

Building Academic Relations and Solidarity through Humour at Work

NOR AZIKIN MOHD OMAR
*Faculty of Languages and Linguistics
Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin
norazikin@unisza.edu.my*

JARIAH MOHD JAN
*Faculty of Languages and Linguistics
University Malaya*

ABSTRACT

The use of humor at the workplace has been well researched in Western countries but such studies in Asian societies are still in its infancy. This study aims to investigate the utilization of humour in academic meetings. In particular, it aims to investigate the factors that influence rapport building through humour in asymmetrical and symmetrical relationships. Data for the study comprise of video recordings of naturally occurring interaction between academic staff meeting. Hay's Taxonomy of Functions of Humour (1995) was used to categorise the functions of humour that mainly maintains solidarity among academicians. Results indicate that friendly teasing and "all-together-now" i.e. AATN (Coates 1989) are frequently used amongst academics to develop and maintain solidarity. Humour appreciation is also shown to strengthen, construct and maintain collegiality in the workplace setting.

Keywords: humour; solidarity; workplace communication; academic management meetings; Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study is to examine and describe the concept of solidarity that is manifested in humour in semi-formal meetings. Solidarity is concerned with the concept of equivalent power and set of relations, which are symmetrical (Brown & Gilman 1960, p. 258). According to Tannen (1993, p.167), solidarity is a similar concept to rapport, which governs symmetrical relationship that is characterised by social equality and similarity. Solidarity is established by the common views and interests that the members share among each other. This brings them closer thus promoting camaraderie within the group.

In a workplace interaction, solidarity is built by social activities such as social talk and the use of humour. Research in New Zealand workplaces suggests that humour can be employed to construct and maintain positive relationship among colleagues (Holmes 2006). The nature of humour helps strengthen, construct and maintain collegiality in the workplace setting. Holmes and Stubbe (2003) stated that obvious contribution of humour is the construction of positive relationship between work colleagues. The nature of humour, which can be used to soften directives and criticism, aids to construct and maintain solidarity among colleagues. By using humour, the speaker recognises and respects the face needs of the addressee (Holmes & Stubbe 2003, p.114) thus mitigating the impact of conflict at the workplace.

The type of humour that reinforces solidarity among participants in interaction is called supportive humour. Supportive humour involves collaborative contribution by several participants who are familiar with each other's way of joking whereby they extend and build

on one another's humorous comments (Holmes 2006). As supportive humour is jointly constructed, many commentators see its chief function as being the creation and maintenance of solidarity (Coates 2007, p. 32). Humour that works towards building solidarity contains the least aggressive linguistic choices.

However, Norrick (2003, p. 13) stated that jokes in the form of verbal attack, competitive word play and teasing among close friends and colleagues actually maintain solidarity among them. Tannen (1984) who recorded a conversation during Thanksgiving dinner among close friends discovered that irony is one of the styles used to produce humorous instances. Katthoff (2006) stated that irony is a politeness device as it works effectively compared to direct statements. Meanwhile, Hay (2000) discovered several types of humour that occurred in a close friendship conversation that subsumes irony, insults and jocular abuse. This shows that humour works towards building rapport despite the different styles adopted while producing humour.

Holmes (2006, p. 35) in her study on *Gender and Humour in the Workplace* distinguishes collaborative talk into two types, which are maximally collaborative and minimally collaborative. Maximally collaborative humour or "all-together-now" (ATN) talk as described by Coates (1989) is when participants made supportive contribution that interspersed with the occurrence of overlaps. The speakers are more likely to complete or echo the other member's turn that signify solidarity and shared views.

EXAMPLE 1

Context: Regular reporting meeting of two men and two women in government department.

1. Yvo: dream it up and if it's a good idea
2. Hen: /yeah\
3. Yvo: /it's a good idea\
4. Jan: /it's worth a\ try
5. [general laughter]

(Holmes 2006, p. 37)

Example 1 illustrates ATN talk where the participants collaboratively construct humorous sequence. Jan and Hen collaboratively support the idea of Yvo [line 2-4] by producing synonymous and simultaneous clauses. Holmes (2006, p. 37) claimed that this example presents precise timing of contributions and the level of skill involved in such collaborative floor work. Meanwhile, for minimally collaborative humour, Coates (1989) defines it as "one-at-a-time" (OAAT) style of talk. OAAT is when the participants compete to gain the floor in order to make contributions in the interaction. Example 2 presents an instance of collaborative humour as discovered by Holmes (2006).

EXAMPLE 2

Context: Ten women from government department in a regular reporting and forward planning meeting.

1. Ellen: Grace you're gonna chair next week
2. Ruth: it must be my turn soon
3. Ellen: and Kaye can scribe
4. XW: so it's at three /(isn't it)\
5. Sally: /I must\ be due for a turn at chairing too +
and I'll put in my apologies now
[general laughter]
6. Kaye: no you're not you're not at all sorry [laughs]

(Holmes 2006, p. 38)

Example 2 illustrates OAAT style of talk where the contribution of the participants are minimally collaborative with no overlaps, independent contributions which do not correlate with each other's utterance and autonomous style of floor construction [line 1-5]. The instances discussed earlier ought to be in concurrence with the present study as there is strong evidence that humour functions to gain solidarity among the interactants in a workplace context. The concept of solidarity that is expressed using humour is reflected by the use of collaborative contributions and extended humour by the interactants.

For the purpose of this study, the definition put forth by Martineau (1972, p. 114) will be referred to identify the instances of humour: "Humo[u]r is conceived generically to be any communicative instance which is perceived as humo[u]rous by any of the interacting parties" (Martineau 1972, p. 114). In simple words, humour in this study is recognised as utterances that make the audience laugh. The intention of speakers to appear humorous is identified based on verbal cues as well as the context (Hay 1995) in order to support the funniness of the utterances.

HAY'S FUNCTIONS OF HUMOUR

This study applied Hay's theoretical framework (1995) in categorising the functions of humour. This taxonomy was developed from 31 different works and the categories identified by Hay are closely relevant to her data, which are within a friendship conversation. According to Hay (1995), this framework assumes that every attempt at humour is an attempt to build camaraderie with the participants and construct a position of respect and status within the group (Hay 1995, p. 97). There are three functions of humour that maintains solidarity in this taxonomy namely power, solidarity and psychological. Since this study is only focusing on solidarity, thus the focus is only on the functions of humour that maintain camaraderie, which is solidarity.

Hay (1995) categorised humour that functions to strengthen solidarity into four, which are 'to share', 'to highlight similarities or capitalise on shared meanings', 'to clarify and maintain boundaries' and 'to tease'. Hay used the label "S" for humour, which maintains solidarity among speakers. Humour does not only restrict to only one type but it can be grouped into several functions at once (Hay 1995). The solidarity function is identified to serve several roles that are to share, highlight similarities or capitalise on shared meaning, to clarify and maintain boundaries and to tease. The examples describe the function in detail and they were obtained from Hay (1995) to elaborate and explain the functions of humour that promotes solidarity.

TO SHARE

'To share' here means to let the audience know something about the speaker. This is a positive function of humour as it positively builds mutual trust and solidarity among the interlocutors. Besides, ties will grow stronger among them especially when sharing sensitive information.

EXAMPLE 3

1. SF: /they were\great
2. RF: i LIKED my poncho + except it had little holes
about the size of my fingers so i'd go to reach
for something [voc:xunk[h]] right through
poncho and and be stopped you know +
3. SF: [ha ha ha]
4. LM: oh dea[h]r

5. RF: but other than that [ha] it was warm and you
could wear it over anything

Example 3 illustrates RF shares her memory of her childhood and her favourite poncho [2-3].

TO HIGHLIGHT SIMILARITIES OR CAPITALISE ON SHARED MEANING

The humour in this category identifies shared interests, social knowledge, experience and other similarities among speakers.

EXAMPLE 4

1. CM: /yeah\\ that's it's a it's it's an
2. //experience\
3. MM: /something\\ you'd want to do once +
4. CM: just cause its quite //quite\
5. TM: /ruin\\ your body by
ingesting all that coke=
6. MM: /=mm i still can't drink
coke like i used after that //episode\ i think=
7. TM: /[h ha]\\

In this instance, a group of friends recall their past days at university and MM recalls the night where he consumed an excessive amount of coke before they needed to submit an assignment. Ever since the incident, he stopped drinking coke. MM is capitalising on shared experience because all his friends have the social knowledge about what had happened on that particular night. The example above shows an instance of “inside jokes”, which are jokes that only group members with shared background knowledge understand (Norrick 1993, p. 6).

TO CLARIFY AND MAINTAIN BOUNDARIES (BOUNDS)

Humour in this category works as a boundary marker (Hay 1995). Hay divides this category of humour into boundS and boundP. BoundS refers to humour that clarifies or supports boundaries that are already established meanwhile boundP is for humour that boosts speakers' power. If humour in this category is associated with power, it clarifies those who have deviated from the social norms and shared values as belonging to in different groups, thus they make fun of the outsiders (Hay 1995). Meanwhile, the humour is regarded to enhance solidarity when the humour is approved by the members of that particular group.

According to Hay, boundary humour imposes boundaries, or clarifies boundaries by ridiculing a member of the group who has unwittingly overstepped the boundaries of acceptability (Hay 1995, p. 102). Example 5 presents an instance of boundary humour that increases solidarity (boundS).

EXAMPLE 5

1. NF: i saw tessa davies in the on the train like
2. JF: UGH
3. SF: [ha ha ha]
4. JF: what a grotter

In this instance, Tessa Davies becomes the butt of the humour because she is not part of the group. Thus, the humour illustrates solidarity among the initiators.

TO TEASE

A tease can also reinforce solidarity if it is about something that is clearly false or trivial (Hay 1995, p. 103). It is divided into two categories, which are TeasesS and TeaseP. TeaseS refers to “Joking Relationship” termed by Radcliffe Brown (as cited in Hay 1995) where individuals normally make fun and mock each other. This helps create and maintain solidarity among the interlocutors.

EXAMPLE 6

1. SF: even really changed eh
2. TF: shit yeah mega
3. SF: he went really arty
4. TF: he and yeah he went to new Plymouth and then he came back and now oh i don't know where he is now
5. JF&NF: [laugh]
6. SF: what's this going on
7. JF: [laughs]: nothing + just good humour:

NF always teases JF because Evan has a crush on her. Only NF knows about this and whenever Evan is mentioned throughout the interaction, NF and JF look at each other, and then burst into laughter [5-7]. The humour here shows solidarity between them.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The entire corpus in this study comprises naturally occurring data of departmental meetings among academicians. The research was initiated by writing an email to the Dean of NAS to seek permission to conduct a research. Once the permission was obtained, a consent letter was submitted to the Head of Department for the purpose of video recordings. A schedule of meetings was provided by the Head of Department and the researcher started recording the scheduled meetings which were held between the months of April and May.

Four meetings were video recorded with a total duration of 382 minutes. The faculty involved is termed as NAS and all of the participants have been changed to pseudonyms to maintain the confidentiality of the setting and data. The present study confines the parameters of the research to the discussion during the specific meetings held only at NAS.

The participants of this study are amongst the academicians in one of the academic institutions in the state of Terengganu, Malaysia. The participants involved are regular team members who often met, discussed and worked together and their positions varied from junior to senior lecturers. The name of the institution and the faculty involved is kept anonymous. For the purpose of this study, the institution is referred to as UNS meanwhile the faculty involved is termed with a pseudonym as NAS. At NAS, there are 56 academicians including junior and senior lecturers. Their ages ranged from 25-55 years of age. Four of the participants involved hold a Ph.D. All of the participants are proficient in the English Language and one of them is a native English speaker. The native speaker provided the pseudonym AN is a Canadian who has lived in Malaysia for more than ten years. Hence, he is proficient in Malay and able to recognise jokes produced by the rest of the colleagues who are mainly Malays. The dominant ethnicity of the participants is the Malays while the other two participants are Chinese and the native speaker from Canada.

The functions of humour are presented in a descriptive manner and are categorised using Hay's taxonomy (1995). The analysis of all the five meetings is based on the video recordings with a combined duration of 382 minutes. The quantitative measurement quantified the frequency of laughter and functions of humour. The medium of instruction used in the meetings was English Language, however the participants were found to code switch to the Malay Language intermittently and the meetings revolved around the same persons, in terms of attendance. During the first and second meetings the participants were informed the meetings would be recorded for research purposes. During the subsequent recordings, all the participants were aware that they were being recorded and all of them were in a relaxed condition, just like in the earlier meetings. The researcher observed that the participants were not distracted by the recording instruments and that they behaved normally. This added validity to the data as Hay (1995) states that data is more natural when the participants are in a relaxed condition.

All the four meetings were transcribed using Jariah Mohd Jan's (1999) transcription notation which was adapted from conventions by Jefferson's (1978). Jariah Mohd Jan presented the distribution of turns between speakers, occurrences of simultaneous speech, interruptions and the point when a previous speaker ceases to talk in relation to the next speaker's turn (Jariah Mohd Jan 1999, p. 226).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In totality, 25% instances of humour showing building of rapport were found in all meetings recorded. Table 1 presents the tabulation of the occurrences of humour that were compiled from the recordings of the meetings with a total duration of 382 minutes.

Table 1. Functions of humour that illustrates solidarity according to Hay's taxonomy

Solidarity	N (%)
Teasing	40 (42.05%)
Clarifying boundaries	12 (25%)
Highlighting/ capitalising	8 (16.67%)
Sharing	5 (10.42%)
TOTAL	48 (25%)

Based on Table 1, teasing recorded the highest functions used in meetings (47.92%) meanwhile share was the least found utilised in meetings (10.42%). Generally, humour, which functions to foster solidarity among colleagues, was produced by members who contributed ideas and opinions throughout the discussions. In addition, it was commonly utilised by the person who produced most humour in the meeting they. In the following section, the functions of humour that enforce solidarity i.e. teasing, clarifying boundaries, highlighting / capitalising and sharing are discussed.

TEASING

The occurrence of humour that functions to reinforce solidarity is referred as to 'Joking Relationship' termed by Radcliffe Brown (as cited in Hay 1995) which totalled to 47.92 percent (see Table 1). Tease fulfilled the highest functions found utilised by the lecturers to signal collaboration. Humour in this category was typically found initiated and directed by

both participants of a different hierarchy i.e. from a superior to subordinate and from a subordinate to a superior. The following examples present the teasing that maintains camaraderie among the academicians of NAS.

Example 1, lines [1023-1026] illustrate an instance where teasing is directed towards RR by AN which works towards fostering solidarity among the participants.

EXAMPLE 1

Meeting 3: SM asks AN whether the lecturers and the students are allowed to take pictures inside the Gong Kedak's airbase.

- [...]
[1023] SM: most of us have camera right / hand phone camera
[1024] AN: it goes without saying nothing / maybe dr. RR is the
only who without er / the camera on the phone
[1025] RR: (<excuse me>
@ <stares at AN>
@ <all laugh>
[1026] RS: she has / (she has the handphone without the
camera>
@ (RR smiles)
@ (all laugh)

The conversation in this excerpt involves senior lecturers (AN, RS and RR) and a junior lecturer (SM). In line [1023], SM is curious to know whether it is permissible to take photos inside Gong Kedak's airbase and expresses his concern that majority of the students and lecturers have hand phones that are equipped with a camera. At the Gong Kedak's airbase, the visitors are not allowed to take photographs in the area so this would pose an issue for the lecturers to observe the students.

AN replies SM's query by initiating a joke which is directed to RR and it consists a hint of sarcasm in his voice [line 1024]. RR, who holds a PhD, turns to be the target of humour where she is belittled and ridiculed by AN who jokingly claimed she is outdated as she is the only one who still owns a hand phone without a camera. The laughter by the team members challenges RR's status in the meeting. However, RR responds with smile that shows that RR is not affected by the joke that was directed towards her [line 1025].

Then, RS extends the joke by restating the claim by AN that RR has a handphone without a camera [line 1026] and that prolongs laughter from the participants. This example demonstrates the use of humour that creates solidarity and enhances social cohesion among members of the same status i.e. AN, RR, SM and RS. Besides, the humour produced was an example of conjoint humour where turns were collaboratively constructed by other participants namely RS [line 1026]. The concept of solidarity that is expressed using humour is reflected by the use of collaborative contribution and extended humour. Coates (1989) defines it as "one-at-a-time" (OOAT) style of talk in which the participants contributes collaboratively with no overlaps and independent.

Example 2, lines [360-364] demonstrate another evidence of teasing that enforces solidarity among colleagues.

EXAMPLE 2

Meeting 2: ML asks the participants whether the answer that was provided by her student is acceptable or vice versa.

- [...]
[360] ML: between thousand to thousand five / between? /

- lebih dari / one thousand (more than) dah tu / or
just one thousand / between thousand / to thousand
five?*
- (then)
- [361] AN: <that's the answer?>
@ <looks at ML>
- [362] ML: let's say
- [363] AK: you need to write two to three sentences / the
instruction says
- [364] ML: (<then i rest my case>)
@ <laughs>
@ (all laugh)

All the interlocutors in this excerpt i.e. AN, ML and AK are senior lecturers. In line [360], ML queries whether the answers that were written by her student are worth being awarded marks. AN responds to ML and asks her (ML) whether the answer she reads is the answer written by the student [line 362]. AK assertively replies ML, that the answer is unacceptable since it does not conform to the instruction [line 363]. Further, ML replies and her contribution *then I rest my case* that is interspersed with laughter states that that she cannot win the argument any further thus she yields to AK's comment [line 364]. ML's response generates laughter from the team members, as it is perceived humorous by them.

The example illustrates ML conforming to AK and she establishes common views with AK's claim using humour. As put forth by Hay (1995, p. 103), a tease can also reinforce solidarity if it is about something that is clearly false or trivial. In this instance, it is clear that ML has mistakenly posed a question to demand for marks. This resulted a teasing initiated by AK towards her since she was negligent of not reading the instruction. The teasing is seen as strengthening solidarity between her and ML.

CLARIFYING BOUNDARIES

The occurrence of humour that functions to create and clarify boundaries to those who have deviated from shared values of the team members was 25 percent as indicated in Table 1. This type of humour was found utilised by both superiors and subordinates and it is regarded as enhancing solidarity when the humour is approved by the team members.

Example 3, Extracts [696-701] illustrate a contribution by MM that was directed to RS that creates boundary between RS with the team members.

EXAMPLE 3

Meeting 3: RS asks the participants the results of the discussion on the number of the facilitators involved in the visit to the Syahbandar Esplanade Park.

- [...]
- [696] MS: kak SL / make it easier / i will go because in the
morning i already (xxx) / so there's nothing
- [697] SM: so we stick to the original plan yeah?
- [698] SL: thank you thank you
- [699] ZN: (yeay)
@ (ZN and SL clap hands)
- [700] RS: what is the final decision?
- [701] MM: yeah / (that's it)
@ (all laugh)

The conversation in this excerpt involves senior and junior lecturers. The senior lecturers are RS and SL while MM, SM, MS and ZN are junior colleagues. In line [698], SL who is one of the leaders of the TESL camp project thanked MS as she has volunteered to be the facilitators during the visit to the Syahbandar Esplanade Park. She (SL) and ZN rejoice at MS' voluntary of helping to assist the student [line 699]. In line [700], RS who does not seem to be concentrating whilst the other participants arriving to a consensus, asks the team members the result of the discussion [line 700]. Shortly, MM sarcastically replies to RS' query by stating *that's it* [line 701] that indicates his declination to re-mention the outcome of their discussion. MM's contribution is perceived humorous by the other participants thus generating a great laughter. The laughter by the team members is directed towards RS who has deviated from the group. Since RS does not pay attention during the meeting, he does not share the common knowledge with the rest of the participants.

The data suggest that there is no sign of power play intending to demean RS' status. Hence, the boundary humour that excludes RS from the group increases solidarity among the team members as the humour that is initiated by MM is approved by the team members. This claim is in tandem with Hay (1995) that stated boundary humour is regarded to enhance solidarity when it is perceived by the members of that particular group.

Example 4, lines [443-446] show another instance of humor that creates boundaries which was initiated by SM towards MM.

EXAMPLE 4

Meeting 1: MM asks the participants regarding the students at Tadika Terengganu.

- [...]
- [443] MM: *anak yatim* students?
(orphans)
- [444] SL: no:::
- [445] FZ: this is tadika
- [446] SM: (<*mak bapak dia orang lok* / (just *lok di situ* / *lok di situ*>)
(their parents ignore)(ignore them there / ignore them there)
@ <looks at MM>
@ (all laugh)

The conversation in this excerpt involves senior and junior colleagues. SL is the only senior lecturer while MM, FZ and SM are junior colleagues. In line [443], MM asks the team members regarding the children at one of pre-schools in Terengganu. His query is with intentions of gaining confirmation about the target students that the participants of the TESL camp will have to teach during the mock teaching. Further, SL intentionally prolongs the exclamation *no:::* [line 444] that emphasising that the children are normal kids from the typical kindergarten. SM produces a sarcastic remark to mock MM since he (MM) was mistakenly judged the condition of the children at the mentioned pre-school mentioned. SM's comment eventually produces laughter from the members that challenges MM's status in the discussion. The comment by SM gives the meaning that the parents of the children at the pre-school just leave them under the teachers' care [line 446]. SM's joke is a culture-based humour and it is mixed with Terengganu dialect *lok* [line 446] that implies ignore.

SM's contribution is found to be amusing by the team members thus generates great laughter from them. MM is excluded from the group because he was the only person who felt that the pre-school is an orphanage thus the children there are orphans. Meanwhile, other participants in the discussion are aware that the pre-school is a typical kindergarten and

therefore the children who attend are pre-school from typical homes. MM is excluded from the group because he expresses his different opinion regarding the kindergarten and its students. The laughter that was directed to him [line 446] deviates him from the discussion thus clarifying a boundary between him and the rest of the team members. Since SM and MM are of the same status and there are no signs of power play, the humour functions to foster solidarity among the academicians.

CAPITALISING ON SHARED MEANING

The occurrence of humour that identifies shared ideas and interests among speakers and interlocutors in this study is 16.67 percent (See Table 1). This type of humour was utilised to establish shared ideas, social knowledge, experience and other similarities among the speakers.

Example 5, Extracts [398-404] illustrates the participants i.e. SL, SM, NB, AZ, and KD read the sentences in an essay that was written by a particular student.

EXAMPLE 5

Meeting 4: The participants read the answers that was provided by a particular student loudly to discuss them with the team members.

- [...]
 [398] SL: (come on with me now)
 @ (reads the sentence with funny intonation)
 @ (all laugh)
 [399] SM: i want to share
 [400] NB: in front of middle
 [401] SM: *di hadapan tengah tengah penonton*
 (in front in the middle of the audience)
 [402] AZ: oh yes
 [403] KD: NB / <penat penat depan cermin / <dia pergi
tengah cermin>/ don't you
 (getting tired to be in front of the mirror / she goes
 to middle of mirror)(understand?)
 @ (all laugh)
 [404] AZ: practice make perfect
 @ (all laugh)

The conversation above involves senior and junior colleagues. The senior lecturers in this meeting are SL and KD while the junior lecturers are SM, NB and AZ. All the contributions in this extracts are the sentences that were read aloud from the essay of a particular student. It is apparent that the academicians have a great laugh at the student's work. The use of role-play by SL derives great laughter from the team members [line 398] when she reads the sentence with a humorous intonation. According to Hay (1995), role-play is when the speaker mimics or quotes the target of humour to appear amusing.

The laughter is extended when SM and KD [line 401, line 403] provide their own interpretation of the sentence *in front of middle* [line 399] that was written in the essay. Both of them state ridiculous interpretations that elicit further laughter from the team members. SM claims that *in front of middle* gives meaning that the writer stands in the middle of the stage and the show is attended by a large number of audiences [line 401]. Meanwhile, KD opines that the writer has mistakenly written the word "middle" instead of "mirror". She assumes that the writer goes in front of the mirrors and later, stands in the middle of the

mirrors. In line [404], AZ highlights the wrongly spelled idiom *practice make prefect*, which also derives laughter from the participants.

It appeared that the academicians are poking fun at the student's work and they laugh at it. Since the essay contains many grammatical mistakes, the academicians build up ideas and state nonsensical assumption based on the student's flaws. This example presents that the participants establish on shared knowledge and highlight similarities on certain part of the essay, which they find it as amusing.

The extracts illustrate an example of minimally collaborative humour or "one-at-a-time" (OOAT) style of talk as defined by Coates (1989 as cited in Holmes 2006). OOAT style of talk is when the participants gain the floor in order to make contributions in the interaction. The concept of solidarity is reflected by the use of collaborative contribution and extended humour among the interactants. When humour functions to enhance solidarity, it is constructed with the intention of establishing common ground on particular issues.

Example 6, Extracts [313-319] present a strong evidence of conjoint humour where the participants extends and build on each other's humorous sequences.

EXAMPLE 6

Meeting 2: The participants provide unreasonable options for the particular question that requires only "yes or no" answers.

- [...]
- [313] ES: if they answer (please repeat?)
@ (all laugh)
- [314] HM: that is the answer / that is question
- [315] ES: so definitely zero right?
- [316] TP: (i'm sorry i don't understand the question)
@ (all laugh)
- [317] HM: (i beg your pardon)
@ (all laugh)
- [318] NZ: that is real situation during the interview
- [319] HM: *dia tanya / ha?* (they ask) (what?)
@ (all laugh)

All the interlocutors in this excerpt i.e. ES, HM, TP, HM and NZ are senior lecturers. The excerpts demonstrate the possible answers for a particular question on interview session that was suggested by the participants. The question is "yes or no" type of question thus it only requires yes or no answers. In line [313], ES asks the participants whether the answer *please repeat* is considered correct or vice versa. The comment provided by ES is irrelevant and deviates from the accepted answer thus it is found amusing by all.

Later, TP and HM extend the humour by stating other unreasonable alternatives as answer during an interview session which are *I'm sorry I don't understand the question* [line 316], *I beg your pardon* [line 317] and *dia tanya / ha?* (they ask / what?) [line 319]. The humorous sequence constructed by TP and HM further extends the laughter and highlights similarities among the team members. The example provides strong evidence that humour reinforces solidarity among participants in interaction since it is collaboratively built by several participants whereby thus extending each other's humorous comment (Holmes 2006).

SHARING

The occurrence of humour that functions to let the audience know something about him/her is 10.42 percent and it was the least popular types of humour produced by the academicians as can be clearly seen in Table 1. This type of humour was commonly utilised by female colleagues to impart information about themselves during the discussions.

Example 7, lines [162-167] present an example of self-deprecatory humour where the Dean of NAS directs a joke to herself and becomes the target of the humour.

EXAMPLE 7

Meeting 1: The Dean of NAS who is attending another discussion in the same venue as Meeting 1 interrupts in the discussion.

- [...]
 [162] DE: (*sempena lawatan?*)
 (in conjunction with a visit)
 @ (all look at DE)
 [163] SL: ha?
 [164] DE: *sempena lawatan dalam English apa?/*
sempena?
 (what is in conjunction with a visit .../ in
 conjunction?)
 [165] FD: in conjunction
 [166] SL: ah / (<in conjunction>)
 @ <nods head>
 @ <FZ nods head>
 [167] DE: ah:: / (dok mari) / (interjection)
 (can't think of it)
 @ (all laugh)

The conversation above involves senior lecturers and a junior colleague. SL and DE are senior lecturers while FD is a junior lecturer. In line [164], the dean of NAS (DE) who is having a discussion with the other staff in the meeting room interrupts the TESL camp meeting and inquires about a particular word in English (the lexical item *sempena*). FD responds by suggesting the word *in conjunction* [line 165]. DE then directs a joke at herself by stating that the word did not come across in her mind [line 167] which produces laughter from the participants.

DE's contribution is perceived humorous since she (DE) mocks herself since she cannot retrieve the word *sempena* in English language. Further, DE extends the joke that displays her sentiment since she is unable to translate the word *sempena* in English language thus inviting more laughter from the team members [line 167].

This is an instance typical of self-deprecatory humour where the speaker anticipates embarrassment and face loss; hence responds by turning the source of the embarrassment into a subject of humour (Holmes 1998, p. 3). As stated earlier, DE mocks herself and this protects her face needs. As put forth by Hay (1995), self-deprecatory humour softens the face threats of speakers and acts as a defense strategy. The speakers receive sympathetic positive response by interlocutors thus helps to foster solidarity among them (Hay 1995). The data also suggests that power differences between DE and her subordinates are reduced through the use of self-mockery.

Example 8, lines [437-429] illustrate an incident where ZN shares a memory during her childhood with the other team members.

EXAMPLE 8

Meeting 1: ZN reminisces about a memory from her childhood about painting a mural.

- [...]
 [427] ZN: yeah i used to do it / when i was small / *orang datang je dia orang* (xxx)
 (people came and they)
dekat pasu yang dia paint / (dua orang sepasu ke / so)
 (at the vase they) (two persons per vase)
 @ (WW and FZ laugh)
 [428] FZ: *comel:::*
 (cute:::)
 [429] ZN: seriously that's what they did

All the interlocutors (ZN and FZ) in this excerpt are junior lecturers. In line [427], ZN relates her memory about painting vases from her childhood with a task of painting a mural, which is organised by one of pre-schools in Terengganu. The task is arranged for the students who are involved during the TESL camp. ZN's anecdote about her childhood [line 427] invites laughter from WW and FR who claim that the painting activity is an adorable thing to do [line 428]. In this instance, ZN shares a personal experience about her in the meeting and positively strengthens solidarity with her colleagues. Sharing personal information was discovered as a strategy that was utilised mostly by the female participants in their attempt to maintain camaraderie.

CONCLUSION

In this study, humour primarily acts as a channel of solidarity when it functions through friendly teasing and boundary marking, highlighting similarities or shared knowledge and disclosing of personal stories to the team members. Hence, this study delineated that the functions of humour within Malaysian academic management meetings are similar with the functions of humour in Western interactions (Hay 1995). It is worth noting that both senior and junior team members collaborated in extending each other's humour during these occasions. The occurrences of "all-together-now" i.e. AATN (Coates 1989) are evidences of solidarity existing among the academicians whereby the colleagues who shared the same views interrupted to support and add humour during the current interlocutor's turn. The male participants were found contributing humour during other participants' humourous turns thus reflecting camaraderie. As stated by Coates (2007, p. 32), since supportive humour is jointly constructed, many commentators see its chief function as being the creation and maintenance of solidarity as also found in this study.

Apart from teasing, there were also acceptable boundaries that were created for team members who had differing views and deviated from the course of the discussion. Boundary marking humour was found employed by both superiors and subordinates in this study. Thus humour is regarded as a tool to enhance solidarity especially when the use of humour i.e. friendly teasing which is approved by the rest of the team members.

Humour also functions towards boosting solidarity among colleagues when capitalising on social knowledge as well as through sharing personal stories. This was observed among female participants who imparted their childhood memories and their experiences while allocating marks for poor essays written by their students. The female

participants were found utilising self-deprecatory humour while disclosing their incompetence with the other team members. While Malaysian women build solidarity through disclosing personal information and by joking at their own expense, Malaysian men maintain camaraderie through interrupting and extending on one another's humour. Such collaborative behaviour indicates support and common ground among them.

It is clear now that Malaysian academic management meetings are no exception to humour which operates to reinforce camaraderie with either senior or junior colleagues.

REFERENCES

- Brown, R. & Gilman, A. (1960). The pronouns of power and solidarity. In T. Sebok. (Ed.), *Style in Language*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 253-277.
- Coates, J. (1989). Gossip revisited: language in all- female groups. In Coates, J. & Tannen, D. (Eds.), *Women in their speech communities*, London: Longman, pp. 94-121.
- Coates, J. (2007). Talk in a Play Frame: More on Laughter and Intimacy. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39, 29-49.
- Hay, J. (1995). *Gender and Humour: Beyond a joke*. M.A Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.
- Hay, J. (2000). Functions of humour in the conversations of men and women. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 32(6), 709- 742.
- Holmes, J. (2006). Sharing a laugh: pragmatics aspects of humour and gender in the workplace. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 38(1), 26-50.
- Holmes, J. & Stubbe, M. (2003). *Power and politeness in the workplace*. England: Pearson.
- Jariah Mohd Jan. (1999). Malaysian Talk Shows: A study of power and solidarity in inter- gender verbal interaction, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.
- Jefferson, G. (1978). A technique for inviting laughter and its subsequent acceptance declination. In Psathas, G. (Ed.), *Everyday Language: Studies in Ethnomethodology*, New York: Irvington Publishers, pp. 79-86.
- Kathoff, H. (2003). Responding to Irony in Different Contexts: On Cognition in Conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 35(9), 1397-1411.
- Katthoff, H. (2006). Gender and Humour: The State of Art. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 38(1), 4-25.
- Martineau, W. H. (1972). A model of the social functions of humour. In Goldstein, J. H., & McGhee, P.E. (Eds.), *The Psychology of Humour: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Issues*, United States of America: Academic Press, 101-124.
- Norricks, R. N. (1993). *Conversational Joking: Humour in Everyday Talk*. Indianapolis: University Press: Indianapolis.
- Norricks, R. N. (2003). Issues in Conversational Joking. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 35, 1333-1359.
- Tannen, D. (1984). *Conversational Style: Analyzing talk among friends*, Ablex Publishing Corporation: United States of America.
- Tannen, D. (1993). *Gender and conversational interaction*. Oxford University Press: New York.