

PRESUPPOSITIONS AND HUMOR CREATION IN LOUIS SZEKELY'S CHEWED UP STANDUP COMEDY: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This research focuses on humor in Szekely's *Chewed Up* standup comedy and aims to (1) identify the types of presuppositions, (2) reveal the forms of humor created by the presuppositions, (3) observe the functions of the humor. This research employed mixed-methods approach. Qualitative approach was applied to describe the findings of presupposition and humor creation, while quantitative approach was utilized to obtain the frequency of the data occurrences to support the qualitative description. The data were in the form of utterances employed by Szekely. The context of the data were the monologue. The sources of the data were the transcripts of Szekely's utterances in his standup comedy. The researcher himself was the primary instrument, supported by the data sheet as the secondary instrument. The trustworthiness of the data was obtained by triangulation. The results of the research show the findings. First, there are six types of presupposition employed in the standup comedy: existential presupposition, factive presupposition, lexical presupposition, structural presupposition, non-factive presupposition, and counter-factual presupposition. Second, there is only one form of humor created by the presuppositions: spontaneous conversational humor. Third, all of the functions: social management, decommitment, mediation, and defunctionalization, exists in the data.

Keywords: pragmatics, presupposition, humor, standup comedy, Louis Szekely

INTRODUCTION

Communication is one of the most crucial aspects in human life. Communication connects human everytime and everywhere. The basic definition of communication is a process of sharing information in mind in order to reach mutual understanding.

There are many ways that can be used by human to communicate, one of them is by employing humor. Davis in Raskin (2008: 238) defines humor as any sudden episode of joy associated with a new discovery that is self-rated as funny. In other words, humor may emerges from the utterance or action that is considered as new or unexpected to the hearer.

Humor gives a new perspective and understanding about something that

happens in life. Humor also has the ability to break the barrier between individuals. However, there are also some difficulties for human to perform humor in communication. An effective communication is usually seen by the level of understanding between the participants. If a hearer does not have any background knowledge about something that is being talked by a speaker, the entire process of communication will not run effectively. This problem also inevitably happens in humor. The hearer who does not posses any background knowledge related to a humorous utterance will consider it as unfunny. To avoid this kind of misunderstanding, the speaker needs to know the background knowledge of the hearer.

Yule (1983: 229) defines presuppositions as something that the speaker assumes to be the case prior to conduct an utterance. It is the background knowledge that the speaker actually has in mind while conducting an utterance. In the issue of presupposition, the speaker assumes that the hearer has already know something about the particular subject being discusses. In other words, the information contained in a presupposition should be mutually known by the speaker and the hearer to be considered as true.

Moreover, there are times when a speaker intentionally manipulates the hearer's presupposition to create humor. Normally, the information contained in a presupposition is considered as known or familiar to the hearer, thus when a presupposition contains a new unexpected information it can trigger humorous situation (Alvaro, 2011: 51).

The phenomena of presupposition can be regarded as a very crucial aspect in a humorous situation, since it is fundamental for a speaker to presuppose what is known to the hearer in order to be able to conduct unexpected utterances that can trigger the humorous aspect. In other words, a speaker should effectively presuppose the background knowledge of the hearer and the hearer should be able to understand the humor contained in the speaker's utterances. Humor and presupposition can be found in any types of communication process. One of the communication processes that utilize humor

in their utterances is standup comedy.

In this research, the researcher is interested in analyzing a standup comedy performance by Louis Szekely entitle *Chewed Up*. As a comedy performace, the standup comedy is expected to have a lot of humorous utterances that are interesting to analyze. Moreover, the researcher is also interested on how Szekely, who is often regarded as one of the most successful standup comedian of all times, communicates his humorous utterances to a group of people with different backgrounds, and then eventually generates laughter from them. Hence, this research will analyze the humor found in Szekely's *Chewed Up* standup comedy. Specifically by identifying the types of presuppositions, the forms of humor created by the presuppositions, and the functions of humor.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Type

This research employed mixed-methods approach. Qualitative approach was used to describe the findings of presupposition and humor creation, while quantitative approach was utilized to obtain the frequency of the data occurrences to support the qualitative description.

Forms, Contexts, and Source of Data

The data were in the form of utterances containing humor uttered by Szekely in *Chewed Up* standup comedy. The context of the data was the monologue of the

standup. The source of the data was divided into two, i.e. primary and secondary sources. The primary source of the data was the video of *Chewed Up* standup comedy by Louis Szekely. The secondary source of the data was the transcript of the stand up downloaded from <http://scrapsfromtheloft.co/2017/07/07/louis-c-k-chewed-2008-full-transcript/>.

Research Instrument

The researcher was the main instrument of the research, supported by the data sheet as the secondary instrument.

Data Collection Techniques

In this research, in collecting the data, the researcher used read and write technique or attentive observation.

Data Analysis Techniques

The steps of data analysis technique are illustrated as follows.

First, the researcher identified the relevant data. Second, the researcher classified the data into the data sheet based on the classification of the objectives of the study. Third, the researcher analyzed the data based on the objectives of the study. Last, the researcher drew the conclusions of the research to answer the formulations of the problem.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION Types of Presuppositions

The findings show that there are six types of presuppositions employed by Szekely in his standup.

a. Existential Presupposition

Like my 5 years old the other day, one of her toys broke. **And she demanded that I break her sister's toy to make it fair. And I did.** That's how much shit she gave me, I broke the little toy and I felt awful I was like crying. And I look at her and she's got this creepy smile on her face.

(datum no 28)

In datum 28, the utterances in bold contains existential presupposition because Szekely is admitted that he has two children, and both of them are girls. Those presuppositions construct the context of a father-daughters relation. In datum 28, Szekely gives the audience a presupposition that his first daughter is bad since she asks her father to break her sister's toy just because she broke hers. The audience expect that based on the common knowledge of a normal father, Szekely will not fulfill his first daughter's request since it will not be fair for the youngest. Hence, when Szekely reveals that he did break his second daughter's toy, it surprises the audience and triggers humorous situation since their expectation is different with what is actually happened.

The humor found in the data is self-deprication humor because Szekely is committed that he is even worse than his first daughter. Thus, he is not a great father. By doing so, he puts himself as the object of the humor. Meanwhile, the function of the humor is social management.

b. Factive Presupposition

He broke his neck, I heard him break his own neck. And then he just dragged his stupid deer head into the woods and he

died. I got outta my car and I yelled into the woods, “**I’m glad you’re dead, you fucking idiot!** I hope your deer wife finds you dead and dies of a broken heart. I hope your deer babies starve to death, you broke my mirror you faggot, cunt, nigger deer.”

(datum no 22)

The utterance “I’m glad you are dead, you fucking idiot!” contains factive presupposition because the employment of the word ‘glad’ presupposes that the information comes after it is a fact. Therefore, the presupposition of highlighted utterance is that the deer mentioned is in fact dead.

The context of the data is when Szekely accidentally hit a deer on his way to a department store. Normally, in this kind of situation, the audience expect that Szekely will feel sorry about the dead deer. However, he intentionally twists the audience’s expectation, so instead of feeling sorry for the dead deer, he exaggerately yells and curses at it. This information is surprising for the audience since they did not expect Szekely’s response, thus it creates humor. The humor is in the form of overstatement, and the function is social management.

c. Lexical Presupposition

I don’t like Starbucks anymore because they don’t care anymore. They just press a button and some old lady’s diarrhea comes out and they just give it to you.

(datum no 4)

Datum 4 is included to lexical presupposition because it has an implied meaning that the hearer can catch, even though it is not directly stated in the utterance. The utterance ‘I don’t like

Starbucks anymore because they don’t care anymore’ presupposes that Szekely used to like Starbucks and Starbucks used to be more careful in serving their coffee. The context in datum 4 is when Szekely buys a cup of coffee in a small local coffee shop. He is amazed by how the barista manually brews the coffee that he ordered. Then, he compares his experience in the mentioned local coffee shop to the experience he has on Starbucks. In Szekely opinion, brewing a cup of coffee manually gives a much better experience to the customer. Hence, when a famous coffee shop like Starbucks employs machine in their production system, it intrigues Szekely to criticize it. In datum 4, humor is created because Szekely manipulates what the audience think about Starbucks which considered as one of the most famous coffee shop in the world. When people heard about Starbucks, they usually think about a high quality cup of coffee. Hence, when Szekely creates an analogy that the coffee made by Starbucks these days are like an old lady diarrhea, it surprises the audience and provoke a humorous situation.

In this datum, Szekely criticizes Starbucks for using machine too much in their production system. In other words, Szekely provides a social commentary to Starbucks through his humor. Hence, the form of humor is satire, and the function is social management.

d. Structural Presupposition

My grandmother is 95, she can’t see out of her left eye, it just shut off. **The**

last time we went to see her she's like "I can't see out of my left eye" and we're all like, "Uggh, hey what was Christmas like in the '40s?"

(datum no 15)

Datum 15 is categorized as structural presupposition because the utterance "Hey, what was Christmas like in the '40s?" presupposes that the hearer, Szekely's grandmother, lived in the 1940s, which also means that she is old. It belongs to structural presupposition since the utterance comes after wh-question can be considered as fact. The humor created is clever replies to serious statements because when Szekely's grandmother tells Szekely about the fact that she cannot see out of her left eye, she is hoping to get some advice about the condition. However, Szekely answers with a nonsensical response that indicates he does not care about his grandmother's illness. It creates a humorous situation because the audience expects Szekely, as a grandson, would take care of his grandmother and show some respect to her. The function is social management.

e. Non-factive Presupposition

He broke his neck, I heard him break his own neck. And then he just dragged his stupid deer head into the woods and he died. And I'm glad he's dead. I was glad right away. I got outta my car and I yelled into the woods, "I'm glad you're dead you fucking idiot! **I hope your deer wife finds you dead and dies of a broken heart. I hope your deer babies starve to death**, you broke my mirror you faggot, cunt, nigger deer."

(datum no 23)

Datum 23 happens when Louis is on his way to a department store. Then, he accidentally hit a deer and killed it. However, the accident also broke his mirror. Driven by his anger, Szekely exaggerately yells to the dead deer by hoping that its wife will die of a broken heart and its babies will starve to death. Datum 23 belongs to non-factive presupposition since the employment of the word 'hope' in the utterance indicates something is not a fact. The utterances in bold contain presupposition that the deer's wife and babies are not dead yet. The creation of humor in datum 23 is started when Szekely analogizes that deer have feeling. Based on common knowledge, deer has no feeling like human. Hence there is a small chance that the deer's wife will die of a broken heart if she finds out that her husband is dead. Szekely's presupposition is contradicted with the audience's knowledge, hence it provokes humor. The type of humor in datum 23 is overstatement, and the function is social management.

f. Counter-factual Presupposition

I'm a lucky guy I got a lot going for me. I'm healthy, I'm relatively young. I'm white, which thank God for that shit. I'm not saying that white people are better. I'm saying that being white is clearly better, who could even argue? **If it was an option, I would re-up every year**, "Oh, I'll take white again, I'm absolutely enjoying it, I'll stick with white thank you."

(datum no 18)

Datum 18 is categorized as counter-factual presupposition because it contains

presupposition that can be considered as the contrary of fact. The highlighted utterances in datum 18 presuppose that being a white or dark-skin people is an option that will be given to us every year. It creates a humorous situation since it is contradicted to the fact known by people that nobody has the power to choose his skin colour. The humor created is overstatement because Szekely completely exaggerates the greatness of being a white man, so if it was an option he would pick it every year. Datum 18 is classified into social management function.

Forms of Humor

Spontaneous conversational humor is the only form of humor obtained from Szekely's standup.

a. Irony

Now if you're white and you don't admit that it's great, you are an asshole. It is great! And I am a man. How many advantages can one person have, I am a white man, you can't even hurt my feelings. What can you really call a white man that really digs deep? **"Hey cracker!" "Ugh, ruined me day, boy shouldn't have called me a cracker. Bringing me back to owning land and people, what a drag".**

(datum no 20)

In his section about how great it is to be a white man, Szekely states that as a white man, there is no word that can really hurt his feeling. His example is the word "cracker". Cracker is a term that is usually used in the past to call a poor white farmer. Nowadays, it is often used as an insult to call someone who is white. It is the equivalence of the word

"nigger" for black people. However, instead of getting offended by the word, Szekely ironically answers "Ugh, ruined me day, boy shouldn't have called me a cracker. Bringing me back to owning land and people, what a drag", that presuppose no matter how offensive the word "cracker" may sound, it does not really offend a white man since they are still white and they have land and slave. Hence, datum 20 belongs to lexical presupposition. By employing those utterances, Szekely is only pretending that the word 'cracker' offends him, while in fact it is not. In other words, Szekely utterances actually contain information that is the complete opposite of what he actually stated. Hence, it belongs to irony.

b. Satire

Here is how great it is to be white. I can get into time machine and go to any time and it would be fucking awesome when I get there. That is exclusively white privilege. **Black people can't fuck with time machines, a black guy in a time machine would be like "Hey, anything before 1980, no thank you".**

(datum no 19)

The context of datum 19 is when Szekely compares between being a white man and being a black man. His comparison is by employing the time machine example. In this datum, Szekely presupposes that his audience aware about the fact that before 1980 racism was still a big issue in America. Thus, when Szekely employs the utterance, "Hey, anything before 1980, no thank you", the audience will instantly relate it to racism issue. Hence, humor is created. Datum 19

belongs to lexical presupposition, the humor created is satire, and the function is social management.

c. Sarcasm

We went to therapy for a while and the therapist is like “You should go on a date.” And I’m like “Fuck you!”. **I did go on a date with my wife though, and I don’t think I’m going to call her again.**

(datum no 30)

Louis and his wife go to a therapist to talk about their relationship. The therapist advises them to go on a date and they accept the therapist’s idea. However, based on the utterance “I don’t think I’m going to call her again’, we get the presupposition that the date was awful and he regrets going on a date with his wife. This data belongs to lexical presupposition. The humor created is sarcasm because Szekely sarcastically comments that he regrets following the therapist’s advice to go on a date. The function is social management due to Szekely’s intention to embarrass his therapist.

d. Overstatement

Boys are hard to rise, all my sisters have boys and I just feel for them because it’s really hard and really do. Here’s the thing though, girls are just as hard to rise but on a whole other level, they are different. Here’s the difference between boys and girls. **Boys fuck things up, but girls are fucked up. That’s the difference. Boys just do damages to your house, that you can measure in dollars like hurricane. Girls leave scars in your psyche that you find later like a genocide or atrocity**

(datum no 27)

Szekely compares between raising a boy and raising a girl. The utterances in bold

presupposes that according to Szekely, raising a girl is much harder since girl tends to hurt your feeling instead of damaging your property. Hence, it belongs to lexical presupposition. Szekely exaggerately gives an analogy that boys are like hurricane that the damage can be measured by dollars, while girls are like genocide that leaves scars in your psyche. Hence, the humor in this data is overstatement. The function is social management.

e. Self-deprecation

I’m 40 now, you know? I’m half dead basically. You get to this point were like, you’re not old enough for nobody to give a shit about your old. Nobody like “I helped a forty years old guy today and I’m feeling good about this.” **Nobody is spent their holiday to deliver hotmeal for forty years old guy.**

(datum no 10)

The utterance in bold presuppose that usually people will give elderly man some hotmeals during holiday. However, 40 years old is not considered as old, hence Szekely got nobody take care of him. It belongs to lexical presupposition. The humor created is self- deprecation since Szekely puts himself as the object of the humor. The function is social management.

f. Teasing

I went to the doctor the other day. I went because my ankle, I was like limping for a month out of nowhere, and the doctor, **he brings me and show me an xray of my ankle and he’s like “Yeah, your ankle is just. worn out”**, and I was like “What do you mean? I injured my ankle?”, and he’s like “No, it is just shitty now”.

(datum no 12)

The presupposition of this data is that the doctor x-rayed Szekely's ankle. It is not stated in the utterances. Hence, it belongs to lexical presupposition. The humor created is teasing because the doctor directly points out the flaw of Szekely's body. In addition, he does not explain the real reason why Szekely's ankle is hurt, instead he merely says that Szekely's ankle is just worn out because of the aging process. The function is social management.

g. Clever replies to serious statements

"Well there is things you can do, you can stretch, for half an hour a day you should stretch your ankle." I was like "How long would that take to fix it?", and he goes "**No, you just do that now.**" Okay, that's just the new thing you do until you and your shitty ankle both die.

(datum no 14)

Szekely goes to a doctor because his ankle is hurting. The doctor advises that from now on he needs to start stretching his ankle for half an hour a day. Then, Szekely asks the doctor about how long he needs to do that until his ankle will not hurt anymore. Then the doctor replies "No, you just do that now", which presupposes that his ankle will never be back to normal since the reason why his ankle is hurt because of aging. Doing stretch is only to reduce the pain and to prevent the problem gets worse. Hence, the presupposition here is lexical presupposition. The humor created is clever replies to serious statements since the doctor's answer is not directly answer the question, but it is able to make

Szekely understand that his ankle will not heal anymore. The function of the humor is social management due to the doctor's intention to terminate further questions by Szekely.

h. Pun

I stumble upon a couple of fellas blowing one another on their respective 'penisia', that's plural for penis that I invented today. I would be respectful to them. But if one of them took the dick out of his mouth and started acting all faggy and saying annoying faggy things. **'You know people from Phoenix are Phoenicians'**, or something like that, I'd be like 'Shut up, faggot, FAAGGGOOOOT!'

(datum no 2)

Datum 2 contains existential presupposition since we can presuppose from the highlighted utterance that a place named Phoenix exist, and the people from Phoenix is called Phoenicians. In this data, humor is created because Szekely intentionally says the word 'Phoenicians' after he created the word 'penisia', as a plural for penis. Since 'Phoenicians' and 'penisia' are homophone, words with different meaning that sound the same, the audience will relate to the word 'Phoenicians' as the plural for penis instead of as the people from Phoenix. In other words, the creation of the word 'penisia' evokes a second meaning on 'Phoenicians'. Hence, the forms of humor in this datum is pun.

'Phoenicians' is not a new word that the audience never heard before. According to the City of Phoenix official website, the proper nickname of the people from Phoenix

is indeed Phoenicians. However, the creation of the word *penisia* gives the audience a new surprising perspective that triggers their humorous aspect. In other words, the word ‘*penisia*’ can be considered as a defunctionalized language, which is a language that is not used to exchange information, but only for playful purpose. Hence, the function of humor in this datum is defunctionalization.

Functions of Humor

a. Social Management

My grandmother is 95, she can't see out of her left eye, it just shut off. **The last time we went to see her she's like "I can't see out of my left eye" and we're all like, "Uggh, hey what was Christmas like in the '40s?"**

(datum no 15)

The utterance “Hey, what was Christmas like in the ‘40s?’”, indicates that the hearer, Szekely grandmother, lived in the 1940s. It belongs to structural presupposition since the information comes after wh-question can be considered as fact. The humor created is clever replies to serious statement since the statement from Szekely’s grandmother was supposed to be serious. However, Szekely answers it with a non sensical answer. The function is social management because Szekely employs humor to embarrass his grandmother and to shift the topic of conversation.

b. Decommitment

Hello, alright. Thank you.
Alright faggot, how you doin'?
Sorry, I called him a faggot. I miss that word, you know? I grew up saying that word and, I mean, it never meant gay.

(datum no 1)

Szekely greets his audience by employing the word ‘faggot’. Then, Szekely adds that the word ‘faggot’ was never meant gay. The utterance “It was never meant gay” presupposes that he used to not knowing that “faggot” means gay. Thus, this data belongs to lexical presupposition since it contains additional information that is not directly stated in the utterance. The word ‘faggot’ can be considered as a highly offensive word. The employment of this word is not appropriate in everyday social interaction. Hence, when Szekely used the word ‘faggot’ to greets his audience, it surprises the audience then led to the creation of humor. However, Szekely does not actually insult or intentionally offend his audience. He just merely wants to greet his audiences with a surprising remark to provoke laughter. Therefore, the type of humor created is teasing.

The function of the humor is decommitment using salvaging tactic. It is a function of humor that can help people to save the situation by indicating that the past action was not serious, but was instead meant as a joke. In datum 1, the utterance ‘it never meant gay’ is employed by Szekely to deny that he has any intention to seriously insult the audience. He attempts to save the situation by indicating that his utterances was not serious.

c. Mediation

My wife and I we've been married for about 9 years now, **so we're almost done.**

(datum no 29)

Datum 29 belongs to existential presupposition because in this utterance Szekely is committed that he has a wife, hence he is married. The utterance “My wife and I, we’ve been married for about 9 years now” is the setup of the punchline “So, we are almost done”. It creates a humorous situation because when Szekely states that he and his wife have been married for 9 years, the audience presuppose that he is happy with his marriage. However, his punchline shatters the audience expectation in an unexpected and cheerful manner. This incongruity between what is expected by the audience and what is actually happened based on Szekely presupposition evokes the humorous situation.

The function of humor in datum 29 is mediation because Szekely employs humor to carry out the utterances that have the potential to hurt somebody, in this context is his wife. The employment of humor frees Szekely from the consequences since it is an accepted mode of communication.

d. Defunctionalization

I stumble upon a couple of fellas blowing one another on their respective ‘penisia’, that’s plural for penis that I invented today. I would be respectful to them. But if one of them took the dick out of his mouth and started acting all faggy and saying annoying faggy things. **‘You know people from Phoenix are Phoenicians’**, or something like that, I’d be like ‘Shut up, faggot, FAAGGGOOOOT!’.

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Datum 2 contains existential presupposition since we can presuppose from

the highlighted utterance that a place named Phoenix exist, and the people from Phoenix is called Phoenicians. In this data, humor is created because Szekely intentionally says the word ‘Phoenicians’ after he created the word ‘penisia’, as a plural for penis. Since ‘Phoenicians’ and ‘penisia’ are homophone, words with different meaning that sound the same, the audience will relate to the word ‘Phoenicians’ as the plural for penis instead of as the people from Phoenix. In other words, the creation of the word ‘penisia’ evokes a second meaning on ‘Phoenicians’. Hence, the forms of humor in this datum is pun.

‘Phoenicians’ is not a new word that the audience never heard before. According to the City of Phoenix official website, the proper nickname of the people from Phoenix is indeed Phoenicians. However, the creation of the word *penisia* gives the audience a new surprising perspective that triggers their humorous aspect. In other words, the word ‘penisia’ can be considered as a defunctionalized language, which is a language that is not used to exchange information, but only for playful purpose. Hence, the function of humor in this datum is defunctionalization.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

For the first objective of the research, there are six types of presupposition employed by Szekely in the standup. They are existential presupposition, factive

presupposition, lexical presupposition, structural presupposition, non-factive presupposition, and counter-factual presupposition. Lexical presupposition is the dominant type of presupposition employed by Szekely. It happens because the topics which are employed by Szekely in his performance are mostly general issues that happen in people's daily interaction. Hence, Szekely frequently uses utterances that contain an unstated meaning since he personally believes that the audience will still get the meaning. In addition, time limitation for comedians to deliver their humorous material is mostly applied in a standup comedy show. Hence, employing lexical presupposition helps Szekely to conduct humorous utterances more effectively.

In relation to the second objective, There is only one form of humor created by presupposition in this research. It is spontaneous conversational humor. Meanwhile, there is no data obtained in jokes and unintentional humor categories. Jokes does not exist in the standup comedy because a joke is a context-free kind of humor, while the humor in standup comedy in contrary, relied heavily on the context to be understood. Moreover, the absence of unintentional humor in the research is actually in line with the nature of standup comedy itself in which comedians mostly design and deliver their humorous materials in the form of utterances. In addition, Szekely writes his humor material

with the intention to generate laughter from his audience. Hence, it is particularly rare that unintentional humor, such as accidental physical humor and accidental linguistic humor, exists in the standup comedy performance.

As for the functions of the humor, all of the types of function: social management, decommitment, mediation and defunctionalization, exists in the data. However, social management's occurrences completely surpass the other functions of humor. This is because Szekely frequently employs stories about his daily social interaction. Either the story about his interaction with the people around him, or the story about social issues that happen in general. Hence, there are a lot of social comments in his standup comedy.

Suggestions

Based on the conclusions of the research, the researcher formulates some suggestions for some parties. First, the students of linguistics should pay more attention to pragmatics study. Therefore, they can conduct other research that explains about humor phenomena by using the other pragmatics approach. Second, to the future researchers, the study of presupposition and humor creation is still rarely discussed. Therefore, the future researchers is expected to conduct another research in this phenomena but with a different object; movie, situational comedy, or talkshow. Hence, those researchs will help to add more

reverences on the study of humor.

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