

Humor through Exploitation of Meaning Duality in English Memes

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Abstract. There are many mechanisms to integrate humor in English memes. One common method is to make incongruity through two different interpretations. The incongruity can be implemented on different levels, such as lexical, syntactic, and more. However, not everyone can understand these levels; thus, the delivery of humor is not achievable. Therefore, this study aims to analyze meaning duality causing humor in English memes. There were 30 data collected from Pinterest through documentation method. The analysis was conducted with content analysis method through descriptive-mixed approach based on theories of incongruity, ambiguity, context of situation, and generative transformation. The result shows that all types of ambiguity is found and can create meaning duality that causes humor from incongruous finishing text. Lexical ambiguity is the dominant type of meaning duality causing humor. This study also found that one meme can contain two ambiguities. Among the five types of ambiguity, this study found a different characteristic of humor for pragmatic ambiguity. These findings can help unveil how humans play with English to create humor.

Keywords: ambiguity, English meme, humor, incongruity, meaning duality

<http://jos.unsoed.ac.id/index.php/jes>

INTRODUCTION

Language plays an important role in creating humor, yet not everyone has the same ability to process and understand language; thus, not everyone can sense humor. English humor, for example, can be created with one word that has two different meanings. However, if an individual's first language is not English and their vocabulary is limited, they may not understand the second meaning of the word;

hence, they will not get the humor. This is well described by Raskin (2008), who stated that the essence of humor in text lies in the contradictory interpretations. Nijholt (2018) provides a similar statement to Raskin (2008).

Humor on the internet can be found as a text, an image, or a combination of both, such as memes. Shifman (2012) defines memes as contemporary folk tales constructed from norms and values in society through images and urban legends; hence, memes are closely associated with pictures or illustrations about one specific topic. Based on the definition of memes above, it is known that memes can be restricted to certain group of society because not all people share similar norms, values, and urban legends, including languages. As a medium to deliver messages about norms, values, and urban legends, memes with a specific language, for instance English, are understood by individuals who can speak English and have a sufficient amount of understanding about English communication style.

Ruch (2008, p. 20) states that humor in linguistics does not always equal to laughter production. Ruch (1993), Martin (2007), and Attardo (2020) propose that an effect of humor can also be just a smile or even simply a small distinct emotion called mirth. Nijholt (2018) further adds that there are times when people completely do not understand and cannot detect the humor. Thus, the emotion felt as the reaction of the humor is not as grand as laughter. It can only be a very light sense of playful feeling.

In the context of English memes, comprehension often hinges on a nuanced grasp of the language due to the intricate interplay of words and images. Individuals with limited proficiency in English may struggle to decode the layers of humor embedded within these memes. This challenge arises from the phenomenon of meaning duality, in which linguistic elements carry multiple interpretations simultaneously. Whether it's a clever pun, a subtle reference, or a play on words, the humor within memes relies on exploiting these linguistic ambiguities to evoke reaction of humor. Consequently, for people with insufficient fluency in English, navigating the intricacies of these linguistic nuances becomes a barrier to fully understanding and appreciating the humor conveyed through memes.

Meaning duality is a well-known mechanism in creating English humor. Several past studies have explored linguistic humor. Azim, Handoyo, and Yulianita (2023) explored humor in the process of subtitling. Sukardi, Sumarlam, and Marmanto (2017) conducted a research on humor and sound alteration. Regarding meaning duality, Haryadi, Rejeki, and Setyowati (2022), Bao (2016) and Yolanda, Bram, Ardi, and Doborovich (2023) have analyzed English humor, including memes, and concluded that humor can arise because of lexical, referential, and syntactic ambiguities. However, they were not able to provide the nature of certain ambiguities, such as the appropriate data for syntactic ambiguity; thus, they could not provide the syntactic structure as evidence of ambiguity.

Understanding humor caused by meaning duality in English memes is important as it benefits to academic and social lives of individuals. Socially, humor serves as a facilitator of social connections that can foster and strengthen interpersonal relationships. Academically, the exploration of humor in memes presents an opportunity to delve into linguistics. Humor integrates linguistic elements which aids to the mastery of the subject; thus, it can be a creative way of learning linguistics, particularly English linguistics.

Although past studies discussed humor caused by meaning duality from ambiguity, their discussions lacked the inclusion of all types of ambiguity proposed by Attardo (2020). Furthermore, these studies only analyzed one ambiguity per instance of data. Therefore, the current study attempts to fill this gap by including all types of ambiguity that can cause humor in English memes and providing cases in which more than one ambiguity is applicable in the memes.

Based on the foregoing background, this study aims to analyze humor in English memes caused by meaning duality. This aim is achieved through analyzing five types of ambiguity, two of which have not been mentioned by past studies and one has not been explained well. This study also presents the application of two ambiguities in English memes to create humor, a topic rarely rarely discussed in previous studies.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method of analysis employed in this study was a descriptive-mixed method. The quantitative part of this study was limited only to simply calculating the distribution of kinds of meaning duality found throughout the memes, whereas the qualitative side of the study was exhibited through the descriptive interpretation of quantitative finding and each piece of data. This study employed a theoretical approach, combining linguistic theories specified for humor. As Attardo (2020, p. 176) states, humor lies in interesting surface structure of a sentence. The humor investigated in this study involved incongruity between the surface and deep structures because the core of humor lies in the manipulation of linguistic elements, with comedic effects emerging from the clever construction of the language itself.

Pinterest was the data source for this study. Memes in English under the tags 'humor', 'meme', and 'joke' on Pinterest were the target data. The memes are in the form of images containing text. Memes with comedic potential stemming from meaning duality were collected for analysis. Data collection was conducted through the documentation method with a note-taking technique to identify linguistic units demonstrating meaning duality as the source of humor. A total of 30 memes were collected. Among the 30 collected, this study employed a purposive sampling technique to select two from each kind of meaning duality as samples for analysis. Selecting two samples from each type was intended to represent each type in qualitative interpretation better, allowing the observation of patterns in humor creation. Having more than one sample from each type would validate the findings and analysis, further supporting the generalization of the results.

To analyze the relationship between humor and language, this study utilized content analysis on ambiguity theory from Attardo (2020) as the main theoretical framework. Supporting theories included incongruity theory from Perlmutter (2002), generative transformation theory from Chomsky (1965), and context of situation theory from Halliday and Hasan (1985).

Ambiguity is one of the most prominent methods for introducing dual, or even multiple, interpretations within a text (Attardo, 2020, p. 181). Attardo (2020, pp. 182–185) proposes five types of ambiguity or meaning duality that can cause humor: lexical ambiguity, syntactic ambiguity, ambiguity between literal and metaphorical meanings, referential ambiguity, and pragmatic ambiguity. Lexical ambiguity relies on the multiple meanings carried by one lexicon. Syntactic ambiguity influences humorous interpretation as one clause can be understood

from two different syntactic structures. Ambiguity between literal and metaphorical meanings involves the use of one lexicon in both its denotative and metaphorical senses. Referential ambiguity triggers humor due to referencing issues within two clauses. Pragmatic ambiguity highlights different focuses of one lingual unit that can cause different understandings.

The presentation of the analysis involved both formal and informal methods. The formal method includes a table showing the distribution and frequency of ambiguity types in English memes. The informal method was used to explain the analysis in a descriptive manner.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study collected 30 memes that exhibit meaning duality. These memes are all under the tags 'humor', 'joke', and 'meme' on Pinterest. Based on Attardo's (2020) theory of ambiguity, all types of ambiguity were found. Table 1 below shows the frequency of each type of ambiguity.

Table 1. Frequency of Ambiguity Types in English Memes

No	Types of Ambiguity	Amount
1	Lexical	14
2	Syntactic	5
3	Between Literal and Metaphorical	2
4	Referential	5
5	Pragmatic	4
Total		30

Table 1 shows that lexical ambiguity has the highest occurrence in English memes. Syntactic and referential ambiguities rank second and third with the same amount. Pragmatic ambiguity is found four times. Ambiguity between literal and metaphorical meanings comes last with the least amount among the others. The analysis of each type of ambiguity is presented below.

Lexical Ambiguity

The first type of ambiguity found is lexical ambiguity. Attardo (2020, p. 182) states that this type of ambiguity creates humor when a lexicon has two meanings associated with it. The ambiguous word influences different interpretations, one of which is incongruous.



Figure 1. Meme with Lexical Ambiguity caused by the Word 'Polish'

The context of Figure 1 is built upon a conversation between a car salesperson and a customer in a car showroom. While looking at a certain car, the salesperson asked the customer, 'How do you think we keep the cars here so shiny?' The customer answered, 'Polish?' After hearing the response, the salesperson apologized and began to restate the question in Polish.

Incongruity arises from the salesperson's initial question, which sets up an expectation for the conversation. The question primes both the customer and the readers of the meme to anticipate a discussion related to car maintenance, specifically about maintaining its shine. Thus, when the customer responds with 'Polish?', he is attempting to engage with the question asked. This aligns with the expectation set by the salesperson's query. However, the ensuing response from the salesperson subverts this expectation by interpreting 'Polish?' as a request to repeat the question in Polish. This unexpected divergence from the anticipated course of conversation is what renders the exchange comedic. The humor is triggered by the sudden shift in interpretation, catching both the customer and the audience off guard.

The humor in Figure 1 is derived from the meaning duality in the lexical item 'polish'. The word 'polish', stated by the customer, is supposed to be an appropriate response to the question asked by the car salesperson. However, the salesperson interpreted the response not as it is, but as a sign that the customer wants the question to be re-asked in Polish, the language spoken in Poland. Therefore, there is ambiguity in the word 'Polish' due to two meanings arising: referring to a substance used for making objects shiny and referring to the language of Poland. This explanation shows how the meaning duality of the lexical item 'polish' triggers the incongruity of the meme, thereby creating humor.



Figure 2. Meme with Lexical Ambiguity caused by the Word 'draw'

The context underlying Figure 2 is a doctor's appointment where the doctor needs to draw blood from the patient. It appears that the patient's medical check-up required a blood test to complete the doctor's diagnosis. Therefore, the doctor communicated this to the patient by saying, 'I'm going to have to draw blood'. The patient seemed to agree, as the doctor then responded with 'Thanks for waiting' following his previous statement.

The humor in the above meme arises from the incongruity caused by the doctor's final statement, which diverges from the expectation set by his first statement. Based on the context and the doctor's initial statement, the patient and the readers of the meme anticipate a medical procedure where the doctor will draw a small tube of blood from the patient using a syringe. However, this expectation is humorously twisted in the interaction. In the lower panel of the meme, the doctor playfully interprets the word 'draw' as referring to the action of creating a picture, as indicated by the pencil and notebook with an animated depiction of blood being drawn. The doctor's incongruous response of 'Thanks for waiting' while displaying his blood drawing to the patient subverts the expected outcome established in the upper panel.

Based on the explanation above, it is evident that the word 'draw' plays an important role in the humor as it introduces lexical ambiguity. The word has multiple meanings: it can refer to the action of creating pictures with a pen or pencil, achieving the same score between two participants in a competition, or extracting an object from another object. In this meme, based on the doctor's initial statement, the phrase 'draw blood' typically means to extract blood from the patient. However, the humor arises when the doctor humorously interprets 'draw' as referring to making pictures with a pen or pencil in that context, which is incongruous given the serious nature of the doctor's job. Therefore, it is evident that meaning duality due to lexical ambiguity is a mechanism for creating humor.

Syntactical Ambiguity

Syntactic ambiguity occurs when two or more different syntactic structures can be inferred from a single surface structure (Attardo, 2020, p. 182). This ambiguity does not necessarily encompass the entire syntactic structure; rather, it can involve a phrase structure within a sentence that influences its deep structure. Chomsky (1965, p. 21) provides an example with the sentence 'flying airplanes can be dangerous', which can ambiguously refer to the act of flying a plane being dangerous or to airplanes that are currently flying being dangerous. This dual interpretation arises due to the phrase 'flying airplanes'. Therefore, the selected memes below exhibit two different meanings without altering their sentence structures or word orders.



Figure 3. Salesperson's Statement Causing Syntactic Ambiguity

The meme in Figure 3 depicts a conversation between a car salesperson and a married couple. The salesperson is attempting to sell a specific car to them. He explains that the car can accommodate a family with several members without any issues, emphasizing its spaciousness. In response to this statement, the husband of the couple humorously remarks that he and his wife have a lot of problems.

The humor of the meme arises from the incongruous and unexpected response of the husband. In the context provided, the salesperson is attempting to sell a particular car by highlighting its strengths. Therefore, any subsequent responses from both sides, the salesperson and the customers, should ideally align harmoniously within the context of discussing the car's features. However, the husband adds a comical twist by interpreting the strength of the car, which is its ability to accommodate a whole family without any problems, as suggesting it can accommodate a family who does not have any problems. His response deviates from the expected interaction and purpose of the salesperson, introducing humor through this unexpected interpretation.

The incongruity in the meme that causes the humor above is triggered by syntactic ambiguity. The sentence ‘this car can fit a whole family without any problems’, which is a surface structure, implies two possible deep structures. These two deep structures give the sentence two meanings, influenced by the prepositional phrase ‘without any problems’. To illustrate this meaning duality, two different constituent structures of the sentence are presented in Figures 4 and 5.

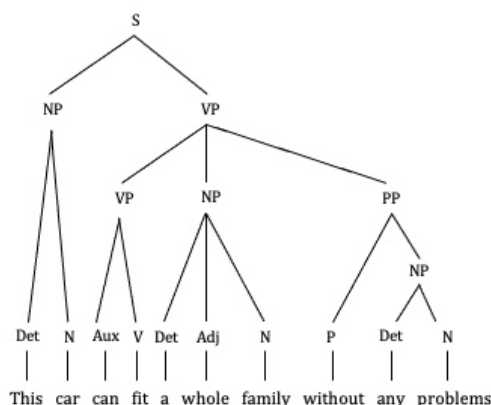


Figure 4. Intended Deep Structure of Salesperson's Statement

In Figure 4, ‘without any problems’ functions as a prepositional phrase modifying the verb ‘fit’. It describes how the action of fitting the family into the car is performed, indicating that the action is smooth, effortless, and without difficulties. The sentence emphasizes the ease with which the car accommodates a whole family.

The structure in Figure 4 represents what the salesperson intends to convey to the customers. The prepositional phrase ‘without any problems’, modifying the verb ‘fit’, highlights the car's capability. However, the customer humorously interprets the statement by creating another structure, as seen in Figure 5.

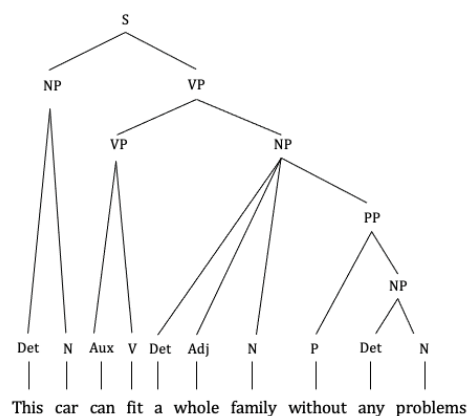


Figure 5. The Deep Structure Understood by the Customer

The deep structure in Figure 5 shows that ‘without any problems’ functions as a modifier of the noun phrase ‘a whole family’. It describes the family itself rather

than the action of fitting, as explained in Figure 4. The phrase indicates that the family that can be fit in the car is one that does not have any issues. This structure is highlighted by the husband's response, 'Damn, my wife and I have a lot of problems'.

In both deep structures, 'this car' is the subject, 'can' is the modal verb, 'fit' is the main verb, and 'a whole family' is the direct object. The difference lies in how the prepositional phrase 'without any problems' is interpreted, either modifying the verb 'fit' or the noun phrase 'a whole family'. These dual interpretations caused by a syntactic structure are proof that syntactic ambiguity can be exploited to bring humor.



Figure 6. Therapist's Statement Causing Syntactic Ambiguity

The meme in Figure 6 portrays a scenario where a married couple seeks therapy because the wife feels unappreciated in the relationship. Specifically, she mentions to the therapist that her husband has never given her flowers, which she interprets as a lack of romantic gestures. The therapist then asks the husband directly if this claim is true. The husband responds that he didn't realize his wife sold flowers, so he never thought to buy them for her.

The response from the husband is comedic due to incongruity. Based on the wife's complaint about never receiving flowers, the therapist likely anticipated a straightforward confirmation or denial from the husband. However, the husband's interpretation of the situation is different, leading to a comedic misunderstanding. Rather than simply confirming or denying the claim, he humorously reveals that he did not realize his wife sold flowers, hence why he never thought to buy them for her. This unexpected twist adds humor to the interaction, as it deviates from the expected yes or no response.

The humor arises from the different semantic interpretations of the sentence 'your wife says you never buy her flowers'. Based on the explanation above, there are two possible meanings of this statement. The first meaning is that the husband never buys flowers for his wife. The second meaning is that the husband never buys the flowers sold by his wife. These dual meanings, or deep structures, are influenced by the surface structure, particularly the noun phrase 'her flowers'. The constituents of each meaning are shown in Figures 7 and 8.

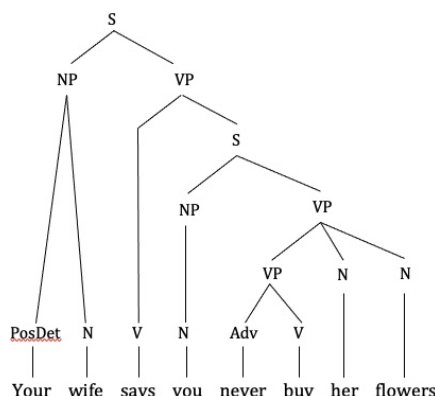


Figure 7. Constituent Structure of 'her' as Indirect Object

What the wife and the therapist meant is the first meaning, which is shown by the structure in Figure 7. In this deep structure, 'her' functions as the indirect object, representing the recipient of the action 'buying'. The direct object is 'flowers', representing what is being bought. The sentence implies that the husband does not purchase flowers for his wife, with 'her' indicating that the flowers are intended for the wife. The incongruity of the husband's response is illustrated by the structure shown in figure 8.

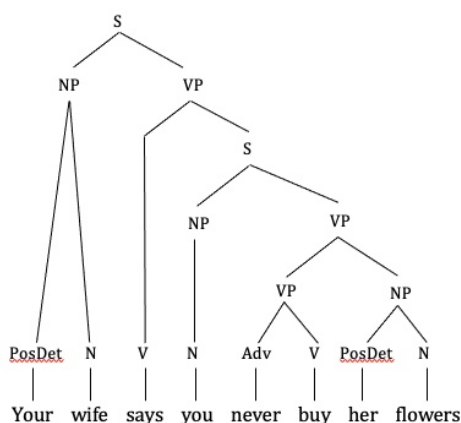


Figure 8. Constituent Structure of 'her' as Possessive Determiner Modifying 'flowers'

The deep structure shown in Figure 8 illustrates the possessive structure of the word 'her'. In this deep structure, 'her' functions as a possessive determiner, indicating that the flowers belong to or are associated with the wife. The possession is denoted by 'her' preceding the word 'flowers', suggesting that the flowers in question are somehow connected to the wife. Based on the husband's response, the flowers are the product sold by his wife. The sentence implies that the husband does not purchase flowers from his wife.

The syntactic ambiguity in the sentence 'your wife says you never buy her flowers' is influenced by the word 'her', which can play two roles. The first role is as

an indirect object. The second role is as a possessive determiner. As an indirect object, the sentence is understood as 'your wife says you never buy flowers for her', whereas as a possessive determiner, the sentence is understood as 'your wife says you never buy flowers that she possesses'. Based on the foregoing analysis, meaning duality is proven to occur under the influence of syntactic structures.

Between Literal and Metaphorical Ambiguity

Humor caused by incongruity due to ambiguity can also be found in a lexical item that is used metaphorically. Attardo (2020, p. 184) referred to this mechanism as the ambiguity between the literal and the metaphorical. This type of humor indicates that a lexical item, as part of a humorous expression, can convey meanings in both literal and metaphorical manners, leading to different interpretations.



Figure 9. Doctor Playing with Word 'Change'

The meme in Figure 9 shows a conversation between a doctor and a nurse. The female nurse asks the doctor, 'How's that kid doing that swallowed all of those coins?' This question indicates that they received a patient, a child, who had swallowed multiple coins, which could harm the child. Based on the question, the doctor seems to have conducted a procedure to help the patient. Therefore, the nurse asked the doctor for an update. The doctor responded with, 'No change yet', meaning that the child's condition had not shown any improvement.

The meme in Figure 9 employs a lexical item, the word 'change', in two different ways, highlighting its ambiguity. The literal usage of the word is straightforward and not incongruous. The doctor's response of 'no change yet' corresponds to the nurse's inquiry. However, incongruity arises when the doctor plays on the word 'change', which also relates to 'coins'. In everyday transactions, 'change' refers to the coins given back when a buyer pays with larger notes. By applying this economic concept to a medical context, where 'change' typically denotes improvements in health, the doctor creates a pun related to the swallowed coins. This wordplay introduces humor into the meme, emphasizing the dual meaning of 'change' and the unexpected turn in the conversation.



Figure 10. Patient Playing with Word 'Waves'

The meme in Figure 10 depicts a woman visiting a therapist to discuss her phobia. The therapist asked her about the reason for her visit. The woman explained that she has a severe fear of tsunamis. The therapist then asked a follow-up question: 'How bad is it?' The woman responded, 'It comes in waves', indicating that her fear fluctuates over time rather than being constant.

In contrast to Figure 9, where the ambiguous lexical item is acceptable in both literal and metaphorical senses, Figure 10 leans more towards the metaphorical. The word 'waves' is the focal point of the humor, playing on human cognition to understand the woman's fear as resembling ocean waves. The incongruity arises when the woman uses a word strongly associated with her fear—tsunami—to describe the fluctuating nature of her fear. On one level, she is describing the intensity of her fear; on another, it creates humor because 'waves' can refer both to the literal waves of a tsunami and the figurative 'waves' of fear. The humor derives from the unexpectedness of the woman's response. The therapist likely anticipated a straightforward explanation of the fear's severity but instead encountered a clever wordplay.

Referential Ambiguity

According to Attardo (2020, p. 184), referential ambiguity is two possible interpretations caused by issues in referencing information within sentences. In relation to humor, this type of ambiguity is usually found in ellipsed constituent.



Figure 11. Server's Question Causing Referential Ambiguity

In Figure 11, a couple is depicted enjoying a meal at a restaurant, with wine as their beverage. The man's glass is empty, indicating he has finished his wine. Observing this, a female server approaches and offers him another glass, saying, 'I see your glass is empty, sir. Would you like another?' The man responds with a question, 'Why would I want two empty glasses?'

The humor in this scenario arises from the unexpected way the man interprets the server's offer to refill his glass. Normally, one would simply accept or decline such an offer, but the man's response deviates from this expectation. This unexpected reply adds surprise to the interaction. The server anticipates a straightforward response regarding refilling the glass; thus, the man's unconventional answer creates a humorous moment and disrupts the usual flow of conversation in a restaurant setting.

This humor is further heightened by referential ambiguity, emphasized by the use of the word 'another'. While the server's question appears straightforward, the word 'another' can be interpreted in multiple ways. Textually, it could refer to another empty glass, which would logically align with the man's response. However, in the context of the conversation, 'another' actually refers to more wine. This discrepancy between what the man understands and what the server intends adds complexity to the situation and enhances the humor. The word 'another' becomes ambiguous because its interpretation can vary, both within the ongoing conversation (endophoric) and outside of it (exophoric).



Figure 12. Interrogative Tweet Causing Referential Ambiguity

The meme in Figure 12 features a conversation in the form of tweets. Initially, a question is posed to the public: 'if a woman sleeps with 10 men she's a s**t, but if a man does it... He's??'. The word 's**t' is censored due to offensive nature. The question pertains to the derogatory terms used for women who engage in sexual intercourse with multiple men. In response to this question, another Twitter account quoted it and humorously answered, 'Gay, he's gay'.

The question highlights a societal double standard that frequently exists regarding sexual behavior between men and women. The statement posed in the question tweet underscores a common stereotype where promiscuity in women is often negatively judged and labeled with derogatory terms like 's**t', whereas similar behavior in men may be normalized or even celebrated. This question indirectly challenges gender stereotypes by exposing the inconsistency of this double standard regarding sexual behavior. It underscores how society judges and labels individuals differently based on their gender. Therefore, the answer to the question aims to align with this intention. It is expected to support the normalization of men's behavior in having multiple sexual partners.

The humor arises when the provided answer, 'Gay, he's gay', defies expectations. Instead of challenging the double standard or proposing a more neutral term for a man who sleeps with multiple partners, it humorously suggests that the man would be labeled as 'gay'. This unexpected answer hinges on referential ambiguity. The ambiguity is influenced by the pronoun 'it' in the phrase 'but if a man does it'. This pronoun refers back to the statement preceding the question, which mentions 'sleeps with 10 men'. 'It' functions here as a placeholder for 'sleeps with 10 men', as pronouns 'her' and 'him' are used for 'a woman' and 'a man' respectively. Therefore, 'it' typically refers to non-human entities or actions, including activities. By using 'it' after 'does', the focus is placed on the action of 'sleeping with 10 men'.

Similar to the scenario in Figure 11, the answer 'Gay, he's gay' arises because the question is interpreted with endophoric reference, whereas the expected answer should have used exophoric reference. Therefore, it humorously accepts interpreting the question as 'but if a man does sleep with 10 men, he is?' and

humorously answers it with 'Gay, he's gay'. This interpretation is the source of the humor in the meme.

Pragmatic Ambiguity

Tannen (1979) noted that pragmatic ambiguity arises when speakers use the same linguistic devices to achieve different ends. Attardo (2020) further specifies that this type of ambiguity should be purely pragmatic, meaning the lexical items, syntax, and reference are not inherently ambiguous. This ambiguity can occur because speakers and listeners may interpret a linguistic device, such as a sentence, with different focuses. This type of ambiguity is exemplified in memes like 'you don't say', which have a unique kind of humor.



Figure 13. Different Interpretations of the Cashier's Question

The meme in Figure 13 depicts a conversation between a customer and a cashier at a supermarket. After selecting the products he wants to buy, the customer proceeds to an open register. When it's his turn, he places all the chosen products on the cashier's station. The cashier then asks him, 'Are you buying all these?' Instead of a straightforward yes or no, the customer replies, 'No, I'm stealing them. I just wanted to show you first', revealing the customer's sarcastic tone.

The humor in the meme stems from the dual interpretation of the cashier's question. It is important to note that the question 'Are you buying all these?' is lexically clear, as each word has a straightforward meaning. It is syntactically clear, with no ambiguous structure, and referentially clear, without tricky reference. The ambiguity arises solely from how the question is interpreted.

Examining the customer's response, it remains relevant to the nature of the question asked. The question is a straightforward yes-or-no inquiry. The customer's response is a direct 'no'. However, the shift in focus occurs within the question itself. The cashier's intention is to ascertain whether all the products on the station belong to the customer, framing the question as 'Are you buying ALL THESE?' On the other

hand, the customer interprets the question differently based on their complete answer, understanding it as 'Are you BUYING all these?' This difference in interpretation creates incongruity between the intended meaning of the cashier's question and the customer's response.



Figure 14. Different Interpretations of the Server's Question

Figure 14 depicts a scenario where a server greets a customer and asks, 'Would you like a table?' This question implies that the customer has just arrived at the restaurant. Instead of simply responding with a straightforward 'yes' to indicate a desire for a table, the customer humorously replies, 'No, not at all. I came here to eat on the floor. Carpet for 5 please'. This sarcastic response indicates the customer's playful attitude towards the server's question.

The humor arises from the unexpected nature of the customer's response. Rather than giving a direct answer, the customer exaggerates in a humorous way by pretending to prefer dining on the floor and even requests a 'carpet for 5', as if organizing a picnic indoors. This incongruous response is influenced by pragmatic ambiguity.

When the server asks, 'Would you like a table?' the server intends to confirm whether the customer needs seating arrangements. However, the customer interprets the question as 'Would you like A TABLE?', finding it absurd because it's generally assumed that a customer coming to a restaurant would indeed want a table. This misinterpretation adds to the humor of the situation.

Exploitation of Meaning Duality

The data presented above demonstrate how each meme constructs humor using only one type of ambiguity. This study also identifies memes that exhibit duality in ambiguity, where two meanings arise from two types of ambiguity. Below is an example of a meme that incorporates both lexical and syntactic ambiguities.

head noun of the noun phrase 'country fan'. It describes the intensity or extent of the woman's enthusiasm or dedication as a fan. This structure implies that the woman is a passionate fan of country music.

The structure on the right in Figure 16 represents the interpretation of the man. In this structure, 'big' functions as an adjective modifying 'country'. It describes the size or significance of the country in the context of being a fan. This structure implies that the woman is a fan of a particular large country.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research. Bao (2016) and Haryadi, Rejeki, and Setyowati (2022, p. 71) focused solely on lexical ambiguity in memes, noting that words with multiple meanings can lead to misunderstandings that create humor in memes. Their findings are further supported by the current study, which identifies multiple types of ambiguities contributing to humor, and demonstrates how lexical ambiguity can be enhanced by syntactic ambiguity to amplify humor.

Yolanda, Bram, Ardi, and Doborovich (2023) suggest that humor in internet jokes is influenced by lexical, referential, and syntactic ambiguities. However, they note that their data primarily address complex interpretations rather than surface-deep structures. In contrast, the current study provides data and analysis showing how surface structures can contain multiple deep structures due to ambiguous constituent structures.

Bao (2016) also noted that humor serves to create an atmosphere and enhance interpersonal communication. Through the current study, another function of humor is identified: sarcasm. This function arises specifically from pragmatic ambiguity, as discussed earlier.

Regarding incongruity as a source of humor, Nijholt (2018), citing Bergson (2003), suggests that stereotypical interpretations are established in specific situations, and humor emerges when there is a deviation from these stereotypes. This concept is clearly illustrated in the data and analysis presented above. Each meme establishes an initial frame of common interpretation through text in the first panel. Subsequently, this common interpretation is unexpectedly twisted, amusing people by humorously defying their expectations.

CONCLUSION

Based on the preceding analysis, humor in English memes stems from various interpretations of the opening statements, where one specific interpretation creates incongruity. Each meme begins with an initial text that establishes expectations for the conversation, only to diverge unexpectedly. This divergence is attributed to the presence of multiple meanings influenced by lexical ambiguity, syntactic ambiguity, literal versus metaphorical ambiguity, referential ambiguity, and pragmatic ambiguity.

Among these mechanisms, lexical ambiguity emerges as the most frequently exploited based on the study's findings. The research also demonstrates that syntactic ambiguity relates to ambiguous phrase structures. Additionally, it provides data and analysis on literal versus metaphorical ambiguity and pragmatic ambiguity. Of these ambiguities, pragmatic ambiguity is particularly utilized to create humor with a sarcastic undertone. English memes often combine multiple

ambiguities to create humor, such as the integration of lexical and syntactic ambiguities.

The study of humor remains an expansive field. While the current study focuses on English memes, future research could investigate humor in spoken data from movies or comedy shows, potentially analyzing prosodic features. Another avenue for research could be the analysis of sarcasm through meaning duality, building on the examples provided in the current study.

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