

Manipulation of Lexical Relations in Cultural Humor of Stand-up Comedy on YouTube Shorts

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Abstract. This research attempts to uncover the manipulation of lexical relations in building cultural humor by applying embedded case study that uses qualitative methods to analyze data from the YouTube Shorts of the ISMO account. The data was purposively collected from popular videos on the channel. The analysis reveals that stand-up comedians use lexical relations, such as hyponymy, meronymy, antonymy, and homonymy, to create cultural humor through hook and punchline. Unlike previous studies, this research explains how lexical relations are constructed in humor with a hook-punchline structure. It also shows how certain types of lexical relations can be utilized by breaking them down into hook and punchline keywords or by combining them directly through stories or narratives. This information can serve as a reference not only for the audience but also for comedians to develop more creative methods of building humor.

Keywords: cultural humor; humor structure; lexical relations; stand-up comedy

INTRODUCTION

Humorous language in stand-up comedy refers to the use of language to create humor and make the audience laugh during a performance. The creation of such humor involves the use of various linguistic features such as wordplay, hyperbole, and irony (Schwarz, 2010). Stand-up comedy can be considered a type of dialogue where comedians share stories that include jokes, with the goal of eliciting laughter from the audience. Therefore, the creation of humor in stand-up comedy is achieved through a combination of linguistic features used to construct and convey jokes.

Stand-up comedy, from a linguistic point of view, is a form of conversation in which an individual, the comedian, tells stories or jokes using certain linguistic aspects. Stand-up comedians organize and present their material in such a way as to create humor that invites laughter from the audience. The use of language in stand-up comedy is intelligent and is often considered to indicate a high level of education and intellectualism (Putra et al., 2022). Stand-up comedy is also a live performance that focuses on the interaction between the comedian, the audience, the jokes, and the venue. Thus, the use of humorous language by comedians is very

important in involving the audience in creating a unique interactive experience (Schwarz, 2010). Besides, the language style used in stand-up comedy can vary greatly, depending on the comedian and the material. For example, Chris Rock's stand-up comedy often raises social issues and human rights (Rullyanti & Nurdianto, 2019).

Studying the language of humor in stand-up comedy is important for several reasons. First, it provides insight into how comedians represent humor through language, offering a deeper understanding of the use of language in creating laughter by engaging the audience. Additionally, an analysis of trust in stand-up comedy humor can help explain the social dynamics between comedians and their audiences, highlighting evaluations of humor and the role of such trust in comedy success. (Abrahams, 2020). Additionally, the integration of comedy aspects in stand-up performances into academic curricula has proven to be an effective tool that innovates the learning experience, highlighting the potential of humor to be used as a healthy way to digest and communicate important messages in educational contexts. (Schouela, 2022). Furthermore, studying the language of humor in stand-up comedy can provide insight into how comedians represent humor through language, offering a deeper understanding of the use of language in creating laughter by taking advantage of the audience's interpretation. (Putra et al., 2022). Apart from that, stand-up comedy also has the characteristic of being an interactive form of conversational humor, reflecting common experiences by involving the audience in live performances. This interactive nature differentiates it from other forms of humor because it allows for dynamic and immediate responses from and to the audience's reactions. Therefore, the linguistic richness and interactive qualities of stand-up comedy contribute to its prominence as a form of humor.

Furthermore, stand-up comedy differs from other forms of humor in several ways. For example, like situational comedy or slapstick comedy, stand-up comedy is a live performance in which comedians tell stories or jokes to the audience. This allows for a quicker and more interactive connection between the comedian and the audience. Stand-up comedy involves a conversation between the comedian and the audience, with the comedian provoking the audience to get involved with what they are saying so that indirectly the audience is also involved in building a joke. This interactive quality allows for dynamic and immediate responses from the audience. Stand-up comedy is generally performed as a single, continuous monologue, in contrast to other forms of comedy such as sketch comedy or improv comedy, which feature multiple performers in short comedy scenarios. This monologue format allows comedians to develop a more in-depth and cohesive narrative, which can lead to a deeper exploration of humor. Stand-up comedy can cover a variety of styles and genres, such as

observational comedy, political satire, or even dark comedy (dark jokes). This flexibility allows comedians to adapt their humor to different audiences and contexts, making it a highly adaptable form of comedy. Therefore, research and analysis of language styles in stand-up comedy is important because it can provide insight into the comedian's approach to humor, both themes and genres, as well as their relationship with the audience (Abrahams, 2020).

The existing linguistic research related to stand-up comedy focuses on various aspects of the linguistic features and performance of stand-up comedy (Azhar & Fitriawati, 2023; Joser et al., 2023; Pramini, 2021). Several studies have investigated the linguistic aspects of verbal humor in stand-up comedy, exploring how comedians organize and perform their material to create humor and elicit laughter, such as repetition, disfluency, discourse markers, and intonation, to understand the quality and quantity of these features as well as its impact on the art of stand-up comedy (Schwarz, 2010). Additionally, there is a focus on the conversational nature of stand-up comedy and the linguistic richness of the genre, including the use of puns, hyperbole, and irony, which makes it an engaging and entertaining form of humor. (Wawrzyniuk, 2021). In addition, research has been conducted regarding computational analysis of humor through stand-up comedy, which aims to analyze and recognize humor in stand-up comedy performances from a computational perspective. (Turano & Strapparava, 2022). The literature on linguistic research related to stand-up comedy has provided valuable insights into the linguistic aspects, performance, and potential educational applications of stand-up comedy, as well as computational analyzes of humor in this genre. However, there are several research gaps in linguistic studies and stand-up comedy. The social and cultural impact of stand-up comedy on audiences has been partially explored, but there is still room for further research into the relationship between stand-up comedy and social change, as well as the role of stand-up comedy in promoting social and cultural understanding. To close this research gap, it is necessary to carry out research on stand-up comedy in other forms, for example on the YouTube Shorts platform which is now increasingly popular among stand-up fans and comedians.

Stand-up comedy is popular on YouTube Shorts videos for several reasons. First, the short format of YouTube Shorts lends itself well to the fast-paced, engaging nature of stand-up comedy, allowing comedians to deliver their jokes in a concise and engaging way. Additionally, YouTube offers a platform for comedians to reach a wider audience, which can increase their popularity and success. Additionally, the interactive nature of stand-up comedy is also represented through the comments section on YouTube, where viewers can interact with the comedians and each other, creating a sense of community and shared experiences. In

conclusion, YouTube Shorts' short format, the platform's ability to reach a wider audience, the interactive nature of stand-up comedy, and the linguistic richness of the genre have all contributed to its popularity on YouTube. Thus, it is necessary to conduct research on wordplay in stand-up comedy found on YouTube Shorts. By paying attention to the research gaps, this research needs to be applied to subjects that promote social and cultural understanding. One of the comedians who meets these criteria is Ismo Leikola who promotes many of his stand-up pieces through YouTube Shorts on his account, namely ISMO.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ismo Leikola, also known as ISMO, is a Finnish stand-up comedian, musician, author, screenwriter, and YouTuber. He made his debut in the United States in 2014 and gained popularity after winning the 'Funniest Person in the World' competition hosted by the comedy club Laugh Factory. Ismo is recognized for his distinctive style of comedy, which frequently includes linguistic and cultural observations. He has gained international recognition for his performances and has appeared on various television shows and comedy platforms. Ismo's comedy often revolves around language, and he is especially known for his humorous analysis of the complexities of the English language. His performances are characterized by clever wordplay and insightful commentary on everyday topics. Ismo is currently touring and performing in various countries, sharing his trademark humor with audiences worldwide (Leikola, 2023).

Stand-up comedians use lexical choices, such as puns, and semantic ambiguity, to create humor and elicit laughter from the audience. Apart from that, creating humor can also be done by utilizing manipulation of lexical relations. Lexical relations refer to the relationships established between words in a language. Saeed (2016) argues that lexical relations are culturally recognized patterns of associations that exist between lexical units in a language. There are several types of lexical relations, including synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, polysemy, homonymy, and meronymy. Synonyms, for example, refer to relationships between words that are very close in meaning, while antonyms refer to words that have opposite meanings. Hyponymy involves a hierarchical relationship in which the meaning of one word is included in the meaning of another word. Polysemy refers to words that have many related meanings, and homonymy involves words that are spelled and pronounced the same but have different meanings. Meronymy, on the other hand, involves part-whole relationships between words. This lexical relationship is important for understanding the meaning and use of words

in language use, including their use to build humor. Thus, this research attempts to uncover the manipulation of lexical relations in building humor.

RESEARCH METHOD(S)

This study is an embedded case study that uses qualitative methods to analyze data from the YouTube Shorts video source on the ISMO account. The data was purposively collected from popular videos on the channel. Data analysis involves using document analysis techniques on video transcriptions to identify semantic manipulation, such as lexical relation plays, as demonstrated by comedian Ismo.

FINDINGS

In this section, the findings of the analysis of the manipulation of lexical relations in stand-up comedy on YouTube Shorts ISMO are presented.

Cultural sarcasm using hyponymy and meronymy

... but dating seems to be different, it seems that if like if a **man and a woman go on a date** here, they both have to do different things like, cuz back home it's not that different like things that we do. Like back in Finland, *if there is a door, who will open?* It's 50:50, it's probably whoever is closest. *Who is closest to the handle of the door they will most likely open it.*

The initial finding demonstrates the use of a form of hyponymy. In this instance, Ismo constructs an abstract hyponymy that is relatively unrestricted. This is advantageous for the comedian because it piques the audience's curiosity and prompts them to make guesses. In the example provided, the underlined sentences serve as hooks, with the bolded word "date" being the primary hook. When the hook is introduced, the audience typically begins to smile and speculate about where the comedy is headed. In this case, Ismo creates a hyponymy of the word 'date' with the events that occur during a date, specifically "if there is a door". Ismo uses cultural sarcasm to compare Finnish and American cultures. According to Ismo, in Finland, the person closest to the door handle is the one who opens the door, while in America, a man may try to open the door for his girlfriend as a form of chivalry.

Ismo seems to suggest that Finns approach dating more logically than Americans, who tend to overanalyze small details such as opening doors. The punchline "if there's a door, who's going to open it?" utilizes event hyponymy and adds a touch of sarcasm that the audience finds amusing. "Whoever is closest to the door handle is most likely to open it" is used as the closing punchline, which generates more laughter from the audience. Ismo also employs the meronymy

of handle - door. The hook keyword, “date”, manipulates the hyponymy of “opening the door” and the meronymy of “handle” as the first and second punchline keywords.

The thing I've made so many mistakes here is **tipping**, like it really I had to learn it because like in Finland, we just don't have tipping like **tipping**, it is not like a thing there and it's not because we are evil, it's because we have this thing, *I don't know if you know but it's a salary.*

In the aforementioned finding, Ismo employs cultural sarcasm humor through the use of hyponymy. Unlike the previous finding, Ismo does not mention the superordinate term. Instead, he uses “tip” as the hook keyword and “salary” as the punchline keyword, both of which are subordinate to “income”. Ismo can use subordinate lexical relations as hook and punchline keywords in cultural sarcasm without explicitly mentioning the superordinate hyponymy.

Creation of new expressions utilizing antonymy

... and if somebody gets in big big trouble they can say that “oh no, we are in **deep shit**”. Everybody knows that **deep shit**, people use that, but nobody has ever said, “don't worry, we're only in *shallow shit*”, never hear that I think we should start using that more because that's more realistic it's better. I think it feels like real life like “how are you?” “*shallow shit*”.

The second type of lexical relation manipulation is antonymy. Ismo uses the term “deep shit” as the hook keyword and creates a new term “shallow shit” by utilizing antonymy. Deep is an antonym of shallow. Ismo arranges “deep” as the hook keyword and its antonym “shallow” as the punchline keyword to form humor.

Humor homonyms

I used to go often to the UK to London before I moved here. I went there often and and they have **pounds** also, but also their money is **pounds**. That's stupid, like that word was already taken, how do you have the same word for money and weight, very confusing... *like I would like 2 pounds of potatoes, that is 3 pounds, 2, yeah that's 3 pounds, no no no 2 pounds, still yeah 3, okay 3 pounds, that's 4.50.*

Furthermore, homonymy is used to create the punchline. In this case, the hook keyword is “pounds”, which has two meanings: as a measure of weight and as currency. This type of humor often elicits laughter from the audience as soon as the hook keyword is mentioned. It is worth noting that, since homonymy involves using the same word with multiple meanings, the hook and punchline are identical in this type of humor. Therefore, the punchline is no longer just pointing out the homonymy of the word “pounds”, but also providing a funny story that

contains both the hook keyword and the punchline caused by the homonymy. In homonymy humor, stand-up comedians use keywords and their homonymy as both the hook and punchline.

In addition to the three types of lexical relation manipulation mentioned above, there is another form that is important to discuss, even though it does not involve lexical relations. This type of humor is built using cultural metaphors, where the comedian tells a story about a metaphor by pretending to be unfamiliar with its meaning.

What it feels like to live the life of the dog cuz the dog is is often **on a leash** and I'll be wondering what it feels like to be **on a leash**. No I don't mean *the marriage* no no no. I really figured out what it actually feels to be on a leash. It's the same feeling *when you're on the phone and you are recharging the phone like your phone is plugged in it's charging and then you see a sausage* that's that's the feeling.

Ismo creates a new metaphor by using the term “on a leash” as a hook commonly applied to animals, in this case, dogs. He delivers the first punchline by stating that a dog on a leash doesn't feel like marriage, as if anticipating the audience's thoughts. He then explains that it feels like making a phone call while charging and then seeing a sausage. Ismo uses a term and then employs it as a metaphor for something new in his punchline.

... and it took me even longer than to figure out that it took me so much so much longer to figure out that, in America, if somebody says **can I help you** it actually means *go away*
...

Another example of cultural semantic manipulation is the expression “can I help you”, which Ismo interprets as “go away”. This is ironic because in America, where this expression is common, people who are annoyed usually say “can I help you”. The term serves as both a hook and a punchline in this case.

DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals that stand-up comedians use lexical relations, such as hyponymy, meronymy, antonymy, and homonymy, to create cultural humor through hook and punchline. Additionally, sarcasm and metaphor are also employed in the execution of cultural humor. Overall, this research aligns with existing studies (Romadlani, 2021; van den Beukel & Aroyo, 2018; Wijana, 2013). This research demonstrates that the use of lexical relations is consistently productive in various forms of humor. Unlike previous studies (Adekunle, 2022; Teguh, 2021; Winarsih, 2020), this research explains how lexical relations are constructed in humor with a hook-punchline structure. It also shows how certain types of lexical relations can be utilized by breaking them down into hook and punchline keywords or by combining them directly

through stories or narratives. Previous research has not thoroughly addressed this topic, despite its importance (Naz et al., 2023; Simatupang et al., 2022). This information can serve as a reference not only for the audience but also for comedians to develop more creative methods of building humor.

CONCLUSION

The use of the hook-punchline humor structure shapes the manipulation of lexical relations in cultural standup comedy. Word pairs in hyponymy, meronymy, and antonymy are split using the splitting technique, with one word becoming the hook keyword and the other becoming the punchline keyword. On the other hand, when utilizing homonymy, it is known that the breaking technique can be challenging. Therefore, using words that include homonymy is better suited for a unified hook and punchline when utilizing the narration technique. Additionally, it is necessary to explore lexical semantic manipulation in other humor structures that have more varied hooks and punchlines. This will benefit other researchers in future research.

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