

HUMOR DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

This paper intends to describe the humorous discourses that emerge during the corona virus diseases pandemic. Even though I am very sure that there are still very limited humorous phenomena used to be the material of joke during the pandemic, their existence is still considered very important in enriching the inventory of jocular discourses in the use of Indonesian or local languages. Accordingly, through the collection of data obtained from various sources, this paper try to classify types of humorous discourse can be found during the pandemic, and linguistic aspects exploited by the language speakers in creating their jokes.

Key Words: Humour, Discourse, and Pandemic

Introduction

It is not surprising that during the pandemic followed by the new normal, the human energy is used up to drive out or to prevent the wide spread of the virus. All people, regardless their fields of study, try to understand the characteristics of the virus, and how this virus cause scaring pandemic that spreads and threatens human life. However, not all scientists give equal contributions to the virus treatments. For example, as far as the virus characteristics is concerned, because of their field of expertise, the medical doctors, will give more significant contributions than the other ones, such as linguists, literary critics, economists, psychologists, etc. Accordingly, they should change the directions or the perspective their contributions. The linguists and the literary critics should give theirs from the role of language and literary works in raising human spirit in facing with various pandemic during their life time. In a line with this matter, economists and psychologists should also try to give their contribution from their own perspectives. For instance, they should try the economic or psychological impacts the virus might bring on the human or community life, instead of investigating the characteristics of the virus for which their knowledge is lacked for. Gadjah Mada University (2020) has published a book entitled *Pengetahuan Budaya dalam Khasanah Wabah* (Knowledge of Culture in the Inventory of Pandemic), and some of articles placed on concern with how Javanese people exploit proverbs to face with various kinds of threatening life dangers (Wijana, 2020, 249-257). Meanwhile Sajarwo (2020, 216-223) and Shahab (2020, 206-215) describe the experience of characters of Camus' novel '*La Peste*' to fight with bubonic plague. As such, this paper will try to describe the jocular discourses develop during the corona pandemic in Indonesia as reflection of the people fighting against the disease in the use of Indonesian, Javanese, and Balinese. I am fully aware that the short time period of pandemic in Indonesia (more or less 10 months), there are only a few types of jokes will be found. However, these few numbers are very pity to miss or be left undocumented.

Theoretical Frame Work

Joking is one of important activities in human life. Through joking human beings can interact with (an)other(s) to release their tension for achieving life comfort and happiness. Without denying that some humorous discourse are intended to aggressively criticize their aggression target (Noerhady, 1989, 129-155; Wijana, 1995, 15-16; Wilson, 19), mostly humour discourses are created to entertain or amuse all people participating the joke deliverances. According to the relieve theory, the smile and laugh arise from humour enjoyment will release human beings from any kind of life tension (Wilson, 1979, 11-13). Smile and laughter are the most overt indicators of the humour experience (Apte, 1985, 14). With regard to its language, humorous discourses generally consist of the use of language which is

pragmatically and semantically violating the conventional use of language. The violations of normal language use in humorous discourse are clearly stated by Nelson (1990, 123-124) as follows:

“Jokes, though encountered fairly frequently in everyday conversation, represent tightening or heightening of language of a kind that is unnecessary to, and sometimes actively disruptive of, the normal pragmatic and informational functions of language. Many, perhaps most, jokes to arise from a phenomenon which is in pragmatic terms a potential source of confusion.”

According to Bergson (1983, 118) there are three techniques commonly exploited to yield humorous discourse, i.e. repetition, permutation, and reciprocal interference of series (See also Wijana & Rohmadi, 2009, 271-292). Repetitive events that occurs can arise comic effects. For instance see discourse (1) and (2) which respectively exploit the accidental repetition of 9 and 59 below:

(1) Pernikahan pasangan emas Olimpiade Alan Budikusuma dan Susi Susanti ternyata cukup unik.

Karena mereka menjalani masa pacaran selama 9 tahun 9 bulan. Hari pernikahan mereka jatuh 9 Februari. Jadi angka 9 adalah angka spesial bagi Alan dan Susi.

‘The wedding of the Olympic medal gold couple. Alan Budi Kusuma and Susi Susanti in fact was unique enough. Because they have led 9 years and 9 months of engaging. Their wedding day was 9th of February. So, 9 was a special number for Alan and Susi.

(2) Setelah ditunggu-tunggu cukup lama, akhirnya ternyata nomor caleg saya sama persis dengan nama nomor blangkon saya, yakni 59. Alhamdulillah semoga pas.

‘After being waited for quite a long, finally I got my legislative candidate number which is coincidentally the same as the number of my male batik headdress, i.e. 59. Hopefully they are matched’.

Meanwhile there are a lot of humorous discourse examples that exploit constituent permutation, such as the change of *Ditanggung tidak luntur* ‘We assure that this cloth will not become discoloured’ to be *Luntur tidak ditanggung* ‘We do not assure if this cloth is discoloured’ following how the Arabic letters are read’. To create sexual association for eliciting laugh and smile, The Indonesian comedian, Parto reverses one line of Javanese Song lyric popularized by the late Mus Mulyadi, *Rek Ayo Rek* ‘Common Guys’, *Kenal anake sing dodol rujak cingur* ‘To know the daughter of the ox snout mixed vegetable seller’ to be *Kenal cingure anake sing dodol rujak* ‘To know the snout of the pungent dressing fruit salad seller’s daughter’.

Finally, the reciprocal interference of series, the widest technic, is exploited by using many ways, such as contrasting two different modes of speech (learned and unlearned, serious and comic, heroic and unheroic, native and acquired, etc), combining the same word carries two divergent meanings, and confusing two semantically remote words which can easily be graphically or phonetically mistaken for one another (Nelson, 1990, 124). This technic is also called *discordia concors* or condensation, a bringing together at one level of elements which do not meet on any other level. Consider (3) and (4) below:

(3) Aku gak ikut demo, takut ditunggangi.

‘I did not joint the demonstration, I am scared of being ridden’

(4) + Pangeran Diponegoro sedane taun pira?

‘What year did Prince Diponegoro die?’

Murid (mbatin jero ati)

‘the student was thinking by heart’

Iki mesti salah sing gawe soal

‘This must be a mistake of one making the problem’
Pangeran Diponegoro numpak jaran dudu numpak sedan.

‘Prince Diponegoro rode a horse, instead of a sedan’

Discourse (4) spoken by a young lady. It places its humour on the use of *ditunggangi* that can mean ‘to be exploited by irresponsible parties’, and ‘to be ridden’ like a horse with its sexual or pornographic association. Discourse (5) is a polite Javanese lesson for talking about an honourable person, in which the polite form *sedane* (seda ‘dead’ plus {-e}) that means ‘the death of’ is confused with one means ‘the sedan’ type of a car. So, the first sentence of discourse (4) can either be interpreted as ‘What year is Prince Diponegoro’s sedan produced (made)’ or ‘What year did Prince Diponegoro die?’

Method

The data presented in this paper are collected during the corona pandemic, and come from local news paper and my WA group friends that are intentionally or unintentionally sent to me as someone interested in analysing humours. They are further classified a long with three technics have been outlined by Bergson, and the discourses were involving 4 languages, i.e. Indonesian, Javanese, Balinese, and English. The following is my research findings.

Findings

The relatively short pandemic spread makes the kinds of technic exploited for creating humorous discourses are also limited. Nearly all discourses found during the pandemic exploit the third technic, i.e. reciprocal interference of series. Such as the following (5) and (6) below that exploit the homonymic sense of *tahu* ‘to know’ and ‘bean curd’, and *Ananda* ‘personal name’ and ‘vocative address term’, and *corona* ‘virus name’ :

- (5) + Corona akan berakhir Bulan Agustus ‘Corona will cease in August’.
- Tahu dari mana. ‘How do you know’ >< ‘Where the bean curds are from’
+ Dari Sumedang. ‘From Sumedang’
- (6) Senin 7 September 2020, setelah menyampaikan materi Latihan pada pembelajaran daring, teman saya mendapatkan kiriman pesan singkat dari salah satu siswa yang bernama Ananda. “Kok hanya saya, Bu, yang diminta mengerjakan Tugas?” Setelah dicek ternyata petunjuk pada tugas tersebut tertulis, Tugas untuk Ananda.”
‘Monday, September 7th, after giving materials on online learning, my friend got a message from one of her student names “Ananda”. “Why just only me to do the task?”. After being checked, in fact the instruction read. Task for “Ananda’.
- (7) Bulan depan Si Corona ulang tahun . Kita pura-pura gak tau aja ya. Jangan ucapin selamat ulang tahun apalagi Panjang umur bisa berabe kita
‘Next month Corona will celebrate birth day’. We just pretend not knowing. Do not wish him happy birth day, let alone to have long life. We will get a serious trouble’

Dialog (5) is a conversation between a bean curd travelling seller with his costumer. The seller states that the pandemic will end on August, and then the costumer responds it with *Tahu dari mana* ‘How do you know. Because in Indonesia *tahu* can also mean ‘bean curd’, the respond is ambiguous with ‘Where the bean curds are from’, so the seller responded it with *Dari Sumedang* ‘from Sumedang’, name of place in Sumedang which is famous of its bean curd. While in (6) the vocative address term *Ananda* ‘my beloved child’ is confused with one of students’ personal name, and *corona* ‘virus name’ and

personal name creation (7). Different from (5), (6) and (7), discourse (8) exploits the nearly homophone *taste* dan *test* using snack street vendor as its extralinguistic context.

(8) Rapid Taste: The New Normal Snack House.

When the corona virus vaccine is found, the vaccination must be carried out. The adapted word for vaccination is *vaksinasi*. The last two syllables *nasi* is accidentally homonymous with *nasi* which mean 'rice', the staple food for the most Indonesian. This linguistic phenomenon is creatively exploited for jocular creation, as shown in dialog (9) below:

(9) + Di vaksinasi dapat nasi ga bro.
'When you were vaccinated, did you get rice or not?'

+ dapat, kalau nggak dapat Namanya vaksin doang

Of course I got, if not, it is not vaccination, it is just vaccin.

Discourse (10) below exploits the polysemic meaning of *berlomba* 'to compete in competition' and 'to compete giving food or meal' for the disinfectant sprayer.

(10) Di Patangpuluhan setiap hari minggu ada lomba tetapi tidak ada panitianya. Tanpa juri, dan tanpa hadiah. Tapi banyak peminatnya. Itu adalah lomba memberi makan dan minum para petugas penyemprotan disinfektan. Bahkan setiap minggu banyak warga yang berlomba sehingga makanan dan minuman sering melimpah.

'In Patangpuluhan every Sunday, there is a competition, but it has not comitee. No referee and prize but has many participants. That is a competition to give food and drink the disinfectant sprayers. Even, every Sunday many people are competing, so, the food and drink are abundant.

The following (11) exploits sound substitution between *iman* 'faith' and *imun* 'immune'. The discourse itself is full of Indonesian and Javanese code mixing:

(11) Suasana saat ini sungguh berbeda dengan dulu sebelum Covid-19. Seorang teman mengirim tulisan lewat WA Grup, judulnya Biyen. Isinya: Biyen iman sing kudu dikuatke. Saiki imun sing dadi wigati. Donya sing waspada. Biyen, jero tas sangu parfum. Saiki, isine hand sanitizer lan tisu. Donya lagi ketaman kekuwatiran (Kedaulatan Rakyat, 10 Oktober 2020, hlm. 1)

'The condition of nowadays is very different from one in the past before the Covid-19. A friend of mine sent a message through WA group, the title is Biyen 'the past time'. The content; In the past, you must strengthen "faith", but to day is *imun* "immune" the most important. The world should be careful. In the past, you have parfum in your hand bag. Now, it contains hand sanitizer and tissues. The world is being stabbed by anxiety.

The rapid test carried out for corona quick identification, is smartly exploited by the street vendor owner for sign of their stand. In humour creation, this technic is called *bischizzy* (Nelson, 1990, 137). Wing Foreign word often makes problem for children to correctly pronounce. The following (12) exploits metathesis in which (*health*) *protocol* to become *procotol*.

(12) 4 M: Memakai masker, menjaga jarak, mencuci tangan, mengikuti procotol.

'4 M: To wear face masker, to keep distant, to wash hand, and to follow protocol'.

In (13), the creator composes a poem to play with final rhyming /u/:

(13) Ular sanca tidak berbulu 'A phyton is featherless'
Sudah pasti bukan teman kangguru 'It is surely not a kangaroo's friend'

Wahai corona cepatlah berlalu 'Oh Corona pass away soon'
Karna mamaku tidak cocok jadi guru 'Because my mom is not suitable to be a teacher'

Ambiguity as one of the most important sources of joke creation is exploited in (14) and (15) in which the word *sekolah* 'goes to school' is applied to the pawned of "motorized vehicle owner's book" (Buku Pemilik Kendaraan Bermotor or BPKB for short) because in this context the verb *sekolah* can also mean to be used as loan guarantee. In (14) *dia* 's(he)' refers to the book. Meanwhile in (15) *oplosan* is undergoing semantic extension for it does not only refer to its negative connotation 'moonshine', but traditional drink made of ginger, clove, and palm sugar blend which is believed in its effectiveness to prevent people from covid 19.

(14) Hanya dia yang boleh sekolah ketika yang lain diliburkan 'Only (s)he is allowed to go to school when the others are freed'

(15) Di wilayah Kampung Bugisan Yogyakarta, setiap minggu dilakukan penyemprotan disinfektan untukantisipasi pandemic covid -19. Di sela-sela itu pasti ada konsumsi minuman. Nah, suatu hari ada 18 orang yang datang dan disuguhi minuman 'oplosan' pak RT. Semula menolak, tetapi setelah diberi tahu bahwa yang dimaksudkan oplosan adalah empon-empon seperti jahe, cengkeh, gula aren dicampur akhirnya minuman cepat habis. Rasanya hangat dan seger.

'In Village of Bugisan Yogyakarta, every week there is disinfectant spraying for covid 19 anticipation. In that occasion there is always drink to consume. So, one day there were 18 served with "oplosan" 'moonshine' by Pak RT. At first they refused, but after getting explanation that what it means by "oplosan" is just spices like ginger, clove mixed with palm sugar, the drink finally finished quickly. The taste is warm and fresh.

The close relation between Indonesian and the local languages in the archipelago made the creators possible to combine the words which constitutes vocabularies of those distinct languages. The Javanese word *kelon* 'embrace while lying down' to be confused with *kelon* the abbreviation that stands for *kelas online* 'on line class' that is forced to carry out during the corona pandemic. Consider (16) and (17) below. Discourse (16) is an elementary school emblem, and (17) is a created humorous dialog based on on line class.

(16) SD Negeri Online 'On Line Elementary School'

(17) Pak Arya Saya Erni Marian Keles AK-B '19 mau tanya, Jadi Kelon atau tidak? 'Mr. Arya, I am Erni Maryan, Will we have on line class or not'

Reciprocal interference of series can also be executed by two different modes of speech. For example, between admiring and insulting, as shown by the monolog of an old Balinese man which is praising thief as an admiring profession for its obedience to follow health protocol. By uttering monolog full of Balinese code mixing, the old person said that house thief always tightly follow the health protocol. First, thieves are never going out, but always entering house of their neighbour. Second, thief are never looking for crowd. In carrying out their job, they always search for quiet situations. Third, thieves are always obeying social distancing, even with their own friend. While doing their action, they are never closed to each other. One is entering the house, and the other stays outside monitoring the situation. Forth, they do not just wearing face masker, but helmet for they usually ride a motor bike in carrying out their job.

Without considering its potentials to arise smile and laugh, I found discourses concerning the social situation in the lock down time. The discourse pragmatically consist of threatening directive speech acts which prohibiting anyone to enter certain locations that make effective of self isolation program. Consider (18) and (19) below:

(18) Perhatian! 'Caution'

Tamu wajib lapor RT dan RW Setempat 'The new comers should report to RT and RW'

Anda memasuki wilayah kel. Kemas-an- Kota Kediri, RT 03, RW 01 'You enter the territory of Kamasan Vilege, Kediri RT 03, RW 01.

Ngeyeel Keplaak 'Not obeying, Slap'

(19) Warning 'Caution'

Pendatang harap lapor RT dan RW setempat 'The new comers must report to the RT or RW'

Angel 'difficult to tell'

Ngeyel REMUK 'always arguing' 'will surely be shattered'

Ngengkel 'always debating'

Urusane nyowo iki... 'This is a matter of someone's life'

Nyawango lan Mikiro 'Look and Think'

Discourse (20) and (21) are truck container signs in Javanese and Indonesian to remind any want for not surrender to Corona virus, but start to think of their profession and responsibility for their family:

(20) Nuruti corona ora nguntal 'Surrender to Corona, you will not eat'

(21) Biar aku saja yang pake, kamu cukup di rumah saja pake daster "Let only me wearing masker, you stay at home wearing lounging gown"

The rests are jokes exploiting pragmatic matters which rely their humour on back ground knowledge of the hearers, such as shown by (22) and (23):

(22) memakai kaos, training topi, masker dan bersepatu. Di luar rumah, teman-teman sekolahnya sudah menunggu, siap gowes bersama. Sambil menuntut sepeda, Si Ragil berpamitan seperti biasanya kalua akan berangkat sekolah. Kali ini ditambah kata-kata: "Sudah 6 bulan saya tidak mandi pagi."

'On Sunday, early in the morning as usual, on 6.30, My youngest child had taken bath, neatly dressed, wearing polo shirt, training pants, hat, masker, shoes. Outside their class mates were waiting, ready went together riding their bike. While led the bike my youngest child, he we saying good bye as usual before leaving for school. But now with addition: "I have not been taking a bath for 6 months.',

(23) Berita duka: Zorro meninggal akibat Covid 19 karena salah cara memakai masker.

Mourning News: Zorro dead because of Covid 19 for he wear his face masker incorrectly.

In (22) because students do not have go to school, they never take bath in the morning, and (23) is made possible by the different way of the film character wearing mask from people during the Corona pandemic. Not all the time people must obey the health protocol, when having their meal, they should put of their face masker, as exploited by (24) below:

(24) Minggu 11 Oktober lalu, saya minum di sebuah warung angkringan di Kulonprogo. Menyanya lumayan komplet, dan ada ajakan untuk taat protokol Kesehatan. Tapi di dindingnya, ada tulisan yang menarik. "Waktu makan, tolong maskernya di lepas". Apa bisa ya yang makan namun tetap pakai masker?"

Sunday, 11th of October, I drank in a food stall Kulonprogo. The menu was complete enough, and there was a suggestion to obey health protocol. But in the wall, there was an interesting sign. "When you are eating, please put on your face mask". Can someone still wear a face mask while eating?"

Discourse (25) below exploits cooperative principle flouting to imply that the doctor the wife has visited was incompetent.

(25) Istri (wife): Pa...tadi kata dokter gara-gara covid 19 aku ini stress harus berlibur, baiknya ke Eropa or Amerika..? 'Darling, the doctor said that because of covid 19, I am becoming distressed, and must have a holiday. To where do you think better, Europe or America?'

Suami (husband): Ke dokter lain aja! 'You'd better go to another doctor'.

To comprehend the joke of (26), anyone should know that at the first stage vaccination is given to the over 60 aged person who worries about honestly informing his age:

(26) Ketemu pas gowes tadi pagi

Dia nanya saya: "Oom sudah divaksin belum?"

Saya bingung jawabnya. Mau bilang belum vaksin, nanti dia takut ngga mau dekat-dekat saya. Tapi kalau bilang sudah vaksin nanti ketahuan deh kalau saya sudah lansia.

'I met her when I wanted cycling this morning'

'She asked me: "Uncle, have you been vaccinated"'

'I got confused how to answer this question, If I answered "not yet", I worried that she would not get close to me, But, if I said yes, she would know that I was already old'

Closing Remarks

The corona virus pandemic period in Indonesia are considered still very short for enabling the situation to rise various types of humour discourse. As such, there are only certain types of joking techniques found since the beginning of the pandemic. With regard to Bergson's theory, all discourses found are mostly created by reciprocal interference of series technique through exploitations of various types of ambiguities by confusing the homophonic and nearly homophonic linguistic units. So far, the other two techniques, repetition and permutation, have not yet been found. This study will hopefully be followed by other studies. So, the other types of joking creativities can continuously be documented.

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