

Multimodal Discourse Analysis: The Interaction of Humor and Gender in the Meme of Video Clip 'Emotional Damage'

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ABSTRAK

Humor merupakan kebolehan atau kualiti untuk mencipta atau mengenal pasti perkara-perkara yang lucu, menghiburkan, atau menyenangkan. Humor boleh muncul dalam bentuk pertuturan, tulisan, tindakan, situasi, atau ekspresi yang membuat orang ketawa atau berasa gembira. Dalam memberi respon terhadap sesuatu humor, pastinya akan wujud interaksi antara satu sama lain. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk menganalisis bagaimana interaksi antara humor dan jantina melalui pendekatan *Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA)* dalam video meme yang membincangkan tentang "Emotional Damage". Dalam era digital masa kini, di mana penggunaan internet sangat pesat, fenomena meme telah menjadi budaya digital yang popular dalam kalangan masyarakat terutamanya golongan muda. Ia sering digunakan untuk menyampaikan humor dengan menggabungkan beberapa elemen iaitu visual, teks, dan audio. Kajian ini meneroka bagaimana peranan jantina boleh mempengaruhi makna sesuatu humor serta bagaimana respon daripada audiens yang berlatar belakang jantina berbeza terhadap meme "Emotional Damage" ini. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kualitatif dan analisis semiotik multimodal untuk mengenal pasti pola-pola humor yang berasaskan sindiran, satira, dan jenaka gelap. Hasil penemuan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa wanita cenderung untuk memberi respon terhadap humor dengan lebih ekspresif dan emosional, manakala lelaki pula cenderung memberi respon dengan pendekatan yang lebih logik dan sarkastik. Selain itu, humor dalam meme juga meningkatkan prasangka terhadap jantina masing-masing dalam masyarakat. Penglibatan dalam kajian ini adalah untuk menunjukkan betapa pentingnya sensitiviti dalam penyampaian humor bagi mengurangkan potensi salah faham antara jantina dalam konteks budaya digital.

Kata kunci: Analisis wacana multimodal, humor, meme, jantina

ABSTRACT

Humour is the ability or quality to create or recognize things that are funny, entertaining, or enjoyable. Humour can appear in the form of speech, writing, actions, situations, or expressions that make people laugh or feel happy. In responding to humour, there will naturally be an interactional response from each party. The aim of this study is to analyse the interaction between humour and gender through the *Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA)* approach in meme videos discussing "Emotional Damage." In this digital era, where internet usage is rapidly increasing, the meme phenomenon has become a popular part of digital culture, especially among young people. Memes are often used to convey humour by combining various elements such as visuals, text, and audio. This study explores how gender roles can influence the meaning of humour and how audiences with different gender backgrounds respond to the "Emotional Damage" meme. This research uses a qualitative method and multimodal semiotic analysis to identify patterns in humour based on mockery, satire, and dark comedy. The findings of this study indicate that women tend to respond to humour in a more expressive and emotional manner, while men tend to respond with a more logical and sarcastic approach. Moreover, humour in memes also contributes to the reinforcement of gender-based stereotypes in society. This study highlights the importance of sensitivity in delivering humour to reduce potential misunderstandings between genders within the context of digital culture.

Keywords: Multimodal discourse analysis, humour, meme, gender

INTRODUCTION

Language is a system used for communication. According to Saussure (1959), language is a part of semiology, which is the study of how signs function in social life. Saussure distinguishes between *langue*, which refers to the collective language system shared by a community, and *parole*, which refers to an individual's use of language. In the field of linguistic pragmatics, two main aspects are of particular concern: language use and the context of utterance. In any language, problems in language use often arise due to its functional aspects. The language used may encounter situations where communication becomes ineffective, potentially leading to misunderstandings in verbal expression (Wijana, 1996).

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) is an approach used to understand how various modes of communication, such as images, text, and sound are used together to create meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). In communication, Multimodal Discourse Analysis involves multiple modes that work in unison to convey a message. To deliver a message effectively, Kress and van Leeuwen introduced the concept of *visual grammar*, which refers to how visual elements are systematically arranged, such as position, direction, color, and shape. These visual elements help establish relationships between the producer, the subject of discussion, and the audience. This can be demonstrated, for example, through the direction of gaze in an image. Although these elements are visual in nature, they are not merely decorative or aesthetic. They also convey social and cultural information. Fundamentally, Multimodal Discourse Analysis is often used to analyze media used for conveying information, such as advertisements, films, posters, or, in the context of this study, memes, where multiple communication modes are combined. The approach developed by Kress and van Leeuwen is well-suited to the rapid development of information media in the digital age, where information is increasingly presented in visual forms rather than through text alone.

Recently, in the rapidly evolving digital era, one form of communication that has gained widespread use is the meme. Memes are a form of visual and textual communication that has become especially popular on social media platforms. The function of memes is not limited to delivering humor, but they also serve as a medium for expressing current issues, cultural narratives, and political commentary. One particular meme that went viral and gained significant attention, especially among young people around the world, is "Emotional Damage." This meme became widely known through a video clip featuring an exaggerated expression of shock. Due to the massive use of social media, this meme quickly turned into a cultural phenomenon and has been widely used across various digital platforms to add context to humorous situations that can trigger emotional reactions.

The role of humour is a crucial part of everyday life. Beyond serving as entertainment to lighten the mental burden of its audience, humour also functions as a medium for delivering social critique on various events occurring in society. In response to the many unique situations that arise, people often express themselves through humorous language that conveys a relaxed and amusing tone for the reader. Humour, being universal in nature, can also assist students in fields such as psychology, anthropology, and sociology in determining their goals and interests (Robert & Yan, 2007). The delivery of humour utilizes one of the primary tools of communication: language (Afrianto et al., 2014; Kuswoyo, 2016). To create an appropriate humorous atmosphere, skill is required from both parties—the speaker and the listener. The speaker's humour must be delivered at the right moment and in the right context; otherwise, it may fail to be funny and even end up offending others. Similarly, the listener must respond wisely, as no matter how "sharp" the critique embedded in the humour may be, it is still intended as humor.

The role of gender in the delivery of memes to audiences has a significant impact on the selection of meme content that is presented (Ikhlef & Awad, 2023). Examining how gender influences the representation of memes is an important topic of study. In humour, memes often, whether

explicitly or implicitly, reinforce gender roles within society. For example, the “Emotional Damage” meme is frequently used to depict exaggerated emotional responses, which leads to differing connotations depending on who is portrayed as the subject. In some cases, when the subject is male, the exaggerated emotional expression is interpreted as a display of boldness or masculinity. On the other hand, when the subject is female, it tends to reinforce the stereotype that women are inherently more emotional than men.

Stand-Up Comedy is a live stage humour performance that features a solo comedian performing in front of an audience, delivering jokes and interacting directly with them. In a Stand-Up Comedy show, the comedian is expected to make the audience laugh without assistance from other performers.

Based on the mentioned of research background, this study aims to further explore gender-based interactions for several reasons: (1) How does the “Emotional Damage” meme represent gendered reactions? (2) How do audiences from different gender backgrounds respond to this meme? (3) What are the implications of gender-based humour representation within the context of digital popular culture?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on previous studies, one reviewed research by Firmansyah & Rokhmawan (2016) focused on pragmatics and humor by taking comedian Raditya Dika as the main subject. This study used a qualitative method and explained how Raditya Dika employed various speech acts to capture the audience’s attention. The second reviewed study by Hakoköngäs et al. (2020) discussed how communication tools are used to influence new audiences. The third study reviewed, by Azzahra & Pranoto (2023), revealed that the humour found in the “Emotional Damage” meme contains elements of sarcasm, insult, and dark comedy, offering a more detailed meaning beyond ordinary humour. From this literature review, to fill the gap in further research, multimodal analysis is used with a focus on gender interaction. The novelty in this study lies in continuing to apply the theory of Kress and van Leeuwen.

METHODOLOGY

The research method used is qualitative. According to Creswell & Creswell (2017), qualitative research is a method in which the researcher seeks to understand the meaning of a problem experienced by a group or individual, either originating from the person themselves or from social issues. The purpose of qualitative research is to provide or describe how current, real-world problems can be addressed using scientific procedures. When analyzing, Arikunto (1983) emphasizes the need for deeper, detailed understanding while maintaining a broad scope.

To achieve the objectives of this research, the researcher refers to the discussion by Azzahra & Pranoto (2023), who examined humour in several video clips of the “Emotional Damage” meme. The approach taken involves analyzing how gender plays a role in responding to these reactions using a semiotic mode.

The semiotic mode is a method used to analyze how meaning is constructed from signs and symbols, which take various forms in communication. To carry out the analysis, the multimodal semiotic method is employed, as it involves multiple aspects such as language, images, music, sound, and movement, all of which collectively produce discourse (Basyid & Firmansyah, 2023). The steps taken in analyzing the data are carried out using a qualitative research method to obtain the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the focus of the research is on the gender aspects observed in the “Emotional Damage” video meme. In previous studies, three patterns were identified from the video transcript data. This research will expand upon those findings by analyzing how different genders respond to the humor presented in the meme.

Previous research presented data in the form of a diagram showing the percentage distribution of sarcastic humour. The diagram categorized humor into three types: satire, dark jokes, and insults. The results were as follows:

- Satire: 43%
- Dark jokes: 14%
- Insults: 43%

The diagram illustrating this data is presented as follows:



Figure 1. Sarcastic Humour Diagram.

Insult

Insult or offending refers to a deliberate act of mocking, speaking harshly, or behaving poorly toward others (Babou, 2014; Saussure, 1959). Previous research showed that such an incident occurred when a woman in the video intentionally made a demeaning comment toward someone else. The woman said to a man: “You’re very ugly,”. To which the man responded: “Your beauty doesn’t match your intelligence.” This exchange was presented in the data as follows:

Girl: “Everyone’s been talking about it you’re just really ugly.”

Guy: “Thanks. It’s lucky you’re beautiful because there’s nothing up here.”



Figure 2. The moment of conversation when the male mentions the female's intelligence.

The interaction in the conversation illustrates the use of sarcasm and insult. Such interactions often depend on social context, the relationship between individuals, and gender perceptions. In the analysis based on gendered reactions, there are several perspectives that can be discussed, particularly from the following aspects:

1. Girl

From that conversation, it is clearly shown that the utterance is a direct insult toward the man being addressed. The woman openly criticizes the man's physical appearance by saying, *"...you're just really ugly,"* which indicates that she is calling him unattractive. In the social context, this is seen as an indicator that women may be more vocal in delivering personal criticism, especially when in an emotional state. This observation supports the notion that emotional expression and communication styles in humor or conflict can differ based on gender, often shaped by societal norms and expectations.

2. Guy

After the woman criticized the man's physical appearance, the man responded with a counter-insult, but in a more intellectual manner. In the conversation, the man said, *"...there's nothing up here,"* implying that the woman lacks intelligence. His response suggests that although the woman may possess physical beauty, she lacks depth or intellect. Rather than directly replying to the insult about his looks, the man chose to attack a more sensitive aspect for many women that has intellectual capability. His statement serves as a subtle but painful retaliation, demonstrating how men may use sarcasm and wit as a defense mechanism against personal attacks. This response reflects a sharp and sarcastic communication strategy. While it may appear more composed on the surface, it carries emotional weight and the potential to harm. If not conveyed with caution or good intent, such strategies can escalate conflict and damage interpersonal relationships.

Satire

According to Thu & Aung (2018), satire is an act intended to criticize or mock someone or something. In the previous research, there was a conversation between a man and a woman. The woman expressed her fondness for cupcakes by saying:

Girl: "I really, really, really love cupcakes."

Guy: "You also love getting diabetes."



Figure 3. A conversation moment when the male insinuates that the female has diabetes because she really likes cake.

The interaction that occurs in the conversation shows how differences exist in the ways men and women express and understand a conversation. In the analysis based on the reactions occurring between genders, there are perspectives that can be discussed, in this case from:

1. Girl

In the conversation, the woman says, *"I really, really, really love cupcakes,"* which means she is expressing an intense liking for something, that in this case, cupcakes. This statement is not intended to insult or provoke but simply to convey a desire. The conversation shows that women tend to be more expressive when sharing their feelings or preferences about something. In some cases, sarcastic comments like this can be considered humorous if both parties understand them as a joke. However, if there is no clear humorous context in the conversation, it can cause one person to feel offended.

2. Guy

After the woman expressed her liking for cupcakes, the man responded by saying, *"You also love getting diabetes,"* which means he implied that the woman also likes to get diabetes. The man replied using sarcastic humour to comment on the health risks that can result from excessive sugar consumption. His response was intended to criticize the woman's habit of frequently eating cupcakes by pointing out potential health consequences like diabetes. This comment can be considered an insult because it touches on health issues and may even lead to sensitive topics such as body weight. From this response, the man uses sarcasm as a form of criticism, which is often associated with men tending to respond logically or with sharper remarks. Perhaps the man found his comment funny and meant it in good spirit towards the woman, but if she tells him that it was offensive, he might apologize and explain himself. Therefore, the man may not have realized that his comment could be perceived as hurtful or belittling to the woman. It is important to always consider the sensitivity of the interlocutor when discussing topics related to health or physical appearance in such interactions. Moreover, this situation can serve as an opportunity for both parties to understand how to communicate more politely and respectfully, appreciating each other's feelings.

Dark Joke

According to researchers (Willinger et al., 2017), dark jokes, also known as "black humour," are jokes or humour that touch on sensitive, taboo topics such as death, abnormalities, special needs, and sometimes unnatural or controversial matters that may make listeners uncomfortable. This type of joke can sometimes evoke entertainment and laughter because it deals with sad topics, sarcasm, or unexpected surprises. Some people may accept such jokes as entertainment, while

others may feel offended or disturbed by what they perceive. The conversation data is presented as follows:

Man: "Number one, by the way. This one was kind of funny. 'This song is so good my dead great grandpa came back to life just to turn it off.'"

Woman: "Oh my God!"



Figure 4. A conversation moment when the male actor reads comments about a song that can bring back his deceased great-grandfather.

Previous research has discussed the type of dark joke found, which involves delivering an exaggerated and absurd satire by describing a song as “bad” to the extent that it could supposedly revive one’s great-grandfather who has passed away. This aligns with the concept of dark humor or black jokes as explained by (Willinger et al., 2017) in their study on humor. In this research, the researcher will analyze how gender interaction occurs based on the reactions between a man and a woman in a conversation about dark jokes, focusing on:

1. Woman

In the conversation, the woman acts as the interlocutor receiving the joke. She responds with *“Oh my God!”* expressing surprise and discomfort. The woman’s expression shows astonishment because she likely did not expect the joke to touch on sensitive topics such as death. Her response to the man’s joke is relatively passive but still attempts to be expressive. Furthermore, her reaction also indicates discomfort towards the joke, which she considers strange and inappropriate.

2. Man

The man plays the role of the informant delivering the dark joke derived from a comment. The tone he uses when telling the joke appears relaxed and somewhat humorous. His statement, *“This one was kind of funny,”* indicates that he considers the joke amusing, even though he might be aware of the sensitive nature of the joke. However, it seems that the man delivers the joke mainly as entertainment to elicit laughter, although it is unclear whether he fully recognizes how sensitive the joke actually is.

The interaction shows the difference in how men and women respond to dark humour. It appears that men tend to focus more on the humorous element itself, while women express a more emotional and sensitive reaction to the content of the joke. Thus, this reflects the differences in perception and tolerance towards sensitive topics based on gender.

CONCLUSION

From this study, it can be concluded that each person's response to humour, whether satirical, dark humour, or insulting, is greatly influenced by gender differences. Women tend to show more expressive and emotional reactions when responding to humour, especially if the humour is sensitive or personally offensive. Conversely, men often respond to humour with logic and tend to reply with intellectual sarcasm, although sometimes men may unintentionally provoke negative reactions from others.

This study also concludes that humour found in memes is not merely a form of entertainment consumption but can also reinforce gender biases. The patterns observed in responses to humour involving gender-based criticism reveal how social perceptions of men's and women's roles are shaped. Therefore, understanding sensitivity and context in communication is crucial, as it can influence gender-based humour patterns within digital culture.

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