



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**JOKE STRUCTURES AND POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN
MALAYSIAN STAND-UP COMEDY**

CHAN TEIK ONN

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**JOKE STRUCTURES AND POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN MALAYSIAN
STAND-UP COMEDY**

By

CHAN TEIK ONN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts**

March 2018

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

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March 2018

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According to Wilson (2008), stand-up comedy is a form of social criticism on ethnicities and politics other than a means for entertainment, and it can be effective with the correct use of politeness strategies. It also has a specific form of narrative, known as a joke, told by the comedian, as suggested by Attardo and Chabanne (1992). It is also subjected to rhetorical strategies taken by comedians to present their jokes without negative backlash. Therefore, in examining the differences of joke structure between ethnic and political jokes in Malaysia, their usage of politeness strategies and how these strategies were manifested through specific rhetorical devices, Hockett's (1960) Internal Structure of Jokes, Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Strategies and Schwarz's (2010) Rhetorical Devices in Joke-Telling were utilized as frameworks for the study. The findings revealed that the joke structure in political jokes lack build-ups to specify the topic. Ethnic jokes, on the other hand, often targeted specific aspects of an ethnicity with build-ups. In the use of politeness strategies, off-record strategy was dominantly used in both ethnic (32.3%) and political jokes (56.66%) to veil their face threats. The least used strategy in ethnic jokes is positive politeness (18.5%) and in political jokes, negative politeness (10%). In rhetorical devices, ethnic jokes relied on *implication* in their use of off-record strategy, whereas *profanity* remains unused. In political jokes, however, the dependence on *implication*, *private ridicule* was another rhetorical device that was dominantly used, while *hyperbole* and *ridicule* were unused. In conclusion, political jokes tend to omit build-up to make the topic of discussion more ambiguous whereas ethnic jokes use build-up to specify a stereotype to avoid making fun of an ethnicity in its entirety. In addition, off-record strategy is most effective in both types of jokes because it allows engagement from audiences in deciphering the joke, making face threats less direct. This strategy was often accompanied with the use of *implication* and *private ridicule*. With these findings, it is hoped that the results will create awareness among aspiring comedians on the use of politeness strategies in their joke delivery. Furthermore, the results may provide useful resources for aspiring comedians and public speakers to introduce humour without creating negative backlash.

Abstrak tesis penyelidikan yang dikemukakan Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sastera

STRUKTUR JENAKA DAN STRATEGI KESOPANAN DALAM PERSEMBAHAN KOMEDI MALAYSIA

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Menurut Wilson (2008), komediri sering digunakan sebagai kritikan sosial mengenai etnik dan politik selain daripada cara hiburan. Attardo dan Chabanne (1992) berpendapat bahawa komediri tertakluk kepada bentuk naratif tertentu dan strategi retorik untuk membentangkan jenaka mereka tanpa tindak balas negatif. Oleh itu, untuk mengkaji perbezaan struktur antara jenaka etnik dan politik di Malaysia, penggunaan strategi kesopanan dan peranti retorik tertentu, Struktur Dalam Jenaka Hockett (1987), Strategi Kesopanan Brown dan Levinson (1987) dan Peranti Retoris Schwarz (2010) dalam Jenaka telah digunakan sebagai rangka untuk kajian ini. Dari segi struktur jenaka, jenaka politik adalah kurang spesifik daripada jenaka etnik kerana kekurangan pembinaan dalam penyampaian jenaka. Jenaka etnik adalah sebaliknya. Strategi luar rekod digunakan secara popular dalam jenaka etnik (32.3%) dan politik (56.66%). Strategi yang paling kurang digunakan dalam jenaka etnik adalah kesopanan positif (18.5%) dan dalam jenaka politik, kesopanan negatif (10%). Akhirnya, dalam perspektif peranti retorik, jenaka etnik bergantung kepada implikasi dalam penggunaan strategi luar rekod, sedangkan carutan tidak digunakan sama sekali. Namun dalam jenaka politik, kebergantungan terhadap implikasi, ejekan tersirat adalah alat retorik yang digunakan secara dominan, sementara hyperbole dan ejekan secara telus tidak digunakan sama sekali. Kesimpulannya, jenaka politik cenderung menyembunyikan topik yang dibincangkan sedangkan jenaka etnik gemar membentuk topik untuk menentukan stereotaip atau sifat yang diketahui. Di samping itu, strategi luar rekod berkesan dalam kedua-dua jenis jenaka kerana ia membolehkan penonton mentafsir jenaka dan membuat ancaman muka kurang langsung. Strategi ini lebih berkesan melalui penggunaan implikasi dan ejekan tersirat. Hasil kajian ini mampu mewujudkan kesedaran di kalangan pelawak and penceramah mengenai penggunaan strategi kesopanan.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

E	Ethnic joke
FTA	Face-threatening act
P	Political joke
MACC	Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission/Malaysian Association of Chinese Comedians
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
T	Transcription



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, various aspects of this study were discussed. The section entitled Background of the Study explained the context the readers need to comprehend the existing phenomenon and why this study needed to be done. It is then followed by the statement of the problem that led to the conception of this study. The outcomes and methods of the research were then conceptualized through research objectives and questions, and followed up with the discussion as to why this study is important as well as the scope and limitations of the data. Together with the discussion of conceptual, theoretical and the definition of terms, readers will have an understanding of what this study hoped to accomplish.

1.1 Background of the Study

Discourse, as defined by Van Dijk (2002) is a specific communicative event which includes written and oral aspects of communication. This means in every setting of human interaction, there are boundaries of what can be said regarding a certain topic. This applies to spoken discourse as well. However, spoken discourse is different from written discourse in terms of its production, which is in real-time. Things that are spoken will have permanent effect. Sinclair et al. (1992) describe spoken discourse as containing an aspect where speakers make mistakes for which there will be no way for them to 'erase' them as in written form. Stand-up comedy discourse, according to Schwarz (2010) however, is a spoken discourse intended solely to elicit laughter. It is defined as an act of telling jokes to a group of audience members in a specified venue. However, compared to other forms of humour, stand-up comedy, as put forth by Attardo (2001:62), is a meticulously scripted discourse similar to speeches, but differs from conversational humour where the jokes are often spontaneous. Mintz (1985) adds that modern stand-up comedy is a more relaxed, informal way of telling jokes that focuses on developing stories pertaining to a specific theme. McIlveny (2006) states stand-up comedy used to be performed exclusively to royal figures by court jesters. Such performance saw various stages of development during the 19th century, according to Marc (1989), and was widely performed in medical tents, where performers would utilize humour to sell medicine. According to Mintz (1985), stand-up comedy is also performed in Broadway shows and at other variety clubs.

The popularity of stand-up comedy later led to multiple studies dedicated to uncovering its structural properties and discourse functions. Hockett (1960) has laid out the fundamental structure followed by most jokes in stand-up comedy, which is called the Internal Structure of Jokes, suggesting that there are three stages in every act of joke-telling: Build-up, pivot and punch line. Sacks (1974) adds that the structure of jokes functions as mechanism to allow a joke to flow the same way a story does, which maximises the comprehensive value of a joke and at the same time builds towards the punch line, which serves as the climax in every joke.

Moving on from stand-up comedy's textual structures, Toikka and Vento (2000) also add that stand-up comedy is filled with word plays and crude jokes. Such devices are used by the stand-up comedians to tease the audience or a third party in order to create humour. In this study, the jokes in question are limited to political and ethnic jokes, where such crudeness would stir strong, negative backlash.

To define political jokes, Wilson (2008) states that they are a type of joke directed towards governmental practises and policy-making. He argues that political jokes are told in order to form political thoughts, which can be regarded a form of activism in its own right. Ethnic jokes, however, employ ethnic stereotypes to ridicule or defend a certain ethnic group. According to Jakoaho and Marjamäki (2012), ethnic jokes are mostly based on commonly known stereotypes. Stereotypes are described by them as an energy-saving tool, a point of reference about an ethnic group that the hearer can instantly relate to. According to Mindiola et al. (2002:36), stereotypes are formed by the media, social research and racism. Therefore, they note that not all stereotypes are positive in nature. In fact, Niemann et al. (1998) claims that stereotypes are generally negative and may lead to stigmatization.

Despite the crudeness of jokes, Schwarz (2010) adds that in order for jokes to be accepted by the audience, they have to be delivered in a way that does not violate the audience's face. A person's face in this context is defined by Brown and Levinson (1987) as the public self-image that every person wants for himself. Jokes such as ethnic and political jokes also require similar strategies in order to gain acceptance from the audience in order to be effective.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Previously established by Toikka and Vento (2000), stand-up comedy is a genre which is crude in nature, due to popularity of topics regarding social problems. Therefore, in providing social criticism in terms of ethnicity and politics, comedians will generally resort to face-threatening acts that target the group that is being made fun of in the joke. This means that there will be instances where the comedians 'attack' the audience and risk backlash, a term in which a comedian faces negative reception due to the things he has said. According to Leech (1983), equilibrium must be maintained in any communicative events to avoid any disruption and maintain friendly relations.

In relation to current Malaysian social and political climate, Azizudin (2007) argues that in order for politicians in Malaysian to retain their and influence, censorship laws were created to suppress remarks that are deemed inflammatory within the media. To make matters even more pressing, while jokes that deal with ethnicity and politics are certainly popular in Malaysia, there are no recent studies that focus on Malaysian stand-up comedy despite the strict censorship laws imposed.

In addition, a joke can be seen as confusing if it is not within the audience's background knowledge. To elaborate, comedians have the need to employ their joke structures in order to make their jokes comprehensible. By doing so, comedians will

have an idea in creating a joke structure that includes background information to the issue they want to discuss.

There has been small-scale research done by Selma (2014) in examining the structures of Indonesian stand-up comedy jokes in light of Hockett's (1960) Internal Structure of Jokes that classifies parts of a joke into its respective categories, which are build-up, pivot and punchline. However, there is a research gap in terms of structural properties of ethnic and political jokes as the aforementioned study does not classify the types of jokes during analysis. The research has concluded that comedians often do not use the internal structure of jokes in every joke. There is no conclusive explanation as to why they choose to employ or ignore the internal structure of jokes.

Double (1991) argues that humour in general should, in fact, be regarded as an ever-changing component of cultural discourse. According to Jakoaho and Marjamäki (2012), ethnic jokes are historically regarded as a field for the racially-dominant groups to ridicule minority groups. He adds that most ethnic jokes in the past were told from the point of view of the racially dominant with the intent to point out negative stereotypes of the target group.

In Jakoaho and Marjamäki's (2012) study in the use of ethnic jokes in stand-up comedy, he conducts critical discourse analysis on American ethnic jokes and determines whether or not the jokes dominantly weaken or strengthen stereotypes. However, the study only focuses on American ethnic jokes, in which the results cannot be applied to Malaysian stand-up comedy. Also, the study is designed to address the functions of ethnic jokes in America and not the use of politeness strategies.

As for political jokes in stand-up comedy, they carry similar limitations to ethnic jokes, which is due to the lack of coverage in the Malaysian perspective. There has been a study on political stand-up comedy jokes by Wilson (2008), where he examines political jokes as a form of political activism. In this study, he seeks to prove that political jokes are effective in forming political thoughts, and may work as an ideological tool. However, this study only focuses on the functions of political jokes as an ideological object, and leaves out the technical uses of politeness strategies in avoiding backlash that may come from comedians' controversial views towards a certain political party or event. This can be considered as an important issue to be discussed in this study, due to the fact that the Malaysian government practises strict censorship laws in various media such as television shows, publications and performances. Previously established by Azizudin (2007), the ruling party in Malaysia regulates media freedom to ensure that the ruling party and its leaders retain their political power. Therefore, jokes that focus on Malaysian politics are bound to contain criticism which may challenge such censorship guidelines imposed by the Malaysian government.

Although there were studies in Malaysia that discuss politeness theory, there is a research gap in this theory with regards to the setting of stand-up comedy. These aforementioned studies such as Najla and Anuar's (2012) study on politeness strategies in online chatrooms and Ali Hassan, Hassan and Taha's (2002) study on politeness

strategies among different genders' speech use conversational analysis, and there is yet to be a content analysis on politeness theory in the perspective of Malaysian stand-up comedy. The findings of this study may, in extension, benefit the field of public speaking and political speech in order to help speakers avoid backlash from their utterances pertaining to ethnicity and politics.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The first objective of this study is to identify the differences in joke structure between Malaysian political and ethnic jokes using Hockett's (1960) Internal Structure of Jokes. This study also attempts to investigate the politeness strategies derived from Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory used in political and ethnic jokes and how they are used alongside rhetorical devices outlined by Schwarz (2010).

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the rhetorical structure of ethnic jokes and political jokes?
2. What are the dominant politeness strategies used in ethnic and political jokes?
3. How are rhetorical devices used alongside politeness strategies in order to mitigate backlash?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study would benefit the field of public speaking in presenting unconventional information using politeness strategies extracted from Malaysian stand-up comedy jokes in this study. Hence, this research would be able to shed light on the linguistic aspects employed in Malaysian stand-up comedy in order to avoid backlash while putting the message across. In the field of humour, this study also sheds light on how ethnic and political stand-up comedy performances are different in terms of their internal structures of jokes. This would determine the level of familiarity that the Malaysian audience has towards the issues discussed, evident from inclusion or exclusion of build-ups in jokes. This study also improves public understanding of the ability of literary criticism found in humour, by offering an academic look into Malaysian stand-up comedy, a topic that is typically overlooked in the academic setting.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The present study was limited to only Malaysian stand-up comedy performances. These jokes were performed at different venues, time and by different comedians so the data gathered would be of a wider focus rather than depending on the style of a single performer.

There are many different types of jokes. However, this study only investigated the text structure and politeness strategies in ethnic and political jokes. The rationale for choosing only political and ethnic jokes is because they provide social commentary which may be deemed offensive to the audience, justifying the use of politeness

strategies. Such social commentary, on the other hand, cannot be found in jokes that are meant solely for entertainment and release such as one-liners and crude jokes.

Furthermore, the content of the ethnic jokes selected must target one or more ethnicities in terms of nationality and race in Malaysia, with the content itself including elements of ridicule or expressions of pride through the use of ethnic stereotypes. Political jokes that are selected must feature social criticism pertaining to the current Malaysian political discourse and provide commentary on political events or scandals.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the theory of humour and politeness theory in order to lay the groundwork on what this study is attempting to accomplish. Therefore, Raskin's (1985) Script-based Semantic Theory of Humour and Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory are discussed. These theories are instrumental in answering the research questions posed, which oversee the textual structure in stand-up comedy and politeness strategies used by Malaysian comedians in ethnic and political jokes to mitigate offensive issues raised.

1.7.1 Raskin's (1985) Script-Based Semantic of Humour

Raskin (1985) postulates that humour falls under a linguistic script, and in order to produce laughter, a joke must follow these specific conditions:

- The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different [semantic] scripts
- The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite. The two scripts with which the text is compatible are said to overlap fully or in part on this text.

Such characteristic is known as Script-based Semantic Theory of Humour (SSTH). This theory proposes that in order for a joke to be funny, there must be an opposing script, known as the secondary script, to the primary script. To explain, a primary script is regarded as the obvious situation set by the comedian, whereas the secondary script is another interpretation that directly challenges the situation first introduced in the primary script. Raskin (1985) illustrates the point with this joke:

"Is the doctor at home?" the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. "No," the doctor's young and pretty wife whispered in reply. "Come right in."

Raskin (1985) explains that the joke provided follows two scripts, which are *doctor* and *lover*. The first half of the joke deals with the patient going to see the doctor, whereas the second part deals with the promiscuity of the doctor's wife. Note that the joke would not make sense if the audience is fixated on only the *doctor* script. Therefore, from this example, Raskin (1985) offers that script opposition is often binary in nature,

such as life (death), rich (poor) and so on. He also explains that comedians have to provide a clever connection between the two scripts in order to maximise humour, and not merely combining two oppositional scripts to pass it off as a joke.

1.7.2 Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory

Brown and Levinson (1987) derived the term 'face' from Goffman (1967). The term 'face' means the public self-image that speakers and listeners maintain in conversations. Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that face must be properly maintained in every form of interaction. This is broken down into two aspects of face: Positive face and negative face. Positive face is associated with the need 'to be understood and approved' (Brown and Levinson, 1987) whereas negative face is associated with the need to 'maintain claims of territory and self-determination'. To further explain this theory, in every communication, face-threatening acts (FTAs) are bound to follow. Such acts are threats to the positive or negative face of the members in the interaction, which are also usually mitigated by 'redressive strategies', known as positive politeness and negative politeness strategies.

Brown and Levinson (1987) state that positive politeness strategies are approach-based, in which speakers treat the hearer as a member of their group or a friend and seek to acknowledge the hearer as a person that is liked or admired. This shows that speakers share at least some of the hearer's wants and interests, and displays the fondness that the speaker has for the hearer so that the potential face threat is minimized. Subsequently, negative politeness strategies are avoidance-based, which means speakers will strive not to cross into the hearer's personal territories and his 'right to non-distraction'. Negative politeness is characterized by a sense of formality, dressed by the speaker's apologies for interfering with the hearer's personal business.

1.7.2.1 Politeness Strategies

Comedians often tell jokes that are derogatory by nature, but in order for the jokes to be humorous, they need to be accepted by the audience according to their wants and face needs (Schwarz, 2010). They also need to adhere to censorship guidelines in order for their jokes to not be seen as a hate speech. In order to do that, comedians often employ linguistic strategies in an attempt to soften up the derogatory remarks found in the jokes. The present study explores Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory in order to relate such strategies to the way that comedians mitigate backlash from their jokes. According to Brown and Levinson (1987) there are four main politeness strategies associated with different payoffs that the speaker desires: Bald on-record, off-record, positive politeness and negative politeness.

Brown and Levinson (1987) associated such payoffs in regard to politeness strategies employed by speakers according to the outcome desired. The discussion below relates how the politeness strategies are utilised in stand-up comedy. First, the definition of each politeness strategy will be provided, and a discussion on each of their payoffs will then be made.

- 1) **Bald on-record:** This strategy refers to utterances that do not utilize any redressive actions. For example, a direct order such as ‘close the door!’ does not put into account any face threats that might be done to the hearer. The payoffs of such a strategy include credits to the speaker for honesty, averting the risk of misunderstanding due to its directness, with this portraying the speaker as someone who is not a manipulator. Bald on-record possesses a characteristic which employs no redressive strategies but rather direct statements. An example of bald on-record can be seen in this joke:

*There’s a lot of nationalities here, are there any Singaporeans here or not?
Good, screw them because – Singaporeans, worthless people.*

In the opening of this ethnic joke, the comedian directly insults the Singaporeans by saying that they are **worthless** without any redressive actions. In this joke, it functions as an indicator of the topic that he is about to discuss -making fun of Singaporean people.

- 2) **Off-record:** This strategy allows the speaker to avoid taking responsibility for his utterances by making the hearer interpret what he said. For example, a person who wants his friend to turn up the air-conditioner could say ‘It’s hot in here!’ in order to let his friend to respond, ‘Oh, I’ll turn up the air-conditioner then’. This strategy allows the hearer to get credit for being generous and cooperative by responding to the speaker. The payoffs of this strategy are the non-coercive stance taken by the speaker so as not to make his utterance seem too face-threatening and, by being indirect, the speaker gives the hearer credit for being cooperative. Characteristics which are associated with the off-record strategy include giving hints and clues rather than a direct statement. It is contradictive, incomplete, rhetorical, metaphorical and vague. It can be used to presuppose and understate. The joke below displays examples of off-record strategy.

*I’m very emotional about this, because you all know, right, **the past few weeks Malaysia has been through some very trying times**. Malaysia has been through some tense periods right, we’ve been very stressed, all Malaysians right? But I think, and I don’t know if you all agree with me, I think all of us: **Malays, Chinese, Indians or whatever, all of us Malaysians must start to move on with our lives**. You guys agree or not? I know we all are upset, I know we all are upset, we never expected this to happen. We never **expected Alex Ferguson to leave Manchester United**. But we have to move on.*

In this joke, the comedian, the comedian is referencing the upsetting result of the 13th Malaysian General Election, evident through the use of the phrase **the past few weeks**. It is made obvious to the audience due to the election being recent at the time of his performance. In that election, he remarks that the citizens had been through **some very trying times** because the government party had won the majority states despite the citizens’ protests. Note that he doesn’t use any keywords that directly relate to the

election, and is made humorous and incongruous by relating that event to the retirement of Sir Alex Ferguson, the football coach of **Manchester United**.

- 3) **Positive Politeness:** This strategy is utilized by the speaker in order to place himself on the hearer's side as someone who shares his wants, seeks agreement and gives sympathy to the hearer in order to minimize face-threatening acts. Brown and Levinson (1987) provide a scenario that serves as an example for this: a wife says 'let's get on with dinner' to a husband glued to the TV. This utterance is inclusive of both parties, as the wife suggests to her husband that 'they' should get on with dinner instead of watching TV. Speakers may also use the inclusive pronoun 'we' to display positive politeness. Characteristics associated with positive politeness include: exaggerated attention and interest in the hearer's wants and needs, seeking agreement and avoiding disagreement, presupposing and establishing a common ground, being optimistic and asserting reciprocity. The joke below shows an example of positive politeness.

*This is one thing about Malaysian people, **we have customs** – we have customs or etiquette or adab – adab – adat and adab or kastam dan etiket, whichever one you wanna say – we all have it. Malay people have it, Indian people have it, **Chinese people... They** – let's not say anything about Chinese people – **they're fine. They're just trying to be efficient** . They got **no time for table manners**, you know what I mean?*

The comedian uses the pronoun **we** in order to reconcile all major races as one entity, before singling out the Chinese people with the use of the different pronoun **they**, which is the first face threat in the joke. To mitigate the face threat, he shows understanding and solidarity by stating that they are just **trying to be efficient**, before delivering the second face threat targeted towards the Chinese people - that they have **no time for table manners**.

- 4) **Negative Politeness:** This strategy is utilized in order to not impose on the hearer, which means speakers that use this strategy will give deference to the hearer and beg forgiveness from the hearer because of his transgression in the hearer's business. This also allows the speaker to keep his social distance from the hearer, as opposed to positive politeness. For example, in formal situations, speakers may say, 'Sorry for bothering you, but...' before making his request in order to soften up the potential face-threatening act that follows. Speakers that employ negative politeness, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), often will be conventionally indirect, use questions and hedges, are pessimistic, minimize imposition to the hearer, give deference, apologize and nominalize. Below is a joke which employs negative politeness to mitigate face threat.

*I don't like to talk about stereotypes, I like to talk about facts, **you know?** Anyone can come up here – stereotypes. We've got some stereotypes. All Indian*

people come from Klang. That's not true, right? Some of them live in Jalan Gasing, okay? Keep it factual, you know?

In this ethnic joke that targets the Indian stereotype; the comedian begins the joke by minimizing the imposition that he doesn't **like to talk about stereotypes** before actually talking about stereotypes. In each face threat found in the joke, he carefully phrases his utterances with questions and hedges such as **right?**, **okay?** and **you know?** in order to make himself seem hesitant while delivering the punch line.

In conclusion, these four types of politeness strategies reveal the effects or payoff desired by the comedians, and are closely related to the face threat they are about to make.

1.8 Conceptual Framework

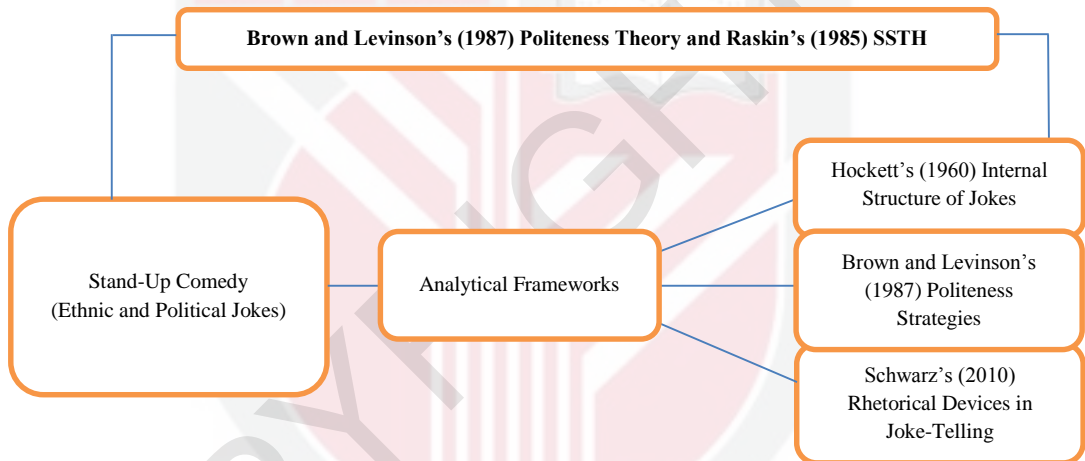


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework

In analysing the textual properties of the jokes, Hockett's (1960) Internal Structure of Jokes was utilized to determine the similarity or dissimilarity of structure between joke categories. This is to determine if the jokes use build-up for coherent delivery or if comedians rely solely on the audience's background knowledge in order to make sense. Next, content analysis was used to code data and categorize them based on the politeness strategies used to mitigate face threats found during readings of those data. These data were analysed with Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory to find out dominant politeness strategies used by Malaysian comedians to soften up their controversial views. Finally, Schwarz's (2010) Rhetorical Devices in Joke-Telling were used in conjunction with politeness strategies in order to examine the possible relationships they may have in mitigating backlash.

1.9 Definition of Terms

- 1) **Stand-up comedy:** A platform where a comedian performs humorous spoken discourse. It is difficult to find any interactional form in stand-up comedy such as in conversational form since stand-up comedy is an encounter between a single standing performer behaving comically, and/or saying funny things, directly to an audience, unsupported by way of costume, props, setting, or dramatic vehicle (Mintz, 1985). In this study, stand-up comedy is regarded as a routine made up of humorous narratives or jokes.
- 2) **Humour:** According to Wilson (1979), humour refers to a sense of amusement at an event which is perceived as absurd, illogical and incongruent. In this study, humour is regarded as the general way to elicit laughter.
- 3) **Ethnic jokes:** Rappoport (2005) defines an ethnic joke as one that includes all elements of ethnicity including race, religion, sexual identity and nationality. He adds that gender-related humour should be included in the ethnic category due to the same social motivation as other types of ethnic humour. In this study, ethnic humour comprises jokes that use stereotypes found not only in races, but nationalities in order to ridicule or to defend them.
- 4) **Political jokes:** Wilson (2008) defines political joke as a humorous narrative that “occurs within the realm of partisan politics and events”. He also extends this definition to include policies and practices by political figures as humorous topics. In this study, political humour deals with jokes with subversive or conservative qualities towards a political event, policy and practice.
- 5) **Joke:** A joke, according to Dynel (2009), is a form of verbal humour told in “conversations and published in collections”. It commonly comes in a specific structure that consists of a build-up, which offers background information regarding the joke topic, pivot, and the remark that creates incongruity or misunderstanding and punch line, which ties up the joke with a humorous remark (Hockett, 1960). It only functions to restore equilibrium when the listener of the joke finds it funny. Butler (1992) also mentions that a joke is a statement of belief that is not necessarily believed by the listener but rather known. In this study, a joke will be classified as a segment in which comedians perform humorous narratives in the form of build-up, pivot and punch line.
- 6) **Backlash:** Backlash, as defined by Merriam-Webster (2017), is a strong adverse public reaction against a social movement or speech. In this study, the term is used exclusively for the possible negative reaction towards stand-up comedy jokes delivered by comedians and how they mitigate it.

- 7) **Genre:** Genres are defined by Miller (1984) as “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations”. This means that genres are rhetorical measures taken by individuals in order to suit a certain event according to their norms. A genre is dictated by various forms of ‘identities’ assumed by individuals in order to fit into a certain mediated situation. In this study, the genre of stand-up comedy is discussed and examined.

1.10 Summary

This chapter outlined the research background of this thesis, along with accompanying research objectives, questions and the frameworks used to achieve the goals of the research. This research was also summed up in the form of a diagram, as seen in the Conceptual Framework section of this chapter.



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