

EXPLORING HUMOR FUNCTIONS IN TREVOR NOAH STAND UP COMEDY: I WISH YOU WOULD

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses the function of humor in Trevor Noah's Stand-Up Comedy entitled I Wish You Would. The aims of this study are to examine the humor functions applied by Trevor Noah in his stand-up comedy and to contribute in filling the existing gaps. The first question to answer is to what extent Trevor Noah's SUC fits Hay (2000) humor's function theory. The second question is to answer how the utterances of Trevor Noah's jokes fit the humor functions. The data in this research are oral data which is transcribed into written form. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method. According to the study in the stand-up comedy entitled I wish I would, the writer found that Trevor Noah uses almost all aspects of humor function.

Keywords: Humor functions, Stand up comedy, Trevor Noah

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini membahas tentang fungsi humor dalam Stand-Up Comedy Trevor Noah yang berjudul I Wish You Would. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui fungsi humor yang diterapkan oleh Trevor Noah dalam stand-up comedy-nya dan memberikan kontribusi dalam mengisi kesenjangan yang ada. Pertanyaan pertama yang ingin dijawab adalah sejauh mana SUC Trevor Noah sesuai dengan teori fungsi humor Hay (2000). Pertanyaan kedua untuk menjawab bagaimana ujaran-ujaran lelucon Trevor Noah sesuai dengan fungsi humor. Data dalam penelitian ini adalah data lisan yang ditranskripsikan ke dalam bentuk tulisan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Berdasarkan penelitian dalam stand-up comedy yang berjudul I wish I would, penulis menemukan bahwa Trevor Noah menggunakan hampir semua aspek fungsi humor.

Kata kunci: Fungsi humor, komedi tunggal, Trevor Noah

I. INTRODUCTION

Humor is defined as multidimensional characteristics (Scheel, T., & Gockel, C., 2017). They summarized humor as (1) the ability to understand jokes and other humorous stimuli, (2) an expression of humor and cheerfulness, (3) the ability to make humorous comments or have humorous perceptions, (4) the appreciation of diverse types of jokes, cartoons, and other humorous material, (5) the active seeking of sources that elicit laughter (e.g., comedies), (6) the memorizing of jokes and funny anecdotes in life, as well as (7) the tendency to use humor as a coping mechanism (Scheel, T., & Gockel, C., 2017, p.11).

Stand up comedy is one of forms of humor that grew into the public zeitgeist just as the civil rights movements of the 1960s were gaining popularity. As a result, race, gender, and critiques of social norms made their way on to stage and screen (Bingham S, Green S, 2016). Humor can be found in various forms such as puns, pantomimes, caricatures, sitcoms, music, and events that make

people laugh. It is unable to separate humor from the context. An understanding of the same background of experience or knowledge is required to guarantee the funniness of humor (Romadlani, M. M. I., & Wijana, I. D. 2021). According to Adetunji A (2013) the interactional setting of stand-up comedy (hereafter SUC) has been explored from various viewpoints, most notably sociological and psychological, reveal a subtle the affirmation of humor studies' multidisciplinary nature. One of the viewpoints this study explored is the function of humor.

According to Hay (2000) as referenced in Puri, A. D., & Baskara, F. R. (2019), humor has three functions namely solidarity function, power function, and psychological function. The solidarity function emphasizes the function of humor to create solidarity between members in a group. There are several strategies in this solidarity function. First, to share by expressing things about the comic including sharing sensitive things. Sharing sensitive things also indicates that a comedian believes to the audience so that it can increase a sense of solidarity. Second, to highlight similarities or to share the same experience. This strategies aims to share ideas, interests, and other similarities between comedian and audience. Third, to clarify and maintain boundaries within a particular group. This strategy strengthens the standard accepted and agreed by the particular group. The last, to tease to strengthen solidarity, express the relationship, and maintain the strength of the teaser (Radcliffe & Brown in Hay, 2000). This can be done by teasing and insulting each other, such as jokes about a relationship, the routine life of an individual, and insulting others who are already known. Next is the power function, that has several strategies. This type of humor intentionally has the purpose of degrading other people or sending an aggressive message (Martineau in Hay, 2000). The first strategy of power function is to control for example humor where comedian tries to control the audiences to do something. Second, to respond to the existing of the social phenomena. This strategy comes from the facts that occur and is something judgemental. Third, power function is to tease by attacking someone else personal or by making criticism for other things. Moreover, insulting, mocking, looking down on others, is included in this strategy.

The psychological function in humor includes numerous tactics, such as defending by discovering the comedian's flaw before anybody else does. Every joke that uses this function has the objective of shielding the comedian from potential criticism. To deal with both contextual and non-contextual issues. This type of humor serves to overcome problems that arise during a conversation, whereas humor to cope with non-contextual problems such as problems for survival that are generally felt by humans as living things, such as pain, depression, and fear. Furthermore, according to Martin and Ford (2006), as cited in Puri, A.D (2020) humor has a purpose in psychology to release pressure, suffering, disappointment, anxiety, and to express taboos.

In order to explore the humor functions applied in Trevor Noah's stand up comedy, this study examines the three functions. Trevor Noah is a comedian from South Africa. He is regarded as one of South Africa biggest exports: a boy from the townships in the US, who ended up hosting the Daily Show, the most satirical programme on American television. His father is a Swiss-German, who is

considered as White man, while his mother is Xhosa, South Africa and considered as a black woman. In 1984, when Noah was born, having a child with a white man was illegal. This situation inspired Noah to criticize them through comedies. He is considered as an excellent comedian because he offers a unique perspective that connected with television viewers (britannica.com).

There are many studies related to humor functions that have been conducted. Goldman (2013) defines humor as an attractive state of a disparity between what is expected to happen and what is experienced. Function of humor was written by Utami (2018) as well as by Suaib, Rafli, and Muliatuti (2019); Martin, Rich, and Gayle (2014); and Kholidah, Widodo, and Saddhano (2020). Their focus was on how humor is used as a media of communication. To the best of the writer's knowledge, there have not been studies discussing about the humor function of Trevor Noah's SUC. This study aimed at examining functions of humor in Trevor Noah's SUC using Hay's theory (2000). This study develops two research questions as follows:

1. To what extent do Trevor Noah's SUC fit Hay (2000) humor's function theory?
2. How do Trevor Noah's jokes relate to Hay (2000) humor's function theory?

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative descriptive method is used in this study. The subject of this study is Trevor Noah's SUC. The stand-up comedy show *I Wish You Would* is the primary source for this study. The stand-up comedy video was downloaded by the writer from the Netflix platform. Three stages are used to conduct this research (Sudaryanto, 1993). Data gathering comes first, followed by data analysis, and finally, the presentation of the analysis's findings.

According to Kesuma (2007, p. 44), the writer used the *simak bebas libat cakap* technique to gather their data. The writer did not participate in the converting process; instead, the writer downloaded, listened to, and watched the video. Following the acquisition of the video, the information is both transcription and adaptation to the show video subtitle found on www.subscene.com. The stand-up comedy data was further separated into three sections by the writer: the opening, the core, which was made up of various portions, and the closing. Then, in order to make it simple for the writer to evaluate the data, each sentence in the data is identified by a number. This study employed a contextual approach, which encouraged the promotion of speech situations with a speaker, hearer, location, and speech time that were all connected with linguistics phenomenon (Sperber and Wilson, in Wijana 2014).

According to the bits in the stand-up comedy, the writer analyzed the humor function presented by Trevor Noah in *I Wish You Would*. The contextual method was used by the writer to analyze the function of humor. The result of the data analysis was presented in formal and informal methods (Sudaryanto, 1993). The obtained data were written into table form by using a formal method, and the explanation of the data is written by using an informal method.

III. DISCUSSION

Every humor which is delivered by the comedian must contain definite intentions or functions. Based on the data which were analyzed, Trevor Noah fulfills the...functions of humor in his SUC show entitled I Wish You Would.

1. Solidarity Function

a. To share

This function can be done by expressing things about the comedian. The things can be personal or sensitive things about the comedian. The purpose is to get to know more about the life of the comedian.

53 If you don't know this about me,I'll tell you why it was such a big dream.	57 My dad is a Swiss man from Switzerland. White man, right?	62 And it was liberating.
54 My mother is a Black woman, Xhosa woman, from South Africa.	58 And so, I never got to go to Switzerland.	63 'Cause here's the thing
55 I grew up in South Africa, right?	59 Then, when I got the chance, I never made the time.	64 My whole life, my whole life,
56-Molweni, molweni.	60 Then I couldn't go. Then finally now, we went to Switzerland	65 I have always felt like my dad didn't really love me
-[crowd cheering]	61 for the first time.	66 Okay?
		67 And then now, when I went and met him in Switzerland
		68 I was like, "No."
		69 "He's just Swiss."

70 [laughter]

71 They're all like that.

72 [scattered cheers]

The data above show the use of humor to strengthen solidarity. The context of these contents are about Noah's personal background. The sharing strategy is used by Noah by delivering where he is from. Then Noah clearly said his mother is black and his father is white, then continued by sharing his thoughts about not to be loved by his father. His purpose in sharing his origins is to give access to audience for his further jokes delivered after that.

b. To highlight similarities experiences

This function can be done by sharing the same experiences. The following examples were delivered by Noah in his show:

197 We all experience <i>schadenfreude</i> .	202 and you look over on the other side, and
198 You know?	the traffic is packed up.
199 We all do. You know when you have <i>schadenfreude</i> ?	203 [laughter]
200 When you're driving on the highway, yeah?	204 And you get that little feeling inside.
201And you're cruising along, everything's going well,	205 Like... [giggles] "I made the right choices in life!"
	206 -[maniacal chortle]

-[laughter, applause]

Trevor reveals on how everybody should has had schadenfreude, a German word to define deriving pleasure from other's misfortune or find joy in the pain and sufferings of others. He is sure the audience do it many times. This utterances are delivered by telling the audience when someone was driving on the highway smoothly, meanwhile the traffic on the other side was packed up then the he or she was happy because of his right decision to enter highway. This bit describes highlight similarities experiences as one of function of humor.

To Tease

This is a strategy that aims at strengthening solidarity in a relationship. This function usually happens among those who have a close relationship one another. Related to this strategy, the following examples are uttered:

452 "Why do we love doing this to ourselves?" 455 Mwah, mwah, mwah. "The lips are so
453 "Why do we like kissing monkeys?" sexy."
454 -Mwah, mwah, mwah, mwah. 456 **[laughter]**

-[laughter]

This joke expresses Noah's concern on South Africa's people customs. By asking a rhetorical question, Trevor Noah highlights their behavior that are usually be blamed as one of causes of diseases in Africa by West journalists or media. In the Covid-19 pandemic context, Noah satirizes west journalists for South Africa's people behavior. Next jokes are still Noah's "to tease "strategy:

457 And then when COVID came, without the help of the West,
458 Africans used everything they had learned 460 and they dealt with it
459 from every virus they had to fight
461 **[applause]**

462 Didn't get credit, by the way.
Everyone made it seem like it was luck.

"Didn't get credit by the way." is a bit targeted to the authority who should respect African community who could deal with Covid pandemic better than any other continent. In this joke, Noah conveys to the authority since Noah and the audience were the victims for their policy during Covid pandemic. African efforts were not considered valuable by the authority, the applause from the audience indicates the same feeling about this situations even though are wrapped by Noah's jokes.

Next jokes are still Noah's teasing western journalists:

464 Yeah. 467 "Good evening, everybody, and welcome to
465 Africans aren't spiteful people. the Africa News Network."
466 'Cause I would've given anything 468 "Tonight, we are covering the ongoing
to see one African news anchor be like, corona virus pandemic

469 that is ravaging the Western world." 471 if these people do not have themselves to
470 "Many African scientists are asking blame."
472 [laughter]

In this part, Noah is mimicking the way Western journalists report about Africa Ebola pandemics by reporting Corona virus pandemic situations using this sentence” Many African scientists are asking if these people do not have themselves to blame.” Noah teases Africa and Western by using “scientists”, where many intelligent people are owned by Africa, however it seems there is no decrease rates for healthier life there. Furthermore, Western journalists are often underestimate African people’s way to survive some pandemic situations.

2. Power Function

The power function within SUC emphasizes the power of a comic to wield influence over the audience in order to achieve goals desired by the comic. Moreover, the power function can also be manifested in the form of criticism, satire, or ridicule for others.

Power function is divided into three categories namely to foster conflict, to control and to respond to the existing of the social phenomena. Trevor Noah’s jokes only fit the third category: to respond to the existing of social phenomena. Using social phenomena that emerge in society as comedic material can serve as a way to generate humor in various situations. This approach can sometimes involve passing judgment based on the actual events or circumstances happening in society. The following jokes are the examples:

371 The pandemic made
people crazy. 379 We'd be like, "All right, 385 Everyone in the world
372 I thought we were all no more racism. No more came together to fight the
gonna come together. That's sexism. Let's do this aliens. We stopped all our...
what I believed. together." 386 There was no politics, no
373 From all the movies I 380 And we'd go and defeat nothing. We unified, and we
watched as a kid. the enemy aliens, and then won.
374 I thought if humans were we'd come back, 387 And then in real life, what
ever threatened with an 381 be like, "All right, let's get do we do?
existential threat, back to the racism and
375 we would abandon every sexism."
single fight we were having, 382 [laughter]
376 and we would come 383 Like in Independence
together to win. Day, that's what happened.
377 You know? Remember?
378 I thought if that virus 384 Yeah. That's what I grew
came, we'd all be there. up watching.

In this strategy Trevor Noah conveyed the Covid pandemic. The Covid Pandemic solutions given by most world leaders were politics solutions. Sexism and racism were the words Noah's used to this strategy. Through his jokes he delivered that stop fighting, be unified, and be focus to the solution to handle Covid were the answers. In fact, in real life, those did not happen.

3. Psychological Function

The psychological function of humor is closely intertwined with the alleviation of tension in an individual.

a. To defend

The objective of this strategy is to establish a safeguard for comedians by highlighting their vulnerabilities, thereby shielding them or enabling them to liberate themselves from potential criticism.

131 "I just wanna practice my German."	137 -I was like, "Guten tag!"	
	-[laughter]	144[laughter continues]
132 He's like, "But they might not understand you, ja?"	138 [shouting] "Ich will ein kleinen Broten haben, bitte schön!"	145 I'll never forget the look 146 in that woman's face.
133 "Because German can be diff--"	139 "Das schwarze Broten mit dem Käse!"	147She was petrified. She stared at me and was like...
134 I was like, "Yo, I got this, Rolf. I got this."	140 "Und das Schinken, bitte schön!"	148 [gasps] "Der Schwarze Hitler!"
135 So I walk up to the counter. The woman was really friendly.	141 "Und gib für mich ein Pepsi Cola! Danke!"	149 [laughter]
136 Like, "Guten Tag, kann ich dich helfen?"	142 [laughter]	150 Which means "the Black Hitler."
	143And she shat herself.	

The above data shows how Noah defended by identifying the weakness he had. His experience in practicing his German language in a restaurant is delivered as jokes. Utterance no 132 is the clue, actually Noah is not good at Germany. Utterances no 137-143 explain the situation where Noah was trying to order in Germany, instead he talks like Hitler, a German leader talked, therefore, the staff was surprised and speechless. Laughter happened at the end Noah finished ordering food, that sounded more like Hitler's order to his force. Then when the staff was petrified and had "Der Schwarze Hitler!" staring as if she is serving Hitler however in black version. This is the strategy that Noah identify in sharing his weakness.

b. To release tension

Releasing tension in psychological function can be implemented by releasing suffering, pressure, and anxiety that feels by an individual. Here is an example of how Trevor Noah uses this strategy in his stand-up comedy.

[British accent]	259 but she finished life.	266 Hashtag "winning."
"The Royal Family has bad news."		267 You want the colonies to be sad? Those are their jewels.
255 [normal] "Is it bad news?"	260 Do you know how many human beings don't get to do that? She finished it.	268 [laughter]
[British] "Yes, it is."		269 Africans are like, "Can we have our diamonds back?"
256 "The Queen has died."	261 She died as Queen. Died of what? Old age.	270 They're like, "No, the Queen takes them with her."
[normal] "Died of what?"		271 [laughter]
257 -Finishing life! -	262 That means you finished the game.	272 You kidding me?
[laughter]		
258 You kidding? I'm not saying someone shouldn't grieve,	263 Done. Credits are rolling.	
	264 [cheers and applause]	
	265 Buried with the jewels.	

The jokes in these show that fit the humor function of releasing tension or addressing suffering are: the data number 255 and 256 "The Queen has died." [normal] "Died of what?" [British] "Yes, it is." This joke plays on the anticipation of bad news, followed by a humorous response to the cause of death, which is simply "finishing life." see data number 260 "Do you know how many human beings don't get to do that? She finished it." This joke highlights the idea that the Queen lived a full life, and her death can be seen as a positive thing, which can release tension and offer a lighthearted perspective on mortality.

Then in data number 265 "Buried with the jewels. Hashtag 'winning.'" This joke humorously comments on the fact that the Queen is buried with her jewels, using a modern reference ("Hashtag 'winning'") to lighten the mood. Next are data no 269-270 "Africans are like, 'Can we have our diamonds back?' They're like, 'No, the Queen takes them with her.'" This joke addresses the historical context of colonialism and the idea of returning stolen diamonds in a humorous way, potentially releasing tension by making light of a serious issue. These jokes delivered by Noah, use humor to provide a comedic perspective on a sensitive topic (the death of the Queen) or a serious issue (colonialism), which can help to alleviate tension or suffering and provide some relief through laughter in data 268 and 271.

c. To convey taboo things

A strategy that is delivered in the psychological function of humor is by conveying taboo issues . Not everyone can speak about this taboo in a serious opportunity , therefore another alternative to discuss taboo issues is by using humor. The following are Noah jokes:

733 I remember how confident world leaders were as well.	734 Some more cocky than others.	736 Prime Minister of the UK, Boris Johnson.
	735 One of my favorites was	737 Yeah.

738 He was an interesting one.
739 [laughter]
740 He went to a hospital
741 during the pandemic,
742 and he was hugging
people.
743 Like, right at the
beginning, he was hugging
people.

754 Yeah. You see him when
he came out? Donald J.
Trump?
755 Oh, he had all the swag.
756 He was like, "Folks,
we're gonna have it handled."
757 -"In 21 days, 21 days."
-[laughter]
758 "The virus will be gone,
21 days."
759 "Some are even saying
20."
760 [laughter, applause]
761 That disease came and
kicked Trump and Boris deep
in the chest.

773 "Please, I can't talk. I have to..." And he was just gone.

744 Journalists asked him,
"Prime Minister Johnson,
745 do you think it's
appropriate to be hugging
people during..."
746 He's like, "First of all,
everyone needs to calm down.
This is not a pandemic."

762 Both men went to the
ICU, almost died. Only reason
they survived
763 is because they're both
heads of state. They gave
them that secret juice.
764 Boris, to his credit, he
came out of that hospital like
he had seen Jesus.
765 [laughter]
766 He came from the
hospital, held a press
conference,
767 shut everything down.

747 "Look at my hair. Do I
look stressed? Everybody
needs to calm down."
748 "Nothing... Everything is
fine. I can touch people."
749 "We're not shutting down.
Everything stays open."
750 "The pubs will stay open,
the football stays open."

768 He came there, barely
dressed, like, "Everybody,
this is not a joke."
769 "I've seen it for myself.
The UK's shutting down."
770 "Please, football's gone.
The pubs are gone."
771 "Do not take this lightly.
I've experienced it myself."
772 "I promise, this is not fun.
I can't talk, I have to go."

These jokes are about how the world leaders handled Pandemic situations. Based on the facts, Prime Minister of UK, Boris Johnson was hugging people. Some journalists asked about this action, which is against WHO's Covid Pandemic rules, make space with others. Then The Prime Minister responded by saying that people should calm down as this was not pandemic. Next leader was Donald Trump, President of USA, who convinced people that Covid pandemic will be handled within 21 days, he even bravely said exact number of days to handle something that every Scientists were confused about. The sensitive things that are delivered by Noah in his show, conveying leaders actions, where at the end, both leaders almost dead because of Covid-19 virus. This taboo subjects are delivered interestingly by Noah indicates by laughter and applause on data 739, 757, and 760.

IV.CONCLUSION

According to the study in the SUC entitled *I Wish You Would* by Trevor Noah, the writer found that Trevor Noah tends to use all humor functions to create solidarity to audiences, except to *foster conflict* and *to control*. To use *Solidarity function* Noah delivered by telling his personal background, delivering where he is from. He highlights the similarities as a part of Solidarity function by sharing same experiences using a German word, *Schadenfreude*, which means find a joy in the pain and sufferings of others. Next is *to tease*, as a part of Solidarity function, Noah conveys African customs to kiss monkeys, and the ignorance of African community in dealing with Covid Pandemic by the Western people.

For the Power function, Noah's jokes only fit *using social phenomena in society*. He focuses on most World leaders in giving solutions for Covid pandemic. Noah offers suggestions to stop fighting, be unified, and focus to the solutions rather than emphasizing sexism and racism.

Moreover to fit Psychological function, Noah delivered his weaknesses in practicing German language, then stated his annoyance on British media regarding The Queen Elizabeth II's death, and the jewels were buried with The Queen as well. Finally to convey taboo things, Noah delivers Boris Johnson and Donald Trump's attitude in conference press that were against WHO's Covid Solutions or rules.

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