

THE ANALYSIS OF CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES AND DIRECTNESS LEVEL OF POLITENESS IN COMIC STRIPS

Jaufillailli

(Jaufillailli@skip-unswagati.ac.id)

Agus Wirabhakti

(Aguswirabhakti@skip-unswagati.ac.id)

Department of English Education, Unswagati

Abstract

In this research paper, the writer intends to analyze the conversational implicatures and directness level of politeness in comic strips. The data are taken randomly from Art&Chip Sansom's *The Born Loser* comic strips published in The Jakarta Post newspapers during June–July 2015. The objectives of this research are; (1) to analyze how the implicatures are creating the humorous effects of the jokes, and (2) to analyze how the directness level of politeness is described in the comic strips. This is a qualitative research, therefore it uses descriptive method with two theories; Grice's Theories of Conversational Implicatures, and House and Kasper's Theories of Directness Level of Politeness. Data collection is through library research and the writer analyzes the data based on the theories mentioned above.

Keywords: *conversational implicatures, directness level of politeness, comic strips*

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a popular concept that has been offered as a cure-all for most of society's ills. It is almost impossible to pick up a newspaper, or even take part in a conversation, without hearing the word communication. Every problem, personal or public, serious or trivial, has become a problem of communication, and everything we do, intentionally or not, is thought to communicate some hidden meaning (Trenholm, 1991: 16).

Hidden meaning is usually contained in our daily conversation when we communicate to other people. And deliberately or not, sometimes we use jokes to cover hidden messages in our conversation.

Humor or joke plays important role in human life. It can lessen our burden and refresh our mind. We usually use humor or jokes to give certain information that might hurt the recipients or cause the uncomfortable situation both to the speakers and listeners. Humor, joke, or even laughter can break the ice and neutralize the frozen conversation. Grotjahn praised laughter for bringing freedom and a whole package of goodies which he associates with freedom:

"Laughter ... can be used to express an unending variety of emotions. It is based on guilt-free release of aggression, and any release makes us perhaps a little better and more capable of understanding one another, ourselves, and life. What is learned

with laughter, learned well. Laughter gives freedom and freedom gives laughter" (qtd. in Raskin, 1985: 9).

Humor or joke is considered as one of the useful communication tools in delivering information or feeling, especially criticism. Criticism conveyed through jokes or laughter is usually felt less painful than that delivered through conventional way.

Throughout the centuries, humor or jokes are also used as attraction to entertain people, such as drama, movie, advertisement, and so on. If people laugh at a particular performance, it means that they enjoy it. However, different people will not find something equally funny. It depends on their knowledge, culture, and experience. Raskin in his book *Semantic Mechanism of Humor* suggests that when somebody laughs, he or she finds the audial or visual stimulus funny (Raskin, 1985: 1). Humor or jokes can be formed in funny situations, funny stories, even funny thoughts occur in daily life. He also states that:

Dealing with humor means dealing with universal human trait. Responding to humor is part of human behavior, ability, or competence, other parts of which comprise such important social and psychological manifestations of *homo sapiens* as language, morality, logic, faith, etc. (Raskin, 1985: 2)

Besides, through biological perspective, Koestler defines humor as follows:

In all its many-splendoured varieties, humor can be simply defined as a type of stimulation that tends to elicit the laughter reflex. Spontaneous laughter is a motor reflex produced by the coordinated contraction of 15

facial muscles in a stereotyped pattern and accompanied by altered breathing. Electrical stimulation of the main lifting muscle of the upper lip, the zygomatic major, with currents of varying intensity produces facial expression ranging from the faint smile through the broad grin to the contortions typical of explosive laughter (qtd. in Chiaro, 1992: 4).

Based on the quotations above, the writer concludes that humor or joke is something, one considered funny, which makes him or her laugh.

Jokes are created in various ways. One of them is a comic strip. *The Born Loser*, created by Art&Chip Sansom, is one of the humorous stories in the form of comic strips, published daily in newspapers. The writer takes *The Born Loser* comic strips as the research data because of several reasons. *The Born Loser* has been a mainstay in newspapers since 1965. It is a classic comic strip. It is favorite with readers in all demographic groups consistently finishing at the top of comic surveys. *The Born Loser* began as a strip with no central characters that revolved around the loser theme gradually. It is developed into the comic we see today, starring loveable loser Brutus Thornapple, his wife Gladys, mother in-law Ramona Gargle, Boss Rancid Veeblefester, dim-witted son Wilberforce and the mischievous neighbor Hurricane Hattie O'Hara (www.suite101.com).

Appearing in more than 1300 newspapers around the world under the United Media Syndicate, *The Born Loser* is read in 30 countries and translated into many languages. The "everyman" concept of the strip is recognized and enjoyed universally. The National Cartoonists rewarded the Sansom cartoonists and *The*

Born Loser with the treasured Reuben honour twice for “Best Humour Strip” in 1987 and 1991. The strip has been nominated a total of six times. They are definitely “born winner”(www.suite101.com).

Besides, jokes usually reflects the relationship between the participants which influences the directness level of politeness shown in the dialogues spoken between the participants. It is interesting to analyze the directness level of politeness in comic strips since it is created in funny ways and influenced by many factors. Dialogues in comic strips reflects what people usually say in their daily life. Based on the explanation above, the writers are interested to analyze **The Analysis of Conversational Implicatures And Directness Level of Politeness in Comic Strips.**

PROCEDURES OF COLLECTING AND ANALYZING THE DATA

The data used in this research are some of Art & Chip Sansom’s *The Born Loser* comic strips taken randomly from August - September 2015 editions of The Jakarta Post newspapers. Not all of the newspaper editions publish *The Born Loser* in one panel (one strip) story. Sometimes they publish the humor in three panels with more than four balloons, thus the writer has to select them before taking them as the research data. The writer only takes the jokes in one panel consisting of two up to four balloons to be analyzed in this research.

1. Technique Collecting the Data

There are some steps taken by the writer to collect the data as follows:

1. The data are *The Born Loser* comic strips, created by Art & Chip Sansom. The writer searches the data from an English newspaper, The Jakarta Post, published during the period of June 2015

– July 2015. All *The Born Loser* comic strips in the newspapers are collected.

2. Then, the writer selects the comic strips. The story in one strip (one panel) consisting of two up to four balloons are separated as the data.

3. From all comic strips collected, then, the writer selects fifty some comic strips taken as the data of her research.

2. Technique of Analyzing the Data

In this research, the data obtained are analyzed using Grice's Theories of Conversational Implicatures and House and Kasper’s Theories of Directness Level of Politeness. The steps in analyzing the data are as follows:

1. The writer takes the selected editions of *The Born Loser* comic strips as a source of data.

2. Then she provides a range of implicatures from the humorous utterances and takes one of them which is the most appropriate for the punch line of the jokes.

3. The last step, the writer analyzes the directness level of politeness based on House and Kasper Theory.

CHARACTER IN ART & CHIP SANSOM’S “THE BORN LOSER” COMIC STRIPS

There are six characters which often appear in Chip and Sansom’s *The Born Loser’s* Comic Strips, they are:

1. **Brutus Thornapple** :
The main character
2. **Gladys** :
Brutus’ wife
3. **Wilberforce** :
Brutus & Gladys’ son
4. **Ramona Gargle** :
Brutus’ mother in law
5. **Rancid Veeblefester** :
Brutus’ Boss in his company

6. **Hurricane Hattie O'Hara** :
 Brutus' neighbour, Wilberforce's
 neighbour

EXAMPLES OF ANALYSIS

The following data are taken as research samples to be analyzed. They were taken from THE JAKARTA POST newspaper, edition August – September 2015.

Data 1:

Gladys : "It certainly is quiet around the house this week

Ramona : "Now that school's started, you must really miss having Wilberforce home all day."

Gladys & Ramona : "Bwah-ha-ha-ha"

(The Jakarta Post, August 26, 20015, page 26)

- The conversation above showed that Gladys was talking to her mother, Ramona Gargle. They were talking about Wilberforce, Gladys' only son who was not at home since he was at school at that time. From the conversation it was described that school time had just started, therefore, Wilberforce went to school. Ramona's words which said that Gladys must really miss having his son home all day had implied meaning. It was proved by the next line that both women laughed out louder. Ramona's words actually implied that Gladys really loved his son's absence. She liked that school had started and his son was at school. From the implied meaning derived from Wilberforce's grandmother, we could assume that Wilberforce's presence at home might cause troubles.

- The directness level of politeness showed by Ramona's words is at level 3 since Ramona Gargle implicitly said that Gladys actually liked if his son was not at home. According to House & Kasper (1981: 1951): X's [speaker's] negative

evaluation of P is expressed explicitly [implicit expression and explicit expression for levels 3 and 4, respectively]. Mother Gargle implicitly said that Gladys actually loved not to see Wilberforce's presence at home.

Data 2:

Wilberforce : "Do I have to finish my stewed spinach, mom?"

Gladys : "Yes, it's good for you!"

Wilberforce : "How can it be good for me – it makes me sick!"

(The Jakarta Post, August 27, 20015, page 27)

- The Conversation in data 2 showed that Wilberforce did not like eating spinach. His last sentence showed that eating spinach made him sick. The word "sick" has two meanings. The first means the opposite of healthy, the condition of ill, etc. The second meaning is crazy or abnormal. In this case, the most appropriate meaning implied by Wilberforce is the second one. Sick meant by Wilberforce is crazy since he really hated eating spinach. Therefore eating something that he did not like would make him sick or crazy.

- Wilberforce's first sentence was a request. It was not a real question. It actually was a request to her mother not to eat spinach. It could be proved by his last sentence that eating spinach made him sick. From Wilberforce's request, we could assume it is at the level 1 of directness level of politeness (House & Kasper; 1981: 159): P [the action] is mentioned implicitly or explicitly [levels 1 and 2]. The writer's reason put it at level 1 because Wilberforce's request not to eat spinach was delivered indirectly/implicitly. The last sentence of Wilberforce strengthen his intention not to eat spinach was delivered explicitly, therefore Wilberforce's last sentence is

categorized into level 4 of directness level of politeness.

Data 3:

Brutus: *“Do you have vanilla bean ice cream? You know, the kind with tiny black bean bits in it. I’d like a bowl of it!”*

Waitress : *“I’ll check”.*

(A few minutes later.....)

Waitress : *“Here’s your vanilla ice-cream. We didn’t have the kind with tiny black bits in it, so I ground some pepper in it for you.”*

(**The Jakarta Post**, August 28, 20015, page 26)

- The conversation in data 3 showed that the waitress was very “creative” since she put some pepper as the substitution of the tiny black bits which are usually in the vanilla ice-cream. Of course it is not the appropriate substitution since it will influence the taste of the vanilla ice-cream. The vanilla ice-cream that was available in the waitress’ shop was one without the tiny black bits. We could assume that she did not want to disappoint her customer, that is why she served the “special menu” of the vanilla ice cream. Her last sentence created humorous effect of the joke since it was an unusual vanilla ice-cream – with pepper in it. Another implied meaning is the waitress did not like her customer, Brutus, which she thought that he had asked an unusual order like tiny black bean bits for his ice-cream. In this case, the most appropriate implicature is the second one, that the waitress did not like Brutus with his unusual order, therefore, she served unusual menu, too, for her customer.
- The directness level of request spoken by Brutus to the waitress is at level 2 of directness level of politeness since his request was explicitly spoken, like what House & Kasper (1981: 159) stated in their book: P [the action] is

mentioned implicitly or explicitly [levels 1 and 2]. Brutus explicitly requested a special vanilla ice cream with tiny black bean bits in it to the waitress. While the waitress’ complaint to his customer not to order unusual menu was implicitly delivered. Therefore the waitress’ last sentence was categorized into implied complaint which was at level 1 of directness level of politeness as stated by House & Kasper (1981:159): P [the action] is mentioned implicitly or explicitly [levels 1 and 2].

Data 4:

Wilberforce was making a bubble from a bubble gum. It worked, then the bubble exploded. In front of him, standing Hurricane Hattie O’Hara watching him. After the bubble exploded....

Hurricane: *“Cool! A bubble gum. Bubble with bad breath.”*

(**The Jakarta Post**, August 29, 20015, page 26)

- The conversation in data 4 showed that there were two contradictive sentences spoken by Hurricane. The first sentence showed compliment that Wilberforce succeeded making a bubble from his bubble gum, but the next sentence showed disparagement that as soon as the bubble exploded, Wilberforce’s bad breath was smelt by Hurricane. The implied meaning delivered by Hurricane to his friend, Hurricane was actually she was not impressed by his bubble.
- Though the first word spoken by Hurricane is exactly a compliment – the word “cool”, but the next sentence showed what she really meant. Therefore Hurricane’s complaint to his friend was at level 8 of directness level of politeness as stated by House & Kasper (1981: 159): The negative evaluation of both Y’s action and Y himself are implicitly or explicitly expressed [levels 7 and 8].

Hurricane explicitly complained about Wilberforce's action.

Data 5:

Brutus: *"I thought you gave up beer, Charlie."*

Charlie: *"That's right"*

Brutus: *"Why did you order that beer – just to stare at it?"*

Charlie: *"I'm reminiscing."*

(The Jakarta Post, September 1, 20015, page 26)

- The conversation in data 5 showed that Brutus' questions actually pointing that his friend, Charlie, did not really give up drinking beer. That is why he continued his question, *"Why did you order that beer – just to stare at it?"* which was continued by Charlie: *"I'm reminiscing"*. What actually happened was Charlie wanted to drink again but he felt inconvenient when Brutus asked him in a such way. The implied meaning of the last line of the joke was Charlie would drink the beer just as his reminiscing when he was still a drunker, in other word, he could not give up drinking beer.
- Brutus' complaint about his friend's behaviour was at level 7 of directness level of politeness since he delivered it implicitly but the implicature could be drawn easily since the way Brutus questioned his friend obviously showed that he judged his friend had not given up drinking beer. In other word, Brutus wanted to say that Charlie did not succeed giving up drinking beer. It is appropriate with what was said by House and Kasper (1981:159): The negative evaluation of both Y's action and Y himself are implicitly or explicitly expressed [levels 7 and 8]. In this case, Brutus had negative evaluation about both Charlie himself and Charlie's action when Charlie ordered a glass of beer.

Data 6:

Brutus was sitting in an armchair, while Hurricane was 'hanging' on the top of the armchair – near to Brutus' head.

Hurricane : *"Hmm..."*

Brutus: *"What?"*

Hurricane : *"I was just wondering how someone with so little hair could have so much dandruff!"*

(The Jakarta Post, September 4, 20015, page 26)

- The conversation in data 6 showed that Hurricane's question at the last line of the joke disparaged Brutus since She saw a lot of dandruff on Brutus's head, while Brutus is a bald-headed man. The implicature of Hurricane's last sentence is Brutus did not keep his head clean, though he had only so little hair. In Hurricane's opinion, man with so little hair like Brutus should not have so much dandruff.
- Hurricane's complaint about the condition of Brutus's head was at level 3 of directness level of politeness since She implicitly showed that She had negative evaluation about Brutus' head by saying *"I was wondering how someone with so little hair could have so much dandruff"*, where in this case, Hurricane did not directly point out Brutus as the man with so little hair with so much dandruff, but he substitute the word you (Brutus) into the word "someone". This explanation is appropriate with what was stated by House & Kasper (1981:159): X's [speaker's] negative evaluation of P is expressed explicitly [implicit expression and explicit expression for levels 3 and 4, respectively].

Data 7:

Wilberforce : *"You don't have to go to work on Monday, pop?"*

Brutus: *"No, it's labor day- a day that was created to honor workers!"*

Wilberforce : “*So, workers don’t work on a day called labor day? Shouldn’t they have called it vacation day?*”

(**The Jakarta Post**, September 5, 2015, page 26)

- The conversation in data 7 showed that Wilberforce’s last sentence had an implicature that all vacation days, in the form of various names and functions, had the same meaning. It means that workers did not work on that day, therefore He thought that there should not be various names for it, just called it vacation day, simpler and easier. The exact implicature of Wilberforce’s last sentence was there was only one call for all forms of vacation. It is a vacation day.

- Wilberforce’s last sentence was at level 5 of directness level of politeness as what was stated by House and Kasper (1981:159): Y’s [addressee’s] negative involvement is implicitly [level 5] or explicitly expressed [level 6]. It is at level 5 since the addressee (the labor day) was implicitly seen negatively by Wilberforce since it had no differences with other vacation days. Therefore respectively Wilberforce asked: “*So, workers don’t work on a day called labor day? Shouldn’t they have called it vacation day?*”

The following example of analysis is taken from the joke with more than one panel or more than one strip. It is a three-panel-joke to be analyzed as a sample to give another case of the joke to give different point of view to the readers.

Data 8

(Brutus was sitting in an armchair while reading a newspaper. He heard Gladys, his wife, talking to their only son, Wilberforce in other room).

Gladys: “*I can explain it to you, Wilberforce. I’ll use your father as an example. Daddy is very handsome. Dady is extremely intelligent.*”

(Brutus, then, walking to the next room where Gladys and Wilberforce were there to know what actually happened).

Gladys: “*Dady has impeccable taste! There – Did that help?*”

Wilberforce: “*Yup – Now I understand what irony is*”.

(Brutus was there, standing still...)

(**The Jakarta Post**, August 30, 2015, page 9)

- From the conversation in data 8, readers were led into the positive things about Brutus explained by Gladys. Brutus was wondering what actually happened between his wife, Gladys, and his son, Wilberforce. He, like all readers, were also led to positive things said by Gladys. But when he arrived to where Gladys and Wilberforce were, Gladys came to the end of her explanation. Wilberforce’s last sentence made everything clear. Wilberforce said that now he finally understood what irony is. The implicature implied in Wilberforce’s sentence showed that all Gladys’s explanations telling his son about his father’s personalities were the contrary to Brutus’s condition itself. All positive things said by Gladys about Brutus were actually the opposite ones.

- The directness level of politeness shown from Gladys’ explanations which were strengthen by Wilberforce’s last sentence is at level 1 based on House and Kasper’s (1981:159): P [the action] is mentioned implicitly or explicitly [levels 1 and 2]. Since irony explained by Gladys, taking his husband as the example, is the most indirect expression to show one’s negative things. The word “irony” spoken by Wilberforce was the

punch of the joke that caused readers into laughter because of its implied meaning, therefore it is at level 1 since Brutus' negative personalities was implicitly mentioned through Gladys's explanation about "irony" to her son, Wilberforce.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it showed that the implicatures are creating the humorous effects of the jokes in two ways, such as in the form of **unpredictable questions** and or in the form of **shocking statements**. Almost all implicatures of the jokes described in the last line of the jokes or the last balloon of the comic strips. This is to create the shocking humorous effect of the joke which was unpredictable. It has a purpose to make the readers laugh at the jokes once they had understood the implicature implied at the last sentence of the jokes or the last balloon of the comic strip. It happened also to the joke with more than one panel or one strip. The implicature was also shown completely at the last line of the joke or at the last balloon of the comic strips. It means that the length of the comic strips does not influence the 'position' of the implicature. The punch of the joke is still at the end of the conversation.

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About the authors:

Jaufileilli, S.Pd., M.Hum and Agus Wirabhakti, M.Si. are the lecturers of the English Department of Unswagati

