

# Why Is Humor Funny?

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**Abstract**— Language has been found to handle communication easily around the world. The main function of communication is as a means of communication mentioned above and also to express thoughts, feelings, ideas or opinions about anything happened in the society. Concerning with that, humor can be as a medium to express ideas or thoughts about society's reaction in a relationship. It can be read (narration) or heard (speaking). Humor itself has been known for long to be a medium to make people laugh. This paper is aimed at finding out 'why is humor funny? '. The data is collected from the internet and a book (Nasruddin Hodja's humor collection). The writer found out what makes humor is funny to be heard and read.

**Keywords**— communication, humor, funny

## I. INTRODUCTION

Language has been found to handle communication easily around the world. Language is different from one place to others. The main function of language is to communicate with each other and the specific function is to express feeling, thoughts, ideas or opinion about anything happened in a society dealing with making relationship. Based on Encyclopedia Britannica (2018), *'language is a system of conventional spoken, manual, or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves. The functions of language include communication, the expression of identity, play, imaginative expression, and emotional release.'* Another definition given by Henry Sweet (cited in Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018), *"Language is the expression of ideas by means of speech-sounds combined into words. Words are combined into sentences, this combination answering to that of ideas into thoughts."*

Language can be as media to do any activities with which can be in the form of speaking (conversation) or writing (literature). Humor is said as a fun medium to make people laugh, since the words are silly and funny listened and spoken to. Geekswipe team (2017) stated that *'humor is a feeling, and a trigger, laughter is a response. Some people laugh as a token of appreciation or to really insult someone or simply if they are enjoying a joke.'* According to May (1998, cited in Humor Matter, 2006, in Sulistyarini, 2007) *'humor is capacity to perceive, appreciate, or express what is funny, amusing, incongruous, ludicrous, etc'.* People laugh to what they listen and read from humor. But have they ever think, why do just words can drive them to laugh? By the means of being funny has driven writer to do ore research about humor. What factors needed to tell that humor is funny or not as well.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. The Process of Humor

In making any conversation, there are some principles that have to be followed, as Grecian Maxim, 1975 (cited in Ahmed Qodoury Abed, 2012) has stated as follows;

- a. Maxim of quantity, which requires the speaker's contribution as informative as one possibly can, and gives as much information as needed, and no more.

Example of the rule:

A : What time do you work tomorrow?

B : Tomorrow I work at 2 pm.

In the example, B responds to A's question without adding other information.

- b. Maxim of quality requires the speaker to be truthful, and that they do not give information that is false or that is not supported by evidence.

Example of the rule:

A : Why were you late last night?

B : My car broke down.

In the example, B gives the truthful information that the car broke down and that's why they were late.

- c. Maxim of relevance requires the speaker to provide relevant information to the discussion, avoiding things that are not pertinent to the discussion.

Example of the rule:

A : How is the weather today?

B : it is rainy and cloudy

In the example, B provides accurate information that is relevant to A's question

- d. Maxim of manner requires the speaker to be clear, brief, and as orderly as one can in what they say, and where they avoid obscurity of expression and ambiguity.

Example of the rule:

A : Where was the professor when class ended?

B : She left class and went to her office.

To make the communication run well, those principles must be maintained. If those are disobeyed, then there will be violation of the principles. Humors are played with words that bring audience or reader laugh since it is not related with what has been expected before.

Humor also has its own way and process in producing such a funny thing. Here is the step of humor process given by Lyttle, 2003 (cited in Sulistyarini, 2007):

**STIMULUS      —————>      PROCESSING      —————>      LAUGHTER**

It means that when we hear a joke, we must somehow:

- Figure out what the joker meant in the 'set-up' line,
- Notice that the important part (punch line) does not seem to fit,
- Figures out the funny way in which the punch line does make it.

This part usually called 'getting the joke'.

However, something in this process has to create mirth (happiness), since the most people recognize the connection between laughter and a good feeling (positive affects).

The formulation above is ignored the important point of aspect such as the context in which the humor experienced and the effects of laughter (or other mirthful expression) can have.

Here is the formulation in which lightening the phenomenon of inputs to and outputs of an instance humor given by Lyttle, 2003 (cited in Sulistyarini, 2007):

**CONTEXT → STIMULUS → PROCESSING → LAUGHTER → LAUGHTER**

It means that when we hear a joke, before we give the positive respond for the joke, we must:

- Understand what is being said
- Figure out what is being offered, and
- Enjoy it

The first step is relied on the clear communication, intelligent, listening, and sufficient shared context. The second step is about a good delivery by the humorist and a sense of humor in the receiver. The third step is about the receiver's mood and appreciation of humor. However, as people react to the stimulus in various ways, the context is changed again. Since, in fact, the effects that will finally happen from any humorous event will be expected as much to the context as they will to the humor stimulus itself.

Here is the next formulation about humor given by Lyttle (2003):

**(C1)>> Stimulus >> (C2) >> Cognitive/ Emotional >> (C3) >> Laughter >> (C4)**

It means that:

- There is a pre-existing context (C1), in which the humor stimulus must be understood and seen as funny. This is the shared understanding that is needed, if the humor is to work correctly.
- There is a change topic (C2) due to the humor stimulus. Once someone makes a joke or introduces humor, the context is changed by that means.

In this new context, two separate humor process occur. First, the receiver does not 'get the joke' (cognitive process). Second, the receiver does not 'like the joke' (emotional processing). It was being debate about the discipline of psychology to consider whether finding something funny is an emotional response to cognition, a cognitive rationalization of an emotion, or some combination of both (James-Lange versus Cannon-Baird). However, the result of the processing (which may include mirth) will change the context again, creating C3.

- Depending on several factors in the context, the receiver may or may not laugh or smile or express mirth in some other way.  
Whatever expression or non-expression of mirth occurs will again change the context.
- Introducing C4 and completing series of events (cycle) for one instance humor.

#### *B. Humorous Interaction*

Lundberg, 1969 (cited in Lyttle, 2003 in Sulistyarini, 2007) gave the four marks for those involved in a joke. The first mark called the initiator for whom that tells the joke or points out the humorous situation. The second was called the target for one being audience of the joke. The third was called the focus (the individual being ridiculed or suggested as funny). The last one was called publics (people who could observe or heard the jokes, but were not intended receiver). The same idea given by Tom Dwyer, 1991 (cited in Lyttle, 2003 in Sulistyarini,2007); he used the term 'initiator' as same as what Lundberg did. The term 'target' was quite different that Dwyer used 'audience' for it. For him, the term target was referred to person who was 'the object of the laughter produced by the joke...the object of the joke'. He said that a joke would be successful if the audience responds the initiator with laughter.

#### *B. A Characterization of Humor*

Generally there are three elements involved in a joke stated by Lyttle, 2003 (cited in Sulistyarini, 2007); they are someone or soething that is ridiculous or laughable (target), someone who points this out (initiator) and someone who agrees that it is funny (appreciator).

However, in fact, it is not necessary that the three elements occurred in the same time. When people use self-effacing humor (pretended that he is not the participants of humor), they bring themselves into both the initiator and the target at the same time that seemed they were ridiculing themselves. When people were laughed at their friend's jokes, they were both the target and the appreciator at the same time. When people smile or laugh at themselves (privately), they were both the initiator and the appreciator (enjoying them). In all the examples mentioned above, it can be assumed that two people are quiet enough to fulfill the participants of a joke. Suppose that someone was laughed at something while she/he was alone was enough as well to fulfill the three elements of participants of a joke.

#### *C. Word Play*

According to Delia Chiaro,1992 (cited in Elina Korhonen.2008) 'the term word play includes every conceivable way in which language is used with the intent to amuse.'

There are some types of word play given by Chiaro. 1992 (cited in Sulistyarini.2007), they are;

1. Metathesis  
It concerns with slip of tongue. For example; It occurs when there is a mistake in saying an initial syllable of the intended place names such as Berkland and Oakley that said as 'Erkland and Boakley'
2. Melapropism  
It concerns with misplaced the use of words that supposed to be right because of the resembled of sounds and pronunciation.
3. Misplaced word  
It concerns with the misread or misunderstand about the class of word that is put into class of word that seemed to be funny to be understood. It means that the means of such a word (of a class of word) is misunderstand to be the means of other class of word.
4. Maneuvering phonology  
It is the case in how the words played in case of stress, intonation and tone. It means that the fun thing of such humor is based on how the punster bring the humor itself deals with how the punster use those cases to create the fun thing of a humor.
5. Playing with word boundaries  
Generate more than one item from what was a single item in the first place by means of eliminating original words boundaries.
6. Homophone  
It concerns with the words that sound the same but with different meaning.  
For example, the word 'Jim Nastic' for 'Gymnastic'.
7. Homonymy  
It concerns with the words with the same form but with different meaning.

8. Polysemy  
It concerns with single word but with different meaning
9. Playing with syntax  
It concerns with the ambiguity means of addressee. The addressee is bringing into the different meaning with what the punster means.
10. Playing with the rules of conversation  
The words said in appropriate of what the addressee has expected to. It is the same means with the ambiguous one.

### III. METHOD

#### A. Data

The data were taken from humors in the internet (cited in Sulistyarini, 2007) and a book entitled 'Nasreddin, the clever man', retold by Sugeng Hariyanto (1995). These data were described using Library Research.

#### B. Discussion

The following stories (data) are taken from Nasruddin Hodja's humor that cited in Sulistyarini, 2017.

##### Story 1

##### *"Two Side of the River"*

*Nasruddin sat on a river bank  
when someone shouted to him  
from the opposite side:*

*"hey! How do I get across?"*

*"You are across!" Nasruddin shouted back*

The story is about Nasruddin and his friend that were in the opposite side of the riverbank. Nasruddin's friend wanted to get into hi that he asked what he supposed to do. But, Nasruddin gave the silly answer that his friend had crossed the river. In this case, Nasruddin made a violation of such a conversation. He broke Maxim of relevant, which stated to be relevant with the topic. By saying "You are across!", we could realize that he did the violation that only by his friend's voice, the friend had crossed the river even his body did not move at all. That breaking point made the story funny to be read.

##### Story 2

##### *'Hodja in Deathbed'*

*With his last breath, Nasruddin Hodja scandalizes his wife by making fun of the grim angel of the death, when he sees him already hovering near his bed, "Put on your very best clothes, my dear wife." Hodja says. "Do your nicely, and put some color on your face. Try to make yourself as beautiful as possible. Then perhaps if the angel sees you in these fine clothes looking like an angel or peacock, he ight take you along and leave me*

Nasruddin was dying at the time that he was close to death. To comfort himself in facing death, Nasruddin make a joke by telling a lie to his wife that if she dressed well and looked beautiful, the death angel would look at her and took her instead of him. In this case, Nasruddin broke the maxim of quantity which stated that we should not tell lie. This lying has made to produce fun thing in the story.

##### Story 3

##### *'Good Swimmer'*

*In the old days, men were permitted to have more than one wife. Nasruddin himself took a second wife who was younger than the first one. One evening, he came home to find them quarelling about which of them loved more. At first, hodja told them that he loved them both, but neither of them was satisfied with the answer. Then the older one asked, "Well just suppose the three of us were in a boat, and it started to sink. Which of us would you try to save?" Hodja thought for a while, and then he said to the older wife "my dear you know how to swim, don't you?"*

The story is about nasruddin lied to his wives on which of them being loved more. The fun thing was that Nasruddin made an ambiguous meaning that he answered his older wife question by irritating her. By saying "my dear, you know how to swim, don't you?" he created an ambiguous meaning just to flirt his older wife. in this case he broke the maxim of manner which tells to avoid the ambiguity.

#### Story 4

##### 'Face at the window'

*Nasruddin hodja called at a large house to collect for charity. The servant said "my master is out". "tell your master that next time he goes out, he should not leave his face at the window. Someone might steal it" Hodja replied*

In this case Nasruddin pretended that he had not seen the master of the servant that was hiding for him not to give out charity. In fact he did see the owner of the house hiding behind the window. The fun thing was that Nasruddin made a joke of his disappointment of the master lied about his presence.

#### Story 5

##### 'A Breath of air'

*One evening, Hodja was crossing a graveyard when in the distance, he saw some men approaching on horseback. Suspicious, he said to himself, "ten to one, these people are bandits" and he hid in a tomb. Unfortunately, the man on horseback had seen him. They rode up to the tomb and called out, "who are you?"*

*Hodja stuck his head out "I am a dead man"*

*"And what is a dead man doing out at this hour?"*

*"Breathing the fresh night air"*

*"Dead man don't need to breathe a fresh air"*

*"Ah, you are right," said Hodja "I made a mistake." And he withdrew into the tomb again*

Nasruddin was pretending to be a dead man that he was found out by the bandits. In order to save himself, he did pretending by making argument. Being pretended by those words produced was the fun thing of the story. Since the arguments were very ridiculous for those who had passed away. The argument ade was a lie to save himself from the bandits. In this case again, Nasruddin violate the maxim of quality which tells not to tell lies (be truthful).

#### Story 6

##### 'The soup of the hare'

*A neighbor came to Hodja's house from hunting, bringing a hare as a gift. Delighted, Hodja had the hare yahni (meat stew with onions) cooked and share it with his guest.*

*Presently, however, one countryman after another stated to call, each one was the relative of the man who brought him the hare. No further present were forthcoming. Hodja cooked some soup from old hare yahni and shared it with his guests.*

*At length Hodja was exasperated. One day yet another stranger appeared, "I am the relative of the relative who brought you the hare". He sat down, like all the rest, expecting a meal. Hodja handed him a bowl of hot water mixed with little salt and spices.*

*"What kind of soup is this?" asked the stranger.*

*"You are the relative of y neighbor, aren't you?" Hodja replied. "And that is certainly the soup of the soup of the hare which was brought by him.*

It was started by the kindness given to Nasruddin from his neighbor. They had the soup together. But then some people came and told him that they were relatives of the neighbor brought him the hare. The last two sentences uttered by Nasruddin marked the story to be funny.

#### Story 7

##### 'Real men'

*"If there is a man among you, who's not afraid of his wife, let him stand up!" challenged a bully ast the new comer in the neighborhood. One by one all who were not sitting already settled down. Only Nasruddin remained standing, leaning on his stick. "Well it seems you and me are the only real men in here. " the man said to Nasrusddin "Speak for yourself" said Nasruddin "my wife warned me that if she catches me sitting with this bunch again, she'll break my other leg too.*

In this case, Nasruddin did not show himself as a 'real man' like what the man had thought before. He was just afraid to be gotten angry by his wife. This situation made the humor funny.

### Story 8

#### 'Wearing the Turban'

*The wit and wisdom of Nasruddin Hodja never leaves him tongue-tied. One day and illiterate man came to Hodja's house with a letter he had received. "Hodja, please read the letter to me". Hodja look at the letter, but could not make out a single word. So he told the man "I am sorry, but I cannot read this".*

*The man cried "For shame, Hodja! You must be ashamed before the turban you wear (i.e. the sign of education). Hodja reoved the turban and placed it on the head of the illiterate man, said "There, now you wear the turban. If it gives some knowledge, read the letter yourself."*

This story talked about someone judging people from his/ her look only, like what the man in the story judging Nasruddin for Turban he wore. The last sentence marked the story to be funny, also, it reminds us not to see people only from the clothes that he/ she wore.

### Story 9

#### 'Help yourself my fur coat'

*One day Hodja was invited to a party. Having arrived in his shabby, everybody clothing nobody seered to take any notice of him. "Well, this wouldn't do." He bided his chance and slipped out unnoticed.*

*He returned, wearing his best robe and his fine fur coat. From the entrance on, he was overwhelmed with compliments, given the best seat at the table and urged to partake of the choice morsels. Smiling, he began to dip the sleeve of his fur coat into the dishes, saying "help yourself my fur coat!"*

*"What are you doing, Hodja?" cried the host and some guest in alarm. "Why, I was just inviting my fur coat to partake of these delicacies, sinve it seems to command so much respect! A few minutes ago, without my fur coat, I wasn't even noticed. Becouse of it, I am now being overwhelmed with attentions!"*

In this case Nasruddin played as a fool that people were looking at him and totally surprised with what he had done since he did the fool thing. He was chatting with his own sleeve of his fur coat that it seemed it was a human like him. The acted the sleeve could eat like him. This foolishness has made the story be funny.

### Story 10

#### 'They are playing music'

*Hodja was returning home one night, with one of his student when he saw a gang of thieves in front of a house, trying to break the lock. Hodja perceived that he would probably get hurt if he spoke up, so he decided to stay quite and pass by quickly. But his student, however, did not understand what was happening, so he asked "What are those standing there doing?"*

*"Shhh!" replied Hodja "They are playing music!"*

*"But I can't hear anything!"*

*"Well, we shall hear the noise tomorrow" Hodja replied*

In order to keep him and his student save from the bandit, he acted that he did not know and see the robbery. The last sentence uttered by him in answering his student question has brought the funny thing in the story. The sentence **"Well, we shall hear the noise tomorrow"** is assumed that the 'music' that he referred here is the reaction of the owner of the house being stolen by the bandit. The owner would scream out loud and create noise (which music does too). The sentence also violates the maxim of manner.

#### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From the explanation above, the writer found out some aspects violated by Nasruddin Hodja's humors that make those funny, they are;

##### 1. Playing with rule of conversation

Nasruddin Hodja's humor has violated three principles of Grecian Maxim; maxim of relative, maxim of quantity and maxim of manner. The violation of maxim of relative can be seen from the sentence ***"You are across!"*** of the story entitled ***'two side of the river'***. In this case he did not make any relation of what the friend asked to what he answered. But if we read for sure, Nasruddin said the truth that the addressee had moved even just by the voice that Nasruddin could hear and answer his question.

The violation of maxim of quantity was about Nasruddin told the lie that he was facing the death time. It was only to make a joke of dying and the death that he would face soon. The sentences ***"Then perhaps if the angel sees you in this fine clothes looking like an angel or peacock, He might take you along and leave me"*** were signed the fun thing of the lie itself. Grecien has stated that we should not make the ambiguous meaning in such a conversation. But this was how Nasruddin put his story become funny.

The violation of maxim of manner was made by him in the story entitled 'a good swimmer'. He was only asked to which he loved more between the older or the younger wives. The sentence ***"my dear, you know how to swim, don't you?"*** lead us to the ambiguous meaning in which we will think that he loves the younger one much more than the older one or he only wants to know if his older wife can swim or not.

##### 2. Pretending

In this case, Nasruddin broke the maxim of quantity. Like in the story entitled ***'Face at the window'***, he was pretending that he did not see the host. He made a joke of the hiding face of the host that he said ***"Tell your master that next time he goes out, he should not leave his face at the window. Someone might steal it."***

And in the story entitled 'A breath of Air', he was pretending to be a death man that he wanted to keep himself save from the bandits. But, in order to be survived, he made ridiculous arguments by saying ***"I am a dead man"*** and ***"breathing for the fresh air"*** just to cover the 'pretending' itself. he was pretending that he was a dead.

##### 3. Attitude

Nasruddin was playing with someone's attitude which also known as one human's characteristic. On attitude, human has a good side and the bad side.

In the story entitled ***'The soup of the soup of the hare'*** he told about the bad manner of someone who wanted to get something from others. The sentence ***"You are the relative of my neighbor, aren't you?"*** Nasruddin replied ***"And that is certainly the soup of the soup of the hare which was brought by him"***. The story told us about how much Nasruddin disturbed of the guest presented. The guest showed the bad manner that he wanted to get the same meal as other guests for free. And also, he considers himself as one the neighbor relatives.

##### 4. Embarrassment

The other side of humankind that can make fun thing in making humor is 'embarrassment'. Every person has their own embarrassment.

In the story entitled 'The real men', Nasruddin showed his embarrassment. In this story he told about his embarrassment that he scared to his own wife. It is signed by he did not move from the 'real man' chair. By saying ***"my wife warned me that if she catches me sitting with this bunch again, she'll break my other leg too..."***

##### 5. Someone's point of view (how we do judge someone)

It is about the characteristic of someone wanted to judge other especially from the clothes they wear. The ***'wearing Turban'*** story showed that a man judged Nasruddin only from his look (turban). The man said "For shame, Hodja! You must be ashamed before the turban you wear" (i.e. the sign of education at that time). And the fun thing was that Nasruddin replied by putting his Turban into the man's head and said ***"there, now you wear the turban. If it gives some knowledge, read the letter yourself"***. It seemed that he broke the maxim of relative that he did not show any relevancy with what the men meant and what he did to the man.

##### 6. Foolishness

Humor cannot be separated from the word 'fool'. However, fool becomes one of the aspects used by some authors in the work of humor so as in Nasruddin's story. Foolishness is one of human characteristics that really creates fun thing in making humors.

Nasruddin played with foolishness by making himself look like a fool in the story ***'Eat my fur coat, at!'***. By saying the sentences ***"help yourself my fur coat!"*** and ***"Why, I was just inviting my fur coat to partake of these delicacies, since it seems to command so much respect! A few minutes ago, without my fur coat, I wasn't even noticed. Because of it, I am now being overwhelmed with attentions!"*** In this case, the foolishness marked by him talking to his coat which is inanimate

thing. The reason is that to tell people around him that people should not be recognized or honored just by the clothes he/she wears. But this sentence has created the fun thing in the story.

The sentences **'Shhh!' replied Hodja 'they are playing music!'**, **'But I can't hear anything!'**, **'Well we shall hear the noise tomorrow!'** of the story entitled 'They are playing music' leads us to know that he played with his own foolishness of the situation at the time. But in the same time he might tell the truth that the same reaction of the robbery would be given by the audience of music performance (noise). In this case, he also broke the maxim of manner which stated to avoid the ambiguity that leads the addressee to be confused of the issue brought.

Nasruddin brought his student into the ambiguous meaning because the event could not be said as music performance but the robbery.

## V. CONCLUSION

The things makes humor funny is that there violation of the word to the principles of the communication that should be as informative as what the addressee has expected to get, not a lie, relevant to the topic talked about, avoid ambiguity.

Also, humor is said to be formed from with human characteristic like; foolishness, pretending, embracement, how to judge someone (someone point of view), and attitude.

Humor forms the words that are not relevant with what we say and what we expect to. The purpose of doing this is only to create the fun itself.

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