

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Humans are *homo ludens* (playing creatures) who can play with everything around them, including language, which is their means of verbal communication (Wijana, 2004). One of the ways humans use language is through humor. Humor comes from the Latin ‘humor’, which means ‘fluid’. Romero and Cruthirds (2006) define humor as amusing communications that produce positive emotions and cognitions in the individual, group, or organization. Meanwhile, Raskin (1984) classifies humor language into verbal and non-verbal. In Raskin’s opinion, verbal humor uses verbal elements such as words, phrases, sentences, and discourse. Meanwhile, non-verbal humor is a humorous situation that a text does not create, describe, or express.

Someone can present humor in various forms, such as fairy tales, riddles, folk poetry, folk songs, nicknames, caricatures, cartoons, and even funny food names (Wijana, 2004). Humorous language can also be found on several signboards and banners in public spaces. The language used in public space is well-known as Linguistic Landscape (henceforth abbreviated as LL). In particular, LL, which focuses on business areas, can be called a business-scape. As a provincial capital city, Padang can be regarded as a business-scape. Padang is the capital town of West Sumatra Province. This city is also dubbed the center of education by the residents

of West Sumatra Province. People living in Padang come from different ethnicities, races, religions, cultures, etc.

Padang has an urban population of 919.145 people (BPS Kota Padang, n.d.). *Minang* is the largest tribe in this city (Kurniawan et al., 2023). The other tribes are Javanese, Chinese, Batak, Malay, Nias, Sundanese, and Mandailing (Imadudin, 2005). This condition causes more than one language to be spoken by the society. Even though each of them has their own language, they can still communicate using Indonesian. Based on the constitution of the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia in 1945, Article 36, the Indonesian language is set as the official language of Indonesia. This condition requires all Indonesian people (from *Sabang* to *Merauke*) to master this language. From ancient times, Minangkabau people have been known as people who like to trade, and they are nicknamed Minang traders (*saudagar Minang*) (Iswadi & Fadri, 2021). Besides, in trading, Elfendri and Erinaldi argue that Minang people, who are the majority and live in Padang, possess some principles of honesty, hard work, and caring for employees. Those values create them as reliable businessmen (Erinaldi, 2016).

When observed closely, almost every area in Padang has stores. The various stores include culinary, services, cosmetics, etc. In promoting their product, the traders use not only the Minang language but also another language, such as Indonesian. It can be viewed in some public spaces. When someone can use several languages, it is called multilingualism. Traders sometimes use this multilingualism skill by playing a language to appeal to the customers to buy their products/services. For instance, they use occasional humor on their signboards and banners.

Occasional means happening sometimes but not often or regularly (Longman Dictionary, n.d.). Commonly, it occurs momentarily, or it is not permanent. Hence, in terms of LL, occasional humor is a written expression that contains humor that appears temporarily, and it can disappear quickly in the public sphere. Additionally, they can also present it in the form of permanent humor, where the Oxford Dictionary (n.d) defines the word *permanent* as lasting for a long time or for all time in the future (existing all the time). Thus, regarding LL, permanent humor means a written expression that includes humor that exists all the time.

As previously mentioned, some traders in Padang utilize their multilingual skills on their business signboards and banners. Gorter states that multilingualism can occur in multiple languages in both speech and writing (Gorter, 2006). From the LL point of view, multilingualism demonstrates the use of more than one language in the public sphere. LL study allows us to comprehend the fast-changing urban landscapes and the increasingly multilingual worlds we live in or experience through travel (Bolton, 2012; Manan et al., 2017). The language used in public areas in Padang City is categorized as multilingual because people use more than one language in several public spaces. As mentioned, in Padang City, traders use some humor in the Indonesian language to promote their products/services. The linguistic business scape in Padang that involves Indonesian humor can be seen throughout this example.



Picture 1. LL in the Business Area on Jalan Dr. Moh. Hatta

This signboard was taken in Pasar Ambacang, Pauh Sub-district, Padang City. It consisted of several components, such as the shop name, the sentence of *Di sini serba ada, kecuali janji manis mu!* (Everything is here except your sweet promises!), and various supporting colors (yellow, black, and white). This signboard demonstrates the retail business and contains humorous language. The sense of humor can be seen throughout the sentence, “*Di sini serba ada, kecuali janji manis mu!*” (Everything is here except your sweet promises!). This utterance is categorized as occasional humor because it only appears temporarily. The business owners only show it before the grand opening. Thereafter, it was discontinued and was no longer utilized by the owner.

This utterance is a simple sentence consisting of one independent clause. Based on the sentence, *di sini* functions as an adverbial of place, *serba ada* serves as the predicate, and *kecuali janji manis mu* acts as an adverbial phrase expressing exception. The subject is implicit and understood to represent the shop called Citra express. If the business owner only uses the sentence “*Di sini serba ada*” (Everything is here), it will not provoke humor because it is normal to inform

customers that the owners sell everything in terms of everyday needs in their shop. This sentence is congruent because it conveys the owner's shop's thoughts to customers literally.

The sense of humor appears when the shop owner adds an adverbial phrase "*kecuali janji manismu*" (except your sweet promises) due to it remains ambiguous in meaning. The existence of the adverbial phrase is classified as language play that the owner shop deliberately created. The adverbial phrase of "*kecuali janji manismu*" (except your sweet promises) indicates that the shop does not sell an abstract or an unreal product like "*janji manis*" (sweet promise). In this context, the noun phrase "*janji manis*" (sweet promise) functions as a nonsense expression. On the other hand, among Indonesians, including residents of Padang, a promise is tantamount to a debt. Accordingly, the business owner intends to emphasize that the shop refuses all types of debt-based transactions. The incongruity between the adverbial phrase and the other elements in the sentence provokes humor among readers because it is absurd, odd, and strange, but amusing and entertaining.

In reference to the sample above proves Saussure's (1916) statement that language is like a chess game. It creates joy, amusement, and fun for the people who read or hear it. Besides, it needs a strategy to create an attractive and unique language. Based on the above phenomenon, the researcher is interested in analyzing this phenomenon. This study intends to reveal the linguistic features of humor found in business signboards and banners, the owners' reasons for using this strategy for promoting their products/services, and the effect of this phenomenon on customers' attitudes, particularly regarding their purchasing motives.

The result of this study is expected to provide practical knowledge on the LL from humor representation in the business scape in Padang City, West Sumatra Province, Indonesia, as well as insights into the society and culture reflected by occasional and permanent humor usage in the business scape in Padang City. Besides, this research is also expected to be beneficial for persons who study languages, society, and culture, as well as businessmen who can utilize and develop the knowledge obtained from this research.

1.2. Scope of the Study

This study is part of a mixed linguistic research approach, combining both micro and macro perspectives. Micro linguistics studies the internal structure of language and only sees language as language. Meanwhile, macro linguistics is a field of linguistics that studies language about the external world, such as society, culture, history, and other fields (Vocroix, 2021). This research investigates the linguistic landscape (LL) that contains Indonesian humor in the business area of Padang City. It specifically concentrates on two prominent platforms of the LL, namely signboards and banners, which serve as the primary mediums for humor representation in a business setting. Therefore, LL without Indonesian humor is not discussed in this study.

1.3. Research Questions

Based on the phenomenon explained in the study's background, this research proposes three (3) questions. They are as follows:

1. What are the linguistic and non-linguistic forms of Indonesian humor found in business areas in Padang City?

2. What are the reasons the business owners use humor in the business-scape's signs in Padang City?
3. Is there any connection between the use of humor in business-scape and customers' attitudes, particularly regarding their purchasing motives in Padang City?

1.4. Research Objectives

The objective of the research is related to the research questions. Thus, this research aims to explore the linguistic and non-linguistic forms of Indonesian humor found in the business areas of Padang City. Moreover, this study will investigate the motivations behind business owners' use of humor in their business signboards and banners, factoring in local culture and innovative marketing tactics. It will create a typology of humor in commercial contexts and uncover the motivations behind its use. The study also aims to examine the relationship between business-related humor and consumer attitudes, particularly regarding their purchasing motivations. It intends to determine whether humorous messaging is associated with increased purchase intent or improved product/service perception. The findings will offer insights into the effectiveness of humor as a marketing communication tool and its implications for language and culture-based promotional tactics.

1.5. The Significance of the Study

The result of this study offers valuable contributions in terms of both theoretical and practical significance within the LL framework. This study contributes theoretically by enriching the scholarly literature on LL. In practical

terms, it provides a reference point for further investigations. A more detailed explanation is provided below.

1.5.1. Theoretical Significance

In theoretical significance, this research is expected to contribute to the LL field, specifically LL in Indonesia, by paying more attention to Landry and Bourhis' perspective. As is known, both of them are scholars who first promoted the LL idea itself. Moreover, applying the semiotic theory by Pierce (1931), Scollon & Scollon (2003), Kress & Leeuwen (2006), and Raskin's Semantic-Script Theory of Humor (SSTH) (1984) can give a better comprehension of the reader and the forthcoming researchers who are keen to conduct research under similar theories. Thus, these theories can be more popular and familiar in LL. Besides, it is also expected to supply more insight related to the usage of humorous language in public spaces used in the business area in Padang.

1.5.2. Practical Significance

This study will be beneficial for the researcher. It will also help readers, language learners, and forthcoming researchers who want to discuss similar topics. For upcoming researchers, this study can be one of their references when conducting research on LL issues. On the other hand, this study is also intended to open up the mindset of businessmen in Padang City toward language so they can be more creative when using language in business areas.