

Abstract

The main purposes of this research are to investigate the ways in which humor is expressed, taking into account linguistic strategies used and how people's intentions in doing so are interpreted, as well as the extent of the relationships between humor and politeness. The data were collected from five Thai situation comedies: "Khok Khun Tra-Kun Khai", "Sam Yaek Chong Cha-Roen", "Heng Heng Heng", "Bangrak Soi 9" and "Chang Sam-Ran Kap Sao Ran Cham".

From a speech-act theoretical perspective, the findings demonstrate that there are six broad categories of humor-related speech acts: boasting, expressing condescension, blaming, threatening, teasing and satire. These strategies, on the whole, indicate that humor in Thai situation comedies is closely associated with a feeling of aggression and superiority created by the speaker.

The study further shows that humor can be conveyed by non-observance of the cooperative principle in two ways: flouting a maxim and violating a maxim. In the first case, only the maxim of relation was found to have been flouted and was a source of instances of conversational implicatures. In the second case, all four maxims were infringed. What is peculiar to the findings of the present study is that humor can be brought about by a speaker intentionally telling a lie in order to confuse the hearer or audience. When the speaker later reveals that he/she him/herself is held responsible for a maxim infringement, laughter and thus humor ensue. It could be inferred, therefore, that the fact that the speaker was successful in confusing others (i.e. his/her perceptual superiority) can trigger laughter and other humorous effects equally well as the apparent incongruity in understanding on the part of the hearer or audience of the speech event, before and after the revelation took place. Apart from this, examples of humor-laden conventional implicatures were also found.

Considered in the light of politeness theory, humor can be classified as a positive politeness strategy employed for oiling the wheels of interpersonal relationships and redressing threats to face. Having said that, humor risks being seen as a face-

threatening act both to the speaker and the hearer such as by means of in-group teasing as well as teasing in the presence of an outsider, or simply by the hearer's incapability of working out the underlying force of the speaker's utterance. Also relevant are the findings which illustrate that humor sometimes has a lot to do with power, in particular repressive humor and contestive humor. The first represents humor used in exerting authority over others (e.g. those lower in status) or controlling their behavior, while the second characterizes the use of humor for challenging the power of others (e.g. those socially superior to us). With regard to the last type, humor can be understood as a subtle pragmatic strategy that threatens the other interlocutor's face, but does not really sever the existing relationship altogether at the same time.