

A Manipulation of Semantic Meanings as a Humor Construction Strategy

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Abstract

This research is conducted to reveal how humorous utterances are constructed by manipulating semantic meaning especially dealing with lexical semantics. Lexical semantics provides multiple meanings that portray their meanings' relationship among a word and they are potentially exploited to elicit humor. This research examines utterances manipulating lexical semantics as the strategy of humor creation in *Mind Your Language* situation comedy. Applying a descriptive qualitative approach, the findings indicate that five types of lexical semantics are utilized as strategies of humorous utterances creation. Those types of lexical semantics are polysemy, homonymy, homophone, hyponymy, dan synonymy. Because of their multiple relation meanings, the speaker can refer to other meanings to construct different meanings with the hearer. The speaker constructs an incongruent meaning between what the hearer's perception is and what the speaker meant. The deviation of lexical semantics between the hearer and the speaker completely illustrates the concept of incongruity theory of humor.

Keywords: Humor; semantics; lexical semantics; *mind your language*

INTRODUCTION

Ross (2005) conceptualizes humor as a certain quality or potential of somebody or something to be funny and amusing. Funniness and amusement are commonly expressed by smiling or laughing. Quite resemble Ross's conception of humor, Raskin (1994) defines humor as everything that can evoke laughter, it can be an audio or visual thing that stimulates something funny. Humor can be expressed by a physical gesture or verbal language. Some humorous expressions also employ both physical and verbal humor.

Verbal humor exploits linguistic aspects as a strategy of humor construction. The speaker can manipulate some linguistic aspects such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantic, and pragmatic to create humorous discourse. The exploitation of those linguistic aspects in verbal humor is closely related to the incongruity theory of humor. Attardo (1994) highlights that

incongruity is based on the discovery of a reality or a thought that turns out to be inconsistent with what was expected. It means that the main characteristic of that theory of humor is incongruences. Based on that theory, a distorted linguistics aspect could be represented by an odd linguistic expression, contradiction, bewildering, or disordering hearer's perception. Berger (1976) underlines that incongruity can be applied linguistically in syllables, words, phrases, and meanings to create humor.

"Incongruity is marked by conflict, contrast, and differentiation" (Marmysz, 2003, p. 128). Related to Marmysz's characteristic of incongruity, Wijana (1994) also states that the essence of humor creation utilizes a different combination of two meanings, perceptions, or conceptions between speaker and hearer by which cause unexpectedness and peculiarity as a humorous construction requirement. That conception of incongruity can be found linguistically by breaking

the ruled-govern of a language which potentially elicit laugh or smile as an indicator of humor occurrence (Wijana, 1995). Even though laughter is a primary indicator of humor, Meyer (2000) involves smiles, grins, or even sudden exhalations that can indicate the experience of humor. In a particular context, Meyer asserts communication is a key factor in nearly all theories of humor because it results from a message or interaction perceived by others.

Based on the conception of humor creation above, Wijana (2004) and Hurley, Dennett, and Adams (2011) identify several forms of verbal humor such as puns and wordplay, situation comedy, cartoons, musical jokes, fairy tale, riddle, folk story, folk poetry, nickname, and an amusing name of food. This research examines verbal humor creation in one of the phenomenal and controversial situation comedies entitled *Mind Your Language*, a British comedy television series produced by London Weekend Television (LWT) in 1977. That sitcom told the audiences about foreigners who learned English as their second language. They came from different countries with different first languages, cultures, and occupations as well. The characters in that comedy series involved Miss Courtney as the headmaster of the educational college, Mr. Brown as an English teacher, Gladys as a cafeteria school keeper, and Sid as the cockney caretaker of the school. The students' characters presented Chung Su Lee from China, Taro Nagazumi from Japan, Anna Schmidt from German, Max from Greek, Ranjeet Singh from India, Giovanni Capello from Italy, Ali Nadim from Pakistan, Danielle Favre from French, Jameela Ranjha from India, and Juan Cervantes from Spain.

Because of their different knowledge of English, their utterances mostly trigger laughter. To make it more specific, this research investigates lexical semantics as the strategy of humor creation in *Mind Your Language* situation comedy. This research focuses on the incongruence of lexical semantics in manipulating meaning to construct humorous utterances. Focusing on one of the smaller linguistic units, hopefully, this research is in a position to provide an applicable strategy in

constructing verbal humor. Semantic meaning, especially lexical relation unconsciously is widely used in daily conversation. This research should contribute theoretically in creating verbal humor by manipulating lexical relation meanings such as synonymy, antonymy, homonymy, hyponymy, and polysemy.

Theoretically, a study dealing with linguistic meaning is known as semantics. Becker and Bieswenger (2006) claim that words in a certain language can be semantically related to one another in many different ways. Finegan (2012) labels that semantic phenomenon dealing with word meaning and examines relationships among word meanings is called lexical semantics (see also Riemer, (2010) and Becker and Bieswenger, (2006). Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams, (2011) characterizes that lexical semantics often ends in the bound morpheme -nym such as synonymy, antonymy, homonyms, polysemy, and hyponyms (see also Rowe and Levine, (2016) Akmajian, Demers, Farmer, and Harnish, (2001) Finch, (2003); O'grady, Dobrovolsky, and Aronoff (1997); Finegan (2012); Yule (2014); and Saeed (2003). Riemer (2010) also comprises meronym as part of lexical semantics even though it has nearly overlapped meaning with hyponyms.

Several pieces of research that examined linguistic aspect especially dealing with semantic aspect in verbal humor were conducted by Joloud (2015); Lutfi (2019); Rahmi (2017); Sukardi, Sumarlam, and Marmanto (2018); Litvinenko, Sirazova, and Zharkynbekova (2020); Sukardi, Yuwana, and Sumarlam (2016); and Anisah (2016). Lutfi (2016) analyze semantic and pragmatic aspect in English jokes while Rahmi (2017) examines semantic and pragmatic aspects as a joke strategy in situation comedy. Some of those previous research findings show how lexical relation meanings are manipulated to construct humor. Joloud's semantic analysis in *The Reader's Digest* humor found that homonymy, paronymy, and polysemy are identified as humor creation strategies. Quite resemble Joloud's findings, Litvinenko, Sirazova, and Zharkynbekova (2020) found that the phenomenon of homonymy, polysemy, and pronomasia is employed to create

humor in English, French and Russian anecdotes. Focusing on one type of lexical relations, Anisah (2016) examines polysemy in Indonesian Lawak Klub humorous discourse while Sukardi, Sumarlam, and Marmanto (2018) examine homonymy in Meme. another investigation concerning lexical ambiguity is conducted by Jojić (2013) and Charina (2017). Jojić (2013) examines lexical puns in a situation comedy while Charina (2017) investigates lexical and syntactic ambiguity in 30 humorous and ambiguous sentences occurring in newspaper headlines, advertisement slogans, and jokes.

METHODOLOGY

By the background of the research, this research applies a descriptive qualitative approach. As Denscombe (2007, p. 248) highlights, “qualitative research is disposed to be associated with words or images as the unit of analysis, this research takes words as the unit of analysis”. Scripts that had been adjusted to the subtitles of *Mind Your Language* in season 1 are proceed to be research data. From those adjusted scripts, comprehensive observation and annotation are needed to provide data analysis. That sitcom has 4 seasons consisting of 42 episodes. This research considers all 13 episodes in season 1 to limit the saturation of repeated and similar data at the rest of the seasons. Besides, the emergence of artificial laughter at that sitcoms is also considered to establish utterances containing humorous utterances especially related to lexical semantics. This research identifies lexical semantics exploited as a strategy of verbal humor creation in *Mind Your Language* situation comedy. After identifying the types of lexical relations, an argumentative discussion is given to explain how the meaning relationship in a word is manipulated to build humorous utterances in that sitcom. This interpretation is also strengthened by looking up an oxford dictionary to understand the semantic meaning.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A distorted meaning in the semantic aspect can be utilized to create humorous utterances. Involving multiple meanings that potentially construct ambiguous or incongruent meaning lead the speaker and hearer to refer to a different meaning of a similar word. Semantic aspects, especially lexical semantics, are employed to create humorous discourse in *Mind Your Language* situation comedy. The findings show that the forms of lexical semantics employed to create humor are polysemy, homonymy, homophone, hyponym, and synonym. The types of lexical semantics which usually are originated in humor construction is polysemy and homonymy. The employment of those lexical semantics occurs because they represent a similar word that has more than one meaning. That is why Becker and Bieswenger (2006) and O’grady, Dobrovolsky, and Aronoff (1997) call them lexical ambiguity because both polysemy and homonym refer to a single lexical form that has two or more meanings. Polysemy is used to the word which has more than one and related meanings, while homonymy is used to express a word that has more than one and unrelated meanings. Rowe and Levine (2016) explain that the term homonymy is labeled for words that have different meanings and might be spelled similarly or differently, but they are pronounced similarly.

Polysemy

Semantically, a word meaning can be a primary or secondary meaning. Some words in every language have primary and secondary meanings, depending on the linguistic context surrounding them. A very common example of a polysemous word is the use of the word *head*. That word can be used to mean a part of a human’s body and it can also be used as the highest position in an institution or a group. Those two meanings are still interconnected based on their linguistic context. The meaning of the word *head* is a part of humans’ body as the highest position. The concept of the highest position of the *head* in humans’ body is involved to construct meaning as the highest position in an organization. Because of those multiple meanings, polysemy is often be employed to produce humorous utterances. The use of two

different concepts of meaning at the same speech event potentially led to an incongruity as in the example below.

(1) Mr. Brown: Let's see your observations on the stars.

Juan: Por favor? Ah sí, stars. There is plenty stars.

Mr. Brown: Yes, could you name some?

Juan: **Sophia Loren, Brigitte Bardot.**

The conversation above occurred in the classroom between Mr. Brown and Juan. Mr. Brown allowed each student to speak English for one minute on a different topic. In Example (1), Mr. Brown asked Juan to talk about stars. The word *stars* mean objects in the sky that appear to light up at night or they can also be interpreted as planets. Mr. Brown asked Juan to describe the object and named some of the stars or planets that he knew. When Juan mentioned several names related to stars, Juan did not name those kinds of stars. He just mentioned several actresses' names such as Sophia Loren and Brigitte Bardot. Juan perceived the meaning of *stars* as a secondary meaning, while Mr. Brown asked Juan to talk about *stars* in their primary meaning. The concept of discrepancy in Juan's utterances above indicated the emergence of humor by manipulating the polysemous meaning of *stars*. Even though that word was used in the different senses of meaning, they still showed a related meaning. Both Mr. Brown and Juan referred to different meanings of that word that evoked laughter.

As mentioned in the previous section, the meaning of a word has a primary meaning and a secondary meaning. When a word used refers to its original meaning, without being influenced by the context of the situation, it can be classified as a primary meaning. Conversely, if the word used does not refer to the original meaning or the lexical meaning it can be said to be a secondary meaning. In other words, the primary meaning can be said as literal meaning and secondary meaning as figurative meaning. As an English native speaker, Mr. Brown can produce meaning figuratively in his utterances to contribute to the humor construction.

(2) Mr. Brown: Taro, sit down. Now, before we do anything else this evening, I want to find a monitor.

Giovanni: **O.K. You tell us where to look! We find one.**

(3) Mr. Brown: Taro.

Taro: Yes teacher?

Mr. Brown: Paris is in France.

Taro: No. to Buckingham Parace.

Mr. Brown: Ah, Buckingham Palace! I follow you.

Taro: **You follow me?**

Mr. Brown: Yes.

Taro: I didn't see you then.

Another example of the polysemous word in constructing humorous utterance was found in Example (2). Before Mr. Brown started teaching, he wanted to find someone with good enough English skills to handle the class if Mr. Brown had to leave the classroom for a while. Mr. Brown expressed it with the word *monitor*. As a native speaker, Mr. Brown certainly understands the figurative meaning of that word. However, students who are still in the process of learning English will take the meaning of *monitor*. A monitor is one of the hardware devices on a computer that functions to display images, video, or other works. Meanwhile, Mr. Brown, in Example (2), used the word *monitor* to refer to the meaning of a person who can help him to oversee. Giovanni, who took that meaning literally, responded to Mr. Brown by saying *O.K. You tell us where to look! We find one*. The funniness occurred when Giovanni contributed a response that was related to Mr. Brown, but conceptually, his response was not appropriate to Mr. Brown's utterance. It was because of a different perception between what Mr. Brown meant and what meaning Giovanni was considered.

The use of figurative meaning in creating humor was also carried out by Taro in Example (3). When Taro shared his weekend experience in Buckingham Palace, Mr. Brown misunderstood the word *Palace*. That was because Taro mispronounced that word by saying *parace* for *palace*. That incorrect

pronunciation sounded like pronouncing the word Paris. After clarifying, Mr. Brown understood what Taro meant that he attempted to say Palace. To confirm, Mr. Brown told Taro that he understood him by uttering *I follow you*. The word *follow* means to come or to go after or behind somebody or something. Contextually, Mr. Brown used that expression to convey that he had understood what Taro meant. On the other hand, Taro considered the meaning literally that Mr. Brown followed him during his weekend in Buckingham Palace. It led Taro to respond to Mr. Brown's utterance by saying *I didn't see you then* because he presumed that he did not Mr. Brown there. Taro's incongruent response above also indicated a concept of incongruity theory of humor. Taro's irrelevant response made audiences laughing.

- (4) Mr. Brown: Ali.
Ali: Yes please.
Mr. Brown: Can I see you please?
Ali: **You are seeing me now.**

Another polysemous meaning to create humor was found in the dialogue (4). When Mr. Brown came to Ali in the classroom, Mr. Brown wanted to have a serious discussion privately with Ali in Miss Courtney's office by uttering *can I see you, please*. Mr. Brown used that utterance figuratively that there is something quite important he wanted to talk to Ali in eyes on eyes. Hearing Mr. Brown's utterance, Ali perceived Mr. Brown's utterance literally and responded by saying *you are seeing me now*. The funniness occurred because Mr. Brown and Ali perceived different meanings for the word *see*. Mr. Brown used that word figuratively while Ali used that word in the literal meaning. That incongruent perception led Ali to produce an irrelevance response which triggered humor. Based on the Example (2), (3), and (4), it can be seen how manipulation of literal and figurative meanings can be conducted to elicit humor. An irrelevance utterance represented the incongruent meaning between the speaker and the hearer.

Homonymy

Nearly all languages, in general, have words that present various meanings even though they are realized with similar speech sounds and similar spelling. Those concepts in constructing meaning in linguistics are called homonymy. As Rowe and Levine (2016) underline about homonymy, an ambiguity caused by a similar sound, and sometimes the same figure is utilized to create humor. Fromkin et al. (2011) presume that homonyms are good candidates for confusion as well as humor. In more specific terms, homonyms are an unrelated sense of the same phonological word. Saeed (2003) highlights that some authors distinguish between homographs, sense of the same written word, and homophone, sense of the same spoken word. Some examples of homonymy use in the humor creation process can be seen in some examples below.

- (5) Miss Courtney: Go down the corridor.
Ali: Down the corridor.
Miss Courtney: Good. Turn left.
Ali: Turn left.
Miss Courtney: **Right.**
Ali: You are confusing me.
- (6) Giovanni: There is Glasgow Rangers, Glasgow Celtics, football.
Miss Courtney: I was not referring to football, I was talking about the race.
Giovanni: **No, no, no, is not a race, it's football. I see them play at milano in the cup.**

A conversation in Example (5) occurred between Ali and Miss Courtney. Ali visited Miss Courtney's office to ask English class for immigrants. After giving some information, Miss Courtney gave Ali a direction to get to the classroom. Miss Courtney also advised Ali to wait for his teacher in the classroom. When Miss Courtney was giving instruction, Ali's gesture seemed as if he understood what Miss Courtney was saying. The funniness occurred when Miss Courtney used the word *right* to confirm that what Ali said was true. Meanwhile, Ali interpreted the word *right* as a hint to go to the right side the opposite of the left. That similarity of the spelling and sounds of the word *right* presents a different meaning that is perceived differently by Miss

Courtney and Ali. It indicates a concept of incongruity theory of humor which is characterized by an inappropriate response from the speaker.

A similar case was also found in Example (6) on Giovanni's utterance. Miss Courtney was explaining the history of the English language. Finding a word *Celtic* in Miss Courtney's utterances, Giovanni who minded Celtics as one of a football club in Scotland conveyed his opinion about Celtics. Those different perceptions of the meaning of *Celtic* between Miss Courtney and Giovanni led them to a misunderstanding situation. Miss Courtney had clarified that she did not talk about football, but she talked about race. The word *race* was perceived differently by Miss Courtney and Giovanni. Miss Courtney used the word *race* to refer to any of the groups into which humans can be divided according to their physical characteristics, culture, history, language, etc., while Giovanni interpreted that word as a contest between runners, horses, vehicles, etc. to see which one is the fastest. Those contradictive meanings are manipulated to construct humorous utterances by demonstrating an irrelevant response. That homonymous word led Miss Courtney and Giovanni in an awkward situation that triggered funniness.

A different conception of one word that has a similar sound and spelling was also found in the example below. Before starting the meeting, Mr. Brown gave a simple question about a term used to describe the valley between two mountains. Juan who seemed to be confused and did not know the answer responded to the question by saying *pass*. Juan used that word to say that he did not know the answer to a question, especially for the quiz. In another context, the word *pass* is also used to refer to a valley between two mountains. Unconsciously, Juan's intention to say that he did not know the answer by saying *pass* made his answer correct. The different meaning of the similar word served by Juan and perceived by Mr. Brown made Mr. Brown received Juan's answer. That ambiguous word portrayed the incongruity between what Juan meant and what he did to respond to the question. A similar word perceived

differently by Juan and Mr. Brown demonstrated how homonymous words could be manipulated to evoke laughter.

(7) Mr. Brown: Here is your question. What is another name for a valley between two mountains?

Juan: **Valley between two mountains? Pass.**

Mr. Brown: Correct.

Another example of homonymy which happened because of naming as Sukardi et al.'s findings (2018) could be seen in Example (8). It illustrates the use of personal names ambiguously to express lexical words related to a sort of color.

(8) Mr. Brown: I am Brown.

Ali: Oh, no. You are committing a mistake.

Mr. Brown: Mistake?

Ali: **Yes, you are not brown! We are brown! You are white.**

Mr. Brown: My name is Brown! I'm your teacher.

Mr. Brown introduced himself the first time he met his students in the classroom by saying *I am Brown*. Hearing Mr. Brown's utterance, one of his students looked surprised. He then corrected Mr. Brown's utterance by saying *you are not brown! We are brown! You are white*. Based on that example, it could be seen that there was an ambiguous meaning of the word *brown*. Mr. Brown used that word to refer to his name. Besides, a different meaning was perceived by Ali who considered that the word *brown* was used to refer to Mr. Brown's skin color. Their incongruent meanings of the word *brown* were employed to construct humorous utterances by showing the concept of lexical ambiguity as what Becker and Bieswenger (2006) and O'grady, Dobrovolsky, and Aronoff (1997) presume. Ali and Mr. Brown expressed different meanings to a similar word, *brown*, that made audiences laughing. That different perception also led Ali to produce an irrelevance response.

Homophones

The term homonym is used to refer to the concept of the same sound and spelling or it may spell differently which has different meanings. Yule

(2014) and Finch (2003) use the term homophones to refer to the concept of a word which has a similar sound but it has different and unrelated meaning. The concept of homophones also refers to the same sound but different in spelling. In short, it can be said that homophones are different words that have the same sound speech or pronunciation (see also Becker and Bieswanger, 2006). Some examples of using homophones as a strategy to create humor can be seen in the conversation below.

(9) Mr. Brown: Max, question five! Quite a hard one this one. Construct a sentence using the word *indisposition*.

Max: **Sure! Every Saturday I play the football and I am being the goalkeeper! Because I like playing in this position.**

(10) Mr. Brown: Max, desk doesn't begin with the letter A! I want a word beginning with A.

Max: A door.

Mr. Brown: **Good, Adore! Well done.**

Ali: Excuse please!

Mr. Brown: Yes Ali.

Ali: I am not understanding why you are saying a desk is not right but a door is right.

Mr. Brown, in Example (9), asked Max to make a sentence using the word *indisposition*. Max responded to the question with a sentence that did not contain the word *indisposition* as Mr. Brown expected. However, in Max's sentence construction, there was a speech sound that had a similar pronunciation as the word *indisposition*. That was *in this position*. Phonologically, those two speech sounds are pronounced in the same pronunciation. Max perceived the sound of the word *indisposition* as the pronunciation of *in this position* so Max made a sentence containing that expression. Those homophonous speech sounds are completely different in writing, but *indisposition* and *in this position* illustrate a similar sound. That different perception of the same sounds also led Max to produce an irrelevance response to answer Mr. Brown's question.

An identical case was also found in Max's utterance in Example (10). Mr. Brown asked Max

to give him an example of an English word beginning with the letter A. At the first chance, Max responded to Mr. Brown by giving the word *a desk* that was no relevance to the question because *a desk* was not a word and the word *desk* began with the letter D. On the second occasion, Max responded to Mr. Brown's question by giving the word *a door*. Conceptually, Max still gave a similar response to the first one. Nevertheless, Mr. Brown perceived the sounds of *a door* as *adore* so he received Max's answer right. The word that Max meant was *a door* not *adore*. That homophonous word unconsciously led the speaker and hearer to perceive different words that evoke laughter. That was because the sound of the word *adore* was similar to *a door*. Based on the example, it clearly can be seen how the concept of homophone led the speaker and hearer to construct humorous utterances by showing an irrelevance response.

(11) Mr. Brown: If you want to be pedantic about it Ranjeet, write your surname and forename.

Ranjeet: **I am not having four names also.**

(12) Mr. Brown: Anna, C.

Anna: Red.

Mr. Brown: Red? What's that got to do with C?

Anna: **Red Sea.**

A conversation between Mr. Brown and Ranjeet in Example (11) also indicated the use of homophones as a humor creation strategy. When Mr. Brown briefed all his students before they had an examination to get a certificate, he asked his students to fill their name column first. Mr. Brown used the word *forename* to refer to the first name. One of his students, Ranjeet, considered that Mr. Brown uttered *four names* so he responded to Mr. Brown by saying *I am not having four names also*. Although they have different meanings and spellings, the word *forename* and the phrase *four names* share a similarity in pronunciation. Ranjeet's word choice in his utterance represented phonological manipulation of those words to construct funny meaning. He seemed conscious to exploit that homophonous expression to evoke laughter. Ranjeet demonstrated the concept of incongruity theory of humor by providing two

incongruent words that have similar sounds in pronunciation.

Another example of homophones use was found in Example (12). Mr. Brown asked Anna to give him an example of an English word beginning with the letter C. Because of their resemblance sounds, Anna supposed that the sound of the letter C was the word *sea*. She responded to Mr. Brown's question by uttering *Red*, a kind of familiar sea's name. Even though they are orthographically different, they share a homophonous sound of two unrelated sense of a letter C and the word *sea*. A conversation between Anna and Mr. Brown indicated the use of those homophonous words to produce an ambiguity to elicit humor. Anna responded to Mr. Brown's utterance with her misperception that led her to make an irrelevant response.

Hyponymy

More specific words that constitute a subclass of a more general word are called hyponyms (Rowe and Levine, 2016). Saeed (2003), Finch (2003), and Cruse (1986) highlight that hyponymy is a relation of inclusion which means that a hyponym includes a meaning of more general meaning with more complete expression. An example of a hyponym provides meaning in more complete words or expressions. Yule (2014) underlines that hyponymy can be identified when the meaning of one word is included in the meaning of another. As Riemer's differentiation of hyponym and meronymy, Becker and Bieswenger (2006) draw the basic concept of those lexical semantics, meronymy refers to terms for parts of real objects, whereas hyponymy refers to a hierarchy.

One example commonly used to describe the concept of hyponymy can be seen in the use of the words *cat* and *animal* or *grasshopper* and *insect*. Cats are a hyponym for animals, as well as grasshoppers which are a hyponym for insects. Based on the category, the word animals and insects in a wider context are called hypernyms because they are superordinate or a more general term. A distorted concept of hyponymy is also able

to construct humorous utterances as in the findings below.

(13) Mr. Brown: And before you discovered this secret of eternal wealth, what did you do?

Ali: I worked at the Taj Mahal.

Mr. Brown: In Delhi?

Ali: **No, Putney. The Taj Mahal Tandoori Restaurant.**

(14) Mr. Brown: Giovanni, what were you and Juan quarrelling over?

Giovanni: He was making fun of Santa Maria.

Mr. Brown: Santa Maria, the Virgin Mary?

Mr. Brown: **No, Louis G Santa Maria, the Italian foot baller.**

A conversation between Mr. Brown and Ali in Example (13) took place when Mr. Brown was fulfilling one of his students' identities, Ali Nadim from Pakistan. Mr. Brown asked Ali about his job. Before he came to London, Ali said to Mr. Brown that he worked at the Taj Mahal. Taj Mahal is widely known as one of India's most popular icons in Delhi, so Mr. Brown interpreted that Ali worked in Delhi. However, what Ali meant about the Taj Mahal was not referring to India's icon located in Delhi. The Taj Mahal meant by Ali is the name of a restaurant in Putney, the Taj Mahal Tandoori Restaurant. Ali's utterance illustrated that he produced incomplete meaning through his utterance. Semantically, the meaning of what Ali meant laid in another more complete utterance. The use of hyponym could be seen in how Ali only mentioned the Taj Mahal at first without mentioning the complete name of a place where he worked to construct the hearer's perception. When the hearer presumed that Ali worked in Delhi, Ali said that he did not work in Delhi, but in Putney, at the Taj Mahal Tandoori Restaurant. What Ali meant about the Taj Mahal was the name of a restaurant in Putney, not the Taj Mahal in Delhi. A quite similar case was also illustrated by Giovanni in Example (14). Mr. Brown assumed that Giovanni's utterance about Santa Maria as the Virgin Mary. Unfortunately, in a more complete meaning, Santa Maria that Giovanni meant referred to Louis G. Santa Maria, an Italian footballer. Involving incomplete meaning in the

previous utterance for more complete meaning potentially lead the speaker and hearer have different perception that can cause humor. That was the realization of the hyponymy concept as the humor creation strategy with irrelevance response.

(15) Anna: Then I had to prepare a meal for the bitch.

Mr. Brown: Anna, she may be a hard taskmistress but I don't think you ought to call her that.

Anna: Who?

Mr. Brown: Mrs. Valker... Walker.

Anna: **I was meaning the dog bitch.**

Mr. Brown: Oh I see.

The use of hyponymy to produce humorous utterance was also found in the Example (15). Anna was telling Mr. Brown the reason why she did not have time to finish her assignment. As an immigrant who worked as a household assistant, Anna told Mr. Brown how busy she was. After completing her housework, Anna also had to prepare food for her employer's female dog. The funniness arose when Anna, at her first utterance, did not convey what she meant completely by only saying *then I had to prepare a meal for the bitch*. This made Mr. Brown assumed that Anna was complaining and insulting her employer by calling her a bitch. Hearing Anna's utterance, Mr. Brown attempted to reprimand Anna for not referring to her employer as a bitch. That word, in English contexts, is classified as a vulgar word. However, at a more complete utterance, Anna then clarified that the word *bitch* did not refer to her employer, but she was referring to her employer's dog bitch. Before Anna explained what meant, it could be seen how the first utterance brought partial and uncomplete meaning to drive the hearer's perception. Then she produced the more complete meaning and utterance in the second utterance to explain what she meant.

(16) Mr. Brown: No, I was engaged once! As a matter of fact, I proposed marriage but it didn't really work out. There was quite a lot of opposition.

Miss Courtney: Her father?

Mr. Brown: **No, her husband I didn't realize she was married.**

Hyponymy usually provides a partial meaning to build the first hearer's perception that is potentially broken by the speaker at the second perception to create incongruity. Mr. Brown, in the example above, was in an attempt to construct Miss Courtney's first perception by uttering that he faced quite a lot of opposition to his previous marriage proposal. The case of rejection in a marriage proposal is usually designated by one or several family members. Therefore, hearing Mr. Brown's explanation about his marriage proposal opposition, Miss Courtney considered that one of the people who oppose Mr. Brown's proposal was Mr. Brown's girlfriend's father. A person who denied Mr. Brown's proposal was his girlfriend's husband. It means that the woman whom Mr. Brown wanted to married was a married one. The unexpected response by Mr. Brown was not only incongruent literally, but it also opposed the social norms. He cannot marry a married woman.

A language practice that distorted partial meaning found in the previous examples was often employed to construct humorous utterances. A partial meaning in the first expression is used to form the hearer's perception and the second one which contains a complete meaning is used to reverse the initial perception of the hearer. The incongruity between the first perception at the first utterance and the overall meaning conveyed at the second utterance is one of the humor creation strategies involved in the Mind Your Language situation comedy series. Generally, this strategy is also widely utilized to create humor in daily conversation.

Synonymy

Fromkin et al. (2011) assume that the best-known lexical semantics are synonymy and antonymy. Synonymy is the use of some words to express the same meaning in some or all contexts while antonymy is the use of some words to express the opposite meaning gradably or complementarily. Phonologically, Saeed (2003) defines synonymy as different phonological words that have the same or very similar meanings. Akmajian et al. (2001)

underline that one of the central meaning relations in synonymy is the sameness of meaning or paraphrase. This kind of lexical semantics is also found as a strategy to construct humorous utterances in *Mind Your Language* situation comedy.

- (17) Mr. Brown: Su Lee Chung.
Su Lee: Plesent.
Mr. Brown: Ali Nadim.
Ali: **Gift**.
Mr. Brown: Gift?
- (18) Mr. Brown: Good evening everyone. Nice to see you all are bright and early. I expect you're feeling a bit nervous.
Jamila: I am not nervous.
Mr. Brown: Good.
Jamila: **I am petrified**.
Mr. Brown: Petrified.

Two examples above illustrate how synonymy was used to produce humorous utterances. In Example (17), Mr. Brown, who had just arrived at the classroom, asked his students to say *present* when their name was mentioned by him. After calling Su Lee's name, Mr. Brown then called Ali Nadim's name. Hearing his name was mentioned by Mr. Brown, Ali did not follow what Mr. Brown asked. Ali did not say *present* to confirm his attendance, but he said *gift*. Ali presumed that the word *gift* and *present* are similar in various contexts. The word *gift* uttered by Ali, in a certain context, has a synonymous meaning with the word *present*. Both can be interpreted as a thing that you give to somebody especially on a special occasion or to say thank you. However, in that context, the word *gift* was not synonymous with the word *present*. That inappropriateness was conducted by Ali to elicit humorous utterances.

Jamila's utterance in Example (18) also indicated how humorous utterance can be constructed by manipulating synonymous words. Before Mr. Brown's students took their examination for English proficiency certificate, Mr. Brown entered the classroom just to greet and motivate his students. Mr. Brown considered that his students were nervous about the exam. Jamila who was sitting in the frontline seat stated that she

did not feel nervous. Mr. Brown looked very happy to hear that. The funniness occurred when Jamila stated that she did not feel nervous, but she felt very scared by uttering *I am petrified*. The word *petrified* means much more than nervous or feeling extremely frightened. It means that the word *nervous* semantically has a synonymous meaning with the word *petrified*. It implied that Jamila felt very nervous or extremely frightened of the examination. She even pronounced that word incorrectly by sounding *putrified* for *petrified*.

CONCLUSION

Humor construction is semantically probable by indicating incongruent meaning. Based on the discussion above, by manipulating meaning, people simply can provide humor. A meaning of a word manipulated by a speaker commonly opposites hearer's perception of the meaning of the similar word. It means that the humorous utterance can be constructed by utilizing a word that has more than one meaning as it shows by lexical semantics. Because lexical semantics provides more than one meaning, it certainly works to elicit humor by manipulating those multiple meaning. Focusing on lexical semantics investigation, five kinds of lexical semantics was found as humor creation strategy in *Mind Your Language* situation comedy. Those are polysemy, homonymy, homophone, hyponymy, and synonymy. The humorous utterances are created by presenting the incongruity concept of the theory of humor. A mismatch meaning perceived by the hearer and produced by the speaker is the basic concept of humor in the incongruity theory of humor. In other word, hearers presume an incongruent meaning with what the speaker means which then lead them in misleading or misunderstanding condition. Multiple meanings in lexical semantics and incongruity theory of humor are employed in humor creation to evoke laughter by demonstrating strange, unpredictable, and irrelevance response.

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