

## Funny English in the Digital World

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### Abstract

This paper aims to study English jokes on Facebook. Since the current generation of our students is often described as Net Geners, learning the English language via jokes posted on social media can be one of the supportive ways for EFL learners to improve their L2 linguistic competence as well as L2 humor competence. The data, or jokes, in this study were collected from one of the most popular public pages, entitled “English is Fun”. Seventy four jokes (out of 200 posts) from 1 to 16 April 2019 were collected and analyzed. The study result revealed that there were two major types of jokes: one was in a textual form while the other was a mixed-code message, or a combination of verbal and non-verbal elements. The latter was further classified into two subtypes: one had a verbal element as the primary factor to provoke humor while the other required interaction between the verbal element and non-verbal element. In addition, the findings showed that there were four types of logical mechanisms: pun, false analogy, faulty reasoning, and satire. As jokes can be a good source of teaching materials, three possible ways for using jokes in teaching the English language were suggested.

**Keywords:** jokes, English jokes, English humor, humor study, L2 humor

### Introduction

Facebook is currently one of the most popular social media as it has created a borderless world since 2004. It has been used for many purposes such as updating a status to presenting an identity. One can set their status as either individual or public, communicating with friends locally and globally, and for commercial purposes, for instance, to advertise products and services. In addition to individual and commercial purposes, Facebook has been also used for pedagogical purposes. For instance, Bosch (2009) studied Facebook use at the University of Cape Town and found that there are potentially positive benefits to using Facebook in teaching and learning. Gray et al. (2010) surveyed the extent and key features of Facebook use among 759 medical students at one university, and explored in depth how effectively students may be using Facebook for supporting their study. On the other hand, Irwin et al. (2012) investigated students' perceptions of using Facebook as an interactive learning resource at a university in Australia. Most students (78.0%) anticipated that a Facebook page would facilitate their learning and promote collaborative and cooperative learning.

Researchers in ELT have also paid attention to Facebook as a platform for learning and teaching the English language. For example, Qureshi et al. (2014) studied the use of Facebook as e-learning tool for higher education. Espinosa (2015) analyzed the possibility of blending conventional instruction with online instruction via a social networking on Facebook in EFL classrooms in order to motivate students and improve their English language learning, and also examined specific ways in which EFL teachers can use Facebook as an educational tool. For instance, a teacher can create a closed group for his or her students to communicate in English by giving comments on a certain topic posted by their peers.

Facebook is not just a platform for being used as a pedagogical tool, but it has become a source of learning on its own. Public pages on Facebook providing tips for learning the English language have been rapidly emerging and seem to be more and more captivating as the number of people including native and non-native speakers who follow the pages has been increasing. In addition to tips for learning the language, the public page creators have also posted English jokes to amuse people. As Facebook is the social medium that provides the most emoticons, their followers can respond to the jokes with emoticons of laugh or “haha”. Such a response shows that Facebook users including both native and non-native speakers appreciate or “get” the English jokes.

Raskin (1985), one of the very first linguists who studied humor systematically using the notion of ‘script’ in cognitive semantics to analyze joke texts, argued that humor is another competence which is not the same as linguistic competence. It is innate as we were born with it. A person who was born and grown with a particular language can tell whether a sentence or text funny or not without a requirement of someone to teach him or her. Although Raskin (1985) does not focus on L2 humor competence, it can be inferred that no matter how high the linguistic competence a second or foreign language learner may have, s/he may fail to acquire L2 humor, and this can lead to a failure in communication. Therefore, L2 humor competence is also important for an EFL learner to communicate naturally and be able to laugh at the same pace as the native speaker does.

Later, Attardo (1994) extended Raskin’s semantic theory of humor to include an important concept of ‘playful logic’ in jokes which cannot be taken as seriously as the logic in the real world. Although joke texts may appear to be concerned with something non-sensical or look like an incongruous or illogical text, they are actually logical, namely in the playful world. In order to justify the contradictory nature of joke texts, he proposed ‘Logical Mechanism’ as a mechanism that can provide resolution to the incongruity in the joke text; thus, it takes part to provoke humor. Well known logical mechanisms include faulty reasoning, exaggeration, and false analogy (see details in Attardo, 2001).

However, to acquire L2 humor may not be easy as L1 humor which is claimed ‘innate’ by Raskin (1985). Bell and Attardo (2010) examined L2 understanding and appreciation of humor by interviewing six non-native postgraduate students, who came to continue their study of the English language and applied linguistics in the US. They found that despite the high linguistic proficiency level in English, L2 learners themselves accepted their failure in L2 humor due to difficulties of vocabulary, culture, and the speed at which playful talks and joke deliveries often takes place.

To prepare our students and probably prevent them from failed L2 humor, EFL teachers may need to examine and understand English jokes first before incorporating them into the classroom. As the current generation of our today’s students is often described as Net Geners, learning the English language by reading online jokes via social media can be one of the supportive ways of foreign language learning. Moreover, online jokes can be a good source of updated teaching materials, not only to help your students acquire L2 humor, but also to possibly improve their L2 linguistic competence simultaneously. Therefore, this paper<sup>1</sup> aims to study the English jokes posted on Facebook with two research questions: (1) Regarding the way the jokes are formed, how many types of jokes are there? and (2) What logical mechanisms of the jokes help provoke humor?

## Review of Literature

Normally, a joke text has two possible readings which typically yield contradictory meanings and then resulting in funny ambiguity. As a joke usually contains such an ambiguity which is

normally different from ordinary ambiguities as it enables us to laugh, many thinkers and philosophers have tried to explain this phenomenon. For instance, Kant (1790) viewed laughter as an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing. In other words, jokes can lead us to seriously expect something, but then we find something else or nothing we expected; thus, we laugh in response to this surprising phenomenon. Also, Freud (1905), another famous philosopher and psychoanalyst who has been considered as the leader of the relief theory in humor study considered laughter as an indicator of pressure relief. To analyze jokes, Freud (1905) proposed the term “condensation” to refer to an ambiguous situation when one object stands for several meanings or ideas.

### **Linguistic Theories in Humor**

Raskin (1979) was one of the very first linguists who showed interest in humor and proposed a theory to study it. He found the term “condensation” proposed by Freud rather vague, and then turned to explain this kind of ambiguity in the way that it is activated by the words in the joke text (Raskin, 1979, p.327). According to Raskin (1979, p.329), our understanding of a sentence’s meaning depends on the two sources: the lexicon and our knowledge of certain things about the world we live in. In other words, the lexicon or words in a joke text contain knowledge which is socially and culturally shared by the joke teller and the joke hearer.

Later, Raskin (1985) published the book entitled “Semantic Mechanism of Humor”, in which he applied the cognitive semantic “script” as a basic unit to analyze a joke text. In his view, the ambiguity in jokes, which is referred to as ‘deliberate ambiguity’ in his book, results from a script opposition and script overlapping. And these are the necessary and sufficient conditions for a text to be recognized as a joke, or humorous text. His notions of script opposition and script overlapping help explain the nature of a joke text that contains contradictory meanings and ambiguity. That is, two scripts oppose each other is the situation when two possible meanings in jokes become contradictory, but they can stay together, or overlap, in the same text though.

More importantly, Raskin (1985) contends that humor competence is not the same thing as linguistic competence. They must be considered as two separate competences. As an illustration, suppose you gave a coherent academic essay that reports the current situation in a society and another text which is a joke to the same readers. And when the readers are able to understand the latter text as well as the former one, this indicates that, according Raskin (1985), humor competence is innate. As a human being (of the same L1), we do not need anyone to teach us what is funny and what is not. Raskin (1985) compared it to how a native speaker can tell which sentence is grammatically correct and which one is not.

Attardo (1994), who is a student of Raskin’s, extended the theory from the semantic script theory of humor (SSTH) to the general theory of verbal humor (GTVH) adding five more parameters to script opposition and script overlapping, which have been shortened into and put together under the single abbreviation SO. Unlike the SSTH that focuses on verbal texts only, the GTVH is applicable for analyzing both the humorous verbal text and the joke that is a combination of verbal and non-verbal elements since Attardo (1994) has added a parameter called Narrative Strategy (NS) referring to how a joke or humorous text is presented. For instance, a joke can be created in the form of question-and-answer as it is often found in riddles. Also, it can be presented as a one liner, or sometimes as a narrative story in which the characters are presented to say or do something funny. With the NS parameter, some researchers applied the GTVH for the analysis of cartoons and caricatures. For instance, Tsakona (2009) analyzed Greek political cartoons published in daily newspapers in Greece.

Apart from NS that helps expand the theory to be applicable for analyzing more humorous text types, the parameter of Logical Mechanism (LM) is also considered important,

as Attardo (1994) put it the second parameter running after SO in the hierarchy of the GTVH<sup>2</sup>. In Attardo's view (1994), most jokes contain logic, which is not the logic in the sense that we observe it in the real world, but a playful logic, or distorted logic, in a playful world. Importantly, LM, according to Attardo (1994), helps resolve the script opposition or the incongruous meanings of a joke to be justifiable and acceptable to readers or hearers. Nevertheless, LM was considered optional although many types of LM have been found in jokes (see details in Attardo, 2001). Let us consider a joke with an example of LM, which is false analogy.

- (1) A married man goes to confessional and tells the priest, "I had an affair with a woman –almost." The priest says, "What do you mean, 'almost'?" The man says, "Well, we got undressed and rubbed together, but then I stopped." The priest replies, "Rubbing together is the same as putting it in. You're not to go near that woman again. Now, say five Hail Mary's and put \$50 in the poor box." The man leaves confessional, goes over and says his prayers, then walks over to the poor box. He pauses for a moment and then starts to leave. The priest, who was watching him, quickly runs over to him and says, "I saw that. You didn't put any money in the poor box!" The man replied, "Well, Father, I rubbed up against it and you said it was the same as putting it in!"  
(Attardo, 2001, p.26)

The character 'married man' in the joke mistakenly performs the act of making donation after confessional as being parallel to having sexual relationship. He apparently follows the process told by the priest, but just only the first few steps, and then he did not complete it by assuming that rubbing against the box is the same as putting his money into it.

LMs can range from a simple wordplay to more complex errors in reasoning such as figure-ground-reversal as shown in:

- (2) Why did the cookie cry?  
Its mother had been away for so long. (Attardo, 1994, p.128)
- (3) How many poles does it take to screw in the light bulb?  
Five. One to hold the light bulb and four to turn the table he's standing on.  
(Attardo, 2001, p.26)

Humor in joke 2 arises from a play upon similar sounds between 'away for' and 'a wafer' while joke 3 shows an unusual way to change the light bulb. Normally, it requires only one person standing on a table to hold the light bulb and turn it around until it fits the socket on the ceiling.

Later in 2004, Hempelmann elaborated the notion of LM as he found that LM works more complicatedly than it has been usually assumed as just a tool to resolve the script opposition, and let alone the script overlapping as a separate condition. According to Hempelmann (2004), LM works closely with the script overlapping (SO<sub>v</sub>) and then resolves the script opposition (SO<sub>p</sub>). Therefore, LM in his view does not work separately but collaboratively with SO<sub>v</sub> and SO<sub>p</sub>, and thus the three conditions (LM, SO<sub>v</sub>, and SO<sub>p</sub>) are necessary and sufficient conditions for a joke text to provoke humor. Let us consider an example from Hempelmann (2004, p. 383).

(4) Those who jump off a Paris bridge are in Seine.

The joke makes use of the punning word “in Seine” of which the pronunciation of the river “Seine” together with the preposition “in” is similar to “insane” to create a script overlapping between the two meanings of ‘in the river’ and ‘crazy’. As a result, the text has two opposing meanings between ‘not crazy’ and ‘crazy’. According to Hempelman (2004, p.383), SOv that includes punning words will trigger an LM, and in turn, the LM resolves the SOP or helps justify the relation between the two incompatible meanings to co-occur in the same text. LM in this joke, which is a wordplay, is considered as a kind of faulty reasoning in language use that one assumes that the French pronunciation of the river “Seine” in France is similar to “sane” in English, and when their sounds are similar or identical, then the meaning must be related or similar (Hempelman, 2004, p.383-385). Therefore, in joke 4, those who jump off a Paris bridge may be crazy as well as falling in the river.

Recently, Hempelmann and Attardo (2011) show agreement that LM is necessary as it helps resolve the script opposition and it has to work along well with the script overlapping to produce humorous effect. Hence, the three key elements, namely SOP, SOv, and LM, are considered necessary and sufficient conditions. In this present paper, the term “mechanism” to provoke humor is used in the same sense as the LM proposed by Hempelman (2004), namely a mechanism of distorted logic that is caused to occur by the script overlapping and has the function to resolve the script opposition so as to make a text funny.

### **Related Literature and Humor in ELT**

Tsakona (2009) analyzed 516 political cartoons published in daily Greek newspapers from December 2004 to March 2005. The researcher adopted GTVH to analyze the data which include both verbal and visual elements. The findings support the theory that humor results from the overlap of two different and incompatible scripts activated in every single cartoon. For instance, a script opposition of ‘normal and abnormal’ was found in a cartoon that presented the Greek Prime Minister in the way that he was expected to show concern about what was going on in the country (normal), but he disclaimed his responsibility and refused to acquire information from the journalists (abnormal) and this caricature was analyzed to have an LM of exaggeration (Tsakona, 2009, p.1176).

Tsakona (2009) further analyzed how verbal and visual elements in the cartoon contribute to humor. It was found that there were three sources of humor. The first one relies on the text, caption and/or the dialogue between the characters in the cartoon, as the primary source of humor whereas in the second type humor arises from the interaction of verbal and visual elements. Finally, the third type is based solely on the visual elements in the cartoon to produce humor. For instance, one cartoon presented Christ with His right hand covering his eyes instead of blessing people with His right hand. According to Tsakona (2009, p.1184), the cartoon presented Christ with a gesture that He refused to see the economic crisis and the members of the Greek clergy involved in scandals during that time. In terms of script opposition, His gesture represents the unexpected script versus the normal script that He normally blesses people with His right hand.

Tsakona’s study on political cartoons in mass media or in newspapers has extended the application of GTVH to analyze humor in both forms of verbal and non-verbal. The findings also shed light on the analysis of jokes in the wider sense beyond a text analysis, but also a multi modal discourse analysis. In this current study, the researcher has adopted his findings as guidelines to analyze jokes in social media with a broader sense instead of being restricted to verbal elements. Apart from the analysis of online jokes, the researcher is also interested in discovering how jokes can be beneficial to EFL teachers and L2 learners.

Scholars in teaching the English language mostly agree that adding humor in the classroom can make the class lively and the students feel relaxed. For example, Medgyes (2002) proposed many activities that include humor in order to make the classroom of different levels an enjoyable place of learning. As an illustration, a game of funny names is recommended as an activity which probably suits the first class (like “getting to know you”) and it is appropriate for beginners (Medgyes, 2002, p.9). The activity lets students introduce themselves with pseudo names using a couple of English words they find funny because of their sound or meaning, or both. In more advanced classes, other activities are suggested (see details in Medgyes, 2002). To me, most of the activities suggested by Medgyes (2002) are rather more appropriate for native students than non-native students who are EFL learners. To illustrate, finding some words that are potentially funny to use as one’s pseudonym can be a difficult task for an EFL learner who has low competence in L2 humor.

Schmitz (2002), on the other hand, is one of the first linguists who made suggestions of learning L2 humor by adding English canned jokes into the classroom. He provided examples of joke texts collected mostly from the Reader’s Digest and the Farmers’ Almanac. According to Schmitz (2002), humor or jokes can be classified into three types: universal humor, culture-based humor, and linguistic humor. The first type has general content without complexity in language use and contains no specific elements that are culture-bound (see examples in (Schmitz, 2002, p.97). Therefore, it was claimed that this type of humor could be mostly suitable for the elementary-level students, or L2 learners at the beginning level (Schmitz, 2002). On the other hand, the second type, which contains specific cultural elements or culture-based content, was claimed to be more appropriate for teaching intermediate students whereas the third type, which includes linguistic ambiguities related to complex meanings and structures, would be more suitable for teaching advanced students (Schmitz, 2002).

Bell (2009) disagrees with Schmitz (2002) that pre-determined types of humor (in forms of canned jokes) are always appropriate for different levels of proficiency. She argued, for instance, that jokes with puns might not be always restricted to teaching only advanced students. Wordplay can come in many forms and this does not mean that beginning learners cannot appreciate this type of humor. As Bell (2009) focused more on humor in ongoing conversations in the classroom, she found that even punning could occur during the teacher-student talks of which the L2 students’ linguistic proficiency was not at the advanced level. Bell (2009, p.246) also questioned the distinction between universal humor and culture-based humor. Particularly, the idea of a universal humor is problematic and difficult to classify. She did not deny that some types of human behavior put in the jokes are likely to be found in human societies around the world, but the situations in which they will be found may vary (Bell, 2009, p.247).

The idea of adding English jokes (in the form of canned jokes) into the classroom of L2 learners that Schmitz (2002) has proposed is appreciated as the atmosphere in the classroom will be relaxed and it can possibly help L2 learners increase their competence in L2 humor as they have more opportunities to get exposure to L2 humor. However, his taxonomy of joke types may be problematic as argued by Bell (2009). Some jokes travel better across languages and cultures than others due to the new technologies that have blurred geographical boundaries, particularly in the online world. In addition, it might be difficult to determine what types of jokes are suitable for which types of learners. To this point, I agree with Bell (2009). For instance, puns or wordplay have different degree of complexity. Less complicated ones can be learned and appreciated by L2 learners at the beginning level.

With main focus on humor in ongoing conversation, Bell (2009) paid more attention to conversational joking which depends heavily on the immediate contexts including the previous turns and the surrounding environment where the speakers are situated. To me,

conversational joking is another skill that requires good command of speaking skills and pragmatic competence to interact and interpret the utterance produced by the other interlocutor. To add English jokes into the classroom in the forms of canned jokes (like Schmitz picked them up from Reader's Digest and the Farmers' Almanac) would be much more interesting as a good start before moving onto conversational joking which is a much more demanding skill. Moreover, today's canned jokes are not produced limitedly in newspaper or magazines, but more of them are found on the Internet via social media. Thus, it is much easier and more up to date for an EFL teacher or researcher to collect such jokes than to wait for conversational joking which is something unpredictable. Therefore, the focus in this study is on canned jokes and excludes conversational joking.

## Methodology

In this research, analyzing the mechanisms to provoke humor in the data will be done on the basis of the concept of LM of the GTVH which has been elaborated by Hempelmann (2004). The data in this study were from a public page on Facebook. Nevertheless, as there are various types of posts on Facebook, to collect only the posts that are jokes separately from other non-jokes in this research were done on the basis of two criteria. One is the definition of jokes proposed by scholars in the field of humor study and the other is an emoticon provided by Facebook. Let us first consider the academic definition of joke used in this research.

## Definition of Joke

To identify a "*joke*" in this research is made on two criteria. First, it is based on the definition of joke proposed by Attardo & Chabanne (1992) that "*joke*" is a playful text type presented in forms of micro narratives, or one of the smallest forms of conventional narrative text type, which can comprise only verbal element and a mixed code message of verbal and non-verbal, or visual, elements. As it is a playful text, it is not considered seriously as "real"; thus, it conforms to the playful world and playful logic (Attardo, 1994), and it excludes "anecdote" which is related to existing people in the history and believed to be real. Therefore, "*joke*" in this sense is also in line with the parameter NS in the GTVH (Attardo, 1994) which includes cartoon and caricature that are playfully created with the purpose to pragmatically amuse people or joke readers.

Additionally, it is widely well known that Facebook provides the most emoticons than any other social media. Thus, Facebook users, or page followers, can choose any of the emoticons to show their feelings in respond to what is posted.

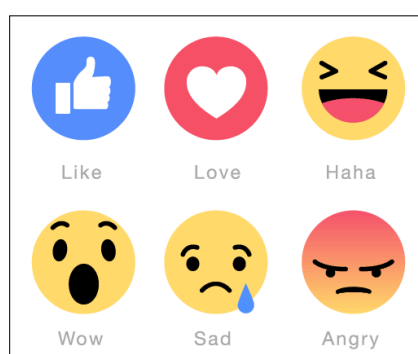


Figure 1: Facebook emoticons

Among the six emoticons provided by Facebook, the emoticon of ‘haha’, which represents laughter, can be considered the best indicator of humor; thus, in this research this emoticon will also be taken into account, and hereafter it will be referred to as the emoticon of laughter. Any post that is responded with the emoticon of laughter was collected as “joke”, except the ones that do not conform to the definition given by Attardo & Chabanne (1992).

On the other hand, any posts that got no response of the emoticon of laughter and have no characteristics that conform to the joke definition were not collected as data in this research. For example, let us consider and compare the two posts below.

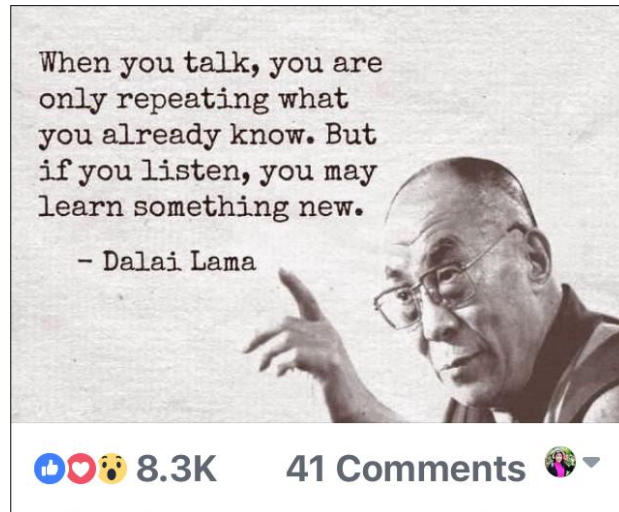


Figure 2: Saying given by Dalai Lama



Figure 3: Joke

As can be clearly seen, although figure 2 shows a post that has a high number of responses, namely 8.3K (8,300), no emoticon of laughter was shown in the combination of the three emoticons under the post. Therefore, this kind of data was not collected, whereas figure 3 shows a post that got responses in which the emoticon of laughter is shown in



combination with the other two emoticons which are ‘like’ and ‘love’. As it got the emoticon of laughter, this kind of posts was collected as a joke.

### Data Collection

This study collected only English jokes posted on the public page entitled “English is Fun”. Compared to other public pages on Facebook which are concerned with English learning in terms of the number of followers, “English is fun” is currently the most popular page with the highest number of over three million followers around the world including my colleagues (EFL Thai teachers), overseas friends and Thai students.

This page was founded in March 2012 with a clear purpose as it states, under the “About” section, that *this page is for those who love English*, with a profile picture which is put in the form of a heart with flags of two native countries (America and Britain) connected together.



Figure 4: Profile picture of the public page ‘English is Fun’

This page contains many types of posts concerning the English language such as tips for learning English grammar, witty saying or famous expression given by celebrities, and English jokes. Only jokes posted since the 1st of April 2019 (April’s fool day) to the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 2019, which was the last public holiday (added to the original three days of 13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> April by the government in Thailand) for celebrating Thai New Year, were collected. Therefore, the time frame selected in this research to collect the data is the time of being relaxed and enjoying yourself which conforms to the nature of jokes that are normally produced to amuse and entertain people.

From the 1st of April 2019 (April’s fool day) to the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 2019, 74 out of 200 posts were collected as jokes. The data collection was made 16 times starting on the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> of April and done on the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2019. In other words, the researcher collected jokes after they were posted and left on the page for seven days or one week for people to read and respond. For instance, jokes that were posted on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, 2019, were collected in the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> of April, 2019.

This method is used in order to control the equal length of time for every single joke to be shown or presented to the public. This is due to the fact that the number of responses may change when some jokes stay longer on the page and there are a higher number of people who have visited the page. Some jokes got only the emoticon of like on the first day, but then got the emoticon of laughter later on the next day. Another reason is that it was found that sometimes the host of the page (or maybe the Facebook owner) has made changes on his/her own by deleting some jokes and sometimes reposted them a few weeks or a month later.

After the data collection was complete, the data were examined and classified into types due their structure and components or how they are formed, and then their logical mechanisms to provoke humor were analyzed.

## Results and Discussion

Regarding how the jokes are formed, 74 jokes can be classified into two major types: one was presented in a textual form while the other was a mixed-code message or a combination of verbal and non-verbal elements. The number of the latter was much larger than the former.

Table 1: Types of Joke Forms

Joke Type	Number
1.textual form	21
2.mixed-code message	53
Total	74

### Jokes in Textual Form

The first type which is in a textual form is mainly comprised of text. Let us consider an example which was posted on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2019.

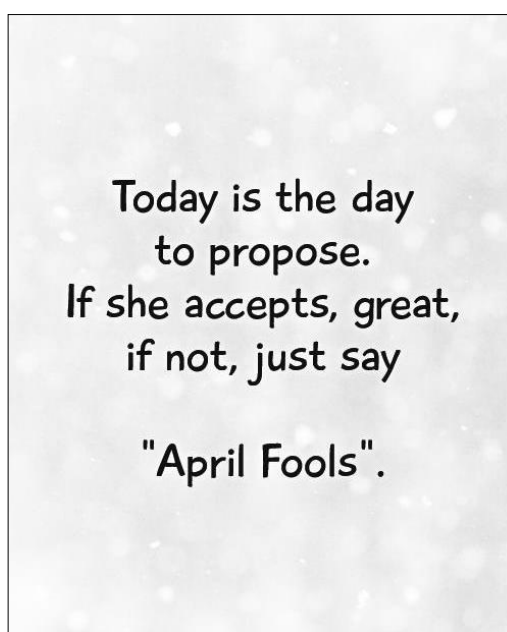


Figure 5: Joke of Textual Type

Although there is a background in shades of gray, the background does not play any role to the humor of the text. The joke in figure 5 plays upon the lie in festival on April's fool day and the truth, thus resulting in a script opposition between YES and NO. In other words, to propose marriage to a woman on April's fool day and you get refused, you could take her answer as if she said "yes".

Following Schmitz (2002), April's fool day could be considered as culture-based content and the joke may be likely difficult for L2 learners at the beginning and intermediate levels. However, the world has been globalized and the boundaries between countries have

been blurred. Some cultural knowledge has been widely spread; therefore, I do not think it is too difficult for an L2 beginner to understand the joke.

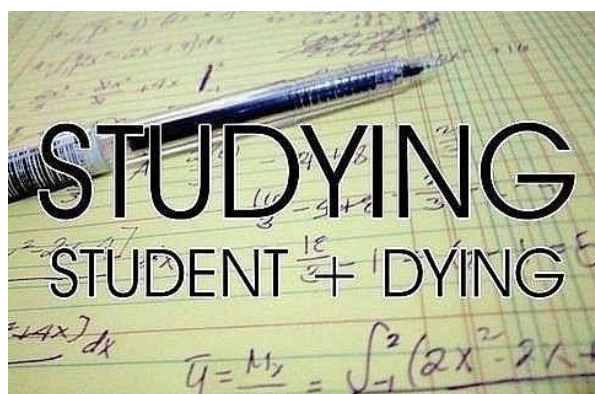


Figure 6: Joke of Textual Type

In addition to the jokes that are presented as a completely plain text as in figure 5, some textual jokes were put in a slight different background which contains a few pictures such as the one in Figure 6, but these pictures are not direct source of the funniness at all. The pictures of a pen and the lecture notes in Figure 6 works as a meaning support to the word “studying”, which can be removed without any effect to the funniness of the plain text of “studying” stemming from the playful combination of “student + dying”.

### Mixed-Code Message Jokes

The other type which is a mixed-code message contains both verbal element and non-verbal element. Let us consider an example in Figure 7.



Figure 7: Joke of Mixed-Code Message

The mixed-code message joke in Figure 7 contains the verbal part which is the speech given by the character, and the visual part, who is a graduate. Both verbal and visual elements work together to create the meaning contrast between the indicators of educational achievement. In reality, students’ academic performance or their learning outcome is systematically evaluated. The students will be given grades which represent their intellectual endeavors and thus, more or less, indicates their intellectual capacity. However, the indicators

of educational achievement in the character's speech in the joke have no direct relation to intellectual endeavor or intellectual capacity.

This type of jokes can be further classified into two subtypes: one has the verbal element as the primary factor to provoke humor while the other requires interaction between the verbal element and non-verbal element. These findings are in line with Tsakona (2009)'s findings of the first two types. However, the solely visual based joke as found in Tsakona was not found in this study.

Table 2: Subtypes of Mixed-Code Message Jokes

Joke Types	Number
1.verbal as the primary factor	15
2.verbal and non-verbal interaction	38
Total	53

Let us consider an example of the first subtype in Figure 8. The joke has two characters (the visual element), who are talking to each other (the verbal element). The man asks the woman, "Are you the new English teacher?" and the woman answers, "Yes, I are!" It can be said that the two cartoon characters are not the primary factors to provoke humor, but their dialogue is. The ungrammatical answer of the woman creates the script opposition between ENGLISH TEACHER and NO ENGLISH TEACHER.



Figure 8: Joke of Mixed-Code Message (Type 1)

On the other hand, the joke in Figure 9 below needs the interaction between the verbal and visual elements to provoke humor. The characters (visual element) are two female crocodiles talking to each other (verbal element). The one on the left gives a compliment to the purse her friend is carrying. Then, her friend said that it was (made from) her ex-husband. A reader has to find the relationship between this answer and the picture of the purse together with the two characters, then the contradictory meanings can be found. It is the script opposition between NICE PURSE and NO NICE PURSE (or NICE PURSE vs MY EX-HUSBAND).



Figure 9: Joke of Mixed-Code Message (Type 2)

### The Logical Mechanisms to Provoke Humor

The results show that there are four main logical mechanisms found in the jokes: pun, false analogy, faulty reasoning, and satire. The frequencies of their occurrences are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Frequencies of Logical Mechanism Occurrence

Logical Mechanisms	Frequency
Puns	39
False analogy	9
Faulty reasoning	19
Satire	7
Total	74

### Pun

In this study, 'pun' is used as a broad term that also includes many kinds of wordplay. The findings revealed that puns were found the most and occurred both in jokes of plain text form and mixed-code message. Moreover, there is a variety of puns ranging from the simple play of identical phonological forms of words to the one that coexist with other techniques. Let us consider an example which is a play on homonymy in Figure 10 below.



Figure 10: A textual joke with punning words

In Figure 10, the words “past”, “simple”, and “perfect” were used twice, but with different meanings, and this results in a script opposition between the grammatical tense and the difficult life experience. It can be said that homonymy is the simplest pun that easily causes a script overlapping, or allows two possible meaning to coexist. With the same spelling, or orthographic form, and identical phonological form, the distorted logic can be applied. This finding conforms to Hempelman (2004, p.383-385) who explained the use of pun to provoke humor that when the words have similar or identical sound, then assumingly their meanings must be related or similar too.

The joke in Figure 6 above also uses pun, but it is not simple nor straight forward like this one with the use of homonymy. Let us get back to have a closer look at it again.

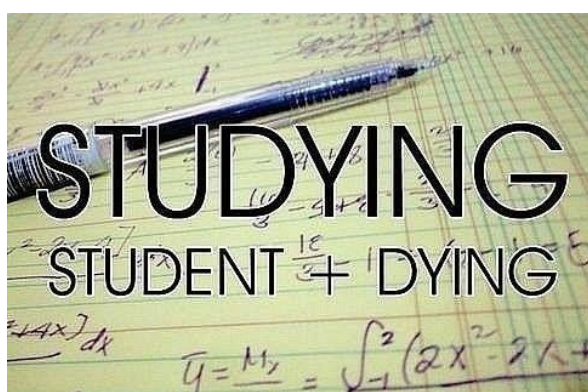


Figure 11 (= Figure 6)

The punning words in this joke are different from that in the figure 10. Their sounds are not identical, but just similar. However, the script overlapping between two opposing meanings is made possible, namely STUDYING vs STUDENT DYING. Although “studying” does not mean ‘student is dying’ at all in reality, the playful logic of similar sounds associate similar meanings helps resolve the script opposition and justify the playful interpretation of the root of the word “studying”.

Puns also occur in the mixed-code jokes. Mostly, when occurring in the mixed-code jokes that have more than one frame; the key word that causes punning effect would be found in the last frame like a punch line. Let us consider the joke in Figure 12 below.



Figure 12: Pun in a mixed-code message joke

In the first frame (upper frame), it is obvious that the joke employs a garden path to mislead the readers, but then it uses pun in the end frame to provoke humor. Assuming there is no use of the garden path in the first frame, the pun in the following frame may not be able to easily provoke humor. Thus, in this case it can be said that the joke uses two mechanisms, but priority is given to pun as it occurs in the punch line.

This finding is different from Attardo (2001, p.27) that ‘garden path’ is separated as one kind of LM. However, the joke in Figure 12 clearly shows that garden path in the first frame functions as supportive mechanism before the punch line is revealed in the following frame where the punning word “fan”, of which one meaning is related to ‘people that are dedicated to celebrities or their favorite game’ and ‘a machine that is used for producing currents of air’, is the primary factor to provoke humor.

### **False analogy**

Normally, analogy means a comparison of two unlike things based on resemblance of a particular aspect, or an inference that if two things agree with one another in some respects, they will probably agree in others. Therefore, by “false analogy”, it means the wrong assumption or inference that if two things agree with one another in some respects, they will probably agree in others. Let us have a closer look at the joke in Figure 8 again.

As mentioned earlier, the dialogue between the two characters is the main source of script opposition. The researcher analyzed the mechanism used in this joke as false analogy due to the reply of the female character to the question asked by the male character, “Are you a new English teacher?” The female character gives a reply in a parallel structure, “I are” assuming that using the parallel structure is grammatical.



Figure 13 (= Figure 8)

To illustrate further, the joke in Figure 14 also appears to follow the common pattern of a sign or reminder “Take off your shoes” when you go into a certain place. However, the joke adds one more thing which is abstract, namely “ego”, which has no relation with the shoes. Assuming that “ego” can be easily taken off like the shoes; therefore, it can be put on the same mat (script overlapping). As a result, it activates the script opposition between tangible object and intangible sense of self-esteem, which has no physical presence that can be touched with hands.



Figure 14: Joke with false analogy

### Faulty Reasoning

In this paper, I use the term “faulty reasoning” in a wide sense covering both faulty assuming and faulty interpretation. Therefore, the joke in Figure 7, in which the female character thanks Wikipedia and Google on her graduation day, is also considered to employ this logical mechanism.

Another good illustration of this mechanism is the joke in Figure 14 below when a turtle lies on its back and has a faulty view.

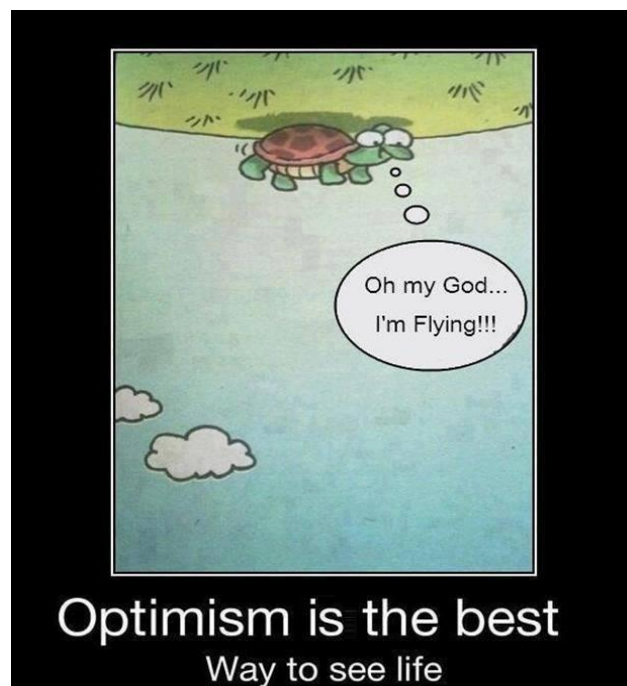


Figure 15: A joke with faulty reasoning



### Satire

By “satire” in this research, it is used with the focus on its pragmatic purpose, namely a way of criticizing people or ideas in order to make them look foolish or wicked. Let us consider an example in Figure 16 posted on 9 April 2019 after the US president, Donald Trump, said that he would have a wall built between Mexico and the US.



Figure 16: A joke that satires a political issue

The joke has two characters in forms of two cats talking to each other. The cat on the left looks rather more naïve and innocent than the other one on the right. It opens the conversation by giving a compliment to show her interest in the other, and then saying, “I wish there was something between us,” which is ambiguous and allows the script overlapping to occur. Originally, this expression is a romantic saying - to wish for a romance or a love life - , but the other cat interprets it literally. That is, “something between us” is a wall, not a good relationship between us. Thus, the script opposition between HAVING GOOD RELATIONSHIP and NO GOOD RELATIONSHIP was activated. And with the logical mechanism of satire the opposing meanings can be resolved as a playful satire of the unfriendly act the President Donald Trump has performed.

As this joke was created on the basis of the US politics under the leadership of the President Donald Trump, it might be difficult for an L2 learner who has no sociocultural background of the US and the political situation at the moment. As a result, students may encounter a failed L2 humor as shown in the study conducted by Bell and Attardo (2010). Also, this kind of jokes appears to be in line with the approach of Schmitz (2002) who claimed that jokes based on specific cultures are too difficult for L2 learners, namely those at the beginning and intermediate level. However, if L2 learners have heard or read the news either in their L1 or L2 before, it is highly likely that they can understand this joke.

## **Benefits of Jokes in ELT**

As there are different types of jokes employing many mechanisms to provoke humor, an EFL teacher can make use of the English jokes as teaching materials for teaching many skills or for different purposes so as to make the class livelier or an enjoyable place for learning. In terms of skills, English jokes can be used possibly in the following ways:

### **To Teach Critical Reading**

To read critically, one must think critically too. It is not just to understand what one reads, but students must be able to analyze and criticize the text, or express their opinions on the topic. Therefore, this skill involves interpretation and evaluation. As a teacher, you have to help your students interact with the texts in different ways. Using jokes with the mechanism of satire such as the one in Figure 16 can be one possible way to lead your students to discuss hot issues. I think it is a better start compared to assigning your students to read a serious text at the beginning of the class which might be a difficult task for them and finally leading to boredom.

Jokes that made fun of some politicians or tease some hot issues can provide different perspectives and bring about an oral discussion in a relaxed way which may enable your students to appreciate it. Once you can get your students to enjoy the critical reading class, it might be then easier to move on to a longer serious text like a piece of news report or editor's notes. After that, students may be assigned to search and analyze relevant texts from different sources, for instance, what the President Donald Trump has tweeted.

Additionally, most of the jokes with faulty reasoning, for instance, the joke in Figure 15, can also probably be a good material to raise different ideas, express different viewpoints, and motivate new ways of thinking or stimulate new perspectives to see the world and how to live our lives happily. A teacher in ESP, for instance, English for Psychology, can use this kind of joke to lead an oral discussion before moving onto assigning the students to read an academic text on psychological issues such as different mindsets, parental programming, and depressive disorder treatment.

### **To teach Vocabulary Expansion**

Jokes with puns, such as the ones in Figure 10 and 12, can help students expand their knowledge of vocabulary. Moreover, this kind of jokes can be a good source for teaching ambiguity. Teaching ambiguity in a traditional way may be a boredom. To illustrate, teaching the ambiguity in an ordinary way in the following sentences:

- (a) The chicken is ready to eat.
- (b) I saw her duck.

In sentence (a) it is ambiguous between 'the chicken is going to eat something' and 'the chicken is already cooked and served on the table for a meal'. On the other hand, the word "duck" in (b) is ambiguous as it can refer to 'an animal' or 'an action to lower one's head'. Duck is a multi-meaning word.

If an EFL teacher turns to use jokes with puns and let the students analyze the ambiguities embedded in the jokes, it might be more fun. Let us consider an example in Figure 17 below.

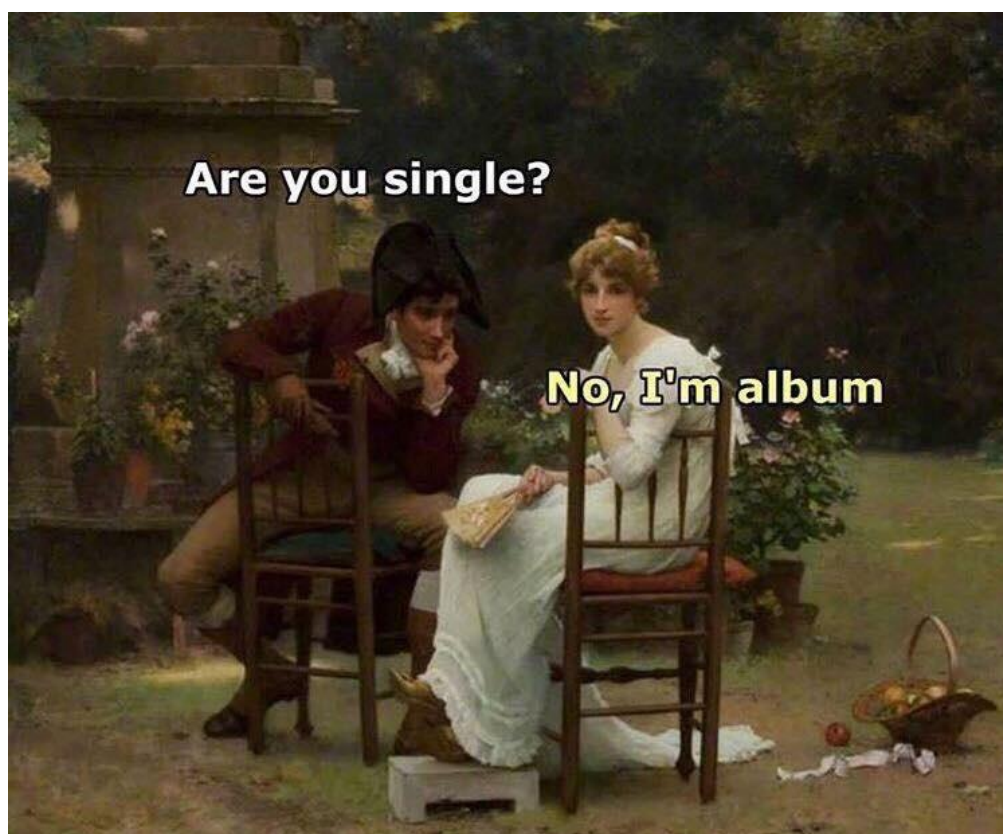


Figure 17: Joke with pun

In Figure 17, the joke makes use of the word “single” which originally has more than one meanings. The male character asked the female character by using this word in the sense of ‘unmarried’, but the woman gives a reply with the other sense, namely ‘a collection of recordings or songs’. A teacher can use this joke in order to assign students to find more meanings of both the words “single” and “album”. As today’s technology can effectively support learning, the students may search for other meanings on the internet where online dictionaries are available.

More importantly, this teaching style can lead the students to be an independent learner as when they cannot find the other meanings of the key words in a joke, they can look them up in a dictionary and become less dependent on the teacher. Furthermore, the teacher can let his/her teaching job to be in the hands of their students to find jokes with puns, and bring them to share with their friends in class. Students may volunteer or be assigned to take turn to deliver their jokes with puns and ambiguities. If it turns out that their friends do not understand the joke nor the embedded ambiguity, the student who tells the joke is responsible for explaining it. After that, the teacher can wrap up or sum up at the end of the class about ambiguity and knowledge of vocabulary they have learned.

### **To teach Creative Writing**

Jokes with puns or word plays, such as the ones in Figure 6 and 12, can be a good start to teaching creative writing. As the meaning of “creative” involves the use of imagination and unusual ideas (rather than something ordinary or imitated), to lead your students with jokes that have LMs like wordplay, faulty reasoning, or false analogy can motivate your students to improve this skill. Let us consider an example below.

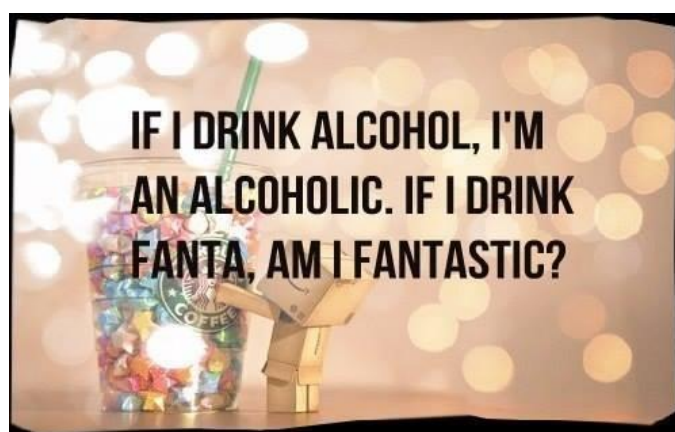


Figure 18: Joke with pun

The joke in Figure 18 playfully shows a way to generate a new word from the one that shares similar sound, namely “alcohol” (noun) to be “alcoholic” (adjective). Following the same rule of adding a suffix to a root noun, you will gain a new word as an adjective. That is, “fanta” (noun) is added with a fake suffix ‘stic’ to be an adjective “fantastic” which has a meaning that is not related to the original root noun at all, but it can provoke humor and would probably help your students to think out of the box as well as enjoy learning.

## Conclusion

This paper investigated jokes posted on Facebook. With the first objective regarding the way the jokes were formed, it was found that there were two major types: one was in a textual form while the other was a mixed-code message, or a combination of verbal and non-verbal elements. The latter was further classified into two subtypes: one had the verbal element as the primary factor to provoke humor while the other required the interaction between the verbal element and non-verbal element. These findings are almost in line with Tsakona (2009), except there was no joke that is purely visual based as found in Tsakona (2009, pp.1184-1185). This might be due to the fact that this Facebook page is created for learning English; therefore, jokes with visual puns may not benefit L2 learners.

In terms of logical mechanism, it was found that there were four mechanisms to provoke humor: puns, false analogy, faulty reasoning, and satire. Satire might be the most difficult mechanism for EFL learners if they are not updated with news or current situations in the native countries. The teacher may have to help provide context to the students. Also, the teacher has to be careful when selecting jokes with satire. If they are out of date, they might not be funny anymore.

Apart from the analysis of jokes, the researcher has made three suggestions to use jokes when teaching the English language except teaching speaking skill. However, it does not mean that humor is not important while speaking. As we can see many famous moderators, for instance, Oprah Winfrey, has humor and she can capture interest of a large number of audience. To me, if we can add humor in some relevant speaking skills, for instance, giving a presentation, EFL learners can improve their L2 humor, but it is still a challenge to teach such a skill.

More importantly, as Raskin (1985) contends that humor competence is not the same thing as the linguistic competence, adding English jokes into your class can be one of the possible ways to help EFL students acquire L2 humor or increase their L2 humor competence.

Last, but not least, in the field of second language acquisition researchers can tell or estimate when is the critical period, but for L2 humor acquisition, it is difficult to say if there is critical period. Nevertheless, it can be said that the more opportunities to expose to English jokes an EFL learner has, the higher chance s/he can increase the competence and finally acquire English humor.

### **Research Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research**

The data in this study were collected just in a short time (about half of the month) and the number of jokes the researcher gained is lower than 100 (74 jokes out of 200 posts) due to the fact that some jokes were deleted a few weeks later and posted again and the responses normally change, its findings and discussion might not be in-depth enough to generalize the whole picture in relation to the theoretical assumptions that were reviewed. Also, there might be more logical mechanisms than those found in this study.

However, based on the researcher's preliminary observation, there are some issues that can be recommended for further research. First of all, the degree of funniness is interestingly investigated. As the current study collected data based on two criteria: one is the definition given by Attardo and Chabanne (1992), and the other is the emoticon of laughter, it was found in my data that when the laughter emoticon showed up in combination with like and love emoticons, sometimes it was in the left most position and sometimes in the middle in between liking and love. (Unlike other posts that were tips for learning such as a quick guide to memorize grammar or phrasal verbs which also got the laughter emoticon, but the laughter emoticon stayed at right most position.)

As the system of Facebook normally ranks the emoticon in the way that any emoticon which has the highest number will be presented on the left and the lowest on the right, it might be interesting for further research to study the degree of funniness in depth whether there is a correlation between the logical mechanism and the high number of the laughter emoticon or not. In this current study, only 20 jokes (out of 74) got the laughter emoticon with the first rank, or the left most position. Others got it as the second runner after the like emoticon. Unfortunately, the researcher did not record the exact number of each emoticon nor calculate the proportion when they are shown in combination. What the researcher can tell is that half of the jokes that got the laughter emotion in the first position (on the left) were created with puns. The rest are mix of the other three different logical mechanisms.

Secondly, in terms of application for teaching the English language, any EFL teachers who are interested in using jokes as suggested can conduct a research to assess whether jokes can contribute to or how effective and how much this suggested methodology would work. Finally, in other courses apart from the suggested skills, probably English for media like promotion or advertisement, it might be interesting to add jokes into the classroom with the hope that it can motivate students to produce captivating advertisement as well as enjoy learning the English language.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>This paper was part of the presentation in CULI International Seminar 2019, on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2019, hosted by the Research Department of Chulalongkorn University Language Institute.

<sup>2</sup>Six parameters of the GTVH (Attardo, 1994; 2001) include script opposition (SO), Logical Mechanism (LM), Situation (SI) or what happen in the story, Target (TA) or the butt of joke, Narrative Strategy (NS), and Language (LA) or the exact wording of the joke. These parameters are organized in hierarchy as follows:

SO  
↓  
LM  
↓  
SI  
↓  
TA  
↓  
NS  
↓  
LA

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