



การวิเคราะห์ความกำกวมและความคลุมเครือ
ในมุกตลกภาษาอังกฤษที่พบในสื่อสังคมออนไลน์
AN ANALYSIS OF AMBIGUITY AND VAGUENESS
IN ENGLISH JOKES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Received September 30, 2020; Revised November 8, 2020; Accepted December 20, 2020

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อวิเคราะห์รูปแบบการใช้ภาษาในมุกตลกภาษาอังกฤษซึ่งพบได้จากสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ และเพื่อเปรียบเทียบรูปแบบการใช้ภาษาในมุกตลกภาษาอังกฤษว่ามีการใช้รูปแบบใดมากที่สุด ทั้งนี้ผู้วิจัยได้รวบรวมข้อมูลมุกตลกจากสื่อสังคมออนไลน์อาทิ เฟซบุ๊ก อินสตาแกรม และทวิตเตอร์ โดยคัดเลือกมุกตลกที่มีจำนวนไลค์ (likes) มากกว่า 10,000 ครั้ง และจำนวนแชร์ (shares) หรือจำนวนการแสดงความคิดเห็น (comments) มากกว่า 1,000 ครั้ง จำนวนทั้งสิ้น 100 มุก โดยเริ่มเก็บข้อมูลระหว่างวันที่ 16-22 ธันวาคม 2562 ผู้วิจัยได้ใช้แนวความคิดเรื่องความคลุมเครือ (Vagueness) และความกำกวม (Ambiguity) ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูล ผลการวิจัยพบว่า มุกตลกในภาษาอังกฤษจำนวน 48 % เกิดขึ้นจากการใช้ภาษาคคลุมเครือ 46 % เกิดขึ้นจากการใช้ภาษากำกวม และ 6% เกิดขึ้นจากการใช้ภาษาในรูปแบบอื่น

คำสำคัญ: ความกำกวม, ความคลุมเครือ, มุกตลกภาษาอังกฤษ, สื่อสังคมออนไลน์

Abstract

The objectives of this research are to analyze language patterns in English jokes found on social media and to compare the patterns in which English jokes are used the most. The researchers collected jokes data from social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, selecting the 1,000 jokes with more than 10,000 likes, 1,000



shares or 1,000 comments from 16–22 December 2019 by using the concept of vagueness and ambiguity to analyze the data. The research results found that 48% of English language jokes were generated from vague language, 46% are generated by ambiguous language, and 6% from other forms of language.

Keywords: Ambiguity, Vagueness, English Jokes, Social Media

Introduction

Entertainment has always been associated with humans from the past to the present because humans naturally seek for the things that make them happy. Language usage is a way to create an enjoyment in several ways, for example using language to compose a song and poetry, to make a joke, etc.

Jokes are one of people's basic enjoyment. In Thai, Jaroenkiatboworn (2005) said that Thai jokes apply 2 main language strategies, including playing on words (lexical) and discourse strategies. Lexical strategy can be divided into 3 sub-strategies: using words causing misinterpretation, an unexpected interpretation, and emphasizing ambiguity. In the discourse strategy, it can be divided into 6 strategies: by misguiding, presenting of unexpected events, violating tradition, using postulate, using sarcasm, and overlapping joke by joke. Many researchers studied language strategies creating Thai jokes on these discourse perspectives such as Mina (2018) in *The Strategies of Creating Humor in Thai Television Programs*, and Thongprasit (2012) in *A Study of Language Usage and Thai Humor Techniques in Situation Comedy*.

English is considered the international language of the world that people use to communicate between countries. Like other languages, it is also used for entertainment, especially jokes or gags. In comparison with the Thai joke studies, English applied more various linguistic frameworks such as Lutfi (2019) in *A Semantic Pragmatic Study of English Jokes*, Taghiyev (2017) in *English Linguistic Jokes Under the Umbrella of Semiotics*, and Seewoester (2009) in *Linguistics Ambiguity in Language-based Jokes*. Nowadays, more people around the world can get access to the English jokes easier through social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Thus, online jokes analysis is an interesting



issue because it is an intermediary that facilitates the exchange of opinions of people around the world currently.

Although there are several linguistic strategies dealing with jokes in Thai and English, strategies mentioned repeatedly in these related researches were ambiguity and vagueness of expressions which affect sense of humor. Ambiguity is a linguistic phenomenon occurring when an expression conveys more than one expected meaning, whereas vagueness is another phenomenon occurring when an audience cannot specify any specific meaning of an expression. These two linguistic phenomena become one of language strategies applied to make jokes since they present unexpected answers to the audience.

Therefore, the researcher is interested to study English jokes in online community to analyze the semantic strategies of English jokes that were found in online society based on ambiguity and vagueness framework and to compare the frequencies of the language strategies used to create jokes.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the language strategies of English jokes that were found in online society
2. To compare the frequencies of the language strategies used to create jokes

Research Methodology

This research is the analysis of the jokes in online communities used qualitative methods to analyze the linguistic patterns of online jokes framed by the principles of ambiguity and vagueness, and quantitative method was applied to compare the frequency of the patterns of the 100 online jokes.

1. Data Collection

The samples in this research were the jokes collected from Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The 100 online jokes were randomly collected and counted 100%. The inclusion criteria for the selected data included the number of “likes” (over 10,000 likes), the number of shares (over 1,000 shares), and the number of comments (over 1,000 comments) collected from 16th – 22nd December 2019. The researchers collected the



data by concerning the number of “likes” to make sure that the data presented sense of humor and to verify the meaning of each joke from the comments.

2. Research Instruments

The tools used in collecting the data were electronic media and the tool for analyzing the data was the analysis table as shown below.

Table 1: Examples of Data Analysis

No.	Jokes	Vagueness	Ambiguity	Others
1.	Daughter: Mother, do you <u>love</u> me? Mother: I like you as a friend.		√	
2.	A boss: Don't think about it, just say <u>it</u> . An employee: Fuck you.	√		

The table was divided into 5 columns: No., Jokes, Vagueness, Ambiguity, and Others. If a joke presented underspecificational sense, the researcher would tick on the “Vagueness” column. If a joke presented ambiguous sense, the researcher would tick on the “Ambiguity” column. If a joke presented neither vague nor ambiguous sense, the researcher would tick on the “Others” column.

3. Research methods

3.1 Data collection process

The research collected the 100 online jokes from Facebook, Instagram and Twitter by considering the inclusion criteria mentioned before from December 16th - December 22nd, 2019.

3.2 Data analysis

This research uses the concepts of ambiguity and vagueness as the analysis framework for classifying the jokes as follow.

1) Ambiguity presents the use of unclear words or sentences that are, often causing readers to misinterpretation because those words, phrases or sentences usually convey 2 or more meanings. For example, ‘Foreigners are hunting dogs.’ The underlined phrase is unclear in the sense whether dogs were being hunted, or foreigners are being spoken of as dogs.



2) Vagueness presents the use of words, phrases, or sentences with a wide range of meanings, which allows the reader to freely interpret them. For example, 'I'll be back later'. Vagueness in this sentence is 'later' because it shows underspecification of time when the speaker will come back. It's may be in 5 minutes? 5 hours? Or 5 days? etc.

3) Other language strategies are the jokes that cannot be classified as ambiguity and vagueness, which may come in the form of sarcasm or everyday parody.

3.3 Statistical data analysis

In this research, the researcher has counted the frequency the strategies that were found in terms of percentage.

Results

The results of the analysis of language strategies: ambiguity and vagueness in English Jokes on Social Media were presented in the table below.

Table 2: Frequency of Language Strategies creating English on-lined Jokes

No.	Language Strategies	Percentage
1.	Vagueness	48
2.	Ambiguity	46
3.	Other forms	6

From the above table, there were 3 types of language strategies created English jokes: vagueness, ambiguity, and others. The vagueness was founded in the highest frequency which is 48% of the total, followed by ambiguity with 46%. The other strategies ranged the last with 6% of the total.

From the analysis, 3 types of language strategies were presented and explained as follow.

1. Vagueness

The vagueness refers to words, phrase, or sentences which could be unspecified, so the word or sentence conveying vagueness can be interpreted freely. It may lead to misinterpretation.



Example 4

A woman: Hyy

A man: Did you know you stole something from me when we met yesterday.

A woman: Sorry, I'll return your wallet.

While that man is typing... : you stole my heart.

A man and a woman were chatting on the phone. The man asked her, "Did you know you stole something from me when we met yesterday". After that, the woman responded with "Sorry, I'll return your wallet", while the woman responded, that man was going to type "you stole my heart".

The vagueness presented via the word "something" in "Did you know you stole something from me when we met yesterday". From this situation, it could be seen that the purpose of the man's question was to flirt with the woman by saying that she stole his heart. However, because of "something" could refer to anything in that question, the woman misunderstood. She thought that the man demanded the wallet that she had stolen from this man.

Example 5

A boss: Don't think about it, just say it.

An employee: Fuck you.

There was a brainstorming session in a company. The boss spoke during the meeting "Don't think about it, just say it". At that time, someone said, "Fuck you".

In this context, the vagueness was the word "it" which could refer to any idea in the listener's head at that moment. The humor is created because of the unexpected answer which is the result of vagueness.

2. Ambiguity

In the ambiguity, even though the interpretation of the word or sentence could be more than one meaning, the meanings of that word or sentence is still limited and could not be freely interpreted.

Example 1

Daughter: Mother, do you love me?

Mother: I like you as a friend.



In this conversation, there were a mother and her daughter. The daughter asked her mother "Do you love me mother?", and the mother answered, "I like you as a friend."

In this context, the ambiguity shows in the word "love" which presents 2 meanings:

- (1) Adulterous love.
- (2) Love is the relationship between mother and child.

From the dialogue, the mother misunderstood the child's question by the ambiguity of the word "love".

Example 2

A man: Are you single?

A woman: No, I'm album.

For the example, there was a man who wanted to flirt with a woman. So, he asked her, "Are you single?", and the woman responded, "No, I'm album." The ambiguous word is the word "single" which conveys two meanings:

- (1) Single status
- (2) Song

In this context, the man's question was about the status of the woman, but the woman could answer him with another meaning.

Example 3

A man: Hey, I'm Christian.

A woman: Sorry, I'm not religious.

From the example, a man wanted to get to know a woman. So, he introduced himself, "Hey, I'm Christian", however, the woman's answer is "Sorry, I'm not religious."

In this context, the ambiguous word is "Christian" has two meanings:

- (1) name
- (2) Christianity

In the context, the woman might have misunderstood that the man wanted to tell his religion. Hence, she answered the man that she had no religion.



3. Other language strategies

Other language strategies included the data that apply neither the ambiguity nor the vagueness.

Example 6

Son: Hey Dad, do you believe in ghosts?

Dad: There is no such thing as ghosts.

Son: But our maid said there's ghosts.

Dad: Pack your bag!! Meet me out in the car now!

Son: Why?

Dad: WE DON'T HAVE A MAID.

Father and son were chatting on the phone. The son asked his father "Hey Dad, do you believe in ghosts?", and the father answered "There is no such thing as ghosts". The son then told his father "But our maid said there's ghosts". With shocked, his father said "Pack your bag!! Meet me out in the car now!". His son was startled and asked, "Why?". His father replied, "WE DON'T HAVE A MAID".

This joke was not created from the ambiguity or vagueness of expression. Rather it presents sense of humor because of the unexpected answer.

Example 7

Lawyer: A women shot her husband because he stepped on her freshly mopped floor.

Police: That is correct!

Lawyer: And it took you 20 minutes to arrest her. Why?

Police: The floor was still wet.

At a court, a lawyer was investigating the police about the crime that a wife had killed her husband. The lawyer then asked the police "A women shot her husband because he stepped on her freshly mopped floor." The police responded to the lawyer "That is correct!". The lawyer went on to ask, "And it took you 20 minutes to arrest her. Why?". The police responded, "The floor was still wet."

In this context, the husband was shot by the wife because the husband stepped on the area where the wife was mopped, and it was still wet. So, the police did



not dare to arrest the wife because the police were afraid of being shot since the floor was still wet. This example presented neither the ambiguity nor vagueness.

Discussion

According to the research results, 48% of English online jokes were created by vagueness expressions, and 46% of them were made by ambiguous expressions. These could imply that the vagueness and ambiguity play major role in making English jokes. These findings, which showed that vagueness was founded more often than ambiguity in making the jokes, might happened because the result of vagueness is plenty of the possible answers of the jokes could be interpreted whereas ambiguity could provide fewer. However, they are not obviously different in terms of frequencies of these both strategies.

Moreover, discourse is another factor used to describe the results of ambiguity and vagueness of expressions by concerning the context of the interpretations. On the other hand, ambiguity and vagueness are sub-strategies or lexical strategies under the discourse to present unexpected events or answers to the audiences (Jaroenkiatboworn, 2005).

Finally, to understand and enjoy the jokes, English as a foreign language learner have to know various senses of vocabulary and understand some background information about the culture as well. On the other hand, intercultural knowledge plays an important role in enjoying the jokes of the audiences.

Suggestion

For the next research, the researcher should increase the number of data, and identify what other language strategies found in the jokes are. For the learners who study English as a foreign language, jokes are another fun source for learning English vocabulary and some cultural knowledge.

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