

## **SEMANTIC AMBIGUITY AND WORDPLAY IN THE STAND-UP COMEDY OF CAK LONTONG: A STUDY OF HUMOR THROUGH LANGUAGE**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to analyze the use of semantic ambiguity and wordplay in the stand-up comedy performances of Cak Lontong. As one of Indonesia's well-known comedians, Cak Lontong is recognized for his distinctive humor, which relies on inverted logic, misdirection, and clever linguistic manipulation. The research adopts a descriptive qualitative method using content analysis. Data were collected from transcribed video clips of Cak Lontong's performances available on YouTube and TikTok. The findings reveal that his humor is often generated through literal interpretation, lexical ambiguity, and intentional contextual shifts. These linguistic techniques not only create comedic effects but also demonstrate language creativity and cultural awareness. The study concludes that Cak Lontong's humor goes beyond mere entertainment, highlighting the strategic use of semantics and pragmatics in everyday communication.

Keywords : semantic ambiguity, wordplay, stand-up comedy, humor, Cak Lontong

### **INTRODUCTION**

Language serves as the primary medium through which humans interact, express ideas, and convey emotions. In everyday life, language not only facilitates communication but also functions as a tool for social expression. One of the most creative and socially rich uses of language can be found in humor. Humor uses language in unexpected ways—through exaggeration, irony, ambiguity, and misdirection—to produce laughter and critique social realities.

In Indonesian culture, humor is a vital part of entertainment and public discourse. Stand-up comedy, in particular, has gained popularity in recent years as a modern form of storytelling and satire. Among Indonesia's prominent comedians is Cak Lontong, known for his unique use of logic-based humor and linguistic ambiguity. His performances are filled with phrases that appear straightforward but often contain underlying meanings that challenge the listener's assumptions.

One key linguistic feature in his comedy is semantic ambiguity, where words or sentences have multiple interpretations. This ambiguity often creates humorous effects when the listener realizes they have misunderstood the intended meaning. Combined with wordplay, Cak Lontong manipulates language to surprise his audience, making them laugh not just at the content but at the way it is delivered.

This study aims to explore how Cak Lontong uses semantic ambiguity and wordplay to create humor. By analyzing selected parts of his stand-up routines, the researcher intends to reveal the linguistic strategies and mechanisms behind his comedic effect.

### **Research Questions**

1. What types of semantic ambiguity are found in Cak Lontong's stand-up comedy?
2. How does Cak Lontong use wordplay to create humorous effects in his performances?

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To identify and describe the forms of semantic ambiguity present in Cak Lontong's stand-up comedy.
2. To analyze how wordplay is utilized as a tool to produce humor.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research is expected to contribute to the field of linguistics by highlighting how language can be used creatively in humorous contexts. It may also benefit students and scholars interested in pragmatics, semantics, and sociolinguistics. In a broader sense, this study offers insight into how language reflects cultural patterns and cognitive play in everyday communication.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Semantic Ambiguity and Humor**

Ambiguity in language refers to instances where a word, phrase, or sentence has more than one interpretation. According to Crystal (2008), this phenomenon becomes particularly valuable in comedic contexts, where the double meanings of words or phrases can be deliberately used to mislead the listener and create humor. In the case of Cak Lontong, this aligns with the view of Attardo (1994), who proposed that humor often stems from the coexistence of two contradictory interpretations within a sentence or idea, creating what he

calls semantic script opposition. This opposition forms the core of the comedic moment when expectations are subverted.

### **Wordplay in Stand-Up Comedy**

Nash (1985) classifies wordplay as the use of linguistic creativity, including puns, double meanings, and intentional misuse of expressions. In live performances such as stand-up comedy, these elements can be particularly effective in engaging audiences. In Indonesia, comedians often play with local expressions, switching between dialects or formal and informal registers to generate humorous effects. Wordplay in this context acts as both a linguistic device and a cultural tool for communication.

### **Cultural Semantics**

According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003), the meaning of language is deeply shaped by its cultural and social context. Humor, therefore, is not universal—it depends heavily on shared values, background knowledge, and social norms. In the case of Cak Lontong's performances, much of the humor derives from a common understanding among Indonesian audiences about certain idioms, expectations, and cultural logic. This makes semantic humor not just a play on words but a reflection of cultural identity and shared reasoning.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to explore how language is used to create humor through ambiguity and wordplay. This approach was chosen to allow in-depth analysis of verbal data collected from stand-up performances by Cak Lontong, with a focus on identifying and interpreting linguistic phenomena.

### **Data Source**

The research data consist of five videos of Cak Lontong's stand-up comedy performances, selected from platforms such as YouTube and TikTok. These specific clips were chosen due to their rich use of semantic features, particularly instances where ambiguity and wordplay were apparent and central to the humor.

### Data Collection Technique

Data were collected by transcribing excerpts from the selected videos that included potential examples of semantic ambiguity or wordplay. Observations were also made of the contextual elements and audience responses to help interpret the meaning behind the humor.

### Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis was conducted in three main stages. First, the researcher identified various forms of ambiguity, both lexical and structural, present in the selected texts. Second, types of wordplay such as homonymy, polysemy, and reinterpretation of idioms were classified. Lastly, the contextual background and cultural references were examined to understand how humor is perceived by Indonesian audiences. The goal was to uncover how language is deliberately twisted to produce laughter, while also reflecting deeper cultural meaning.

## DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Data Analysis

This section presents a semantic and pragmatic analysis of humorous expressions found in the stand-up comedy performance by Cak Lontong. The analysis focuses on semantic ambiguity and wordplay strategies used to generate humor. The data are taken from one of Cak Lontong's live comedy shows, where several jokes contain lexical ambiguity, misinterpretation, hyperliteral logic, and metaphorical extensions.

Each expression was transcribed and analyzed to identify its literal meaning and how humor is produced through linguistic mechanisms such as incongruity, ambiguity, cultural reinterpretation, and context manipulation. Below is the table showing examples of expressions, their literal meanings, and the semantic interpretation that explains the humorous effect:

Tabel. Semantic Ambiguity and Wordplay in Cak Lontong's Comedy

No.	Expression	Literal Meaning	Semantic Analysis
1.	"Adik gua makanin koran."	A younger sibling eats a newspaper	Ambiguity arises from treating "koran" (newspaper) as food. Humor emerges from

			violating the expected purpose of an object.
2.	“Biarin aja, yang dimakan itu koram yang kemarin.”	Let him eat, it’s yesterday’s newspaper.	Humor from temporal wordplay-contrasts the concept of outdated information with a literal object to be eaten.
3.	“Kata guru ngaji saya nggak boleh ngomongin orang yang sudah meninggal.”	Talking about the deceased is forbidden.	Lexical ambiguity in “ngomongin” (gossiping vs narrating). Misinterpretation causes comic confusion in an educational context.
4.	“Gagal itu keberhasilan yang tersesat jalan.”	Failure is success that got lost.	Reframing failure with metaphorical optimism. Humor from overly positive reinterpretation.
5.	“Ayok pak, sunat! Udah waktunya!”	Come sir, get circumcised now!	Humor from context shift: applying sales pitch language to a medical practice, creating shock and incongruity.

## Findings

Based on the analysis of Cak Lontong's stand-up comedy material, several patterns of semantic ambiguity and wordplay were identified as key sources of humor. These findings demonstrate how language is creatively manipulated to produce humorous effects.

### Literal Misinterpretation

Some jokes are constructed by interpreting expressions literally when they are typically understood idiomatically or contextually. For example, in the sentence “my little brother ate the newspaper,” humor arises from the misapplication of the word “newspaper,”

which is meant to be read, not consumed. This clash with general knowledge creates a comedic effect.

### **Lexical Ambiguity and Misunderstanding**

Wordplay involving multiple meanings is often used to trigger humorous misunderstandings. One example involves a student who refuses to talk about Prince Diponegoro because his religious teacher told him not to “talk about people who have died.” The phrase “talk about” (in Indonesian: ngomongin) can imply gossiping or speaking about respectfully, and the confusion between these interpretations leads to humor.

### **Contextual Incongruity and Meaning Shift**

Several jokes rely on surprise meanings that don't match the expected context. For instance, a street vendor aggressively promoting circumcision as though he were selling food creates a bizarre and unexpected situation. This type of contextual incongruity is deliberately used to generate laughter.

Overall, these findings indicate that Cak Lontong's humor depends heavily on the audience's linguistic awareness and shared cultural background to interpret and enjoy the comedic twists.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this research strongly align with established linguistic theories of humor, particularly the Incongruity Theory proposed by Attardo (1994) and Raskin (1985). This theory posits that humor arises from a mismatch between what is expected and what is actually delivered. In Cak Lontong's performances, laughter often results from meanings that diverge from the listener's initial interpretation.

From a pragmatic perspective, Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature is also evident in the structure of the jokes. Many meanings are not explicitly stated but are instead implied through context and logical inference. When these implied meanings are cleverly subverted or reversed, humor emerges.

The consistent use of ambiguity and sentence manipulation illustrates that Cak Lontong's comedy is not just about content, but also about form—how messages are structured and interpreted. In addition, the use of familiar cultural contexts such as family dynamics, education, and daily life reinforces the close relationship between humor and social reality.

Thus, it can be concluded that Cak Lontong's humor reflects an intelligent interplay of semantics, pragmatics, and cultural knowledge. Language in his performances serves not only as a medium of communication but also as a tool for playful meaning-making and intellectual entertainment.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **Conclusion**

This research explores how semantic ambiguity and wordplay are used as tools to generate humor in Cak Lontong's stand-up comedy. The analysis of selected video transcripts revealed that Cak Lontong often creates laughter by using literal reinterpretation, ambiguous words, and shifting contexts to deliver punchlines that contrast with the audience's expectations.

His style depends heavily on the audience's awareness of everyday language and cultural norms. Many jokes are funny not because of what is said directly, but because of how the language is twisted from its usual meaning. This confirms the core idea of Incongruity Theory, where humor comes from a gap between what people expect and what actually happens.

This study also shows that humor is not just about entertainment—it involves creativity in using language, shared cultural understanding, and smart timing. Cak Lontong's use of language demonstrates how humor can serve as a mirror to social realities, values, and ways of thinking.

By combining elements of semantics, pragmatics, and cultural reference, Cak Lontong crafts jokes that are not only funny but also intellectually engaging. Therefore, analyzing his performance helps us see the deeper role of language in shaping how people communicate and connect through humor.

### **Suggestions**

Future researchers are encouraged to explore a wider range of comedic materials, perhaps by comparing different comedians or examining how various types of audiences interpret the same jokes. This would allow for a broader understanding of humor in different social and cultural settings.

It would also be beneficial to include audience reactions or feedback in the analysis, as this would add depth to the pragmatic aspect of humor. Understanding how people actually

respond to wordplay can offer valuable insights into how language functions in real-time communication.

In addition, researchers may benefit from applying a multidisciplinary perspective, incorporating linguistics alongside psychology, media studies, or cultural theory. This would enrich the analysis and highlight how humor works at both individual and societal levels.

Lastly, educators and students in linguistics can use studies like this as a way to understand how language operates beyond structure—how meaning can shift, be misinterpreted, or intentionally distorted to create impact and laughter.

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