling pleasant, change a mood of someone, also soothe the sadness and even construct a way to an interesting life. Further, Twain divides humor into two types. Firstly, visual humor which pictures and actions are represented. The second is verbal humor which conducted by producing many funny utterances respectively.

The statement above parallels to Hamlyn's point of view (1995: 806) in Riyono's journal. He points out that "humor is an ability to entertain and make people laugh by using utterances or written form". Further, he adds that "humor itself will not sound funny, laughable if it is not understandable, emerging antipathy attitude, and breaking one's feeling and not meeting the appropriate time, place and situation."

However, in humor—at least in Jensen's view—there is something more than just the ability to make laugh or to be able to laugh at funny things (2009: 1). In addition, laughter is basically a typical reaction to humor. Beside, there are still more complicated things than that. It is when people perceive something as humorous, but nobody laughs at it. Moreover, sometimes, people laugh at things not really humorous. The last people also have experienced that laughter can also be an emotional response to fear or embarrassment.

So, humor can not be defined as something that makes everybody laugh. The response of humor is the important thing to identify the definition of something as humorous. Hence, there are still things should be overlooked. They are aspects and details to humor itself.

Likewise in Poerbatjaraka's view (1997: xvi) in Unpublished Thesis *Unsur Humor Dalam Si Kabayan*. He stated that humor exactly has quality. He further notes that the highest quality of humor is a humor which not only makes the participants laugh but also asks them to think and ponder the content of that humor itself. In addition, humor was defined by Mindess (1971: 21) in Raskin (1984: 7) as "a frame

of mind, a manner of perceiving and experiencing life. It is a kind of outlook, a peculiar point of view, and one which has great therapeutic power”.

Based on the explanations above, one can conclude that humor beside can make people healthy as it is such a therapy, is also able to establish their creativity in interpreting the content of humor itself. It is caused by the way how they interpret that humor. People should think in different way like usual. They usually think something based on the rule, but in humor, people are suggested to think not at that place since there are many twisting of words and different presuppositions are raised in humor. Furthermore, if people think and ponder the contents of that humor more and more, it means that humor has quality.

Besides, humor exists across languages and cultures as an essential human characteristic. Responding to humor is part of human behavior (Raskin, 1985: 2). He distinguished humor into three topics namely sexual humor, ethnic humor and politic humor (1985: 148)

Even though humor is different from individual to individual and also from culture and culture, there is still one distinction which seems to apply and related to how the humorous effect is received. Freud in Jensen (2009: 2) distinguishes it into verbal humor and conceptual humor. Further, he explains that verbal humor is when such aspects of language exploited to get humorous effect. However, conceptual humor is when that humor does not need the aspects of language work to reveal the humorous effect, because in conceptual humor, only ideas or concepts are involved.

Raskin in his book divides theory of humor into three kinds of theories (1984: 30). They are the Superiority Theory, the Release Theory and the Incongruity Theory. Yet, the Incongruity Theory is probably the most influential on in this research since there are discussed the contradiction of interpretation. This contradiction sometimes is grounded by some ambiguous words in that topic explained and it makes the hearers strain their expectation. As stated by Jensen (2009: 4), the incongruity theory is a theory which conflict or incongruity between what people expect to appear in a joke and what actually appears is focused.

Here is an example of how polysemy (one of figurative expressions) is exploited in order to create incongruity. This example is taken from Jensen's article (2009: 4-5):

A : Do you believe in *clubs* for young people?
 B : Only when kindness fails.
 (W.C. Fields)

In this sentence, the word 'club' is the locus of incongruity (a more technical term is linguistic trigger). Person A's utterance activates the meaning of the word 'club' which has to do with an association of people with similar interests and perhaps the physical location itself where the members of the association spend time together. However, in person B's utterance, a completely different meaning of word is activated—namely, that of a stick used for striking objects and/or people. This creates incongruity, since A was expecting the answer to his question to also how to do with the associations of people, because normally, discourse ('discourse' meaning any stretch of language that is longer than the sentence) is expected to be coherent.

Since A expected B to utter something which is coherent with the topic of the discourse, the activation of meaning of club which has to do with sticks (and violence) has somewhat of a surprise effect.

The example above is kind of verbal humor since the humor contains the aspects of language (polysemy). The second example is conceptual humor. The humor attached below is taken from British stand-up comedian Omid Djalili (quoted by Jensen, 2009: 3)

An Iranian, an Arab and an Indian were the sole survivors of a shipwreck. As they were splashing about the water, a big shark came and ate the Iranian and the Arab, but not the Indian. Gratefully, the Indian asked the shark ‘Why didn’t you eat me’. The shark replied ‘I had one of you people last year and my arse is still burning’.

As seen above, there are not linguistic aspects used in that humor. The funny thing is the concept of Indian and arse of the shark. There must be relationship between Indian and arse of shark. So it can elicit laughter when the reader read it over and over again. Furthermore, in traditional analysis, additional layers of meaning are connoted by the words in figurative expressions, while words in literal expressions denote what they mean according to common or dictionary usage. When the human ear or eye receives the message, the mind must interpret the data to adapt it into meaning. (Thangavel, 2013).

Nowadays, it is easier to find humor in many aspects in this progress of globalization, such as movie, magazine, news, speech act and even in stand-up comedy. According to Wikimedia (2013), stand-up comedy is a style of comedian who performs and speaks in front of the audience directly. Further, it explains that a fast-paced succession of humorous stories, short jokes called “bits” and one-liners are

usually recited by the comedian. Besides, the stand-up comedians often perform their comedy in clubs, bars colleges, etc by using props, music or magic tricks to enhance their acts.

Stand-up comedy, based on Wisegeek (2003) when discussing about “What is Stand up Comedy?” has often described as one of the harder acts to pull off. It explicates that “it basically consists of one person standing in front of an audiences and trying to make them laugh. Many professionals say that stand up comedy can be harsh and lonely.”

According to Wikimedia (2013) and Wisegeek (2003), one can conclude that stand up comedy is a man who speaks in front of groups (it is not always a comedian) by the aim of making them laugh and sometimes comedy is already planned or not planned as he or she has to perform it directly on the stage. Comedy given indirectly sometimes contains ridicule or anomalies that exist in the daily life of the people.

In general, stand-up comedians are individual performers who plant themselves in front of their listeners with their microphones and start telling a succession of funny stories, one-liners or short jokes, and anecdotes, which are often called “bit”, in order to make their audience laugh. Furthermore, there are many outstanding stand-up comedians in the world. They are Woody Allen from U.S.A, Omid Djalili (a British stand-up comedian), Yakov Smirnoff—a comedian from Russia and etc. Here, the scripts of Yakov Smirnoff will be analyzed in this research.

The next paragraph, the biography of Russian Stand-up Comedian, Yakov Smirnoff would be introduced first in this research.

Yakov, “Soviet Russia” Smirnoff, according to Wikimedia (2010) was born on January 24th 1951 and a comedian who immigrated to America from the USSR. He was well-known in the 1980s for his irony, word play and transpositional pun in his comedy performances. He did it mostly to contrast life under the Communist regime in his native Soviet Union with life in the United States, delivered in heavily accented English. In addition, Yakov’s comedic style is firmly grounded within his mission statement “to experience happiness and teach it with passion through comedy and sensitivity”. One of his famous murals is “America: What a Country!”.

Moreover, Yakov Smirnoff is also known in his ability to reverse the object of one sentence can be subject. It is called as “Russian Reversal Joke”. According to uncylopedia (2013), it is Russian tactic in debating and argumentation. It is developed by USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republic) during the twentieth century. It conveys that its purpose is to end and subsequently in any discussion especially for capitalist dogs such as America’s events and situations. Russian reversal is done by reversing the subject and direct object of the sentence in question. Its execution is simple, but it is lethal. For example, “in America, you can always find a party, but in Russia, party finds you”.

As far as the research observer, there is not research which discusses verbal humor through incongruity theory, especially in figurative expression theory which is

well-known as stylistics. Finally, the result of this research can be used as a reference for further research on the stand up comedy. Based on this reason, the research is conducted.

1.2 The Statements of the Problems

Based on the previous background, the present research is generally intended to empirically examine the different ways in which humor is manifested linguistically in the spoken discourse named Verbal Humor in Stand-up comedy by Yakov Smirnoff, the stylistic device functions it plays, and the process how its interpretations are arrived at. The statements of the problem help to discuss the intended meaning or moral values that Yakov wants to convey toward the audience. The research is aimed at investigating the following research questions:

1.2.1 Which figurative expressions of joke telling does Yakov Smirnoff follow?

1.2.2 How is humor revealed by those figurative expressions in stand-up comedy by Yakov Smirnoff?

1.3 The Purpose of the Research

In line with the above-mentioned research questions, the present research therefore is aimed at:

1.3.1 Discovering the figurative expressions of joke telling Yakov Smirnoff follows.

1.3.2 Elaborating the humor revealed by those figurative expressions.

1.4 The Significance of the Research

Since the research of language an enterprise with both a practical and a theoretical side, the present research is expected to have some significance both theoretically and practically as described as follows.

From theoretical perspectives, the research is beneficial to give contribution to the classification of linguistic aspects used in Stand-up Comedy. The mechanism of the perception of Stand-up comedy based on those figurative expressions used is also considered in this research.

In terms of practical significance, the research gives some benefits are the research is to outline the significance of stylistic analysis and suggest some ways in which the approach can be used to help teachers intervene more effectively in the classroom because an understanding of the patterns that underpin effective communication can be used to inform materials production and teaching. Next, the research can provide opportunities for teachers and students to reflect on and discuss how language works in a given context and how it can most effectively be employed to meet particular goals. Furthermore, this research will be an important contribution to linguistics especially in stylistics analysis is hopes. In addition, for education, studying humor is a good process of foreign language acquisition. It facilitates the teachers in teaching and learning English. Thus, it is suggested for teachers to conduct jokes for teaching, especially teaching English using puns. For example, when it is combined in pronunciation learning, it will make the students are easier to learn new language like the differences between “mouse” as an animal, also “mouse”

as a computer tool (polysemy), they will get—at least two vocabularies. Since humor can color the topic of the communication, so the most obvious benefit of understanding jokes is it can help students feel more enjoyable and comfortable in studying their new language. If a class can laugh and enjoy learning together, they are likely to learn and figure out better together, too. Nevertheless, getting sense of humor does not mean to make the teachers as the clown in the class. The last, the researcher expects that the present research will be worth for all readers in general, notably those who are interested in studying humor.

1.5 The Scope and Limitation

The scope of this research is in linguistic-stylistics analysis because it focuses on the relationship between the style of the speaker (utterances) and the world (context) in terms of whether or not sentences are used to make statements which can be assigned truth-values.

Moreover, the research limits itself to the humor in Stand-up comedy of Yakov Smirnoff named “What a Country!”. In addition, this research is limited to the utterances which have characteristic of joke. The jokes in this research are limited to verbal jokes, which hold the definition as any texts that capable of creating humorous effect. Non –verbal jokes are excluded because it falls beyond the scope of this research.

1.6 Definition of Related Terms

The following is the operational of the related terms used in the present research:

1. Stylistics

Jeffries and McIntyre defines stylistics as the linguistic study of style in language which aims to account for how text project meaning and how the readers construct meaning also why readers responds to texts in the way that they do (2010).

2. Humor

According to Ostrower (1998) in “What is Humor?” stated that humor is the individual deals with emotional conflict or external stressors by emphasizing the amusing of ironic aspects of the conflict or stressor.

3. Verbal Humor

Raskin implies the verbal humor as any texts which are capable of creating a humorous effect (1985: 46).

4. Incongruity Theory

According to Raskin and Attardo (2001), incongruity is the cognitive consequences of humor and the emphasis is focused on the contrastive or distinct meanings of the joke.

5. Joke

According to Dika in “Studying-Comedy” joke consists of two basic components. The first it setup, it is the explanation of a joke, part of the joke

itself is not to be laughed at, but an exposition or introduction of the joke itself. Setup will lead to a punch line; this is the funny part of a joke (2007).

1.7 Organization of the Research

This research is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is the introduction that conveys background of the research, statements of the research, purpose of the research, significance of the research, scope and limitation, definition of related terms and organization of the research. The second chapter is the review of related literature. It consists of the theories that analyzing the data are used. Furthermore, this chapter also consists of some studies that she uses to back up her research. Chapter three consists of the method of research. It consists of the research approach, the procedures of data collection, the source of data, and the method of data analysis. The fourth chapter is analysis that discusses about the findings and discussion as well as the interpretation of the findings. Last but not least, the fifth chapter is the conclusion of the result of this research.