Humor as an Approach Used by Teacher to Evoke Students' Motivation in EFL Online Learning

Nashruddin[1], Fiptar Abdi Alam[2]
[1]English Education Study Program of STKIP Muhammadiyah Barru
[2]Guidance and Counseling Study Program of STKIP Muhammadiyah Barru
Email: nashruddin@stkipmb.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Covid-19 pandemic condition demands the learning activities to be conducted online. The current study aims to investigate the types of humor inserted by the teacher in the EFL online teaching-learning activities, and students' responses toward the teacher's humor. The participants of this descriptive qualitative research are an EFL teacher and 29 students of the 2nd grade at SMA Muhammadiyah Barru. To collect data about the types of humor used by the teacher, the researchers directly observe the online learning activities conducted by the teacher and his students. For gaining the deepest data about students' responses toward the teacher's humor, the researchers randomly interview 10 from those 29 students. The researchers found that in the online teaching-learning activities, the teacher inserted humorous words that based on the theory were classified into pun fan, joke, innuendo, malapropism, and absurdity. Besides that, the researchers also found new types of humor used by the teacher, which were then named as local humor and *plesetan* humor. From the interview result, it is found students' responses towards the teacher's humor indicate that humor maintains students' focus in learning activities, stimulates students to solve problems quickly, and keeps students' self-confidence in online learning.

Keywords: *humor, joke, innuendo, malapropism, absurdity, local humor, plesetan humor*

Introduction

Learning activities need high motivation to conduct. According to Marples (1999) and Adams and Pierce (2006) studying any subject without motivation and interest causes unsatisfactory result. Thus, teacher should apply various approaches as an alternative to give various situations for students. These can create comfortable and interesting atmosphere and stimulate students' motivation during learning process. If teacher uses an attractive approach that can motivate all students to learn, the students will easily receive and apply the materials that are taught.

Boredom may be the largest pedagogical obstacle in learning. Many people believe it depends on teachers to spark students' interest in the class (Woo, Serenko, & Chu, 2019). Hence, teachers need to be creative to avoid this kind of problem. Kardena (2020) state if students are filled with boredom in learning, they will not be able to receive the subject matter well. As a result, learning outcomes are not achieved optimally.

According to Cann and Cann (2013) one way to ignite students' enthusiasm in learning is by using humor. If the humorous utterances are occasionally inserted proportionally in learning activities, students will follow the learning process comfortably. In a learning activity, humor can create a cheerful learning climate, enhance social bonding through increased student-instructor interaction, add variety to lectures, decrease test anxiety, and provide enjoyment.

To the social benefits, humor is cognitively and pedagogically important. For instance, instructional humor has been touted as an excellent way for students to learn vocabulary, increase critical thinking, practice semantics, and remember more information (Bell, 2009). Therefore creating a humor in the learning activity is an effective way to encourage students' attention and enjoyment during the class.

The main goal of humor is to lose the tense because a good sense of humor could reduce perceived stress and threats (Lefcourt & Martin, 1986). In learning and teaching contexts, humor may not only come from

teachers' explanation but also students responses of the lesson given by the teacher. According to Gaither (2008) the learning condition atmosphere will be relaxed with humor, but the learning process among them must be maintained during the relaxed interaction.

The Covid-19 pandemic, which has been going on for about a year, demands that learning be carried out online. Through their research, Churiyah, Sholikhan, Filianti, and Sakdiyyah (2020) and Abdelrahim (2021) state that this online learning system is a psychological challenge for teachers and students. On the one hand, teachers are required to convey lesson materials as clearly as possible so that all students are able to receive them well. On the other hand, the absence of direct face-to-face contact between the teacher and students is an obstacle to receiving the subject matter as clearly as possible. Not only have those, the various difficulties that often arise in online learning tended to decrease the students' motivation in learning.

Motivation is firmly related to the students' achievement in learning. Generally, students with strong motivation in learning will get good achievement in their study (Keller, 2010). The students usually are not motivated to learn because teachers do not use an attractive approach in teaching.

Based on the initial observation by conducting a mini research at an EFL online learning conducted for students at SMA Muhammadiyah Barru, the researchers found that an EFL teacher in the school communicated with students by inserting verbal-humor style in the online learning interaction. The teacher had proportional sense of humor and always created comfortable atmosphere. Therefore, the objectives of the current research are to identify types of humor used by the EFL teacher in an online learning, to analyze how the teachers' use the humor types, and to describe students' responses toward the humor types used by the EFL teacher.

If noticed, people who like humor look fresher than those who are too serious. This is because these activities can increase the number of endorphins in human body, which are natural pain killers (Shammi & Stuss, 2003). Research psychoneurotic immunology shows humor associated with emotions and a person's immunity. Many health care providers take advantage of humor to speed up the healing of patients by providing comedy rooms and clowns for entertaining patient. Humor is considered to be a method of deep acceleration recovery in patients suffering from chronic pain, cancer, and other diseases.

Besides providing positive benefits for the body, humor also has a quite important role in the social life of the community. Kruse and Prazak (2006) stated that silliness in every aspect of social life is in line with customs and habits in social communities themselves. Therefore, humor keeps in developing because it follows everything that happens in society. Various things inhuman scope can potentially be used as material for cuteness such as social inequality, strange phenomena, the latest trends, and political satire.

Humor can be used as a good medium to convey messages because it is relaxed and entertaining. Basu (1999) stated the term humor comes from an old Latin medical term, means bodily fluids, or fluid balance in the human body that regulates human health and emotions. In short, humor is something funny or amusing situation.

Humor can also be defined as something that makes someone smile or laugh. It is basically a human emotional reaction to language, either spoken or written. In the existing literature, there are a lot of theories that discuss humor. According to Billig (2005) humor is an attitude that tends to be done to arouse joy feeling and trigger laughter.

Humor as a multidisciplinary phenomenon can be viewed from differing points of view. It depends on its specific context of the use, namely from social to psychological, from philosophical to physiological, and from linguistic to a lay person. There are many theories that discuss about humor. The latest theory about humor was conceived by Attardo and Raskin (1991). The theory of Raskin (1985) is related to Semantic Script-Based Theory of Humor (SSTH). General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) is a theory that is developed by Attardo and Raskin (1991).

Attardo and Raskin (1991) asserted that humor is an act performed through linguistic or nonlinguistic means by any of the participants. "This act is the result of two incongruous scripts (a cognitive structure internalized by the native speaker and represents the native speaker's knowledge of a small part of the world)". The producer of this act may or may not have had the intention of creating laughter or smile (Raskin, 1985). Norrick (2003) saw humor as utterances intended as amusing by the speaker where the presence of linguistic and contextual clues is necessary to support this.

Research on the structure of humorous discourse began in classical philosophy and still represents an essential research area for contemporary linguists. Many theories of humor have been advanced by famous philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Schopenhauer, and Kant. Those theories dealt with the question of why people laugh at certain situations, whereas they do not show any reactions in others.

Plato and Aristotle began to deal with the essence of humor about 2000 years ago and laid the foundations for today's modern theories of humor as represented by influential linguists such as Kruse and Prazak (2006).

In general, the principal theories of humor can be classified into three main groups (Raskin, 1985), namely:
- incongruity theories
- hostility theories
- release theories

Raskin (1985) specifies the theories further and points out that they can also be characterized from a psychological perspective as cognitive-perceptual (incongruity), social-behavioral (superiority), and psychoanalytical (relief).

The understanding about the types of humor is really helpful. The types of humor will be explained as follows based on the theory proposed by Attardo and Raskin (1991).
a.) Pun Fun
    This type of humor is playing with words. It is a play on words involving consonants and vowels that are exchanged, which is done deliberately to make cuteness. It is using words to imply the opposite of their literal meaning, or a situation where the outcome is the opposite from that intended or expected.
b.) Joke
    It was a kind of funny story someone made in order to make other people laugh. It is also a long joke that has an intentionally silly or meaningless ending.
c.) Innuendo
    It is a figure of speech that contains hint expressions to convey intent. This type becomes funny because it is not planned or arises spontaneously.

d.) Malapropism
    This type is the use of the wrong word producing speech that doesn't make sense, and it is often funny. It is deliberately minimizing whatever is being spoken about, often absurdly. Generally, the audience knows and that is what makes it amusing.
e.) Absurdity
    It is a term for things extremely unreasonable, or as to be foolish or not taken seriously. It is used to expose silliness, foolishness or stupidity through ridicule.

Keller (2010) stated that motivation is something that energizes, directs, and sustains behavior; it gets students moving, points them in a particular direction, and keeps them going. According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), motivation is a force that cannot be seen or it is an abstract and a hypothesis which used to explain humans' behavior. We often see students' motivation reflected in personal investment and in cognitive, emotional, behavioral engagement in school activities.

Gottfried (1990) defines academic motivation as enjoyment of school learning characterized by a mastery orientation; curiosity; persistence; task-endogen; and the learning of challenging, difficult, and novel tasks. On the other hand, Sakai and Kikuchi (2009), and Fokkens-Bruinsma and Canrinus (2014) considered motivation to be synonymous with cognitive engagement. They define as voluntary uses of high-level self-regulated learning strategies, such as

paying attention, connection, planning, and monitoring.

Keller (2010) stated that motivation is something that energizes, directs, and sustains behavior; it gets students moving, points them in a particular direction, and keeps them going. Psychologists have studied human motivation extensively and have derived variety of theories about what motivates people. This section briefly highlights the motivational theories. These include theories that focus on motivation being a function of:
- employee needs of various types
- extrinsic factors
- intrinsic factors

According to Murphy (1993) and supported by Adams and Pierce (2006), there are two main indicators of students who have high learning motivation, namely:

1. Attention
   One of measurements of learning motivation is attention. Students' focus on the ongoing lesson is one of the main parts to know whether they have their motivation or not. As long as they stay focused on the ongoing learning activities, it means they are motivated in following the learning activity.

2. Students' Accuracy on Solving the Problem
   Accuracy in solving problems and tasks given by their teachers is one of the criteria to know whether the students have a high motivation. If they perform accurately and faster or equal with the base time which has been given by their teacher means that they have the motivation on learning.

Fishbah and Toure (2014) add some indicators of students' learning motivation are students' attention, students' accuracy on solving problems, students' performances in the classroom activities, and students' confidence. In line with that statement, Tosun (2015) and Chandra (2021) has investigated the correlation between learning motivation and students' achievement in learning. They found that learning motivation is directly proportional to the achievement of student learning outcomes.

Another research conducted by Rahardjo and Pertiwi (2020) found that the traits of students who are strongly motivated to learn can be identified by the following factors.

1. Students' Self Confidence in the classroom
   Self-confidence is one of the main parts to identify whether those students have high motivation or not. As long as they have the self-confidence to the lesson and assignment or any test in the classroom, it means they have a high motivation in learning.

2. Students' Performances in the Classroom Activities
   Students' performance can be used to measure or to know whether students have their motivation or not. As long as they have the self-confidence to perform the lesson in the classroom it means they have a motivation on learning something.

Method

This research applies descriptive qualitative method especially conversation analysis. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated that qualitative research is a research which investigates the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials. According to Hyland and Paltridge (2011) conversation analysis (CA) – the study of talk-in-interaction – is a theoretically and methodologically distinctive approach to understanding social life.

The researcher investigated the effect of the use of humor by an EFL teacher to evoke students' motivation in online learning process by using descriptive qualitative research design. To collect the data, this psycholinguistic study involved an EFL teacher and 29 students from the second grade of SMA Muhammadiyah Barru as participants. From those 29, the researchers then choose randomly 10 students to be interviewed.

The data was collected by using qualitative data collection. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), qualitative data collection involves spending considerable time in the setting under study, immersing oneself in this setting, and collecting as much relevant information as possible. There are two methods will be done in collecting the data namely observation and interview.

1. Observation
   Observation is conducted to find out the real or factual situation of teaching

process. The researchers observed the subjects when they communicate online. The researchers used an audio-record to record the teaching and learning process. It was conducted until the researcher gets enough data. The observation will be conducted in SMA Muhammadiyah Barru. While recording, the researchers filled the observation checklist.

2. Interview

The second method is interview. Interview is a way of collecting data by delivering some questions to the informants directly. The purpose of this interview is for matching the result of the observation with the opinion of informants. From here, the researcher will find out the implication of teacher's humor towards learning and teaching activities.

The data analysis here is based on Miles and Huberman (1994), consisting of three concepts; data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verifications. In data reduction, researchers made script of recorded and written data, took data which was needed to answer the research problem, threw out unnecessary data, and identified kinds of humor utterances. In data display, researchers made relation of humor used and English teaching and learning, and displayed it. The last is conclusion drawing or verification.

Teacher's utterances containing humor sense in online teaching then were analyzed to get the research findings. The data is explained in form of words and sentences either in deductive or inductive ways. It is presented gradually and systematically based on the research objectives to get a good and clear narration of the explanation of the humor in this research.

Finding

From the observation results, the researchers found that the EFL teacher applied some humor types in conducted the online learning.

Pun Fan Humor

The following are examples of humor applied by the teacher in the process of online learning. In that situation, the teacher asked to a student about a lesson material.

Figure 1
The Result of Extract 1
Teacher   : "Okay. Then, What is indirect, Armin?"
Student   : "*Kalimat tak langsung*, Sir!"
/"It is indirect speech, Sir!"/
Teacher   : "*Iyyaa, kalimat tak langsung, saya kira tembak langsung*"
/"Yes, it is indirect speech, I thought it was directly shooting"/

This data was taken from the first meeting of class observation. In this situation, the teacher delivered the lesson material from the classroom in the school, while all students followed the class from their own homes. The learning activity was conducted by zoom meeting. The teacher asked to his students about the meaning of indirect speech. Ono of students answered correctly by saying "it is *kalimat langsung*." The teacher then responded with humor by saying "*Iyyaa, kalimat tak langsung, saya kira tembak langsung*". Spontaneously, all students laughed and they were monitored in the teacher's screen. According to Attardo and Raskin (1991) this type of humor is categorized as Pun Fan Humor.

Joke

The researchers also found that the teacher applied a type of humor by saying something to evoke amusement or laughter. That type is called Joke.

Figure 2
The Result of Extract 2
Teacher : Hello all students? Are you ready?
Student   : We are ready, Sir! What is the material for this meeting, Sir?
Teacher **: *Tunggu dulu ka belum pi simpan tas orang.***
/Wait the moment! I don't even put my bag yet./
[Many students laughed.]
Teacher : OK

Innuendo Humor

In another situation, the teacher gave speaking materials for all students in the online learning activities. The teacher gave instructions from the classroom in the school building, while all students followed the learning activity from their houses.

Figure 3
The Result of Extract 3

Teacher   : *Luar biasa teman kita*, Supriyanto. Give him applause!
[All Students clapped hands. Some students laughed.]
Teacher   : Amazing, he can speak in two languages simultaneously.
[Many students laughed.]
Teacher   : **Yah, secara bersamaan teman kita berbicara menggunakan dua bahasa, Inggris dan tubuh.**
                 /Yes, our friend can talk using two languages simultaneously, English and body./
[Students increasingly laughed]

At that time, the teacher was practicing student skills in conversation. One student who was invited to speak in English only spoke in intermittent while continuing to move his body. This situation was monitored either by the teacher or by all students from their screen. So the teacher jokingly praised that student by saying that the student could speak using two languages simultaneously. All students in the class laughed because the teacher's praise actually means the opposite. According to Attardo and Raskin (1991) this type of humor is categorized as Innuendo Humor.

Malapropism Humor

The EFL teacher used this type of humor when asking students about their previous knowledge.

Figure 4
The Result of Extract 4

Teacher   : Okay, *jadi kita akan berbicara tentang materi yang sudah tidak asing lagi bagi kalian. Sudah tidak asing lagi bagi kalian atau sangat asing?*
                 /Okay. So, we will talk about the material which is not strange anymore for you. Is it not strange for you? Or very strange for you?/
A Student   : *Tidak asing.*
                 /It's not strange/ [speak alone and aloud]
Teacher   : **tidak asin?**
                 Is it not salty?
Students   : *hahahahahha* [all students are laughing]

The teacher's utterance "*tidak asin*" (in English "Is it not salty") is categorized as malapropism. It means the misuse of the word-substituting the correct word for another with a similar sound (*asing* with *asin*).

Absurdity Humor

The researcher also found that the teacher used absurdity type by giving questions for students to confirm their ability.

Figure 5
The Result of Extract 5

A student   : Subject *tambah* have *atau* has *tambah* not *tambah* past participle.
                 /It is subject plus have or has plus not plus past participle/
Teacher   : **yeah betul-betul tawar ya**
                 /Yes, you all are really tasteless/
Students   : *hahahahahha* [all students are laughing]

The word *"tawar",* is included as absurdity because this type of humor is obviously lacking in reason. It is foolish or ridiculous and includes nonsensical language.

From the results of the observation, the researchers found some utterances from the EFL teacher contained humor types that considered as new types. Those are listed in follows.

Local Humor

Local Humor means that the use of humorous words by using local language

where the conversation takes place. The situation investigated is in Bugis area, therefore, the local humor here means that the person makes a verbal-humor with the bugis language.

Figure 6
The Result of Extract 6

Teacher	: *Oke, itu supaya ditahu yang mana berpasangan dengan* have, *yang mana berpasangan dengan* has. *Sekarang, kalau* past participle, *kalau pergi ada tidak bentuk kedua dan ketiganya dalam bahasa Indonesia?* /Okay. It is for you to know which one is paired with have, which one is paired with has. Now, what about past participle, is there any past tense and past participle for the word "go" in Indonesia language?/
A student	: *Tidak adaa, Paaaak…..* /There is not, Sir./
Teacher	: *Ada* /Yes, there is./
[All students seem to show the astonished expression.]	
Teacher	: Iya, *ada.* **Yang awalnya pergi, kemudian bentuk keduanya adalah lokka.** /Yes, there is of course. **The present form is go, and the past participle is lokka.**/
Students	: *hahahahahha* [all students are laughing]

The researchers categorized that the EFL teacher used local humor. It is because, the teacher said that *lokka* is the past form of the word go. In fact, *lokka* is a Bugis language that means *pergi* in Indonesia language, and means go in English. The EFL teacher jokingly said that *pergi* is the present form, while *lokka* is the past form.

Plesetan is Indonesia term that means a person uses some silly words to replace the real word to make other people laugh. *Plesetan* is sometimes made intentionally just to make a joke. From the results of the observation, the researchers found some utterances from the EFL teacher contained *plesetan* humor.

Plesetan Humor

Figure 7
The Result of Extract 7

Teacher	: The second one is your intonation or the sound in pronouncing words must be clear. Your voice must be louder and the intonation must be clear. Do not whisper! **Don't do like your neighbors do, namely bisik-bisik tetangga**!
Students	: *hahahahahha* [all students are laughing]

In this situation, the teacher actually wanted to emphasize that students don't whisper when pronouncing a word. The Indonesia language for whisper is *bisik-bisik*. In Indonesia, there is a very popular song '*Bisik-bisik tetangga*' (The neighbors' whispers). Therefore, when the teacher said to students "Don't whisper!", with a joke he shifted his words to "**Don't do like your neighbors do".**

Discussion

From the interview result, the researchers found that students feel positive in following the online learning due to humor utterances inserted by the teacher in learning activities.

Humor Maintains Students' Focus in Learning Activities

The focus is one of the main parts to know whether students strongly motivated in learning or not. The results of the interview indicate that all the students are still focusing on the lesson because humor applied by the teacher. It is proofed by the following students' statement "*Iya, kami tetap bisa fokus pada pelajaran, karena, karena itu humor itu salah satu yang membuat saya bisa senang ketika belajar dan kami tidak tegang*" ("**Yes, we can still focus on the lesson, because, because of the humor is one of the things that makes us happy in learning, and finally we are not tense**"). Students answered with this way when they

were asked how their focus on the lesson is by the humor that the teacher inserted into learning activities.

Humor Stimulates Students to Solve Problems Quickly

If students perform faster with the base time which has been given by their teacher, it means that they have the high motivation in learning. The result of the interview on students indicated that all students answered "*Iya, tugas-tugas dan pertanyaan yang pak guru berikan kepada kami dengan cepat dapat kami selesaikan, karena ketika menyampaikan materi, pak guru kadang menyelipkan ucapan-ucapan humor sehingga penjelasan beliau cepat kami pahami.*" In English "**Yes, we could quickly resolve the assignments and questions the teacher gave us, because when delivering the lesson material, he sometimes slipped humorous words so that we quickly understood his explanation**".

Humor Keeps Students' Self-confidence in Online Learning

Good self-confidence is one of indicators that a student highly motivated in learning. The result of the interview showed that all students said that they got their self-confidence while the English was conducted online, due to humorous words inserted by the teacher in teaching. It is proofed by the students' statement "*Iya, karena pak guru sering menyelipkan joke-joke, maka, kami semakin percaya diri dalam menyelesaikan tugas, kejenuhan dalam belajar online juga dapat teratasi, dan yang lebih utama kami tidak mengantuk pada saat belajar.*" In English "**Yes, because the teacher often slips some jokes, we are more confident in completing assignments, the boredom in online learning can also be overcome, and most importantly we are not sleepy while studying.**"

From the interview results, it is indicated that students like the humor inserted by their teacher in learning online. All the students said that they liked it for several reasons. The inserted humor avoids them from the boredom. All students also say that they are not sleepy anymore because they are more interested in learning with joke. Furthermore, all the students state that they like if their teacher are teaching them with fun. From the data found, it can be said that all students prefer to hear a few jokes or humor from their teacher in online teaching and learning process.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and the discussion in the previous section, the following are the conclusions of the current study. The EFL teacher at SMA Muhammadiyah Barru inserted humorous words in online teaching-learning activities. Based on the theory that underlies this research, the types of humor used by the teacher are classified as pun fun humor, joke humor, innuendo humor, malapropism humor, and absurdity humor. Besides that, the researcher discovered other types of humor used by the teacher, which have not yet been found in the humor theory. Therefore, the researchers name the new types of humor as local humor and *plesetan* humor.

The use of humor by the teacher emerges the students' motivation in online learning. It is proofed by the way the students still focus on the lesson, students are able to solve the problems quickly, and students' are self-confident in learning. The result of the interview indicates that the students feel positive in following the online learning as their responses toward the use of humor by their teacher in EFL learning activities.

Based on pedagogical point of view, the findings of this research have positive implications for student learning outcomes. This is shown by the interview results with students that the humor that the teacher inserts in teaching can maintain their learning motivation. Pedagogically, learning motivation has a direct impact on learning outcomes.

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