The Power of Local Language Terms in Creating Humor in English Language Teaching

Antonius Ali Wutun¹, Iriany Kesuma Wijaya², M. Dahlan Bahang³
English Department of STKIP YPUP Makassar, Indonesia¹²³
Email: aliwutun@gmail.com¹

Submitted: 24/03/2021 | Revised: 18/05/2021 | Accepted: 15/06/2020

Abstract. Humor is regarded as an important aspect in English language teaching (ELT). Therefore, English teachers are expected to create humors in their teaching. Creating humor in ELT, however, is still regarded hard for Many English language teachers. Humor is related to personal capability. Although humor has been widely explored, there is still scarcity on investigating it from local language terms. Therefore, this study came to investigate how humor can be presented in the classroom through local language terms. This was a descriptive qualitative study carried out at Pharmacology Institute of Makassar. The subjects of this study were students at the first semester that had different local languages. The data were collected through classroom observation and in-depth interview. This current study reveals that local language terms have significant power to present humor in ELT. Humor that created from local language input has emotional impact on cheerful learning in the classroom. The local language terms have power to trigger emotional engagement and enthusiasm in learning English. In addition, they function to reduce the complexity and anxiety in learning English as foreign language.

Keywords: Local Language Terms, Humor, Emotional Engagement, Cheerful Learning.

https://ojs.unm.ac.id/eralingua

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License
INTRODUCTION

English as a foreign language subject presents various challenges for English teachers in their teaching. One of the biggest challenges is how to create a relaxed, cheerful, and enthusiastic learning atmosphere in the classroom. A positive learning atmosphere will encourage students’ involvement in language learning process. On the other hand, negative learning atmosphere easily leads students to feel bored. One of the ways to present positive learning atmosphere is to integrate humor in English teaching.

Humor in general refers to fun, joy and relaxed. The obvious expressions of humor are laughs and smile. In order to make someone laughs and smiles, humorous comments, jokes and funny stories are mostly used in daily life (Matsumoto, 2014). Humor is, therefore, considered effective to create a cheerful learning atmosphere and to bridge the gap between teachers and students in foreign language class (Petraki & Nguyen, 2016). In addition, having fun in the classroom, the students feel free from the stress (Wagner & Urios, 2011). Humor also functions to avoid teacher-students’ gap in learning. Beside the learners’ attentiveness is increased (Gönülal, 2018). There are various ways of creating humor such as joke, funny stories, humorous comments, and language play. Fun learning is more beneficial psychologically than monotonous learning. The moment by which the students have humor in their learning is regarded as the opportunity for language learning (Reddington & Waring, 2014). Furthermore, Pomerantz & Bell (2011) state that humor that is created naturally and spontaneously have positive impact in language expressions and development.

Despite its significant role in creating fun learning, humor is not simply created. Some teachers have humor skill, while others do not have it. Wanzer, Frymier, & Irwin (2010) found that the instructional humor that presented in the classroom do not automatically bring the learners to get fun and enjoyment. Creating humor requires some basic skill such as behaviors, playing the words. Davies (2015) states that teachers’ and students’ behaviors plays significant role to create humor in foreign language class. In addition, humor in foreign language requires language and culture competence. Matsumoto (2014) claims that creating humor requires certain skill of teachers and students. She further states that linguistic and pragmatic competences of the learners are to be taken into account in incorporating humors in foreign language learning. In context of skill, some language teachers probably have skill to play jokes or telling funny stories or playing the words and perhaps their actions such as mimic can create sense of humor (Heidari, 2018). On the other hand, some teachers cannot do it. They find difficulties how to create humor in the classroom. Since humor is very personal, teachers are expected to find their own ways or strategies to create humors in the classroom.

In integrating humor in ELT, there are some learners aspects considered in presenting humor in learning such as language proficiency level, age, and culture. Learners’ language proficiency is considered important to adjust suitable humor for learners (Davies, 2015; Heidari, 2018; Neff & Rucynski, 2016). Beginner, intermediate and advanced level of the learners should put into account. The higher the level of language proficiency will determine the more complexity of linguistic input in
presenting humor. Then the age factor is also important to be considered. Humors for young learners are different from teenagers and adults. In addition culture is the significant factor since humor is also different from culture to culture. Foreign language instructors are expected to adjust the appropriate humor in learners’ cultural context. Sense of humor is different from culture to culture. Most of researches reveal that the inclusion of humor in foreign language learning increases learners’ participation in classroom learning. One of the key successes in foreign language learning is free from pressure.

A number of researches have explored various aspects of humor particularly humorous content, language play jokes. It is however the local cultural terms are rarely explored in English language teaching. Originally local cultural terms are not humorous contents. They do not generate sense of humor in students’ first language use. Even in national language, they do not generate sense of humor either. Yet the use of local terms in English as foreign language learning generates sense of humor. This study explored the power of local terms that belong to the learners to create humor in English language learning. In addition, the local terms that neglected for years in foreign language teaching were explored as learning input for foreign language acquisition.

RESEARCH METHOD

A descriptive qualitative method was applied in this study. The research was done at a Pharmacology Institute of Makassar. The participants were the first semester students. The participants had different ethnic backgrounds and had their own local languages. The students were assigned to talk about their localities and traditional things that they were familiar with. Classroom learning activities of English were monologues and dialogues in English. The topics were traditional or local food, traditional events, local favorite places and local habits. The firstly students were assigned to do individual monologue, secondly students did interactive dialogue with their partners and the last was classroom talk by which all students were provided opportunity to speak in front of the class. The students’ performance of monologues, interactive dialogues and classroom talk were observed and recorded. When a session was over, students were interviewed to get their perspectives, opinions on the topics talked and the classroom learning atmosphere they underwent. The interview session was a part of learning activities. The data collected through observation and interview were analyzed using thematic analysis. The data were identified, examined then grouped in main themes as they came up repeatedly.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Using local terms in English usage generates sense of humor

The local language terms are not originally humorous contents. Their use in students’ first language and national language do not generate humor in daily conversation. They however generate sense of humor in English language teaching. Here were some situations that the students got humor in their in learning English using the local language terms.
Teacher; “Can you tell us about your favorite food in your village?
Student X said,”Good morning. My favorite food (smiling) Kapurung.(staple food made from palm tree) I like kapurung (smiling). It’s very delicious (laughing).
Teacher asked student Y,” Do you like papiang (meat cooked in bamboo)?”
Student Y: (Smiling)….yes…I like papiang..(laughing)
Teacher,” Why do you laugh?”
Student ,”…smilling...
Teacher ,” Why do you smile?....kenapa senyum?(Why smile?)
Student Y,” Saya rasa lucu kalau ucapkan bahasa daerah dalam bahsa Inggris (I feel funny when I want to say or pronounce local terms).”
Student Z,” Kedengaran lucu karena bahasa Inggris bahasa modern sedangkan kapurung atau papiang itu bahasa daerah. Sehingga kedengaran lucu. (It sounds funny because English is modern language and kapurung or papiang are local words. That is why it sounds funny).

In ELT, it was found that when students were about to pronounce the local language terms in English, they spontaneously smiled and laughed. They smiled before pronouncing them. They sometimes had big laugh after pronouncing those local language terms.

Local terms generate humorous comments

The Students were enthusiastic to talk. The use of local language terms creates some varieties of pronunciations of students in the classroom. Stress and rhythm expressed by nonlocal students create humors since they are not familiar with those terms. That is why they feel funny and their expressions sounds funny. It makes the class laugh. The use of local language terms triggers students to express their humorous comments.

Students X said,” I like Coto Makassar (traditional dish of Makassar.”
(Smiling)
Student Y said,” I like coto Paraikate (laughing). This student suddenly mentioned other famous places of Coto in Makassar.
Student Z said," I like Coto Bagadang,” (smiling).
Students A said,’ We went to gunung Nona for picnic (all are smiling and laughing)
All students,”(laughing)…. Nona mountain? ....woman mountain...girl mountain
Student B,” F likes woman mountain. You like ?.”
All students,” Yes...yes...haaaaa... (Laughing )

All students laughed when X mentioned gunung Nona. The direct translation of gunung nona is Woman Mountain. The local people called it gunung Nona since the shape of the mountain is identical with certain part of woman body. That is why they called it gunung Nona.
The cheerful learning makes students feel easy to say what comes in their mind. Sometimes students have a lot of ideas however because of the learning atmosphere, they cannot express them. The other reason is that the local language terms from other ethnics as expressed by other students bring humor as there is some lexical interference.

**Students’ anxiety of mistakes was reduced**

Through the observation it was found that the use of local language terms the students felt easier to speak English. Having sense of humor on the local language terms, they felt relaxed to speak English. Their focus was not on grammar and pronunciation but the validity of using local language terms. Since they felt funny, they always asked if it was allowed to use them in English.

Student P: *The traditional food in Palu is like… sinonggi (smiling)… (smiling) sinonggi is delicious…(smiling). Bisa bilang Sinonggi?(smiling) (Can I say sinonggi?). Sinonggi is make from ubi (cassava) (smiling).*

Students R said,***every year we celebrate mapadendang (laughing).. (traditional feast after harvest of Bugis tribe). We eat ketupat,..(smiling) (rice cooked in coconut leaf) opor (Chiken) and many food. I am like it very much. (smiling).**

Students usually hesitate to speak English when they think of grammar such as tenses. They however in cheerful learning did not focus on the grammar. As a result, they keep speaking although some mistakes occur. Many students thought that the use of English is just to use all English words. That is why many of them questioned,***Bisa diijinkan berbahasa Inggris dengan memakai istilah traditional? (Is it allowed to speak English and using local terms?).***

Student R said,***Saya kira kalau berbahasa Inggris maka semuanya dalam bahasa Inggris (I think if we speak English, we cannot use local terms because they are not English words).***

By using local language terms, they have, the complexity of foreign language learning such as vocabulary, pronunciation was reduced. The vocabulary becomes essential for productive skills. The contribution of local language terms provides the smoothness of their expressions. They feel confidence since some vocabulary used they were familiar with and they do not mistake in their pronunciation.

**Students’ emotional engagement in learning increased**

There is no sense of humor without emotional engagement. The use of local language terms reflects their daily experience and reality. Daily experience involves students’ emotional experience. When a student mentions the local language terms, they spontaneously connect to the object and their experience. They sometimes recall their funny experience related to the object.

Student W said,***Saya ketawa kalau bilang kapurung dalam bahasa Inggris. Kalau omong kapurung ada pengalaman lucu waktu makan kapurung pertama kali. Ada teman pakai tangan. lucu karena kapurung lengket di tangannya kena mukanya.(Laughing ). (I laugh when I say
Kapurung...because I remember our experience when we made a kapurung party and my friend eat by using her fingers) (laughing)...since it is liquid so kapurung stick on her face (laughing)..It is very funny moment” (laughing).

Student B said,” I remember my experience going to wedding. It was funny cause watching candoleng (local singer and dancer) (smiling) for wedding) in village.

Humorous talk accelerates fluency in English

In fun atmosphere or the condition students feel happy, there is a tendency they can express their ideas or speak on a topic addressed. When they smile, they can speak. It seems that there is no anxiety or fear of making mistakes. While smiling, the students talk about their cultural facts in their community.

Student A said,”.......(smiling)...I (laughing)... like putu (traditional cake made from Cassava) (smiling ) jalang kote (traditional cake saled on streets) (laughing )...and (smiling) putu (smiling )...very delicious sehr (smiling).

Student Y said,” my favorite food is....(smiling )....papiong (food cooked in bamboo)...(smiling) depatori (traditional cake from Toraja) (laughing)...yes...delicious...I like it (smiling).

The students are fluent when they are having fun in their talk. They have pause when they come across some local terms, yet they keep talking. The available words of local language help students to speak in English.

Discussion

Local language and culture provide various local terms. Those local terms are quite helpful for the beginners to trigger them to speak English as foreign language. Local language terms are ready to be used in foreign language use to talk about the local surrounding. It can be denied that the beginners generally are able to talk something found in their surrounding community. Basically the local language terms do not contain humorous contents. They however generate sense of humor when they are used in foreign language. When the local language terms are mixed with foreign language words, it sounds strange and something strange creates humor. Students generally felt funny when they come across or they want to express the local terms. It seems that unfamiliarity of the use of local language terms in a foreign language is considered awkward. That is why the local language terms sound strange when they are spoken or heard. On the other hand, monolingual act and mono cultural act are regarded in language use by the students. In a multi lingual and cultural society such as Indonesia, where English regarded as foreign language, the opportunity to speak English is rare. The unfamiliarity of using the local terms in English is the cause of humor. In addition, the characteristics of language pronunciation are different between the languages such as rhythm, stress and intonation will generate some humor in speaking time. Some local terms require certain ways of pronouncing them; the inappropriateness of their pronunciation brings sense of humor. Therefore, the local language terms
are quite appropriate in English language teaching for beginners. Since the sense of humor generated at the moment of speaking, the local cultural terms are appropriate to trigger students to speak in English.

Providing cheerful and fun learning is necessary. Having fun needs emotional engagement. Sense of humor involves affective aspect. The sense of humor generated by local language terms not only because of their unfamiliarity use but also their emotional experience is recalled. By mentioning the traditional food or local places for example kapurung as one of the local food, or Buntu kasisi (place) they automatically recalls some experiences that the students have. Sometimes the intensity of humor increases since the experience itself has humor (Wulf, 2010). Some students remember their first moment eating kapurung, some friends did not eat properly as the local people did. The power of local language terms can generate positive atmosphere in classroom learning. Many students express some humorous comments. Humorous comments that occur in the classroom make the learning more dynamic and lively.

For the beginners the use of linguistic input from their local language terms reduces the complexity in foreign language learning. In addition, the cheerful learning atmosphere generated by the use of local language terms reduces the learners’ anxiety. Woodrow (2015) describes that foreign language learning process can be debilitated by anxiety effect. In reducing the complexity and anxiety, humor functions as ice breaker to bridge the gaps between students and teacher or among the students. The students feel comfortable and relaxed to join the class. Humor in this learning condition is described as a safe house (Pomerantz, & Bell, 2011). Having fun, learners do not think of mistakes that they are making. While smiling and laughing, the students keep talking. The moment of humor is effective for learning to use the language. There are various vocabulary originated from their first language assist them to speak fluently. The students get more confidence since they have some input. Watkins (2019) reassures that that low anxiety of classroom environment enable learners to speak much in a foreign language. For example, when the students say “I like Coto Makassar” they felt easier since some components of linguistics such as vocabulary and their pronunciation belong to them. Coto Makassar is the terms that quite familiar with them. The students feel confident since they have known some words that will be used in English. The use of local language terms in English at that time brings humor in learning to use them in English. The moment of humor is effective for learning to use the language.

Multilingual acts are inevitable. According to Arian & Mamaghani (2019) the inter language knowledge has significant influence to build oral fluency in a foreign language learning. Therefore the terms of the first language can be used as the new vocabulary in English to talk about the local context. The use of local language terms in foreign language class sooner or later validates the terms being used in English conversation. The unfamiliarity of their use in foreign language is regarded as a mistake. Students tend to have feeling guilty. That is why the students always try to translate the local language terms into English. They however find problems in translating the local language terms since there is no parallel translation. The students find strange since they never hear people speak English and talk about the
local objects and terms in their culture. This is a challenge how the English teacher explore the local terms into the language class. The classroom is a formal stage to formalize the local terms to get their validity to be used in English language. Multilingual act becomes familiar in daily language use. Teaching English in non-English speaking country is unavoidable to involve the local language terms as the context of students’ life.

CONCLUSION

Integrating local language terms in ELT is quite effective for triggering the beginners in building self-confidence to speak in English. The local language terms have their power to create humor in the classroom. Without English teachers’ skill to provide humor affect, the local language terms generate sense of humor. Humor in foreign language teaching are connected with various disciplines including anthropology, cultural studies, education, communication, history, linguistics, literature, mathematics, health and medicine, philosophy, political science, psychology, and sociology. The English teachers are required to select topics that affect emotional experience. Learning input that basically refers to emotional experience affects emotional engagement in the classroom.

The local language terms do not only recall the students’ knowledge but also their emotional experience. The emotional experience generates sense of humor. In a cheerful learning atmosphere, students are enthusiastic to speak. They do not think about the grammar or mistakes in their speaking. Therefore, the use of local language terms is also regarded effective to build speaking fluency. They sometimes hesitate to use the local language terms, but if the teachers encourage them to speak then they feel confident to use them.

The local language terms are never used in the formal class so the foreign language learning is considered as a monolingual act by the foreign language learners. By integrating the local terms, they will be familiar with multilingual act activity. This is effective to encourage the use of English outside the classroom. They are reluctant to speak in their real life since the local language terms that belong to their daily life is still regarded not as English words to be used in foreign language. For this sense, the local terms in English use have power to create humor and fun learning in English class.

REFERENCES


