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Linguistics

# Indonesian Jokes on Tailgates and Posters in English

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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigated jokes written on tailgates and posters in English in an Indonesian context to identify and understand the different variations of the joke meanings as non-verbal communication. Data, consisting of jokes on tailgates and posters, were collected online and examined phonologically and pragmatically using a document analysis. The data were analyzed in order to identify, categorize and classify the words and phonics and then interpret the meanings. Results showed that three jokes written on tailgates and two jokes written on posters contained funny or amusing aspects due to phonological and pragmatic factors, as in “She Book Carry Do It” which means “Sibuk Cari Duit” in Indonesian and “Busy to find money” in English.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Language is fundamentally needed by people from all over the world to communicate with each other. There are many languages used in various countries throughout the world and each language plays a significant role in communication which can be divided into two types, namely verbal and non-verbal. This paper involves phonology and pragmatics in non-verbal communication in English.

Based on Krich (1979), non-verbal communication may transfer phonological habits from one language to another which is sometimes produced by mistakes and grammatical errors. Furthermore, Krich (1979) states that humans are free to choose the message and color it. The non-verbal communication which is written in English can be found on some tailgates and posters in Indonesia. It is written as a joke since the purpose is to amuse the readers.

This paper also deals with one of the language aspects, namely the pragmatic factor, dealing with speakers' meanings. More specifically, the paper deals with the pragmatic meanings of jokes. According to Leech (1993), “pragmatics is the study of how utterances have meanings in situations”.

It means that pragmatics is the study that implies meanings within the utterance in the context surrounding it. Furthermore, Cruse (2011) states, “The meanings of all linguistic expressions vary with the context in which they occur”. Moreover, pragmatics is the ability to express appropriately a range of language functions (Vasquez & Sharpless, 2009). The researchers were interested in analyzing jokes on tailgates and posters written in English. According to the *Cambridge dictionary*, a *tailgate* refers to the door or board at the back of a vehicle that can be brought down to put in goods. A poster is defined as a “large printed picture (which may or may not be an advertisement) suitable for decorative display” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Both tailgates and posters containing jokes are common in public places, and this situation triggered the researchers to investigate the humour aspects of several jokes on tailgates and posters written in English.

### Language and Language Play

Language is assumed to foster the transmission of knowledge; however, it may be defined as concepts, facts, opinions, emotions, or any other kind of information (*Oxford English Dictionary*), expressing thoughts or feelings (*Chambers*), for communicating ideas or feelings (*Longman*

*Dictionary of the English Language*).

“We play with language when we manipulate it as a source of enjoyment either for ourselves or for the benefit of others” (Crystal, 2001). Language play is manifested through a variety of different activities (Cook, 2000). According to Cook (2000), “play” refers to the modification of linguistic forms, semantic and pragmatic meaning.

### ***Jokes and Humour***

“Humour is present throughout social conventions and cultural artifacts” (Ritcie, 2004). It is used as the medium for people to interact and socialize. The use of humour is highly valued in the interaction between people (Ritcie, 2004). Humour leads people to laugh as everyone has the right to laugh. Eagleton (2019) states that laughter is a universal phenomenon.

Smiling and laughing are different. Smiling is visual and laughing is an aural (Eagleton, 2019). Laughter can convey a range of emotional attitudes, which include knowing, embarrassed, sympathetic aspects (Eagleton, 2019). Laughter might be a sign of high spirit (Eagleton, 2019).

Jokes for the release theory compromise formation, incorporating both the act of repression and the instinct being curbed (Eagleton, 2019). Muschard (1999) characterizes jokes as a form of communication with the following constitutive elements: “conceptual incongruity, unexpectedness, or lexical ambiguity” (as cited in Higashimori, 2008). To understand jokes, the reader/hearer has to expend extra mental effort (Higashimori, 2008), and “studying humour in general and jokes in particular may give us rich information about the society around us” (Cendra, Triutami, & Bram, 2019, p. 45).

There is also a fact that different people tend to find different stimuli funny. According to Ritchie (2004), an audience finds a joke will depend on some factors, such as their mood, timing of the joke-telling, and cultural biases. There are some factors which might contribute to the appreciation of humour; incongruity, complexity, time is taken and salience of jokes (Goldstein, 2013).

### ***Pragmatics***

Leech (1993) states that pragmatics studies how utterances convey messages or meanings

situationally. It means that pragmatics is the study that implies a meaning of an utterance depending on the context of the communication. Furthermore, Cruse (2000) states that “the meanings of all linguistic expressions vary with the context in which they occur”. Dowty et al. (1981) state that “pragmatics is the study which deals with presupposition, conventional implicature, conversational implicature, and speech act”. Furthermore, pragmatics may refer to the ability to express appropriately a range of language functions (Vasquez & Sharpless, 2009).

## **II. METHOD**

This study was qualitative and based on Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh and Sorensen (2010), “qualitative research deals with interpreting human actions, institutions, events, customs and the like. Besides, qualitative research tends to depend on non-numerical data and the type of research is exploration or discovery (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The data analysis is shown by a narrative report full of description.

The researchers used a document analysis in this study. A document analysis is a procedure of reviewing and evaluating both printed and electronic material (Bowen, 2009). The material has been recorded without a researcher’s interventions. Atkinson and Coffey (1997) define documents as ‘social facts’, which are produced, shared, and used in socially organised ways (p. 47). The data of this research were jokes written on tailgates and posters in Indonesia which can be downloaded from the Internet.

The researchers collected the data by browsing online tailgates and posters in Indonesia and taking the data from *Google Image*. Then, the researchers analyzed the data by paying attention to the language of the jokes and taking notes related to the jokes. The researchers identified the data which were categorized jokes. Finally, the researchers analyzed the meanings of the jokes phonologically and pragmatically. The document review and identification were designed to identify the language phenomena, namely the humorous aspects of the jokes on the tailgates on posters written in English produced by truck drivers and other professions in different environments.

### ***Data***

The researchers selected and downloaded five jokes containing pictures or images from the



Internet. Three of the jokes were tailgates and the two were posters. The researchers identified the images, analyzed the words, and examined the phonological and pragmatic meanings in three sections. The sections were the pictures, phonics, and meanings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion of the study of the three jokes written on tailgates and two jokes on posters are presented in the following.

### 1. Jokes on Tailgates

Below is the first joke on a tailgate.

The first joke is written in English: New Fear The



Fig. 1 New Fear The Me Is 3

Me is 3. Phonologically, it can be explained as follows: New /'nū/, Fear /'fir/, The /thə/, Me /'mē/, Is /ɪz/, 3: Three /'thrē/. Common people will read it as /'nū/ /'fir/ /thə/ /'mē/ /ɪz/ /'thrē/. Separately, these words carry no specific or clear meanings since they are only crammed words which do not have basic characteristics of a sentence. But, if we read them in an Indonesian pronunciation, it can be read as “Nyupir Demi Istri” and in English, it means “Driving for Wife”. Those words are written on the tailgate which means it is possibly written by the owner of the truck or the driver. In this case, he works as a driver and so he is driving (working) to fulfil his responsibility as a husband. Based on the joke, it might be concluded that there are three possible responsibilities as a husband, namely:

1. To earn money
2. To make his wife happy
3. To fulfil his wife's needs

Driving a truck is not an easy job; it is even a rough job. A truck driver goes from city to city to deliver sand, stones, or other heavy things. Thus, the driver wants to put on those words at the back of his truck to tell the readers that he is willing to do that rough job for his wife. As Muschard (1999) mentions, “unexpectedness or lexical ambiguity” belongs to joke characteristics, those words have implicit meanings to tell the readers about the willingness to work for the wife and also amuse the readers at the same time after the readers read and know it (Eagleton, 2019).

The second joke is written on a public transportation car: She Book Carry Do It. Phonologically, it can be explained as follows: She /ʃi:/, Book /bʊk/, Carry /'kæri/, Do /du:/, It /ɪt/



Fig 2. She Book Carry Do It

Common people will read it as a meaningless phrase which is pronounced as /ʃi:/ /bʊk/ /'kæri/ /du:/ /ɪt/. In English, those crammed words do not have any basic characteristics of a sentence. Meanwhile, in Indonesian, the meaning can be seen from how we pronounce the words and equate them with some sentences in Indonesian. “We play with language when we manipulate it as a source of enjoyment either for ourselves or for the benefit of others” (Crystal, 2001). Therefore, it will be read as “Sibuk Cari Duit”. It means that the driver is busy earning money. As written, “sibuk” which means “busy” in English, we can conclude that the driver does not have any spare time doing another enjoyable activity. He spends most of his time working as a driver.

The third joke is written on a tailgate; *Demi Anak Istri*. Phonologically, it can be explained as follows:



Fig 3. The Me A Nack Is Three

The /ðə/, Me /mi/, A /ə/ --> a, Nack /-/ --> nak, Is /ɪz/, Three /'θrē/. In Indonesian, it means *demi anak istri*, and in English it means for the wife and child(ren).

As the first picture (New Fear The Me Is 3), those words are written at the back of a truck, which means it is possibly written by the owner of the truck or the driver. The meaning of the writing is working for the wife and child(ren) but in this case, it is only written: “*demi anak istri*”, which means “for the child and wife”. Since it is written at the back of a truck, we can conclude that the joke means: in general, drivers will work for their families.

## 2. Jokes on Posters

Next, two jokes written on posters are presented.



Fig 4. Meat and Great

The next picture is shown on a poster of a conference: Meat and Great. Phonologically, it can be explained as follows: /mi:t/ and /greɪt/

In Indonesian, Meat means “daging” and Great means “sangat baik” and In English, Meat means the soft part of an animal or a bird that can be eaten as food; a particular type of this. Great means very good or pleasant. Notice that those words are written on a poster in front of a conference. That means the poster is displaying the activity in that room. If we pay attention, three people in front are having a discussion. It is proven that the activity refers to a conference. The conference does not seem to talk about the great level of meat. Thus, it is supposed to be “Meet and Greet”.



Fig 5. Lock Don't

This picture went viral these days. People can find that on social media since they consider it as a joke. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, some countries in the world decided to take action against the spread of the virus. They introduced the word “Lockdown” to the people. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, lockdown is “a situation in which people are not allowed to enter or leave a building or area freely because of an emergency”. It is also suggested by the Indonesian government that the country should do self-quarantine rather than lockdown. Having said that, Indonesia tends to use the term “lockdown” and close most of the welcoming gates to protect their villages or neighbourhood. Surprisingly, the researchers found one interesting picture which was written as “Lock Don't”. The word “down” is changed into “don't” because it has a similar pronunciation. There are

two possibilities why the people in the location did that. First, the people in the location seriously did not know the right word: down, so that they wrote the word which nearly has a similar pronunciation but different meaning. Ssecond, the people there realized the mistake, but they wrote the wrong one to amuse the readers on purpose which refers to a joke and laugh eventually. This is line with what Higashimori (2008) stated, namely to understand jokes, the reader/hearer has to expend extra mental effort.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the funny aspects of jokes on tailgates and posters written in English in an Indonesian context. There are some funny meanings of jokes on Indonesian tailgates and posters, such

as “New Fear The Me Is 3: which means “Nyupir Demi IsTri” in Indonesian and “Driving for Wife” in English, “She Book Carry Do It” which means “Sibuk Cari Duit” in Indonesian and “Busy to find money” in English, “The Me A Nack Is Three” which means “Demi Anak Istri” in Indonesian and “For the Children and Wife” in English. The meanings of jokes on posters are as follows: “Meat & Great” which is supposed to be “Meet & Greet” and “Lock Don’t” which is supposed to be “Lock Down”. Indonesians tend to smile and laugh because of the lexical ambiguity of some crammed words. They tend to produce jokes by constructing English words which have no meaning or relation but can be read by pronouncing the words and equate them with Indonesian pronunciation.

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