

**FORMS OF VERBAL HUMOR PRODUCED BY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
STUDENTS: A GTVH-BASED STUDY IN AN INDONESIAN
ISLAMIC SCHOOL**

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Abstract

This study investigates the forms of verbal humor produced by elementary school students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Swasta (MIS) Syababul Qorib Perbaungan, Indonesia. Data were collected through participatory observation, interviews, and audio-visual documentation of students' verbal interaction during formal learning activities and informal peer communication. The analysis was conducted by examining humorous utterances through the six Knowledge Resources of GTVH: Script Opposition, Logical Mechanism, Situation, Target, Narrative Strategy, and Language. The findings reveal that students consistently produce structured forms of verbal humor, including riddle-based humor, metaphorical humor related to learning content, light peer-directed teasing, situational humor, and media-influenced digital humor. These forms emerged from recurring configurations of script opposition and logical mechanisms adapted to age-appropriate language and classroom contexts. This study contributes to applied linguistic research on child humor and extends the application of GTVH to naturally occurring discourse in Indonesian Islamic elementary school settings.

Keywords: verbal humor, GTVH, children, classroom discourse, elementary education

Abstrak

Studi ini meneliti bentuk-bentuk humor verbal yang dihasilkan oleh siswa sekolah dasar di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Swasta (MIS) Syababul Qorib Perbaungan, Indonesia. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara, dan dokumentasi audio-visual interaksi verbal siswa selama kegiatan pembelajaran formal dan komunikasi informal antar teman sebaya. Analisis dilakukan dengan memeriksa ujaran humor melalui enam Sumber Pengetahuan GTVH: Oposisi Skrip, Mekanisme Logis, Situasi, Target, Strategi Naratif, dan Bahasa. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa siswa secara konsisten menghasilkan bentuk-bentuk humor verbal yang terstruktur, termasuk humor berbasis teka-teki, humor metaforis yang berkaitan dengan isi pembelajaran, ejekan ringan yang ditujukan kepada teman sebaya, humor situasional, dan humor digital yang dipengaruhi media. Bentuk-bentuk ini muncul dari konfigurasi berulang oposisi skrip dan mekanisme logis yang disesuaikan dengan bahasa dan konteks kelas yang sesuai dengan usia. Studi ini berkontribusi pada penelitian linguistik terapan tentang humor anak dan memperluas penerapan GTVH pada wacana yang terjadi secara alami di lingkungan sekolah dasar Islam di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: humor verbal, GTVH, anak-anak, wacana kelas, pendidikan dasar

1. INTRODUCTION

Humor constitutes an integral component of children's everyday communication and plays a significant role in their linguistic, cognitive, and social development. Research in child language and developmental psychology has consistently shown that humor reflects children's growing ability to recognize incongruity, manipulate meaning, and engage in metalinguistic play (McGhee, 1979; Martin, 2007; Moran, 2018). As children reach elementary school age, their humor becomes increasingly verbal and context-sensitive, indicating advances in pragmatic competence and abstract thinking. From a linguistic perspective, verbal humor is not merely a source of amusement but a complex meaning-making process. Humor is constructed through the interaction of opposing scripts, logical mechanisms, and contextually appropriate language choices (Raskin, 1985; Attardo, 1994). In peer interaction, verbal humor functions as a communicative resource for negotiating social relationships, expressing identity, and maintaining group cohesion (Norrick, 2003; Dynel, 2009). Despite this, research on humor in educational contexts has largely focused on teacher-generated humor and its pedagogical effects, such as motivation and classroom atmosphere (Ziv, 1988; Garner, 2006; Banas et al., 2011), while children are often positioned as passive recipients rather than active producers of humor.

Recent discourse-based studies have emphasized the importance of examining humor as a linguistic product emerging from authentic interaction. Children do not simply reproduce ready-made jokes; instead, they actively construct humor by drawing on shared cultural knowledge, situational cues, and linguistic creativity (Holmes & Marra, 2002; Attardo, 2017). Classroom interaction therefore provides a rich site for investigating how verbal humor is produced, negotiated, and interpreted among young speakers. In the Indonesian context, linguistic studies applying the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) remain relatively limited but have begun to demonstrate the framework's applicability to local discourse. For example, Mulyadi, Yusuf, and Siregar (2021) apply GTVH to analyze verbal humor in Indonesian stand-up comedy, showing how script opposition, logical mechanisms, and narrative strategies operate within culturally specific humorous discourse. Their findings confirm that GTVH is a productive analytical tool for examining Indonesian verbal humor beyond Western contexts. However, existing studies have primarily focused on adult or performative discourse, leaving children's naturally occurring humor in educational settings underexplored.

At the same time, research on Indonesian children's language use suggests that humor plays an important role in communicative development and reflects children's ability to manipulate meaning and pragmatic intent (Sahayu, 2019). Nevertheless, few studies have

systematically examined how children construct verbal humor at the linguistic level, particularly within Islamic elementary school (madrasah) environments where social interaction is shaped by religious values, local culture, and contemporary media exposure. To address this gap, the present study adopts the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) as its primary analytical framework. GTVH conceptualizes verbal humor through six interrelated Knowledge Resources: Script Opposition, Logical Mechanism, Situation, Target, Narrative Strategy, and Language (Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Attardo, 1994). By applying this framework to naturally occurring classroom interaction, the study examines how elementary school students linguistically construct humor in everyday communication. Accordingly, this study focuses on identifying and classifying the forms of verbal humor produced by elementary school students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Swasta Syababul Qorib Perbaungan. Through a qualitative, GTVH-based analysis of classroom discourse, this research aims to contribute to applied linguistic studies on child humor and to extend existing Indonesian humor scholarship by foregrounding children as active and competent humor producers in educational contexts.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine verbal humor as a naturally occurring linguistic phenomenon in classroom interaction. The research was conducted at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Swasta (MIS) Syababul Qorib Perbaungan, an Islamic elementary school in North Sumatra, Indonesia. The participants consisted of students from Grades IV and V, aged approximately 9–11 years, who were actively involved in verbal interaction during classroom activities. Classroom teachers were also involved as key informants to provide contextual clarification during the data collection process.

Data were collected through participatory classroom observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Classroom observation focused on capturing spontaneous instances of verbal humor occurring during lessons, group work, and informal interactions. Interviews with selected students and teachers were conducted to clarify contextual meanings and support interpretation of the observed humor. In addition, audio and video recordings, along with field notes, were transcribed verbatim to form the primary data corpus for analysis. All procedures were conducted with due attention to ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality.

Data analysis followed the interactive qualitative model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Instances of verbal humor were identified based on the presence of incongruity and humorous intent, and subsequently analyzed using the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH). The

analysis focused on the six Knowledge Resources of GTVH: Script Opposition, Logical Mechanism, Situation, Target, Narrative Strategy, and Language. The primary objective of the analysis was to identify recurring patterns and to classify the forms of verbal humor produced by students. Representative excerpts were selected to illustrate each humor form, with emphasis placed on structural and linguistic features rather than on frequency counts or pedagogical effects.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of verbal humor produced by elementary school students at MIS Syababul Qorib Perbaungan was conducted by closely examining naturally occurring humorous utterances using the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH). Rather than beginning with predefined categories, this study started from individual instances of humor and traced how linguistic and contextual features, as specified in GTVH, clustered into recurring forms. This section first illustrates the analytical process through representative data excerpts and subsequently discusses the resulting humor forms. To demonstrate how the analysis was carried out, the following excerpt is taken from a spontaneous classroom interaction:

“Why didn’t the watermelon take the exam? Because it was afraid of cracking under pressure.”

At the initial stage of analysis, this utterance was identified as humorous based on shared laughter and playful responses from peers. Applying GTVH, the humor was first examined in terms of Script Opposition (SO). Two opposing scripts were identified: *academic pressure* associated with examinations and *physical pressure* associated with objects cracking. The humor arises from the unexpected overlap between these two scripts. Next, the Logical Mechanism (LM) was identified as *personification*, as the watermelon is attributed human emotions such as fear. The Situation (SI) involves an informal classroom moment during a lesson break, while the Target (TA) is non-human, which minimizes social risk. The Narrative Strategy (NS) takes the form of a riddle with a question–answer structure, and the Language (LA) is simple and concrete, ensuring accessibility for peers. When similar GTVH configurations were identified across multiple humorous utterances, particularly those employing riddles and personification, these instances were grouped analytically and categorized as riddle-based verbal humor. A similar analytical procedure was applied to humor related to learning content, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

“Is this math homework or a secret code? It feels like learning magic.”

In this case, the Script Opposition lies between *clarity* and *confusion*. The Logical Mechanism is *hyperbole*, as the difficulty of the task is exaggerated through metaphor. The Target of the humor is the learning material itself, while the Narrative Strategy is an

evaluative statement rather than a dialogic exchange. Linguistically, the humor relies on metaphorical language that transforms an abstract cognitive challenge into an imaginative scenario. Repeated occurrences of similar GTVH patterns led to the identification of metaphorical humor related to learning content as a distinct form. Peer-directed humor was analyzed using the same procedure. Consider the following excerpt:

“Your handwriting looks like chicken scratches.”

Here, the Script Opposition contrasts *neatness* with *messiness*. The Logical Mechanism is *metaphorical comparison*, drawing on familiar imagery. The Target is a peer, yet the Situation and shared laughter indicate that the humor remains within socially accepted boundaries. The Narrative Strategy is a direct humorous remark, and the Language draws on colloquial, culturally familiar expressions. When multiple instances shared similar GTVH configurations, they were grouped as light peer-directed teasing, highlighting humor’s role in peer bonding rather than aggression. Situational humor was identified through utterances responding to unexpected classroom events, such as the following:

“Let’s study using candles—like in colonial times!”

This utterance was analyzed as containing a Script Opposition between *modern* and *traditional* learning contexts. The Logical Mechanism is *irony*, achieved by exaggerating the contrast between past and present conditions. The Situation—a temporary power outage—plays a crucial role in making the humor intelligible. The recurrence of similar context-driven GTVH patterns supported the classification of situational humor as a distinct form. Finally, media-influenced digital humor emerged from utterances such as:

“You’re like YouTube buffering—thinking too slow!”

In this example, the Script Opposition contrasts *speed* and *delay*, while the Logical Mechanism is *analogy*. The Language incorporates digital terminology familiar to students, reflecting their media exposure. Repeated identification of similar digital analogies across data excerpts led to the categorization of media-influenced digital humor. Through this step-by-step application of GTVH to individual data excerpts, five recurring forms of verbal humor were analytically derived: riddle-based humor, metaphorical humor related to learning content, light peer-directed teasing, situational humor, and media-influenced digital humor. These forms represent patterned configurations of GTVH elements rather than isolated jokes. The analysis demonstrates that elementary school students systematically employ linguistic and contextual resources to construct humor, underscoring their role as active and competent humor producers in classroom interaction.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study identifies the forms of verbal humor produced by elementary school students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Swasta Syababul Qorib Perbaungan through a qualitative analysis based on the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH). The findings show that students consistently produce structured forms of verbal humor, including riddle-based humor, metaphorical humor related to learning content, light peer-directed teasing, situational humor, and media-influenced digital humor. The GTVH-based analysis demonstrates that these humor forms are constructed through recurring patterns of script opposition, logical mechanisms, and context-sensitive language choices, indicating that children are capable of employing complex linguistic resources appropriate to their developmental stage. By focusing on humor as a linguistic product rather than its effects, this study contributes to applied linguistic research on child humor, particularly within the context of Indonesian Islamic elementary education.

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