



Research Paper

Understanding the Characteristics Of Indonesian Humorous Riddles

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ABSTRACT: Lately in Indonesia, various kinds of riddles pop up in both social or printed media. There are not many of its forms that have changed, in fact, its old forms are still much in use. However, based on its content, there have been many changes occurred which causes a change in its function. The riddles nowadays no longer use true riddles, which is useful to sharpen the brain. Rather the riddles have turned into riddle jokes, which serves for amusement only. Based on this, this article aims to look at the form and content of the riddle, to what extent the difference between the riddle in the past and the present. In analysing the topic, this article uses the method of semiotic structure, which focuses only on the text and the signs contained therein. There is an opinion that the purpose of the riddle is not to obtain information but rather as a game, and some say that the riddle is a way of talking about things that cannot be said and contain questions about contemporary values and norms. The benefit of riddles is very complex, but it certainly provides entertainment and performs cognitive functions in reaffirming common values in society. Riddle seems to be more pleasurable to the person who asks than the one who answers and seldom produces a genuine laugh. Based on that opinion, this article argues that there is still a true riddle that serves to train the intelligence of thinking, but it is only used as a lesson in a particular educational institution or community so that the students or the community do not forget the cultural heritage of the past. However, old riddles that are now more widespread are filled with new themes and informal language, whose function is nothing but entertainment.

KEYWORDS: Humour, riddle, culture, Indonesia

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I. INTRODUCTION

This study aims to see the form and content of humour riddles spread in Indonesia, because riddles are part of popular culture in Indonesia and is still used today, despite experiencing many changes, both from the aspects of content and function. As Dorothy Noyes puts it in Kaivola-Bregenhøj (2017: 201), riddle jokes are one of the most common forms of joke today. Riddle is a tradition that is rapidly developing, both among children and adults.

The word riddle comes from Classical English, *raedelse*, and medieval English, *redels* or *ridel* which means "to read into". There are various definitions in the dictionary. Webster defines the riddle as "a mystifying, misleading, or puzzling question posed as a problem to be solved or guessed." American Heritage defines the riddle as "a question or statement that requires thinking to answer it." There are some riddles that overlap with (word play) and are answered as well. (MacHovec, 2008: 65)

Riddle is a term commonly used to describe humorous texts in the form of question and answer using conceptual and linguistic ambiguity, the riddle jokes is essentially humour made in the form of a puzzle. Most humour riddles talk about new topics, such as national and global news, and comment on accidents, disasters, politics, the popular and recent ethnic minority situation. Riddle is a way to talk about the unspeakable and ask contemporary values and norms. The function of the riddle is complex, but it certainly provides entertainment and performs cognitive functions in reaffirming common values in society (Attardo, 2014: 645)

Riddle is an exchange of question and answer with the intention not to get information but more for the game. The person who asks already knows the answer but challenges the person asked to guess the answer. Riddle has contributed to several goals throughout the ages and has been used in literature around the world. (Thursby, 2006: 51). Riddle jokes are not only famous among children, but also found among adults. This humour consists of questions addressed to listeners, followed by answers made by the questioner himself, when the listener does not know the answer. (Sherze, 2002: 36)

Riddle is a misleading question or a puzzle question that poses a problem. Although there is a riddle that contains a word play or a joke without humour, but the answer often makes people laugh. This variation of the riddle is called the puns, otherwise known as the conundrum, which answers the riddle in any form. The answer of the riddle is often very difficult for the listeners to find. When the questioner reveals the answer, the listener will learn how the anomaly in the question can be answered. Riddle seems more pleasurable to those who ask than answer and rarely produces genuine laughter. Riddle positions the person who asks a question more highly than the one asked, since the person asked cannot answer the question. (Franzini, 2002: 25)

Oring mentions that a riddle is a suitable medium to convey something odd and funny at the same time. The peculiarity is often found clearly in the riddle, because in general, the function of the question in the riddle is to give an anomaly that must be answered with the proper solution. According to him, riddle jokes not only convey questions, but also contains explicit problems. So, the question in the humour is not like a question in a puzzle that does not provide a solution. The question in the humour is different from the question in the puzzle, because humour contains something odd. (Warner, 2008: 20)

In riddles, it takes intelligence to find the right answer. In a pure riddle, logically, the answer must match the question. In an impure riddle, the answer does not have to match the question, to understand the logic requires a lot of thought. The answer to an impure riddle will surprise the listener, because the content is illogical. (Fowler, 1986: 23). The answer to the puzzle is unique, always one, and it means one, like a key that can only open one door. Each puzzle question has only one answer. (Stefanova, 2007: 137)

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the riddle has been done by many people, among them is by Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj in 2017 under the title riddles and Humour. In his article, he uses several references that discuss the existence of two types of riddles, namely true riddles and riddle jokes. In his discussion, he mentions that true riddle and riddle jokes are products of different eras. True riddle contains questions that do not contain misleading elements and the answers contain clues. People who know about the riddle know that it will not be easy to express the answer. However, finding answers from a riddle is a fun experience. There is a way of revealing the answer of the riddle. Some are international, and some have their own expression modes according to their language and cultural area. A riddle joke is a contemporary riddle that does not exist in classic riddles because of its unexpected questions and answers. riddle is abundant in seemingly impossible things that people have to guess or know beforehand. The ambiguity and non-conformity avoided in normal speech is perfectly acceptable in the riddle.

In his article, he also said that riddle makes people confused, but at the same time gives answers to the confusion with familiar answers known to everyone. The possibility of being confused is always there, but at the same time it provides entertainment. True riddles and riddle jokes are a way of learning social customs besides having fun and laughing together. There are several functions of the riddle, that is, in addition to providing a form of entertainment, while at the same time fostering a sense of closeness among those who use the riddle, carrying cultural metaphors and terminology, and expressing the values and norms of society. Riddle techniques are various, ranging from asking to explaining and starting from entertaining to mocking. In addition, the riddle is also used as a means to address politically sensitive issues that cannot be written in the media.

In the research article conducted by Voolaid (2010), he discusses the features of abbreviation jokes, which deal with the humour and slang language and the way in which interpretations relate to the socio-cultural context. The number of abbreviation jokes examined is roughly 3,000 texts from about 330 kinds stored in the Folklore Archives Museum of Estonian Literature. The data has been systematically presented in the Estonian Abbreviation riddles database. This database provides an overview of alternative folkloric interpretations of abbreviations and acronyms in different periods and it is possible to observe and describe the genre transformations in the dichotomic sociocultural context. This article introduces possible ways of systematising and formulating alternative interpretation principles of abbreviation parodies from Estonia that are specific to folklore and language. According to him, the folklorists approached the phenomenon as a subgenre of riddles: the question part consists of conventional abbreviations, while the explanations given in the answer section are radically different from the conventional ones; it is funny and often with political or sexual tone. An abbreviation can produce some alternative interpretations, both conventional and folkloric. Funny alternative interpretations of abbreviations can be regarded as an important source of group language slang lexicon, such as exclusive subcultures, professional language or secret language.

In addition, there is also research conducted by Stefanova (2007), which seeks to review the riddle as a psychological phenomenon of the community, from the perspective of analytical psychology CG Jung, M. Eliade, E. Durkheim's conception of "sacred" and "profane" and the conception of S. Arietion concepts and endocepts. In the study, he also reviews neck riddles that are similar to initiation rituals, predictions, and other community phenomena, as a way of achieving individuation. Another study conducted by Awedoba (2000) in his article argues that the riddle has a significant social role, either implicitly or explicitly. Such roles can be

described as cultural, educational, intellectual, ideological, cosmological and political. Meanwhile, some studies ignore the riddle as a genre, because it lacks the capacity to sharpen the mind. The study argues that the riddle exercises intelligence to be more active. A riddle teaches logic, for forcing the audience to engage in contemplation of various paradoxes and teaching about social and cultural environments, about social norms, about history, biology and more. A riddle can also be said to play a role in developing the intuition people need in acquiring their language and social structure. This study was collected from several Kasena communities.

Gachanja and Charles Kebaya (2013) have conducted a critical examination of the pedagogical aspects of the riddles that exist among the Abagusii community. They argue that riddles play an important role in the education system in Kenya, not only for children, but also in adults, with various functions in society in the fields of culture, social and history, and instilling pedagogical values. The primary data for this analysis were obtained from field studies conducted among children and adults in Abagusii communities. This research uses participatory approach and observation in data collection. Using deconstruction theory as its theoretical framework, this study explores the various values of education and skills inherent in the riddle and shows that riddles embody educational values. This study emphasises that riddles should be included in teaching methods. For this reason, it is concluded that participating in tinkering with the riddles is not a vain exercise, but an education based on pedagogical empowerment. The study proposes new ways in which riddles can be used in teaching and learning processes in Kenyan schools for integration purposes.

Likewise, Sharndama et al (2014) has done research on riddles. According to them, riddles belong to an important oral literary genre. Riddle as a game requires mastery and language manipulation. The game is played by blurring the subject to challenge the person who is asked. In this study, they examined the morphology, syntax and rabbinical functions of the people of Kilba. This study uses systemic linguistic theories, syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships, and analytic and synthetic approaches used to structure words. The results show that almost all different sentence types are prevalent in the Kilba people's riddle structure. The study also reveals that there is a possibility of choice of language based on the context of the riddle. This study concludes that the possibility may cause ambiguity over the correct answer. Research has established the fact that the riddle as a game is being played for different purposes such as entertainment and teaching.

The same study with this article, is a study of riddles in Indonesia, conducted by Bowden (2013). According to him, playing the riddle is a widespread tradition throughout Southeast Asia, although few still notice it. He elaborated on the extent of the riddle's role throughout Indonesia. The main focus of his research is research on riddle traditions in East Nusa Tenggara and East Timor. He started by sketching the main social function of the riddle. He said that riddle could encourage sleepless children to sleep, riddles are part of funerals, when used to help people, to be awake when they wait for the dead before the funeral, and the riddle can also be used for fun. In addition, he also examined the typical structure of the riddle in an attempt to decipher its typology.

This article also examines the riddle in Indonesia, but from the aspect of humour and the corpus of this research is also not from one of the regions, but from all over Indonesia. The texts on riddle humour used in this study were taken from books and social media.

III. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

In analysing this riddle, this article is based on several theories. In analysing the type of riddle, this article uses the theory proposed by Voolaid (2010: 63), which divides the riddle into several types of traditional riddles which part of the question is the description of the object, such as:

Question: One swan, four noses?

Answer: Pillow.

The next one is a riddle which uses the word "which", such as the following:

Question: Which one is heavier—a kilogram of iron or a kilogram of cotton?

Answer: Both are as heavy.

Riddles with phrase as the answers, such as the following:

Question: What kind of feet that do not walk?

Answer: Table feet.

The puzzle in the form of a picture-guessing - mostly a visual image that serves as a question and description of the image that serves as an answer, for example:

Question: What is this? (referring to a picture)

Answer: Four elephants sniffing an orange.

Next, the theory in Maranda (1971: 14) argues about the level of complexity in riddles. According to the theory, the riddle structure can be divided into three, namely: simple riddle, compound riddle and string riddle. Simple riddle is a puzzle that contains only one term, one true premise, one wrong premise and one answer. If one of these components develops, it is called a compound riddle and if the puzzle is a long list with the same answer, it is called a riddle string. Meanwhile, when viewed in terms of function, the riddle is divided

into three; namely emotional, intellectual and informational riddles. The first deals with sex, more precisely with the creation of an atmosphere of erotic nuance by creating a riddle that evokes erotism but with "wrong" answers. Because, as some riddle experts have pointed out (Taylor 1951, Virtanen 1960: 181), the riddle is only a joke. The second is usually called true riddles (Taylor, 1951) because they require an intellectual effort to find the answer of the riddle, if one has run out of ideas. The third is usually known as the question of the monks, asking questions about something previously known, especially information on religious teachings and facts (see Taylor 1951: Haavio and Hautala 1946: XV-XVI). Like any other sign, the riddle consists of a signan, the core of the riddle, and a signatum, which is the answer of the riddle. (see de Saussure)

In addition, this article also uses the theories contained in Voolaid (2010: 63) in analysing the riddle. Voolaid has researched what is known as the "abbreviation riddle", which is largely an acronym. Meanwhile, in discussing the theme, this article refers to the opinion of Kaivola-Bregenhøj (2017: 204), which says that the riddle is often political or sexual. Meanwhile, Brundvan mentions that humour riddle entertainment includes important and serious aspects of life, such as religion, politics, work or sex.

IV. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

In Indonesia, there are many riddles in the form of puns. Therefore, the first part to be analysed in this chapter is that riddle. Puns are frequently asked questions that use phonological ambiguity. There are three ways to create phonological ambiguity, namely syllable substitution, word substitution and metathesis. What is meant by syllable substitution is a strategy done by confusing syllables in a word with the same sounding words. What is meant by Word substitution is a strategy done by confusing a word with another word that sounds the same, and Metathesis is a strategy that does not use the way contained in the syllable substitution, word substitution. (Mele, 2007, 511)

According to Miller (2016: 60) a pun indeed a common source of humour in jokes and other comedy works; even being a special kind of joke. A pun is also a means of rhetoric in literature, speech, slogans, and oral narratives, and can also be used without humour. Shakespeare, for example, is famous for his use of wordplay, which occurs at high frequency even in his non-comical works. Both the humourous and non-humourous play of words have been the subject of extensive study, which has led to a breadth of insight into the realm of humour and wordplay, including its role in commerce, entertainment, and health care.

Puns can provide a pleasant experience in several ways (cf. Tanaka, 1994; McQuarrie and Mick, 1999, 2003; Tom and Eves, 1999). First, because a pun is a fun entertainment tool. Funny messages can make the audience amused. Secondly, puns can be a riddle. Solving the riddle is fun, because it directs the audience of intellectual ability and shows it to them that they have relevant knowledge to solve the problem. (Van Mulken, 2005: 708)

Among the examples of using puns with the syllable substitution type is as follows:

Question: What kind of lele that can fly? (lele, i.e. catfish)

Answer: lelelawar (kelelawar, i.e. bat)

(Dianawati, 2008:1)

Looking at the above question, it is clear that the above riddle is not a true riddle type, because it is not logical to ask. Realistically, there is no lele (catfish) that can fly. Catfish is a type of fish that live in polluted water. Given this lack of clarity, it is certain that the purpose of this riddle is not to train intelligence, but only to provide entertainment to the reader, and it is also certain that the pun answer will be illogical. As mentioned above that one form of puns is a syllable substitution. In the text, the replacement of this syllable is found in the answer of lelelawar. The real word is kelelawar (a bat). So, kele syllables are replaced by lele syllables. In the Indonesian language, there is no such thing as a lelelawar. There is kelelawar, which means a bat, one type of animal that can fly, especially at night. Substitution of syllables in this text has no purpose whatsoever, except for giving fun effects.

Meanwhile, one example of puns with type word substitution is as follows:

Question: What kind of lidah (tongue) that won't bleed when cut off?

Answer: Lidahbuaya (crocodile's tongue, i.e. aloe vera)

(Dianawati, 2008:5)

As mentioned in the previous riddle, the question of the riddle also does not make sense. There is no tongue that does not bleed when it is cut, rather all tongues will bleed if it is cut because it is part of the body of living beings. Thus, the answer to that question must be illogical. The answer to this text is lidahbuaya. The expression of lidahbuaya, literally translates to 'crocodile's tongue', has two meanings, namely the literal meaning and figurative meaning. As in literal meaning, the expression of 'crocodile's tongue' is a tongue in the mouth of a crocodile, one of the animals that lives in two realms or amphibian. Meanwhile, figuratively, the expression of crocodile's tongue means "a leaf that serves to help the hair grow", i.e. aloe vera. In the Indonesian language, aloe vera is called a crocodile's tongue because of its shape sticking out like a tongue of crocodiles. In

this text it is not a replaced syllable, but the whole word is replaced. The word *lidahbuaya* which means "tongue on crocodile" is replaced with *lidahbuaya* which means "hair supplement".

As for, the example of pun with *metathesis* is as follows:

Question: *Apabedanyasarungdankotak?* (What's the difference between a sarong and a square?)

Answer: *Kalasarungbisakotak-kotak, tapikalaukotaktidakbisasarung-sarung* (A sarong has squared motives, but a square doesn't have sarongs.)

(Dianawati, 2008:4)

As mentioned in the theory, *metathesis* is not a syllable or word substitution, but other than that. The above example may be included in that category. The wordplay can be seen on the word *sarung* (sarong) and *kotak* (square) called several times. *Sarong* is a wide piece of cloth sewn on both ends so that it is formed like a tube, while *kotak* is a square space. If the word *kotak* is repeated *askotak-kotak*, in Indonesian it has the meaning of 'squared motive', while the word *sarong*, if repeated *assarung-sarung*, the meaning becomes plural: lots of sarongs. Such things can also be incorporated into word plays.

Besides in the form of puns, one of riddles that are popular in Indonesia have the form of abbreviation riddle. *Voolaid* (2010: 63-64) divides the abbreviation riddle into several types. The first is an abbreviation taken from its first letter or popular acronym which stands for several alternative answers, such as *SAS* - *Scandinavian Airlines System*, to be interpreted into completely different words with an ironic tone - *Sex And Satisfaction*. The riddle on the part of the question is a well-known acronym, often is interpreted into different words, to look for a funny effect. A single acronym or abbreviation may be given a different meaning, in accordance with its interpretation - whether conventional or normative or folkloric or alternative. The *Folklorists* call these abbreviations the expression of abbreviation riddles, although some call them abbreviation parodies, humourous abbreviations, alternative interpretations of abbreviations or quasi abbreviations. Humourous interpretation of the abbreviation as a sociocultural phenomenon is widely mentioned in speech as well as in the media.

The second is non-normative abbreviations, such as abbreviations based on common knowledge on a particular type of organisation, such as the name of a news agency, usually abbreviated with acronyms: *BBC*, *CNN*, and so on. The third is an abbreviation taken from a word or phrase through a specific interpretation, known as *backronyms*. For example, in an episode of *The Simpsons*, *Homer* defines *GRUNGE* as *Guitar Rock Utilising Nihilist Grunge Energy*. The fourth is an abbreviation as a combination of mixing and a part of the first syllable of the corresponding words or selected letters. So, in general, the types of abbreviations presented here reveal a genre called *quasi-acronym*, which defines the initial letter of popular abbreviations, defines or describes abbreviations in the form of single words or syllables, or abbreviations formed from spontaneously constructed phrases which may also be presented as entities of a commonly used name type in short form.

In Indonesia, there are two types of abbreviation riddles; first, those that use the existing abbreviations and then given a new interpretation; and second, newly created abbreviations, both in terms of form and content. One example of abbreviation riddle in Indonesia that already exists, then given a new interpretation, is as follows:

Question: What does *AIDS* stand for?

Answer: *AkibatIntimDenganSesama* (equivalent to 'the consequence of intimate relationship with same sex')

<https://cdproom.blogspot.co.id/2012/12/kumpulan-kata-kata-singkatan-lucu-gokil.html>

AIDS stands for 'Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome'. *AIDS* means a collection of symptoms due to a deficiency or weakness of the immune system that was formed after a person is born. *AIDS* is an old acronym that has existed since the onset of the disease. If this abbreviation above stands for *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*, then it does not belong to the riddle humour, but the true riddle. However, in this text, the abbreviation is interpreted by the words of the *AkibatIntimDenganSesama*, which translates to 'the consequence of being intimate with the same gender'. The letter *A* stands for *Akibat* (consequence), the letter *I* stands for *Intim* (Intimate relationship), the letter *D* stands for *Dengan* (with), and the letter *S* stands for the word *Sesama* (same sex). In theory, this kind of humour is called *wordplay*, a joke that relies on similar words in sound, but is used in two different meanings. The difference between the two meanings creates conflict or demotivation, which is funny for some people. Word plays can be made between: two words with the same pronunciation and spelling, with two words with different spellings but the same pronunciation, and with two words with different spellings and pronunciations (*Taylor*, 2004). Meanwhile, *al-Hufi* (in *Lesmana*, 2014: 38) refers to it as *al-La'bu bi al-alfaz*, that is humour that occurs due to one's ability to play words.

The following is an abbreviation riddle examples which do not use existing abbreviations, but the new abbreviations:

Question: What does *Politisi* (Politician) stand for?

Answer: *PoligamiTigaIstri* (i.e. Polygamy of Three Wives)

<http://katalucuterbarus.blogspot.co.id/2014/04/singkatan-kata-plesetan-lucu.html>

The word politician is not an abbreviation, but a title. Politisimeans politician. This means that people who work in the political field, usually a party official or party activist. In this text, the word politician is made into an abbreviation to polygamy of three wives. Syllabe Po is extended into Polygamy, Ti syllabe is extended to Tiga(Three), and the Si syllabe is lengthened into Istri(Wife). This kind of creativity happens a lot in Indonesia recently. The creation of such acronyms is not without reason, but it may also be used as a satire for the behavior of politicians in Indonesia. As Simpson points out (Skalicky, 2014: 67) that there are three participants involved in satire, the author, the intended audience and target. In this case, the target is politicians. In the theory of humour, al-Hufi (in Lesmana, 2015: 52) refers to this as al-tahakkum bi al-'uyub al-khuluuqiyyahwa al-nafsiyah, which is the kind of humour that occurs because of one's ability in showing the bad behavior of others.

V. CONCLUSION

Referring to AnnikkiKaivola-Bregenhøj's opinion that divides the riddle into true riddle and riddle jokes, after doing research on some riddles in Indonesia it is found that many of the riddles that are circulating in Indonesia today are riddle jokes. This can be seen in books as well as texts that are on the internet. Also, if we refer to Maranda's (1971: 14) opinion which divides the riddle structure into three, namely: simple riddle, compound riddle and string riddle, it seems that the most occurring is a simple riddle. Meanwhile, in terms of function, riddles are divided into three: emotional, intellectual and informational riddles, in Indonesia most of which are emotional riddles, which only use riddles as a joke tool.

Meanwhile, if we refer to the opinion of Mele (2007: 511) who says that there are three ways of creating phonological ambiguities in the riddle jokes: the syllable substitution, the word substitution and metathesis, all these can be found in the riddle jokes in Indonesia since most riddle jokes in Indonesia use pun techniques.

Likewise, if we refer to Voolaid's opinion (2010: 63-64) that divides the abbreviation riddle into several types, the abbreviations taken from the first letter or popular acronym and then lengthened by several alternative answers; abbreviations based on common knowledge on certain types of organizations and abbreviations derived from words or phrases through a particular interpretation, known as backronyms, it appears that the most widely used is the first type of abbreviation. Meanwhile, if we refer to Kaivola-Bregenhøj's opinion (2017: 204) who says that a riddle is often political or sexual and the opinion of Brundvan's who says that riddle jokes entertainment includes important and serious aspects of life, such as religion, politics, work or sex, this article also finds a variety of all these themes mentioned above as how they occur in everyday life.

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