

Analysis of Humor from the Perspective of Incongruity Theory : Focusing on a YouTube Parody Video Titled 'Parodysite'

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Abstract

Framed with a perspective of incongruity theory, the aim of the study is to examine the joke mechanism to understand humor in the parody video. The data was collected from the parody video titled '*Parodysite*' created in early 2020. The researcher analyzed humor in the parody video based on two distinct components: set-ups and punchlines, and further explored the humor process of incongruity and resolution. The results reveal that for a punchline the two comedians in the parody video use linguistic elements such as phonological and semantic puns. The findings also confirm that the basic two components (set-ups and punchlines) serve well as a theoretical construct to understand humor presented in the parody video.

[Key Words] Parody Video, Humor, Incongruity Theory, Set-up, PunchLine

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I. Introduction

One of the perspectives of humor processing is to perceive incongruity and resolve it to find the humor. The idea of incongruity has frequently been suggested as an account of many types of joke (Ritchie, 1999). Based on the view of incongruity, emerging research has focused on cartoons (Blaber, 2021; Carbajal et al., 2020), relationship between resolution-incongruity (Sanada, M. et al., 2022), incongruity features meme (Chłopicki et al., 2021; Putra 2018), image macro meme(Yus, F., 2021).

Although humor research on incongruity has been conducted in several settings, there is a paucity of research on closer observation of humor process in terms of comedy videos. In the present research, I will analyze how humor is evoked in the parody video context and discuss linguistic elements that create humor through the perspective of incongruity. This paper is structured as follows: First, the notion of incongruity theory will be discussed along with the illustration of the basic two elements, set-ups and punchlines. Second, the researcher will present and analyze the data collected from the video parody of the Academy awards ceremony and then elaborate on how incongruity is embodied in each context by focusing on the two basic components: set-ups and punchlines. Finally, the implication and limitation of the study will be drawn with the future research direction.

II. Incongruity Theory: Set-up and Punchline

The *Incongruity Theory*, also known as *Incongruity-Resolution Theory* is the third of classic humor theories, the first two being *Superiority* – humor is a form of social aggression – and *Release* – humor releases psychological tension (Raskin, 1985). Among theories of humor, incongruity is the reigning theory of humor which illustrates the laughter-eliciting mechanism of humor (Bai, 2011). From the incongruity perspective, incongruity itself is a prerequisite for a joke to produce humorous effect. However, the incongruity alone cannot produce humor effect; it mainly depends on the resolution of the incongruity, that is, the process making the incongruity to be shown logical, or at least less incongruous than was first thought (Ritchie, 1999). The basic idea behind the incongruity theory is based on the fact that people generally live in an orderly world where they have come to expect certain patterns among things or their properties, events, etc. Humor or laughter occurs when people experience something doesn't fit into these patterns or formed expectation (Morreall, 1983). The following presents an example.

Teacher: Why are you late?

Student: There was a man who lost a 100-dollar bill.

Teacher: I see. Were you helping him look for it? (Set-up)

Student: No. I was standing on it. (Punchline)

(Dai, Ru H., et al, 2017)

When the reader reads teacher's question, 'Were you helping him look for it?', the reader will form a certain expectation that the student was late to help the man looking for the bill. However, when the reader reads the student's answer, which is 'No. I was standing on it,' the discrepancy between formed expectation and the content emerges, leading to incongruity.

Based on the concept of incongruity theory, humor can be analyzed as being in two main parts: the initial portion of text, the *set-up*, and the second part, the *punchline*. The set-up creates no particular incongruity that the audience is aware of, but the punchline, at least initially, does not make immediate sense but create incongruity (Ritchie, 1999). Incongruities come from the gap between the punchline and the expectation. Going back to the example above, the teacher's question serves as a set-up and student's following answer act a punchline. Incongruity is detected when a punchline deviates from one's expectation formed from the content in a setup (Dai, Ru H., et al., 2017). In order to resolve such incongruity, a reader must read back and forth over the set-up and punchline to integrate information. The reader may change the perspective from a helpful student but a greedy one. In this process of resolving the incongruity, laughter or humor is triggered. One example might not be enough to understand the incongruity and resolution process. In the next part, more vivid examples will be shown to illustrate the process of humor.

III. Incongruity in Parody Video

Early 2020 may be remembered as the year of spreading the virus, COVID-19 but at the same time it was the year when the movie '*Parasite*' made history at the Oscars. At the Academy Awards, the movie became the first non-English film to win best picture and Bong Joon Ho became the first Korean to win the best director. At that time, Bong's quotation at the Awards attracted a large audience both at home and abroad. The videos interpreting Director Bong's words went viral on YouTube. Sharon Choi, the interpreter who followed him and interpreted Bong's words also became an instant celebrity due to her amazing interpreting ability. After a while, another video titled '*Parodysite*' was created, in which the two famous Korean comedians, Yoo Se-yoon and Moon Se-yoon parodied the award winning footage of Bong and Sharon Choi. The video parodies went viral sooner. Since the video parodies drew much attention to viewers in both Korea and beyond, the researcher chose the data to analyze the set-ups and punchlines and demonstrate how humor is related to congruity. The following extract is from the original version of the video.

Bong: 어느 나라나 가난한 자와 부자들이 있고 그들 사이에 되게 가파른 계단이 있죠 (Set-up). 여기 로열 앨버트 홀에도 계단이 되게 많아서 땀이 막 나려고 하는데...(Punchline)

Choi: I think in any country you have the rich and the poor. Between those classes, you have very steep staircases (Set-up). So, today going up and down the stairs of Royal Albert Hall is making me sweat...(Punchline)

Humor is created by a process in which an initial incongruity is created, and then some further information causes that incongruity to be resolved through the process of taking and integrating information. Director Bong initially makes an attempt to explain the problem of the social gap between the rich and the poor which may be taken seriously by the audience. And then, the meaning of the ‘staircases’ originally employed as a metaphor of ‘social gaps’ in the previous sentence is suddenly switched into indicating real staircases at the Royal Albert Hall. When the audience hears the set-up, they may form an expectation that Bong will continue to speak about the issue of social gap. However, when the audience hears the exact punchline which is ‘계단이 많아서 땀이 막 나려고 하는데...’, the deviation between formed expectation and the humorous content emerges. To resolve such discrepancy or incongruity, the audience must think back and forth over the set-up and punch line to integrate the pieces of information (Dai, Ru H., et al., 2017). Then, they perceive the punchline as a funny joke, probably imagining Bong’s figure climbing up and down the stairs of Royal Albert Hall in a sweat.

The following example drawn from the parody video just mimics the scene in the first extract. Moon Se-yoon and Yoo Se-yoon play the roles of director Bong and his interpreter Sharon Choi, respectively, bringing out the characteristics of their speech and actions in detail.

Moon: 어느 나라나 가난한 자와 부자들이 있고 그들 사이에 되게 가
 파른 계단이 있죠(Set-up). 여기 로열 앨버트 홀에도 불닭 볶음면이 보
 여서 땀이 나려고 하는데...(Punchline)

Yoo: I think in any country you have the rich and you have the poor. Between those classes, you have very steep staircases (Set-up). Today fire chicken fried noodle (Punchline1) of Royal Albert Hall is making me Pocari Sweat (Punchline2).

In the parody video, the audience already expects the set-up used in the original video. Moon continues to mimic Bong and changes the word from 'staircases' into 'Spicy chicken noodle (불닭 볶음면)', which is unexpected by the audience. The content of the punchline is made of using the food-related word which Moon often used to play with in other comedy programs. Moon is notable for 'Mukbang' where he employed 'Hot Chicken Flavor Ramen' to describe that he is sweating since people often sweat when they eat spicy food. The congruity of the punchline is resolved by the link between Moon and spicy chicken noodle, thus provoking humor.

In the meantime, Yoo interprets Moon's words in the same way that Sharon Choi did at the Oscars but in the third sentence, he adds two punchlines: one is 'fire chicken fried noodle', a broken English version of interpretation which is supposed to be interpreted like 'spicy chicken noodle', and the other is 'Pocari Sweat', a form of a pun for 'sweat'. Humor occurs when something unexpected happens in a certain situation or when an unexpected response to certain stimulus is received (Morreall, 1983). Even though the punch line provides little information for resolution, it can be partially resolved by perceiving the linguistic aspect of the punchline especially by those who already know the Korean semantic or phonological link between the words. In addition,

humor is provoked by far funnier elements in their parody since the two comedians imitate the original characters' gesture and tone perfectly and show visual gags with exaggeration shown Figure 1.



[Figure 1] Choi and Bong vs. Moon and Yoo

A feeling of amusement is an intellectual reaction to something that is unexpected, illogical, or inappropriate in some other way (Morreall, 1983). The following extract continues to show how congruity evoke humor.

Bong: 어렸을 때 제가 항상 가슴에 새겼던 말이 있는데, “가장 개인적인 것이 가장 창의적인 것이다.”

Moon: 어렸을 때 제가 항상 가슴에 새겼던 말이 있는데(Set-up), “가장 개인적으로 좋은 것같이 가장 창난것인 것이다(Punchline).”

Yoo: When I was young and studying cinema, there was a saying that I carved deep into my heart which is “My favorite jutgal is gijang changnan jutgal(Punchline).”

Moon: The quote was from our great Ho-dong Kang (Punchline).

The first quote by Bong means “the most personal is the most creative” which was used to pay tribute to the director Martin Scorsese at the Oscars. Then, Moon employs the linguistic aspect of the punchline again. The pronunciation of ‘창난젓’ (Changnanjut: salted pollack intestine) is similar to the Korean word for ‘창의적’ (Changeujuk: creative) but the meaning is totally different from each other. Here, Moon’s sudden shift from the original word to the absurd word in an unexpected way leads to incongruity. Then, the incongruity is resolved by the perception with the food-related pun.

Meanwhile, Yoo takes a different approach to the punchline. Instead of interpreting from the word for ‘창난젓’ to ‘salted pollack intestine’, he literally says the Korean word ‘창난젓갈’ with English native-like pronunciation. The core meaning of incongruity is that we perceive and think about violating our standard mental patterns and normal expectations (Morreall, 1983). Audience already expects something from the previous patterns (Yoo’s interpretation style) and the non-interpreting word (gijang changnan jutgal) violates audiences’ ordinary expectations. The discrepancy between the humorous content and formed expectation emerges, thus resulting in incongruity. The incongruity is resolved through Yoo’s lexically poor English. Soon after Yoo mentions ‘favorite jutgal’, Moon refers to Kang Ho-dong while imitating Bong’s action and words. Kang is regarded as a godfather of Mukbang who is defined as a person eating a large quantity of food. Incongruity here works with learned patterns that audience already experience in the original Bong’s video. Then, incongruity is resolved by perceiving the similarity since both pay tribute to their role models.

Incongruity is regarded as a conflict between what is expected

and what actually occurs in the joke (Vandaele, 2002). From the beginning of the video, Yoo attempts to interpret from Moon's Korean words into English in a sincere manner. Audience probably just prepares what they have experienced and faces unexpected moments again.

Moon: 라면 먹을, 때마다 죄책감을 느끼지만 먹을 수밖에 없었습니다.

Yoo: I hate diet(Punchline).

Instead of interpreting the sentence in its literal meaning, Yoo provides shorter interpretation for Moon's words in a pragmatic way. The cause of laughter is the perception of something incongruous that violates the hearer's expectation (Xie et al., 2020). The punchline "I hate diet." deviates from the expectation and thus produces incongruity, eliciting stronger feeling of funny. Audience goes back and forth over the set-up and punchline and incongruity is finally resolved through the process of perceiving the meaning equivalence between the set-up and punchline.

IV. Conclusion

The outbreak of COVID-19 has changed life in many sectors and generated high levels of stress on a global scale. Humor is one of the most widely used strategies when dealing with stressful situations. Drawing on the perspective of incongruity theory, the present paper tracked and examined one of the popular parody videos created in 2020. By analyzing the data with two components

(set-ups and punchlines), the study made an attempt to illustrate how humor builds on incongruity in the parody video. The findings confirm that for punchlines Moon more likely uses linguistic puns related to food such as 불닭 볶음면, Pocari Sweat, 창난젓 while Yoo employs semantic, lexical or pragmatic elements (fry chicken fried noodle, my favorite jutgal is, I hate diet). More importantly, the results also provide that the basic two components, set-ups and punchlines act well as a theoretical construct to understand humor presented in the parody video.

The present study is limited in one example of the video parodies created in Korea and there are also many cases of humorous laughter which do not involve incongruity. Furthermore, there could be an intuitive aspect to create humor from comedians in the video parody. Nevertheless, the current study has an implication in that it attempts to explore the hidden aspects of humor by drawing the attention to the incongruous theory. Within this short paper, it is not possible to show a completely generalized idea but the analyses presented here will be a useful step towards further studying the humor.

For future studies, the analysis of more extensive data such as stand-up comedy videos or comedy video on YouTube is needed to understand the humor process from the incongruity view. For comedians, set-ups and punchlines are basic tools practical and concrete ways to create and organize material (Keisalo, 2017). It will be worthwhile if the study examines the actual process of jokes through the interview of comedians, performers or comedy writers and then further compare the results with the existing studies.

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‘Parodysite’ 유튜브 동영상에 나타난 유머 분석: 부조화 이론의 관점에서

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본 논문의 목적은 패러디 동영상에 담긴 유머를 부조화 이론의 관점에서 살펴보는 것이다. 이를 위해 봉준호 감독의 아카데미 수상 소감 패러디로 화제가 되었던 동영상을 중심으로 영상 속 코미디언들의 언어를 셋업과 펀치라인이라는 두 가지 요소로 나누어 분석했다. 그 결과 코미디언들은 다양한 말장난(puns)을 펀치라인으로 이용했으며 펀치라인에서 생긴 부조화와 이를 해결하는 과정에서 유머가 발생했다. 본 연구는 유머를 유발하고 웃음에 기여하는 언어학적 기제를 부조화 이론을 통해 분석을 시도했다는 데 의의가 있다.

[주제어] 유머, 동영상, 부조화 이론, 셋업, 펀치라인

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