Humor in School Jokes: A Pragmatic Study

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ABSTRACT

In our lives, there are many instances where we encounter jokes. The media; printed, online, or broadcasted, presents jokes in many ways. Some television programs have their own form of humour such as through talk shows or other kinds of performances. In printed media, we can read humour through comic. Online media also provides certain sites to deliver jokes. We are familiar with 9gag or other sites which post funny pictures or memes. This paper is going to analyse how the jokes in online media is presented using a pragmatic point of view. The researchers took the data from the website and chose the joke about school life and analysed the 30 school jokes using the reference and maxim theory. The result of this study shows that in order to create a school joke, the joke maker violates the reference and maxim.

Keywords: *school joke, maxim, reference*

INTRODUCTION

Jokes may occur in a variety of contexts and, predictably, have different communicative functions connected to a certain extent to these different contexts. One of the possible contexts is within the school context; therefore it is called school jokes. School jokes are jokes that occur in the school linguistics context that may involve students, teachers, and parents. School jokes do not only happen among students, but also between a student and a teacher or the students and their parents at home. The scope of school jokes is jokes which are still relevant to the issues of school such as examination, homework, and classroom and school environment.

How is it possible then that speakers indeed successfully engage in communicative practices that involve humorous exchanges? In our opinion, there are two reasons to propose related to the notion of humour in school jokes namely the refer-

ence matter and the maxim matter. Thus, one of the indications is by claiming that the speaker violates Grice's maxims in which the texts constitute examples of non-cooperative behaviour; nevertheless, the examples do "somehow" make sense, and are understood and recognized as jokes. On the other hand, the reference also becomes important since it will not reach the "humorous" idea if the speaker and the hearer/interlocutor have different interpretation of referents.

This paper is a pragmatics study of school jokes which specifically examines the work of reference and maxim in school jokes. The aim of this study is to reveal that the reference and maxim are significant factors in defining and making the jokes in school jokes. To see how the maxim and reference exploit the jokes, we took 30 school jokes as the data of this study. Further, concerning the terms of cyclicity and saturation, we classified the context into three cycles and analysed them using Grice's maxim and reference.

DISCUSSION

The discussion section will be divided into two parts. The first part is the analysis on the reference. The second part of the discussion is about how the jokes violate the maxim in order to create the joke.

Reference

The first significant factor in defining jokes is the reference assignment. Attardo (2000) implies that the reference is important since it deals with how the hearer is able to pick not just any interpretation, but the interpretation intended by the speaker. Horn & Ward (2007) defines reference as the *indexical* words. This means that we need to know something about the context in order to work out which person, time, and location the speaker intended to refer to. The pragmatics study allows us to explain how the hearer recognizes the speaker's intentions in communication. Therefore, if humour is intended, the central part of what is being communicated must be able to be understood in order for us to arrive or figure out the speaker's jokes. One of the ways is by using the theory of reference, hence enabling us to refer to the thing or person that the speakers talk about. Further, Wenzel (1988) indicates the reference as humour- generating devices since it is employed as the "pointed" text.

From the 30 school jokes, we found that all jokes applied references in the form of definite reference, generic reference, and non-definite reference. The distribution of each type of reference is displayed below:

Table 1. The Reference Distribution

No.	Reference	Occurrence	Percentage
1	Definite	20	67 %
2	Generic	7	23 %
3	Non-Definite	3	10 %
Total		30	100%

The table presents that the highest occurrence of reference is the definite reference which covers 67% of the total. Besides that, the generic reference is the second highest occurrence with 23% and the non-definite reference is 10%. The following discussion will give a close reading for each type of references found in school jokes.

Definite Reference

Definite reference, as its name, has the meaning of something that has been known widely. Cruse (2004) regards definite reference as the most crucial for the functioning of language. He adds definite reference allows the hearer to uniquely identify the referent without any extended information. In other words, definite reference does not require a confirmation from the speaker because the speaker assumes that the referent can be understood by the listener. The example of this definite reference found in the school jokes are:

a) TEACHER: Do you know "London Bridge Is Falling Down?"
PUPIL: No, but I hope no one gets hurt.
b) What is an archaeologist?
Someone whose carrier is in ruins
c) What did they do at the Boston Tea Party?
I don't know. I wasn't invited!

In the first joke, what the teacher means by "London Bridge Is Falling Down" is a song, however the funny thing here is that the pupils thought that the London Bridge is really falling down and that is why they asked whether there were any victims or not. From this example it can be clearly seen that the funny thing here is the different understanding about a particular object between the teacher and the pupils. Both teacher and pupils refer to the same London Bridge, however the teacher aims to confirm whether the pupils know the song or not. The funny thing here the pupils think that the teacher wants to ask if the pupils know that the London Bridge has fallen down. The teacher does not mention the song *London Bridge is Falling Down* because the teacher assumes that the pupils already know that the teacher refers to the song not the real bridge.

The second school joke applies the idea of definite reference in terms of defining the archaeologist's work. The pupils give a dull answer by referring that archaeologist works in historical ruins, which is why they answer the question by saying an archaeologist is someone whose work is in ruins, meaning to say archaeologist's career is in danger. The teacher surely does not expect that kind of answer since the teacher believes that the pupils know who archaeologist is. Because of this answer, which is wrong, still related to the archaeologist's work which is in ruins, this answer is funny. Another funny aspect of this school joke is that the noun *ruins* can have two meanings; the destroyed site and a condition in which a company or someone loses money.

In the third example, this school joke is also related to definite reference. Similar to the school joke 1 where the teacher expects the pupils to know what the Boston Tea Party is. The teacher asks that question to know the pupil's knowledge about the event called the Boston Tea Party. Based on history, the Boston Tea Party is a war which happened in May 10, 1773. The war was an effort to rescue the financially weakened East India Company so as to continue benefiting from the company's valuable position in India done by the government. So, it must be very funny if the pupils unexpectedly answer that question by saying so; that he was not invited to the party thus he does not know what the people were doing there. However, it can be clearly concluded that the teacher and the pupil do not have the same reference about the noun *Boston Tea Party*. Since the Boston Tea Party in fact is not a kind of party, the pupil's answer is funny since he refers to the party and he does not know what people are doing there because he was not invited to the party.

In conclusion, definite reference is related to proper noun. If we talk about a certain proper noun, for example the song *London Bridge is Falling Down* and *Boston Tea Party*, we talk about a particular subject that does not need any confirmation since it is assumed that everybody, relying on mentioning the proper noun only, has already known what subject we are talking about. The school jokes containing definite reference is funny because the given answers are not related to the intended object but referring to another object, as if the listener does not know those particular objects. In short, the "beyond expectation" answers give the funny sense in these school jokes.

Generic Reference

Generic reference in English is a reference to a class of referents. It also refers to something general which everyone knows. Cruse (2004) gives an explanation that generic reference sometimes triggers the ambiguity since the referent used in the utterance may not be relevant to the hearer. In the following, there are three examples of jokes which contain generic reference.

a) ***Pupil: I don't like cheese with holes***
Diner Lady: Well just eat the cheese and leave the holes on the side of your plate!
b) PUPIL: If a person's brain stops working, does he die?
TEACHER: You're alive, aren't you?
c) TEACHER: I think you have your shoes on the wrong feet.
PUPIL: No I don't, teacher. These are the only feet I have.

In the analysis, generic reference is in second place, after definite reference, meaning that the jokes are mostly required to fulfil what the addresser wants to say, to be understood by the addressee by understanding the reference. However in the three examples, even though the addressees understand perfectly, they decide to put a twist in their answers. In the first example, the idea of the conversation is "cheese". The pupil refers to the cheese which is always portrayed in a cartoon, like Tom and Jerry, where the mouse Jerry eats cheese with holes. It indicates that the pupil thinks that the holes in the cheese are caused by the mouse. Then the diner lady who seems to know that cheese actually do not have holes, gives a response that the pupil should not eat the hole parts as well. In the second example, a student asks about whether or not a working brain is a sign of a human's life. While the teacher gives a question in return which also could mean that the student's brain has stopped working but he is still alive. A similar example as second one is shown in the third example, where everyone knows that the term "feet" means the right and left foot. While the teacher is wondering why the student put the shoes on the wrong feet, and the student has a different idea that as long as he has complete feet, he can put them to any foot he wants.

Non-Definite Reference

According to Kreidler (1998), non-definite reference means the hearer must make an extension of a certain noun from their own choice. When non-definite reference happens, new information is also created, but along with one or more accompaniment of the definite reference. As an addition, Cruse (2004) says that the essence of non-definite reference is that the identity of the reference is not germane to the message. There are some non-definite references found in school jokes as it can be seen in the examples below.

a) TEACHER: "Do you ave a good excuse for being absent yesterday?"
PUPIL: "If I had a good excuse for being absent, I'd save it and use it for tomorrow."
b) "We have a very simple dress code at

our school."
"Anything that's comfortable or looks cool is illegal."

The joke examples above show non-definite reference which is found least compared to the other references because they are mostly clear enough to be clarified in the case of definite referring. In the first example, the point of the conversation is "a good excuse for being absent". The teacher asks whether his student has a good reason for not coming to the class yesterday, and the student elaborates from the noun phrase "a good excuse for being absent" even though in the end of his answer, he does not really give the reason which makes this joke have a non-definite reference. The same thing also occurs in the second example; it is imagined that the same person is talking about his "dress code" at school. He gives a statement in the first utterance explaining that his school has a rule about the uniform, then he clarifies that "a very simple dress code" means that anything that's comfortable or looks cool is "illegal". In other words, he is trying to say that the "dress code" is everything opposite from what he has stated; uncomfortable and old-fashioned.

Maxim

The second significant element in defining humour in school jokes is the maxim. The term maxim is related to the notion of Co-operative Principle proposed by Grice. Leech, as cited by Mey (2001), stated that cooperative principle is the extra linguistics motivation in achieving the social goals. There are four kinds of maxims namely the maxim of relation, maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, and maxim of manner (Verschueren, 1999: 32). Each type of maxim will be explained in more detail in the next part of this discussion. How humour can be created through flouting the maxims agrees to Cutting's idea about how someone can deliver a sense of humour in the conversation. Cutting (2002) gives an example and explains that not telling the true intended purpose in conversation can create humour since the hearer does not expect such utterance is spoken.

If the school jokes obey the use of maxim, humorous ideas of the talks will not be achieved. Why does this sort of thing happen? It is simply because the communication is governed by the principles or maxims. It means that the communication has to use the principles which derive from more general principles of rationality or cognition. Allott (2010) construes that the pragmatic principle is an obvious question of how hearers can recognize the relevant speaker intentions, and how speakers can have reasonable confidence that their intended meaning will be understood. Grice (1989) states that the cooperative principle (CP) is about making your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

After analysing the 30 school jokes, we found that all jokes violate Grice's cooperative principles. It is obvious that the jokes also violate the maxims. From the three cycles, we discovered that the school jokes employ the maxim of quantity, quality, relation, and manner as shown in the **Table 2** below.

Table 2: The Maxim Violation Distribution

No.	Maxims	Occurrence	Percentage
1.	Relation	12	40 %
2.	Quantity	9	30 %
3.	Quality	5	17 %
4.	Manner	4	13 %
Total		30	100 %

The dominant maxim that is applied to define the humour in school jokes is the maxim of relation, with 40%. The second place is occupied by the maxim of quantity that covers 30% of the total, while maxim of quality with 17% is in the third place, and the last is maxim of manner with only 13%. The following discussion will explain the details of each maxim violation along with the examples.

Maxim of Relation

From the maxims we found in the school jokes, the one which mostly occurred is the maxim of relation. Grice (1989) explains that the maxim of relation is related to being relevant in giving a response. We can take a look at these three school jokes. The funny thing here is the condition in which the pupils give irrelevant answers toward the questions. The violation of maxim of relation happens in these school jokes.

a) MOTHER: How come you never bring any books home?
SON: Mom, they're schoolbooks, not home books.

b) You've failed history again!
Well you always told me to let bygones be bygones!

c) TEACHER: Young man, you've been late for school five days this week. Does that make you happy?
PUPIL: Sure does. That means its Friday.

The school joke *a)* violates the maxim of relation in terms of the reason why her son never brings his books home. The relevant answer should be because there is no homework or there is a student locker to put the books in. However, her son answers his mom's question by referring to the term schoolbook not home book. In fact, it does not mean that students cannot bring their schoolbook home especially when there is homework or a test. In short, the situation in this school joke is his mom wonders why her son never brings his books home and it is weird if her son never has any homework or tests. His mom also wants to ask her son to study at home not at school only.

The similar thing is seen in the second school joke. The teacher asks the students why the student always fails history test. The pupil answers the question by saying that he has already forgotten the material since the past event, such as history, should be forgotten. Thus, the funny things in this school joke is that the pupil actually wants to say there is no point in passing the history test since the past event should let be in the past.

The last example of the school joke also violates the maxim of relation. As the idea of maxim is the true meaning behind the utterance, in this school joke, the pupil wants to say that he hates school except Friday because Friday is the last school day. That is why when he is asked by his teacher whether he was happy being absent five days a week he says he is happy.

In conclusion, school jokes violate maxim of relation because it is always funny to

say our real intention indirectly especially by using humour. Those three examples of school jokes that violate maxim of relation because the pupil gives the answer in a funny way and is irrelevant to the question but in fact the pupil wants to say something bad.

Maxim of Quantity

The second most occurring maxim in school jokes is the maxim of quantity. This maxim takes place 30% of the total occurrences. Allott (2010, p.45) states that Grice's maxim of quantity has to ensure that the contribution has to be informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange) or does not make the contribution more informative than is required. The example of the violation of the maxim of quantity in school jokes are found in the following conversations:

a) Pupil: I don't like cheese with holes.
Diner Lady: Well just eat the cheese and leave the holes on the side of your plate!
b) TEACHER: I think you have your shoes on the wrong feet.
PUPIL: No I don't, teacher. These are the only feet I have.
c) TEACHER: Do you have a good excuse for being absent yesterday?
PUPIL: If I had a good excuse for being absent, I'd save it and use it for tomorrow.
d) Mother: Does your teacher like you?
Son: Like me, she loves me. Look at all those X's on my test paper!

The first example shows the violation of the maxim of quantity as stated by the diner lady, "Well just eat the cheese and leave the holes on the side of your plate!" This statement does not follow the rule of ensuring that the contribution has to be informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange). The pupil said that she/he did not like cheese with holes, then the diner lady replied *just eat the cheese and leaves the holes on the plate.* The thing that makes this funny is how can we eat the cheese, when we do not like the kind of cheese, while leaving the holes of the cheese on the side of the plate? The pupil mentioned about one kind of cheese, the cheese with holes. On the other hand, to give no excuse for the pupil to not eat, the diner lady just demanded the pupil to eat the cheese and just leave the holes if the pupil did not like them. But in fact, it is an impossible thing to do.

The second example also violates the maxim of quantity in the case of not making the contribution more informative than is required. What the teacher means in the dialogue is that the student may have worn his/her left and right shoes on the wrong feet, but the student does not realise that. Instead of the response which the teacher intended, the student replied that those were the only feet she/he had. This is such a fishy answer from the pupil to what the teacher stated. They encountered miscommunication about the feet and the shoes the teacher and pupil refer to.

While in the third example, instead of answering what the teacher asked, the pupil tends to feel no guilt about his/her absence. On the contrary, he/she challenges the teacher by saying "*If I had a good excuse for being absent, I'd save it and use it for tomorrow".* This is also one example of the maxim of quantity violation by stating what is not required for the current purposes of the exchange between their conversations. This sounds like a ridiculous answer from the student in response to the teacher's anger because she or he did not attend the class on the previous day.

In example four, when the mother asked her son whether his teacher liked him or not, the son gave no appropriate response or information towards what is being asked by his mother. In the beginning of his answer, it may be acceptable that

he told her that his teacher liked him, even loved him. But, in his following answer he mentioned that he got many X's on his test paper. The son violates the maxim of quantity in order to create jokes or an amusing reason, hoping that his mother will not get angry because of the X signs on his test paper. So, he pretended firstly that his teacher loved him a lot by giving many X signs where in texting the "X" is identical with a "hugging" sign that symbolizes love and affection, when in fact, his teacher gave "cross" signs on his test because he had wrong answers.

Maxim of Quality

The third highest occurrence is the violation of the maxim of quality. This maxim occupies 17% of the total maxim violation occurrences in the school jokes that we analysed. Allott (2010, p.46) defines Grice's maxim of quality as the effort to make the contribution that is true. So, we do not need to say what we believe to be false or that which we lack adequate evidence. Some of them are found in school jokes, as the following:

a) PUPIL: If a person's brain stops working, does he die?
TEACHER: You're alive, aren't you?
b) Father: How did your exams go?
Son: I got nearly 100 in every subject.
Father: What do you mean, nearly 100?
Son: I was just a digit out; I averaged 10!
c) TEACHER: Will you two please stop passing notes!
PUPIL: We're not passing notes. We're playing cards.
d) Teacher: Class, we will have only half a day of school this morning.
Class: Hooray!
Teacher: We will have the other half this afternoon!

Referring that the maxim of quality requires us to give the contribution of one that is true; the above example violates this condition. In the first example, to make laughter in the class room, the teacher tends to give an untruthful answer that whenever a person's brain stops working, he will not die or he will stay alive. The funny thing in this conversation is that the teacher tries to tease the pupil that even when his brain stops working, in case he cannot follow the class discussion, he is alive. The teacher is not telling the right answer to what the pupil asks, but prefers to create a joke of that which may be because the student is quite slow to cope with the teaching and learning process in the class.

The second example is another maxim of quality violation because the son did not tell the truth to his father about his score. The son has no intention to lie to his father, he is only afraid that his answer will disappoint him, so he gives a rather longer answer by saying "*I got nearly 100 in every subject",* then his father asks again to make sure*, "What do you mean, nearly 100?",* finally he tries to reveal the truth that he got a very bad score and said, *"I was just a digit out; I averaged 10!".* The son seems to violate the maxim of quality because he has fear that his father will get angry at him when he directly implies that he got a 10 for his exam.

In the third example, the pupil does not admit that they were not cheating when the teacher found them passing notes. They flout the maxim of quality because they pretend that they were not passing notes but playing cards. The pupil tells untrue information in order that the teacher does not get mad at them; in fact, the teacher knows that they are working together during the exam. This is humorous.

While in the fourth example, the teacher tells the class that it will be a half day of school. The students feel very happy and shout, "*Hooray!"* After letting the students

feel free from school, and then the teacher continued his/her speech and says, "*We will have the other half this afternoon!"* This indicates that the teacher violates the maxim of quality. He/she says what the students believe to be true that there will be only a half day of school on that day, and the rest of the day will be free. Yet, in the reality she/he only makes a joke to the students because the class will be continued in the afternoon. We can imagine that the students feel like they were duped by their teacher. This subject makes the laughter of the school jokes as explained above.

Maxim of Manner

In avoiding flouting maxim of manner, the speaker must be aware of obscurity of expression, ambiguity, and unnecessary explanation. Since the object of the analysis is school jokes, there must be some violations in them. Here are the examples of violation of the maxim of manner found in the analysis.

a) "What school do dogs go to?"
"BARK-ley".
b) TEACHER: "How many letters are there in the alphabet?"
PUPIL: "Eleven".
TEACHER: "Eleven!"
PUPIL: "T H E A L P H A B E T = 11!"
c) Father: "How were the exam questions?"
Son: "Easy."
Father: "Then why look so unhappy?"
Son: The questions didn't give me any trouble, but the answers did!

In the first example, ambiguity happens when the first speaker asks about the school of all dogs and the answer has two meanings, firstly a real university in California or secondly, something that is related to dogs because they all bark. While the second example, ambiguity also happens regarding the number of the alphabet. The violation of manner is seen between the teachers who refer to 26 alphabets while the students refer to the number of the word "the alphabet" which is only 11. In the third example, an obscurity happens when the father wants to know about his son's exam. The son's answer makes the joke funny because as readers we cannot blame him for giving such an answer. He intends to remind the father that the problem is not the exam's question but the answer instead.

CONCLUSION

In order to make the jokes in school jokes work, we need to see two significant studies in pragmatics namely the use of the reference and maxim. The importance of the reference is measured whether the speaker and the hearer/ interlocutor have the same indexical or not. Sometimes, when they have different referents to refer to when talking about the same thing in a school context, the jokes or the humorous idea will work. If the speaker and interlocutor do not share the same object as the referent, then the school joke will fail; the interlocutor cannot give the response to that school jokes. Another factor that needs to be considered while making school jokes is the maxim. To make the school joke work, it should violate maxims: whether it be the maxim of quantity, quality, relation, or manner. The purpose is clear; the funny answer is made when the answer is purposely not related to the definite object meant by the speaker, meaning that they do not follow the rule of cooperative principle.

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