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MISFORTUNE VERBAL HUMOUR REPRESENTING SUNDANESE AS COMMUNITY IDENTITY

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Abstract: Humor serves as a communicative strategy that reflects cultural values and shapes interpersonal relationships. This study investigates verbal humor in Sundanese conversations through the lens of the Script-based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH). Using recorded and transcribed dialogues between Sundanese speakers, the analysis explores the presence of script oppositions and logical mechanisms that generate humorous effects. The findings reveal that humor in Sundanese discourse frequently emerges from incongruities between misfortune and reinterpretation, seriousness and absurdity, or reality and imagination. These humorous constructions function as tools for emotional relief, tension reduction, and the reinforcement of social solidarity. Furthermore, verbal humor reflects the cultural identity of the Sundanese people, emphasizing politeness, warmth, empathy, and indirectness. Rather than ridiculing others, Sundanese humor promotes harmony and collective well-being through laughter. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how linguistic creativity and cultural norms intersect in the construction of humor within local sociolinguistic contexts.

Keywords: conversation, cultural identity, Script-based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH), Sundanese language, verbal humor

INTRODUCTION

Humor is one of the communicative forms that serves to create a warm, pleasant, and positive conversational atmosphere. In social interaction, humor functions not only as a form of entertainment but also as an effective communicative strategy to establish interpersonal closeness and emotional alignment among speakers (Martin, 2007). As stated by Gonot-Schoupsinsky et al. (2020), humor is often employed as a means of entertainment that evokes laughter and joy among listeners. Beyond amusement, humor facilitates social bonding and contributes to the construction of harmonious interaction by reducing interpersonal distance (Lippman & Dunn, 2000).

In everyday communication, humor can ease tension, reduce anxiety, and strengthen social bonds, particularly in situations that involve sensitive or potentially

face-threatening topics (Haugh, 2017). However, not all humorous expressions are received in the same way, as the interpretation and acceptance of humor are highly influenced by cultural and social contexts. Nissenbaum and Freud (2021) assert that humor is only accepted when it aligns with the cultural values and social norms of the target community. Consequently, each community possesses its own distinctive forms and styles of humor that reflect its unique cultural identity and shared systems of meaning (Attardo & Raskin, 1994).

Indonesia, as a nation characterized by cultural and linguistic diversity, represents a wide spectrum of social expressions and communicative practices. This cultural richness positions humor as an integral part of interpersonal communication across regions and ethnic groups (Wahyu et al., 2016). Indonesian society is widely recognized for its tolerance and appreciation for humor, which is evident in various domains, including everyday conversations, social media interactions, and public performances. Each ethnic group demonstrates its own ways of creating, interpreting, and responding to humor, thereby representing collective values, social norms, and cultural identity (Hartanti, 2008; Martin, 2007).

One ethnic group particularly known for its humorous disposition is the Sundanese people. In Sundanese culture, humor frequently appears in both informal and formal contexts, including family interaction, educational settings, and professional environments. According to Asteka and Sutrisna (2020), Sundanese individuals are commonly characterized by intelligence, cheerfulness, politeness, gentleness, and strong respect for social harmony and elders. This cheerful and polite disposition is often manifested through humor, which functions not merely as entertainment but also as a socially appropriate means of maintaining interpersonal balance and emotional sensitivity (Harimansyah, 2017).

Generally, Sundanese humor operates through shifts in perception between stimulus and response, employing mechanisms such as misunderstanding, irony, analogy, and subtle teasing (Harimansyah, 2017). Previous studies have examined Sundanese humor from various perspectives. Wahyu et al. (2016), for instance, focus on linguistic innovation in Sundanese humor, demonstrating how humorous expressions reflect creativity and social change within Sundanese-speaking communities. Harimansyah (2017) further emphasizes the pragmatic and cultural functions of humor, particularly its role in mitigating face-threatening acts and maintaining social harmony. In addition, broader studies on humor in Indonesian local cultures highlight humor as a communicative strategy for negotiating negative experiences, emotional discomfort, and social tension while reinforcing collective identity (Davis, 2020; Hartanti, 2008). In this sense, Sundanese speakers often employ humor even when addressing potentially negative topics, such as misfortune or personal shortcomings, transforming situations that would typically evoke sadness into warm, laughter-filled moments.

However, despite these valuable contributions, existing studies largely conceptualize Sundanese humor as a relatively stable cultural phenomenon that reflects communal values and identity (Priana et al., 2024). While such work highlights the cultural meanings of humor in Sundanese contexts, there has been limited attention to how humor is realized in contemporary discourse and how it is linguistically constructed in naturally occurring conversations, especially using detailed semantic frameworks (e.g., Risty & Mustikawati, 2025; Indarti & Luciana, 2025). Moreover, few studies have applied semantic-based humor theories to analyze how Sundanese verbal humor is linguistically constructed in interaction (Attardo & Raskin, 1994). Therefore,

this study seeks to fill this gap by exploring Sundanese humor as a dynamic practice that reflects ongoing linguistic negotiation and cultural identity formation. Based on these observations, this study focuses on the analysis of verbal humor in Sundanese conversations using Raskin's (1979) Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH). This theory provides a semantic framework for understanding how humor arises from the opposition and overlap of contrasting scripts within a single utterance (Attardo & Raskin, 1994). Through this approach, the present research aims to explain how humor is linguistically constructed in everyday Sundanese interaction and how it reflects culturally embedded values.

Based on the background above, this study aims to examine how humor is constructed in Sundanese conversations by applying the Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH). In addition, this research seeks to analyze how verbal humor represents and reflects the cultural identity of the Sundanese people as manifested in everyday communicative practices. Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How is humor linguistically constructed in Sundanese conversations based on the principles of the Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor? and (2) How does verbal humor function as a medium for expressing and negotiating Sundanese cultural identity in everyday interactions?

This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of linguistics. Theoretically, it extends the application of the Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH) to Sundanese verbal humor, a non-Western linguistic and cultural context that has received limited attention in humor studies. By doing so, the study enriches existing discussions on humor construction and semantic incongruity in local languages. Practically, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how humor functions as a medium for expressing and maintaining Sundanese cultural identity in everyday communication. The findings may serve as a reference for educators, researchers, and cultural practitioners in developing culturally sensitive language teaching materials and preserving local wisdom embedded in humorous discourse. Furthermore, this research provides empirical data that may support future studies on regional languages, multilingual interaction, and cultural identity in contemporary society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Humor

Humor originates from the Latin word *umor*, meaning “body fluid,” which in ancient medical theory was believed to influence human temperament and emotional balance. This early view framed humor as a physiological phenomenon; however, over time, the concept expanded beyond its medical roots to encompass psychological, linguistic, and social dimensions of human interaction. In contemporary perspectives, humor is commonly associated with expressions that evoke laughter or smiles, yet its function extends well beyond entertainment, serving important communicative and interpersonal roles (Bres et al., 2016; Yahiaoui, 2023).

As a communicative resource, humor involves complex cognitive processing, cultural knowledge, and contextual interpretation. Dawood (2020) conceptualizes humor as a cognitive aspect of human nature that entertains, creates emotional comfort, and emerges through the recognition of incongruity or unexpected meanings in discourse. Similarly, Fatonah and Riadi (2017) emphasize the linguistic construction of humor through wordplay, ambiguity, irony, exaggeration, and pragmatic deviation.

Beyond its linguistic dimension, humor also fulfills psychological and physiological functions by reducing stress and enhancing emotional well-being (Damanik and Mulyadi, 2020). Provine (2000) highlights the inseparable relationship between humor and the audience's perception of amusing contexts, while Lippman & Dunn (2000) argue that humor fosters joy, comfort, and emotional closeness, thereby supporting harmonious social relationships. Overall, humor can be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon involving language, cognition, emotion, and social interaction.

Functions and Roles of Humor in Communication

Humor plays a multifaceted role in communication, functioning not only as entertainment but also as a strategic communicative resource. At a surface level, humor creates a relaxed and engaging interactional atmosphere, reducing formality and social distance between interlocutors (Davis, 2020; Martin, 2007). More deeply, humor enables speakers to convey meanings indirectly, express evaluations, and negotiate sensitive issues while maintaining politeness and interpersonal harmony (Haugh, 2017; Ladilova & Schröder, 2022). Through humorous framing, speakers can mitigate face-threatening acts, manage social relationships, and align themselves with others in culturally acceptable ways (Attardo, 2020).

Humor also allows speakers to communicate criticism or disagreement without causing offense. Hartanti (2008) notes that humor reduces tension and softens potentially face-threatening acts, a function particularly valued in cultures that emphasize harmony and indirectness. Davis (2020) further argues that humor shapes social interaction by fostering solidarity, inclusivity, and mutual understanding, enabling speakers to negotiate power relations and signal group membership. Similarly, Ladilova and Schröder (2022) emphasize humor's role in enhancing communicative effectiveness and cooperation in context-dependent interactions. Overall, humor should be understood as a meaningful discourse strategy reflecting social norms, communicative intentions, and interpersonal goals.

Humor and Cultural Identity

Humor is closely connected to cultural identity because it reflects shared values, social norms, and culturally specific ways of interpreting reality. Lynch (2002) argues that humor and jokes reveal identity, patterns of thought, and interactional styles within particular social groups. What is perceived as humorous is largely determined by cultural conventions, collective experiences, and shared knowledge, which shape both the production and interpretation of humorous discourse (Attardo, 2020; Haugh, 2017; Ladilova & Schröder, 2022). Consequently, humor is not a universal phenomenon but a culturally embedded practice grounded in shared assumptions and interpretive frameworks.

Attardo and Raskin (1994) further emphasize that humor reflects speakers' identities through their linguistic choices and communicative behavior. From this perspective, humor functions as a marker of group membership, distinguishing insiders who share cultural knowledge from outsiders who may fail to recognize the intended meanings. This function is particularly salient in collectivist societies, where humor is closely linked to politeness norms and the maintenance of social harmony (Davis, 2020). In such contexts, humor often operates as a face-saving strategy that enables speakers to address sensitive or potentially face-threatening issues indirectly.

Rather than expressing criticism or disagreement explicitly, speakers may employ humor to mitigate tension and reduce the risk of social conflict. Studies in Indonesian contexts demonstrate that humor reflects local cultural values and social norms embedded in everyday interaction, functioning as a polite and socially acceptable communicative strategy (Harimansyah, 2017; Wahyu et al., 2016). Humor in these settings is therefore not merely a source of amusement but an important interpersonal resource.

In Sundanese society, humor represents a key expression of cultural identity characterized by friendliness, politeness, and the prioritization of social harmony (Harimansyah, 2017; Wahyu et al., 2016). Sundanese humor tends to be subtle, indirect, and non-confrontational, often realized through playful teasing rather than overt sarcasm. This reflects a cultural preference for emotional restraint, relational sensitivity, and respect for others' face (Davis, 2020; Haugh, 2017). Through humorous interaction, Sundanese speakers enact values such as empathy, respect, and face consideration, which are central to maintaining harmonious social relationships (Harimansyah, 2017).

Moreover, humor functions as a cultural mechanism for negotiating social hierarchy and interpersonal distance in Sundanese interactions. Advice, disagreement, or social commentary is frequently conveyed humorously to ensure politeness and acceptability. This practice aligns with broader communicative patterns in collectivist cultures, where indirectness and emotional restraint are valued as markers of respect (Davis, 2020). Thus, humor serves as a reflection of collective cultural identity, shaping how Sundanese speakers communicate, interact, and position themselves within their social world.

Theories of Humor

The Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH) proposes that humor arises when an utterance simultaneously activates two opposing yet overlapping semantic scripts, a phenomenon known as script opposition (Raskin, 1979). These scripts typically involve contrasts such as serious versus non-serious, normal versus absurd, reality versus imagination, or expected versus unexpected. Humor emerges when listeners initially interpret an utterance through one conventional script but are subsequently prompted to shift to an alternative, incompatible script, often triggered by a punchline. This shift creates semantic incongruity that produces a humorous effect. SSTH also highlights the role of logical mechanisms, which explain how the opposing scripts are connected through strategies such as exaggeration, analogy, or unexpected associations, as well as the importance of shared background knowledge, situational context, and the target of humor. Together, these elements position humor as a phenomenon operating at the intersection of linguistic structure, cognition, and social interaction.

Although SSTH is primarily a linguistic and semantic model, it is theoretically related to classical humor theories, including Incongruity Theory, Superiority Theory, and Relief Theory (Attardo & Raskin, 1994). SSTH is most closely aligned with Incongruity Theory, which views humor as arising from a mismatch between expectation and outcome (Lynch, 2002). SSTH formalizes this idea by explaining how incongruity is linguistically encoded through script opposition and cognitively resolved when the listener shifts from one script to another (Attardo & Raskin, 1994).

SSTH can also be linked to Superiority Theory, which suggests that laughter stems from a sense of triumph over others' weaknesses (Morreall, 1983). In SSTH analyses, evaluative script oppositions such as competent versus incompetent or normal versus

deviant may position a character as inferior, potentially evoking a sense of superiority in the listener. However, superiority is better understood as a social effect of script opposition rather than the structural source of humor itself (Attardo & Raskin, 1994). Similarly, SSTH relates to Relief Theory, which conceptualizes humor as the release of psychological tension (Freud, 1905). In SSTH, the tension created by competing scripts is resolved through script switching, which may produce a sense of cognitive closure and emotional relief. Thus, SSTH complements classical theories by explaining the semantic and cognitive mechanisms underlying humor, while classical theories account for its social and emotional effects.

Humor in Sundanese Culture

Sundanese culture is characterized by values of politeness, emotional restraint, empathy, and the maintenance of social harmony. These values shape everyday communicative practices, where indirectness and relational balance are prioritized over direct confrontation. Research indicates that humor plays a significant role in Sundanese interaction as a culturally embedded strategy for managing social relations and fostering solidarity (Sudaryat, 2015; Nugraha & Suryadi, 2019). In this context, humor functions not merely as entertainment but as a pragmatic resource that supports harmonious interaction.

Sundanese speakers commonly employ mild, indirect, and non-aggressive humor, even when addressing sensitive topics. Such humor aligns with politeness norms that favor implicitness and emotional consideration, allowing speakers to mitigate face-threatening acts and reduce interactional tension (Wijana & Rohmadi, 2017; Rahardi, 2020). Harimansyah (2017) notes that Sundanese humor often relies on perceptual and logical play, including irony, exaggeration, and analogy, which generate incongruity without harsh personal targeting. These mechanisms depend on shared cultural knowledge and emphasize togetherness rather than individual superiority (Suryadi, 2021).

From a linguistic perspective, Sundanese humor can be effectively analyzed using SSTH, as humorous meanings often emerge from the interaction of culturally specific scripts that are socially constrained. The resulting incongruity is subtle and socially acceptable, reflecting the Sundanese emphasis on politeness and harmony. Consequently, humor in Sundanese discourse not only serves communicative purposes but also reinforces cultural identity and shared social values (Attardo, 2017).

METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive design, which is intended to portray the examined phenomenon in its natural context. Such an approach allows the researcher to provide an in-depth and realistic representation of participants' experiences rather than numerical or statistical generalizations. As highlighted by Lambert and Lambert (2012), qualitative descriptive studies aim to produce a holistic summary of specific human experiences as perceived by the participants themselves. Trochim and Donnelly (2006) also assert that this approach seeks to describe observable data rather than interpret beyond what is presented, while its focus on current or existing conditions instead of controlled experimental situations. In line with Mackey and Gass (2015), qualitative research relies on descriptive information rather than quantitative measures to interpret social behavior and meaning.

The research was conducted among Sundanese participants consisting of lecturers who were doctoral candidates and students enrolled in a doctoral program residing in Bandung, focusing on their spontaneous conversations that displayed humorous expressions of misfortune-related experiences. Data collection was conducted over eight months, from February to October 2025. During these interactions, moments of laughter or humorous responses connected to unfortunate situations were identified as data sources. All participants shared a common ethnolinguistic background, reflecting their identity as members of the Sundanese community.

Data were gathered through observation and audio documentation. The researcher recorded naturally occurring conversations containing humorous elements emerging from discussions of misfortune. A total of ten separate conversations involving different individuals were captured and later transcribed word-for-word to ensure fidelity to the original discourse.

Once transcription was complete, the data were examined using Raskin's (1979) Script-based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH). This theoretical lens was employed to identify how contrasting scripts, semantic relationships, and contextual triggers construct humorous effects within the conversational data of Sundanese doctoral students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

According to the Script-based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH), humor emerges when an utterance simultaneously activates two opposing scripts (known as *script opposition*). These contrasting scripts can coexist within the same text or interaction, producing incongruity that invites laughter or amusement. Such oppositions commonly appear in pairs of meanings such as *serious vs. non-serious*, *reality vs. imagination*, *normal vs. absurd*, *fortunate vs. unfortunate*, or *expected vs. unexpected*. In addition to *script opposition*, SSTH emphasizes the *logical mechanism* (the way both scripts are connected to form humorous meaning), the *situational context* in which the utterance occurs, and the *target of humor*, or the object being laughed at. Together, these elements account for how humor functions both linguistically and socially within conversation.

The Construction of Humor in Sundanese Conversation Based on the Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH)

Superiority theory

Superiority theory is concerned with the social aspects of humour. Central to these theories is the idea that laughter derives from the joy of feeling superior to some other, or that humour is a social corrective that corrects deviant behaviour (Attardo & Raskin, 1994). According to these theories, all humour is based on a discourse of included groups and excluded groups. The following conversation illustrates the use of humor constructed through the principles of Superiority Theory:

Except 1

A: Éta penjelasan dosen filsafat ampun, teu ngarti.

B: Geus mah teu ngarti, didinya mah kalah merhatikeun si bapak nu nundutan.

A: Lain nundutan éta mah tibra, ih.

B: Tapi naha nya, si éta ari kuliah nundutan, ari ngajawab pertanyaan bisa.

A: Enya, ari urang merhatikeun ti kerung-kerung gé angger teu ngarti.

B: Otakna si éta mah tingkat dewa.

This exchange reflects a typical form of classroom humor among doctoral students, where humor emerges from shared academic experiences and peer interaction. Previous studies have shown that humor in educational settings often functions as a coping mechanism that helps students manage academic pressure and cognitive load, particularly in demanding courses such as philosophy (Martin, 2007). In this instance, students gossip about a peer who appears inattentive by sleeping during lectures yet is still able to answer the lecturer's questions correctly. Similar patterns of humor have been observed in classroom discourse, where paradoxical behavior becomes a source of shared amusement and social bonding.

The humorous effect in this exchange is constructed through a logical paradox, namely the contradiction between inattentiveness and intellectual competence. This finding aligns with incongruity-based accounts of humor, which argue that humor arises from the coexistence of conflicting expectations within a single interpretative frame (Attardo & Raskin, 1994; Lynch, 2002). Within the Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH), the humor can be explained through the opposition of two scripts, inattention versus intelligence, that are activated simultaneously by the same discourse segment (Attardo & Raskin, 1994; Raskin, 1979).

Moreover, this example also resonates with the Superiority Theory of humor, in which laughter arises from the recognition of socially acceptable deviations from normative behavior. Previous studies have noted that academic humor often involves mild ridicule or evaluative comparison that remains non-threatening due to shared group membership and mutual understanding (Davis, 2020). In this case, the humor does not aim to demean the peer but instead reinforces a sense of collective identity among students facing similar academic challenges.

Finally, the function of this humor extends beyond entertainment. Consistent with prior research on humor in educational and professional communities, such humor serves to build camaraderie, relieve tension, and foster solidarity among participants (Martin, 2007). By laughing together at paradoxical yet familiar situations, doctoral students construct a shared emotional space that helps them navigate the demands of an intellectually rigorous learning environment. Thus, this finding supports and extends previous studies by demonstrating how classroom humor operates simultaneously at semantic, social, and affective levels.

Release/Relief theory

This theory is based on psychoanalytical theory, with Sigmund Freud as their most influential proponent. This type of liberation theory is also called release, relief, or relaxation theory. This type of release or liberation theory can be a sign of relief from tension and pressure. The following example is a conversational comedy taken from lecturer's conversation that illustrates the use of humor constructed through the principles of Superiority Theory.

Excerpt 2

A: Ninggali tugas si ibu éta, méni panjang daptar pustakana oge, langsung deg-degan abi macana.

B: Komo abi, asana téh bade IGD.

C: Ieu sirah abi kunang-kunang pak ninggali-na.

D: Tong ditinggali atuh, sok nyiar-nyiar pipanyakiteun.

This exchange illustrates how doctoral students employ humor to collectively respond to academic pressure triggered by a peer's assignment that appears intimidating due to its extensive list of references. Similar findings have been reported in studies on academic humor, which show that exaggerated reactions to workload and scholarly demands often function as a shared emotional outlet among students in higher education (Martin, 2007). By framing academic stress as something physically overwhelming, participants transform an anxiety-inducing stimulus into a source of collective amusement.

The humor in this interaction is constructed through the opposition of two contrasting scripts: academic stress and medical condition. This semantic clash is intensified through the logical mechanism of hyperbole, as participants jokingly describe symptoms such as dizziness, hospitalization, or illness merely from reading the assignment. Previous humor studies have identified exaggeration as a common strategy for amplifying incongruity and enhancing humorous impact, particularly in peer-group discourse where emotional alignment is shared (Attardo & Raskin, 1994; Lynch, 2002). Within the Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH), the overlapping activation of these scripts produces a sudden shift in interpretation that results in laughter (Attardo & Raskin, 1994; Raskin, 1979).

From a functional perspective, this instance of humor aligns closely with Relief Theory, which conceptualizes laughter as a symbolic release of psychological and emotional tension (Freud, 1960). Prior research has demonstrated that humor involving bodily metaphors and mock illness is frequently used to externalize stress and restore emotional balance in demanding academic contexts (Davis, 2020). Rather than expressing stress directly, the students reframe their anxiety through playful dramatization, making it socially acceptable and emotionally manageable.

Furthermore, this humorous exchange reinforces group empathy and solidarity. Studies on humor in collectivist and academic communities emphasize that shared laughter strengthens interpersonal bonds and validates common emotional experiences (Martin, 2007). By collectively exaggerating their stress responses, the students implicitly acknowledge one another's academic struggles, thereby fostering a supportive and empathetic peer environment. Thus, this finding supports previous research by illustrating how verbal humor functions not only as a semantic construct but also as an affective and social strategy for coping with academic pressure.

Incongruity theory

This type of theory states that humour appears when there is an oddity between the concepts prepared in certain situations and the real events that are thought to be related to the concept. The following conversation of lecturer as students of doctoral program illustrates the use of humor constructed through the principles of Incongruity Theory:

Excerpt 3

A: *Si bapak (C) mah nyasar heula tadi téh.*

B: *Maénnya, bet nyasar kamana atuh, lainna bareng tadi téh.*

C: *Enya nyasar kukurilingan heula, tapi wios ah anggap wé towaf, datang kadieu geus jadi haji mabrur.*

In this conversation, the humor is initiated by speaker C, who reframes a moment of personal misfortune into a humorous remark. By admitting that he became lost on the

way to the destination, C initially presents a potentially embarrassing situation. However, this negative experience is reinterpreted through a religious analogy, as he compares his wandering to *tawaf*, the ritual circumambulation of the Ka'bah during pilgrimage. Similar uses of religious or culturally sacred references in humor have been documented as a strategy to elevate mundane or problematic experiences into socially meaningful narratives (Attardo & Raskin, 1994).

The humorous effect emerges from the semantic opposition between two contrasting scripts: misfortune and religious sanctity. Within the framework of the Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH), these scripts are activated simultaneously by the same linguistic segment, creating a semantic incongruity that triggers laughter (Attardo & Raskin, 1994; Raskin, 1979). Previous studies on analogy-based humor suggest that drawing parallels between everyday mishaps and elevated cultural or religious practices intensifies incongruity while remaining socially acceptable, particularly in communities where religious discourse is culturally salient (Lynch, 2002).

From a functional perspective, this instance of humor aligns with Relief Theory, in which laughter functions as a mechanism for releasing emotional tension and restoring psychological equilibrium (Freud, 1960). Research on self-directed humor indicates that individuals often use humorous reframing to manage embarrassment, protect face, and reassert a positive self-image in social interaction. By transforming a navigational error into a spiritually framed joke, the speaker neutralizes potential social judgment and repositions himself in a favorable light.

Moreover, this type of humor reflects culturally embedded communicative practices common in Indonesian and Sundanese contexts, where indirectness, self-deprecation, and religious references are frequently employed to maintain harmony and emotional balance (Harimansyah, 2017; Wahyu et al., 2016). Rather than inviting ridicule, the humor fosters shared amusement and empathy among interlocutors, reinforcing group cohesion. Therefore, this finding supports previous research by demonstrating how verbal humor functions as both a semantic construct and a culturally grounded strategy for managing misfortune, embarrassment, and interpersonal face.

Excerpt 4

A: *Kumaha tugas téh?*

B: *Acan.*

A: *Sami ih, méni lieur ti kamari ngahuleng.*

B: *Bisi gélo mah, hayu atuh arék ngahuleng berjamaah moal?*

A: *Hayu, ke Senén lah di kabaran.*

This dialogue reflects shared frustration among doctoral students who are struggling with heavy academic demands. The speakers explicitly express mental exhaustion and cognitive overload through the Sundanese expression *ngahuleng*, which denotes a state of being absent-minded, mentally drained, or overwhelmed. Similar expressions of collective academic fatigue have been identified in studies on student discourse, where humor emerges as a coping strategy to manage sustained intellectual pressure (Martin, 2007).

The humorous effect is constructed through the blending of two contrasting scripts: academic stress and religious practice. By jokingly describing their exhaustion as something done *berjamaah* (in congregation), the speakers introduce religious imagery

typically associated with devotion and communal worship into a secular academic context. Within the Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH), this overlap of incongruent scripts generates semantic surprise and triggers humor (Attardo & Raskin, 1994; Raskin, 1979). Previous studies have shown that the use of religious metaphors in everyday humor is particularly effective in culturally religious societies, as it draws on shared knowledge while simultaneously subverting conventional expectations (Lynch, 2002).

From a functional perspective, this instance of humor aligns with Relief Theory, which views laughter as a symbolic release of psychological and emotional tension (Freud, 1960). Research on humor in academic communities suggests that joking about stress through metaphor and exaggeration allows speakers to externalize their anxiety and momentarily regain emotional balance (Davis, 2020). Rather than expressing frustration in a direct or confrontational manner, the speakers reframe their difficulties in a playful and culturally resonant way.

Moreover, this exchange reinforces social solidarity among the participants. Studies on humor in collectivist contexts emphasize that shared laughter functions as a marker of group cohesion and mutual understanding. By framing their academic struggle as a collective experience—something endured together—the speakers strengthen interpersonal bonds and affirm their shared identity as doctoral students navigating a demanding environment. Thus, this finding supports previous research by demonstrating how verbal humor operates not only as a semantic mechanism but also as a culturally grounded social strategy for coping with stress and maintaining group harmony.

Excerpt 5

A: *Punten, duh teu janten ngempel téh abi kedah ka DU.*

B: *Okeh atuh teu nanaon?*

A: *Kumaha atuh ngahuleng berjamaah téh?*

B: *Nya, bae lah, sementawis mah munfarid heula wé ngahulengna.*

In this interaction, the recurring motif of academic misfortune once again becomes the basis for humor among the speakers. Both participants express their struggle with overwhelming academic demands and mental fatigue, which are then playfully reframed through religious terminology. The contrastive use of *berjamaah* (in congregation) and *munfarid* (individually) draws directly on Muslim prayer practices, embedding sacred discourse into a secular academic context. Similar findings have been reported in studies showing that speakers in religiously informed societies frequently employ sacred terms humorously to reinterpret everyday difficulties in socially acceptable and culturally resonant ways (Lynch, 2002).

The humorous effect is constructed through the incongruity between two opposing scripts: religious sanctity and mundane academic struggle. Within the Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH), this overlap of scripts activates a sudden semantic shift that produces laughter (Attardo & Raskin, 1994; Raskin, 1979). Previous research on wordplay-based humor highlights that such contrasts between elevated or sacred registers and ordinary experiences intensify incongruity while remaining intelligible to in-group members who share the same cultural and religious background.

Functionally, this humorous exchange aligns with Relief Theory, in which laughter serves as a mechanism for releasing psychological tension and restoring emotional balance (Freud, 1960). By joking about their exhaustion using religious metaphors, the

speakers normalize academic stress as a collective and relatable experience rather than a personal failure. Studies on humor in academic and collectivist communities suggest that this kind of shared joking helps individuals cope with pressure while reaffirming emotional support and empathy within the group (Martin, 2007).

Moreover, the use of *berjamaah* versus *munfarid* underscores the role of humor in constructing social solidarity. Rather than framing fatigue as an individual weakness, the speakers emphasize togetherness, reinforcing a sense of communal endurance. This finding supports previous research indicating that humor functions as a social bonding mechanism that strengthens group identity and mitigates stress through shared amusement (Davis, 2020; Wahyu et al., 2016). Thus, this instance of verbal humor demonstrates how culturally grounded wordplay simultaneously operates as a semantic, emotional, and social strategy within academic interaction.

Excerpt 6

A: Ari bapak S1-na tafsir hadits, naha S2-na kana manajemen pendidikan, sanés tafsir hadits deui atuh?

B: Naha kitu?

A: Pan améh linear.

B: Bae ah, mun tafsir hadits deui mah sieun jadi nabi.

This conversation addresses academic background and the issue of educational linearity, a topic that often carries evaluative pressure in higher education careers. When speaker B humorously suggests that pursuing another degree in *tafsir hadith* might cause him to “become a prophet,” he deliberately introduces a theologically impossible outcome into an otherwise rational academic discussion. Similar uses of religious exaggeration in professional or academic settings have been identified as a common humorous strategy for easing tension surrounding assessment, credentials, and career legitimacy (Davis, 2020; Martin, 2007).

The humorous effect arises from the opposition between two contrasting scripts: academic rationality and spiritual absurdity. Within the Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH), these scripts are activated simultaneously, creating semantic incongruity that triggers laughter (Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Raskin, 1979). Previous studies on exaggeration-based humor demonstrate that invoking impossible or taboo outcomes—such as prophetic status in Islamic theology—intensifies incongruity while remaining safe when framed playfully among in-group members who share the same religious knowledge (Attardo & Raskin, 1994; Lynch, 2002).

From a functional perspective, this instance aligns with Relief Theory, which views humor as a mechanism for releasing emotional tension in socially demanding interactions (Freud, 1960; Ladilova & Schröder, 2022). Research on humor in evaluative and professional discourse suggests that joking allows speakers to momentarily suspend seriousness, reduce face-threatening implications, and reestablish conversational equilibrium. By exaggerating the consequences of academic pursuit into spiritual absurdity, speaker B neutralizes the pressure associated with academic linearity and repositions the discussion in a lighter, more collegial tone.

Moreover, this humorous exchange reinforces interpersonal alignment and solidarity among participants. Studies in academic humor indicate that playful religious references can function as markers of shared cultural and ideological background, strengthening group cohesion while softening potentially sensitive topics. Rather than

undermining professionalism, the humor facilitates a more relaxed and inclusive interaction. Thus, this finding supports previous research by illustrating how verbal humor operates as a culturally grounded strategy to manage academic evaluation, preserve face, and maintain social harmony in professional discourse.

Excerpt 7

A: *Nu bener ieu téh acara teu aya konsumsian kitu?*

B: *Acan, sigana acan dikaluarkeun.*

C: *Sabar, bu, sabar.*

A: *Teu bisa sabar ieu, tos lapar abi mah, sok kasurupan pami lapar téh!*

B: *Tah-tah, kade atuh euy, bahaya!*

In this conversation, the participants humorously express their discomfort over the absence of food during an event. Speaker A dramatizes hunger by likening it to *kasurupan* (spirit possession), a supernatural phenomenon deeply embedded in local cultural beliefs, while Speaker B responds with exaggerated concern and mock alarm. Similar uses of supernatural or mystical imagery in everyday humor have been documented as an effective strategy for amplifying ordinary experiences and transforming physical discomfort into shared amusement (Lynch, 2002).

The humorous effect emerges from the analogy between a basic human need, hunger, and a spiritual or supernatural condition. Within the Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH), this instance demonstrates script opposition between bodily deprivation and spiritual possession, both of which are activated simultaneously by the same linguistic expression (Attardo & Raskin, 1994; Raskin, 1979). Previous studies on culturally grounded humor show that invoking supernatural concepts in non-threatening contexts creates strong incongruity while remaining socially acceptable within communities that share the same cultural knowledge.

From a functional standpoint, this humorous exchange aligns with Relief Theory, as laughter functions to release tension caused by physical discomfort and unmet expectations (Freud, 1960; Ladilova & Schröder, 2022). Research on humor in everyday interaction suggests that joking about hunger or fatigue allows speakers to cope with inconvenience without escalating dissatisfaction or complaint. Rather than expressing frustration directly, the participants collectively reframe their discomfort through playful exaggeration.

Moreover, this exchange strengthens group solidarity by transforming a potentially unpleasant situation into a moment of shared laughter. Studies in collectivist cultures emphasize that humor often serves to maintain harmony and emotional balance by mitigating negative experiences through communal amusement (Harimansyah, 2017). By avoiding overt complaint, the speakers preserve politeness and reinforce social cohesion. Thus, this finding supports previous research by illustrating how verbal humor operates as a culturally embedded strategy for managing discomfort, maintaining group harmony, and fostering social connection in everyday interaction.

Excerpt 8

A: *Ari tugas téh dikempelkeun dimana, bu?*

B: *Duka, da acan aya pemberitahuan.*

A: *Ah...*

B: *Kalem wé atuh, da abi mah ngerjakeun-na gé acan.*

A: *Abi mah lebar ieu tugas mun teu dikirim, bisi buruk diantep téh.*

In this exchange, the humor is constructed through a simple yet effective analogy used to express anxiety over an submitted academic task. Speaker A jokingly suggests that if the assignment is left unattended for too long, it might “rot,” thereby attributing biological properties to an inanimate object. Similar uses of anthropomorphism and illogical imagery have been identified in previous studies as common humorous strategies in academic and everyday discourse, particularly when speakers attempt to cope with stress or procrastination (Martin, 2007).

The humorous effect emerges from the script opposition between an inanimate object and a living organism. Within the framework of the Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH), these opposing scripts are activated simultaneously, producing semantic incongruity that triggers laughter (Attardo & Raskin, 1994; Raskin, 1979). Prior research on analogy-based humor suggests that attributing organic qualities to abstract or non-living entities enhances incongruity by violating logical expectations, while still remaining interpretable within the conversational context.

From a functional perspective, this instance of humor aligns with Relief Theory, as it serves to alleviate psychological tension associated with academic responsibility and deadline pressure (Freud, 1960). Studies on humor in student interaction show that joking about academic anxiety allows speakers to externalize stress and reframe obligation in a less threatening manner (Davis, 2020). At the same time, the humorous remark subtly functions as a prompt or encouragement for the interlocutor to submit the assignment, blending emotional support with practical motivation.

Moreover, this exchange contributes to interpersonal alignment by maintaining a light conversational tone despite the seriousness of the academic task. Research on humor and politeness emphasizes that indirect humorous reminders are often perceived as less face-threatening than direct commands or criticism. Thus, this finding supports previous studies by demonstrating how verbal humor operates as a culturally and pragmatically sensitive strategy for managing stress, encouraging action, and preserving social harmony in academic interaction.

Excerpt 9

A: *Bu, saurna nuju kuliah deui?*

B: *Muhun, doakeun lah.*

A: *Sadis euy, anom kénéh tos bade janten Bu Doktor.*

B: *Hayu atuh nyusul.*

A: *Ah, atuh abi timana artos-na?*

B: *Pan éta ginjal aman, meureun.*

A: *Henteu puguh, minum wé téh pucuk.*

B: *Otak gé tiasa, da diical.*

A: *Moal payu sigana mah, Bu, da otak abi mah ngeres.*

B: *Euh, atuh lapur.*

A: *Nya paling jalan terakhir mah miara tuyul.*

This conversation between two Sundanese speakers exemplifies culturally embedded humor that intertwines financial anxiety, social teasing, and supernatural references. What initially begins as a polite inquiry about pursuing further study gradually escalates into increasingly absurd suggestions, reflecting a common conversational pattern in which serious concerns are reframed through playful

exaggeration. Previous studies on Indonesian and Sundanese humor note that everyday anxieties, particularly those related to economic pressure and education, are often managed through humor that relies on indirectness and escalation rather than direct complaint.

The humorous effect in this exchange is constructed through multiple layers of script opposition. The conversation juxtaposes economic struggle with absurd solutions, reality with fantasy, and morally acceptable behavior with culturally taboo acts. The logical mechanism underlying this humor is false causality, as the speakers humorously link the high cost of education to extreme and illogical actions such as selling body organs or raising a mythical creature (*tuyul*). Within the Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH), this overlap of incompatible scripts produces semantic incongruity that triggers laughter (Attardo & Raskin, 1994; Raskin, 1979). Studies on escalation in humor further suggest that progressive exaggeration enhances comedic impact by creating a rhythmic buildup that invites shared anticipation and amusement.

From a theoretical perspective, this instance aligns with Incongruity Theory, as humor emerges from the listener's recognition of the clash between a serious, rational issue—financial difficulty—and ludicrous, culturally impossible or forbidden solutions. Similar findings have been reported in research on culturally grounded humor, where supernatural figures and taboo topics are invoked not to be taken literally, but to intensify incongruity while remaining socially intelligible within the cultural group (Davis, 2020; Lynch, 2002).

Socially, this humorous banter serves several important functions. First, it operates as a tension-release mechanism, allowing speakers to address financial stress without overt complaint, thus aligning with Relief Theory (Freud, 1960; Ladilova & Schröder, 2022). Second, it strengthens interpersonal rapport by engaging both speakers in a shared playful frame. Studies on humor in collectivist cultures emphasize that such banter reinforces solidarity and mutual understanding through shared cultural knowledge and values. Finally, the use of culturally specific references such as *tuyul* signals shared Sundanese cultural identity, demonstrating wit, indirectness, and emotional restraint. Therefore, this finding supports previous research by illustrating how Sundanese verbal humor functions as a multidimensional strategy, semantic, social, and cultural, for managing anxiety, maintaining harmony, and affirming collective identity.

Excerpt 10

A: *Ninggali si ibu éta mah, nya, emamna seueur tapi begang wé, bisaan.*

B: *Puguh, hayang gendut téh méni hésé.*

A: *Maénya ah.*

B: *Aslina tos nuangan kunyit mah, ginseng mah, ah sagala.*

A: *Ai abi naha ngarenghap gé jadi daging, nya, bagi atuh resep-na.*

B: *Naon atuh?*

A: *Tapi abi gé basa éta kantos begang, pas jeung salaki nu bareto.*

B: *Cik atuh euy, brarti ieu abi kedah ganti salaki kitu?*

A: *Bisi bade dicobian.*

B: *Yeuh, atuh hayang begang mah gampil.*

A: *Aslina ah, hésé.*

B: *Kedah ngabatin gancang, ke gé begang.*

A: *Tuh kan, ceuk urang gé moal bener.*

This final conversation centers on body image and weight, topics that are often considered sensitive and potentially face-threatening in everyday interaction. However, the speakers successfully transform this delicate issue into a source of humor by playfully linking physical condition with marital status. The witty suggestion that one can lose weight by “changing husbands” exemplifies the logical mechanism of false causality, in which an illogical cause–effect relationship is humorously constructed. Similar uses of false causality and exaggerated reasoning have been identified in prior studies as effective strategies for creating humor while discussing personal or sensitive matters (Attardo & Raskin, 1994).

From the perspective of the Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH), the humorous effect emerges through the opposition of two incompatible scripts: body image and marital relationship, as well as realistic health concerns and absurd reasoning. These scripts are activated simultaneously by the same utterance, producing semantic incongruity that triggers laughter (Raskin, 1979; Attardo & Raskin, 1994). Research on incongruity-based humor suggests that juxtaposing unrelated life domains—such as diet and marriage—intensifies the humorous effect by violating logical expectations while remaining interpretable within the conversational context (Davis, 2020; Lynch, 2002).

Socially, this humorous exchange functions to make a potentially uncomfortable topic more approachable. Studies on humor and politeness demonstrate that joking allows speakers to address issues related to physical appearance without directly threatening face or causing embarrassment (Haugh, 2017). In collectivist and harmony-oriented cultures, humor is often preferred over direct criticism as a means of maintaining emotional balance and relational closeness.

Moreover, the shared laughter generated by this joke reinforces emotional intimacy and solidarity between the speakers. Previous research highlights that humor concerning everyday personal experiences, such as body image, can strengthen interpersonal bonds when framed playfully and non-judgmentally. Thus, this finding supports earlier studies by illustrating how verbal humor operates as both a semantic mechanism and a social strategy—allowing speakers to negotiate sensitive topics, preserve politeness, and affirm relational closeness through culturally resonant wit.

Based on the analysis through the Script-based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH), humor in Sundanese conversations among both adolescents and lecturers frequently arises from the opposition between bitter realities (misfortune) and their humorous or absurd reinterpretations. This type of humorous mechanism reflects the distinctive characteristics of Sundanese humor, which tends to be non-aggressive, not intended to demean others, but rather serves to entertain oneself and those around them, thereby reducing social and emotional tension.

Verbal Humor Represents the Cultural Identity of the Sundanese People

Verbal humor reflects Sundanese cultural identity through its emphasis on politeness, indirectness, and the maintenance of social harmony (Harimansyah, 2017). As illustrated in Conversation 10, humor arises in a discussion of body image and marital life when a speaker jokingly suggests changing one’s husband as a way to become slimmer. This humorous remark exemplifies the Sundanese tendency to address sensitive or potentially face-threatening topics—such as physical appearance and marriage—through playful, indirect expressions rather than confrontation or overt sarcasm (Harimansyah, 2017).

The humor in this interaction is generated by incongruity between a realistic concern about body image and an absurd solution linking physical appearance to marital change. This finding aligns with Lynch's (2002) view of humor as arising from violated logical expectations and with Raskin's (1979) Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH), which explains humor through the overlap of opposing scripts. Here, a serious script concerning personal appearance intersects with a non-serious, illogical script involving marital replacement, producing semantic surprise and amusement. Similar patterns have been identified in humor functioning as a face-saving and tension-reducing strategy in everyday interaction (Attardo & Raskin, 1994).

More broadly, this type of verbal humor reflects key Sundanese values, including *someah hade ka semah* (kindness toward others), emotional restraint, and collective social orientation. Consistent with findings in Indonesian cultural contexts, Sundanese humor functions as a social lubricant that strengthens interpersonal bonds and mitigates tension (Davis, 2020; Hartanti, 2008). Rather than ridiculing others, it fosters emotional closeness and shared understanding, positioning humor as a culturally embedded strategy for sustaining social harmony.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of Sundanese conversational humor through the framework of the Script-based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH) reveals that most humorous expressions arise from incongruous script oppositions, particularly between misfortune and reinterpretation, reality and absurdity, or seriousness and playfulness. Such incongruities are strategically employed by speakers to transform everyday hardships, academic stress, or social discomfort into moments of shared laughter. Rather than functioning as aggressive or superiority-based humor, these exchanges serve as mechanisms of emotional relief and social harmony.

Moreover, the study demonstrates that verbal humor functions as a mirror of Sundanese cultural identity. It reflects a communication style rooted in politeness, empathy, and subtlety—values that emphasize collective comfort over individual dominance. The humorous reinterpretation of sensitive topics, such as financial struggle, physical appearance, or academic pressure, illustrates how Sundanese speakers maintain social cohesion and emotional balance through laughter. Therefore, verbal humor in Sundanese interaction is not merely linguistic play, but a form of cultural expression that preserves communal warmth, reinforces social bonds, and affirms the moral and relational ethos of Sundanese society.

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