

Lexical Ambiguity in English Puns on Memes Posted by X Account @Punhubonline

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Abstract

Memos are a recent way to communicate, particularly popular on social media platforms such as X. Many memos engage readers by combining text with images or videos. An important component contributing to a meme's humor is using ambiguity in puns. This phenomenon demonstrates its importance for readers to comprehend the meaning and function of puns in memos. Nevertheless, despite the growing use of memos as a communication medium, limited study has studied the particular role of lexical ambiguity in generating humor within digital media. This research aims to identify the various types of lexical ambiguity employed in puns portrayed in memos posted by the @Punhubonline X account and examine the impact of these ambiguities on the development of humor. A qualitative descriptive methodology was applied to examine the research data, which consisted of 20 data of recent memos from the account. The various types of lexical ambiguity are identified using Ullmann's theory, and how it produces of humor is described using Kant's theory. Findings indicate that 15 words or phrases demonstrate lexical ambiguity of the polysemy type, while 5 words or phrases demonstrate the homophone type. The conclusion exists that the appropriate application of lexical ambiguity can produce entertainment content in the digital medium of the current day. The employment of lexical ambiguity in memos enables current digital content users to present entertaining content on social media in a more engaging and creative way, providing people to acquire both entertainment and novel knowledge.

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INTRODUCTION

Language has emerged as the primary communication medium across all social strata, serving as a valuable medium for expressing thoughts, feelings, and knowledge in diverse areas. In the contemporary digital era, social media has become the main method of communication. Social media enables public disclosure of an individual's status. In addition to facilitating ideas on various subjects, including cultural, social, political, or celebrity gossip, social media can

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also function as a source of entertainment (Nizar & Aestetika, 2024). A popular kind of entertainment expression employed on social media is memes.

Meme is a social media phenomenon gaining traction among the public. The meme has evolved as a novel media for conveying ideas by combining verbal and visual communication, enable studies to display text on pictures (Ulfa, 2021). A meme uses concepts that have the same literal interpretation but culturally transmit a completely different or even conflicting meaning. This causes enjoyment because of the discrepancy between the actual interpretation and the intended meaning (Joshua, 2020). The application of humor is an essential aspect contributing to the entertaining value of memes; puns are one of the most frequently employed humorous ways. Each of these depends on a variety of features which modify the structural and semantic aspects of lexical units (Miller & Gurevych, 2015). Memes' humorous impact is typically achieved through clever puns.

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary describes a pun, or paronomasia, as a form of wordplay that indicated many meanings by employing various interpretations of words or phonetically similar terms for entertaining or rhetorical purposes. It is an approach for applying the characteristics of languages to produce a word, sentence, or discourse with several interpretations (Lems, 2011). Puns utilize lexical ambiguity, employing words that have many meanings or similar pronunciations with various meanings (Faina et al., 2021). People become consciously aware of lexical ambiguity when interpreting puns intentionally chosen to reference both meanings of a lexically ambiguous term (Rodd, 2018).

Ambiguity represents as an aspect of semantics, a branch of linguistics. Ambiguity arises because a word or phrase possesses two or more probable meanings (Wiyanto, 2022). Ullmann (1972) categorised ambiguity into three types: lexical ambiguity, phonological ambiguity, and structural ambiguity. Lexical ambiguity begins from the meaning of a term rather than its structure. All of this is a group of words, such as a dialogue or discourse, that may provide various meanings due to the polysemous structure of each term. Ullmann asserts that lexical ambiguity relates to the multiple interpretations of a word, influenced by two different variables: polysemy and homonymy. According to Ullmann (1972) defines polysemy as a term or phrase that possesses multiple meanings, while maintaining relationships and connections among each of its meanings. This indicates that the word possesses an alternative meaning, while it remains connected to its other definitions. The transformation of a word's meaning into two or more interconnected meanings constitutes the evolution from a singular meaning to polysemy. Homonymy is described as two or more words that share similar phonological forms and pronunciations but have distinct meanings. Cann (in P. Andini et al. (2021) defines homonymy as a phrase with two or more unrelated meanings. Homonymy is classified into four categories: homophones, homographs, full

homonymy, and partial homonymy defines homonymy as a term possessing two or more unrelated meanings. Homonymy is categorized into four types: homophones, homographs, full homonymy, and partial homonymy. Homophones emerge when lexemes display phonetic similarity but differ in orthography, whereas homographs originate when the spelling looks the same but the pronunciation varied. Cann asserts that homonymy is considered complete if it functions as both a homograph and a homophone. Partial homonymy arises when only certain word forms are identical. A meme may use a term or phrase with two meanings: literal and funny (Yule, 2006). When the reader understands both meanings and the punchline, a hilarious effect is created.

Kant (1987) asserted that humor arises from the incongruity or contradiction between expectations and reality. Humor emerges from confusion or anxiety, recognizing that the incongruity bears no significant consequences, resulting in laughter (Beeman, 1999). Humor typically manifests on social media, particularly on X, which conveys a comedic context through memes. This incongruity results in surprise when our cognition uncovers something unexpected from expectations (Raskin, 1979). The humor produced by puns rely on the ambiguities inherent in language. This ambiguity enables meme creators to play with word meanings, resulting in an entertaining and humorous impact (Rahayu et al., 2019). The X account @Punhubonline is well-known for its adept use of puns in a clever and amusing way. The account often shares memes that utilize lexical ambiguity for humorous purposes, engaging millions of followers in the process.

The lexical ambiguity in puns is not simply a humorous thing, it is also a method of challenging our comprehension of linguistics. In order to comprehend the humor in a meme, it is important to begin perceive understanding the meaning of the word or phrase, considering that people frequently face memes that contain a variety of meanings. This research is relevant to real-life situations since it attempts to explore how the application of lexical ambiguity serves as a medium of enjoyment and a stimulus for critical thinking, consequently enhancing our intellectual and linguistic capabilities through the comprehension of ambiguity.

The earlier research on lexical ambiguity was conducted by Kristiana Tri Wahyuni in 2014. This research aims to identify the various forms of lexical ambiguity in David Hundsness's adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, analyze the manifestation of lexical ambiguity through puns and wordplay, and assess the influence of such ambiguity on the meanings within Hundsness's adaptation. Further research was conducted by Risa Rachmawati in 2018, titled "Study on Lexical Ambiguity in Chandra Liow's YouTube.Com." The primary objective of the research was to identify and analyze the different forms of lexical ambiguity in Chandra Liow's YouTube videos. The researcher was trying to clarify the meanings of ambiguous words or phrases in these videos, and how these

ambiguities can result in varied interpretations by audiences. The latest research on lexical ambiguity by Fairuz & Irma Madarina in 2021 that examined lexical ambiguity in song lyrics. The research aims to identify the many forms of lexical ambiguity and its contributing reasons, particularly focusing on lexical ambiguity in song lyrics.

This research distinguishes itself from previous research by identifying specific classifications of lexical ambiguity in memes and looking into the relationship between these types of lexical ambiguity in the production of humor in memes. It applies new media, specifically X, in contrast to the majority of previous studies, which relied on books, films, song lyrics, or other social media platforms. The comprehension of communication in the digital age can be improved by a more thorough comprehension of the meaning and function of wordplay in memes. This understanding can also broaden our understanding of linguistics and communication, particularly in the context of the possible application of language in entertaining communication. The main objective of this study is to evaluate the usefulness of all of the types of lexical ambiguity in puns that are employed through memes in the production of humor. Consequently, this study has the potential to address the research void by concentrating on the creation and comprehension of lexical ambiguity in puns in English, with a particular emphasis on the platform of X.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative descriptive methodology. Qualitative research is utilized to achieve an in-depth understanding of a particular context or culture, investigate under-explored topics, and generate innovative concepts. Creswell & Creswell (2017) defines qualitative research as an inquiry process aimed at comprehending a social human issue, characterized by the construction of a comprehensive, holistic representation, articulated via words, detailing the perspectives of informants, and done in a natural environment. This research utilises images of memes that include speech. These memes consist of image parts or original photographs enhanced with text or captions by their creators.

The data utilized in this study comprise memes with speech collected from the @PunhubOnline X account. Technique of collecting data is a procedure to collect data related to the problem in this research. According to Creswell & Creswell (2017) collecting data in a qualitative study, the writer needs to record any potentially useful data thoroughly, accurately, and systematically, using field notes, sketches, audiotapes, photographs, and other suitable means. From the quotation, the writer takes some step to collecting data, there are collected a sample of memes from the account over a period of time, and selecting memes that explicitly use wordplay and lexical ambiguity.

The population in this study consists of all memes that were posted by the X account, @punhubonline, which reached 356 memes. The writer selected a

a purposive sample of 20 recent memes that were relevant to the research objectives and contained lexical ambiguity from this population. The purposive sampling method was employed to ensure that the selected memes was contemporary and met the specific criteria of containing lexical ambiguity as they are key to achieving the research objectives. This approach allowed the study to focus on the most recent examples of lexical ambiguity in X account, @punhubonline.

In this research, to ensure validity and reliability, several systematic steps were taken. First, writer collected memes containing wordplay from the @punhubonline account. Second, the data were analyzed using the concept of lexical ambiguity from Ullmann (1972) to identify the types of ambiguity that arise, both in the form of polysemy and homonymy. In this stage, the researcher also categorizes the data based on Cann's four types of homonymy, namely homophones, homographs, full homonymy, and partial homonymy. The identification of lexical ambiguity was conducted in steps, with the supervisor guiding the process to ensure classification accuracy. Any differences in the classification of ambiguity were examined and resolved cooperatively. Third, after classifying the types of lexical ambiguity, the researcher analyzes how the ambiguity creates a humorous effect using Kant's incongruity theory (1987). The researcher examines how the incongruity between the literal meaning and the intended meaning in the meme produces a humorous effect. For example, when a term has various meanings (polysemy) or diverse pronunciations (homophone), the disparity between the intended meaning and the initial perception causes an alternation in thinking, resulting in humor. Fourth, the writer evaluate the effectiveness of the use of lexical ambiguity in creating humor by considering the cultural context and the audience's understanding of the puns. Finally, the results of the analysis are presented descriptively qualitatively by explaining the forms of lexical ambiguity found and how the ambiguity contributes to producing humor effects in memes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study collected 20 memes that contained lexical ambiguity. These memes were posted by the X account, @punhubonline. Based on the theory of lexical ambiguity proposed by Ullmann, table 1 below shows the frequency of each type of lexical ambiguity.

Table 1 : Frequency of Lexical ambiguity Types in The X Account @Punhubonline

	Types of Ambiguity	Amount
o		
	Polysemy	15
.		

Homonymy	
1) Homophones	5
2) Homographs	
3) Full Homonymy	
4) Partial Homonymy.	
Total	20

Table 1 indicated that polysemy had the highest frequency of occurrence in the most recent meme posts made by the @punhubonline account, encompassing 15 examples. Additionally, another type of ambiguity, homonymy, was identified in all 5 examples. This table categorizes homonymy into four types: homophones, homographs, full homonymy, and partial homonymy. In this study, only the homophone category of the four types of homonymy was present. Below is an examination of examples of each category of ambiguity:

1. Polysemy

The first category of lexical ambiguity identified is polysemy. Ullmann (1972) defined polysemy as a word or phrase that possesses multiple meanings, while maintaining linkages and interconnections among its various interpretations.

Figure 1. The meme posted in The X Account @Punhubonline on September 13, 2023



The meme portrayed in Figure 1 is categorised as lexical ambiguity polysemy since it employs the term "feet" with many meanings. In accordance to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the term "feet" possesses several definitions, including:

1. "the terminal part of the vertebrate leg upon which an individual stands"
2. "a unit to measure the length or distance in the US"

The term "feet" in this meme indicates a unit of height measurement often utilised in the United States. Another meaning of the word refers to a part of the human body (the plantar surfaces of the feet). Both definitions derive from the same root, "foot", however they are used in different contexts. The ambiguity arises from the word's several interpretations, which generate humor through the relationship of meanings.

Kant theory of humor states that humor emerges from a discrepancy between expectation and reality. The meme requires the reader to think of a narrative centred on an extreme skydiving event from a specified height. In the second panel, the punchline arises when the man reveals that the "feet" in problem refer solely to the feet of his own feet. This discrepancy is unexpected because the individual responding to the meme employs the literal meaning of "feet" just as body parts. The lack of significant consequences enables tension to diffuse through humor. This meme produces humor by using the diverse interpretations of interrelated terms.

Figure 2. The Meme posted in The X Account @Punhubonline on July 11, 2022



The meme presented in Figure 2 is classified as lexical ambiguity polysemy due to its application of the term "dying" with a multiple meaning. Based on the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the term "dying" has multiple meanings, there are:

1. "very ill and likely to die soon"
2. "to be extremely eager to have or do something"

The first meaning is the literal meaning of death or passing away. As opposed, the second meaning employs the figurative meaning of the term extremely eager. These two meanings are included in polysemy because they are semantically related and derive from the same root.

In accordance with Kant (1987) theory of humor, the humor in this meme is the result of the discrepancy or contradiction between expectations and reality. It might expect a serious or literal answer when a person states, "This graveyard looks a little overcrowded." Nevertheless, the meme's written response, "Yes, people are dying to get in" used unpredictable and unexpected wordplay. This response could be interpreted as a joke that describes how eager people are to go into a graveyard, or it could refer to death in literal terms. This results in a sense of surprise and incongruity, which in turn causes humor. This incongruity causes an element of surprise as our minds find something that contradicts what people already think. Raskin (1979) clarified that humor is the result of such confusion or tension. Upon realising that the incongruity has no significant consequences, people release it through laughter (Beeman, 1999). To convey a message in an amusing way, this meme, like many others on social media, employs the context of humor.

Figure 3. The meme posted The X Account @Punhubonline on October 31, 2022



The lexical ambiguity in Figure 3 is seen in the phrase "come out." According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the phrase "come out" possesses a double meaning:

1. "to come into public view"
2. "to openly declare one's sexual orientation or gender identity"

The phrase "come out" literally means to emerge or exit from hiding which aligns with the context of the werewolf in this meme. However, the phrase is frequently employed to indicate an individual's sexual orientation. The two meanings are interconnected and originate from the same root, resulting in producing polysemy.

Kant's theory of humor assumes that humor emerges from a discrepancy between expectations and reality. This meme expects that the werewolf will

engage in a frightening or perilous action due to its presence below a full moon. In truth, the werewolf is merely disclosing his sexual preference in an unexpected way. The disparity between the expectation of the werewolf as a terrifying creature and the reality of a sexual orientation disclosure results in surprise and humor. The humor in this meme comes from the transformation of fear into a more benign, less frightening setting. Kant argues that the unexpected dissolution of tension expectations into the absurd or humorous produces laughter. In this example, the revelation of the werewolf serves as the punchline that transforms the context from frightening to humorous.

2. Homonymy

a. Homophones

One form of homonymy identified in this research is homophone. Homophones are two or more words that have distinct orthography and meanings, despite the fact that they sound the same, as many linguists observe. The writer defines homophones as words that are pronounced the same but have distinct orthography and meanings, despite the fact that they have the same sound.

Figure 4. The Meme posted in The X Account @Punhubonline on November 15, 2023



The meme seen in Figure 4 is an example of the homophones type of lexical ambiguity, whereby the term "by" has similarity with "buy" sound. Based on the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the terms "by" and "buy" have different definitions or meanings, which are:

1. By: "in proximity to : near"
2. Buy: "to acquire possession, ownership, or rights to the use or services of by payment especially of money : purchase"

The shop worker uses the word "by" to specify the location of the milk, that is, "by the eggs", giving it a prepositional meaning in the

context of a place marker. However, the customer interprets the phrase to mean the word buy, which means to purchase, so he declines and replies, "No, I only want to buy the milk". When uttered, these two words sound similar, but they have quite distinct semantic meanings. The difference between the worker's real intent and the customer's interpretation becomes the starting point of the humor. According to Kant theory of humor, humor results from an incongruity between expectation and reality. In this meme, the idea is that the shop worker is giving fundamental and unambiguous instructions about where the milk is, which is understood in the literal context. However, because the words "by" and "buy" sound so close, the consumer misinterprets the term. This incongruity causes a sense of surprise, which stimulates the humor reaction, as explained by Kant's thesis. Humor develops when people realise that this uncertainty has no major repercussions, resulting in a sense of funny.

Figure 5. The Meme posted in The X Account @Punhubonline on November 5, 2023



The meme seen in Figure 5 is an example of the homophones type of lexical ambiguity, whereby the term "wait" has similarity with "weight" sound. Based on the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the terms "wait" and "weight" have different definitions or meanings, which are:

1. Wait: "to stay in place in expectation of: to delay serving (a meal)"
2. Weight: "the amount that a thing weighs: something heavy"

In the context of the meme, the waiter apologises by saying, "Sorry about your wait, sir", referring to how long the customer had to wait. However, the consumer misinterprets the term "wait" as "weight", which denotes weight or anything heavy. Wordplay like this produces humor

because, while the two terms have different spellings and meanings, the pronunciation is the same, allowing for misconceptions, which is what makes it amusing.

In the meme, humor emerges when the customer sees the waiter's statement as a critique to his weight. Instead of accepting the apologies for the wait time, the consumer responds, "*Did you just call me fat?*" indicating that he is insulted by a meaning that the waiter did not intend. This ambiguity serves as the starting point for the meme's humor, as the audience realises the customer misunderstood a reasonably basic phrase.

According to Kant's study (1987), the humor in this meme arises from the inconsistency or contradiction between expectation and reality. When the waiter offers the apology, the audience expects the customer to respond reasonably, such as accepting it without complaint. However, the reality in this meme reveals an unexpected response: a misreading of the waiter's intentions. This incongruity provides a surprise that elicits laughing because the paradox has no significant repercussions. Beeman's (1999) explanation of cognitive ambiguity enhances the humor in this meme. In the beginning, people may not comprehend why the customer is insulted by the waiter's apologies. However, as they realise the ambiguity of the homophones "*wait*" and "*weight*", their uncertainty transforms into a funny understanding. This method portrays how humor can emerge from the resolution of linguistic misunderstanding, followed by the finding of multiple meanings in the context of conversation.

Discussion

Puns often use various types of lexical ambiguity, particularly in the context of entertainment, such as memes on the @punhubonline account. Based on the research results, it was determined that polysemy is the lexical ambiguity that is mostly used in memes from the account. Ulfa (2021) contends this process lead to the use of words with many interconnected meanings to generate humor. The use of polysemy in memes can be referred to to the word "*feet*", which has identical spelling and writing but has distinct meanings that are still related. Homonymy, particularly homophones, is a type of lexical ambiguity which is included in this research. The pronunciation of words for example "*buy*" and "*bye*" is similar, but their meanings are distinct, which can result in humorous misinterpretations. The presence of both types of lexical ambiguity in these memes demonstrates that puns can be an essential element in the creation of humor by using ambiguity.

Lexical ambiguity affects humor through creating incongruity. It is consistent with Kant's theory that once perception is a discrepancy between expectation and reality, humor appears, as demonstrated by the words "*wait*" and "*weight*," that have the same sound but have distinct meanings. The disparity in meaning ultimately leads to ambiguity. As an effect of the

discrepancy between expectations and reality, this ambiguity generates humor. For an understanding of the humor caused by ambiguity in a meme, people requires to comprehend a language, because ambiguity causes unexpected variations in meaning, therefore leads to humorous.

The use of lexical ambiguity in these memes indicate its presence has the ability to increase the creativity and entertainment value in digital communication. In contemporary society, content must be able to quickly attract users' attention and provide value. This characteristic makes it highly relevant. Cultural and linguistic contexts are frequently used by memes that employ lexical ambiguity in order to induce users to interact with the content by sharing, commenting, and discussing their interpretations (Rahayu et al., 2019). Therefore, they encourage active participation in the content. The result could have significant impacts on how lexical ambiguity is used in digital discussions. Furthermore as being entertaining, memes that use ambiguous words may help users learn unfamiliar phrases, words, and cultural meanings in a pleasant and simple method. As an example, memes that use the word "*dying*" in both literal and figurative usage are both amusing and assist individuals to improve linguistic comprehension, which encourages knowledge that happens unconsciously but beneficial learning for users. Due to social media keeps evolving and growing, content creators can use humor and language especially in the use of lexical ambiguity in memes to make information that engage, share knowledge, and connect people.

CONCLUSION

The identification and classification of lexical ambiguity through wordplay in memes posted by The X @ punhubonline account reveals that the usage of words with multiple meanings serves as vital for the creation of humor like these memes. The most prevalent ambiguity in this research is polysemy. Incongruity theory is used to create misunderstandings or errors in memes by using terms with different meanings. Study of lexical ambiguity in contemporary entertainment, particularly in social media platforms like X, is a significant contribution of the study. The use of proper lexical ambiguity can create more engaging and unique entertainment content in current digital platforms, allowing users to learn new things and entertain themselves. The results of this study may eventually be used as an overview for developing better ways to communicate in the realm of digital communication. This is because content creators will be able to create more prosperous and interesting social media posts by learning how to employ language ambiguity to generate humor. Nevertheless, the results of this study may not accurately represent comparable phenomena on other social media platforms, particularly in light of the limited collection of data from just one account. For further research, it is advisable to expand the scope of the study by conducting an analysis of the news media, including podcasts and various social media platforms and

accounts, to acquire a more thorough comprehension of the use of lexical ambiguity in the current context.

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