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Analyzing the Humorous Communicative Interactions during the Wartimes in Aceh¹

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Abstract

Prolonged armed conflicts between the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement/Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM) happened from 1976 to 2005. The three-decade-vertical political conflicts have received worldwide attention in research, except its humorous sides. This study attempted to capture the types and styles of humor within the memories of Aceh society. To do so, this qualitative study used interviews and document analysis to interview 20 Acehnese people from five districts in Aceh province who experienced the vertical wars in Aceh and analyze written resources. The research found that there are many types and styles of humor that happened unintentionally as the result of the speakers' mistranslating and miscode-mixing from Acehnese language to Indonesian language during unexpected interactions. Most of the humor occurring during the wars in Aceh fall into the incongruity theory, the verbal pun style, and the self-enhancing style. The findings of the study provide insights on the humorous side of the long wars through communicative interactions in Aceh that are useful to relieve tension when remembering the bitterness of the wars.

Keywords: Humor, Aceh wars, incongruity theory, superiority theory, relief theory.

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1. INTRODUCTION

No one can stop laughing at humorous things, even in wars (Barber, 2016). While wars can make people apart, humor can serve as the glue to make people together. The wars in Aceh, Indonesia, for instance, is among them. Aceh, as represented by the Free Aceh Movement or *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (GAM), used to fight against the central Government of the Republic of Indonesia from 1976 to 2005 with the intention to free Aceh from Indonesia, which has left not only many frightening and miserable stories (Ahmad & Dinamika, 1999) but also humorous ones. Many studies on the frightening and miserable stories of the armed political wars in Aceh (e.g., Aspinall, 2005; Rafie, et al., 2017; Reid, 2004) have existed, but with scant attention to humor during the wars.

We argue that researching the humor during the wars in Aceh is crucial. Firstly, not everyone is willing to remember the wars through sad and miserable stories. Some of the victimized people or their descents are still traumatic when hearing about the wars. Therefore, remembering the Aceh wars through humor or humorous stories can be an alternative. Secondly, humor can unite people, especially Acehnese people, when talking about the stories of the prolonged wars in Aceh. Thirdly, understanding humor during the wars which pertain to linguistic issues can be a way for the bilingual people in Aceh in understanding what linguistic problems sparked humorous effects.

Humorous interactions commonly happened spontaneously as a result of linguistic problems during the vertical armed conflicts, which were then settled in Helsinki, Finland, in 2005, mediated by the former President, Martti Ahtisaari, who led the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) (Aspinall, 2005; Usman, 2017). For instance, on one side, many villagers especially in the countryside where the wars, ambushes, or fire exchanges frequently occurred mostly spoke and understood the Acehnese language but had little command of Indonesian language. On the other side, many security apparatuses, shortly deployed in the province located in the northern tip of Sumatra Island were from other provinces in Indonesia and used Indonesian language, but did not understand the Acehnese language. Consequently, it created incongruity when they suddenly interacted.

Among the linguistic problems are the similarities of forms and pronunciations of some vocabularies in Acehnese language to those of Indonesian language, but both have different meanings. For example, “*semula*” in the Indonesian language means “as before” or “as previously”, but “*seumula*” in Acehnese language means “to plant” (Usman & Mathew, 2019). As a result, some Acehnese people who do not have a good command of Indonesian language attempted to codemix with words in Indonesian language when they needed to suddenly respond to the questions from troops during the wars in Aceh. The interaction sounds humorous when heard by the audiences who have a good command of both languages.

Researching humor in life, including those that happened during the wars in Aceh, is beneficial. Many existing studies show that humor is useful for improving one’s well-being (Bullough Jr., 2012; Liu, 2012), stimulating creativity, reducing stress, and motivating students to perform (Shade, 1996), denying negative feelings (Stieger et al., 2011), serving as a therapeutic tool for war veterans (Kopytin & Lebedev, 2013), increasing students’ participation in learning (Derakhshan, 2016), building rapport between lecturer and learners, creating relaxed learners (Simin & Ketabi, 2009), and maintaining social order between lecturers and learners (Nesi,

2012). Hence, humor during the wars in Aceh cannot be dismissed as inappropriate because they can be resources for many purposes, such as for remembering the wars in a less tension way.

Nevertheless, the effects of humor in social interactions are frequently dependent on the styles of humor used, intentionally or unintentionally. The adaptive style of humor, for instance, can benefit people's psychological well-being, whereas maladaptive humor style is psychologically harmful to well-being (Martin, et al., 2003). However, even though many studies on humor have been conducted qualitatively or and quantitatively in various contexts (e.g., Andarab & Mutlu, 2019; Bakar & Kumar, 2019; Escalante, 2012; Logi & Zappavigna, 2019; Lovorn & Holaway, 2015; Martínez & Morales, 2014; Oliver & Nguyen, 2017), research on the humor during the wars in Aceh is scant. This study intends to fill in the gap by exploring and analyzing the styles of the humor happening in Aceh during the wartimes. Given this study, people would be aware of the humorous side of the wars and retain their memory on the past vertical political conflicts in Aceh.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Defining Humor

Even though humor pervades every social context and has been extensively discussed and researched, many authors argued that it is not an easy task to define it (Attardo, 1994, 2010; Reyes et al., 2012). It is a very complex issue to define because what causes a person laughs are not easy to generalize or formalize (Reyes et al., 2012). Amidst the debates on the complexities, Reyes et al. (2012, p. 2) simply define humor as "the presence of amusing effects, such as laughter or well-being sensations". In the same vein, Vandaele (2010, p. 1) defines humor as "what causes amusement, mirth, a spontaneous smile and laughter". Another author, Montgomery (1997, p. 170) defines it as "a perceptual and a cognitive process involving an ability to recognize and appreciate the absurd and incongruous aspects of a situation". All these suggest that humor needs not only stimulants for amusement but also the ability to recognize it.

In reality, however, not all humor is intentionally created to amuse or make the audience laugh by the speaker(s). Some occur spontaneously in daily informal talks that create laughter (Ibraheem & Abbas, 2016). The unintentional humor is unplanned, whereas intentional one is the planned humor and involves three components: initiator, audience, and the subject of humor. An instance of the unintentional humor is the spontaneous talks between the troops and local people during the wars in Aceh. In such interactions, both interactants might not be aware that their talking was humorous due to their miscommunication or loss of information as a result of the wrong translation. According to Falk, et al. (2011), loss of information can happen as a result of translation that is incorrectly done.

2.2 Theories on Humor

There are many theories of humor generated today, even though Chapman and Foot (1976), Attardo and Raskin (2017), and Schaefer and Lynch (2017) asserted that there is no single theory that provides a comprehensive scheme for understanding

humor. The existing general theories of humor are relief theory, incongruity theory, and superiority theory (Larkin-Galiñanes, 2017; Lynch, 2002; Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009; Krikmann, 2006). Firstly, the relief theory states that the creation of humor is for relieving tension. Concerning this, Schaefer and Lynch (2017, p. 2) explained that relief humor has two properties, such as “a healing quality that allows built-up tension and energy to be released...[and] an act of disguised aggression and sanctioned resistance”. Secondly, the superiority theory states that humor created by a person who feels superior over and laughs (together) at those who are misfortune or refuses to comply with the rules (Lintott, 2016). This theory focuses on the psychological effects of humor on the expected audience. Thirdly, the incongruity theory states that humor generated as a result of the incongruities of expectation and experience. This theory focuses on the cognitive-linguistic aspect of humor in which perceivers feel that the person has done or said something violating normal rules. In this regard, Schaefer and Lynch (2017, p. 2) state that “incongruity humor theory argues that something can be found to be funny if it is irrational, paradoxical, illogical, incoherent, fallacious, or inappropriate”. According to Logi and Zappavigna (2019, p. 2), “humor arises when a text simultaneously construes multiple incompatible meanings”. Therefore, the audience needs to be aware of the incongruence in the interactions to be able to catch humor. Otherwise, the humorous one will not be humorous for those who are unable to capture the meanings. Especially for understanding the spontaneous dialogues between the local Acehnese and armed forces officers, the audience needs to have bilingual competence of the Acehnese language and Indonesian language.

2.3 Styles of Humor

The styles of humor are composed of adaptive and maladaptive (Martin, et al., 2003). The adaptive style of humor refers to the humor used to benefit psychological well-being. This style includes affiliative humor and self-developer humor. On the other hand, maladaptive humor style is humor that is psychologically harmful to well-being. It includes self-defeating and aggressive humor. Self-defeating style of humor happens when we say something humorous even though it can belittle ourselves, whereas the aggressive humor style happens when we use a certain expression that has negative effects on others. In this theory, “humor is actually a form of aggression” (Attardo, 2010, p. 44).

2.3.1 Affiliative humor style

Affiliative humor suggests that “the benign one aiming to strengthen the individual’s social relationships with others” (Andarab & Mutlu, 2019, p. 28). The sort of humor happens once we use funny things to create a joke. Among the instance could be a person who uses humorous language to alleviate any increasing tension. It aims to entertain others and enhance cluster cohesion. In the exploitation of this sort of humor, it is not malicious to oneself or others. This sort of humor is associated with sociability, cheerfulness, shallowness, intimacy, relationship satisfaction, and preponderantly positive moods and emotions (Martin et al., 2003).

2.3.2 *Self-enhancing humor style*

The self-enhancing humor style refers to the utilization of humor to boost the self. It happens after we produce a once managing one thing unhealthy that happens to us. Self-enhancing humor style is an endeavor medium to create ones feel higher concerning themselves. According to [Andarab and Mutlu \(2019\)](#), an individual who applies this humor style typically takes a humorous perspective to life. As a result, a person intentionally uses humor as a resource to handle nerve-racking or tense things or deal with negative or harmful emotions.

2.3.3 *Aggressive humor style*

Aggressive humor style is the humor created “to enhance the self at the expense of others” ([Andarab & Mutlu, 2019, p. 28](#)). It ridicules or derides others for self-enhancement, even though the individuals who use an aggressive humor style are not fully aware of the potentially bad effects of this type of humor style on the person(s).

2.3.4 *Self-defeating humor style*

The last style of humor based on [Martin et al.’s \(2003\)](#) categories is a self-defeating humor style. The aim of the humor in the self-defeating humor style is to enhance relationships at the expense of oneself ([Andarab & Mutlu, 2019](#)). When creating this humor style, the interactant tends to belittle himself or herself to please others. Nevertheless, the person himself or herself may also laugh together.

2.4 **Types of Humor**

Besides the styles, the types of humor exist in literature. Some classify them into seven types of humor, including comparison, personification, exaggeration, surprise, sarcasm, silliness, and pun ([Catanescu & Tom, 2001](#)). Firstly, the comparison type, which refers to humor that happens because of the combination of two or more objects to generate a humorous situation. Secondly, personification type, which is by attributing human traits to animals or other inanimate things. Thirdly, exaggeration type, which happens when something is overstated to generate humor, such as by exaggerating foolishness. Fourthly, sarcasm type occurs when one uses sarcastic remarks in responding to a situation. Fifthly, silliness type happens when a joker shows funny faces when responding to absurd situations. Sixthly, surprise type, that is the humor that arises from unpredicted situations.

The seventh type of humor is a pun. Pun or paronomasia refers to “a rhetorical device often categorized as a form of wordplay, primarily aimed for humorous effect” ([Pathong, 2019, p. 818](#)). A pun can be spoken, written, graphic, and signed types ([Attardo, 1994](#)). The written pun is exemplified by repeating a word, such as in the Javanese language ([Kasiyarno & Sarage, 2019](#)). In a bilingual society, like Hong Kong, puns were commonly used such as in advertisement ([Leung & Chan, 2016](#)). Moreover, pun has also been typified into homophony, homography, homonymy, and paronymy ([Delabastita, 1996](#)). Homophonic pun refers to creating a humorous effect through the use of word pairs that have a similar sound but different spellings and meaning. The homographic pun is about creating a humorous effect by the use of

words that have different meanings but spelled the same. The homonymic pun is the wordplay that creates a humorous effect by the use of homographic and homophonic puns. And paronymic pun is words spelled or written similarly but have different lexical meanings.

3. METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013) to analyze the humorous conversations during wartimes in Aceh. To collect data, it employed document analysis and interviews. Document analysis was done when analyzing the book of humor in Aceh by Siswowiharjo (2003) and the war in Aceh by Hamzah (2005), whereas the interview was when gathering data from 20 respondents who experienced the wars in Aceh. The interviews were carried out in the Acehnese language to enable them to express their ideas fully, fluently, and humorously. They were asked to narrate the humorous stories during the vertical armed conflicts between GAM and the Government of Indonesia. All of the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

The transcripts of the document and interviews were then analyzed using content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). However, not all of the transcripts were analyzed, only nine of them were selected. The language use was analyzed to find out the styles of humor based on Martin et al.'s (2003) categories (such as affiliative humor, self-developing humor, self-defeating humor, and aggressive humor) and the types of humor, such as comparison, personification, exaggeration, pun, sarcasm, silliness, and surprise (Catanescu & Tom, 2001).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

The analyzed data suggest that during the spontaneous interactions during the wars in Aceh were in Acehnese language or mixed Acehnese and Indonesian languages, but were translated into the Indonesian language in replying to the questions, that leads into confusing meanings. Drawing upon the types of humor (Catanescu & Tom, 2001), the interactions exert puns in homographic and homophonic types, and falls into self-enhancing, according to the four styles proposed by the theorists (Martin, et al., 2003). Below are the nine humorous interactions between them that are still in the memory of some Acehnese people to date.

4.1.1 "Bakar Sekolah"

Following an incident of school burning, a group of non-organic armed forces came to do the investigation. The apparatus caught many people around the area of the burnt school for the investigation purpose. The suspects were asked to stand in line while the apparatus interrogated them one by one. Then, the security apparatus (SA) spoke with a local Acehnese person (AP) who was standing fearfully.

Excerpt 1

- SA: *Siapa yang bakar sekolah* (Who burnt the school?)
 AP₁: *Saya, Pak* (Me, Sir)
 SA: *Apa? Kamu?* (What? You?)
 AP₁: *Ya, saya.* (Yes, me)
 SA: *Mengapa kamu bakar sekolah* (Why did you burn the school?)
 AP₁: *Karena saya penjaga sekolah* (Because I am the guard of the school)
 SA: *Tapi, mengapa kamu bakar sekolah? Mengapa? Mengapa???* (But, why did you burn the school? Why? Why???)
 AP₁: *Ya, karena saya penjaga sekolah* (Yes, because I am the guard of the school)
 SA: *Jadi???* (So?)
 AP₁: *Ya, saya Bakar Sekolah* (Yes, I am Bakar Sekolah)
 SA: *???*
 AP₂: *Pak, maksud dia namanya Bakar Sekolah* (Sir, he means that his name is Bakar Sekolah).
 SAs: (laughing)

In Excerpt 1, the officer expected that the local person would provide an answer about the person who burnt the school. However, the locals misunderstood the question. He thought that the officer intended to know which of the people was named Bakar Sekolah. As he was the guard of the burnt school, who was daily called, Bakar Sekolah in his village, he then replied that he was indeed Bakar Sekolah. Luckily, another witness suddenly attempted to help explain what AP₂ meant with Bakar Sekolah. Bakar is his name, which means a young camel in Arabic. Meanwhile, *sekolah* means a school in the Indonesian language. His explanation made the security apparatuses (SAs) laughed because they soon understood and caught the funny meaning, which at the same time helped reduce the tension.

The humor in Excerpt 1 above happened unexpectedly or unplanned, even though it has an object of humor and audience. Concerning this, [Ibraheem and Abbas \(2016\)](#) explained that planned humor should have another component, an initiator. In the excerpt above, the speaker did not intentionally make funniness. It seems that the interaction became humorous due to homographic pun in verbal form ([Delabastita, 1996](#)), as the word *bakar* means ‘burn’ and another form of *Bakar* is a person’s name, both are similar in spelling and form, but different in meanings.

4.1.2 “Kepala mu”

Once upon a time, a group of soldiers who were in an operation in a village suddenly met a banana monger during the political conflicts in Aceh. One of the security apparatuses (SA) then addressed the local Acehnese monger (AM).

Excerpt 2:

- SA: *Berapa harga pisang ini?* (How much is the price of these bananas?)
 AM₁: *Sepuluh ribu rupiah.* (Ten thousand rupiah).
 SA: *Kenapa mahal amat?* (Why is it very expensive?)
 AM₁: *Ya, itu karena kepala mu.* (Yeah, it is because of your head)
 SA: *Apa?* (What?)
 AM₁: *Itu kepala mu.* (That is your head)
 SA: *Apa???* (What???)
 AM₁: *Kepala mu.* (Your head)

AM₂: *Maaf, Bapak, maksudnya kepala mu itu sisir pisang yang utama. Maaf dia tidak bisa Indonesian language.* (I am sorry, Sir, he means the main bunch of bananas. Sorry, he can't speak the Indonesian language)

AMs: (laughing)

Similar to Excerpt 1, in Excerpt 2, *kepala mu* did not have an initiator of the humor, even though they talked about an object. The interactants involved in the interaction did not plan to amuse the audience. Rather, the local was struggling to make SA understand by codemixing of the Acehnese word *mu* as he did not know what *mu* is in Indonesian language. A humorous expression because of misunderstanding between the armed forces officer who did not understand Acehnese language talked with an Acehnese who had little command of Indonesian language. The monger said, “*Ya, itu kepala mu*” (Yes, it is because of your head). *Kepala mu* in Indonesian language means ‘your head’. Coincidentally, a local person witnessing the interaction who has a good command of both Indonesian language and Acehnese language understood what the SA meant, and bravely explained it to the armed forces officers.

The humorous effect in that conversation happened because the Acehnese monger wrongly translated *ulè mu* in Acehnese language into the Indonesian language, which means ‘your head’. A main bunch of bananas is usually expensive, because it is commonly better looking and big. The use of *kepala mu* (in Acehnese language) and *kepala mu* (in the Indonesian language) in that interaction suggests that homographic pun is used, as both have similar in spelling and form, but different meanings.

4.1.3 “*Tidak kubilang*”

On one day during the political conflicts, following the battle between a security apparatus (SA) and local fighters, several local people who were around the location were arrested, among them was AP. They interrogated one by one by the soldier, SA.

Excerpt 3:

SA: *Berapa orang semuanya?* (How many people are all?)

AP₁: *Tidak kubilang, Pak.* (I did not tell you, Sir)

SA: *Berapa?* (How many?)

AP₁: *Tidak kubilang, Pak.* (I did not tell you, Sir)

SA: What???

AP₁: *Iya, Pak. Tidak kubilang, Pak.* (Yes, Sir. I did not tell you, Sir)

AP₂: *Maaf, Pak, ia salah memahami kata “bilang” tadi, dia pikir sama artinya dengan “bileung” yang artinya hitung in Acehnese language.* (Sorry, Sir, he misunderstood the word “bilang”, he thinks “bilang” is the same as “bileung” which means counting in Acehnese language).

SAs: (laughing)

In Excerpt 3, the humorous effect generated during the interaction between the armed forces officer and the arrested person. By his answer *Tidak kubilang*, the local means that he did not count them. *Bilang*, which means ‘say, to tell’ in the Indonesian language is almost similar in form to that of the Acehnese *bileung*, which means ‘to count’. In that context, *tidak kubilang* actually means “I do not want to answer it” in Indonesian. That was why the troop was very angry at the local. Luckily, at that time, another person who had a good ability in speaking both Acehnese language and Indonesian language were there and helped to explain what the AP meant by his

answer. His explanation soon caused laughter among the SAs, which reduced the tension. The use of *bilang* to mean ‘tell, say’ (Indonesian) and *bileung* to mean ‘count’ (Acehnese) is also a verbal pun in the form of homography.

4.1.4 “*Kembali seperti semula*”

In a village security check post, several people were taking turns at night to guard their village. During the wars, all young male people were required to support armed forces to secure their villages. However, they were sleeping when a group of armed forces suddenly came. An armed forces officer shouted angrily, suddenly awakening the villagers. Then they were asked to sit on the ground for being interrogated about their night duty. After the interrogation process, the armed forces officer said:

Excerpt 4:

SA: *Kembali seperti semula*. (Return as you were)

AV₁: (A villager is still squatting down)

SA: *Kembali seperti semula!* (Return as you were!)

AV₁: *Ini seumula, Pak*. (This is how planting is, Sir)

SA: ???

AV₂: *Maaf, Pak, teman saya ini kurang mampu berbahasa Indonesia. Istilah ‘berdiri semula’ seperti itu maksudnya ia menunjukkan bagaimana cara orang menanam padi, yang dalam bahasa Aceh disebut ‘seumula’*. (Sorry, Sir, he is not good in Indonesian language. Saying *berdiri semula* (return as you were in Indonesian) made him thought that you wanted him to *seumula*, meaning ‘planting’ in Acehnese)

SA: (laughing)

In Excerpt 4, the villager misunderstood what the armed forces officer meant by *semula*. He thought the soldier wanted him to show how to plant paddy because *semula* (in the Indonesian language) and *seumula* (in Acehnese language) look similar in form. However, they have very different meanings; *semula* means “as before” or “as you were”, but *seumula* means “to plant (paddy)”. That was why he kept bending down his body as a way to show how planting rice seedling is. Consequently, the excerpt above shows humorous effects from the use of the homophonic pun. *Seumula* and *semula*, despite in different languages, are words that are different in spelling and meaning, but have similar in sound.

4.1.5 “*Sirih*”

In the following conversation, a security apparatus (SA) came to a local granny’s house, and then a talk between him and the Acehnese granny (AG) happened. SA was going to buy *sirih* (‘betel leaves’ in Indonesian), or *ôn ranub* in Acehnese.

Excerpt 5:

SA: *Nek, ada sirih?* (Granny, do you have betel?)

AG: *Si Rih ka ijak u blang*. (Si Rih has gone to the rice field)

SA: *Apa?* (What?)

AG: *Apa-apa jih kaleupah u blang*. (His uncle has also gone to the rice field, too)

SA: *Apa???* (What???)

In Excerpt 5, a misunderstanding happened between the armed forces officer and the granny. When the armed forces officer intended to know whether the granny has betel (*sirih* in the Indonesian language), the granny thought that the officer asked if her son named Idris, or locally nicknamed as Si Rih, was at home. That was why she answered: “*Si Rih ka ijak u blang*” (Si Rih has gone to the rice field). And when the armed forces officer asked *apa?* or ‘what?’ for further clarification, the granny added that his son’s uncle (Si Rih’s uncle) has gone to the rice field too, because in Acehnese language *apa* means ‘uncle’. And so, the use of *sirih* and *Si Rih* that generates a humorous effect in that interaction indicates that homophonic pun is used. *Sirih* and *Si Rih* sound similar but have different meanings and forms.

4.1.6 “*Parang orang besar*”

On one night during the political conflict in Aceh, a group of armed forces officers rallied around the village. Suddenly a pick-up truck passed by and it was stopped by the armed forces. They searched the truck to see whether it carried weapons, and suddenly found a *parang* (chopper) at the back.

Excerpt 6:

SA: *Apa ini?* (What is it?)

AP₁: *Parang.* (Chopper)

SA: *Parang?* (Chopper?)

AP₁: *Ya, parang orang besar, Pak.* (Yes, a big person’s chopper, Sir)

SA: *Apa?* (What?)

AP₁: *Parang orang besar, Pak.* (A big person’s chopper, Sir)

SA: *What??? Ada yang bisa menjelaskan apa maksudnya?* (What??? Can anyone explain what he means?)

AP₂: *Ya, Pak, maksudnya itu parang orang dewasa.* (Yes, Sir, he means that the chopper is for adults)

SAs: (laughing)

Excerpt 6 is a short talk between the local Acehnese person and a security officer, the local literally translated *orang besar* in a word-for-word manner into a ‘big person’. What he meant as *orang besar* was an adult. In the Acehnese language, a child is commonly called *aneuk miet* that can literally be translated into ‘small child’, the opposite of ‘big person’. As such, it had a humorous effect when heard by the people who understand both Acehnese and Indonesian languages. However, in reality, not all adults are big. So, there is an incongruity in codemixing in the interaction. The Acehnese’s response should have been: an adult’s chopper or *parang orang dewasa*.

4.1.7 “*Tengah*”

A man that the villagers typically call *Polem*, meaning ‘eldest brother’ in Acehnese was given the task by the security apparatuses to guard the checkpoint post of his village. He was to always be alarmed and awake if people entered or exited the village that day. On time, when the security apparatuses (SA) came, he was found to be asleep. As a punishment, he was forced to swim in a small river nearby the village.

Excerpt 7:

SA: *Ke tengah lagi!* ((Swim more) to the middle!)

But, instead, Polem moved to the river bank, went out of the river, and felt happy.

SA: *Hei, mau apa kau? Kusuruh ke tengah, malah kau keluar sungai* (Hey, what do you want? I asked you to swim in the middle river but you go out of the river).

Polem: *Lho, Bapak bilang teungoh. Ya, saya mau teungoh!* (But you said *teungoh*. I go out now)

Excerpt 7 indicates that each of the speakers used different languages in the interaction. SA used the Indonesian language in asking Polem to swim to the middle of the river, by using the word *tengah* (meaning ‘middle’ in Indonesian). Polem had little command of the language and thought that it has a similar meaning to *teungoh* (‘get out of something’) in the Acehnese language. He thought SA asked him to *teungoh* (get out of) the river.

The interaction used homophonic pun, because, at a glance, *teungah* sounds similar in pronunciation to *teungoh*. Even though they look similar in pronunciation, their meanings are different. The speakers in the interaction unintentionally created humor; it became humorous because of the incongruent meaning of the words used.

4.1.8 “Armed forces Officer, Police Officer or GAM fighter”

During the armed conflicts in Aceh, Acehnese people were gripped and frightened by everything related to the military such as the armed forces officers, police officers, and AGAM fighters. On one time at the bus terminal, a soldier, AP, was queuing up to ask a prospective stout-bodied passenger and crew cut.

Excerpt 8:

AP: *Maaf, apakah bapak ini dari TNI?* (Excuse me, are you an armed forces officer?)

Stranger: *Bukan!* (No)

AP: *Jadi, apakah bapak ini polisi?* (So, are you a police officer?)

Stranger: *Bukan juga!* (No)

AP: *Jadi Bapak ini pasukan GAM, ya?* (Are you a GAM fighter?)

Stranger: *Bukaaan...!* (Noooo...)

AP: *Kurang ajar kau!* (You bastard!)

Stranger: *Lho kenapa?* (Why?)

AP: *Kamu menginjak kaki saya tahu???* (You are stepping on my foot, you know ???)

In Excerpt 8, the villager at first politely asked what the person’s job was. He tried to make sure whether he was an armed forces officer, a police officer, or a GAM fighter. Later on, he became impolite and angry as soon as he had known that the person who was stepping on his foot was an ordinary person. The speaker used a sarcasm type of humor in responding to the situation. The interaction became humorous because he immediately changed his attitude.

4.1.9 “Katak...Ular”

During the implementation of martial law during the political conflicts in Aceh, a security officer (SA) was inspecting a group of villagers doing communal work. While they were working, they saw some snakes crawling around some bushes that the villagers had to clear out. SA was alert and asked a villager, AP, to be careful.

Excerpt 9:

SA: *Awas, ada ular!* (Watch out for the snake!)

AP: *Ya, katak!* (Chop it!)

SA: *Itu ular* (It's a snake)

AP: *Ya, katak!* (Yeah, chop it!)

SA: *Itu ular* (It's a snake)

AP: *Ya, katak!* (Yeah, chop it!)

In Excerpt 9, the security officer reminded the villagers to be aware of snakes, which in Indonesian language is called *ular*. The local asked him to chop it, and said in the Acehnese language, *katak*. *Tak* is a verb in the Acehnese language that means 'to chop' and *katak* is the combination of a subject and a verb means 'you chop it', but SA assumed that the villager called it *katak* (which means 'frog' in Indonesian). It becomes humorous because each of the speakers meant different things and used the same word repeatedly. The interaction seems to use homophonic pun, because *katak* and *katak* is very similar in pronunciation and form, but each of them has a different meaning. That is also a kind of incongruent use of words.

4.2 Discussion

This research aimed at exploring and analyzing the types and styles of humorous interactions during wartimes in Aceh, Indonesia. The results showed that most humorous verbal effects happening during the wars or armed political conflicts in Aceh were because of the linguistic issues. To understand them, we involved the three dominant theories of humor, such as the incongruity theory, superiority theory, and relief theory (Logi & Zappavigna, 2019; Martin et al., 2003). According to many scholars (e.g., Attardo, 1994; Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Raskin & Attardo, 1994), incongruity theory is the dominant theory in verbal humor as "humor arises when a text simultaneously construes multiple incompatible meanings" (Logi & Zappavigna, 2019, p. 2). The humorous effects felt by the audience were due to the use of the vocabularies of Indonesian language that sound similar to those of the Acehnese language, but they have different meanings.

That the meanings of the speakers aimed are incongruent with the words chosen can be understood from each of the excerpts. In Excerpt 2, for instance, "*kepalamu*" in the Acehnese language is not congruent in meaning to the "*kepala mu*" in the Indonesian language. In the Acehnese language, it means 'the main bunch of bananas', whereas in the Indonesian language means 'your head'. For the Acehnese person, the use of the words was aimed to explain something, but for AM, it meant to snap him, and this created tension between the speakers. Actually, in that interaction, SA did not mean snapping at all because the locals were frightened when dealing with soldiers.

Moreover, the interactions also seem to fall into the superiority theory. Superiority theory is a theory of humor created by a person who feels superior over a person who is not compliant with the normal rules (Larkin-Galiñanes, 2017; Krikmann, 2006). In the interactions, they laughed at the drawback of a person using the language. The audience felt that they better understood the language than the person at whom they laughed at.

Moreover, the humor in the interactions falls into the relief tension theory because it relieved the tensions between the powerful armed people and the powerless. The relief theory maintained that humor intentionally is created to relieve tension

(Larkin-Galiñanes, 2017; Krikmann, 2006). However, the interactions would not have humorous effects if the audience only understood one of the languages the speakers used. The interaction became humorous because the audience was able to make sense of the incongruence. It seems that either of the speakers involved in the interactions intentionally created humor. Nevertheless, the findings may function to boost the self or relieve the tension when remembering the wartimes (Andarab & Mutlu, 2019).

5. CONCLUSION

From the discussion, it can be concluded that most of the humors happening during the wars in Aceh were spontaneous. However, the humors can be used as a tool to remember the past wars and the inability of some Acehnese people to use Indonesian language as their national language at that time, to increase relationship between the young generations and the old ones, and to relieve tension of the survivals and their generations when remembering the wars.

However, this study was limited to qualitative analysis of the six interactions between the apparatus and few local Acehnese people whose had insufficient command of Indonesian language during the wars in Aceh. Further studies can be done, such as developing lesson materials based on humorous interactions during the wars for teaching and learning English. In this way, students will not only be motivated to learn English language through the book written, but also at the same time learn the history of Aceh, especially the vertical political conflicts for over thirty years.

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