

# COVID-19 in Humor: Verbal Humor Construction in Indonesian Stand-Up Comedian Performances

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**Abstract**—This current study explains how verbal humor is constructed in stand-up comedian's discourse on COVID-19 pandemic issue in Indonesia. This research employed a qualitative approach by applying the content analysis method. The transcription of five stand-up comedy audio-video clips concerning COVID-19 in Indonesia that were taken from [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) provided the primary data in the form of spoken words. Videos were selected based on keywords submitted by comedians. The findings show that verbal humor in stand-up comedian discourse has variations in knowledge resources (KRs). Topics presented by comedians related to the COVID-19 pandemic are realized in various logical mechanisms (LM) such as fallacious reasoning, word repetition, insult humor, and false analogy. Another variation found is the variation in the narrative strategy, target, and situation constructed by the comedian.

**Index Terms**—humor, pandemic, mechanism

## I. INTRODUCTION

Humor is an integral part of human communication and crucial to how we connect. Humor delivery can be successful when the audience understands the humorous stimulus conveyed by comedians (Sugiarto, 2016). Another aspect of humor that has been studied is the role of context in creating humorous effects. For example, jokes often rely on a setup, in which a particular context is established, followed by a punchline that subverts the expectations created by the setup. The humor in the joke comes from the contrast between the expectation and the punchline. One of the critical aspects of the theory of humor in linguistics is the role of context in creating humorous effects. Jokes rely on a setup followed by a punchline that subverts the expectations created by the setup.

It is possible to describe humor as a feeling or symptom that makes us laugh or causes us to laugh out loud while we are aware of anything. It is typically separated into two categories: verbal humor and situational humor. In a particular context, verbal humor is typically expressed via rhetorical strategies, including sarcasm, ridicule, irony, puns, and other rhetorical abilities. On the other hand, situational humor is linked to comedic themes like mimicry, impersonation, and disguise (Ma & Jiang, 2013). Torok et al. (2004) divided this type of humor into positive humor and negative humor. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused worry and anxiety, and even fear. Humor is one of the solutions to overcome and decrease the fear since it can make people relax and can increase the body's immunity (Zahoor, 2020).

In the 19th century, stand-up comedy (SUC) was originally popularized in Europe and America (Puri, 2020). Papan (2012) explains that SUC is a type of performing art that aims to get the audience to laugh out loud. Verbal humor is a crucial way that stand-up comedians connect with their audience and get laughs. By using wordplay and other forms of language-based humor, stand-up comedians can create hilarious and memorable performances. Another thing to note is that SUC is focused on language plays to trigger the audience's laughter. With no exception, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit Indonesia, this topic became material that was often brought up to entertain the audience.

The general theory of verbal humor (GTVH) can be used to see the construction of humorous discourse. This theory seeks to give a joke representation model, illustrating all elements from the joke's notion, which in SSTH theory is still identified abstractly, to the language used (Attardo, 2008; Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Damanik & Mulyadi, 2020; Mulyadi et al., 2021). Six parameters are required to suggest a verbal humor construction into text. These are known as knowledge resources (KRs), namely *language, narrative strategies, targets, situations, and logical mechanisms*. The nature of this KRs is as a supporting concept of the opposition script (SO).

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The *language* criteria relate to the linguistic decisions made in jokes and are the verbal actualization of jokes, i.e., specific words, as jokes can be included in a variety of ways without altering their semantic value. The *target* refers to individuals or groups that are poorly portrayed in the spotlight. This decision is influenced by applicable stereotypes. Nevertheless, not every joke needs to be addressed to someone, and some can receive a zero for this KR. *Narrative strategy* is the genre or structure used in telling a joke. The *situation* clarifies the joke's true meaning. There are multiple events in each joke, and these events—which involve all of the participants—are referred to as joke scenarios. Lastly, the logical mechanism refers to the resolution of the nonconformity present in the joke. It refers to how two scripts are put together, which can be a false analogy, and the garden path phenomenon (Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Hirsch, 2017).

Many researches related to humor have been carried out by various researchers and in various perspectives such as in pragmatic studies (Abdulabbas, 2020; Chalsum, 2019; Chao & Xinghua, 2013; Kehinde, 2016; Li, 2016; Taufiq et al., 2018), humor about pandemics COVID-19 (Amici, 2020; Cancelas-Ouviña, 2021; Hadžić & Baralić, 2021; Wijana, 2021), humor in cartoons related to COVID-19 (Blaber et al., 2020), humor in Instagram related to COVID-19 (Susanti & Rahmawati, 2021), humor in COVID-19 memes and banners (Setiaji & Mursalin, 2021, 2021; Zahoor, 2020), and humor and health (Sumantri et al., 2021). This study is different from the previous studies since this study attempts to explore how verbal humor constructed in SUC discourse on COVID-19 in Indonesia.

## II. METHODS

This research employed a qualitative approach by applying content analysis method. The primary data were obtained in the form of utterances obtained through transcriptions of 5 audio-video recordings of stand-up comedy about COVID-19 in Indonesia which were downloaded from [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). The videos in table 1 were selected based on the keywords submitted by comedians. As an effort to improve data reliability, writers asked for the opinion of experts from the field of communication science or linguistics who hold at least a Doctoral degree with expertise in the field of mass communication or semantics.

TABLE 1  
SOURCE OF THE DATA

No	Video Title	Comedian	Premiere Time
1	Stand Up Comedy Arif: KOCAK!! Gara-gara Corona Banyak Tidur Sampai Jadi Selebgram - Comedy Lab	Arif	13 July 2020
2	Stand Up Comedy Ridwan Remin: Kurang Ajar Corona, Bikin Susah Orang Aja - Comedy Lab (Part 2)	Ridwan Remin	19 July 2020
3	Stand Up Comedy Afif: Indonesia Buruk Menghadapi Corona, Tapi Ada yang Nyinyir... - SUPER	Afif Xavi	13 September 2020
4	Stand Up Comedy Rahmet Ababil: Pengangguran Itu Sebelum Ada Corona Juga Udah Isolasi Mandiri - SUPER	Rahmet Ababil	4 October 2020
5	Stand Up Alif Rivelino: Kombud Sama Pasien Covid - GRAND FINAL SUCI IX	Alif Rivelino	7 May 2021

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In GTVH, there will be six parameters used to analyze verbal humor known as knowledge resources (KRs). This parameter allows comparison of one humor with another. KRs consist of *language (LA)*, *target (TA)*, *situation (SI)*, *logical mechanism (LM)*, *script opposition (SO)*, and *narrative strategy (NS)*.

TABLE 2  
DATA ANALYSIS NO.1

Verbal humor no.1	
<b>Transcript:</b>	<i>Iya karena beberapa bulan ini tidak ada kerjaan terus ya begitulah kerjanya cuman tidur. Punggung saya udah motif spreai aja.</i>  (Yes, because for the past few months there has been no work, so that's how it works, it's just sleeping. My back is just a sheet tattoo)
<b>KR</b>	<b>SO</b> Sleeping Vs Sheet tattoo Back
	<b>LM</b> Fallacious Reasoning
	<b>SI</b> Sleeping on the bad
	<b>TA</b> Self-targeting
	<b>NS</b> Simple Narrative Strategy
	<b>LA</b> <i>Set-up</i> <i>Iya karena beberapa bulan ini tidak ada kerjaan terus ya begitulah kerjanya cuman tidur.</i> (Yes, because for the past few months there has been no work, so that's how it works, it's just sleeping).  <i>Punch line</i> <i>Punggung saya udah motif spreai aja.</i> (My back is just a sheet tattoo).

Based on data 1, the SO conveyed by the comedian is *sleeping* and a *bed sheet tattoo*. This can trigger humor because when you stay in bed or sleep for too long due to the lockdown during the pandemic, it can cause the sheet tattoo to stick to your back. It is very relevant that the LM used is *fallacious reasoning*. This shows the reasons that are difficult to make sense of. No matter how long someone sleeps, usually, the pattern on the sheet will not stick in someone's back unless the sheet is still wet with factory paint. Here, it can be seen the foresight of the comedian in triggering humor. Related to the *situation* that is built is the bedroom in which comedian uses the situation of sleeping in a bed. The NS used in the data above is a simple narrative strategy, which is a short narrative that tells about the behavior of being in bed for a long time due to a pandemic.

TABLE 3  
DATA ANALYSIS NO.2

Verbal humor no.2		
<b>Transcript:</b>	<p><i>Media Australia waktu itu pernah bilang. Kalau Indonesia itu buruk banget dalam menangani korona. Isinya adalah isi beritanya adalah waktu itu karena pasien korona setiap hari setiap hari meningkat. Gitu kan? Ini bagus himbauan nih kubaca beritanya. Tapi aneh nih, ada orang Indonesia satu yang komen di kolom berita itu. Dia bilang begini Ah, bawel lu Australi kasih makan gue juga kagak.</i></p> <p>(The Australian media at that time once said. Indonesia is really bad at dealing with Corona. The content of the news is that time because of Corona patients every day every day is increasing. Is that right? This is a good appeal, I read the news. But it's strange, there is one Indonesian who comments in the news column. He said like this Ah, you nauseous Australian, feed me too or not).</p>	
<b>KR</b>	<b>SO</b>	Caring Vs Not Feeding
	<b>LM</b>	Insult humor
	<b>SI</b>	Protest from a friend because of the appeal from the Australian media about Corona
	<b>TA</b>	Australian Media and Standup Comedian Friend (undefined)
	<b>NS</b>	Simple Dialogue
	<b>LA</b>	<p><b>Set-up</b> <i>Media Australia waktu itu pernah bilang. Kalau Indonesia itu buruk banget dalam menangani korona. Isinya adalah isi beritanya adalah waktu itu karena pasien korona setiap hari setiap hari meningkat. Gitu kan? Ini bagus himbauan nih kubaca beritanya. Tapi aneh nih, ada orang Indonesia satu yang komen di kolom berita itu.</i></p> <p>(The Australian media at that time once said. Indonesia is really bad at dealing with Corona. The content of the news is that time because of Corona patients every day every day is increasing. Is that right? This is a good appeal, I read the news. But it's strange, there is one Indonesian who comments in the news column).</p> <p><b>Punch line</b> Dia bilang begini Ah, bawel lu Australi kasih makan gue juga kagak.</p> <p>(He said like this Ah, you nauseous Australian, feed me too or not).</p>

In data no 2, the SO constructed by the comedian is *caring vs not feeding*. During the pandemic of COVID-19, many people ran out of food stocks due to panic buying for lockdown preparation. People were reluctant or did not dare to leave the house. This is evidenced by the NS constructed by comedians regarding appeals from the Australian media. The thing provoking humor and making people laugh was that a friend of the comedian sneered at the Australian media about *not giving food to people who stay home*. Moving to other part, the LM used is insult humor where the comedian ridicules the Australian media based on a comment from one of the Indonesians featured in the narration he built. The situation shown is a protest from a friend due to an appeal from the Australian media about COVID-19 pandemic.

TABLE 4  
DATA ANALYSIS NO.3

Verbal humor no.3		
<b>Transcript:</b>	<p><i>Lagian kadang di daerahku suka aneh aneh waktu itu waktu waktu belum punya normal ya. Gue servis motor ini aneh banget nunggu servis motor, ada mekanik yang nanganin motor gue itu. Gue kalo ngeliat disitu mekaniknya tuh lider banget deh. Mekanik disitu yang paling kepala banget yang tau segala galanya ambil ini itu, yang lain ngambilin, ambil busi, kasih tahu. Sampe dia nyeletuk langsung kepikiran di kepalaku. Dia bilang gini "Ah jangan takut ama Korona ama bang". Terus dia bilang gini, dia nyebutin tumbuhan yang bisa nyembuhin korona. "Jangan takut ama Corona ma bang pakai cengkeh aja bang, cengkeh bang cengkeh bang, borok aja ilang bang, apalagi Corona".</i></p> <p>(Besides, sometimes in my area I like to be weird, at that time I don't have normal yet. I'm servicing this motorbike, it's really strange waiting for motorbike service, there is a mechanic who takes care of my motorbike. I can see that the mechanics there are really leaders. The mechanic there, who was very knowledgeable, who knew everything, took this and that, the others took it, took the spark plugs, told me. Until he snapped directly into the thought in my head. He said like this "Ah, don't be afraid of Corona, bro". Then he said this, he mentioned a plant that could cure Corona. "Don't be afraid of Corona, just use cloves, bro, cloves, cloves, bro, just don't have any ulcers, let alone Corona.").</p>	
<b>KR</b>	<b>SO</b>	ulcer disease vs Corona
	<b>LM</b>	False Analogy
	<b>SI</b>	Motorcycle service station
	<b>TA</b>	Motorcycle mechanic (leader)
	<b>NS</b>	Simple Interaction
	<b>LA</b>	<p><b>Set-up</b></p> <p><i>Lagian kadang di daerahku suka aneh aneh waktu itu waktu waktu belum punya normal ya. Gue servis motor ini aneh banget nunggu servis motor, ada mekanik yang nanganin motor gue itu. Gue kalo ngeliat disitu mekaniknya tuh lider banget deh. Mekanik disitu yang paling kepala banget yang tau segala galanya ambil ini itu, yang lain ngambilin, ambil busi, kasih tahu. Sampe dia nyeletuk langsung kepikiran di kepalaku.</i></p> <p>(Besides, sometimes in my area I like to be weird, at that time I don't have normal yet. I'm servicing this motorbike, it's really strange waiting for motorbike service, there is a mechanic who takes care of my motorbike. I can see that the mechanics there are really leaders. The mechanic there, who was very knowledgeable, who knew everything, took this and that, the others took it, took the spark plugs, told me. Until he snapped directly into the thought in my head)</p> <p><b>Punch line</b></p> <p><i>Dia bilang gini "Ah jangan takut ama Korona ama bang". Terus dia bilang gini, dia nyebutin tumbuhan yang bisa nyembuhin Corona. "Jangan takut ama Corona ma bang pakai cengkeh aja bang, cengkeh bang cengkeh bang, borok aja ilang bang, apalagi Corona".</i></p> <p>(He said like this "Ah, don't be afraid of Corona, bro". Then he said this, he mentioned a plant that could cure Corona. "Don't be afraid of Corona, just use cloves, bro, cloves, cloves, bro, just don't have any ulcers, let alone Corona.").</p>

In data 3, the comedian tries to convey SO by comparing diseases between Ulcers Vs COVID. According to LM, the comedian used *false analogy* between these diseases. In this case, the comedian is trying to compare ulcers vs Corona where these two diseases have a big difference. Ulcers attacks human's hair and head while COVID-19 attacks the respiratory system. This provokes laughter in the audience. Semantically, there are different components of meaning. According to Jayantini et al. (2017), meaning component explores lexical meaning comprising of complex components that should be interpreted correctly in its context. In the data, there is a significant difference of meaning component between **ULCERS** [+ disease, + is in the head, -attacks the lungs] and **COVID-19** [+ disease, -is in the head, + attacks the lungs]. Therefore, the LM used clearly refers to a false analogy In fact, COVID-19 is a dangerous disease when compared to ulcers. Furthermore, cloves are also assumed to cure ulcers and COVID-19. It is called as play on words that causes people laugh. It happens because audiences think that cloves can treat Corona is just a joke. The situation built also shows something illogical where this statement is said by a mechanic and not a doctor. Audiences may agree if the doctor provides his opinion related to COVID-19 medical treatment. When the motorcycle mechanic says about COVID-19 medical treatment, it is hard for audience to believe. In addition, the NS used in this data is a simple interaction between the comedian and the mechanic.

TABLE 5  
DATA ANALYSIS NO.4

Verbal humor no.4		
<b>Transcript:</b>	5 bulan kagak ada job, sekali ada jobnya penonton yang gak ada. (5 months <i>no</i> job, once there is a job, <i>no</i> audience).	
<b>KR</b>	<b>SO</b>	Gak ada job vs gak ada penonton (no job vs no audience)
	<b>LM</b>	Word repetition
	<b>SI</b>	Corona Pandemic
	<b>TA</b>	Self-targeting
	<b>NS</b>	Simple narrative strategy
	<b>LA</b>	<i>Set-up</i> 5 bulan kagak ada job, (5 months <i>no</i> job)  <i>Punch line</i> sekali ada jobnya penonton yang gak ada. (once there is a job, <i>no</i> audience.)

In data 4, the SO constructed is *no job* vs. *no audience*. The LM used is word repetition namely the repetition of words and phrases "job", and "no". This repetition according to Pasaribu and Kadarisman (2015) is part of a word game that can cause laughter. The comedian presents a narrative strategy that the pandemic has resulted increasing jobless condition for comedian up to 5 months. Unluckily, when there is a job, there are no spectators due to social distancing rules and restrictions on crowds in closed spaces. The situation built in the data is a pandemic situation with the target referring to the comedian himself. The use of self-directing according to Mulyadi et al. (2021) is for the safety of the comedian and to avoid prosecution for unpleasant behavior or electronic information and transactions law.

TABLE 6  
DATA ANALYSIS NO.5

Verbal humor no.5		
<b>Transcript:</b>	<i>Dulu sebelum ada Corona di rumah, paling mandi cuma sehari 2 kali mandi pagi mandi sore udah. Sekarang gara gara diluar banyak Corona, gue tiap dirumah tuh mandi. Sehari bisa 5 kali mandi pagi mandi sore mandi wajib, mandi wajib, mandi wajib.</i> (In the past, before there was Corona at home, at most, I only took a bath twice a day, in the morning, and in the evening. Done. Now because there are lots of Corona outside, I take a bath every time I'm at home. A day can take 5 baths in the morning, in the afternoon, <i>junub junub</i> , and <i>junub</i> bath).	
<b>KR</b>	<b>SO</b>	Corona vs <i>Junub</i> bath
	<b>LM</b>	Word repetition
	<b>SI</b>	Lockdown
	<b>TA</b>	Self targeting
	<b>NS</b>	Simple Narrative Strategy
	<b>LA</b>	<i>Set-up</i> Dulu sebelum ada Corona di rumah, paling manis cuma sehari 2 kali mandi pagi mandi sore udah. (In the past, before there was Corona at home, at most, I only took a bath twice a day, in the morning, and in the evening. Done). <i>Punch line</i> <i>Sekarang gara gara diluar banyak Corona, gue tiap dirumah tuh mandi. Sehari bisa 5 kali mandi pagi mandi sore mandi wajib, mandi wajib, mandi wajib.</i>  (Now because there are lots of Corona outside, I take a bath every time I'm at home. A day can take 5 baths in the morning, in the afternoon, <i>junub junub</i> , and <i>junub</i> bath).

In verbal data no. 5, the SO used is Corona and *Junub* bath. In this data, the comedian used word repetition as LM, namely the word *mandi* (taking a bath). The diction for *mandi* is combined with other words into phrases, namely afternoon bath, morning bath, and *junub* bath. Ideally, under normal circumstances, a person should take a bath 2-3 times a day, at least take a bath in the morning, and in the afternoon. However, in a pandemic situation, a person can take a bath more than 2 times because *junub* bath. The thing that makes people laugh is the association that the pandemic forces people to stay at home so one of the activities that emerge for husband and wife is sexual intercourse. The consequence is after doing that in Islam is doing *junub* bath. This diction makes people laugh that Corona has some relevance to the increasing intensity of bathing for some people based on the narrative built by comedian. Semantically, *junub* bath is part of the types of bathing that have special causes such as after having sexual intercourse. This sparked laughter because the audience understood the cause of the *junub* bath itself. The target in this verbal humor is the comedian himself which can be understood that he experienced this with his wife.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The results of the study show that in verbal humor there are variations in knowledge resources. Topics presented by comedians related to the Corona pandemic are realized in various logical mechanisms (LM) which include fallacious

reasoning, word repetition, insult humor, and false analogy. Another variation found is the variation in the narrative strategy, target, and situation constructed by the comedian. This study has limitation in terms of the objects of the analysis namely in SUC discourse related to COVID-19. Further researchers are suggested to explore non-verbal humor related to COVID-19 as presented in the poster, meme, or animation.

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