

On Ethnic Jokes in Indonesia

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Abstract

This paper aims to describe various scripts opposed in ethnic jokes found among diverse ethnic groups in Indonesia. By examining carefully the humorous discourses extracted from humor collection, English lesson, linguistics text books, and jocular discourses ever heard as well, it is found that several scripts which are often opposed by the joking creators are language distortion, dumbness, stinginess and deceitfulness, and cunningness script. Ethnic jokes found amid various Indonesian ethnic groups essentially constitute a wealthy source to promote a harmonious multicultural society in Indonesia

Key words: *joke, humor, ethnic, discourse*

Introduction

In any society joking activities play an important role because of its function to release human beings from various tensions that they face with in conducting their daily activities. Without jokes, people are trapped in boring routines that tend to bring many kinds of suppression in human life. In spite of its amusing characteristics, humors that appear in various genres are effective tolls to develop collective consciousness among groups of people, as implicated by the following quotation:

Laughter can be used to express an unending variety of emotions. It is based on guilt-free release of aggression, and any release make us perhaps a little better and more capable of understanding one another, our self and life (Grotjahn, 1957: VIII-IX, see also Raskin, 1984: 9).

Indonesia is a state populated with various ethnic groups that do not share common backgrounds. They are separated by various cultural identities, such as religion, language, race, belief, etc. Accordingly, to build mutual solidarities, trusts, and understandings among those ethnic groups is

considered indispensable. The Indonesian state and nation must be developed and strongly stand on the basis of multicultural spirit. The spirit of multiculturalism can be evoked by many different ways. One of which is by deep understanding of the life, attitudes and behaviors of those ethnic groups together with their own specific characteristics. Because everything that concerns human cultures are reflected in linguistic practices, investigations on many kinds of humorous discourse can be used to achieve this purpose. Based on this assumption, this brief paper will try to analyze types of ethnic jokes found in many regions in Indonesia. To gain better understanding, comparisons are carried out by using discourses of the same types found in various foreign ethnic groups.

Although discourses, either oral or written, containing ethnic jokes can easily be found in the use of Indonesian and local languages in Indonesia, the linguistic studies on such materials are considered rare. Most of the studies related to jocular discourses in Indonesia focus their study on play on words (puns) exploited by their creators to arouse comic effects. Among those are studies done by Wijana (1995), Wijana & Rohmadi (2006: 55-76). Unlike those previous studies, this

paper will approach types of ethnic jokes found in Indonesian societies by using script based theory pioneered by Raskin (1984: 99) and applied by Noerhadi (1989: 189), Soedjatmiko (1991: 5-12) and Wijana (2015: 1-16) to analyze other types of discourses, Indonesian cartoons and American literature, Indonesian political humors respectively.

Theoretical Framework

Script based opposition theory departs from the main hypothesis that a text can be characterized as a single-joke carrying text if both of the following conditions are satisfied:

- a. The text is compatible, fully or in part with two different scripts.
- b. The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite in a special sense. (Raskin, 1984: 99)

A text in this matter can be sufficiently defined as the most complete and abstract linguistic unit of either oral and written (Kridalaksana, 1993: 212). Meanwhile, Brown and Yule (1989: 6) define a text as a technical term to refer to the verbal record of a communicative act (see also Wijana, 2014: 296), which means that script is all semantic information that is attached to the word or that are possibly evoked by it. Any script is a representation of the native speaker's knowledge about the world in which he lives and interacts with others. Accordingly every speaker internalizes such a kind of common sense by which he can understand certain routines, standard procedures, or basic situations which occur every day in his society. Beyond the common sense, he also has individual scripts determined by his subjective experiences and restricted scripts that he shares with his family, neighbors, play mates, colleagues, but not with the whole speech community members (Raskin, 1984: 81). By this description, a script is essentially not different from "context" outlined by Sperber & Wilson (1986: 15-16) which is used by the speakers of any language to interpret utterances. For example to understand the following ethnic Jokes (translated from Santoso, 2009: 44) a speaker should know a lot of things instead of just understanding the language structure:

- (1) *Stereotypes of People from Minang, Jogja, and Bali. It is said that these three Indonesian ethnics tend to lose in every marathon competition. First, people from Minang will make a moment stop at every intersection and strategic places because marathon is also used to conduct a survey and feasible study to open Padang Restaurant. Second, the Javanese marathon runners will run very slowly every time they pass a crowd of people because they must bow while saying 'kula nuwun' --'excuse me', and shaking hand with the people on the sides of the road. Third, the Balinese runners will stop when they pass through every spooky places and big trees to pray.*
- (2) *There was once a Sundanese Gajah Mada University student who wanted to go to a toilet. Unfortunately the toilet door was locked because there was already someone inside. Because of the urgent need, he could not stand any longer, and loudly shouted 'Atos?' --'finished?' However, the person inside who was from Jogja was forced to answer it with embarrassment, 'Ora, empuk kok' --'No, it is soft'. The other students who watched the incident were burst to laughter because they understood that 'atos' in Sundanese means 'it's finished/it's done', but, in Javanese, it means 'hard'.*

To fully comprehend (1) and (2), anyone should not merely know the meaning of words and phrases, and types of sentences which construct the discourses, but more importantly they must also be familiar with the attitudes and behaviors of those ethnic groups in interacting with each other in Indonesian social life. By proper comprehension, then someone can identify the scripts that want to be opposed by the joke creators. In (1) the creator intends to oppose the script of Minang people business instinct, Javanese politeness, and Balinese religiousness and the behavior of Indonesian people in general that will not do such kinds of behavior in the marathon competitive situation. In (2), the creator wants to expose a language distortion script between a Javanese and a Sundanese as a reflection of Indonesian multilingual situation in which the two ethnics often laugh at each other when the

lexical units of those languages are contrasted. In the contrasted version of (2), a Sundanese are told to ask a Javanese to take a stone or any kind of a hard object by saying 'Cokot!' that means 'Take it!', and objected by the Javanese because that expression means 'Bite it!' in his/her native language.

Using a large sample of ethnic humor discourses taken from various ethnic group, Raskin (1984: 181-221) finds many kinds of scripts exploited by the creators to make humorous texts, such as script of language distortion, script of dumbness, script of stinginess, and script of cunningness. Without denying some particularities, there must be universals in joking practices. As such, it can be assumed that those kinds of scripts also exist in Indonesian ethnic jokes.

Methods of Investigation

All data presented in this paper are extracted from humor collection written in Indonesian or found in English lesson books and ethnic jokes that the writer has ever heard up to now. The selection begins with a process of sorting to get ethnic script humorous discourses, and setting them aside from the non-ethnic ones. However, the classification is often not easy to carry out because of the slight differences among the joke scripts. The ethnic jokes are then translated into English. Indonesian and local language elements, such as words, phrases, and longer linguistic expressions which are considered very important in arising humorous situation are sometimes deliberately not translated. Further, the ethnic joke discourses are classified according to the scripts used as the basis of their joking creation. As a comparison, the description is completed with foreign ethnic jokes extracted from humor linguistic text books.

Research Findings

A careful investigation towards the data collection finds several scripts commonly exploited to create ethnic joke discourses. Those scripts are analyzed in 1 to 4 below:

1. Language Distortion Script

Language distortion jokes are generally based on differences of linguistic performance between two or among ethnic groups in a society. The majority of the ethnics consider that the minority groups perform a strange linguistic behavior. The linguistic features of the minority are considered less prestigious than the forms used by the majority. Usually this types of joke play upon phonological variations of dialects that belong to the same mutually intelligible language or lexical confusions between two languages, such as shown in (2) above. For example in Indonesian society, Balinese and Acehese are two ethnics that cannot pronounce voiceless dental or alveolar stop /t/. They usually pronounce this sound as voiceless palatal stop /t̪/. For the majority Javanese, the Balinese and Acehese strange linguistic performance can be the target of their joking creativities. The following (3) is a humorous discourse based on this language impediment:

- (3) + *What is the different between /t/ of the Balinese and the Acehese?*
 - *The Balinese /t/ is tourists, but The Acehese /t/ is terrorist.*

Javanese living in Bali also often becomes a joking target because of their inability to pronounce voiced stop consonants, such as /b/, /d/, and /g/ occurring in the word finals either when they speak Balinese, Javanese, or Indonesian as well. They tend to pronounce these sound as /p/, /t/, and /k/ respectively. The Javanese speaking Banyumas dialect can pronounce words end with /b/, /d/, /g/. However the Banyumas Javanese also becomes a joking target for their incapability to pronounce /O/ (unround lower middle back vowel) because this sound is pronounced /a/ in Banyumas Dialect. People from Madura often become a target of language distortion joke because of reduplication and repetition system of their language. This ethnic expresses 'tong-potong' 'cut repeatedly', 'tu-satu' 'one by one', 'ju-baju' 'shirts', while the Indonesian majority say 'memotong-motong', 'satu-satu', 'baju-baju'. Indonesian people insult the Maduranese as improper people to choose as march leaders

because they will give command 'tu-satu', 'wa-duwa', 'ga-tiga', 'one...one, two...two, three...three' instead of the standard command 'satu-satu', 'dua-dua', and 'tiga-tiga'. The Indonesian and the Javanese pronounce /u/ as [U] when this sound occurs in the final closed syllable, such as 'atUr' 'order, regulate', while the Maduranese realize it as /O/, 'atOr'. 'Ra diatUr' 'is not ordered' in Javanese corresponds to 'ra diatOr' in Maduranese. Therefore, 'mangan ra diatur' 'do not eat regularly' correspond to 'mangan ra diator' that phonetically coincides with 'to eat a radiator'. Indonesian people who come from Batak (North Sumatera) are often laughed at by other Indonesians because of their less proficiency in pronouncing unrounded central middle vowel /ə/. They always pronounce this vowel as unrounded front central vowel /e/. Meanwhile, Holmes (1992: 134) exemplifies the following anecdote to explain the difference between British English and New Zealand English in which the pronunciation of 'dad' 'father' is similar to 'died' 'passed away':

- (4) *A British visitor to New Zealand decided while he was in Auckland he would look up an old friend from his war days. He found the address, walked up the path and knocked on the door.*
'Giddy, said the young man who opened the door, 'What can I do for you'
'I've called to see me old mate Don Stone', said the visitor.
'Oh he's dead now mate' said the young man.
The visitor was about to express condolences when he was thumped on the back by Don Stone himself. The young man had said 'here's dad now mate, as his father came in the gate.

2. Dumbness Script

Dumbness script jokes are created on the basis of accusation of some ethnics of being stupid, less educated, and less intelligent, etc. The people belonging to the accused group are often told to behave strangely from the view point of the accusers because they do not perform such a stupid behavior in the same situation. In Indonesian

society, people from Madura are considered less intelligent than other ethnics. Accordingly, people who belong to this ethnic group are used to become a figure of jocular discourse developed on this kind of script, as shown by (5) below

- (5) *A Maduranese man was asked to measure the height of a flag pole. All people watching how the Maduranese did the job were very surprised because he measured it by climbing the pole without first lying down it. This was totally different from what common people usually did. The reasons was because he wanted to measure the height of the pole instead of its length.*

People from Ambon are also often alluded to and stigmatized as less intelligent people. In discourse (6) they do not know that the film title "Ten Commandments" (a colossal film starred by Charlton Heston) cannot be changed into "Two commandments" to make its playing time shorter because he does not have a lot of time to watch. This is told by Warkop, a popular comedian group in the middle of the seventies, about an Ambonese male in front of ticket counter with his strong accented Indonesian.

- (6) *"Eei... sepuluh perintah terlalu lama, beta mau 2 perintah saja" (oh..ten commandments are too long, so I want to buy two commandments only).*

Among Russian ethnic groups, Ukrainians are considered stupid minority, and often to be a target of dumbness based script humorous discourse, as shown by (7) extracted from (Raskin, 1984: 186):

- (7) + *How many Ukrainians does it take to charge a light bulb?*
- *Five. One to stand on the table and put the bulb in and four to turn the table.*

Jewish are always scripted clever or genius, but Polish are described stupid and dumb for they never use their brain, as seen in (8) taken from Raskin (1984: 187):

- (8) *A patient in hospital is offered a choice of two kinds of brains for his brain transplant. "We have Jewish brains," he is*

told at \$ 5,000 and Polish brain at \$ 10,000." How come the Polish brains are twice as much as the Jewish brains?" he asks in amazement. "Well, sir, the Polish brains are brand new. They have never been used."

3. Stinginess and Deceitfulness Script

Jokes belong to scripts of this type are created from the facts that several ethnic groups have a specific trait of being more economical or more generous compared to others. Arabs are often to be the joking target as people with such characters. Meanwhile, because of their profession or livelihood as traders, Chinese are often insulted as people who are full of deceitfulness. Consider (8), (9) and (10) below. Discourse (8) and (10) are translated from their Indonesian version found in Jamboel (2012: 73-74) and (9) are precisely extracted from Priyasudiarja and Purwaningsih (2011: 27) without any modification. In (8) the stinginess is represented by only one out of three requests fulfilled by the genie. This discourse entrusts that treating a woman is much more difficult than constructing a building on the mountain top. In (9) the stinginess is combined with the play on idiomatic and literal meaning of *take* and *give*. In (10) the stinginess script, is presented together with many kinds of script own by other races.

(8) *An Archaeologist and a Magic Lamp Genie.*

An archaeologist was digging the ruin of an old civilization around an archeological sites. When he found a magic lamp, he directly rubbed the lamp, and suddenly appeared a genie. "Bless you, you have freed me, and as a return you may ask for one request." "Oh, where are the other two? Because, there used to be three requests to demand, right?" said the archeologist. "Oh, no, you must be watching television too much. I will just grant you one request, and you can object it in case it is very difficult to realize.

"Now, say what you want," said the genie confidently.

"Hmm, up to now I just want to reach the top of Semeru, but I am not strong enough to walk up there. So, please help me make

an escalator that goes up and down from the bottom to the top." the archaeologist replied.

"What?!!!!", the genie shouted loudly. "Your request is absolutely impossible. It will cost for trillions rupiah, for millions of cement sacks, hundred thousands of workers, and years of constructing time. Damn you, make another option!" The archaeologist felt very disappointed because the genie could not realize what he had asked for. Then he thought a while, and finally said.

"All right then. This is very simple request. I just want to understand a woman felling, make her happy, and especially make her obedient to me. Now, the genie turned very confused, and with very pity looking, he finally said,

"What color of holder do you want for your escalator, red or blue?"

(9) *A Stingy Rich Man*

There was a rich man in Nasreddin's village. Even though he was rich, nobody really liked him because he was very stingy. One afternoon, he went to a river bank for a walk. While walking, he was playing with his coins just to kill the time. Losing concentration, he dropped the coin into the river. He got so disturbed and tried hard to get the coin back. He didn't manage to keep his balance, so he fell into the river. Since he didn't know how to swim, he was about to get drown. The villagers gathered around the river bank, trying to save him.

"Give your hand! Give your hand!" the people shouted. Miraculously, the man didn't want to extend his hands. At that time Nasreddin happened to pass by.

"Nasreddin, you should do something. Hasan, the rich, has fallen into the river. He is going to get drown, but he doesn't let us save him," one of them told Nasreddin.

"Let me try," Nasreddin replied. He went to the bank of the big river immediately and rolled up his sleeves. Hasan, Hasan, take my hand! Nasreddin shouted to the drowning man. To this the man immediately extended his hand and grabbed Nasreddin's arm. Now Nasreddin and the others were able to pull the man out of the water.

"How could you make it, Nasreddin?" one of the villagers asked.

"It's easy. He is quite stingy, right? He is not used to giving to others. He is better at taking than giving. So use the word 'take' not 'give'. Nasreddin replied calmly. The people nodded their heads, indicating that they understood. They know that the stingy person never give but take something.

(10) Ten Commandments.

It was said that the 10 commandments were not for the Israelis, but for other people as well. However, just other people rejected them. This is the story...

An angel went to Italia.

Angel: Hey, you are Italians. Do you want a God commandment or not?

Italians: What is the commandment?

Angel: Do not kill!

Italians: Oh, sorry we are mafia, killing is our activities.

Then the angel flew to Russia.

Angel: Hey, you are Russians, do you want God commandment?

Russians: What is it about?

Angel: Pray to your God!

Russians: Sorry, we are atheists. We do not believe in your God.

Angel: Hey, you are Chinese people, do all of you need a God commandment?

Chinese people: What is that about?

Angel: Never tell a lie.

Chinese peoples: Sorry, we are traders. So, we must cheat.

The angel became very frustrated, and finally flew to Israel who were stubborn. Who knows, they would accept it.

Angel: Hey, you are Israelis, Do you want a God commandment?

Israeli: Do we have to pay for it?

Angel: No, it is free.

Israeli: Ok, we take 10.

4. Cunningness Script

Although Maduranese people in many cases are regarded as people who are full of dumbness, in some jocular discourses this ethnic group is alluded to people whose cunningness can solve various of problems of their daily life in their own unique and tricky

ways. Other ethnic groups usually do not take such ways in case of facing with such situations. The following (11) extracted from Buchari (2006: 10) shows how a Maduranese orange seller answers the complaining costumer about the sour taste of oranges she has bought. In this discourse homonymic Javanese word 'pencil' 'pinch' is clashed with 'pencil' 'nipple'.

(11) Abunawas sold Oranges

Following his friends invitations, Abunawas sold oranges in Tanah Merah Bangkalan Market, Madura. Early in the morning, Abunawas had got to that busy market. And not long after, his merchandises were crowded around by costumers.

Costumers: How much is this orange a kilogram?

Abunawas: Five thousands.

Costumers: How come these very little oranges cost that high?

Abunawas: It is not bad, Ma'am. It is better that my orange is as big as a pinch (pencil) than the nipple (pencil) is as big as an orange.

Having heard Abunawas' answer, the female costumer was gone. She did not buy Abunawas' orange. Afterwards another female costumer came.

Costumer: Are these oranges sweet?

Abunawas: Sure, Ma'am. These oranges are from Madura.

Costumer: Give me two kilograms. Can I get a lower price?

Abunawas: Sorry Ma'am, this is fixed price. Even though you buy one hundred kilograms, the price will be the same.

The costumer bought two kilograms and then she was gone. However, two hours later she came back, and protested Abunawas with an angry voice.

Costumer: You said that these oranges were sweet? And, why are they sour? You Cheated me.

Abunawas: Oh Ma'am, I do not live inside the oranges. So I cannot differentiate them one by one. Which orange is sweet and which orange is sour?

Costumer: I am protesting it. I am very disappointed buying two kilograms.

Abunawas: You just bought two kilograms. I bought 1 truck, but never make a protest.

Among the world ethnics, Jewish people are well known of their cunningness. The following (12) and (13) are humorous discourses taken from Raskin (1984: 192-193) which represent how cunning and tricky the Jew is:

(12) *A Jew and a Gentile have an automobile accident: their cars collided at an intersection. They call the police and wait for them to arrive. Neither is injured but both are shaken. The Jew takes out a flask with vodka and offers it to the other. The man gladly accepts and takes a sip. Then he returns the flask to the Jew with thanks and says, "Now help yourself." "Oh no," says the Jew. "I'd better wait for the police to establish now who is the guilty party."*

(13) *There was a Jew in town whose favorite occupation was betting. Once he insisted on an audience with the governor because he had some very important news to report. The governor was incredulous but decided to see him. "Your Excellency", said the Jew. "I am afraid I have bad news for you. You are developing a huge boil on your behind, and has to be taken care of immediately." "This is ridiculous," respond the governor. I have nothing of the kind. "I will bet you 5 rubles that you do." "Well," said the governor, just to punish you for your imbecility." He lower his trousers, and sure enough that no boil in his behind. "Wait a second!" said the Jew. "I don't understand. I know that you do have a boil there. May be it is very small. Come to the window -There is more light there. No, you are right, there is no boil." And he paid the Governor the 5 rubles. "Now, what do you do this thing for?" asked the governor indignantly. Why do you waste money like that?" "Oh no Your Excellency," said the Jew. "I never waste money." "But this stupid bet! You just threw away 5 rubles." "No, Your Excellency, I just made 5 rubles. "What do you mean?" I bet somebody on the street that he would see the governor bare ass in this window.*

Conclusion

Any humorous discourse which concerns ethnic jokes is commonly created on the basis of scripts oppositions. The universal scripts that are used to oppose are language distortion, dumbness, stinginess or deceitfulness, and cunningness. In humor creation, one kind of script is often and easily mixed with the other. In language distortion script, the languages of the minority groups are treated as less prestigious or not standard than those used by the majority ones. At the same time the minorities are also alluded to behaving more stupidly, more economically, dishonestly, more trickily, etc. because the majority will not perform such behaviors if they face the same situations.

In order to be able to live in harmony, every ethnic group should have good understanding about every ethnic group's behavior because every behavior has its own strength and weakness. Each ethnic group must be able to corporate in synergetic ways. Accordingly, all ethnic groups should accept those differences with tolerance. For this matter, ethnic jokes discourses constitute a wealthy source which can broadly inform ethnic behavioral differences which in turn will become an important instrument to develop Indonesia as a harmonious multicultural society.

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