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Types of Meaning in Stand-Up Comedy: A Semantic Analysis of Pauline Yasuda's "I Love Being Asian"

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Abstract. This study explores Geoffrey Leech's (1981) seven types of meaning within the context of stand-up comedy. The analysis focuses on Pauline Yasuda's performance entitled "I Love Being Asian", featured in the YouTube series "Laugh After Dark". The research aims to identify and describe the presence of conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflected, collocative, and thematic meanings in Yasuda's language. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through video observation, transcription, and classification of utterances based on Leech's semantic framework. The findings reveal that stand-up comedy is a powerful medium for layered expression, where humor serves as a vehicle for conveying personal experience, cultural identity, and social commentary. Linguistic analysis of comedy not only enhances understanding of language in performance, but also contributes to broader conversations on identity, culture, and communication in contemporary media.

Keywords: laugh after dark; leech; linguistic analysis; Pauline Yasuda; semantics; stand-up comedy; types of meaning

1. Introduction

Semantic is the study of meaning in language (Hurford, Heasley, and Smith, 2007:1). Palmer also state that semantics is the technical term used to refer to the study of meaning (1981:1). Semantics is the study of meaning that is very important in our life. Learning semantics is very useful, because by semantics we can understand about the meanings that are often found in the words or phrases in the communication that we do every day or that we can find in some literary works. The meaning of word is often complex, it has such component as a picture, an idea, a quality, a relationship and personal feelings and association.

A word is the smallest meaningful linguistic unit that can use on its own. It is a form that cannot be divided into any smaller units that can be used independently to convey meaning (Katamba, 1994:6). Most words have more than one meaning, it is the characteristic of words that a single word may have several meaning, in fact, words may play an enormous part in our life. Words are used to express something and also convey the feeling. It is through our experience with them in human situation that they take on meaning.

Meaning is the main aim in language to indicate something or some relation or even an idea. To understand the meaning, we need to understand how word used to convey meaning. Thus the word may have a primary meaning, secondary meaning or figurative meaning. The primary meaning will come to the mind of the speakers when the word is cited in isolation. The secondary meaning is the additional meanings which a word has context with other words. Figurative meaning is based on its relationship

with the primary meaning. It may be a word of phrase, used in some way other than the main meaning used to make a comparison (Larson, 1984:7).

Types of meaning can be found in poems, novels, and also the Holy Bible. The interesting thing about the Bible is that it does not only mention about God's ways but also the use of word that have more than one meaning to convey idea and felling.

This research focuses on the seven types of meaning as proposed by Leech (1981), namely: conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning, and thematic meaning. These types of meaning are analyzed in the context of Pauline Yasuda's stand-up comedy performance "I Love Being Asian" for several important reasons.

First, stand-up comedy is a spoken performance that uses a specific language style to communicate not only humor, but also complex ideas, personal identity, cultural values, and social critique. In Yasuda's routine, the language style plays a central role in conveying deeper meanings related to race, motherhood, gender, and immigrant experiences. The use of figurative language, metaphor, exaggeration, and sarcasm produces meanings that are often multi-layered and not always easily understood by the audience on a literal level. This aligns with Hurford, Heasley, and Smith's (2007:1) assertion that language can produce meanings that are vague, important, and elusive.

Second, the performance holds cultural and societal significance, particularly for Asian American communities. Understanding the various layers of meaning in Yasuda's language use allows a better appreciation of the social and emotional dimensions she explores through comedy.

Third, Yasuda often uses words and expressions that do not align strictly with their literal or conceptual definitions. Instead, she expresses her thoughts and experiences through irony, metaphor, and cultural references that invite multiple interpretations depending on the listener's background and understanding.

In studying the meanings embedded in "I Love Being Asian," this research applies Leech's theory of seven types of meaning. While many linguists focus primarily on logical or conceptual meaning, Leech (1981:9) offers a broader and more nuanced categorization, which is particularly useful for analyzing humorous, emotional, and socially situated texts like stand-up comedy.

2. Method

The method is the way of system that is used to solve the problems. The method of this research gives some guidance in order to achieve the aims of research. Without a proper method of research, this writing would be considered invalid and unreliable. The methods of research are applied to determine data source, data collection and data analysis. The data source used in this research is the "Laugh After Dark" Youtube Video. The "Laugh After Dark" Youtube Video was chosen as the data source because there are a lot of types of meaning which could be found.

In collecting data, first reading the bible repeatedly and intensively and tried to find the seven types of meaning. After the data were found, the second step, was underlined the sentences contained seven types of meaning. And the last step was to take notes and make the data list. The data list would help to classify all the data. In analyzing the data the descriptive method was used. All the data collected would be descriptively analyzed by giving some examples and explanations based on the theories concerned. After all data were collected, classified, and analyzed, they were presented in the form of a paper to present the results of this paper.

3. Discussion

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of types of meaning used in Pauline Yasuda's stand-up comedy performance entitled "I Love Being Asian". To address the first research question, identifying the types of meaning found in the performance, this study follows the classification proposed

by Geoffrey Leech (1981). Leech categorized meaning into seven types, namely: conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning, and thematic meaning. His framework emphasizes the multiple semantic dimensions embedded in every utterance and how they contribute to both literal and implied messages in communication.

Each of these types was identified in Yasuda's performance based on its function and linguistic expression. Stand-up comedy is a rich field for this analysis, as comedians often rely on language play, sarcasm, and cultural reference to deliver humor. In the following sections, examples are presented for each type of meaning found in the performance.

Conceptual Meaning

Conceptual meaning, also known as logical or cognitive meaning, refers to the literal or dictionary-based meaning of a word or phrase. In Yasuda's performance, she introduces herself by saying: "My name is Pauline" and "My daughter just turned two." These statements carry a clear, factual purpose. They help set the scene and establish context without ambiguity.

Connotative Meaning

Connotative meaning refers to the additional emotional or cultural implications a word carries beyond its literal meaning. When Yasuda says "I'm basically a Toyota," she evokes stereotypes of Asians being efficient, durable, and low maintenance. This metaphor builds on widely held cultural connotations and functions humorously to reflect internalized identity commentary.

Social Meaning

Social meaning expresses the speaker's identity in terms of social class, region, or cultural background. Yasuda mimics her immigrant mother's accent and phrases like "She's driving me up the nuts," blending language errors with affection. These utterances reflect not only her mother's non-native English but also highlight generational and cultural gaps.

Affective Meaning

Affective meaning conveys the speaker's emotional attitude. Yasuda often uses hyperbole and tone to express frustration or affection. For instance, in the line "Granny panties with pockets," the imagery and tone suggest self-deprecating humor and embarrassment, which enhance emotional connection with the audience.

Reflected Meaning

Reflected meaning occurs when one sense of a word evokes another sense. Yasuda uses phrases like "faulty airbags" as a metaphor for emotional unavailability. While the literal meaning references safety equipment, the reflected meaning hints at her inability to express emotions effectively, particularly in relationships.

Collocative Meaning

Collocative meaning arises from associations a word acquires due to frequent co-occurrence with other words. Yasuda plays with unexpected word pairings such as "granny panties with pockets" or "hooked on phonics Asian baby," where the collocative shock adds to the humor. These combinations blend stereotypes with everyday language to highlight absurdity.

Thematic Meaning

Thematic meaning relates to how the structure or word order of a sentence emphasizes particular ideas. Yasuda opens her set with "I love being Asian," setting a strong thematic focus on identity. The placement of this line early in the routine frames the performance as a personal narrative filled with cultural pride and humorous contradictions.

4. Conclusion

Based on the result of data analysis shown in the previous chapter, in this chapter the researcher would like to present some points as the conclusion. It can be concluded that meaning plays a crucial role in understanding language use, especially in spoken performance such as stand-up comedy, where expressions carry not only literal but also social, emotional, and cultural implications. Discerned from the research analysis, the data collected from Pauline Yasuda's stand-up comedy entitled "I Love Being Asian" shows the presence of seven types of meaning as proposed by Geoffrey Leech (1981). These include conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning, and thematic meaning with five example on each type. Each type of meaning was identified through specific linguistic features and expressive patterns used in the comedian's performance.

In the analysis of the Laugh After Dark YouTube video, the types of meaning appeared with distinctive characteristics. Conceptual meaning was used to convey factual information, while connotative and social meanings brought deeper cultural and emotional layers. Affective meaning reflected the speaker's feelings and attitudes, while reflected and collocative meanings involved word associations and unexpected pairings. Thematic meaning was constructed through the way the comedian structured her speech and emphasized certain ideas. Therefore, it can be concluded that stand-up comedy is a rich medium for linguistic analysis. The use of language in this genre is not only meant to entertain but also to express identity, highlight social issues, and create a connection with the audience through layered meanings. This shows that analyzing meaning in comedic performance can enhance our understanding of how language functions in real-life and culturally embedded contexts.

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