

USING HUMOR TO NAVIGATE THE DYNAMICS OF MULTICULTURALISM IN ANWAR ZAHID'S RELIGIOUS PREACHINGS

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Abstract

Many preachers use jokes or humor in delivering their *da'wah* (religious preaching). One of the preachers who often use humor in their religious lectures is Anwar Zahid, a well-known traditional preacher from Bojonegoro, East Java. The purpose of this study is to reveal the humor techniques used by Anwar Zahid in his two lectures on Youtube. The analysis is based on Arthur Asa Berger's humor theory. The results showed that Anwar Zahid used several humor techniques in his religious preachings such as Bombast, Catalog, Coincidence, and others. Humor is also an effort to navigate the dynamics and various changes in multiculturalism that occur in society. In addition, the humor serves to release the tension of the audience.

Keywords: Humor, Religious Talks, Anwar Zahid

Introduction

Multiculturalism is defined as an ideology that recognizes and glorifies differences (Zarbaliyev, 2017); (Benet-Martínez, 2012). Multiculturalism is also understood as an ideological concept that is seen as an attempt to create social relations between certain groups to build a level of equality and social justice (2007, p. 111). This concept is important considering that in one country, diversity often exists and sometimes even divides unity.

The issue of multiculturalism in America, for example, gave rise to two major theories: the Melting Pot Theory and the Salad Bowl Theory. Both imply the integration of various cultures into a single society. America is often the destination of many people to just visit or even stay. The impact is the diversity of cultures that developed there. The Washington Post published an article entitled 'the American Tradition of Multiculturalism', reviewing how Americans see multiculturalism which tends to lead to something positive. Nevertheless, multiculturalism was 'rejected' for some time despite black Americans' long struggle to gain political recognition.

In Indonesia, multiculturalism is an issue that cannot be avoided. Simply put, this is because of the diversity of ethnic groups, languages, and religions in Indonesia. All of them can be a 'field' of differences and lead to conflicts due to multiculturalism. Relations between ethnicities and cultures are not always well established because of

sharp differences that allow conflict to occur. For example, in Indonesia, there had been a major conflict between the Madurese and Dayak tribes known as the 'Sampit Event'. Approximately 600 people died as a result of this incident. Besides inter-ethnic conflicts, a conflict as a result of multiculturalism occurs between the two largest Islamic religious organizations in Indonesia: Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. It means that multiculturalism conflict is very likely to occur within one large group, in this case, the religion of Islam.

Da'wah is an activity to communicate divine truth (Islam) to others (Dermawan, 2002). Da'wah (preaching) is defined as an activity that conveys a religious lecture and a series of delivery of divine messages to many people. It means that preaching is one way to influence the audience. In other words, the task of a preacher is to make his words influential to his audience who may come from various backgrounds. Therefore the preacher must be able to make his lectures accepted by different audiences.

In preaching, sometimes preachers often use humor for several reasons. One of which is to make the information conveyed can be easily accepted by the audience. In addition, humor is also a means to reduce tensions that may arise during the process of delivering information (Aziz, 2015). Therefore, humor is important because it can trigger laughter, benefiting human health, especially mental health. (Soedjatmiko, 1992) argues that all humans in the world must have had humor. (Hooke, 2012) reveals that humor in preaching is a necessity even though sometimes it does not relate to the content of the preaching. Humor can also make religious preaching be enjoyed with laughter. Humor is also considered to help bridge the awkward moments that may arise during preaching. Therefore, humor is often 'brought in' by many speakers in their preaching.

However, Javanese culture requires Javanese people to maintain etiquette (Riyanto, 2017), reflected in three levels of Javanese language: ngoko (rough), medium (madya), and subtle (krama) (Riyanto 2016). According to (Riyanto, 2017), one of the methods used to penetrate the barriers regulated in etiquette is the reverse language technique (walikan). Humor can also be seen as a way to break through the barriers of etiquette that apply.

One of the preachers who often includes humor in his lectures is Anwar Zahid, a Javanese preacher from Bojonegoro, East Java. He is a kyai who is famous for fresh humor in his preaching. For his preaching to be well received by the audience, he often connects humor with various social dynamics, including multiculturalism. His audience is not limited to one group but has a wider range, from those with high strata to the lower middle class. This is because Anwar Zahid often conducts his preaching in rural areas. Especially in the current era where the Youtube platform plays a crucial role in disseminating lectures, Anwar Zahid indirectly has more opportunities to reach all circles. This makes him one of the most prominent Javanese preachers in Islamic lectures.

Anwar Zahid's preaching had been the focus of some research. One of which was carried out by (Fadilah, 2019). She focused on the analysis of Yule's speech acts on

Anwar Zahid's preachings. She found out that the three speech acts (locution, illocution, and perlocution) were present in Anwar Zahid's lectures. Meanwhile, (Rahayuningsih, 2013) reviewed the representative speech acts of Anwar Zahid in his lectures on Youtube. The results of their research showed that Anwar Zahid delivered his preaching with a specific tone and intonation and used the right moment for humor so that the audience responded with laughter.

This current research is different from the previous studies because it investigates how a religious preacher uses humor to deliver sensitive messages in his preaching. Besides, it also reveals how humor is used to navigate the dynamics of multiculturalism that exists in society. A preacher might use humor to defuse conflicts that may exist when sensitive themes are discussed. Meaningful jokes are expected to invite the audience to 'negotiate' and then accept the existing dynamics.

Research Method

The data used in this research were utterances containing humor (114 utterances) in the lecture videos from Anwar Zahid on the Youtube platform. Two videos are used as data sources. The videos were chosen because the preachings were carried out when he was not yet famous. That means the religious lectures analyzed have a clear significance as the initial basis for how Anwar Zahid uses humor in his lectures to date.

Data were collected using non-participant observation techniques (Moleong, 2013). The following are the steps taken in conducting data collection. (a) Watching Anwar Zahid's lecturing videos in the "Imam Murod" channel on Youtube, (b) Marking utterances containing humor in the lecture, (c) Categorizing humor in accordance with their techniques and dimensions. The collected data were then analyzed by relating it to the dynamics of multiculturalism that exist in the community situation

Result And Discussion

Results

In this section, the humor techniques used in Anwar Zahid's religious preaching is described. The theory used as the basis for the analysis is the theory of humor techniques proposed by (Berger, 2012). The results of the analysis are described in the table below.

Table 1
Humor technique: Language

No.	Video	Humor techniques	Number	Percentage (%)
1.	Video 1: V 1 dan Video 2: V 2	Allusion	6	5.2 %
		Bombast	3	2.6 %
		Irony	7	6.1 %
		Puns, Word Play	9	7.8 %
		Satire	10	8.7 %
		Ridicule	4	3.5 %

Exaggeration	4	3.5 %
Facetiousness	2	1.7 %
Sarcasm	18	15.7 %

Table 1 shows the humor techniques used by Anwar Zahid in his two religious preachings. In his preachings, Anwar Zahid used nine types of humor techniques: Bombast, Irony, Puns / Word Play, Satire, Ridicule, Allusion, Exaggeration, Facetiousness, and Sarcasm. Of the nine humor techniques, Sarcasm was the most frequently used (15.7%). In this case, Sarcasm is used to quip sharply. One example is when Anwar Zahid satirized two major Islamic groups, namely Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, which often disagreed about a problem. Such a theme, of course, is sensitive for many people, so Anwar Zahid chose to use humor to discuss this.

Table 2
Humor technique: Logic

No.	Video	Humor technique	Number	Percentage(%)
1.	Video 1 (V 1) and Video 2 (V 2)	Comparison	7	6.1 %
		Catalogue	13	11.4 %
		Coincidence	13	11.4 %
		Disappointment	1	0.8 %

Table 2 describes the 'logic' humor technique used by Anwar Zahid in his two preachings. Of 12 techniques described by (Berger, 2012), four 'logic' techniques were used, namely Comparison, Catalog, Coincidence, and Disappointment. Catalog and Coincidence were the most frequently used (11.4%). A catalog is an inappropriate use of terms to refer to something. For example, the word '*imam*' (leader), which usually has a positive meaning, is used to refer to the negative thing '*ngimami kopek*' which means the '*imam*' (leader) of gambling. Meanwhile, Coincidence is an unexpected thing that happens and then becomes a joke, for example when Anwar Zahid referred to two cameramen and connected them with a lecture about one's destiny.

Table 3
Humor technique: Identity

No.	Video	Humor techniques	Number	Percentage (%)
1.	Video 1 (V 1) and Video 2 (V 2)	Burlesque	6	5.2 %
		Exposure	10	8.7 %

Table 3 describes the 'identity' humor technique used by Anwar Zahid in his two preachings. In this case, two techniques were used: Burlesque and Exposure. Of the two techniques, Exposure was the most frequently used (8.7%). One example of the application of the Exposure technique is when Anwar Zahid told about himself who had been slandered to have an accident and died. In this case, Anwar Zahid joked by saying

that the news reached neighboring countries where he had many fans in those countries. In addition, he also told, with humor, about himself who had studied in Mecca.

Table 4
Humor technique: Action

No.	Video	Humor technique	Number	Percentage (%)
1.	Video 1 (V 1) and Video 2 (V 2)	Speed	1	0.8%

Table 4 describes the 'action' humor technique in the two preachings. In this technique, only the humorous technique 'Speed' is found. This technique can be seen when he has a term that is abbreviated as P36 – *pergi pagi pulang petang poyang payingan pontang panting pantat panas pinggang pegal perut perih pala pusing peringas peringis pendelak pendelik pelirak pelirik plorak plorok penculat penculut pletak pletik penghasilan pas pasan pengeluaran pol polan potongan pirang pirang*. The words were spoken quickly which reflects the speed in speaking and thinking. The audience who heard the term laughed out loud and enjoyed the preaching that was being followed.

Discussion

The results of the analysis show that in his preaching, Anwar Zahid often uses humor as a powerful medium to convey religious messages. Humor techniques are very helpful in making the preaching of Anwar Zahid iconic and easy to remember by many people. This is evident from his various preachings which have been watched by hundreds of thousands and even millions of viewers on Youtube. In addition, his jargon "*kulhu ae lek, kesuwen*" has become iconic and is widely used by people referring to a situation where easy or fast things are more desirable than difficult things. Such jargon is a sign that humor can be a convincing tool as a way of preaching because the jargon "*kulhu ae lek, kesuwen*" itself was later used by listeners of Anwar Zahid is used in everyday life.

Based on (Berger, 2012) techniques, the 'language' technique is the most widely used because this technique refers to the use of language in delivering humor. In this case, the Sarcasm dimension is the most commonly found. Sarcasm is making sharp satire. In his preaching, Anwar Zahid satirized a lot of dynamics of multiculturalism in society. One example is when he mentioned the two largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia: Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. The differences that occur between these two organizations are often a very sensitive discussion in society. In his preaching, Anwar Zahid alluded to some differences in the NU and Muhammadiyah organizations which are actually not too many and have the same foundation, namely *Ahlussunah Wal Jamaah*. Some of his statements are as follows.

“Wong NU karo Muhammadiyah itu sebenarnya dalam soal akidah sama, tidak ada perbedaan, sama sama Ahlussunah Wal Jammah. Perbedaannya kan hanya dalam

tata cara pelaksanaan syari'at dan tipis saja kok. Kalo soal akidah tidak ada yang menyimpang.....”

“Iha nek, maaf. NU sama Muhammadiyah itu bedane tipis kok. nek NU atek nggawe, nk Muhammadiyah gak atek nggawe. Dulur NU seneng seng rodok dowo, dulur Muhammadiyah seneng seng ndek (pendek)...”

(“NU and Muhammadiyah people are the same in terms of creed, there is no difference, they are the same as *Ahlussunah Wal Jammah*. The difference is only in the procedure for implementing the Shari'ah and it's only a thin one. In matters of faith, there is nothing to deviate...”)

“Sorry to say. The difference between NU and Muhammadiyah is thin. If NU wants to make it, Muhammadiyah doesn't want to do it. NU people like long ones, while Muhammadiyah people like short ones...”)

He conveyed the differences in very simple language even with light jokes. The audience responded well and still got the gist of what was being said. In fact, the difference between NU and Muhammadiyah is often sharp and becomes a daily debate, and even triggers a prolonged conflict. However, with good delivery, this can be avoided. Anwar Zahid also invited the audience to tolerate each other and see similarities amid multiculturalism in Indonesian society.

In this case, Anwar Zahid used humor with a sarcasm dimension that sharply satirized the conflicts that often occur between the two organizations. Jean Harvey (in Tapley, 2006, p. 421) explains that humor can essentially be understood as a social behavior that occurs in a group with diverse social statuses. This is in line with what was done by Anwar Zahid who brings humor in his efforts to speak in front of many different people. That way, the audience can receive well what is conveyed. To convey sensitive matters, Anwar Zahid tried to convey them with humor. When viewed further, the preacher is negotiating with the listener, so that sensitive and conflicting messages can still be received by those who listen.

The use of sarcasm does not always mean 'insulting'. This is because he conveyed it in a 'joking' tone which later became one of the ways to navigate the existing dynamics of multiculturalism. Moreover, the lecture was conducted in front of lower to middle-class people. To make it easier to accept, humor was chosen. Although sarcasm is synonymous with statements sharply made by someone to insinuate and often result in hurt, "Sarcasm is the lowest form of wit but the highest form of intelligence" (a quote by Oscar Wilde). This means that a person's sarcasm could be a manifestation of someone's intelligence, which in this context is used to navigate the dynamics of multiculturalism.

In the 'logic' humor technique, Anwar Zahid mostly used the dimensions of Catalog and Coincidence. The catalog is an inappropriate use of the term, as in the use of the terms bajing 'squirrel' and codot 'big bat' to describe greedy humans. In addition, Anwar Zahid also used the term 'imam' which is usually synonymous with a leader in a positive sense, but he used it negatively instead, as in the term 'ngimami kopek' or 'to be the imam of a gamble'. The use of catalog dimension can provoke laughter from the

audience and create entertaining humor. Some of the terms used feel familiar to the audience and can be accepted because these terms are often heard in everyday life but are not used properly.

The dimension of the 'Coincidence' technique is also widely used during religious lectures. Coincidence means an unexpected event. Several 'coincidental' events happened and later became humorous. For example, Anwar Zahid explained that people who have been destined to be fat, will remain fat; and those who have been destined to be thin will remain thin, no matter how many meals they eat. He gave an example of two cameramen who were at the lecture venue. This incident was unexpected and led to some embarrassment for the two cameramen. '*...mbok mangan peng pitu yo kuru, contone koyo tukang soting seng kuwi, lha nk ancen pawak.an lemu mbok mangane ra patek akeh, yo lemu, contone tukang soting seng tengah wi*' ('...even though you eat seven times, you will be still skinny, like that cameraman. If you have been destined to be 'fat' even if you don't eat too much, you will be still fat. Like the cameraman in the middle...')

In this case, 'coincidentally' there were two cameramen who later became the object of the joke. Anwar Zahid uses humor to 'teach' his listeners about many things. Kaplan and Pascoe in Osborne (2019, p. 147) explain that humor can be used for lectures in two contexts. First, humor can be used to explain things related to the content of a lecture; second, the use of humor has no relationship with the content of the lecture. From this statement, it can be seen that he used humor to convey the contents of his preaching and not just for entertainment. This happens to make the content of his lectures acceptable to audiences who may come from various circles. Anwar Zahid uses the Coincidence dimension to describe a person's situation in different societies, in this case, related to different financial circumstances from one person to another. If this is conveyed directly, without humor, it can offend the people who are in the situation. Therefore, KH. Anwar Zahid then connected his preaching with an incident that happened at that time by chance and at the same time delivered da'wah with humor to make it more acceptable to the audience.

In the 'identity' technique, Anwar Zahid most often brings up the Exposure dimension. This dimension refers to the exposure to oneself. For example, Anwar Zahid spoke about rumors about him who reportedly had an accident and died. Related to the dimensions of Exposure, Anwar Zahid is doing what Arthurs and Gurevich call self-disclosure which means expressing personal feelings, values, and experiences while communicating humor (2000, p. 215). The aim is to negotiate that the community will respond to the rumors without over-worrying. With the humor that is uttered, the community captures the existing dynamics without tension.

The last technique used is 'action' with the speed dimension. This technique is used when he talks about how sometimes a person works very hard but his life does not change significantly. Viewed from the side of the dynamics of multiculturalism in Indonesia, it is certainly related to the rise of hoaxes. The preacher makes jokes by

connecting it and mentioning what happened. With the humor uttered, the community captures the existing dynamics without tension.

Through humor, Anwar Zahid is trying to direct listeners to accept multiculturalism in society for simple things such as differences in class and personal status because of their financial ability. Davis in Aloh revealed that humor works well if it is intended to break down barriers or barriers in the social world and seeks to create bridges that can reduce tension in it (2019, p. 06). Anwar Zahid managed to use humor to reduce the tension that may arise amid his audience with different backgrounds. This also strengthens the statement that humor exists as a person's attempt to release tension that may occur (Christoff & Dauphin, 2017). Several other things were also highlighted by Anwar Zahid related to the problems that exist in the dynamics of multiculturalism in society is polygamy. As a form of existing multiculturalism, polygamy is a 'view' that does exist in Indonesia. Although coming from Islam, its adherents do not always agree with the idea of polygamy. To get around this, which does have tension, he tried to convey it with humor to reduce the existing conflict.

Anwar Zahid chose to navigate his audience with humor to unravel the tensions that might arise as a result of the dynamics of multiculturalism that developed in society (Apte, 1987, p. 34). It can be understood that humor can be a good way because people will try to accept and adapt to the essence of a preacher's lecture. In this case, the jokes are a way to convey sensitive messages to be received without tension. Indirectly, Anwar Zahid used humor to navigate the dynamics of multiculturalism that exist in society so that his messages can be accepted smoothly by audiences from various backgrounds.

Conclusion

The results of the study show that humor in religious lectures is needed to make the religious yet sensitive messages be easily accepted and enjoyed by the audience. In addition, humor can also be used as a tool to navigate the various dynamics of multiculturalism that exist in society. The dynamics of multiculturalism in society are diverse. Therefore, for the essence of the lecture to be accepted, certain tips are needed, including using humor.

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