FACE THREATENING ACT STRATEGIES FOR HUMOROUS EFFECT IN RAGE COMICS

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ABSTRAK

Rage comic adalah salah satu publikasi populer di ranah internet yang memiliki ciri khusus yang membedakannya dari genre komik lainnya. Ciri khususnya adalah terdapatnya ekspresi kemarahan dari tokoh dalam komik tersebut yang menjadi bagian penting dari Rage Comic. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis Face Threatening Act (FTA) atau Tindak Pengancaman Muka (TPA) yang terdapat dalam Rage Comic sebagai strategi untuk menciptakan ekspresi kemarahan yang memberikan efek humor dalam komik tersebut. Jenis TPA dalam Rage Comic diklasifikasikan berdasarkan strategi kesantunan Brown & Levinson (1987) yang terdiri atas Bald On-Record FTA, FTA against Positive Politeness, FTA against Negative Politeness, dan Off Record or Indirect FTA. Temuan penting dalam penelitian ini adalah terdapatnya jenis TPA yang lain yang disebut Unintentional FTA. TPA jenis ini terjadi secara tidak sengaja. Strategi TPA diterapkan untuk menghasilkan ironi, penghinaan, dan penderitaan yang menyebabkan terjadinya ekspresi kemarahan yang justru merupakan efek humor dalam Rage Comic. Pada dasarnya Rage Comics adalah realisasi kesantunan yang berwujud satire yang bertujuan untuk menyadarkan orang untuk memperbaiki kesalahan dalam hidup. Dengan demikian, pesan yang tersirat dalam Rage Comic dapat menjadi pemicu adanya revolusi mental untuk hidup lebih baik.

Keywords: *Tindak Pengancaman Muka; rage comic; humor; kesantunan; pragmatik*

A. Introduction

The rapid development of information technology provides many opportunities to create various kinds of creative art and literary works by using various styles of speech. The facilities of vast broadcasting publications interest people to create various kinds of artwork. One of them is online comics with peculiar illustrations and rage expressions. Such comics are called rage comics. This type of comic is often used as a medium to deliver criticism upon social phenomena in such an amusing way. Therefore, comics are often used as a medium to communicate and provoke ideas in society. Online comics may fulfill various kinds of purposes which give an impact on the use of a particular style of language. Quirk & Stein (1990) explained that even where the content remains constant (a particular specialist field), a shift in purpose (from addressing fellow specialists to addressing non-specialists) triggers a shift in style and tone. Consequently, comics have their style to communicate ideas to the readers.

Online comics are also created for humor purposes. Therefore, the comics contain verbal humor. Regarding this matter, Mahna (2012) stated that verbal humor must have some fundamental principles, namely, linguistic ambiguity, which is a word or phrase with two or more possible meanings. Furthermore, Mahna (2012) explained that the main source of ambiguity is, in fact, the absence of one-to-one correspondence between form and meaning or form and function. So, the ambiguity of a word/phrase allows us to interpret it in two or more possible ways, and then it leads us to a humorous situation. Rage comics offer various interpretations in each topic. The topics are mostly related to social phenomena in daily life. Thus, the comics describe the phenomena in a humorous witty way although it always ends with a rage expression. To this extent, the Face Threatening Act (FTA) strategy is the essential strategy to create such a comic. This feature distinguishes rage comics from any other genre of comics. The violation of the conversation maxims is part of FTA strategies which causes rage. Thus, the rage comics are usually sarcastic and harsh. Swearwords and taboo words uttered in rage expressions are the essential features in such comics.

Rage comics published online are easily spread and translated into many languages to accommodate readers from all over the world. The comics are so popular among the netizens, the call for internet addicts so that the research about online comics from the perspective of linguistics and pragmatics might be a breakthrough to describe the current use of language in the online publication. Thus, the research would give insights into the language in online media. In this case, online rage comics are the object of the research since the comics represent the current internet publication which has a particular language function. In particular, this research discusses the FTA strategies implemented in rage comics based on pragmatics politeness. Thus, the types of FTAs which occur in rage comics are the main discussion.

The pragmatic study of comics in this research contributes to the description of the application of particular pragmatic strategies to produce such interesting comics. One of them is by using the FTAs as strategies to produce a humorous effect in rage comics. To this extent, FTAs are conducted to produce rage expression in the final part of the comic as a distinctive feature of the comic. Hence, this research discusses FTA from a different point of view since the previous studies mostly discussed strategies to minimize FTAs.

B. Literature Review
1. Grice Cooperative Principles

To produce such an ideal conversation, the Cooperative Principles which consist of four maxims of conversation proposed by Grice (1975) must be fulfilled. The maxims are quality, quantity, relevance, and manner. Maxim of quality suggests the speaker give the true information whereas maxim of quantity focuses on the sufficient information which must be given by the speaker. The maxim of relevance deals with the relevant information that the speaker must contribute in the specific context of a conversation. The maxim of manner requires the participants to convey their message, clearly, orderly, and avoid ambiguity. Thus, the participants who are involved in such

a conversation are required to say something based on the fact, deliver sufficient information which is needed, be relevant with the topic of a conversation, and avoid obscurity. A similar concept is also proposed by Yule (2006). The theory of the Cooperative Principle is applied to analyze the violation of the maxims as a part of FTAs strategies in producing rage expression in rage comics.

2. *Politeness Principle*

An important concept in pragmatic politeness is 'face'. The concept of face is a reputation or self-esteem of a person (Goffman, 1967). Moreover, Brown & Levinson (1987) explained that the face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction. In general, people cooperate (and assume each other's cooperation) in maintaining face in interaction, such as cooperation based on the mutual vulnerability of face. Thus, Goffman (1967) emphasized that conversation will work if the participants consider politeness as the main thing to make the communication run smoothly. The pragmatic study of face emphasizes how we use language to acknowledge the fact that people have face 'needs'. The concept of face in communication and interaction elaborates that face deals with the 'positive social value' that we should maintain in social interactions. In such a conversation, each of the participants has a certain face so that each of them will produce utterances that take notice of each other's face in such a particular situation. However, an individual's face can suddenly change during a single interaction.

One of the most prominent concepts of the face is 'positive face' and 'negative face' (Brown & Levinson, 1987). A positive face reflects the need to be accepted and respected. A negative face refers to the need for freedom to do what we want and to be independent. The concept of the face which is proposed by Brown and Levinson is closely related to the cooperative principles since the participants of such a conversation will cooperate in maintaining each other's face needs. However, intentionally or unintentionally, speakers often produce utterances that are possible to threaten one or both types of face. This is what Brown and Levinson called 'face-threatening acts' (FTAs). Insults or expressions of disapproval are examples of utterances that are very potential in giving harm to the addressee's positive face. Less dangerous utterances such as requests might be face-threatening to negative face if it against people's need to be free to do what they want to do.

The concept of face in pragmatics is closely related to politeness. Mey (1998) found that politeness is considered as a conversational maxim, a face-saving activity, or a conversational contract. Moreover, Mey (1998) explained that the politeness principle is a complement to Grice's cooperative principles. Consequently, the principle of politeness is employed to reduce potential friction in such an interaction. In other words, politeness has a role to save each other's faces. Regarding the politeness principle, the research shows how FTA against politeness strategy is employed to create a humorous effect in rage comics.

3. Context in the Perspective of Pragmatics

Context is essential in the discussion of pragmatic strategies. The importance of context is to determine pragmatic meaning. In this case, context helps to determine whether a particular utterance is appropriate or inappropriate as well as how changes to context alter sentences' meaning (Bergmann, Hall, & Ross, 2007). Hence, a similar utterance might have a different interpretation based on the context in which it occurs.

Context of comics which include words and pictures is a crucial aspect that must be taken into consideration in interpreting the messages implied. Moreover, context also determines the types of FTAs employed in such a conversation.

The Prior Studies on Politeness and Comics

The discussion of politeness in the previous studies was conducted upon some types of communication strategies such as politeness of EFL learner's request realizations (Syahri, 2013), politeness in responding to compliments in Javanese (Sukarno, 2015), and congratulation strategies of Jordanian EFL postgraduate students (Al-Shboul & Huwar, 2016). The prior studies of politeness did not discuss the flouting of the politeness principles in detail. Therefore, this research discusses the flouting of the politeness principles by conducting FTAs as strategies to create the new genre of a comic as the main topic of the discussion.

The prior studies of language in humor and comics were mostly conducted by using a linguistic approach. Shifman (2007) conducted research about humor in a digital era which explored both the content and the various forms of comic texts in 'humor hubs' – large, dynamic, Websites containing verbal and visual humor. Next, Mahna (2012) focused on the investigation to find why certain discourse textual maneuverings are perceived as humorous in verbal humor. The other study of humor in the linguistics basis revealed the process of language humor from the perspective of Grice's Cooperative Principle (Pan, 2012). Although Pan (2012) used some theories of pragmatics, the focus in the research is mainly about the form of the language which is used in verbal humor. The next pragmatic study of implicature in humor found that in Indonesian spoken verbal humor, various kinds of conversational implicatures are violated to support humor expressions (Rustono, 1998). The more specific discussion about online humor from the perspective of media and cultural study discussed how the genre of *baozou manhua* (Rage Comics) enables Chinese netizens to express their everyday experiences and frustrations of daily life (Chen, 2014).

All the previous studies focused on the form and structure of the language used in humor and comics. Besides that, the previous research also discussed the function of humor from a socio-cultural point of view. Apart from the aforementioned prior studies, this research emphasizes the discussion to reveal the particular pragmatic strategies applied in online rage comics, particularly, the strategies which are conducted by performing FTAs to produce rage as the main distinctive feature of the comics. Therefore, the research is aimed to explain the types of FTAs implemented to create the comics. Moreover, the flouting of cooperative maxims is also discussed as a part of the strategy. Thus, the types of the flouted maxims are discussed as well.

C. Research Method

The research is descriptive qualitative in nature. The observation method is employed to collect the data in the form of conversation texts. The data of the research were taken and downloaded from specific websites of rage comics. All the comics on the websites were freely downloaded and easily passed along via various types of social media applications. The websites selected as the source of data are www.lol_comics.livejournal.com., www.MemeBlender.com, www.memejelly.com., and www.memecomiccentral.wordpress.com. The websites were chosen as the source of data as they publish many types of online comics via the internet regularly. Moreover, the websites were visited by many netizens from all over the world. They act not only as the readers but also as the contributors who update the stuff regularly. Rage comics are published in various languages to accommodate readers from different countries. However, rage comics in English are mostly found as English is used worldwide. To obtain the validity, the data had already been consulted to and verified by the native speaker of English.

The 63 rage comics containing FTA were collected to be the data of the research. The pragmatics equivalent method is employed for the analytical procedure. First, the pragmatics strategies to produce rage effect in online comics were analyzed based on the theory of Grice's cooperative maxims (1975), politeness theory, and FTAs theory of Brown and Levinson (1987). Then, the flouting of cooperative maxims in FTAs strategies is analyzed based on Grice's Cooperative Principles.

D. Result and Discussion
1. Result

As one kind of comic genre which is published in internet media, rage comics apply particular pragmatic strategies to produce a humorous effect. One of the strategies is performing FTAs in which the flouting of cooperative maxims is a part of FTA strategies. Thus, the discussion in this research includes the analysis of the types of FTA that occur in the comics and the flouting of cooperative maxims which supports the performance of FTAs.

The types of FTA found in the comics are bald on record FTA, FTA against the positive face, FTA against the negative face, off-record or indirect FTA, and unintentional FTA. The flouting of cooperative maxims occurred in the four types of conversational maxims classified by Grice.

a. *Bald on Record FTA*

The bald one record FTA occurred when the speaker expressed his negative opinion towards the hearer directly, for instance, mocking, criticizing, cursing, and making fun of someone. The example of bald on record FTA was seen in the comic in Figure 1. The setting of the comic is the situation in a family. One day, a son of the family came home for spending a holiday. At first, he thought that his family would be delighted to welcome him after such a long time he was not back home. Unfortunately, he faced the reality that each member of his family was so rude to him as if he were the troublemaker in the house. Thus, he must accept that his family did

not expect him to come home. The FTAs occurred when his sister and his father uttered some rude opinions to him. They did not try to save his face at all as they uttered their opinion directly. Therefore, he potentially bore the risk of losing his face. The bald on record FTA in the comic is best illustrated in Figure. 1.

Figure 1. Welcome Home

Son: "It's reading week! Finally coming home from university. I wonder if my family will be happy that I'm back home!"
Son: (He sees his dog) "OMG my dog! I missed you so much."
Dog: "O hai Thur…..herp derp brb food."
Son: "Wow! Hey sister, can I use your hairdryer? I forgot mine at school."
Sister: "OMG! WTF! I hate you so much! Don't touch my stuff! Why did you even come home! No one loves you! Ffffuuuuck."
Son: "Hey Dad, I'm hungry. What's for dinner?"
Dad: "…Want food? Get a job and go buy some."
Brother: "You have been home for 1 hour and your room is messy! WTF are you doing with your life!!!!!!"
Son: "Okay." (sad face)

The FTA in this comic was conducted to produce agony. It was seen when the sister said *I hate you so much! Don't touch my stuff! Why did you even come home! No one loves you.* The bald on record FTA performed by the sister was strengthened by some swearwords such as *WTF* and *Fuck.* Then, the brother also performed FTA by saying *WTF are you doing with your life!!!!!!.* The FTAs performed by the sister, the brother, and the father threatened the son's positive face as he was rejected by his family. The FTAs made him loses his face and bear agony as well.

b.   FTA Against Positive Politeness
The FTA strategy might against positive politeness. Although it has a risk to threaten the hearer's face, the threat is relatively low. This type of FTA might happen in the directive act. It was best illustrated in Figure. 2 which shows a conversation of a

mother and her son in their house. The mother offered some snacks to her son but he refused them at first but then, he ate the snack up.

Figure 2. Snacking Time

Mother:　　　*"Hey Sweety, I'm making a snack. Do you want one?"*
Son:　*"No, I'm not hungry. Don't make me any."*
Mother:　　　*(Put the snack on the table)*
Son:　*"That looks good. Can I have some?" (Eat up the snack)*
(5 minutes later mother finds the snacks are gone)
Mother:　　　*"Ffffuuuuck."*

The mother performed positive politeness when she used the in-group identity marker *sweety.* The strategy was performed to make her son willing to taste the snack. Then, FTA against positive politeness occurred when the son refused her mother's offer by saying *No, I'm not hungry. Don't make me any*. This act caused his mother to lose her face as she cooked the snack herself especially for her son. Positive politeness was conducted by the son who praised his mother by saying *That looks good, can I have some?* but finally, he ate all the snacks up. In this case, the maxim of quality was flouted as the son ate all the snacks while his mother thought that he just wanted to eat some. It produced rage shown by his mother who cursed *Ffffuuuuck.*

c.　*FTA Against Negative Politeness*

Negative politeness concerns with hearer's 'negative face' by acknowledging the other's face is threatened. In other words, the speaker might cooperate with the hearer by expressing his or her negative opinion in saving the addressee's face. However, negative politeness means that the speaker would impose the hearer in some ways. The FTA which threatens the hearer's negative face could be performed by conducting positive politeness at the beginning of the act. It is best illustrated in Figure 3 which involves two people in the kitchen. To make the hearer did what the speaker wanted, the speaker did some strategies.

Figure 3. Sandwich Maybe

(The boy is singing Carly Rae Jepsen's song)
Boy: Hey I just met you!!!
Girl: (Blushed)
Boy: And this is crazy!!!
Girl: (Smiling)
Boy: So, here's the kitchen!!!
Girl: (Disappointed)
Boy: A SANDWICH, MAYBE!!!

The comic in Figure 3 was created by using the lyric of the popular song of American singer Carly Rae Jepsen entitled "Call Me Maybe". The boy used the lyric of the song to make the girl flattered. It was a strategy to order the girl to make a sandwich for him. The flouting of the maxim of relevance occurred when the boy said *So, here's the kitchen* and *sandwich maybe.* The utterances were not relevant to the previous utterances which seemed like a seduction. The FTA in Figure 3 occurred when the boy said *sandwich, maybe.* It made the girl realized that it was a command for her to make a sandwich instead of a compliment for her. Thus, it threatened her negative face as she was imposed to do the boy's order. The FTA in the final part of the comic was used as a strategy to give a surprising effect to the readers.

d.   Off Record or Indirect FTA

To save somebody's face, we are required to do off-record strategies in uttering criticisms. In other words, criticisms could be uttered indirectly to avoid loss of face. In daily life, we often face the fact that we have to express our sincere opinion that might insult others. However, although criticisms are uttered indirectly, it still has the potential to create FTA. The example is described in Figure 4 which describes the conversation of two sisters. Both just reached home and talked about the performance of one of them after having treatment in the beauty salon.

Figure 4. Beauty Salon

(Just me and my sister who just came home)
Me: Where have you been?
Sister: I was in the beauty salon.
Me: Was it closed?
Sister: (Expressing rage)

The girl in Figure 4 tried to be honest to say that her sister's performance was not getting better at all although she had already got beauty treatment in the beauty salon. Instead of uttering her honest opinion, the speaker employed the indirect FTA by questioning whether the beauty salon was closed. The maxim of quantity was flouted as the question was not what the hearer expected to hear. Moreover, the question was considered as FTA because it potentially insulted the hearer who expected a compliment. The speaker was being ironic by asking a question *Was it closed?*. It was conducted to minimize the threat on the hearer's face. However, the FTA in the form of the question in Figure 4 caused the rage. The hearer realized that the speaker's question was a mock instead of a true question. In other words, being ironic is uttering some utterances which seem polite but in fact, they are potentially producing FTA. The indirect FTA which was employed in the comic made it amusing and funny.

The off-record or indirect FTA was also one of the strategies employed in the rage comic to avoid loss of face, e.g., in the case of telling the things related to the sexual matter. Regarding this matter, Shifman (2007) offered the internet as a suitable medium for sexual jokes, as the anonymity and isolated reading process may encourage people who find it embarrassing to tell or hear sexual jokes in the 'offline world' to send or read them online. Some online comics contain satirical jokes about sex. Figure 5 is one of the examples of telling jokes indirectly by using online media in the form of a comic. The context shows a couple who were having a conversation on the phone. The boy invited the girl to come to his new apartment to try his new bed which indicated the invitation to do sexual activities.

Figure 5. New Apartment

(Me moving into my new apartment. Suddenly, there is a call from a girlfriend)
Girlfriend: "Hey! What are you doing"
Boyfriend: "I just finished unpacking" everything. Wanna come over and try out
my new bed?" (Grinning)
(A few minutes later, both of them jump up and down on the bed).

The invitation to try out the new bed was the off-record invitation of having sexual intercourse. The maxim of manner was flouted as the boy did not say his intention clearly. The off-record invitation might turn into FTA if the girl considered it as humiliating her dignity and pride as a good person who did not agree with free sex. However, the surprising effect presented in the last part of the comic showed that there was nothing happens between them as both jumped up and down on the bed. Thus, no FTA was performed.

e.   Unintentional FTA

In a certain situation, FTA might be conducted unintentionally. It is what we call unintentional FTA respectively. The example of the act is best illustrated in the comic in Figure 6. The comic shows the fact that being honest has the potential of performing FTA. The conversation was between a security guard and a mother who took her 7 years old son with her. They were at the gate of the amusement park. The mother wanted to get a free ticket for her son by lying to the guard about her son's age.

Figure 6. Seven Years Old

Guard: "All children under 6 get in free."
Mother: "Don't worry, my son is 5 years old."
Son: "But mom, I'm 7."
Mother: "Fuuuuuck."

The rule of the park allowed all children under 6 to get free entry. Knowing that her son had already been 7 years old, the mother broke the maxim of quality by lying to the guard that her son was only 5 years old. This strategy was considered as negative politeness as it was performed to minimize imposition to the guard to let her and her son get in. Thus, it might minimize the threat to the guard's negative face. By lying that her son is only 5 years old, it seemed that she followed the rule. Unfortunately, the kid was honest so that he spontaneously said that he was 7 years old. To this extent, the kid performed the unintentional FTA. This act made his mother being shamefaced as her son said the truth in front of the guard.

2.   Discussion

Various social problems in daily life are lucrative topics of rage comics. However, the comics tend to portray the weakness in life in such an amusing way. There are many ways to deliver social problems in comics. One of them is performing Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) as a strategy to create humorous comics. The previous study discussed humor which was derived from the deliberately flouted maxims. Therefore, deliberate violation of the Cooperative Principles is the linguistic basis of humor (Pan, 2012). The types of FTAs employed in producing rage comics were classified based on Brown and Levinson's concept (1987) and one additional type. The classification is bald on record FTA, FTA against positive politeness, FTA against negative politeness, off-record or indirect FTA, and unintentional FTA. Regarding the types of FTA, the occurrence of each type of FTA found in 63 rage comics is provided in Table 1.

Table 1
Types of FTA

Types	Frequency
Bald On Record	11
Against Positive Politeness	12
Against Negative Politeness	16
Off Record	15
Unintentional	9

The FTA against Negative Politeness was the most frequently occurred in rage comics. Preventing ones to do what they want would give insult, e.g. ordering and commanding. Next, the off-record FTA was very potential to produce rage by the implied message which was uttered by the speaker. Bald on-record FTA was

conducted by cursing, mocking, and swearing while the FTA against the positive face was conducted by humiliating. Unlike the aforementioned types, the unintentional FTA which was the additional type of the classification of FTA was the least used in online rage comics. This type of FTA was caused by infringing when one of the participants failed to comprehend the intention of another participant at the same stretch of conversation.

The strategy of conducting FTA in the rage comics is a trigger to build rage expression to create a humorous effect on readers. The humorous rage expression itself is the particular characteristic of the comics. In this case, FTA might be conducted by flouting cooperative maxims. Besides the flouting of maxims, the flouting of the politeness principle potentially creates a humorous effect. In this case, FTAs are conducted on purpose to violate the politeness principle to produce rage expression. FTAs are conducted by uttering irony, humiliation, and agony which lead to producing a humorous effect. Furthermore, Rage comics have a social function to deliver a satire for negative things in daily life. Consequently, the message delivered in rage comics is character-building to elevate social morality.

E.   Conclusion and Suggestion

To create online rage comics which have distinctive features, some pragmatics strategies must be applied. The flouting of the politeness principle by performing Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) is the effective strategy to create such entertaining comics which are published in internet media. Moreover, the flouting of cooperative maxims in performing FTAs strengthens the humorous effect and the surprising effect of the comics.

The FTAs which are performed in producing rage comics are classified based on Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies, i.e. bald on record FTA, FTA against politeness principle, FTA against negative politeness, and off-record or indirect FTA. Perhaps, the research contributes to the idea that FTA might be conducted unintentionally in a particular context. This is what is so-called an unintentional FTA. The realization of FTA is a strategy to create a new genre of comics. Eventually, the moral messages which are implied in the comics are intended to encourage people to improve their quality of life and stop perpetuating the bad habit. Since the criticisms are delivered in a witty way, readers may consider the comics more as a form of entertainment than just a piece of advice. Hence, people might not feel that they are imposed to change their bad habits and attitude. Yet, they will realize their mistakes and try to do better in life.

The variety of rage expressions used in the comics and the persuasive effect of the comics in society would be a significant topic for further research under the sociolinguistics approach. Therefore, the research on rage comics may give a valuable contribution to the study of linguistics especially pragmatics and sociolinguistics in media. Generally, the study may also give a contribution to society to understand more about the language function in internet publication.

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