JUST FOR A LAUGH: HUMOR IN COMICS

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Abstract

This paper is to describe how to understand humor in English comic strips based on the stage of humor and the incongruity theory. It is a descriptive qualitative study and the object of this study is comic strips 'Rose Is Rose'. This study finds that humor is there in comic strips. Rose is Rose fulfills the stages of humor, namely the setup, the paradox, the denouement and the release. In addition, Rose is Rose also satisfies the incongruity theory. It means one who reads this comic strips will find enjoyment, at least laughter, as a response to the perception of incongruity.

I. Introduction

Humor is a part of the human experience. As human beings, we have the ability to laugh at ourselves and others. In other words, directly or indirectly we are able to make jokes, to add humor to situations which are seemingly without humor, and to be absurd. Humor is part of everyone’s experience, and those who have no sense of humor would probably not admit it.

Humor is also a component of culture. The humor of an individual or nation is an integral part of that such a person or nation’s culture. It means that understanding the sense of humor of a people is a key element of understanding the culture and language and perhaps even more importantly of developing relationships with people from that country.

Previous study conducted by Morain (1991) as quoted by Hadley (2001:383) describes a study in which the reactions of international students were sought to America comic strips appearing in the New Yorker in 1990. She discovered that international students found humor to be hard to understand and most said they experienced a sense of isolation and even alienation from the target culture group when humor passed them. In addition, she found there were five general areas of culture with which one must be familiar in order to understand the comic that were analyzed: The social world (including domestic interactions, popular cultural situation and scenes), the working world, the language world (including puns, word plays, body language), the intellectual world (art, music, science, social) and any other world (including visual gags and fantasy). Therefore, it is obvious that understanding humor is necessary for helping people understand the culture and language.

Based on the explanation above, this paper tries to describe how to understand humor in comic strips.
1.1. The Purpose

The purpose of this research is to describe how to understand humor in English comic strips based on the stage of humor and the incongruity theory.

1.2. The Object of Research

Rose Is Rose is a comic strip, written by Pat Brady since its creation in 1984, and drawn since March 2004 by Don Wimmer. The strip revolves around Rose and Jimbo Gumbo, their son Pasquale, and the family cat Peekaboo. Rose and Jimbo are deeply in love with each other, sometimes exchanging love notes or kissing under the stars, and doting fondly on Pasquale. Moreover, Rose is Rose is unusual, especially in modern comic strips, in that it has a generally positive and cheerful outlook on life and deals heavily with the emotional states of its characters, especially Rose and Pasquale.

1.3. Methodology

The method in this research is selected by considering its appropriateness with the research object. In this case, the object determines the method, not in the other hand. Therefore, I apply descriptive qualitative method since it provides a systematic, factual and accurate description of situation area. (Maxwell, 1996). In this research, I would describe how to understand humor in English comic strips based on the stage of humor and the incongruity theory.

II. Literature Review

What is humor? According to Beeman in Duranti (2001 : 98), it is a performative pragmatics accomplishment involving a wide range of communication skills including, but not exclusively, and management. Another definition is conveyed by Ross (1999 : 1), humor is something that makes a person laugh or smile The aims of humor is creating a concrete feeling of enjoyment for an audience or reader.

The context for humor is crucial for determining whether an individual finds something amusing or not. Even so, it is possible to examine the features of language that have the potential to make people laugh. One of humor theory, according to Hutcheson as quoted by Ross (1999 : 7) the incongruity theory focuses on the element of surprise. It states that humor is created out a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in the joke.

Ross (1999 : 8), furthermore, elicits that humor has various effect whether these are intentional or not. It is simplistic to say that it’s just for a laugh. Humor will have the following elements:

- There is a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in the joke
- The conflict is caused by an ambiguity at some level of language
- The punchline is surprising as it no the expected interpretation, but it resolves the conflict
Meanwhile, Beeman (2001: 98) states that humor involves four stages, the setup, the paradox, the denouement and the release. The setup involves the presentation of the original content material and the first interpretive frame. The paradox involves the creation of the addition frame. The denouement is the point at which the initial and subsequent frames are shown to co-exist creating tension. The release is the enjoyment registered by the audience in the process of realization and the release resulting therefrom.

Where is humor found? Tannen (2005: 163) expressed that humor is anywhere, it is one of the distinctive aspects of any person’s style, directly or indirectly. Directly means in the conversation among groups, on the other hand, humor can be found in media. One of the mass media which illustrates the story is comic strips. A page in newspaper containing several of these comic strips is called, by most Americans, the “funny page” or simply the “funnies”. It is sometimes that first thing they turn to when they open their daily newspaper (Taska, 1976). The delightful thing about some of the comic strips is that while comic strips appeal to reader of all ages and background, they also furnish language material that is culturally based and pedagogically useful. Besides, many strips can be mined for their cultural value alone. The reader can find these individual characterizations as well as in the situations. In short, comic strips tells a lot about various attitudes, interpersonal relationships (those of parents and child, husband and wife, peer groups, and so on), and patterns of behavior (dating, work, school, family and so on).

Dealing with comic strip which is used in this research, Rose is Rose appears in the Jakarta Post.

III. Discussion and Findings

The following is Rose is Rose, a comic strips, that I will analyze based on stages of humor, namely the setup, the paradox, the denouement and the release. Thus, it would be obvious to describe humor in this English comic strips.

The set up begins when Rose and her husband, Jimbo is embracing each other for showing their love. ‘A loving embrace seems to make them extremely happy’. It is such a common phenomenon in western culture where this comic strips come from. It is quite different, in Indonesia culture, for a couple to show
their love directly although they are a family (husband and wife). These such behavior inspires a squirrel who observes them from the top of tree. He says ‘we can learn a **thing or two** from humans. This such utterance becomes the key points for successful creation of paradox. It is in line with what Beenman (2001 : 99) states that

the paradox requires the alternative interpretive frame or frames be presented adequately and be plausible and comprehensible to audience.

What a squirrel says it is really sufficient and appropriate to gain the adequate and comprehensible info for audience. Later on, when a squirrel turns back, he wants to practice what he has learnt from Rose and Jumbo. Thus, when he finds his friend who carries a lot of walnuts, he said “I am always **wide open for hug**” at this point, it is called denouement. It must successfully present juxtaposition or interpretive frames. The squirrel Why is denouement successfully in this comic strip? Because what the squirrel asks, he gets unexpected responses from his friend. Instead of getting the loving embrace from his friend, his friend makes the joke by saying ‘that’s because I’m always the one carrying walnuts”. In turn, the last stage, the release can be proven from the enjoyment that a reader engages, and I think one who reads this comic strip ‘Rose is Rose’ will find humor on it.

In terms of whether this comic strip is fulfilled the incongruity theory or not, let’s see what the incongruity theory says as quoted by Ross (1999 : 7)

humor is created out a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in the joke.

Learning from a couple Rose and Jimbo who show the loving embracing, a squirrel wants to practice it with his partner. However, in fact there is a conflict between them, namely, his partner feels he is the one who always carrying walnuts. Therefore, when a squirrel provides wide open for hug, the unexpected responses comes up from his partner, and it becomes the joke. In sum, this Rose is Rose fulfills is accordance with the incongruity theory.

**IV. Closing**

It is undeniable that humor is there in comic strip. Rose is Rose is one of comic strips which fulfills the stages of humor, namely the setup, the paradox, the denouement and the release. In addition, Rose is Rose also satisfies the in incongruity theory. It means one who reads this comic strips will find enjoyment, at least laughter, as a response to the perception of incongruity.
References


