

# **CHAPTER I**

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### 1.1 Background of the Study

Men are social creatures. They depend on each other to fulfill their needs such that they cannot live without others. Based on this thought, then a question may be raised. How can they make others know about their needs? The answer is simple – through communication with its main property, language. Hereby, it is quite evident that communication is extremely substantial in men's life.

Owing to its importance, communication has long been an interesting subject for experts to explore and investigate, prior to language. Then, the study of language, called linguistics, was born to the world. Yet, that is not adequate. Linguistics alone cannot account for all aspects of communication, such as appropriateness, culture, age, and status. Therefore, experts strove to find 'something' that can cover that hole. They tried to examine what was beyond language. The emergence of aspects and branches of linguistics, such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, discourse, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and biolinguistics and hundreds of incredible theories followed next. One of those theories, Speech Act Theory, has aroused the writer's interest to make investigation and have further details about it. Speech Act Theory can be explained somewhat like this.

According to Levinson (1983), of all theories of language usage, Speech Act Theory, which elucidates meaning in communication, has aroused people's biggest interest. For the truth, it is so interesting to discuss about it – the manifestation, the usage, and how to analyze something through it. Moreover, in his book, *Pragmatics*, Levinson

(1983) also provides some instances to prove and support this. He states distinctly that psychologists have noted that for the acquisition of language in general, first one must know the concepts underlying Speech Acts; anthropologists have hoped to find something which can explain the nature of magical spells and rituals in general; while linguists have seen the 'capability' of this theory to be used in solving problems in syntax, semantics, second language learning, and elsewhere.

Literary critics have also looked at Speech Act Theory for an illumination of textual subtleties or for an understanding of the nature of literary genres (see e.g. Ohmann, 1971; Levin, 1976) (Levinson, 1983:226). John Searle (1969:21) has mentioned that:

"The hypothesis that the speech act is the basic unit of communication, taken together with the principle of expressibility, suggests that there are a series of analytic connections between the notion of speech acts, what the speaker means, what the sentence (or other linguistic element) uttered means, what the speaker intends, what the hearer understands, and what the rules governing the linguistic elements are."

Those studies above may be the basic principle and concern of many essays and reports in order to provide general annexation between Speech Act Theory and many things, such as everyday conversations, slogans, advertisements, headlines, news either in magazines or newspapers, and novels. Here, the writer also wants to show that connection with limitation to the humor column in *Reader's Digest* - that is "Laughter, the Best Medicine" - since there are few studies concerning the investigation of the speech act manifestation in foreign magazine, chiefly in the humor column. Moreover, when the writer compares the jokes in *Asiaweek* and *Reader's Digest*, it seems that the jokes in *Asiaweek* are political ones which may be more difficult to understand by the

readers than those in *Reader's Digest*. Therefore, she decides to take *Reader's Digest* as the source of her data. Additionally, in order to give the direction of her thesis and avoid misunderstanding, the writer makes deeper scope concerning that column. She singles out only humors that are in the form of dialogues. How to analyze the utterances spoken by participants in *Reader's Digest's* "Laughter, the Best Medicine" through Speech Act Theory and to find out the language functions of those utterances are specialized here. By the way, the writer conceives that it is quite essential to make the humor column readers aware that speech acts are able to make reading humor column more enjoyable.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problems

Cook (1989) stated that in communication, there are two important major components, they are: (1) the elements of communication and (2) the macro functions of language. Those two previous components have an ultimate power to build successful communication that happens when the addressee is able to perceive a message in a way the addresser wishes. If the addresser does not intend the message to be perceived as such, or if the addressee does not realize that they are deliberate, then communication degenerates into lying, obfuscation, or simply breaks down altogether (Cook, 1989:31). This can happen wheresoever and at anytime: in a classroom, when a teacher explains a lesson to the students; in a seminar, when a discussion session is held; at home, when someone reads a book; or even in the humor situation in a magazine's humor column. The last event becomes the writer's focus in her thesis. A participant may not be able to catch some acts (locution, illocution, and perlocution acts) that are contained in the speech uttered by the other participants and vice versa. On account of this concern, there

are some questions that are raised in analyzing humor by means of speech acts. The questions are:

1. What acts are involved in the utterances in every joke?
2. What are the language functions of the utterances in every joke?
3. How can those jokes become humorous?

### **1.3 The Objectives**

Derived from the above formulated questions, it is noteworthy to say that in general the study is planned to have three objectives:

1. To find out some acts which are contained in the utterances of every joke.
2. To find out some language functions of the utterances in every joke.
3. To find out how those jokes become humorous.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

It is hoped that the greatest contribution of this study is for the language teaching and learning quality improvement in Widya Mandala Catholic University, especially to the material of Discourse Analysis and Semantics prior to the Speech Act Theory and Language Function Theory, four major skills (Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening Comprehension), and CCU (Cross Cultural Understanding). Hopefully, the investigation of analyzing communication among participants in the humor situation in *Reader's Digest's* "Laughter, the Best Medicine" will provide more insight and clarification for those subjects above.

### 1.5 Theoretical Framework

The study under report is discussing about the implementation of Speech Act Theory in the utterances spoken by participants in the humor column and the functions of those utterances likewise (and here the Theory of Language Function is utilized). Therefore, the focus of the study mainly deals with Speech Act Theory itself and Discourse Analysis as well (with special concern to the study of oral discourse and language function). Yet, it is possible for the writer to serve some more supplement theories that could help her in doing the analysis, namely The Theory of Humor, Presupposition, and Language and Culture.

Santoso (1998) in her thesis says that Discourse Analysis actually studies the relationship between 'form' and 'function' as one of its major concerns is the relationship between the discourse and the speaker-hearer by and for whom it is produced. Santoso also quotes J.R Firth's (1935) statement that "we shall find the key to a better understanding of what language is and how it works."

There are two divisions of discourse, they are the oral and the written one. In line with the background of the study, the writer then is deeply interested in discussing the oral discourse only.

Speech Act Theory is included here as it provides "an ability to develop the function of what is being said" (Santoso, 1998). Speech is a form of action and words are instruments in which actions can be performed. This assertion is supported by Austin's words in Stubbs' book, *Discourse Analysis* (1983:148) which postulates that "...the saying and the doing are inseparable in two senses. The acts could not be done without using language, and the saying counts as the doing."

Correspondingly, Stubbs also says that utterances can perform three acts: locution, illocution, and perlocution. Furthermore, it is believed that every utterance must have at least two acts, whether they are the combination of locution and illocution acts or even the mixture of them all.

That is why, in analyzing an utterance, it is better to keep in mind that Speech Act Theory and Discourse Analysis (oral discourse and language function) are inseparable means. The writer puts these two theories together on account of Stubbs' saying (1983:147):

"In order to account for the coherence of discourse we need accounts not only of surface lexical and syntactic cohesion, and of logical prepositional development. We need also an account of speech acts, indirect speech acts (in which the illocutionary force of an utterance is overlaid by markers of mitigation or politeness), the context-dependence of illocutionary force, and the sequential consequences (predictive power) of certain speech acts. In other words, we have to have multiple theories of discourse coherence."

Renkema (1993:22) also supports this by saying that speech act theory has had a strong influence on the field of discourse studies as this theory focuses on the question of what people are doing when they use language.

The writer adds the theory of language function as well. She uses Cook's view that there are seven functions of language, namely emotive, directive, phatic, poetic, referential, metalinguistic, and contextual function.

The theory of humor by Veatch (1998) is also important for the thesis owing to the fact that the study deals with humors. He assumes that this theory does not tend to respect disciplinary boundaries, though writers often address themselves to the concerns of disciplinary-restricted audiences. His theory is given in the form of three necessary and

(jointly) sufficient conditions for humor perception. Those conditions are V, N, and Simultaneity. Moreover, the writer puts the theory of humor by Raskin (1985) which lists some characters of humor. The more apparent features of these requirements of humor can be seen in chapter 2.

Presupposition is also attached in this study. The writer does so since she considers that when two persons are speaking, they have in mind a view about what they are talking about. When this view is violated and things do not go as they should be, then there comes up a laughable situation. Correspondingly, this concern does affix to the Veatch's theory.

The last theory to discuss is the theory of language and culture. Language has something to do with culture. The emergence of *ethnolinguistics* as the study of language in relation to culture (Lyons, 1981:267) has already proved the notion that language has something to do with culture. He postulates that "But culture, in this sense, presupposes society; and society in turn depends upon culture." Additionally, he also formulates that "If competence in a particular language implies the ability to produce and understand sentences of that language, then it is unquestionably a part of culture: i.e. social knowledge." By this opinion, it is distinct that culture is related to every aspect of human life, including language and jokes which are discussed in this study.

## 1.6 Assumptions

It is a must for a good study to have it's own assumptions concerning the topic. Therefore, in order to walk on the right track, this study is carried out under these following assumptions:

1. Every utterance must have at least two acts and one function.



2. There is a time when one cannot correctly interpret – implicitly and explicitly – the messages given by others.
3. There is a time when the view that someone has previously had in mind is violated.

### 1.7 Scope and Limitation

The study is limited to the investigation of humor column in *Reader's Digest*, that is “Laughter, the Best Medicine”. The jokes are taken from March (the ordinary edition and the special one) and April issues of *Reader's Digest*. In this case, the writer takes humors that are in the form of dialogues only. To be more specific, she selects the humor column of *Reader's Digest* for it is the easiest access for her to do some observations and collect the data. Moreover, she limits the data up to 52 utterances since she considers that the number of the samples is sufficient to represent the acts and functions of the language.

Meanwhile, the theory used to analyze the data is limited as well. The writer uses two primary theories in her study: Speech Act Theory and Language Function Theory. These two theories are carried out together since they are inseparable and every book of Speech Act always mentions about Language Function Theory. In addition, there are some minor theories in this study that are chiefly deliberated in chapter 2. The writer utilizes them t

### 1.8 Definition of Key Terms

In order to eliminate any misinterpretation of some key terms used in the study, the writer feels it necessary to define those terms that are taken from the title of her thesis, namely:

### 1. Oral Discourse

Formulated from Cook's book, the writer can conclude that oral discourse is meaningful and unified stretches of language that is considered to be less planned and orderly and more open to intervention by the receiver.

### 2. Participants

The term participants here are the speakers and hearers in the humor situation.

### 3. Reader's Digest

This magazine is the flagship magazine of the Reader's Digest Association, Inc which is founded in 1922 by Lila and DeWitt Wallace. Reader's Digest is widely known and respected for its editorial creativity and direct marketing expertise. It is published in 48 editions and 19 languages and reaches almost 100 million readers around the world each month. It is also published in Braille, on cassette and in a large edition for Easier Reading.

### 4. Laughter, the Best Medicine

A humor column in Reader's Digest magazine.

### 5. Humor or joke

Webster Dictionary says humor is the power to see or tell about the amusing side of things; a keen perception of the comic or the ridiculous.