

Joke and Its Relation to Students Grammar Mastery in EFL Learning

Awliya Rahmi

Fakultas Adab dan Humaniora
 UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi
 Jambi, Indonesia
 awliya@uinjambi.ac.id

Muhammad Adek

Fakultas Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia
 Universitas Negeri Padang
 Padang, Indonesia

Abstract—This linguistic-based educational research was conducted to identify the relation between semantic understanding and student's syntax comprehension in learning English as foreign language. This observational research was managed by giving English humor (joke, pun, wit, etc.) to thirty students of English Department. In addition, students were interviewed to know how humor is advantageous for their grammar understanding. This research emerged that students were encouraged to construct well-structured sentences after firstly discovering the meaning of the humor. The first factor was the fact that students were able to understand the whole humor although they missed the grammar structure of it. The second factor was the in complex and brief structure of humor-triggered students to competently sustain its grammatical structure. The third factor was the ridiculousness of the joke itself. That humor is undoubtedly ridiculous motivate students to memorize its grammatical structure and meaning. Thus, humor was highly beneficial for students to elevate their grammatical mastery.

Keywords—EFL; grammar; humor; joke

I. INTRODUCTION

Grammar has been an endless problem faced by both students and teacher in teaching and learning English as foreign language. Not only because it is different from students' mother language but also because its structure is uniquely different and complex. Students probably can memorize many vocabularies of English, but to make those meaningful in sentence, they must be provided with knowledge of grammar. It is the knowledge to modify and join the words together in order to express some meaning [1]. Among other aspects of English language learning, grammar and structure are seemingly the most difficult part for students to learn. Therefore, this fact causes struggle for teachers to teach grammar and structure to students [2]. This condition, however, brings about teachers to invent some strategies to improve students' grammar mastery. Teacher has responsibility to transfer the knowledge to the students by applying some method. These methods purpose to ensure and maintain the quality of teaching activity itself [3].

Humor is one of strategies used by teachers to trigger students interest in learning English as foreign language [4,5]. The fact that humor is fun inspired many linguists and teachers to seek its relation to improving students' academic

achievement in learning language as foreign language. Humor can be particularly advantageous in teaching 'dread courses' which students often avoid due to a lack of self-confidence such as grammar [6].

Many linguists and teachers have been observing humor and joke from various aspects, including relating humor to teaching and learning activity. Humor, which is given in teaching and learning activity, is considered fun and can release students from stress and depression. It can help create warmth and friendly situation of learning. Therefore, numbers of researches had been conducted by scholars to seek the influence of humor to education. A research about how humor and context affecting teaching language function by Azizi et al resulted in the fact that male and female students are not different in learning performance [7]. Kavandi and Kavandi have also sought the significant effect of using humor to students' grammar performance and motivation [8]. The research proved that it is more enjoyable for the students to learn English grammar through humor and they got motivated. Another research conducted by Faulkner showed different result. It resulted in there is no significant benefit of learning English as foreign language among Korean students, stating that using humor in bigger class was not really advantageous [9]. Despite the similarity and difference of the research topic, this research observed humor relation to students' grammar mastery from other perspectives. Firstly, this study aims at uncovering the factors causing humor to be advantageous for students in learning English grammar. Secondly, this study also purposes to describe how understanding meaning before the structure linguistically affects students' grammar mastery. The previous research on how humor influence students English grammar mastery had never been linguistically explained.

II. METHODS

This research is categorized descriptive qualitative [10]. To collect the data, the researcher involved thirty English Department students to be observed. There are three main steps applied in this research. First, the researcher gave a pre-test to get informed about students' basic grammar mastery. The pre observation was given in the form of multiple questions related to English structure. After that, the learning process of English grammar was given by using humor as the media. This observation and experiment was held in eight meetings. In one

meeting, five slides of humor were given to the students. After eight weeks, the researcher gave the students a posttest in the form of multiple questions. All the questions given were about English structure related to humor that had been discussed before. The data collected were then analyzed by using semantic humor theories to prove the linguistic factor that ease humor structure to be understood easily by the students. Not only that, to gain information about the factors of why humor can affect student's grammar mastery, an interview was also set.

III. HUMOR AND ITS RELATION TO STUDENTS GRAMMAR MASTERY IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE

This research has successfully proven that humor has contribution to students' grammar mastery improvement. The factors supporting this improvement vary in some ways. Internally, students' pedagogical ability determines their grammar mastery. Externally, the linguistic factors of help students comprehend its grammatical structure in a better way.

A. Factors Supporting Students Improvement

After analyzing the students' score and having deep interview about how jokes help them understanding grammar, four reasons are recognized to be helpful for students in improving their grammar mastery. In this research, four main reasons are identified as the beneficial points of taking humor as media in learning English as foreign language.

1) *Humor is understandable regardless of its grammatical structure:* The eight-meeting observation results in the finding that students are able to understand the meaning of the jokes given to them without considering the grammatical rules of the jokes. Most of jokes given to the students are semantically ambiguous or having more than one meaning [11]. Thus, students need to firstly understand the possible meaning of the words within the jokes. In understanding a joke, students mind focus on the meaning of key words, leaving aside its syntactic construction. Joke is a statement that consists of one or more sentences. Compare to other sentences or paragraph, jokes are more challenging to understand for students. First, students need to understand the literal meaning of the joke. Second, students need to focus on the meaning to get the humorous effect of the joke. If the students do not get the humorous effect, they are then considered failed to understand the humor. These reasons answered why it is natural for students as listeners to be able to understand joke regardless of its grammatical structure. This result of this research agrees to previous study which resulted in the fact that the humor-based instructional media on genetic material considered to facilitate the students and help them learn quickly [12].

2) *Ridiculousness of humor makes It preferable:* Despite the fact that humor is a form of language phenomena, it has uniqueness that is not conveyed by other sentences. Common sentence might only communicate meaning between speaker and hearer but humor creates laughter. The laughter creates by humor gives relief effect between the speaker and listener. This effect, however, is not born by other kinds of sentence.

Students like to hear joke because of its relief effect. This effect, however, can help students cope with their stress and adversity, particularly those related to learning activity [13]. Another benefit of using jokes as media to learn English as foreign language is that it covers up the stern side of grammar to be more entertaining. Not only for entertainment, humor can also be used by students for socialization because it's jocular effect creates laughter that can warm the situation up [14]. Based on the interview with the students, it is concluded that students like to learn English grammar in humorous situation. Using humor as the media of learning English grammar means that teacher is giving the examples of sentence in fun and interesting way. Therefore, the students said that being given examples of sentence in the form of humor eliminate the perspective that grammar is serious and difficult. This finding is in line with previous study by Aboudan which proved that humor does not only improve excitement in the classroom but also triggers students to speak more to teacher [15].

3) *Humor incomplex structure is easy to memorize:* Humor given to the students in this observation were categorized short and simple. Not only that, from the aspect of the content itself, the humor given is contextually independent. The researcher limited the humor to one-liner or the question and answer joke. The short form of humor helps students to understand its grammatical structure. In addition, it also advantageous for student to memorize the structure and construct other sentences with similar syntactic element. Compared to complex sentence, the simple sentence in a joke creates more possibility for students to analyze its syntactic roles. The example of humorous sentence given to the students can be seen in the following figures.

My mom said follow your dream so I went
back to sleep

Fig. 1. Example of humorous sentence.

The above example is a common simple sentence with humorous effect produced by the contrastive meaning between the first and the second idea. The length of written jokes itself are various. Therefore, in this research the short jokes are chosen. The joke in the example is one-liner and easy to remember on the mind of the students, compared to the longer form of humor. In addition, the short form of humor also conveys simple grammatical structure. As in example above, the cause and effect sentence is constructed in past tense, composed by 'My mom' as subject, 'said' as predicate and 'follow your dream' as object. It is then followed by the second idea which also built up by 'I' as subject, 'went back' as predicate and 'to sleep' as adverb. This structure is considered incomplex.

B. Meaning before Structure

This part of writing is the burden of proof of how understanding meaning before structure can promote students

English grammar mastery. The result of this study strongly supports the finding of previous research which stated that humor can be used help correct reading problems, control behavioral disorders, build vocabulary, integrate social isolate and teach English as foreign language [16].

First of all, the researcher requires to underline that in the country where this research is conducted, English is taught at schools. Therefore, it is important to recall that students involved in this research speak English as foreign language is the main consideration. For the students, English is their foreign language and they are in the process of learning this language. Most of these students are categorized as passive user of English language considering that they only use English occasionally. Besides that, the lack of vocabulary and knowledge about English structure cause them unable to use English actively. For passive English user, it is reasonable for them to notice the keywords in the sentence to help them understand the meaning of the whole sentence. However, this strategy is also used by them to understand the lexical meaning of the joke in order to get the ridiculous effect.

I	like	cooking my family and my pets.
S	P	O
Singular		gerund and adjective clauses
		present

Fig. 2. Example of humorous sentence.

To know the meaning of the words in a jocular sentence does not only to know its lexical meaning but also its class of words. In structure, class of word has its own syntactic categories which determine its function and role in sentence construction. In this research, students were informed the syntactic categories, role and function of the words in the joke. This strategy is effective to help students understand the English grammatical rules so they can construct other limited sentences under similar pattern. The example given below is one of the jokes given to the students during the research.

Example above is a one-liner, which has a short and incomplex structure. Yet, it is humorous for those who understand the meaning. The jocular effect of the joke above is born by the object of the sentence. Functionally, the noun phrase *cooking my family and my pets* is the object of the sentence, which consists of three independent ideas; *cooking*, *my family* and *pets*. However, this sentence is funny because of the absence of punctuation comma (,) in the sentence which misleads the meaning of the sentence. Because of this, the meaning of the whole sentence turns to something irrational and ridiculous.

The joke given as example makes it possible for students to construct other sentences following its grammatical rules such as:

- She likes reading, her sister and her cat
- They like swimming, their swimsuits and their friends
- Mike eats his cereal and his sandwiches

By following the sentence construction in the example, students are able to construct unlimited sentence by using technique of replacing. In the term of tenses, the joke above is written in present tense. Thus, if the subject *I* is replaced with *She* or another third person singular subject, the verb will be added suffix *-s* as in *likes* and *eats*. In other words, the existence of pronoun *she* is syntactically function as determiner [17]. Because it determines whether the verb appears after requires suffix *-s* or not. The possessive pronoun *my* follows the subject *I*. Therefore, if the subject is replaced to *she*, the possessive pronoun is grammatically replaced to *her*. The syntactic function of *cooking*, *my family* and *pets* as object of the sentence are also replaceable to other equal syntactic function such as *reading*, *her sister*, *his sandwiches*, etc.

Another form of joke given to the students are the question and answer joke. Question and answer joke is very popular among students. Not only that it gives change students to think of the answer but also it makes students familiar with the structure of question in English. One of students' problem in English grammar is constructing question. Students have difficulties in differentiating the use of auxiliary, modals, to be and question words. Thus, by memorizing the funny examples of joke given to them, students' awareness of the criteria in determining the construction of the question is improved.

The example of question and answer question given to the students in this research is:

Q: What is the longest English word?

A: Smiles. Because there is a mile between its first and last letters.

Joke above is in the form of question and answer. As it is stated earlier on this paper, that joke can increase students' interest in learning grammar. By given this humorous question, students' curiosity appeared and they are motivated to find the answer. This is useful for students to start the lesson.

Students also get familiar with the different construction of questions. The example question above uses question word in which this type of question needs the appearance of 'helper' whether it is to be, auxiliary or modals. The students are able to understand the meaning of the joke. It is proven by them trying to answer the questions regardless of the wrong answers.

After the students understands the meaning of the questions, the structure of the question is then analyzed. The analysis started with determining the syntactic role, function and category of the words in the question. This analysis process makes students easier to understand sentence construction. It is too, helpful for students to construct other questions with similar type.

The main information highlighted by the students in analyzing the humorous question above are: 1. Every question words need *helper* whether it is auxiliary, modals or to be. 2. The core of the sentence determines the type of *help*. In the example given *the longest English words* determines the existence of *is* in which is a to be. Therefore, students are now initiated to seek the core of the sentence first before determining the appearance of to be, auxiliary or modals after the question words. By following this information, students

are possible to construct limited sentences. The sentences constructed by the students such as:

- Who is the headmaster?
- Where are Tom and Angel?
- What do you eat?
- Where does she live?

In the sentences constructed by the students, *the headmaster* and *Tom and Angel* determine the existence of *is* and *are* after the question words. In addition, the appearance of *do* and *does* after question words *what* and *where* is caused by the use of subject *you* and *she* in the sentence.

Nevertheless, humor is linguistically in the field of semantic. It is about understanding the meaning to get the ridiculousness. In humor, language is played to create the humorous effect through ambiguity, questioning, lexicography, idiomatic, etc. Understanding the meaning of humor helps students considering the roles of the words in structure. By considering the roles of the words, it is easy for the students to identify any particular grammar-related devices of the sentence.

IV. CONCLUSION

Regardless of its ridiculousness, joke consists of sentences constructed following grammatical structure. Jokes contributes significantly to students' grammar mastery. Some factors supporting jokes to be beneficial for students' grammar comprehension are: (a) humor is Understandable regardless of Its Grammatical Structure (b) Ridiculousness of Humor Makes It Preferable and (c) Humor Incomplex Structure is Easy to Memorize. Besides that, there is particular linguistic reason of why understanding meaning of the humor first can help students improve their knowledge about sentence structure. Understanding the sentence meaning in the concept of semantic means knowing its literal meaning along with the words function, role and category.

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