

**HUMOUR IN MEETINGS: A STUDY OF POWER AND  
SOLIDARITY IN THE MALAYSIAN ACADEMIC CONTEXT**

**NOR AZIKIN BINTI MOHD OMAR**

**FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS  
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Name of Candidate: **Nor Azikin binti Mohd Omar**

Registration/Matric No: **TGB 090035**

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the linguistic features that describe the functions of humour associated with power and solidarity in a particular workplace settings referred to as NAS. The purpose of this study is to investigate the nature of humour that is manifested in tandem with the concept of power and solidarity in symmetrical and asymmetrical positions during academic management meetings. Moreover, the aim of the study is to ascertain the turn taking patterns accompanying humour in these respective meetings. The parameters of this study are confined to the different rankings of the participants who utilise humour either to be used for exercising power or building rapport in a hierarchical environment.

The data were recorded from four semiformal meetings at NAS with a total combination of 380 minutes and 189 seconds duration of time. Although the medium of instruction was primarily English Language, it was discovered that code switching in Malay occurred throughout the meetings. The age range of the participants ranged from 24-55 years old and they are all proficient in the English Language. The dominant ethnicity of the participants is Malay while there were only two participants who are Chinese and a native speaker of English from Canada.

All the four meetings were transcribed using Jariah Mohd Jan's (1999) transcription notation which was adapted from Jefferson's (1978) conventions. The adapted transcription highlights the distribution of turns between speakers, occurrences of

interruptions and the point when the prior speaker finishes his/her contribution in relation to the next speaker's turn (Jarrah Mohd Jan, 1999:226). The instances of humour were categorised using Hay's Taxonomy of Functions of Humour (1995) which mainly focuses on the two functions which are power and solidarity. The organisation of turn taking accompanying humour was analysed based on Sacks et al. Turn-Taking Model (1974).

The findings revealed that teasing was the most popular function of humour in the power and solidarity category. Teasing was the predominant strategy utilised by the academicians to enact power or to maintain camaraderie among the team members. On the other hand, conflict was the least popular type of humour that was associated with power play and share was the lowest type of humour produced by the participants which functioned as rapport building.

The data suggested that the organisation of turns which subsumed humour were basically adhering to the second rule of SSJ Model of Turn-Taking (1974). The rule demonstrated that turns were taken through self-selection where the members of the floor will select themselves in order to make their respective contributions. This rule was discovered as the most applied rule by the participants especially for those in higher status in their attempt to produce humour.

This study provides great insights that the production of humour in academic management meetings is influenced by the status or position that one occupies. Moreover, this study will certainly contribute to the existing body of local researches as well as it could be used to extend on future studies on power and solidarity in relation to production of humour.

## ABSTRAK

Kajian ini meneliti ciri- ciri linguistik yang menghuraikan fungsi humor yang dipengaruhi oleh dua faktor iaitu kuasa dan solidariti di dalam mesyuarat pengurusan akademik di tempat persekitaran kerja yang dirujuk sebagai NAS. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji sifat humor yang dimanifestasikan dengan konsep kuasa dan solidariti dalam kedudukan simetri dan tidak simetri. Selain itu, matlamat kajian ini juga adalah untuk menyiasat pola pengambilan giliran yang mengandungi humor di dalam mesyuarat pengurusan akademik. Parameter kajian ini adalah terhad kepada kedudukan peserta yang berbeza yang menggunakan humor sama ada bagi menjalankan kuasa atau membina hubungan baik dalam persekitaran hierarki.

Data linguistik bagi kajian ini dikumpulkan daripada empat mesyuarat separa rasmi yang telah direkod secara audio visual di NAS dengan kombinasi tempoh masa selama 380 minit dan 189 saat. Bahasa pengantar yang digunakan adalah Bahasa Inggeris dan kajian menunjukkan terdapat percampuran kod dalam Bahasa Melayu berlaku sepanjang mesyuarat berlangsung. Lingkungan umur peserta adalah dari 24-55 tahun dan mereka adalah penutur yang mahir dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Majoriti peserta adalah berbangsa Melayu manakala seorang peserta berbangsa Cina dan seorang lagi adalah penutur asli Bahasa Inggeris yang berasal dari Kanada.

Empat mesyuarat telah disalin menggunakan konvensi transkripsi Jariah Mohd Jan (1999) yang telah disesuaikan daripada konvensyen Jefferson (1978). Transkripsi ini menonjolkan

ambilan giliran antara penutur, pertindihan pertuturan, celahan dan saat dimana penutur sebelumnya selesai bercakap di mana saat itu berkaitan di dalam giliran penutur yang lain. Fungsi humor dikategorikan menggunakan *Hay's Taxonomy of Functions of Humour* yang telah dicadangkan oleh Hay (1995) yang memberi tumpuan tiga faktor yang mempengaruhi penggunaan humour iaitu kuasa, solidariti dan psikologi. Manakala *Sacks et al. Turn- Taking Model* oleh Sacks, Schegloff dan Jefferson (1974) telah digunakan sebagai asas dalam menganalisa data bagi pola pengambilan giliran yang mengandungi humor.

Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa humor yang dihasilkan di dalam mesyuarat pengurusan akademik tidak terkecuali digunakan untuk menunjukkan kuasa dan membina hubungan baik antara rakan sekerja. Status dan kedudukan tinggi di dalam organisasi mempengaruhi penggunaan humor yang dimanifestasi oleh konsep kuasa dan solidariti. Hasil kajian mendapati *teasing* sebagai strategi yang digunakan oleh para peserta untuk menunjukkan kuasa dan juga untuk membina hubungan baik dengan rakan sekerja. *Conflict* merupakan kategori humor yang paling kurang digunakan untuk menunjukkan kuasa manakala *share* ialah kategori humor yang paling sedikit dijumpai dan digunakan untuk mengekalkan hubungan baik bersama rakan sekerja.

Bagi pola pengambilan giliran yang mengandungi humor, dapatan kajian mendapati pola pengambilan giliran lebih kepada mematuhi peraturan kedua dalam *SSJ Model of Turn-Taking* (1974). Peraturan kedua ini menyatakan bahawa pengambilan giliran adalah melalui *self-selection* di mana penceramah yang lain akan mengambil giliran untuk bercakap selepas penceramah sebelumnya jika dia (penceramah sebelum) tidak membuat

pilihan siapa yang akan berinteraksi selepasnya. Peraturan ini dijumpai sebagai peraturan yang paling kerap dilaksanakan dalam cubaan untuk membuat humor oleh peserta peserta terutamanya bagi mereka yang menduduki status tinggi.

Kajian ini juga memberi pandangan bahawa penggunaan humor dalam mesyuarat pengurusan akademik adalah dipengaruhi oleh status atau ranking yang dipegang oleh seseorang. Adalah diharapkan dapatan daripada kajian ini akan menyumbang kepada kajian tempatan dan menggalakkan lagi kepada kajian lanjutan tentang kuasa dan solidariti melalui humor.

University of Malaysia



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**Nor Azikin binti Mohd Omar**

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Background of the Study

Research in humour from various disciplines such as psychology, management, anthropology, pragmatics and sociolinguistics are widely researched especially in Western countries. In Western countries, joking is a significant manifestation of conversational involvement since it represents an important way in which rapport is developed and maintained (Davies, 2003:1362), thus humour is regarded as a legitimate topic for serious investigation (Martineau, 1972).

One of the main aspects investigated is the functions of humour in specific social settings. As a component of workplace discourse, the functions of humour have been extensively studied in various workplace contexts such as in a hospital (Coser, 1960; Pizzini, 1991), school (Powell and Andersen, 1985), courtroom (Hobbs, 2007), fish market (Porcu, 2005), hotel kitchen (Lynch, 2010) and IT call centres (Taylor and Bain, 2003). Holmes and Marra (2002c) who studied humour as a determiner of workplace culture investigated the different types and styles of humour used in four different workplaces which were a factory, private commercial organisation, semi-public organisation and government department. The findings from the sociolinguistic perspective discovered that humour comprised positive and negative functions. Further, humour is termed paradoxical because of the dualistic functions it possesses (Lynch, 2005:25).



Research by the Wellington Language in the Workplace Project discovered that humour *provide[d] insights into the distinctive culture which develops in different workplaces* (Holmes and Marra, 2002c:1683). Their analysis suggested that different workplace settings have their own distinctive workplace norms based on the amount and styles of humour produced thus providing a basis for further research in establishing and identifying distinctive aspects of the culture of different communities (ibid.:1707). The project also discovered that humour is a relevant resource in workplace in the construction and management of power relationships and that humour works towards rapport building between work colleagues (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003:111). Humour is used by subordinates to subtly oppose authority meanwhile for the superiors; humour helps those in higher positions to appear less demanding while giving directives or making criticisms directed to subordinates (ibid.:111).

Besides, the use of humour as a tool to relieve pressure has provided a stress-free environment for workers to work effectively. Also, humour maintains solidarity since it facilitates maintaining positive relationship among people of different hierarchies in an organisation (ibid.:169). Hence, the findings from the Wellington Language in the Workplace Project show that humour imparts a channel of power play as well as maintains solidarity in the workplace setting.

## **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Humour has been recognised as an effective communication device that helps lighten the atmosphere. Its ability to amuse is widely known and its usefulness leads to several positive functions especially in mental and emotional relief.

Humour is pervasive, thus it is employed in most settings such as at home, in school and at workplaces to name a few. In a general setting where situation is tense, humour can be a cure to alleviate stress, provide mental break and control the situation. Humour is found to be useful in increasing attentiveness and acts as a communication tool between teachers and students (Powell and Andersen, 1985) as well as a 'survival' strategy to facilitate and overcome problems of teaching and learning tasks (Woods, 1983). Meanwhile in the workplace setting, humour is broadly used as a source to foster solidarity, fulfill free time and breaking the ice among people in different hierarchies (Holmes, 2000b) which Fairclough (2001:36) described as unequal encounters. According to Fairclough (2001), an unequal encounter refers to interaction between non-powerful people with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds with powerful people of higher status (ibid.:40).

With reference to daily basis-settings such as in-house meetings, humour is commonly used as a 'time- filler' (Holmes, 2000a) before the meeting starts or during short breaks and after the meeting ends. Besides, it is claimed that a chairperson uses a variety of devices to lighten a meeting and humour is found to be part of them (Kangasharju and Nikko, 2009). According to Revell (2007), humour is embedded in the openings and as topic-closing.

Yet, apart from the positive functions, humour also possesses negative functions that are often deemed to disrupt the flow of work, slow down productivity and waste time (Porcu, 2005). In a workplace setting, humour functions as a boundary marker that is covertly used to assign colleagues who conform or deviate from shared social norms. Humour can be a double-edged sword where it functions to involve and stray participants from 'in group' members during discussions.

Revell (2007) who investigated functions of humour in business meetings discovered that humour fosters solidarity among participants who constructed collaborative humour with converging speech styles. Meanwhile, speakers whose speech style is divergent from the 'in group' members were segregated from the team through humour. Revel's study concluded that humour not only signalled solidarity but also collusion especially among those who have different shared norms.

Besides, humour can be employed to control over certain individual or group members' behaviour. In the workplace context, humour is used to perform directives whereby the superior intends to control the behaviour of his/her subordinates and also to gain compliance (Holmes and Marra, 2002b). Conflict may arise if there is opposition from subordinate. This demonstrates the negative functions of humour where it is used to control, thus, creating a conflict and causing tension in situations involving social stratification. Irony, satire, sarcasm, caricature and parody are the discourse strategies used to express the conflict function of humour (Stephenson, 1951).

It is clear at this juncture, that humour is used to fulfill various communication goals. Some people may perceive and comprehend the underlying implicit message while others might misinterpret and get offended. The failure to notice the speaker's intended meaning leads to undesirable consequences since humour is paradoxical and incongruent. Thus, a basic knowledge of how humour functions will help interlocutors identify the intended meaning behind the humour directed to them. For the purpose of this study, the researcher aspires to investigate the functions of humour in interaction in a specific Malaysian workplace and the manifestation of power and solidarity in humour occurring in academic management meetings from a sociolinguistic perspective. The factor that contributes to power play and solidarity will be based on the positions of the participants which in this case would be junior and senior lecturers in a hierarchical environment.

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

The objective of this study is to examine and describe the functions of humour employed by academicians in semi-formal meetings. Specifically this study intends to study the concept of power and solidarity that are manifested in humour within a particular context which is during semi-formal academic meetings. The study will focus on humour in meetings which provides opportunities for the participants who are academicians either to enact power or build rapport. The factor that influences the exercise of power and rapport building through humour will particularly draw on the different positions of the participants i.e. in asymmetrical and symmetrical interactions. According to Sollit-Morris (1997:83), asymmetrical interaction involves greater entitlements to those who are of higher status and thus they tend to control the interactional processes of the talk. Symmetrical

relationship, on the other hand is an interaction between people of similar ranks (see Jariah Mohd Jan, 1999).

For the purpose of this study, the definition put forth by Martineau (1972:114) will be referred to identify the instances of humour.

*Humo[u]r is conceived generically to be any communicative instance which is perceived as humo[u]rous by any of the interacting parties.* (ibid.)

In simple words, humour in this study is recognised as utterances that make the audience laugh. The intention of speakers to appear humorous is identified based on verbal cues as well as the context (Hay, 1995) in order to support the funniness of the utterances.

Further, the study aims to ascertain the turn-taking patterns accompanying humour in a particular workplace setting which in this case are academic meetings.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

In order to achieve the research objectives of this study, the research questions that guide the study are constructed as follows:

- a. What are the functions of humour in tandem with the manifestation of power and solidarity in academic management meetings?
- b. What are the turn-taking patterns accompanying the production of humour among academicians during their academic management meetings?

#### 1.4 Significance of the Study

Humour in Malaysia is rarely discussed as it is very much an unexplored area. Sociological research in the western world however has identified broad functions of humour such as identification, differentiation, control and resistance. Communication humour research on the other hand focuses more closely on specific types of humour producing communicative functions such as to release boredom and tease (Lynch, 2002:431). The layperson views humour as having the sole function of amusing others and themselves, unaware of the various other functions it actually holds. An extensive amount of literature from the West also has discovered that humour is more than just entertainment and that it is used to convey explicit and implicit message within a conversation.

Thus, it is worth investigating the nature of humour occurring in the workplace context to discover the various functions it holds. For that reason, this study would be useful as it aspires to provide knowledge on the linguistic aspects of humour and how it operates in an institutional setting.

Jariah Mohd Jan (1999) in her study of power and solidarity in the Malaysian *Global* talk show found that in each panel discussion, the person with the lowest status received the least turns and talk-time. This suggests that there are possibilities that the participants in higher position dominate and thus could be so with the production of humour in meetings as well. Therefore, the present study hopes to gain insights in understanding the manifestation of power and solidarity in academic meetings through the use of humour.

Further, the present study also intends to contribute to the existing body of local literature and fulfill the void in the current research since research on humour is relatively unknown and an unexplored area in the Malaysian context.

### **1.5 Scope and Limitations**

This study primarily focuses on the linguistic forms that describe the functions of humour associated with power and solidarity in academic management meetings. Besides, the study also describes the organisation of turn-taking in tandem with the production of humour in meetings. The parameters of this study are confined to the different positions of the participants who utilise humour either for exercising power or for rapport building in asymmetrical and symmetrical relationships. Thus, other mechanics of humour and factors related to humour that may influence power play and building solidarity through humour will not be covered in the study.

The entire corpuses comprised in the study are naturally occurring data of departmental meetings among academicians. The data were video recorded and the faculty involved is termed as NAS for the purpose of this study. The present study confines the parameters of the research to the discussion during the specific meetings held only at NAS and any interaction outside this particular context will not be described.

Finally, since the study uses a small corpus of data that are collected from one learning institution in Terengganu, the findings therefore cannot be generalised to other learning institutions and workplace interactions in Malaysia. Nevertheless, the study may be

replicated in different settings by other researchers to explore other aspects of humour that are not discussed in this study.

## **1.6 Definition of Terms**

This section explains and elaborates the various terminologies that are significant throughout the whole course of this study. Although these terms have various definitions, their explanations are as indicated in the following:

***Meeting*** refers to an occasion where people meet together to discuss or to decide something because they have arranged it, or by chance (Oxford Dictionary, 8<sup>th</sup> ed., 2010). A meeting is a tool of communication to gather information for monitoring progress, reviewing the organisation's work, setting plans and budgets and deciding matters related to policy (Jasnawati Jasmin, 2008).

***Repressive humour*** refers to humour that is employed by the superiors to maintain power. This type of humour maintains the face of the interlocutor as it minimises the face threatening acts and softens speech acts such as directives and criticisms (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003).

***Subversive humour*** refers to humour that is expressed by the less powerful people as a socially acceptable means of challenging or subverting authority, whether informal or formal, explicit or implicit (Holmes and Marra, 2002b).



**Power** refers to as either power or authority of one speaker over another in an interaction or an equal encounter. Power governs asymmetrical relationship where one participant is subordinate to another (Jariah Mohd Jan, 1999:11).

**Solidarity** refers to the concept of equivalent power and set of relations which are symmetrical (Brown and Gilman, 1960:258).

**Symmetrical** refers to closeness and it is associated with or linked to solidarity whereby members in a group share a common interest, unite and operate more solidly as a unit (Jariah Mohd Jan, 1999:12).

**Asymmetrical** refers to distancing and it is very much related to power which are usually held by the person in the one-up position (Jariah Mohd Jan, 1999:11).

**Conjoint humour** refers to humour that is developed between people who know each other well. Also known as jointly constructed humour, people extend and build on one another's humorous comments when they are familiar with each other and with each other's sense of humour (Holmes, 2006:33).

**Turn** refers to the contribution of a single speaker to a developing spoken discourse. In conversation analysis, the management of turns represents an important area of investigation, including how turn is relinquished, floor-holding device, how speaker may allocate next turn and how a hearer knows when it is appropriate to take the floor (Jackson, 2007:80).

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses literature works conducted in the area of humour. Aspects such as theories and functions of humour as well as turn-taking patterns related to power and solidarity are examined. It is necessary for the purpose of this research to recognise works of Malaysian research on humour in order to gain a better perspective of how humour functions to foster solidarity and also to be applied for the purpose of enacting power within the Malaysian workplace context.

#### 2.1 Defining Humour

Vast literature on humour has proven that to define humour is not an easy task (Keith-Spiegel, 1972; Holmes, 2000b; Cruthirds, 2006). Though humour is part of people's daily lives, Wilson (1979) stated that the definition of humour seems to defy examination. Keith-Spiegel (1972:5) stated that many statements and definitions are actually *descriptions* of conditions under which humour may be experienced rather than attempt to *explain* what humour is. Meanwhile, Hay (1995) concluded from her research on humour that the degree of funniness of an utterance defined by past research depended either on the speaker's intention or the audience's interpretation.

It is claimed that incongruity has been consistently cited as a sufficient or necessary cause of humour and the general proposition in a joke is the opposition, conflict or contradiction of the components within a joke itself (Wilson, 1979:9). Incongruity is defined as a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in a joke. It is a concept which accounts well for the most obvious structural feature of jokes and the surprise in the punchline (Shultz, 1976:12). This generalisation is particularly true based on definitions used by scholars from many of the past researches in humour which identified incongruity as the most popular explanation of humour.

In focusing on the definition of humour that recognised incongruity as its main criteria, Suls (1972:82) stated that the recipient encounters an incongruity when experiencing humour. Incongruities lie in the punch lines; where the recipient finds a definition, fact or experience to reconcile the incongruous part (ibid.:83). Suls further noted that incongruity on how a joke ends refers to how much the punch line violates the recipients' expectation and it is one of the factors that contribute to the funniness of a humour (ibid.:92).

Another definition is from Martineau (1972:114) who combined the importance of speakers' intention and audience's response by stating that that *humour is conceived generically to be any communicative instance which is perceived as humorous by any of the interacting parties* which Hay (1995) claimed is more comprehensive, rather than an interpretation that depended on either speaker's intention or audience's responses.

Meanwhile, scholars who concentrated solely on analysing audience's responses have simply defined humour as something that can make somebody laugh or smile (Ross,

1997:1). Cruthirds (2006:34) in *The Impact of Humour on Mediation* stated that humour is a form of communication that is intended to elicit laughter. Wilson (1979:2), on the other hand treated “joke” and “humour” as synonymous and used these terms to refer to any stimulation that evokes amusement and funny experiences.

Based on the various definitions stated earlier, it is clear that past research has not confined to only one definition of humour and that the definition of humour somehow can be a confusing issue. Hay (1995) stated that it is crucial for researchers to have a clear view of what humour means so that the readers are assured of the term “humour” when it is referred to in any study. For the purpose of this study, the definition put forth by Martineau (1972) will be used to identify the instances of humour (see Section 1.2, Chapter 1).

Though the definition by Martineau is not inclusive of all types of responses of humour, yet the definition is considered apt enough to be applied to the corpus intended to be analysed in this study.

## **2.2 Theories of Humour**

There are three major humour theories that are widely described by most authors in humour research namely superiority, incongruity and relief. These three theories explain the purposes of individuals applying humour in their everyday lives. Theorists have noted that none of these theories is in fact adequate to provide a general theory of laughter; however it is argued that each theory provides a helpful framework for understanding the existence of humour and laughter (Rushing and Barlow, 2006:3). This study will briefly

elaborate on the notion of these theories which has been widely used in several literature reviews especially in the fields of communication and psychology.

### **2.2.1 Superiority Theory**

The superiority theory of humour originates from the insight that laughter often seems to accompany the feeling of superiority towards some other person or situation. Thomas Hobbes (1651), the famous superiority theorist claimed that humour arises from a “sudden glory” which is achieved by observing infirmities of others and comparing them with the “eminency” in ourselves (cited in Keith-Spiegel, 1972:7). The “sudden glory” is referred to the awareness that he/she is better than others thus humour, joy and victory are celebrated by laughing at others’ misfortune (Keith-Spiegel, 1972). Hostility, superiority, malice, aggression, derision or disparagements are the concepts derived from this theory (Raskin, 1985:36).

In the case of rectifying, superiority humour is used towards the people who step outside of societal norms by manipulating the power one has over others. This form of humour gives excitement and pleasure when degrading and suppressing people who are in a weaker position.

### **2.2.2 Incongruity Theory**

The incongruity theory is probably the most popular explanation of humour because of its inappropriateness, disharmony and impropriety resulting in amusement (Feinberg, 1978:2). Pollio (1983:226) observed that all the theories of humour seem to recognise the

“unexpectedness” or at least “suddenness” which is an important aspect for situations to evoke laughter and smiling.

Incongruity is the recognition that something is inconsistent with the expected rational nature of the perceived environment (Lynch, 2002:428). The incongruity theory suggests that people laugh at certain things because of its inappropriateness with the usual patterns, thus it results in amusement. The main feature of this theory is ambiguity, paradox, dissimilarity (Raskin, 1985:31), unexpectedness, illogical and the element of surprise which causes a punchline. The punchline is the point where a joke lies.

According to Suls (1972:82), the incongruity theory emphasises on cognitive abilities and psychology for one to grasp humour. In this relation, one should be equipped with necessary mental capacity to be able to comprehend the incongruities of humour. Lynch (2002) explains that incongruity humour is cognitively based because it emphasises the thoughts and perceptions of a person towards an event, individual and symbol in comparison to what is considered typical.

This suggests that incongruity depends on experience and expectations (Morreall, 1983) and proves that responses and perception of incongruity humour is situationally and relationally driven (Lynch, 2002). The ability to appreciate and experience the incongruity of humour may lead to smiling and laughter meanwhile the failure to resolve the incongruity in the joking situation leads to confusion and no laughter (Rothbart, 1976:38).

### **2.2.3 Relief Theory**

Consistent with its name, the humour in this category serves to release stress and tension by laughing and joking. Spencer (1860) who first discovered relief humour suggested that laughter serves to release surplus energy which is also known as repressed energy termed by Freud (1905).

The basic principle of this theory is that laughter provides psychological support, reduce nervousness and supplies supremacy energy in tense condition. As a result, the use of humour in a stressful situation lessens the tension and assists people get back to stable state after a struggle, pressure and strain (Raskin, 1985).

According to Moran and Massam (1997:7), humour and laughter are also important contributors especially in emergency work since it helps workers manage with their cognitions, stress reactions during their emergency work and provides an atmosphere that facilitates performance. Coser (1960:180) equated humour to a 'safety-valve' since it provides relief from the mechanical routine in a hospital setting. Hence, Moran and Massam's as well as Coser's interpretations revealed that humour functions to cope with pressure as relief takes place when a joke liberates people from an inhibition (Raskin, 1985).

### **2.3 Functions of Conversational Humour**

Many studies on humour have been investigated from various disciplines namely sociolinguistics (Hay, 1995, 2000; Davies, 2003), pragmatics (Arfeen, 2009; Robinson and Lovin, 2001; Holmes, 2006), psychology (Scott, 2009), advertising (Weinberger and

Gulas, 1992) and management in a variety of contexts (Graham, 2010) such as in classrooms, hospitals, workplaces and hotels to name a few.

A study by Miller (1967) who studied the social functions of humour in Chippewa tribal council meetings discovered that humour functions to maintain solidarity, establish relationship with outsiders and help to relieve tension. Miller claimed that mutual ribbing among members of the council maintains positive relationship and establish friendly relationship with other participants. It appeared that government officials and the outsiders involved in the meeting had to gain trust and confidence of the council in order to be approved (ibid.:267).

On the other hand, it was discovered that humour was also utilised as a subtle means to comment on a suggestion, proposal or decision since Miller's findings revealed that no participants directly made opposed to the particular matters discussed. In fact humour helped ease the pressure that was derived from the issue discussed (O'Quin and Aronoff, 1981:269). Miller (1967) concluded that humour functioned in Chippewa tribal council meeting to release tension and fulfill the communication purpose and stressed that the context in which jokes occurred is important to determine the effects of the jokes (ibid.:266).

Apart from that, humour was also identified as a technique of social influence. O'Quin and Aronoff (1981) conducted a study between a buyer and seller to discover the influence of humour in bargaining. Four members who consisted of the experimenter, a confederate and two observers were assigned to make a bargain on a fake painting with potential buyers



and to reach an agreement on the price of the painting (O'Quin and Aronoff, 1981:351). For the purpose of the study, humour was tested and used throughout the negotiation and price bidding in order to persuade buyers to buy the painting. The results established that the subjects who received a demand accompanied by humour made a greater financial concession than no-humour subject. The findings of O'Quin and Aronoff suggested that humour can be utilised to gain compliance and influence others in interpersonal negotiation (ibid.:354).

Lynch (2010) who conducted an ethnography research in a hotel kitchen discovered that kitchen humour that is produced by a group of chefs (re)produced and transformed the social organisation of the hotel. The study that was conducted for a year revealed that humour maintained the in-group identity of chefs and helped the participants to perform work effectively. In Lynch's study, humour is used to transform the unwanted behaviour of in-group members. Lynch argued that being direct might be offensive to other people, thus humour is subtly used to reduce the impact of being rude. The study concluded that peer teasing was used to distance undesired work practices and in so doing encouraged in-group members to conform to the group's preferred meanings (ibid:153).

In a workplace setting, humour is employed to promote social cohesion and solidarity among colleagues (Holmes, 2006). Anderson (2005) claimed that humour is fun and joyful because it plays an important role in the empowerment of employees. Apart from that, humour is widely used to improve interpersonal skills in teams (Miller, 1996), get things done, enhance productivity (Arfeen, 2009), construction of leadership (Holmes, 2007), lessen the influence of differences in asymmetrical relationships among the

conversationalists, reduce stress in tense conditions (Kangasharju and Nikko, 2009), alleviate conflict, end arguments and broach touchy topics (Norrick and Spitz, 2010). As such, it is clear that humour has various positive functions in a workplace rather than just being used as a tool of entertainment.

However, when humour functions as teasing associated with power whereby it creates conflict, humour is no longer effective as a uniting device, but causes separation and division. This negative connotation of humour in the workplace was addressed by Holmes (2000b). Holmes mentioned that humour is often utilised by individuals in higher rank and directed to those people who are in the lower position than them. This act emphasises power differences in which superiors impose their authority on their subordinates.

There is also evidence that humour can foster conflict in interactions when it fails to fulfill its function (Hay, 1995;2000). Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (2006) defined it as risky humour while Hemmasi et al. (1994) defined it as aggressive humour. This type of humour derives negative feelings in interlocutors which results in humiliation, degradation and derision. Examples of humour which invites conflict to hearers are insults, unwelcome ethnic and sexist jokes (Clouse and Spurgeon, 1995). The negative effects of humour tend to distance the relationship among colleagues at a workplace thus affecting the performance of the workers.

Clearly, humour is multifunctional as it performs both positive and negative functions. Lynch (2005:37) termed humour as paradoxical because of its incongruities; as it can promote collegiality and divide people according to groups, reduce the hierarchical

asymmetry and at the same time challenge the authority, help things to get done at work but also used to signal mistakes of others. Hence, it is apparent that humour has a dualistic nature of functions which is either to foster solidarity or enact power; which would be investigated in this present study.

#### **2.4 Power and Solidarity**

Language is clearly a crucial means for enacting power (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003:3) that is manifested with the use of various discourse strategies. Generally, power in discourse is associated with people in high position who have the authority to perform power and dominate over those who are in lower hierarchies.

Tannen (1992:79) stated that power has to do with controlling others, involvement, resisting to be controlled and independence that is the desire not to be imposed on. She further asserted that power also has to do with registering social status since superior status entails the right to control and to resist being controlled (ibid.:79). Therefore, a person who is in a dominant position is said to have power over a conversation and constrain others' contributions in a discussion. This minimises the involvement of the subordinates of controlling the people of higher rank. Distance is created as the apparent asymmetrical power relationship exists between superiors and subordinates.

The concept of power need not only be applied solely to workplace interaction but also in social interactions such as between parent-child, teacher-student and doctor-patient interaction. The principle basically lies in the elements of asymmetrical relationships and unequal power.

Fairclough (2001:38) stated that powerful participants tend to control and constrain the contributions of non-powerful participants. He further stipulated that power is assigned to a particular group and those in a higher position do not constantly hold the power but they have to reassert their power. Thus, those in a lower position could try to conquest power (ibid.:57).

Holmes and Stubbe (2003) pointed that status is not the sole determiner for a person to 'do power' but it depends on the specific discourse context of any contribution. The particular topic of discussion may be relevant in identifying where power or authority lies in a particular section of talk, as well as how it is enacted (ibid.:5). This claim underpinned Foucault's (1977) argument (cited in Simpson and Mayr, 2010) who stated that the power that one possesses is not fixed, stable or inherited.

Besides, Locher (2004:31) argued that people in the lower status may also enact power over people with relatively greater status by controlling the topic discussed that is in his/her particular domain. Thus it is clear at this juncture, that power fluctuates and can be exercised either explicitly or implicitly by groups of people regardless of the status they hold in a hierarchical environment.

While power is related to a nonreciprocal relationship, solidarity is concerned with the concept of equivalent power and set of relations which are symmetrical (Brown and Gilman, 1960:258). According to Tannen (1993:167), solidarity is a similar concept to rapport which governs symmetrical relationship that is characterised by social equality and similarity. Solidarity is established by the common views and interests that the members

share among each other. This brings them closer and consequently promotes camaraderie within the group.

In a workplace interaction, solidarity is built by social activities such as social talk and the use of humour. It is claimed that humour is one way that is used to emphasise a sense of belonging to a particular community of practice as well as to express solidarity in the workplace (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003:169). Apart from its function to amuse, humour also functions to mitigate the effect of directives and criticisms. Humour can be also subtly used to challenge or oppose the superordinate in an acceptable way.

Although power signals dominance and solidarity implies closeness, Tannen (1993:167) asserted that these two elements entail each other. Tannen claimed that the attempts to dominate a conversation which is an exercise of power may actually be intended to establish rapport (ibid.:168). While solidarity emphasises on closeness, it also limits freedom and independence so it involves power play among the members. On the other hand, enacting power in discourse not only shows dominance but also signifies solidarity as it engages participants in relation to the speaker and interlocutor.

In relation to this current study, the presence of power and solidarity in an academic institution is seen as inextricably linked to humour that occurs in a workplace setting. Holmes and Stubbe (2003:109) stated that humour constructs and manages power relationship and on the other hand humour maintains camaraderie among colleagues. The assertion is parallel with Tannen's (1993) stand that any show of power and solidarity goes hand in hand since these two aspects are closely related.

## **2.5 Humour as Tool to ‘do power’**

Humour is perceived as a relevant resource in the construction and management of power relationship in workplace (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003:109). Many researchers have pointed out that humour acts as a linguistic device to enact power in the workplace. Generally, past studies distinguished two types of humour that demonstrated power play among colleagues in asymmetrical and symmetrical interactions among colleagues (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003; Holmes, 2000b; Marra, 2007). The two types of humour which functions as tool to enact power in hierarchical context are repressive and subversive humour.

### **2.5.1 Repressive Humour**

The first type of humour that is associated with power is called repressive humour. It can be identified as ‘repressive discourse’ (Sollit-Morris, 1997) which is a discourse of unequal power and functions to gain willing compliance, retain goodwill and reduce power imbalance in asymmetry talk, at least superficially (ibid.:82). Repressive humour, also known as coercive humour is directed downward by one who is superior in ranking to those who are subordinates to reduce the face threat of a directive, challenge or criticism (Holmes, 2000b).

By applying this type of humour, the superior appears less authoritarian while performing directives and more acceptable since the superior’s ‘do power’ is less explicit to reduce the emphasis on power differences. Hence, the relationship among people of different hierarchies is maintained since repressive humour reduces the possibilities of conflict because of the hedging effect it has.

A study by Arfeen (2009) who employed Brown and Levinson's *Politeness Theory* in analysing authentic business meetings found that repressive humour is used to downtone directives thus minimising the face threatening acts of the interlocutor. Their findings also revealed that humour often functioned to repress the subordinate and get the subordinate to conform to the orders made. This demonstrates how superior 'do power' is on people who are of a lower position. Sollit-Morris (1997) discovered several categories of humour within repressive discourse such as witticism, banter, abuse and sarcasm to name a few. Example 1 demonstrates the instance of repressive humour as stated in a study by Arfeen (2009).

Example 1

Context: Andy talks about about John's shift duties and the need for one of the staff members to be a standby. He asks Venice if she is willing to act as back up.

1. Andy: so, John will you come back on next Saturday ok between 8 and 10 ok + I need someone to standby + just in case [uh] +++++ Venice do you think you can [uh] [uh] prepare? I mean you don't have to come back. Just in case
2. Venice: [uh] ok
3. Andy: i mean, ok let's say +if John got something to do/ something important to do\
4. Venice: /you won't have anything to do\ [laughs]

(Arfeen, 2009:9)

Venice, who is of a higher hierarchical position than John, gives directives to John by implicitly stating John does not have anything to do, thus he can be a standby [line 4]. Venice is implicitly stating that she is not willing to work on the particular day and hence, Instead of giving directives, Venice is asserting her authority to get John to replace her [line 4]. Venice has employed humour to gain compliance and covertly makes John

conform to her request. Venice's use of humour [line 4] could be seen as a strategy of downtoning her directive (Arfeen, 2009:9).

Apart from that, repressive humour was also found to control the behaviour of other participants. Sollit-Morris (1997) in her study of teachers' departmental meetings discovered that humour was used to control the contribution of a speaker as well as the topic being discussed. Example 2 demonstrates the instance of repressive humour which was found in Sollit-Morris' study.

### Example 2

Context: School department meeting. Zeb is the Head of Department and Chair.

1. Zeb:           okay let's have a look at this agenda ++ exams right we've all got a copy of the third form  
                  [general laughter] what about the //fourth? \\
2. Bet:   // no        \\=
3. Bet:           =no ANN hasn't got one yet-/
4. Ann:           /-no I haven't [with fake American accent]: Mom:

(Sollitt- Morris, 1997:94)

Example 2 illustrates how a speaker constrained the contribution of another speaker. The corpus was recorded from a school departmental meeting wherein a teacher contested one's contribution who made an attempt to speak for her [line 4]. In this meeting, Zeb was the head of the Mathematics' department while Bet and Ann were ordinary members.

Bet takes it upon herself to answer for Ann, which Ann clearly does not appreciate. Instead of overtly telling Bet that she does not want Bet to speak for her, Ann agrees with Bet then calls her 'mom' in a silly voice. 'Moms' speak for children, and 'moms' have a higher



status in relation to their children. By addressing Bet as ‘mom’, which she is patently not, Ann is able to undermine Bet’s interference (Sollit-Morris, 1997:94).

With these examples demonstrated above, it can be concluded that humour is directed downwards by those with a higher status at those with a lower status with the intention of subjugating the behaviour and contribution as well as to retain conformity with those who are inferior in status.

### **2.5.2 Subversive Humour**

The second type of humour that is manifested to impose power is subversive humour which is also known as the “dark side” of humour (Holmes and Marra, 2002:2b). This humour is utilised to question, challenge and subvert the authority of someone who is superior. While repressive humour is used to repress subordinates, subversive humour is a strategy employed by the subordinates to implicitly convey negative or critical message to their superiors. This way, the subordinates appear less defiant or rebellious in expressing disagreement (ibid.). Example 3 is an example of subversive humour as stated in a study by Holmes and Marra (2003).

#### Example 3

Context: Project team member (acting as chair of this meeting) calls his manager, Clara to perform order.

1. Sandy: can we get back to business
  2. Clara: [laughs] sorry sorry.
- [General laughter]

(Holmes and Marra, 2003:71)

Example 3 is an evidence of subversive humour which was directed by Sandy to her superior, Clara. Since Clara is deviating from the agenda of the discussion, Sandy implicitly send directives using humour and thus challenges the status of Clara as a superior.

Holmes claimed that this type of humour is not so much a politeness device that attends to participants' positive or negative face needs, nor a repressive discourse device that disguises an underlying power relationship; instead, it functions as a critical discourse device to challenge the existing authority structures (Holmes, 2000b:177). The strategies used in subversive humour are short witty quips, pitchy ironic comments and are usually contributed by a particular individual.

A study by Taylor and Bain (2003) investigated the use of humour and subversion in two call centres; Excell and 'T' demonstrated that humour can be used to subvert the higher authority. The results identified that the use of humour in Excell was found to construct an effective opposition to undermine the management, meanwhile in 'T', humour was employed as a relief from tension and to resist boredom. Nonetheless, the humour used in 'T' was also to conduct a satirical attack on the management but it was a directionless subversion which was unconnected to any conscious strategy to challenge managerial 'frontiers of control' or improving working conditions (ibid.:11).

In comparison to Excell, humour was a conscious strategy to challenge the management and it was carried out by distributing hundreds of union leaflets that comprised satires and

humiliation. This study by Taylor and Bain showed that subversive humour is a powerful weapon to oppose managerial legitimacy.

Subversive humour apparently has a distancing effect whereby it tends to isolate the speaker. Holmes (2000b:82) explained that humour and the distancing effect may be simultaneously expressed by the selection of particular linguistic devices as follows:

- a. the strategic use of the name of the individual who is the focus of the humour
- b. the choice of pronouns which emphasise the in-group versus out-group boundaries
- c. the use of roleplay to parody the behaviour of others

(ibid.)

Thus, subversive humour is directed indirectly by using humour in order to avoid conflict that may arise because of disagreement among colleagues and those in higher authority. Subversive humour provides the idea that power fluctuates and is not only can be exercised by people in the higher hierarchy but also by those people who are powerless.

## **2.6 Humour as a Tool to Construct Solidarity**

Researches in New Zealand workplaces suggested that humour can be employed to construct and maintain positive relationship among colleagues (Holmes, 2006). The nature of humour helps strengthen, construct and maintain collegiality in the workplace setting.

Holmes and Stubbe (2003) stated that obvious contribution of humour is the construction of positive relationship between work colleagues. The nature of humour which can be used to soften directives and criticisms aids to construct and maintain solidarity among

colleagues. By using humour, the speaker recognises and respects the face needs of the addressee (ibid.:114) thus mitigating the impact of conflict at the workplace.

The type of humour that reinforces solidarity among participants in interaction is called supportive humour. Supportive humour involves collaborative contribution by several participants who are familiar with each other's way of joking whereby they extend and build on one another's humorous comments (Holmes, 2006). As supportive humour is jointly constructed, many commentators see its chief function as being the creation and maintenance of solidarity (Coates, 2007:32). Humour that works towards building solidarity contain the least aggressive linguistic choices.

However, Norrick (2003:13) stated that jokes in the form of verbal attack, competitive word play and teasing among close friends and colleagues actually maintain solidarity among them. Tannen (1984) who recorded a conversation during Thanksgiving dinner among close friends discovered that irony is one of the styles used to produce humorous instances. Katthoff (2006) stated that irony is a politeness device as it works effectively compared to direct statements. Meanwhile, Hay (2000) discovered several types of humour that occurred in a close friendship conversation which subsumes irony, insults and jocular abuse. This shows that humour works towards building rapport despite the different styles adopted while producing humour.

Holmes (2006:35) in her study on *Gender and Humour in the Workplace* distinguishes collaborative talk into two types which are maximally collaborative and minimally collaborative. Maximally collaborative humour or "all-together-now" (ATN) talk as

described by Coates (1989) is when participants made supportive contributions that interspersed with the occurrence of overlaps. The speakers are more likely to complete or echo the other member's turn that signify solidarity and shared views. Example 4 illustrates ATN talk where the participants collaboratively construct a humorous sequence.

#### Example 4

Context: Regular reporting meeting of two men and two women in government department.

1. Yvo: dream it up and if it's a good idea
2. Hen: /yeah\  
3. Yvo: /it's a good idea\  
4. Jan: /it's worth a\ try  
5. [general laughter]

(Holmes, 2006:37)

Jan and Hen collaboratively support the idea of Yvo [line 2-4] by producing synonymous and simultaneous clauses. Holmes (2006:37) claimed that this example presents precise timing of contributions and the level of skill involved in such collaborative floor work.

Meanwhile, for minimally collaborative humour, Coates (1989) defines it as "one-at-a-time" (OAAT) style of talk. OAAT is when the participants compete to gain the floor in order to make contributions in the interaction. Example 5 presents an instance of collaborative humour as discovered by Holmes (2006).

#### Example 5

Context: Ten women from government department in a regular reporting and forward planning meeting.

1. Ellen: Grace you're gonna chair next week
2. Ruth: it must be my turn soon
3. Ellen: and Kaye can scribe

4. XW: so it's at three /(isn't it)\
5. Sally: /I must\ be due for a turn at chairing too +  
and I'll put in my apologies now  
[general laughter]
6. Kaye: no you're not you're not at all sorry [laughs]

(Holmes, 2006:38)

Example 5 illustrates OAAT style of talk where the contribution of the participants are minimally collaborative with no overlaps, independent contributions which do not correlate with each other's utterance and autonomous style of floor construction [line 1-5].

The instances discussed earlier ought to be in concurrence with the present study as there is strong evidence that humour functions to gain solidarity among the interactants in a workplace context. The concept of solidarity that is expressed using humour is reflected by the use of collaborative contributions and extended humour by the interactants.

## **2.7 Studies of Functions of Humour in Malaysian Setting**

It is noted that research on humour is still a new and relatively unexplored area in Malaysia. The related literature is rather limited thus not many studies were found related to the current study. The studies that will be described later are the closest sources that have been found in relation to humour as well as power and solidarity in a Malaysian context. According to Kangasharju and Nikko (2009:103), laughter is often treated as an expression of humour, associated with solidarity and positive effect that contribute in constructing and maintaining good relations with others (Kangasharju and Nikko, 2009:103). The reviewed studies discussed laughter and humour in two different contexts which are workplace interaction and casual talks among close friends.

A study by Morais (1994) who conducted her research in a Malaysian business setting discovered that laughter that occurred during the meetings was related to the concept of power. Morais claimed that nearly all instances in her corpus showed that laughter was initiated by participants in higher status or produced in response to gestures or moves from the people in higher authority (ibid.:173). The example of laughter found in the corpus was from the chairman who laughed derisively in recalling the inconsistent behaviour of one of the foreman. He ridiculed the foreman to show that the foreman's latter statement cannot be taken seriously as they do not correspond with what may be readily observed at the plant (Morais, 1994:278). The chairman used laughter to control, handle and influence the situation using the authority he has in the meeting.

On the other hand, laughter was also used to cope with more powerful participants. The patterns of laughter by subordinates were viewed as reinforcement to establish hierarchy (ibid.:173). An example of laughter that was produced by a vocal subordinate was to reinforce his sarcastic response to a view expressed by other participants. Thus laughter initiated by a subordinate was regarded as a powerful sign indicating disagreement on matters discussed (ibid.:279).

The occurrence of laughter in the meetings also revealed positive effects on the interaction. According to Morais, laughter had a mitigating effect on the utterance and served as face-saving function. Besides, laughter was also utilised to alleviate tension during the discussion which helped keep harmony. Laughter is thus seen as an expression of solidarity and friendliness because of its hedging effect and as maintaining positive interaction among the participants.

Another study *Function and Role of Laughter in Malaysian Women's and Men's Talk* conducted by David et al. (2006) investigated the function and role of laughter in Malaysian women's and men's casual conversation. They discovered that humour was used to mock others, create a scenario and relieve pressure. The study also described the common topics that invoked laughter which were physical appearance, food, self-deprecatory, gossip and sexual issues.

The findings revealed that men were more likely to insult their listeners who use humour. The insults however were found to be strong evidence of building camaraderie between the speaker and listeners. These findings are parallel with Norrick's (2003) claim that aggressive forms of humour enhance solidarity among friends and colleagues. David et al. (2006) also discovered that camaraderie that was built among the male participants also involved the use of power play. Poking and sarcasm were instances that indicated the challenges made between the speaker and the listeners which show a sign of power play.

On the other hand, humour also was employed for the purpose of creating absurd scenarios and building stories among male participants (David et al., 2006:88). Male participants utilised humour to add spice to the story discussed which triggered more laughter among them. Meanwhile for female participants, it is discovered that humour was employed in gossips and was exercised by mimicking a person's particular behaviour. The use of humour to create scenario and in gossips provides strong evidence of solidarity among the participants.



On the other hand, female participants' discourses ascertained that humour may also function to defuse conflicts and ease pressure. The laughter acts as a 'face-keeping function' (Jariah Mohd Jan, 1999 cited in David et al., 2006) where the participant escapes from getting herself involved in a sensitive discussion. Besides, the extended laughter functions to reduce pressure during the interaction. Hence, the occurrence of laughter symbolises solidarity and common shared knowledge among the interactants.

It is worth noting that the use of humour within casual conversations among female participants is not only to build solidarity but also to discuss serious issues such as sexual matters. Humour is used to talk about their sexual needs of their partners and such personal disclosure bonds the group of women who appear to see the constant sexual needs of their partners as a common 'problem' (David et al., 2006:97). The findings suggested that humour not only functions to amuse but also to solve problems in a casual manner. Unlike females, men's sexual jokes were initiated to claim attention from the hearer and gain status (ibid.:97). David et al. noted that it is debatable whether men view such discourse and laughter as a bond of solidarity.

Though humour is seen as an effective strategy to foster solidarity, normally jokes are better understood by members affiliated to that particular group or committee. Non-members are expected to face difficulty in comprehending "inside jokes" (Norrick, 1993:6) produced by the particular group members who share the common background knowledge in order to grasp the humour. For that reason, humour creates distance between members and those who do not belong to the group. This notion is parallel with Raskin's (1985:2) assertion that different people will not necessarily find the same things equally funny.

Morais' and David et al. studies revealed that humour which functions within Malaysian interaction has similarities with the functions of humour occurring in Western interactions such as to defuse, to control and handle situations as well as to insult others. It is clear at this point that humour can be correlated with the concept of power and solidarity which either functions to exercise power or to build rapport among the conversationalists. Factors such as position and close relationships may involve the use of power play when humour is employed with the purposes of ridiculing and controlling the listener's contributions in an interaction. Meanwhile for solidarity, the use of humour in gossips and in sexual matters established and highlighted similarities on shared knowledge among the participants.

## **2.8 Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson Turn-Taking Model (SSJ Turn-Taking Model)**

Since the present study intends to investigate turn-taking patterns in producing humour employed by academicians in their academic management meetings, thus a related framework on turn-taking design is reviewed.

One of the most noticeable features in conversation is speaker change (Liddicoat, 2007:51). A speaker change is when a speaker exchanges or allocates turns of talk to other speakers, which is also known as a turn. According to Jamaliah Mohd Ali (2000:69), a turn is the basic unit of interaction that refers to a shift in the direction of the flow of speech which is a characteristic of normal interaction. Schegloff (2000:2) claims that the organisation of turn-taking practices in talk-in-interaction is among those features of social life that are so deeply embedded in ordinary common-sense practice that they challenge articulate awareness and explicit, disciplined description.

A speaker who is having a turn in a conversation is obliged to contribute to the interaction and to influence its course (Jamaliah Mohd Ali, 2000:69). The speaker who is currently holding a turn in a conversation has the control on roles, rights and obligations to speak in the conversation (Jamaliah Mohd Ali, 2000). The right to allocate a turn for the next speaker to make a contribution is generally determined by the current speaker who is holding the turn.

The process of changing turns of talk is called turn-taking. Turn-taking occurs when a speaker takes the turn from the previous speaker in order to contribute to a conversation. When a turn is shifted and the other speaker holds the turn, the speakers in an interaction perform and constitute the turn-taking process without overlaps, minimal gaps and the turns eventually shift smoothly.

Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) have developed a framework based on corpus of naturally occurring conversation which analyse the organisation of turn-taking in conversation. Jamaliah Mohd Ali (2000) claimed that the framework is best-known and widely accepted model of turn-taking in conversation. The framework is also recognised as SSJ Turn-Taking Model which aims to sort out problems in distribution of turns within a conversation and provides a rule-governed process of turn-taking in naturally occurring conversation.

Sacks et al. (1974) argued that in order to take the next turn, a conversationalist has to observe a relevant point in each turn for him/her to hold the next talk turn. The point indicates the possible completion of the speaker's contribution that ends at the transition

relevance place (henceforth TRP). Such a point is where the previous speaker's talk is potentially complete and speaker change could occur. TRP is usually indicated by grammatical completeness, adjacency pairs and paralinguistic cues such as changes in pace and pitch, gestures and eyes movements that signal the current speaker's contribution is over.

By understanding the cues of the current speaker, it displays the shift and provides understanding to the next speaker to exchange turns efficiently. Thus, the speaker has to listen attentively at which point the contribution of the current speaker is completed. The failure to recognise TRP will result an overlap or interruption between the speaker and the interlocutor.

The allocation of turn at TRP is not relatively specified. The speaker may continue his/her speech without allocating a turn to any interlocutor or the interlocutor may self-select him/herself to make contribution in the conversation. TRP is a means of transition of turns but it need not be necessary for the turns to be changed.

Sacks et al. (1974) formed a rule which governed the turn-taking process within a conversation. Figure 2.1 illustrates the SSJ Model of Turn-Taking in conversation developed by Sacks et al. (1974) which describes the basic rules of the turn-taking system.

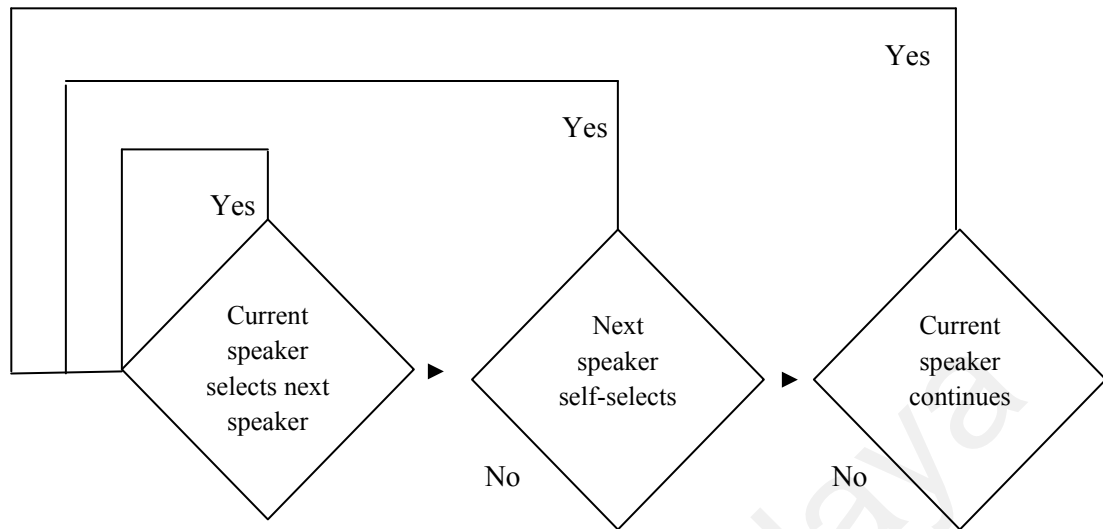


Figure 2.1 SSJ Model of Turn-Taking in Conversation (1974: 696)

The rules demonstrate three ways to assign turns to the participants. Simultaneous speech and interruption can be minimised by obeying the rules. The fundamental rules are stated as follows:

- a. Turn allocation by the current speaker – This is when the current speaker allocates a turn to the next speaker. This can be done by posing questions such as “What about you?” or “Do you agree?”
- b. Self- selection – This is when the speaker selects him/herself and competes to gain the floor and contribute to the interaction. However, self selection is not possible when a turn has already been allocated.
- c. Current speaker continues- This is when neither rule a or rule b is executed. Thus, the current speaker gains the floor and continues his/her speech.

The set of rules described earlier constrain each other and this constraining effect applies to each of the rules (Liddicoat, 2007:68). Rule b will be executed if rule a is not employed and rule c will be used if rule a and b are not utilised.

Listener's attention is highly crucial to determine the point in which turns can be taken up from the next speaker. Sacks et al. (1974) stressed the notion of 'one speaker at a time' can be achieved by paying full concentration in a conversation. Thus, interruptions and overlapping are minimised and violation of turns may be avoided.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher has decided to focus on SSJ Turn-Taking Model (1974) which appears to be the best approach to analyse the distribution of turns in multiparty talk such as meetings. This is because the SSJ model could help to explain the stream of communication that can sometimes be extremely complicated especially when many people converse at the same time (Ellysha Nadira Abdullah, 2005:19).

## **2.9 Past Research in Turn-Taking**

Studies on the organisation of turn-taking has been widely researched in different contexts such as in university faculty meeting (Saft, 2004), classroom discourse (Jones and Saxena, 1996), intimate women's conversation (Leila Mohajer, 2006) and also in media setting such as news interviews (Greatbatch, 1988), Japanese movie films (Kato, 2000) and internet chat room (Ellysha Nadira Abdullah, 2005). The works of literature presented in this section are the related studies on turn-taking design that are manifested with power and solidarity in the various Malaysian contexts i.e. in media, education and business meeting.

Jariah Mohd Jan (1999) in her study *Malaysian Talk Shows: A Study of Power and Solidarity in Inter-Gender Verbal Interaction* discovered that floor apportionment is one of the linguistic features that can be used to contest for power and foster solidarity. The study investigated the distribution concept of power and solidarity in verbal interactions of male and female participants in the *Global* talk show which revealed that status has its influence over one's domination of talking time.

In the single-sex (SS) panel discussions, the findings showed that the person who holds a higher status and is most influential in the discussions gets the most talk-time and dominates the discussion (ibid.:346). Meanwhile those in the lower rank get the least talk-time. This suggests that the power a person holds in a particular interaction influences the domination over the conversation as well as the received talk-time.

Further, Jariah Mohd Jan's study also indicates that the male participants in the SS group compete for the floor resulting in unequal distribution of talk (ibid.:347). The turns constructed were longer which prevented a collaborative conversation among the participants. Such behaviour is said to promote position of power and prestige among the panelists (ibid.:347). In contrary, the all-female panels demonstrated a more co-operative style of turn distribution in which the floor was shared equally, turns were shorter and the conversation was jointly developed (ibid.:347). The female panelists were found to avoid interruptions and competition for the floors and were attentive throughout the discussion. This behaviour indicates support for each other's point of view and they are said to maintain solidarity (ibid.:382).

In the mixed equal-cross sex panels, it was discovered that the exercise of power and competition of floor were discouraged by the panelists. Most of their talk-time related to providing pertinent information regarding the topic of discussion (Jariah Mohd Jan, 1999:348). In contrast, play of power was exercised during the mixed unequal-cross sex panels where the person, regardless of gender holding the high position dominated the conversation and received more talk-time and turns. Those in the lower status were found to be cooperative in the mixed-unequal cross interaction.

It appeared that those of higher authority had the advantage of controlling the conversation and dominating the floor compared to individuals who were in the lower rank. As such, the findings advocate that there are possibilities that the participants in higher position would dominate in the production of humour in meetings as well.

Another study by Baljit Kaur (1994) that examined turn-taking patterns in a semiformal committee meeting among parents and teachers concluded that differential status affected the turn-taking patterns in a meeting encounter. The study demonstrated that the headmistress controlled the meeting rather than the chairperson. The role of the headmistress was to report, comment and decide on the matters discussed thus contributing to higher number of turns which indicated that status plays an important aspect in gaining turns during a meeting.

In her study, Baljit Kaur discovered that the turn-taking patterns differed during the different phases of a meeting. During the initial phase of a meeting, turns were allocated by the chairperson meanwhile in the medial phase, turns were taken by the members involved



with the raised issues. The turns were pre-allocated according to items on the agenda (Baljit Kaur, 1994:55) and self-nomination was employed by a person who was responsible for that particular issue in order to provide explanation.

The participants who usually dominated the turns were the office bearers. Baljit Kaur stated that the chairperson's skills to persuade participants constrained their contributions and involvement in the discussion besides participants' lack of knowledge and incompetence in the English language (ibid.:159).

Baljit Kaur's study demonstrated that turns were allocated by the chairperson and the authority the headmistress holds in a school organisation which provided opportunity for her to take most turns in the meeting. Also, the members of the floor had equal rights to initiate and close a particular issue which was contradictory with conventional meetings where all transactions are opened and closed by the chairperson.

A study by Morais (1994) of a Malaysian business setting in a Swedish multinational company operating in Malaysia provided clear evidence that the status of a chairman permitted him to control over the meeting. Morais stated that the chairman dominated through preallocation of turns and also in turn mediation (ibid.:210). Hence, this constrained the contribution of the participants since there were limited opportunities to self-select themselves to share ideas during the discussion.

Morais discovered that interruptions were generally performed by people at the top management level as an example of exercising power during the meetings. Although the

interruptions that occurred during the meetings constrained the contribution of team members of a lower rank, it was revealed that the subordinates also interrupted. They competed for the floor and refused to yield the turns where simultaneous speech occurred during the discussion. However, Morais (1999:222) viewed the interruptions by subordinates not as forceful as the superiors.

Similar to other findings on business meetings, the corpus in Morais' study demonstrated a hierarchical relationship of asymmetrical, symmetrical as well as indeterminate relationships (ibid.:74). Morais categorised indeterminate relationship as neither symmetrical nor asymmetrical but involving the relationship among the staff of the company and suppliers.

For the purpose of the current study, SSJ Turn-Taking Model (1974) is employed to gain insight of the turn-taking patterns accompanying humour in meetings among academicians. It would be interesting to examine whether status plays a crucial role in taking control of the floor to produce humour. Referring to the studies reviewed earlier, it is expected for participants in the higher positions to initiate humour and dominate the floor compared to those in the lower positions.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter describes the methods and procedures that were utilised for the purpose of the present study. In addition, the chapter provides information of the samples, the instruments and their placement, the pilot study as well as the framework that was adopted in this study.

#### **3.1 Sample**

The subjects are academicians who are currently working in one of the academic institutions in the state of Terengganu. The participants involved are regular team members who often met, discussed and worked together and their positions varied from junior to senior lecturers.

Since the data are confidential, the name of the institution and the faculty involved is kept anonymous. For the purpose of this study, the institution is referred to as UNS meanwhile the faculty involved is termed with a pseudonym as NAS. At NAS, there are 56 academicians including junior and senior lecturers. Four of the participants involved hold a Ph.D.

The reason why NAS was chosen as the institution for data collection is because the researcher is one of the staff; thus allowing access to confidential data as well as attending meetings. The medium of instruction used in the meetings was English Language and the meetings basically revolved around the same persons, in terms of attendance. Table 3.1 shows the details of the participants involved.

Meeting	Gender		Position of Lecturers				Number of Participants
	M	F	Junior		Senior		
			M	F	M	F	
Meeting 1	3	4	3	3	-	1	7
Meeting 2	6	14	2	6	4	8	20
Meeting 3	7	8	4	3	3	5	15
Meeting 4	3	11	3	8	-	3	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>56</b>

Table 3.1 Representations of Gender and Position of Participants

The age of the participants ranged from 24-55 years. All of the participants are proficient in the English Language and one of them is a native English speaker. The native speaker is provided the pseudonym AN who is a Canadian who has lived in Malaysia for more than ten years. Hence, he is proficient in Malay and able to recognise jokes produced by the rest of the colleagues who are mainly Malays. The dominant ethnicity of the participants is the Malays while the other two participants are Chinese and the native speaker from Canada.

### 3.2 Instruments

This study employed the following instruments for the purpose of data collection:

- a. video recording of meetings
- b. observation

#### 3.2.1 Video Recording

The data comprised 382 of time recording at NAS (see Table 3.2). The medium of instruction was primarily English although code switching occurred throughout the meetings. The meetings that were recorded were semiformal in nature.

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Duration of Meeting</b>
Meeting 1	21 <sup>st</sup> April 2011	91 minutes
Meeting 2	26 <sup>th</sup> April 2011	57 minutes
Meeting 3	27 <sup>th</sup> April 2011	148 minutes
Meeting 4	2 <sup>nd</sup> May 2011	85 minutes
<b>Total</b>		<b>382 minutes</b>

Table 3.2 Details of the Recorded Meetings

The purpose of using video recordings was to gain detailed information of the participants' interaction with specific focus on humour. The use of audiovisual data would allow a larger amount of humour for observation and recording purposes. Besides, the videos helped the researcher to recall the instances of humour easily (Mallet and A'hern, 1996), recognise the speakers and gain a more accurate view on how humour is initiated.

Figure 3.1 represents the placement of the instruments and the researcher's seating during the meetings.

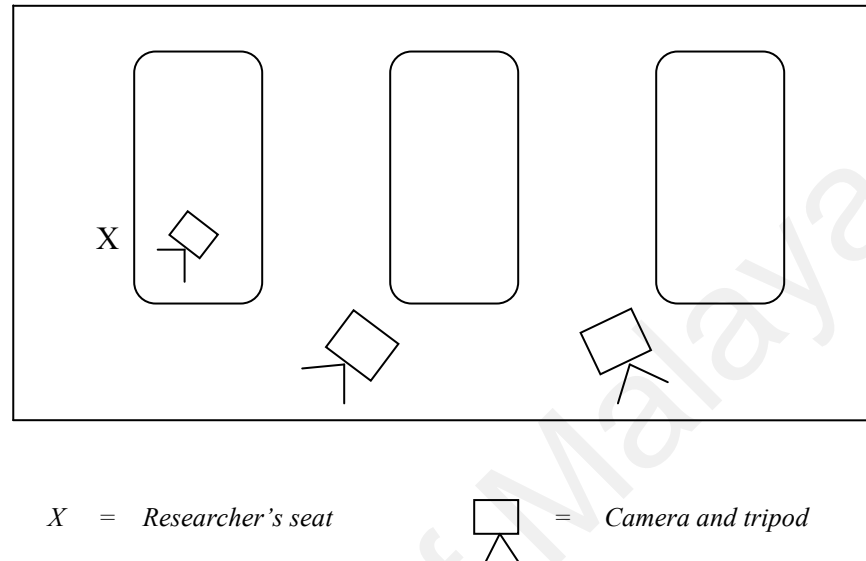


Figure 3.1 The Placement of the Instruments and the Researcher's Seating

The instruments were placed at strategic locations in order to capture the faces of the participants involved. The instruments which comprised a video recorder and two cameras were placed at a strategic location so that the participants' faces could be recorded. The researcher sat in an unobtrusive corner to observe the meetings and also monitor the instruments. Since the meetings varied in terms of numbers of participants, the seating arrangement of the participants differed from one meeting to another.

### 3.2.2 Observation

The researcher was an observer and was seated in an unobtrusive place. The researcher did not participate during all discussions and just observed the meetings. Besides, the presence of the researcher was also to ensure that the recording equipments functioned efficiently.

Apart from that, by adopting the observation method, the researcher gained a clearer view of what was really happening during the meetings. This was also to aid in comprehending humour since to understand humour, one has to be familiar with the social context, which in this case were academic meetings (Lynch, 2005).

### **3.3 Setting**

All the four meetings were recorded at NAS. Meetings which are held at NAS are usually conducted twice a week and the medium of instruction used in the meetings is the English Language.

In many organisations, a meeting is a tool of communication to gather information for monitoring progress, reviewing the organisation's work, setting plans and budgets and deciding matters related to policy (Jasnawati Jasmin, 2008) and it is proven that meetings contribute largely to the accomplishment of workplace objectives.

Meetings also are means for enacting and managing institutional power and relationship (Holmes and Marra, 2003). Sollit-Morris (1997:82) stated that influence can be carried out by any person who is present in the meeting and does not restrict influence to those with authorised or a higher social status. Therefore, everyone has the opportunity to 'do power' by opposing opinions of others or stand up to present their views. For this reason, meetings generally have a pre-determined context of power status and social relationship. Thus, it would be interesting to ascertain the power play amongst colleagues in asymmetrical and symmetrical relationships.

Generally, meetings are grouped into two categories. Boden (1994 cited in Kangasharju and Nikko, 2009) distinguished the characteristics of formal and informal meetings. A formal meeting involved a large number of participants, a chairperson who allocates turns to the participants and fixed goals to be accomplished meanwhile in an informal meeting, the conversational style is more casual and turns are self-selected (Kangasharju and Nikko, 2009).

For this study, all the four meetings have been classified as semiformal since they fulfill both criterion of formal and informal meetings and also they were planned in advance. The purposes of the meetings recorded were mainly to arrive to a consensus on marking schemes, reporting and finalising results of a team project which is the TESL camp.

### **3.4 Why Meetings?**

Meetings were chosen as they represented a natural setting in a specific workplace to be observed. Past research on humour which employed dependent measurement by rating laughter, jokes or cartoons (O'Quin and Aronoff, 1981:350) has provided insufficient information on the linguistic aspects of humour. Besides, conventional methods such as questionnaires and interviews only provide general findings on humour without examining any real conversational data (Norrick, 1993) thus they may not be adequate to describe the role of humour. Norrick further claimed that various forms of humour are best understood by explaining its integration in natural conversational contexts to shed light on the structure and point of both conversation and humour.



For the purpose of this study, the researcher recorded any meeting that occurred within the period of data collection and did not restrict to recording meetings which met any particular criterion.

### **3.5 Pseudonyms**

The learning institution and the faculty involved are referred to with pseudonyms to maintain the confidentiality of the data and the setting. The faculty is referred to as NAS and all the names of the participants have been changed. Besides, other information such as codes of the various subjects and names of students mentioned during the meetings have also been changed.

### **3.6 Ethics and Consent**

The researcher gained permission from the Dean of NAS to record the meetings and the consent form was approved by the Head of Department.

### **3.7 Data Collection and Procedure**

The research was initiated by writing an email to the Dean of NAS to seek permission to conduct a research. Once the permission was obtained, a consent letter was submitted to the Head of Department for the purpose of video recordings. A schedule of meetings was provided by the Head of Department and the researcher started recording the scheduled meetings which were held between the months of April and May. Three out of four meetings that were recorded were not in the schedule and were notified on the whiteboard at the office.

At the first meeting, all the participants were informed of the recording of the meeting. At the second meeting, the chairperson informed the participants that they were being recorded for research purposes at the preamble of the meeting. However, there were some participants who came in late for the meetings who were unaware of the purpose of recording the meetings. Once the meeting ended, the researcher informed the late comers that they had been recorded and the purpose behind the recording. During the subsequent recordings, all the participants were aware that they were being recorded and all of them were in a relaxed condition, just like in the earlier meetings.

The researcher was an observer and based on the observation, it appeared that the participants were not distracted by the recording instruments and that they behaved normally. This added validity to the data as Hay (1995) stated that the data is more natural when the participants are in a relaxed condition.

The data collection took twelve days to record all the four meetings.

### **3.8 Transcription**

All the four meetings were transcribed using Jariah Mohd Jan's (1999) transcription notation which was adapted from conventions by Jefferson's (1978). Jariah Mohd Jan who adapted Jefferson's transcription in her study of power and solidarity in Malaysian *Global* talk presented the distribution of turns between speakers, occurrences of simultaneous speech, interruptions and the point when a previous speaker ceases to talk in relation to the next speaker's turn (Jariah Mohd Jan, 1999:226) (see Appendix A for the transcription notation).

Since all the meetings with the exception of one that were recorded involved more than 10 participants, consequently, several utterances were particularly unintelligible to be transcribed. This is due to the presence of more than three speakers talking at the same time during the discussions. Furthermore, several utterances were not transcribed due to the distance between the instruments and the participants' seating. Thus, these aspects caused certain difficulties to the researcher to identify and transcribe the overlapping utterances which were articulated by more than three speakers concurrently.

The occurrence of personal talk among some of the participants while the meetings were carried out also obscured the transcription. For that reason, the researcher has omitted the personal talks which were considered trivial and focused on the speeches which were crucial and related to the current study.

### **3.9 Method**

This study is a combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses. The functions of humour are presented in a descriptive manner and are categorised using Hay's taxonomy (1995). The analysis of all the five meetings is based on the video recordings with a combined duration of 382 minutes. The quantitative measurement quantified the frequency of laughter and functions of humour.

#### **3.9.1 Theoretical Framework: Hay's Taxonomy of Functions of Humour (1995)**

This study will apply Hay's theoretical framework (1995). This taxonomy was developed from 31 different works and the categories identified by Hay are closely relevant to her data which are within a friendship conversation. This framework assumes that every

attempt at humour is an attempt to both express solidarity with the audience and construct a position of respect and status within the group (ibid.:97).

Though the taxonomy is specially developed to characterise the functions of humour among close friends, the researcher opines that it is also suitable to be used in a workplace setting for the following reasons:

- a. the taxonomy covers the functions of power and solidarity which are the main concepts intended to be scrutinised in the present study
- b. the taxonomy provides a clear-cut view for the researcher to identify the functions of humour
- c. instances of humour in the present study subsume “inside jokes”, which are jokes that only group members with a shared background knowledge understand (Norrick, 1993:6); which is similar with the data from Hay (1995)

According to Hay (1995), there are three types of functions namely power, solidarity and psychological. The general function is the primary criteria among the three mentioned functions. Further, Hay stated that the instances which do not fall into the identified main categories are categorised into the general function (ibid.:98).

The first function identified by Hay is power. Power functions are divided into four which are ‘conflict’, ‘control’, ‘bound’ and ‘tease’. Solidarity functions are also categorised into four which are ‘to share’, ‘to highlight similarities or capitalise on shared meanings’, ‘to clarify and maintain boundaries’ and ‘to tease’. Lastly, the psychological category subsumes the functions ‘to defend’ and ‘to cope’. Hay used the label “P” for humour which increases or reinforces the speaker’s power and “S” for humour which maintains

solidarity among speakers and interlocutors. An instance of humour is not restricted to only one type and can be dwelled into several functions at once (ibid.:99). Figure 3.2 demonstrates the taxonomy of functions of humour.

University of Malaya

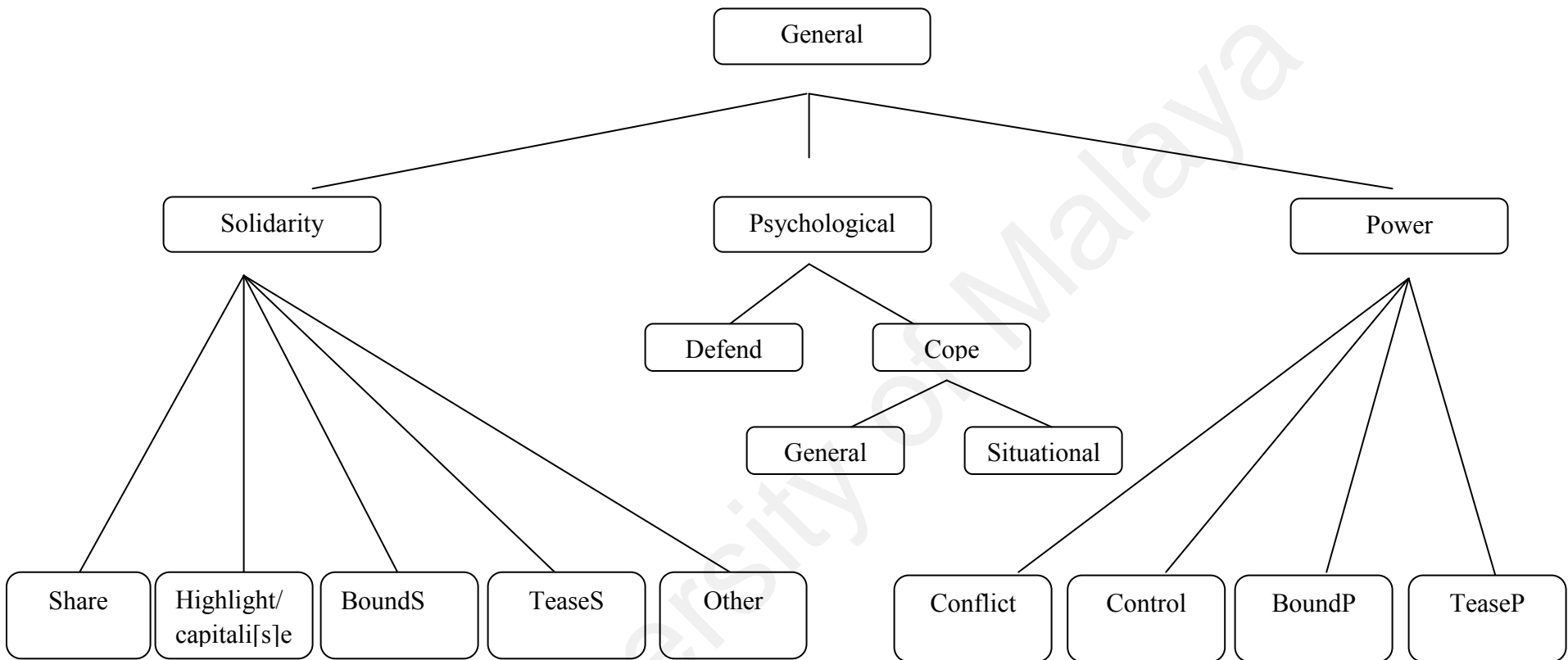


Figure 3.2 Hay's Taxonomy of Functions of Humour (Hay, 1995:98)

The next section will describe the functions in detail and examples provided were obtained from Hay (1995) to elaborate and explain the functions of humour.

### 3.9.1.1 Power

Humour that serves power functions are branched into four which are as follows: fostering conflict, to control, to challenge and set boundaries and to tease by attacking or criticising in order to increase or maintain speakers' power. The subsequent examples from Hay are provided to further illustrate the functions of humour in relation to power.

#### a. Fostering Conflict

The type of humour in this category initiates or creates conflict among group members. Belittling, demeaning and uttering aggressive messages are classified in this category.

#### Example 1

1. DF: //she couldn't \ eat properly any more //eh\
2. BM: /and er\ \ /she\  
got to the stage- yeah she couldn't eat  
properly  
mm major
3. BM: but//it\ was a co- it was basically a=
4. DF: /yeah\  
5. BM: =cosmetic thing though //+i\ mean there=  
6. AF: /yeah\  
7. BM: =wasn't any-=/
8. DF: /=//[challenging tone]: well=  
9. AF: /(was it quite)\
10. DF: =it was partly 'cause she couldn't eat:  
11. AF: //but that's what but that's what=  
12. DF: /[laughs] I think she's ( )\  
13. CM: /[laughs]\

In this instance, the participants are talking about BM's relatives who had a surgery to straighten her teeth. BM tells the other interlocutors that the surgery was mainly cosmetic. However DF opposes to that stand in a way that would foster conflict [line 4-10] that leads to the other participants' laughter. According to Hay (1995:104), BM's comment is framed in such a way with the intentions of fostering conflict.

### **b. To Control**

Instances of humour which fall into control functions are humour that intends to influence the behaviour of the audience. Humour in this category is expected to arise in a workplace or in a situation which involves power differences among speakers. Hay (1995) states that most examples that demonstrated the attempt to dominate and influence the behaviour of the audience comes from boundP type of humour. Nevertheless, Hay provides an example of non-boundary humour that aims to influence the participants' behaviour derived from her data.

#### Example 2

[pour wine]

1. BM: the sound of wine pouring always sounds good on  
tape
2. DF: what tape [ha]
3. BM: [nh ha]

BM and DF's conversation was being recorded by someone and it was required that they act natural. DF, employs humour to remind BM that the tape should not be mentioned to ensure the authenticity of the recorded conversation. The data revealed that DF tried to control the behaviour of the participants to make sure that the recording session went smoothly.



**c. To Challenge and Set Boundaries (boundP)**

According to Hay (2000:107), humour can challenge existing boundaries, attempt to set new ones, create or maintain boundaries by making an example of someone present. As mentioned earlier in the clarifying and maintaining boundaries (boundS) function; humour in this category clarifies boundaries to exclude outsiders and those who deviate from social norms and shared values (Hay, 1995).

Example 3

1. BF: i like petroleum geology i think it's cool=/
2. AF: /=do  
you=/  
3. BF: /=mm //that's what i'd like to do\ if i do=  
4. AF: /( )\\
5. BF: =anything in geology=/  
6. SF: /=far out=/  
7. AF: /=it's where the  
money is=/  
8. BF: /=i'm just a (sucker for it)=/  
9. AF: /=really=/  
10. CF: /=yeah=/  
11. SF: /=mhm i'm not interested in money i more  
interested in the research side I could never  
do //coal and that\  
12. BF: /oh i want to \\ make big bikkies=/  
13. AF: /=[ha ha]  
14. CF: //like me i just want to marry\ [ha]=  
15. SF: /raping and pillaging the land [ha ha]\\

Hay found only one example that exerts power among friends and stated that this function was most likely to occur in a workplace setting. SF's comment in (10) creates a boundary between acceptable and unacceptable applications in geology (Hay, 2000:107).

#### **d. To Tease (P)**

Teasing is associated with power when it is utilised to make a criticism for the purpose of attacking interlocutors. Commonly, teasing overlaps with the boundary category. The speaker who teases by manifesting power intends to maintain or increase his/her power in a conversation.

#### Example 4

1. LM: i'd love to see the john cleese one as well
2. DT: yeah yeah // yes i set the video wrong give me=
3. LM: /nh nh nh nh ha\\
4. DT: =a break\

DT was teased by LM regarding the programme he forgot to record [3-4]. DT keeps teasing about this matter and eventually annoys LM.

#### **3.9.1.2 Solidarity**

The solidarity function is identified to serve several roles which are to share, highlight similarities or capitalise on shared meaning, to clarify and maintain boundaries and to tease. The instances of humour which do not include the functions mentioned earlier are described as others.

#### **a. To Share**

'To share' here means to let the audience know something about the speaker. This is a positive function of humour as it positively builds mutual trust and solidarity among the interlocutors. Besides, ties will grow stronger among them especially when sharing sensitive information.

### Example 5

1. SF: /they were\\great
2. RF: i LIKED my poncho + except it had little holes about the size of my fingers so i'd go to reach for something [voc:xunk[h]] right through poncho and and be stopped you know +
3. SF: [ha ha ha]
4. LM: oh dea[h]r
5. RF: but other than that [ha] it was warm and you could wear it over anything

Example 5 illustrates RF shares her memory of her childhood and her favourite poncho [2-3].

#### **b. To Highlight Similarities or Capitalise on Shared Meaning**

The humour in this category identifies shared interests, social knowledge, experience and other similarities among speakers.

### Example 6

1. CM: /yeah\\ that's it's a it's it's an
2. //experience\\
3. MM: /something\\ you'd want to do once +
4. CM: just cause its quite //quite\\
5. TM: /ruin\\ your body by ingesting all that coke=/  
6. MM: /=mm i still can't drink coke like i used after that //episode\\ i think=  
7. TM: /[h ha]\\

In this instance, a group of friends recall their past days at university and MM recalls the night where he consumed excessive amount of coke before they needed to submit an assignment. Ever since the incident, he stopped drinking coke. MM is capitalising on shared experience because all his friends have the social knowledge about what had happened on that particular night.

**c. To Clarify and Maintain Boundaries (boundS)**

Humour here works as a boundary marker. Hay divides this into boundS and boundP. BoundS refers to humour that clarifies or supports boundaries that are already established meanwhile boundP is for humour that boosts speakers' power. If humour in this category is associated with power, it clarifies those who have deviated from the social norms and shared values as belonging to different groups, thus they make fun of the outsiders (Hay, 1995). Meanwhile, humour is regarded to enhance solidarity when the humour is approved by the members of that particular group.

According to Hay, boundary humour imposes boundaries, or to clarify boundaries by ridiculing a member of the group who has unwittingly overstepped the boundaries of acceptability (ibid.:102). Example 7 presented an instance of boundary humour that increases solidarity (boundS), while boundP humour is illustrated in Example 3.

Example 7

1. NF: i saw tessa davies in the on the train like
2. JF: UGH
3. SF: [ha ha ha]
4. JF: what a grotter

In this instance, Tessa Davies becomes the butt of the humour because she is not part of the group. Thus, the humour illustrates solidarity among the initiators.

**d. To Tease (S)**

A tease can also reinforce solidarity if it is about something that is clearly false or trivial (Hay, 1995:103). It is divided into two categories which are TeasesS and TeaseP. TeaseS refers to "Joking Relationship" termed by Radcliffe Brown (cited in Hay, 1995) where

individuals normally make fun and mock each other. This helps create and maintain solidarity among the interlocutors.

#### Example 8

1. SF: even really changed eh
2. TF: shit yeah mega
3. SF: he went really arty
4. TF: he and yeah he went to new Plymouth and then he came back and now oh i don't know where he is now
5. JF&NF: [laugh]
6. SF: what's this going on
7. JF: [laughs]: nothing + just good humour:

NF always teases JF because Evan has a crush on her. Only NF knows about this and whenever Evan is mentioned throughout the interaction, NF and JF look at each other, then burst into laughter [5-7]. The humour here shows solidarity between them.

#### **3.9.1.3 Psychological**

Humour that serves the functions of psychology is divided into two which are; to defend and as a coping strategy.

##### **a. To Defend**

'To defend' functions are to defend oneself in order to cover up one's weaknesses. It is used to conceal mistakes or flaws before the other person discovers it.

#### Example 9

1. PM: it was a nice trifle
2. WF: normally //yeah well it was nice\  
/what's this\\ WAS shit
3. TF: /what's this\\ WAS shit
4. WF: [laughs] but it sort of the problem is i just kept adding more and more and I

only had certain size bowls so I couldn't balance it all up and I didn't have enough ingredients to just keep adding// [ha huh] \

In example 9, WF is anxious about the trifle she has prepared. Thus, she protects herself with an explanation before she is criticised by others.

### **b. To Cope with a Contextual Problem**

'To cope' functions in two situations which are contextual and non-contextual situations. Coping in a contextual situation is to fix a problem that arises during a conversation.

#### Example 10

1. CM: i thought she was going to rescue us at four  
YOU'RE LATE
2. All: [laugh]
3. CM: [yells]: come on:
4. MM: we should start with the credits now yeah
5. NM: this conversation HAS feature=/
6. TM: /= [ha ha ha]

Example 10 illustrates the humour employed by the participants to cope with their insecurities about the presence of the recording instrument.

### **c. To Cope with a Non-Contextual Problem**

Hay claimed that this type of humour is utilised to cope with common setbacks such as sickness and death and it functions to ease gloom and sorrow. Hay states that non-contextual problems are the predicaments that we need to cope with in order to survive in life.

### Example 11

1. TF: they obviously thought that that i looked like  
the type that wouldn't make them //ring\ up i=
2. WF: /oh\
3. TF: = # r # d i iMAGine
4. LF: should ring the i # r # d up if they don't come back
5. TF: [h]if they d[h]on't come back [h] we just wo[h]n't PAY // them anything\

Example 11 demonstrates the use of sarcastic humour to cope with TF's problem. She has employed tradespeople who made an initial appearance, but have recently disappeared into thin air (Hay, 1995:110).

In relation with the current study, the classification of the functions of humour will be limited to the two functions which are power and solidarity, as the main purposes of this study is to investigate power and solidarity embedded in humour in academic meetings.

### **3.10 Data Analysis**

The data were examined with a combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses. The qualitative analyses describe in detail the functions of humour and also the turn-taking pattern accompanying humour. Meanwhile the quantitative measurement quantified the frequency of laughter and functions of humour, number of turns in each meeting and also number of turns for each speaker.

There are two phases of data analysis in the study. The primary phase of analyses observes humour in tandem with the sub categories of power and solidarity functions meanwhile the secondary analysis focuses on the analysis in relation to the organisation of turn-taking in producing humour among academicians. The next section presents the functions of humour

that will be investigated as well as the frameworks to identify the organisation of turn-taking accompanying the production of humour.

### 3.10.1 Hay's Functions of Humour (1995)

The instances of humour were categorised using Hay's Taxonomy of Functions of Humour (1995) that focuses on the two functions which are power and solidarity as presented in Table 3.3. The analyses of the data in this phase were also drawn on the work of Holmes (2000) and Holmes and Marra (2002b) on subversive and repressive humour.

<b>Power</b>	<b>Solidarity</b>
Conflict	Share
Control	Highlight/Capitalise on Shared Meaning
Bound	Bound
Tease	Tease

Table 3.3 The Two Functions of Humour: Power and Solidarity from Hay's Taxonomy Functions of Humour (1995)

### 3.10.2 Conversational Analysis

Conversational Analysis (henceforth CA) is used as the framework to identify the organisation of turn-taking whenever humour was injected during the meetings.

CA which is branched out from the ethnomethodological approach views talk as an activity in which speakers achieve communicative goals in interaction (Liddicoat, 2007). It was developed through a collaboration of the late Sacks, Schgloff and Jefferson in the 1960s who investigated spontaneous spoken interaction to discover the organisation of



conversation. Besides, it scrutinised the process of how participants produce joint achievements such as conversational closings, storytelling, disputes, medical diagnosis, the mutually dependent roles of interviewer and interviewee and so on (Lane and Hilder, 2003:354).

CA investigates orderliness in a conversation and treated sequences as the most important focus of an analysis since each utterance or gesture is understood as a step in a conversation (Lane and Hilder, 2003). It describes things at the most-micro level and focuses on important excerpts that transmit subtle meaning by the interactionists (Holmes, 2006). It also comprises the evidence in interaction that supports the interpretation of the meaning based on the significant utterances or things other than language i.e. body posture, silences and eye gaze.

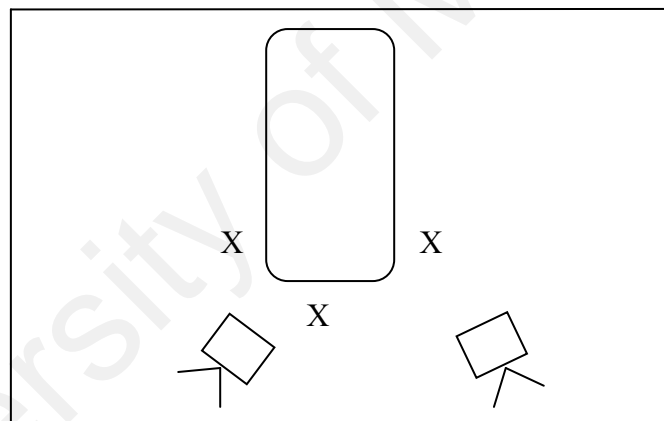
The fundamental approach in CA is the concept of turn-design. The turn-taking system describes the process of allocation of turns to participants which aims to achieve an organised and systematic flow of a conversation. In relation to this study, CA is deemed as the best approach to examine the sequential organisation of talk and the allocation of turns when humour is injected in academic meetings.

### **3.10.3 Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson Turn-Taking Model (SSJ Turn-taking Model)**

The organisation of turn-taking accompanying humour is analysed based on the basic rules of the turn-taking construction that was illustrated by Sacks et al. (1974) (see Section 2.8, Chapter 2). Similar to the first phase of analyses, the secondary analysis also takes on a qualitative approach and concurrently provides answers to the second research question.

### 3.11 Pilot Study

Since a good research study requires detailed planning and a pilot study is part of it, the researcher has conducted a pilot study to try out the effectiveness of the recording instruments. A meeting discussion which was executed for 18 minutes and 19 seconds was recorded for this purpose. Three participants were involved and two recording equipments were used to record the meeting. The respective instruments were video cameras. The instruments were left without supervision and the researcher was not a participant observant during the pilot study. Figure 3.2 represents the placement of the instruments during the course of the pilot study.



X = Participants

 = Camera and tripod

Figure 3.3 The Initial Setting of the Instruments

This pilot study helped the researcher to overcome the shortcomings that may occur during the real data gathering process. The problems that arose during the pilot study were:

- a. the instruments were not sufficient to cater for the recording of all the participants' faces
- b. the instruments were not placed at strategic locations, thus the face of the chairperson was not included in the recordings

In order to overcome these problems, the researcher had to prepare a sufficient number of recording instruments in order to ensure the validity of the videos recorded. Also, the instruments were located at places where they can capture all the participants' faces. Besides, the researcher was an observer in order to gain a clearer view and to get more specific details of what was really happening throughout the meetings. The presence of the researcher was also to monitor the instruments that were to be used for the purpose of this study (see Figure 3.1).

### **3.12 Shortcomings of the Instruments**

There are a few limitations to the instruments utilised as found in the process of data gathering. The first limitation was the insufficient number of instruments used to record the meetings. Though the researcher had initially utilised three recording equipments to record all the meetings, but due to the seating arrangement of the participants and the fact that the meetings were held around a round table, the coverage only involved certain participants' faces. Some of the participants' faces could not be captured since they were blocked by the person seated opposite. However, the problem did not affect the validity of data since it was most often the person seated at the back who occasionally initiated humour during the course of the meetings.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter reports the findings on the functions of humour and how turns are managed in semiformal academic management meetings that were recorded at NAS. Both analyses are described in relation to humour and the turn taking that displays the instances of authority and solidarity among the academicians. In addition, the findings also present the frequency of the occurrences of humour and laughter which are tabulated to further validate the findings.

The first part of this chapter examines the occurrences of humour and the management of turns as linguistic devices that are perceived as powerful tools to express dominance over the participants of a lower status. The functions of humour that were identified to perform power in a hierarchical environment are conflict, control, bound and tease (Hay, 1995).

Meanwhile the second part of this chapter deals with humour and turns which function as agents of collaboration and solidarity among the academicians in semiformal meetings. The analysis which comprised four functions of humour signifying solidarity are share, highlight/capitalise, bound and tease (Hay, 1995) which will also be highlighted in this chapter.

The number of turns of each speaker and other types of linguistic choices that were found employed by the academicians during the meetings which the researcher considers relevant are also presented in this chapter.

#### 4.1 Occurrences of Laughter: An Overview

All four meetings were attended by the academicians who often met regularly and worked together to arrive to a consensus on marking schemes, reporting and finalising results of a team project which was the TESL camp. It is discovered that laughter was a vital response of humour in the meetings recorded. Table 4.1 shows the occurrences of laughter found in the four meetings with a total duration of 382 minutes.

Meeting	Laughter Tokens	%
Meeting 1	160	49.84%
Meeting 3	84	26.17%
Meeting 4	54	16.82%
Meeting 2	23	7.17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>25%</b>

Table 4.1 Frequency of Laughter

The results in the study show that Meeting 1 produced the highest token of laughter (61.35%) while Meeting 2 initiated the least token of laughter (2.89%) (see Table 4.1).

Meeting 1 comprised the highest percentage of tokens of laughter due to the symmetrical relationships among participants. The participants are mainly junior lecturers while only

the chairperson who chaired the meeting is a senior staff (see Table 3.1, Section 3.1). Many instances of supportive humour (Holmes, 2006) were produced since the discussion was dominated by the junior staff of the same hierarchical status. The role of the chairperson also influenced the occurrence of humour as she also contributed actively in the production of humour.

In addition, the issues in Meeting 1 revolved around activities during the TESL camp were more relaxed and casual in comparison with other meetings which had lesser occurrences of laughter. Hence, this reflects that the topic of discussion influenced the amount of laughter in the meetings.

Meeting 2 consisted of an equal number of participants of junior and senior staff, thus the different status and positions among the participants were apparent. Besides, the agenda of the meeting was to come to a consensus on a marking scheme for a particular exam paper. The subject matter discussed in Meeting 2 was a serious issue thus not much humour was produced during the meeting. Hence, the meeting was conducted in a more formal manner in comparison with other meetings that discussed activities to be held during the TESL camp.

#### **4.2 Functions of Humour**

In totality, 25% instances of humour showing enactment of power or building of rapport were found in all meetings recorded. The instances of humour have been categorised into nine strategies based on Hay's (1995) Taxonomy Functions of Humour with the exception of the psychological function. Table 4.2 presents the tabulation of the occurrences of

humour that were compiled from the recordings of the meetings with a total duration of 382 minutes.

<b>Power</b>	<b>N (%)</b>	<b>Solidarity</b>	<b>N (%)</b>	<b>Total</b>
Tease	17 (36.17%)	Tease	23 (47.92%)	40 (42.05%)
Control	15 (31.91%)	Bound	12 (25%)	27 (28.46%)
Bound	10 (21.28%)	Highlight / capitalise	8 (16.67%)	18 (18.98%)
Conflict	5 (10.64%)	Share	5 (10.42%)	10 (10.53%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>47 (25%)</b>		<b>48 (25%)</b>	<b>95 (25%)</b>

Table 4.2 Functions of Humour that Illustrate Power and Solidarity according to Hay's Taxonomy (1995)

Table 4.2 presents the functions of humour that display authority and solidarity among the academicians which were produced in the respective meetings. For the power category, teasing received the highest percentage (36.17%) while conflict occurred the least (10.64%) in all of the four meetings recorded. On the other hand, for the solidarity category, teasing recorded the highest functions used in this category (47.92%) and share was the least found in the meetings (10.42%).

The following section will report on each function of humour that is used to enact power and to enhance camaraderie. Each function of humour will be dealt thoroughly based on the transcriptions of the four meetings that were recorded.

### 4.2.1 Power

There is approximately 25 percent of humour that was used to boost power in the four meetings recorded. Subversive and repressive humour was found utilised through the use of four functions of humour with the purpose of enacting power. The next section presents the functions of humour in relation to power i.e. tease, control, bound and conflict.

#### a. Tease

The occurrence of humour that functions to tease interlocutors in tandem with the assertion of power in all meetings recorded is 47.92 percent. Teasing received the highest percentage of humour in relation to exerting power as reflected in Table 4.2. The data suggested that teasing, that is manifested with power, overlaps with boundary functions since it excludes those who deviate from shared opinions. Teasing which boosts speakers' power was also found by Hay (1995) in her study of gender and humour.

Example 1, line [1183] present an instance of teasing with assertion of power by SL that is directed towards SM.

#### Example 1

Meeting 1: MM asks SL about the prizes for the best facilitator award of the TESL camp.

[...]

[1178] SM: so faci award should be / SL / ES and / AN cannot be in that committee right / so sixteen thirteen only / because you're the leader / leader cannot

[1179] SL: it doesn't say

[1180] SM: normally leader (cannot)  
@ (all laugh)

[1181] MM: *apa yang dapat pun?*  
(what will we get?)

[1182] SM: ha::: *dapat i pad*  
(get)

[1183] SL: (i pack)



@ (all laugh)

In this particular meeting, SL is the only senior lecturer while SM and MM are junior colleagues. In line [1178], MM initiates a skeptical comment about the prize that is provided for the winner of the best facilitator. Previously in the meeting, MM mentioned the *i pad* during the meeting and SM brings it up once again [line 1182] for the purpose of ridiculing MM. SL who takes the turn just after SM's contribution gains laughter from the team members with his comment that is directed towards SM. SL mimics the word *i pack* [line 1183] to appear amusing and also to criticise SM.

The participants laugh conspiratorially – which builds solidarity among them. However, the laughter also presents a form of authority enacted by SL. SL who was previously excluded from the discussion group (see Example 1, lines [1178-1180]) re-asserts her power to gain control over the meeting. She (SL) is challenged by SM who states that leaders cannot be nominated for the best facilitator award for the TESL camp. The teasing towards SM indirectly puts SL in the position of power during the discussion.

Example 1 presents turns which was allocated through self-selection. The distribution of turns is managed coherently and did not involve the use of any interruption markers such as “Excuse me” or false starts. This particular instance demonstrates MM self-selecting himself to make a contribution [line 1179] between SM's and SL's turn. All the participants; SM, SL and MM recognised the point where a TRP occurred thus allowing them to grab the floor with no pauses. It also proves that the conversation involved active listeners who took their turns accurately.

Example 2, lines [1222-1224] present another instance of humour that is directed by SL to SM which functions to challenge SM's status during the meeting.

### Example 2

Meeting 1: SL explains the merit system that is going to be used during the TESL camp.

[...]

- [1222] SL: how to design / this i leave you afterwards / <you help me> / *cumanya*  
(it's just that)  
*dia kata gini / sistem kita / kita akan buat just plus minus / instead kita*  
(he said that) (our system / we will do) (we)  
*kita akan tulis markah / letak plus minus je kat situ / when if dia punya*  
(we will give the marks / put) (there) (theirs)  
*attire bagus / kita letak plus je / yang tukang kiranya i dengan SM*  
(good / we put) (only / SM and I will edit )  
@ <looks at WW>
- [1223] WW: aha:::
- [1224] SL: er / (<another extra joke>)?  
@ <looks at SM and laughs>  
@ (FZ, ZN and WW laugh)

In this meeting, SL is the sole senior lecturer while the rest; SM, WW, FZ and ZN are junior lecturers. In line [1222], SL briefs the team members about the merit system that is going to be used during the TESL camp. A comment *another extra joke?* [line 1224] posed at SM indicates SL, one of the leaders of the TESL camp, exerting power over SM and this generates laughter from the female participants. The contribution by SL [line 1224] where she asserts her power to ridicule and tease SM eventually degrades SM's status in the conversation, and thus makes him the target of the humour.

Prior to discussing this, the team members had laughed at SM who tried to challenge SL by stating that SL and the other two leaders should not be nominated for the best facilitator award (see Example 1, lines [1178-1180]). The humour produced by SL is repressive

humour because it was directed downward to a subordinate, SM with the purpose of repressing the subordinate (see Chapter 2, Section 2.5.1).

It is also apparent that whilst teasing, she issued directives when SL said *i and SM will count* [line 1222] which has the underlying meaning, 'I am the leader and SM has to help me'. This indirect directives and laughter produced by SL suggest that she is instructing SM with the intentions of gaining compliance from him (SM). By applying repressive humour, SL's 'do power' is less explicit and this reduces the intensity of directives between SL and SM. As stated by Holmes (2000), repressive humour functions to reduce the face threat of a directive, challenge or criticism.

Example 2 demonstrates an instance of selecting the next speaker by looking at the potential speaker. According to Sacks et al. (1974), paralinguistic cues such as eye movements may signal that the current speaker's contribution is over. Such a point indicates that the previous speaker's talk is potentially complete and speaker change could occur. In line [1222], SL commands WW by stating that she (WW) will have to help her design the merit system that is going to be used during the TESL camp. WW provides a brief feedback that indicates she agrees [line 1123]. SL selects herself to make a contribution and directs a repressive humour to SM with a glance; [line 1224] where the contribution was found humorous by other participants i.e. FZ, ZN and WW. This example demonstrates that turn allocation by the current speaker employed by glancing at the subsequent speaker.

Example 3, lines [1026-1028] demonstrate humour with assertion of power that is directed by AN to RS in Meeting 3.

Example 3

Meeting 3: AN tells the participants that he will call the Gong Kedak's airbase to seek confirmation about bringing cameras inside the airbase.

[...]

[1026] AN: maybe we can double check i will call them

[1027] RS: yes / *kalau berlaku*  
(if happen)

some you know / emergency like you know / two years ago remember one  
one / one girl *kan* i have to carry on

[1028] AN: you / you just drove the vehicle /

(we have to carry her)

@ (all laugh)

Both interlocutors in this excerpt (AN and RS) are senior lecturers. In line [1026], RS supports AN's suggestion on making a confirmation with the airbase company about taking cameras inside the airbase to avoid any undesirable incidents like they had experienced previously. RS recalls the incident by claiming that he was the one who had to carry the student who fainted at the same airbase, two years ago.

AN interrupts RS [line 1028] and ridicules RS by stating that RS only drove a vehicle and ferried the patient to the clinic while AN and the others had to literally carry the patient. AN manifests his power by interrupting and producing humour that increases his power in the conversation. His contribution draws laughter from the team members which eventually weaken RS's status who previously stated that he was the one who saved the victim.

AN's contribution [line 1028] is an instance of jocular abuse; that is typically aimed at individuals in a high position and it has the possibility of fostering conflict if the relationship is distant (Holmes, 2002b).

Example 3 illustrates an interruption made by RS, a senior lecturer, during AN's turn. In line [1026], RS violates AN's turn and interrupts before AN finishes his turn. He (RS) selects himself to make a contribution and recalls the incident of a student who fainted at the Gong Kedak's airbase. AN interrupts RS before RS ends his contribution and AN produces a humorous turn to challenge RS' status in the discussion [line 1028]. This example demonstrates AN and RS, who are senior lecturers utilising interruption to gain the floor. A sign of power play is also seen in the interruption by AN as he challenges RS during his turn [line 1028].

Example 4, lines [1048-1052] illustrate another instance of humour whereby RS is teased by AN and this increases AN's power in the conversation.

#### Example 4

Meeting 3: ES informs SL that the phone numbers of the leaders of the TESL camp, office and the nearest clinic should be included in its programme book.

[...]

[1048] ES:            leaders only *lah* / leaders / and also office number / and also the clinic

[1049] RS:            emergency / the clinic / maybe you need to inform them also

[1050] SL:    ha okay

[1051] AN:    and <maybe (your number for the driver for instance)>

@            <looks at RS>

@            (all laugh)

[1052] RS:    <i'm not the driver>

@            <laughs>

All interlocutors in this excerpt (ES, RS SL and AN) are senior lecturers. In line [1048], ES comes to the decision that the contact numbers of leaders of the TESL camp, office and the nearest clinic ought to be listed in the TESL camp programme book for the students' reference.

RS interrupts ES and states that the committee has to inform the clinic if anything urgent comes up [line 1049]. AN thus evokes humour with the intention of ridiculing RS [line 1051] by stating that RS' phone number should be included in the programme book as a driver, in the instance of an emergency.

The team members laugh at the humour that was directed to AN. This teasing that was initiated by AN increases his (AN) power in the discussion and degrades RS' status in the meeting.

Throughout the meeting, it appears that AN and RS are challenging each other and aim to degrade each other's status during the discussion through the use of humour. Meanwhile, the other junior and senior female lecturers do not take the opportunity to challenge and defy RS since RS is the most senior colleague at the meeting.

Example 4 presents an interruption by RS that was made during the chairperson's turn (ES) [line 1049]. ES explains that important contacts such as the clinic should be included in the TESL camp's programme book. Before ES finishes his turn, RS interrupts and he provides support to ES' claim by stating that the committee of the TESL camp should

inform the clinic earlier in order to avoid any undesirable incident [line 1049]. SL selects herself and produces a brief response that indicates she agrees with RS [line 1250].

Subsequently, AN holds the floor by selecting himself and initiates a contribution that is intended to demean RS. His turn is perceived humorous by other participants when he sarcastically suggests to include RS' contact number for him (RS) to be the driver during emergency [line 1051]. The instance shows AN and RS refusing to take turns at possible TRPs thus has caused interruptions during their turns.

#### **b. Control**

The occurrence of humour that functions to control the behaviour of the participants in the recordings of the total meetings was 31.91 percent as illustrated in Table 4.2. The data suggested that humour in this category was commonly employed by one who is superior in ranking to his/ her subordinates which is in tandem with Sollit-Morris' (1997), Holmes' (2000b) and Arfeen's (2009) findings.

Example 5, lines [380-383] present laughter from the chairperson SL, who intends to control the behaviour of a lower ranked interlocutor.

#### Example 5

Meeting 1: SL explains the duty- time slot she has allocated for every facilitator involved in the TESL camp.

[...]

[380] SM: oh / i'm six / (of course the leader / only one / extra)  
@ (SL smiles)

[381] SL: ni / <i'm six / MM's seven>  
(this)  
@ <points to the schedule>

- [382] SM: (oh okay)  
@ (SL laughs)
- [383] SL: okay / okay / motivational talk / er / why i put you there you SM / because /  
because of merit demerit / and then / <just to fill in your six times>  
@ <laughs>

In this meeting, the interlocutor SL is a senior lecturer while SM is a junior colleague of his. This is an instance of repressive humour as it minimises the face threatening act and softens speech acts such as directives and criticisms (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003) (see Section 2.5.1, Chapter 2). In line [380], SL, who is of higher rank in this context and also one of the leaders of the TESL camp project, exerts her power to make SM conform to her instructions. The laughter by SL is to soften the demand she had made on SM and also to gain compliance so that he performs the task.

In this instance, the use of laughter can be interpreted as a strategy by a superior to make a subordinate conform to the task she has assigned. Thus, SL appears less demanding by producing laughter while performing directives to a person who is of a lower rank. Since the laughter is used to soften the demand and is directed by a superior (SL) to a subordinate (SM) to ensure SM conforms to SL's order. Hence, this instance presents SL who performs a directive that is interspersed with laughter to control the behaviour of the subordinate.

Example 5 demonstrates that the turn length taken by the chairperson (SL) is relatively longer than SM. In line [380], SM tries to challenge SL by stating that SL receives only one extra slot with respect to his duty slot, which he (SM) thinks is unfair. SL takes the turn and responds to SM's challenge that MM's duty receives the highest proportion of slots [line 381]. Eventhough MM's name is mentioned during the discussion, he does not



take the next turn to provide any response. Contrarily, SM grabs the floor and replies shortly as he mistakenly thinks that SL's duty slots contain the highest number of duty. Then, SL grabs the floor and adds a slot for SM and directs him to work during the motivational talk. The instance illustrates that the topic discussed influences the length of turns a person receives. This is because the particular speaker needs a longer time to explain and brief on the raised issue. Hence, the turns are coherently managed even though the turns are self-selected.

Example 6, lines [178-179] illustrate another example of humour that functions to control the behaviour of interlocutors.

#### Example 6

Meeting 2: AR reads out loud a sentence which is provided by a student to discuss the team members whether the answer is acceptable or vice versa.

[...]

[178] AR: okay i would like write / i would like to read a sentence here / for number three / the student's answer / i was active in sport both and school and university / and the student write here / i good in tennis / at

[179] ML: don't we write there? / *kita nampak sikit* / i just cannot / it just can't go into  
why why  
(so that we can see)  
my (head) / (full of water)  
@ (all laugh)

Both interlocutors (AR and ML) in this excerpt are senior lecturers. In line [178], ML who holds a Ph.D directs AR to write out the sentence she has read to ensure that the examples provided are clearly demonstrated to the rest of the staff. A comment *full of water* that was inserted by ML [line 181] gives the meaning that her brain is already full and that she hardly understands the sentence read by AR. ML's contribution generates laughter from

the team members and appears to be an effective strategy to challenge and gain compliance from AR. AR who is a senior lecturer obeys ML's instruction and she writes the student's answers on the whiteboard.

It appears that the joke produced by ML is an indirect way of performing directives thus minimising the face threatening act of the interlocutor, who in this case is AR. As put forth by Arfeen (2009), humour helps mitigate the intensity of instructions and protects the face needs of the interlocutors. The humour produced by ML elicits laughter from the colleagues and compels AR to obey the instruction directed towards her. This is an evidence of repressive humour with the intention of gaining compliance where ML exerts her power on AR, who is of the same status as her in terms of designation.

Example 6 illustrates an interruption by ML during AR's turn. In line [178], AR reads a sentence that was provided by a particular student in order to discuss it with the other participants. Before AR finishes her turn, ML self selects herself and interrupts [line 179] to give orders to AR to write the sentence on the whiteboard. The interruption is perceived humorous by all and generates laughter from them. The interruption demonstrates that she (ML) is exerting her power by opposing AR and also to control the conversation.

Example 7, lines [182-185] demonstrate an extension of humour of Example 6, lines [178-179] used to gain compliance from a colleague of the same status.

### Example 7

Meeting 2: AR reads one of the student's answer that is written on the whiteboard to discuss with the rest of the team members.

[...]

[182] AR: okay i good in tennis / at the school i represented my school in tournaments / and also good in rugby and sports it good to my healthy / as we can see a few mistakes here

[183] AK: a few (mistakes?)

@ (all laugh)

[184] ML: there is a lot

[185] AR: yeah <lots of mistakes> okay so / i'm sure that she got two marks for the content right / but what about the language?

@ <AR circles the mistakes in the sentences that were written on the whiteboard>

All the interlocutors in this meeting i.e. AR, AK and ML are senior lecturers. After NZ helps AR to write the answers from the work of a particular student on the whiteboard, AR reads the sentence and claims that the sentences contain only a handful of mistakes [line 182]. AK interrupts and produces a high pitched comment *a few mistakes?* [line 183] where she questions AR's claim. In doing so, she shows disagreement. AK's contribution is perceived as humorous as it elicits laughter from the team members.

The instance presents AK enacting her power although they both have a symmetrical relationship. As stated earlier, AK challenges AR's opinion with the use of a high pitched comment to oppose AR's opinion. The comment influences AR and the rest of the participants to agree with her view. This example suggests that humour is a powerful tool to control and influence a person's standpoint.

Example 7 presents contributions from the participants which are self-selected. In line [182], AR, who holds the turn, reads the sentence that was provided by a particular student.

She is interrupted by AK before she completes giving her comments on the sentence. AK self selects herself and interrupts AR to argue against AR's claim [line 183]. The contribution by AK is found amusing since everybody laughs when she opposes AR. ML grabs the floor after AK and provides support to substantiate AK's claim [line 184] by stating that there were a lot of mistakes in the sentence that was provided by the student. Further, AR grabs the floor and agrees that the sentence she has read contains many errors.

The turns were all self-selected and an interruption was made by AK to challenge AR. It can be interpreted that the interruption made by AK during AR's turn [line 183] demonstrates that she (AK) exerts her power on AR to get the turn and dominate the discussion.

Example 8, lines [1248-1250] show evidence where humour can control a contribution and gain compliance from a target participant.

#### Example 8

Meeting 3: MS suggests taking her netball team members to help the facilitators assist the students during a hike at Bukit Kluang.

[...]

[1248] SL: i think we will troublesome them to come seriously

[1249] MS: no because i'm the coach / and i am

[1250] SL: no no i know / i know / but  
troublesome for them / and just that / i don't know / are you / are you think  
that we are (<unreliable?>)

@ <laughs>

@ (ZN laughs)

In this excerpt, SL, a senior lecturer interacts with MS who is a junior lecturer. MS, is also a state netball coach proposes to bring along her players on the hike to Bukit Kluang with

the intentions of helping the facilitators assist the students. SL, who is one of the leaders of the TESL camp declines MS' offer as she believes that the participating lecturers are capable of supervising their students despite the small number of lecturers going on the hike.

In line [1250], SL subtly shows her disagreement through the use of laughter and influences the situation using the authority she has during meeting. As put forth by Morais (1994), laughter can function as a coping strategy and thus may display an indirect opposition towards different views.

The interruption made by SL during MS' turn indicates that she is exercising her power of a leader to challenge MS' suggestion. Moreover, SL intends to gain compliance from MS and conform to her decision. Consequently, the use of power by SL in the meeting makes MS and the rest of the participants agree with SL's decision of not bringing along the netball players. This is an evidence of repressive humour whereby SL directs a joke to reduce the face threat of a directive, challenge or criticism (Holmes, 2000).

Example 8 illustrates MS who is interrupted by SL before she finishes explaining the rationale of inviting her netball team for the hike. SL self selects herself and violates MS' turn to decline her (MS) offer [line 1248]. SL sarcastically ends her contribution by questioning MS, whether she (MS) thinks that the lecturers involved are unable to assist the students. As mentioned earlier, SL's interruption displays signs of power as she enacts her power to question and oppose MS.

**c. Bound**

The occurrence of humour that functions to create boundaries for those who have deviated from the social norms and shared values in the meetings recorded is 21.28 percent as indicated in Table 4.2. It is found that with this type of humour, power fluctuates where it can be enacted by people regardless of the status they hold in a hierarchical environment.

Example 9, lines [689-694] present an evidence of how humour clarifies boundaries on a particular person who is perceived to have deviated from the on-going discussion.

Example 9

Meeting 3: AN asks whether the team needs an additional facilitator for the trip to the Syahbandar Esplanade Park.

[...]  
[689] ES: one more / one more  
[690] AN: so we need one more location?  
[691] SL: no faci  
[692] ZN: faci faci  
[693] MM: okay (thank you AN) / oh the camera man can <follow>  
@ (all laugh)  
@ <looks at the researcher>  
[694] AN: it's the camera (woman)  
@ (all laugh)

In this excerpt, ES, AN and SL are senior lecturers meanwhile MM and ZN are junior colleagues. In line [690], AN misunderstands the information provided by the team members and thinks that ES is asking for one more facilitator for the trip to the Syahbandar Esplanade Park. AN's turn that appears as an offer to help contribute ideas for the trip [line 690] is consequently ridiculed by MM since he has posed a wrong question. Further, MM who sits beside AN directs an ironic *thank you* to AN [line 693] which in fact indicates a contrast to what he really means. The comment by MM invites chuckles and great laughter

from the participants. Hence, the laughter creates a boundary between AN and the other members because he has deviated from the discussion.

It is noted that the ironic remark produced by MM is evidence of subversive humour [line 693]. Subversive humour is a type of humour which is directed by a subordinate to challenge and make a criticism levelled at colleagues who are of a higher rank. In this case, MM produces a humorous contribution to challenge AN's status in the meeting.

In line [694], AN who is previously ridiculed by MM and the participants further initiates a contribution that acts as an effective strategy to challenge MM's attack on him. AN reasserts his power and control in the conversation by repairing MM's contribution who mistakenly refers to the researcher as a camera man. This presents AN's contribution to be perceived as humorous by the team members and it produces laughter from them.

The humour produced by AN boosts his power and creates a boundary between MM and the team members. This example shows evidence that power fluctuates and can be exercised to regain status and control over the conversation (Fairclough, 2001) through the use of humour.

Example 9 presents the turn taking patterns that is organised through self selection and a brief interruption by ZN. ES asks the participants to suggest an additional facilitator for the trip to the Syahbandar Esplanade Park. He opens the discussion to give opportunity to other members to make a contribution [line 610]. Subsequently, the turn is taken by AN

[line 690] who seems to deviate from the discussion as he provides a wrong response to ES' query. SL takes the floor after AN and she is interrupted by ZN [line 691-692].

Both of them correct AN and state that the team needs a volunteer to assist the students during the trip. MM self-selects himself and produces an ironic *thank you* [line 693] that is directed to AN. His (MM) contribution generates laughter from his colleagues. MM continues his turn and suggests that the researcher could be the facilitator. Since MM wrongly referred to the researcher as a cameraman [line 693], AN grabs the floor and corrects him (MM) [line 694]. As stated earlier, AN's contribution is perceived as amusing by the team members and it is also seen as a challenge towards MM who previously ridiculed him. The turn taking pattern in this instance shows that the speakers self-select themselves to challenge each other through humour.

Example 10, lines [811-816] demonstrate another example of humour that creates boundary between AN and the other participants.

#### Example 10

Meeting 3: AN informs the team members that the hot seat activity is the most popular activity in the English Language Enhancement Programme.

[...]

[811] AN: yeah / that's right we have four facilitators / all the indoor committee and except for SL / and then we split into two groups to start and then we will (xxx) / and the hot seat was rated / rated the number one activity at the English enhancement programme / <rated number one activity >  
@ <smiles>

[812] ES: the hot seat

[813] SL: hot seat

[814] AN: number one / in English / enhancement programme

[815] ES: the vocabulary  
game

[816] AN: <did you really read (any nst or news week or something?>)



@ <smiles>  
@ (all laugh)

All the interlocutors in this excerpt i.e. AN, ES and SL are senior lecturers. In line [811], AN holds the turn and describes the “hot seat” activity which he is assigned to conduct during the TESL camp. The “hot seat” is an activity where the students are expected to choose their favourite character from a movie or book. This activity requires the students to become the selected character and they will be posed with a barrage of questions by their friends. The players in this game will take turns and every student will get the chance to be their selected character.

In line [811], AN claims that the “hot seat” activity is rated as the number one activity in the Malaysian English Language Enhancement Programme but it appears that none of his colleagues were aware of this except for ES. Further, AN initiates an ironic comment [line 816] with the underlying notion that his colleagues do not read the newspapers or magazines i.e. The News Straits Times (NST) or News Week since they do not seem to know about the “hot seat” activity. The question posed by AN is a negative comment that is directed to the members in a humorous way which generates laughter from them. Since only AN and ES are aware of the “hot seat” activity, this creates a boundary between AN and ES and the rest of the team members. This example presents AN exercising his power while holding a turn and consequently, the humour helps boost his status to a higher level in the meeting.

Example 10 illustrates the turns that are allocated through self-selection i.e. taken by AN, ES and SL. In line [811], AN holds the turn and briefs them on the “hot seat” activity to

the team members. He finishes his turn and the floor is taken by ES. ES provides support to AN's claim [line 812, line 815] by adding a brief description of the game to the participants. The interruption by ES [line 815] is deemed as a sign of solidarity since ES provides the appropriate response to AN's contribution. ES opens the floor to every member who wishes to make comments on the "hot seat" activity. Since nobody takes the turn, AN selects himself and generates an ironic contribution [line 816] that gives the underlying meaning that the team members are supposed to be aware of the issue. The instance presents that interruption need not be negative but it may also act as collaboration by the interrupter to the current speaker.

Example 11, lines [1177-1180] present an example of SM, who is of a lower rank subjecting SL's utterance by excluding her from the discussion group.

#### Example 11

Meeting 1: SL briefs the rest of the team members about the best facilitator award for the TESL camp.

[...]

[1177] SL: best faci award / best faci award among us *lah* / *yang* sixteen of us / *kita*  
(that) (we)  
/ *kita ada* best faci award so *siapa yang nak dapat* best please volunteer  
(we have) (who wants to be)  
more on the

[1178] SM: so faci award should be / SL / ES and / AN cannot be in that committee  
right / so sixteen thirteen only / because you're the leader / leader cannot

[1179] SL: it doesn't say

[1180] SM: normally leader (cannot)  
@ (all laugh)

In this excerpt, SL is a senior lecturer meanwhile SM is a junior colleague. In line [1177], SL states that the best facilitator award for the TESL camp is open to all lecturers regardless of their position. SM interrupts SL's turn by stating that the leaders of the TESL

camp who are SL, ES and AN should not be nominated [line 1178] because they have the highest possibilities of being selected as the best facilitator. SL disagrees and states that she wants to be listed as one of the nominees but SM argues that leaders usually do not participate in such awards. The comment inserted by SM [line 1180] challenges SL's power as a leader as well as generates laughter from the team members.

SM and all the participants involved during the discussion are subordinates to SL, who is the leader of the TESL camp. The example reflects SM gaining power by utilising subversive humour to undermine SL's status as a superior. The humour and laughter by the other members create a boundary between SL and the rest of the participants as she (SL) is the only person who is from a different rank.

This instance of humour illustrates an example of subversive humour which is directed by SM to his leader. Indirectly, SM performs a directive through humour to SL to state that she (SL) cannot be included in the nominee list for the best facilitator award.

Example 11 illustrates the turns that are allocated through self-selection. In line [1177], SL holds the turn and states that volunteers who are willing to work more hours will get better chance to win the best facilitator award. SL pauses at the end of her turn [line 1177] and shortly after that, SM grabs the floor [line 1178]. SM takes the turn and challenges SL by stating that she is not eligible to be nominated as one of the candidates for the award. Since the challenge is directed towards SL, she takes the floor and opposes SM's claim [line 1179]. SM then grabs the floor and produces a humorous contribution that leaders should not participate in such awards. The extracts show that turns were managed coherently

without interruption. It appears that SL and SM make their respective contributions at possible TRPs.

Example 12, lines [66-69] present another instance of humour that sets a boundary between SM and SL.

### Example 12

Meeting 1: SM suggests adding the number of staff in order to assist the students who are in charge of the opening ceremony during the TESL camp.

- [...]  
[66] SM: ha / just to assist / in case to put here and there / to lift things / who knows / okay i'm lost  
[67] SL: why are / why do you lost?  
[68] MM: these kids will help us around right for the opening ceremony / how many of them?  
[69] SL: twenty / make sure that we have like / er / to identify them by the way / and and we have to inform number one / inform them number two / what are the responsibilities / so they won't be lost like <you>  
@ <laughs>

In this excerpt, SL is a senior lecturer meanwhile MM is a junior colleague. In line [66], SM expresses his concern that there is insufficient staff during the opening ceremony of the TESL camp to assist the students who would be responsible for handling the event. The skeptical remark by SL *why do you lost?* (why do you seem lost?) [line 67] shows doubt that the staff and students would be unable to manage the situation despite the lack of manpower. SL who disagrees with SM initiates a repressive humour [line 69] with the purpose of opposing SM's opinion.

The comment *so they won't be lost like you* [line 69] as stated by SL creates a boundary which excludes SM from the discussion. SL's comment ridicules SM since he is

considered by SL as the only person who will get confused and “lost” during the opening ceremony. This example is an instance of repressive humour where it was directed by a leader, SL towards her subordinate, SM. The laughter [line 69] helps SL appears less authoritarian while making the criticism towards SM.

Example 12 presents the turns which are managed coherently without any interruptions. In line [66], SM suggests adding more staff to be in charge of the opening ceremony. He ends his turn by providing a rationale for increasing the number of staff which is to avoid any problem that might arise during the ceremony. SL takes the turn and poses a skeptical question [line 67] to SM. SM does not respond to SL’s question but MM takes the floor and poses a question to SL, asking how many students are involved in the ceremony [line 68]. Then, SL takes the turn and responds to MM’s question [line 69]. She explains the duty of the facilitators during the ceremony and she completes her turn with a sarcastic comment that is directed to MM [line 69]. These extracts explain that the academicians self-select themselves to make their respective contributions in this discussion.

#### **d. Conflict**

According to Hay (1995), humour in this category tends to create conflict between the speakers and interlocutors. The occurrence of conflict humour is 10.64 percent and it was the least popular type of humour produced by the academicians as can be clearly seen from Table 4.2. This type of humour was commonly directed by colleagues in symmetrical relationship who hold similar positions in the department.

Example 13, lines [247-257] show an instance of humour that has the potential to foster conflict between AN and the other participants.

### Example 13

Meeting 2: The participants are discussing the answer written by a student in a particular exam as to whether the answer is acceptable or irrelevant.

- [...]
- [247] AN: i was active in sport both in school and in the university / in my school i was selected as the head prefect in my final year / i was also the president of the girl's guide association
- [248] ML: not relevant
- [249] AN: but in the university i was the president of the tennis bla bla bla / i think it's perfect
- [250] ML: no:::
- [251] AN: because it's school / and then it's university / it talks about the experience
- [252] ML: (...)
- [253] TP: but it's not sports / because prefect / <prefect> / (...) / half a mark / @ <shakes head>
- [254] AN: <kesian?>  
(pity?)  
@ <looks at TP>
- [255] TP: yeah (<kesian>) / yeah half / half  
(pity)  
@ <laughs>  
@ (all laugh)
- [256] ML: (for writing)  
@ (all laugh)
- [257] NZ: yeah

All the interlocutors in this excerpt i.e. AN, ML, TP and NZ are senior lecturers. In line [247], AN attempts to defend the answer provided by his student and tries to convince the rest of the participants that the student's response is acceptable and related to the answer scheme. However, all the team members disagree and claim that the answer is irrelevant.

ML, who is a Ph.D holder, interrupts AN by firmly stating that the answer is irrelevant [line 248]. ML's opinion is supported by TP who comes to the decision that the answer is

worth only half a mark, not because of the content but because the student has put some effort to write the answer [line 256]. Besides, the lexical item *kesian* (pity) [line 252-253] indicated mockingly towards the particular student provokes laughter from the team members.

TP and ML who are senior lecturers similar to AN are exercising their powers to challenge AN's opinion. The laughter from the colleagues is a response indicating that TP and ML's opinion are strongly perceived by the participants. It is apparent that the laughter initiated by the team members could lead to a conflict because of contradictions in opinions. AN is laughed at by his colleagues which shows that he is being belittled.

The laughter which occurred may also be categorised into the boundary function which divides AN from the social group because he has deviated from the agreed decision. As Hay (1995) stated, an instance of boundary humour that is exercised with power excludes those who deviate from social norms and shared values. This example illustrates that AN is excluded from the group and that is how conflict can be initiated.

Example 13 illustrates an instance of turns that are allocated through self-selection. In line [247], AN reads the sentence from a particular student's work and he is interrupted by ML before he finishes his turn. ML interrupts AN because the answer read by AN is irrelevant according to the answer scheme [line 248]. AN takes the turn after ML, interrupts her and continues reading the answer [line 249]. He claims that the answer that was written by his student is acceptable.

However, ML takes the turn and opposes AN's claim. ML's opposition is supported by TP who grabs the floor after ML's contribution [line 253]. Knowing that the opposition is directed towards him, AN takes the floor and asks whether the marks ought to be awarded is out of sympathy for the student [line 254]. TP responds *yes* to AN's query resulting in laughter from the other team members. [line 255]. Later, ML selects herself to make a contribution [line 256] and her contribution is supported by NZ [line 257]. The instance shows that allocations of turns are mostly self-selected.

Example 14, lines [258-266] illustrate the continuation of conversation from Example 13, lines [247-257].

#### Example 14

Meeting 2: The team members discuss the marks that ought to awarded for the answer provided by a particular student.

[...]  
[258] AN: two marks? / half a mark for the content / and then four marks the grammar?  
[259] ML: no / half mark for the whole  
[260] AN: for the whole thing?  
[261] ML: yeah  
[262] AN: but if the grammar is perfect?  
[263] ML: but the answer is not related  
[264] AN: but the grammar is the grammar  
[265] ML: no::: / it has to be <related>  
[266] TP: er have you been to school? / (i went to the clinic / and everything was perfect but then)  
@ (all laugh)

All the interlocutors in this excerpt i.e. AN, ML and TP are senior lecturers. In line [261], AN still feels that his student's answer is relevant and demands for the marks that his student deserves. Majority of the staff at the meeting concur that the answer provided by the particular student is irrelevant.



TP challenges AN by questioning and joking [line 266] which act as an indirect challenge on AN's opinion that the answer provided by AN's student is irrelevant. TP's challenge weakens AN's power in the conversation and it eventually makes the team members agree with her (TP) that the answer provided by AN's student cannot be accepted. The example demonstrates a challenge made by TP and ML towards AN, whereby all of them are of the same status. It appears that the challenge made by TP and ML is able to influence the rest of the staff [line 265].

Besides, the joke [line 266] produced by TP is intended to make AN conform to the decision that the answer is irrelevant. The laughter from the rest of the participants is an attempt to belittle AN and create a conflict between AN, TP and ML. This example clearly shows that TP, who is a senior lecturer utilised humour to oppose AN's stand and indirectly gains more control over the meeting.

The instance of humour provided in Example 14 also overlaps with the boundary function since the laughter produced by the rest excludes AN from the discussion group as he is being mocked.

Example 14 shows turns taken by the participants involved through self-selection. In line [258], AN asks the rest of the participants about the marks that ought to be allocated to his student's answer. ML takes the next turn and states that the student deserves only half a mark. Before ML finishes her turn, AN interrupts her and asks whether his student deserves half a mark for the content and the grammar of the essay [line 260]. ML takes the turn quickly and answers *yes* to AN's query [line 261]. Subsequently, AN grabs the floor

and demands marks for the correct grammar of his student's answer [line 262]. ML declines AN's demands and states that his student's answer is irrelevant [line 263].

AN takes the turn and claims that the marks for perfect grammar should be allocated although the content is irrelevant [line 264]. ML grabs the floor and disagrees with AN's claim. ML states that the content is more important and it should be related to the answer scheme. Her (ML) claim influences the rest of the participants thus leading to overlapping talk regarding the issue. Later, TP grabs the floor and poses a question to AN which generates laughter from the team members [line 266].

It is apparent self-selected turns were taken by the participants who are involved with the issue discussed i.e. AN, ML and TP. This shows that the chairman of the meeting allows the members to come to a decision about the problem without restricting their turns. Besides, Handford (2001:225) states that the chairperson's overt presence would probably mean that the other participants would be less empowered to arrive at a decision by themselves. Thus, the non-involvement of the chairperson provides an opportunity for the team members to arrive at a consensus without his leading presence (Handford, 2001).

Another example of humour initiated among interactants is depicted in Example 15, lines [154-159].

#### Example 15

Meeting 3: MS informs the participants about the stations where she has placed the lecturers involved during an activity called "explore lit".

[...]

[154] MS: okay and then / cikgu RS will in charge at station five / the gazebo

[155] ES: oh yes of course  
 [156] RS: bus stand / bus stand  
 [157] AN: <who gets to the gazebo?>  
 @ <looks at ES>  
 [158] ES: ha?  
 @ <looks at AN>  
 [159] AN: who gets the <gazebo?> / (*kesian*)  
 (pity)  
 @ <ES points to RS>  
 @ (all laugh)

The discussion in this excerpt involves both senior (ES, AN and RS) and a junior (MS) colleagues. In line [154], MS who is in charge of the “explore lit” activity has arranged for a location for every lecturer and has positioned RS at the gazebo. “Explore lit” is an abbreviation of “explore literature” whereby the activity is similar to explore race. The students who participate in the activity will have to answer questions on literature for them to gain clues and reach the next pit stop.

After ES finishes his turn, RS takes the floor and suggests he is to be posted at the bus stand [line 156]. AN interrupts RS [line 157] further by putting an element of sarcasm during his turn [line 159] which provokes laughter from his colleagues. The gazebo refers to the unoccupied hut which is located beside the main road of NAS. Since RS is the most senior in terms of age and position among the participants, thus it is perceived as pitiful for him to be positioned at an abandoned place such as the gazebo.

The lexical item *kesian* (pity) [line 159] by AN is an ironic comment that was directed to RS since ‘pity’ is actually the opposite of what he really means. Hence, AN’s contribution [line 159] is perceived and treated as a joke by the other team members. The laughter from

the participants ridicules RS and could trigger a conflict between him and the initiator, AN. Through this example, AN who is a senior lecturer can be as seen as challenging RS.

Example 15 illustrates turns that is allocated through self-selection. In line [154], MS briefs the participants about their respective location during “explore lit”. ES grabs the floor after MS in agreement with her (MS) [line 155]. Later RS suggests himself that he ought to be positioned at the bus stand [line 156] but he is interrupted by AN [line 157] who poses a question to ES, asking who gets to guard at the gazebo. ES responds through paralinguistic features as he points to RS to answer AN’s query [line 159]. AN takes the turn and produces a sarcastic remark that is directed towards RS [line 159] which eventually generates laughter from the participants. It is apparent that the meeting conducted does not follow the conventional typical of a meeting where the chairperson will allocate turns to the participants (Baljit Kaur, 1996).

Example 16, lines [468-474] present an extension of humour from Example 15, Lines [154-159].

#### Example 16

Meeting 3: SL suggests that AN helps to facilitate the students in their preparation of the lesson plan for micro teaching during the TESL camp.

[...]  
[468] SL: he has a lot of things to do / to do the merit  
[469] ZN: yeah merit demerit / (he’s busy already)  
@ (SM smiles)  
[470] ES: but AN i guess /  
[471] SL: can can / (xxx) for (the the)  
@ (ES laughs)  
[472] RS: AN is busy with his  
[473] ES: outdoor  
[474] RS: (brilliant idea)

@ (all laugh)

In this excerpt, SL, RS and ES are senior lecturers while ZN is a junior colleague. In this instance, SL asks AN whether he can be one of the facilitators in assisting the students for the preparation of lesson plans during the TESL camp. RS, who was ridiculed by AN previously undermines AN by inserting a comment *brilliant idea* that is directed towards AN [line 474]. The interruption made by RS is viewed as being funny by the team members because of the presence of irony in the phrase *brilliant idea* [line 474] which actually indicates the opposite in meaning.

In line [474] RS takes the opportunity to exercise his power by interrupting ES's turn in order to challenge AN's mockery that was directed earlier towards him (see Example 15, Lines [154-159]). The sarcastic remark made by RS provides room for conflict between RS and AN since they are challenging each other; from time to time during the discussion. The enactment of power by RS is not only present in his contribution but also in the interruption he makes during ES' turn [line 473]. RS manages to reassert his power through interruption after his status was previously challenged by AN.

Example 16 demonstrates turns taken by the participants through self-selection. In line [468], SL states that SM has a lot of work thus he is unable to assist the students in their preparation of the lesson plan during the TESL camp. ZN grabs the floor and supports SL's claim by stating that SM will be busy finalising marks for the merit system. The chairperson, ES suggests AN to perform the task [line 470] and it is supported by SL in her turn subsequent to ES [line 471].

In line [472], RS grabs the floor and produces a contribution to challenge AN. RS' turn is violated by ES as he interrupts and states that AN will be busy with outdoor tasks. After ES finishes his turn, RS produces an ironic comment *brilliant idea* which is aimed at putting AN down [line 474]. The contribution by RS is perceived amusing by all the participants as they laugh at AN. The extract illustrates that the participants were able to recognise possible TRPs thus minimising the occurrence of interruptions during the discussion.

It is clear that humour in this study enacted with power has several functions. These functions included teasing, controlling the behaviour of colleagues, creating boundary with those who deviated from the discussions and initiating conflict between the speakers and other interlocutors.

#### **4.2.2 Solidarity**

There is approximately 25 percent of humour that functions to foster solidarity in all four meetings recorded. Generally, humour which functions to foster solidarity among colleagues was produced by members who contributed ideas and opinions throughout the discussions. Also, it was commonly utilised by the person who produced most humour in the meeting they attended i.e. SM in Meeting 1 and AN in Meeting 2. In the following section, the functions of humour that enforce solidarity i.e. tease, bound, highlight/capitalise and share are discussed.

**a. Tease**

The occurrence of humour that functions to reinforce solidarity is referred to as ‘Joking Relationship’ termed by Radcliffe Brown (cited in Hay, 1995) which totalled to 47.92 percent (see Table 4.2). Tease fulfilled the highest functions utilised by the lecturers to signal collaboration. Humour in this category was typically found initiated and directed by both participants of a different hierarchy i.e. from a superior to subordinate and from a subordinate to a superior. The following examples present the teasing that maintains camaraderie among the academicians of NAS.

Example 17, lines [1023-1026] illustrate an instance where teasing is directed towards RR by AN which works towards fostering solidarity among the participants.

Example 17

Meeting 3: SM asks AN whether the lecturers and the students are allowed to take pictures inside the Gong Kedak’s airbase.

[...]

[1023] SM: most of us have camera right / hand phone camera

[1024] AN: it goes without saying nothing / maybe dr. RR is the only who without er / the camera on the phone

[1025] RR: (<excuse me>)

@ <stares at AN>

@ (all laugh)

[1026] RS: she has / (she has the handphone without the camera)

@ (RR smiles)

@ (all laugh)

The conversation in this excerpt involves senior lecturers (AN, RS and RR) and a junior lecturer (SM). In line [1023], SM is curious to know whether it is permissible to take photos inside Gong Kedak’s airbase and expresses his concern that majority of the students and lecturers have hand phones that are equipped with cameras. At the Gong Kedak’s

airbase, visitors are not allowed to take photographs in the area, so this would pose an issue for the lecturers to observe the students.

AN replies SM's query by initiating a joke which is directed to RR and it consists a hint of sarcasm in his voice [line 1024]. RR, who holds a Ph.D, turns out to be the target of humour where she is belittled and ridiculed by AN who jokingly claimed she is outdated as she is the only one who still owns a hand phone without a camera. The laughter by the team members challenges RR's status in the meeting. However, RR responds with smile which reflects that RR is not affected by the joke that was directed towards her [line 1025].

Then, RS extends the joke by restating the claim by AN that RR has a handphone without a camera [line 1026] and that prolongs the laughter from the participants. This example demonstrates the use of humour that creates solidarity and enhances social cohesion among members of the same status i.e. AN, RR, SM and RS. Besides, the humour produced was an example of conjoint humour where turns were collaboratively constructed by other participants namely RS [line 1026]. The concept of solidarity that is expressed using humour is reflected by the use of collaborative contribution and extended humour. Coates (1989) defines it as "one-at-a-time" style of talk in which the participants contribute collaboratively with no overlaps and are totally independent (see Section 2.6, Chapter 2).

Example 17 illustrates an example of turns that is allocated through self selection. In line [1023], SM holds the turns and states that everyone involved in the visit to the airbase might take photos in the area. Since AN is in charge of this visit, he responds quickly and agrees with SM's statement [line 1024]. AN continues his turn and teases RR. Since the



tease is directed towards her, RR grabs the floor to oppose AN's claims about her [line 1025] and concurrently stares at AN.

After everyone has laughed at the joke that is directed towards RR, the joke is lengthened by RS, the most senior lecturer, who grabs the floor and initiates humour [line 1026] thus generating more laughter from the participants. The example demonstrates that the turns taken by the participants who are involved with the raised issues, namely, AN. Besides, the turns taken are also influenced by status a person holds in the discussion where the participant of a higher position (RS) dominates the floor compared to those in the lower position.

Example 18, lines [360-364] demonstrate another evidence of teasing that enforces solidarity among colleagues.

#### Example 18

Meeting 2: ML asks the participants whether the answer provided by her student is acceptable or vice versa.

[...]

[360] ML: between thousand to thousand five / between? / *lebih dari* / one thousand  
(more than)

*dah tu* / or just one thousand / between thousand / to thousand five?  
(then)

[361] AN: <that's the answer?>  
@ <looks at ML>

[362] ML: let's say

[363] AK: you need to write two to three sentences / the instruction says

[364] ML: (<then i rest my case>)

@ <laughs>

@ (all laugh)

All the interlocutors in this excerpt i.e. AN, ML and AK are senior lecturers. In line [360], ML queries whether the answers that were written by her student are worth being awarded marks. AN responds to ML and asks her (ML) whether the answer she reads is the answer written by the student [line 362]. AK assertively replies ML, that the answer is unacceptable since it does not conform to the instruction [line 363]. Further, ML replies *then I rest my case* that is interspersed with laughter states that that she cannot win the argument any further thus she yields to AK's comment [line 364]. ML's response generates laughter from the team members as it is perceived humorous by them.

The example illustrates ML conforming to AK and she establishes common views with AK's claim through the use of humour. As put forth by Hay (1995:103), a tease can also reinforce solidarity if it is about something that is clearly false or trivial. In this instance, it is clear that ML has mistakenly posed a question to demand for marks. This resulted in teasing initiated by AK towards her since she was negligent of not reading the instruction. The teasing is seen as strengthening solidarity between her and ML.

Example 18 shows how convergence and consensus are reached in meetings through the use of humour. It is apparent that turns can be managed coherently by the participants without any interruptions and overlaps. In line [360], the turn is held by ML who queried the answer provided by from her student. She creates an open discussion to gain the other members' response. AN grabs the floor and poses a question for confirmation from ML [line 361]. ML takes the floor as the question is directed to her [line 362]. Further, AK makes a contribution and states that the answer provided by ML's student is unacceptable because it does adhere with the instruction.

ML replies humorously to AK's claim by stating *i rest my case* and her contribution generates laughter from the participants [line 364]. The extracts demonstrate that the turns were self-selected and managed coherently by the participants who were involved in the issue discussed. It also shows that the chairperson plays a less active role by allowing the participants to come to a decision about the topic without overt gatekeeping (Handford, 2010:226).

Example 19, lines [901-920] show another instance of humour that establishes rapport among team members.

Example 19

Meeting 1: The participants count the number of slots of duty that have been allocated for them during the TESL camp.

[...]

[901] SM: *saya punya lima je*  
(mine is five only)

[902] SL: *ha?*

[903] SM: *lima je*  
(five only)

[904] SL: *ye ke? ce kira WW / <i tak percaya dia ni>*  
(is it? please count WW / i don't believe him)  
@ <laughs>

[905] SM: *kalau betul saya buka (<se lagi air ni>)*  
(if correct i open another drink)  
@ <points to a drink and and laughs>  
@ (WW, ZN, and FZ laugh)

[906] ZN: *minum je*  
(just drink)

[907] FZ: *yang ni ada dua right?*  
(this one have two...)

[908] SM: *yang mana?*  
(which one?)

[909] WW: *jangan kira briefing eh*  
(don't count)

[910] FZ: *day four dia ada two slashes so sebab tu jadi enam*  
(it has) (that is why it becomes six)

- [911] SM: two slashes? / *nama sekali je / sembilan hingga dua belas kira sekalilah*  
(one name only / nine to twelve count once)
- [912] FZ: *dua / kak SL kira dua*  
(twice / SL count twice)
- [913] SM: *<kira dua ke? >*  
(count twice?)
- @ <looks at SL>
- [914] WW: *dua lah / lapan setengah / sepuluh setengah / sepuluh setengah / dua*  
(two ... / eight thirty) (ten thirty) (ten thirty)  
*dua belas setengah*  
(twelve thirty)
- [915] SM: *<the whole day kira satu je?>*  
(count once only)
- @ <looks at SL>
- [916] SL: *kira dua*  
(count twice)
- [917] SM: *kira dua sebab kalau break (...)*  
(count twice because if break)
- [918] WW: *itu time slot lah tu*  
(that's the time slot)
- [919] SM: *so enam lah itu / betul lah / saya bilang ada nama ada sini / tak cakap ada*  
(six lah / correct lah / i count there is name here) (did not inform it  
*dua*  
has two)
- [920] WW: *yes / (tak jadi buka air tu)*  
(cannot open the drink)
- @ (all laugh)

All the interlocutors (FZ, ZN, WW and SM) in this excerpt are junior colleagues except SL, who is a senior lecturer as well as the chairperson in this meeting. SL, the leader of the TESL camp project asks the team members to count the number of duty slots that were allocated for them. SM claims that he has to work five times which is the least number of duties [line 901]. SL further jokingly responds to SM and states that SM cannot be trusted thus she asks WW to re-count the number of SM's duty slots [line 904]. SM then challenges SL by stating that if the counting he has made is correct then he will get another canned drink [line 905].

While WW is counting the number of SM's duty, SM asks SL whether the slashes written on the paper should be counted as once or twice [line 913-916]. SL replies that it should be counted twice [line 916] and was supported by WW that it should be calculated as two slots of working time [line 918]. Afterwards, SM admits that his working slots were six and blames SL for not informing him to count the particular time slot as twice [line 919].

Previously, SM states that he will open a fresh canned drink as a reward if the counting he has made is correct [line 905]. Nevertheless, since he has counted wrongly, WW pokes fun at SM and states that he cannot have another canned drink because he has made a mistake with his counting [line 920]. The tease directed towards SM generates a burst of laughter from the participants and puts SM down. The laughter is directed towards SM and this causes him to be the target of humour. It is apparent SM was teased because he has made a mistake and the laughter maintains rapport among the involved participants.

Example 19 demonstrates multiple turns by a few participants namely SM, SL, ZN, FZ and WW. It is apparent that the turn taking pattern does not seem to follow a fixed order of speakers. The participants gradually come to a consensus that the counting made by SM is incorrect through recounting the numbers of SM's slots of duty. Throughout the discussion, the turns are quickly taken by the participants [line 902-919] that consists of long and short turns. The extracts also show interruptions in between the conversation that was made by SM [line 913] and WW [line 918].

In line [913], SM interrupts FZ and poses a question before FZ finishes her turn. The question is directed to SL as he (SM) looks at SL. However, SL does not respond. Instead,

WW grabs the floor and demonstrates to SM the right way to count the duty slots [line 914]. SM takes the turn after WW finishes her turn and poses another question to SL [line 915]. The next turn was passed on by SM to SL by glancing at her (SL) [line 915]. SL replies briefly [line 916] and SM grabs the floor asks thoroughly about the counting [line 917].

As SM is contributing his opinion in the discussion, WW interrupts him to oppose SM's claim [line 918]. Finally, in [line 920], WW teases SM because he has counted wrongly thus he will not be given another drink. The extracts reveal that the chair (SL) allows other junior participants i.e. WW and SM to arrive at a decision on their own. She provides the opportunities to other participants of a lower status to freely take the turn without restricting the turns that ought to be taken.

Example 20, lines [1179-1187] show teasing that was directed to MM to make him agree to be the *imam* during the TESL camp.

#### Example 20

Meeting 3: ES suggests MM to be the head leading the students' prayers during the TESL camp.

[...]

[1179] ES: *imam / imam* who will to be *imam?* / students *la* / one of the students / (pious man that leads a prayer / pious man that leads a prayer) one of the students / MM?

[1180] MM: <*tak layak*>  
(disqualified)  
@ <smiles>

[1181] SM: everyday they take turns / they take turns everyday / not the same person

[1182] SL: it is encouraged that male staff / male staff / to / to / to lead / to show examples

[1183] MM: <eh you guys are married>  
@ <points to SM, FR, FD>

- [1184] SL: <who said that / where's the?>  
 @ <looks at MM>
- [1185] SS: (<eh you're going to get married / you're going to be the head>)  
 @ <looks at MM>  
 @ (MM laughs)
- [1186] ES: <i support you>  
 @ <laughs>
- [1187] SM: you get married and (merit also)  
 @ (all laugh)

The conversation in this excerpt involves senior and junior colleagues. The senior lecturers are ES and SL while SS and MM are junior lecturers. In line [1179], MM is teased by ES about being the *imam* and leading the prayers during the TESL camp. In Islam, Muslims are obliged to perform their prayers five times daily with an *imam* leading their prayers. MM refuses to oblige the request with a smile and claims that he is not the right person for the job [line 1180]. He states that only married men are supposed to take the responsibility of being an *imam* [line 1183]. The smile by MM is a polite way of declining the instruction by ES and also to appear less defensive.

In line [1182], SL further insists that MM acts as the *imam* and opposes MM's claim by stating that every man; regardless married or single can be an *imam* and she (SL) is supported by SS [line 1185]. ES takes the floor by stating *i support you* [line 1186] indicating that he agrees with MM's claim and it acts as a backup in case anyone provokes him again. SM then produces a humorous contribution stating that MM will get married later on and will be demerited if he refuses to be the head of the prayer session [line 1187].

SM's contribution [line 1187] elicits laughter from the participants since it comprises criticism which is aimed at putting down MM in front his of other colleagues. It is

perceived that the teasing which is directed towards MM is a sign of camaraderie within team members since it shows ‘conspiracy’ between MM and ES, who help to defend MM.

Example 20 illustrates several turns that were taken through allocation by the chairperson and also self-selection. In line [1179], ES, who is the chairperson, offers the male participants to act as the *imam* during the TESL camp. Shortly, he suggests MM to be the *imam* to head the students’ prayers sessions. The next turn is allocated by the chairperson to MM when he (ES) mentions MM. MM takes the turn and briefly responds that he is not qualified to be the *imam* [line 1180]. After MM finishes his contribution, SM grabs the floor and states that there are several students who can be in charge as the *imam* [line 1181].

SL quickly takes the turn and claims that the male staff are encouraged to be *imam* in order to set a good example to the students [line 1182]. SM then grabs the floor and produces a humorous sequence that eventually concludes the issue among SL, SS and MM about MM being the *imam* [line 1187]. This instance shows that both the senior and junior lecturers were given the opportunity to seize the turns in order to make contributions. It is also interesting to note that the senior and junior lecturers collaborate with each other’s turn with the purpose of giving support i.e. ES and MM [line 1186] and SS and SL [line 1184, 1185]. The turn-taking pattern in this example shows camaraderie is built through turns that were taken by participants of different hierarchies.



**b. Bound**

The occurrence of humour that functions to create and clarify boundaries on those who have deviated from shared values of the team members was 25 percent as indicated in Table 4.2. This type of humour was found utilised by both superiors and subordinates. It is regarded as enhancing solidarity when the humour is approved by the team members. The subsequent examples illustrate the humour that functions to create boundary.

Example 21, lines [696-701] illustrate a contribution by MM that was directed to RS that creates a boundary between RS with the team members.

Example 21

Meeting 3: RS asks the participants the results of the discussion on the number of the facilitators involved in the visit to the Syahbandar Esplanade Park.

[...]

[696] MS: kak SL / make it easier / i will go because in the morning i already (xxx) / so there's nothing

[697] SM: so we stick to the original plan yeah?

[698] SL: thank you thank you

[699] ZN: (yeay)

@ (ZN and SL clap hands)

[700] RS: what is the final decision?

[701] MM: yeah / (that's it)

@ (all laugh)

The conversation in this excerpt involves senior and junior lecturers. The senior lecturers are RS and SL while MM, SM, MS and ZN are junior colleagues. In line [698], SL who is one of the leaders of the TESL camp project thanks MS as she has volunteered to be a facilitator during the visit to the Syahbandar Esplanade Park. She (SL) and ZN rejoice at MS volunteering to help assist the students [line 699]. In line [700], RS who does not seem to be concentrating whilst the other participants are arriving to a consensus, asks the team members the results of the discussion [line 700].

Shortly, MM sarcastically replies to RS' query by stating *that's it* [line 701] indicating his declination to re-mention the outcome of their discussion. MM's contribution is perceived humorous by the other participants thus generating great laughter. The laughter by the team members is directed towards RS who has deviated from the group. Since RS does not pay attention during the meeting, he does not share the common knowledge with the rest of the participants.

The data suggest that there is no sign of power play intending to demean RS' status. Hence, the boundary humour that excludes RS from the group increases solidarity among the team members as the humour that is initiated by MM is approved by the team members. This is in tandem with Hay (1995) who stated boundary humour is regarded as enhancing solidarity when it is perceived by the members of that particular group (see Section 3.9.1.2, Chapter 3).

Example 21 demonstrates the turns taken by the speakers i.e. MS, SM, SL, ZN and RS who compete for the floor to make a contribution during the interaction. In line [696], MS grabs the floor and states her willingness to assist the students during the visit to the park. SM takes the turn quickly to get confirmation about the final decision on the number of facilitators involved [line 697]. SL takes the next turn and thanks MS for her volunteering without acknowledging SM's query [line 698].

Then, ZN grabs the floor and says *yeay* [line 699] which indicates her happiness towards MS' willingness to work during the visit. Both SL and ZN clap their hands to show

gratification to ML. Shortly, RS makes a contribution and inquires about the result of the discussion [line 700]. MM sarcastically responds to RS' question and this eventually produces laughter from the team members [line 701]. The example illustrates that the speakers grab the floor without any specific fixed turns allocated by the chairperson. The turns are all self-selected.

Example 23, lines [443-446] show an instance of humour that was initiated by SM towards MM.

### Example 23

Meeting 1: MM asks the participants regarding the students at Tadika Terengganu.

- [...]  
[443] MM:       *anak yatim* students?  
                  (orphans)  
[444] SL:   no::  
[445] FZ:   this is tadika  
[446] SM:   <*mak bapa dia orang lok* / ( just *lok di situ* / *lok di situ*>  
                  (their parents ignore)                   (ignore them there / ignore them there)  
              @     <looks at MM>  
              @     (all laugh)

The conversation in this excerpt involves senior and junior colleagues. SL is the only senior lecturer while MM, FZ and SM are junior colleagues. In line [443], MM asks the team members regarding the children at Tadika Terengganu. His query is with the intentions of gaining confirmation about the target students that the participants of the TESL camp will have to teach during the mock teaching. Further, SL intentionally prolongs the exclamation *no:::* [line 444] emphasising that the children are normal kids from the typical kindergarten. SM produces a sarcastic remark to mock MM since he (MM) had mistakenly judged the children at Tadika Terengganu. SM's comment

eventually produces laughter from the members that challenges MM's status in the discussion. The comment by SM gives the meaning that the parents of the children at Tadika Terengganu just leave them under the teachers' care [line 446]. SM's joke is a culture-based humour and it is mixed with the Terengganu dialect *lok* [line 446] that implies ignore.

SM's contribution is found to be amusing by the team members thus generates great laughter from them. MM is excluded from the group because he was the only person who felt that the Tadika Terengganu is an orphanage thus the children there are orphans. Meanwhile, other participants in the discussion are aware that the students at Tadika Terengganu which is a typical kindergarten and therefore the children who attend are pre-school children from typical homes. MM is excluded from the group because he expresses a different opinion regarding the kindergarten and its students. The laughter that was directed to him [line 446] deviates him from the discussion thus clarifying a boundary between him and the rest of the team members. Since SM and MM are of the same status and there are no signs of power play, the humour functions to foster solidarity among the academicians.

Example 23 illustrates that the participants freely take up turns without any restriction from the chairperson. The extracts present the turn taken by the chairperson, SL which is relatively short in comparison with other participants [line 444]. In line [446], SM grabs the floor to tease MM who has deviated from the group discussion. His contribution is perceived humorous by the other members thus produces laughter which is directed

towards MM. This example demonstrates that the chairperson plays a less active role as she allows other participants namely FZ and SM to provide explanation to MM's query.

Example 24, lines [972-975] illustrates SL being excluded from the group in a very similar way to what was presented in Example 23.

#### Example 24

Meeting 3: ES asks the participants whether they have any objections on the lucky that will be conducted during the TESL camp's closing ceremony.

[...]  
[972] ES: okay okay / any objection? / lucky draw  
[973] SL: lucky draw based on what?  
[974] RS: luck la / (what else?)  
          @          (all laugh)  
[975] SL: <that was a nice one>  
          @          <laughs>

All the interlocutors in this excerpt i.e. ES, SL and RS are senior lecturers. In line [972], ES asks the participants if they have any objections to make regarding the lucky draw which they have agreed upon. The team members have decided to conduct a lucky draw for the facilitators since the prizes that are provided for the students are far more. SL responds by posing a question on the parameters that guide the lucky draw [line 973]. RS quickly replies *luck la / what else?* [line 974] indicating that the prizes for the lucky draw depends on a person's luck; which is similar to other conventional lucky draws. RS' contribution was found amusing by the team members since SL poses a question whereby the answer is apparent and predictable. All the participants laugh and this signals solidarity among them.

It is clear that the laughter is directed to SL because of the question she has posed. RS's humour isolates SL and clarifies a boundary between her (SL) and the team members. It is apparent that SL is the only member who does not seem to be aware that a lucky draw basically depends on one's luck. Further, SL comments metaphorically that the joke that was directed to her was a great joke which actually gives the meaning the RS' contribution towards her is 'impaled' [line 975]. Subsequently, SL laughs loudly indicating she is not affected by RS' humour. The boundary-marking humour enhances a positive relationship among the team members.

Example 24 demonstrates the chairperson creating an open discussion whereby everyone is provided an opportunity to make a contribution [line 972]. In line [973], SL takes up the turn and poses a question on the lucky draw. Shortly, RS grabs the floor and sarcastically responds to SL's query [line 974] which generates laughter from the participants. Realising that the laughter is directed towards her, SL takes the turn and ironically praises RS that the joke that was directed to her is an excellent joke [line 975]. The extracts illustrates that turns are allocated through an open discussion that was created by the chairperson and also through self-selection of the participants.

**c. To Highlight Similarities or Capitalise on Shared Meaning**

The occurrence of humour that identifies shared ideas and interests among speakers and interlocutors in this study is 16.67 percent (see Table 4.2). This type of humour was utilised to establish shared ideas, social knowledge, experience and other similarities among the speakers. The subsequent examples demonstrate the humour that functions to highlight similarities among the team members.

Example 25, lines [398-404] illustrate the participants i.e. SL, SM, NB, AZ, and KD reading the sentences from an essay that was written by a particular student.

### Example 25

Meeting 4: The participants read the answers that was provided by a particular student loudly to discuss them with the team members.

- [...]
- [398] SL: (come on with me now)  
@ (all laugh)
- [399] SM: i want to share
- [400] NB: in front of middle
- [401] SM: *di hadapan tengah tengah penonton*  
(in front in the middle of the audience)
- [402] AZ: oh yes
- [403] KD: NB / <*penat penat depan cermin / dia pergi tengah cermin*>/ don't you  
(gets tired to be in front of the mirror / she goes to middle of mirror)  
(understand?)  
@ (all laugh)
- [404] AZ: practice make (prefect)  
@ (all laugh)

The conversation above involves senior and junior colleagues. The senior lecturers in this meeting are SL and KD while the junior lecturers are SM, NB and AZ. All the contributions in Example 25 are the sentences that were read out loud from the essay of a particular student. It is apparent that the academicians have a great laugh at the student's work. The use of roleplay by SL derives great laughter from the team members [line 398] when she reads the sentence with an humorous intonation. According to Hay (1995), role play is when the speaker mimics or quotes the target of humour to appear amusing.

The laughter is extended when SM and KD [line 401, line 403] provide their own interpretation of the sentence *in front of middle* [line 399] that was written in the essay.

Both of them state ridiculous interpretations that elicit further laughter from the team members. SM claims that *in front of middle* gives the meaning that the writer stands in the middle of the stage and the show is attended to by a large number of audience [line 401]. Meanwhile, KD opines that the writer has mistakenly written the word “middle” instead of “mirror”. She assumes that the writer goes in front of the mirror and later, stands in the middle of the mirror. In line [404], AZ highlights the wrongly spelled idiom *practice make prefect* which also derives laughter from the participants.

It appeared that the academicians are poking fun at the student’s work and they laugh at it. Since the essay contains many grammatical mistakes, the academicians build up ideas and state nonsensical assumptions based on the student’s flaws. This example presents that the participants highlight certain parts of their students’ essays which they find amusing.

The extracts illustrate an example of minimally collaborative humour or “one-at-a-time” (OOAT) style of talk as defined by Coates (1989). OOAT style of talk is when the participants gain the floor in order to make contributions during an interaction. The concept of solidarity is reflected by the use of collaborative contributions and extended humour among the interactants. When humour functions to enhance solidarity, it is constructed with the intention of establishing common ground on a particular issue.

Example 25 demonstrates the turn taking pattern that is managed coherently without overlaps and interruptions. Every member of lower and upper ranking contributes in the discussion through self-selection and takes the turn at the possible points of TRPs. The



chairperson is not involved in the “ridiculing” session as he only provides the opportunity to the members of the floor to discuss the essay freely.

Example 26, lines [313-319] present a strong evidence of conjoint humour where the participants extend and build on each other’s humorous sequences.

#### Example 26

Meeting 2: The participants provide unreasonable options for the particular question that requires only “yes or no” answers.

- [...]  
[313] ES: if they answer (please repeat?)  
          @ (all laugh)  
[314] HM: that is the answer / that is question  
[315] ES: so definitely zero right?  
[316] TP: (i’m sorry i don’t understand the question)  
          @ (all laugh)  
[317] HM: (i beg your pardon)  
          @ (all laugh)  
[318] NZ: that is real situation during the interview  
[319] HM: *dia tanya / (ha?)*  
          (they ask) (what?)  
          @ (all laugh)

All the interlocutors in this excerpt i.e. ES, HM, TP, HM and NZ are senior lecturers. The excerpts demonstrate the possible answers for a particular question during an interview session that was suggested by the participants. The questions are the typical “yes or no” type of questions thus requiring yes or no answers. In line [313], ES asks the participants whether the answer *please repeat* is considered correct or vice versa. The comment provided by ES is irrelevant and deviates from the accepted answer thus it is found amusing by all.

Later, TP and HM extend the humour by stating other unreasonable alternatives as answers during an interview session which are *i'm sorry i don't understand the question* [line 316], *i beg your pardon* [line 317] and *dia tanya / ha?* (they ask / what?) [line 319]. The humorous sequence constructed by TP and HM extends the laughter and highlights similarities among the team members. The example provides strong evidence that humour reinforces solidarity among participants in interaction since it is collaboratively built by several participants whereby they extend on each other's humorous comment (Holmes, 2006).

The turn-taking patterns in Example 26 are also another instance of turns that were taken through self-selection. Interruptions and overlaps are not present since the involved participants make contributions at possible points of TRPs. In line [318], NZ who is the chairperson concludes that the answers provided by the team members happen in the real world. He does not select the next turn thus HM grabs the floor and produces a humorous contribution [line 319]. The extracts present that all turns are self-selected and are managed coherently by the members of the floor.

Example 27, lines [874-877] present AN who manipulates the shared social knowledge with the members creating a joke.

#### Example 27

Meeting 3: AN jokingly suggests using Nuri Aircraft to bring the potential patients from Bukit Kluang to the nearest place where they can obtain help in the case of emergency.

[...]

[874] SM: yes we have stretching there / before we start the hiking

[875] SL: <i'll rely on him>

- [876] AN: @ <looks at SM> not only the stretching / (but also the  
stretcher also)
- [877] AN: @ (all laugh)  
we / em / gonna (make an arrangement with the airbase for the nuri to fly  
over (xxx))  
@ (all laugh)

The interlocutors in this excerpt are senior lecturers i.e. SL and AN except for SM, who is a junior lecturer. In line [877], the issue of using the Nuri Aircraft, the helicopter for the Royal Malaysian Airforce to bring patients from Bukit Kluang which is initiated by AN causes the members to burst into laughter. Since all the team members are familiar with the issue of Nuri Aircraft thus all of them can relate to the joke. AN's contribution is found amusing by the team members.

AN's suggestion to operate the Nuri Aircraft in the case of emergency during the hike to Bukit Kluang is illogical and incongruent. The humour establishes common ground among the participants who have adequate social knowledge about the Nuri Aircraft. The instance shows that the speaker highlights and shares with others a common view which creates and maintains solidarity among the colleagues – while also enhancing the speaker's status within the group (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003:111).

Example 27 illustrates turns which are allocated through self-selection. In line [874], SM tells the participants that the students involved in the hiking will be asked to have a stretching session in order to get the students prepared before they start with their hiking. SL grabs the floor and indirectly directs SM to lead the stretching session [line 875]. RS interrupts SL before she finishes her turn and jokingly states that stretchers are also made

available for the hike [line 876]. The contribution by RS is recognised as wordplay where he creates a joke by manipulating the word stretching. According to Chiaro (1992:2), word play includes every conceivable way in which language is used with the intent to amuse.

Shortly, AN grabs the floor and states that the Nuri Aircraft may be used to substitute the stretchers [line 877] which is perceived humorous by the participants. These extracts demonstrate that the participants namely AN and RS self-select themselves to initiate humour during the meeting.

Example 28, lines [1301-1302] demonstrates MM and ES re-asserting the issue of utilising the Nuri Aircraft with the purpose of rescuing the potential patients during the hike at Bukit Kluang.

Example 28

Meeting 3: MM reasserts the 'issue' of operating the Nuri Aircraft to rescue the participants during the hike at Bukit Kluang.

[...]

[1301] MM: we have the (nuri)

@ (ZN laughs)

[1302] ES: <you make the arrangement for that / when we are at the airbase / you know>

@ <smiles>

In this meeting, ES is a senior lecturer while MM is a junior lecturer. This example presents MM who triggers off a memory of a previous humorous contribution (see Example 27, Lines [874-877]) which results the group to laugh and enjoy the humour again (Hay, 1995:66). Hay (1995:66) categorised the jokes that occurred previously as recycled humour. This is evidence of the team members capitalising on the same shared

knowledge because the members are able to recognise the joke on the Nuri Aircraft which they all can share.

The instance of solidarity among the team members is illustrated through the extension of humorous sequence by ES [line 1302]. According to Holmes (2006), supportive humour involves collaborative contribution where they extend and build on one another's humorous comments. Since supportive humour is jointly constructed, many commentators see its chief function as being the creation and maintenance of solidarity (Coates, 2007:32).

Example 28 demonstrates the turns which were self-selected in order for the participants to produce humorous contributions. MM and ES grab the floor and take the opportunity to re-mention the joke which they had laughed at previously.

Example 29, lines [506-509] demonstrate SL, KM, and SM sharing similar opinions about the marks that should be allocated for the student's essay.

Example 29

Meeting 4: SL states that the essay that they have discussed is worth being awarded half a mark.

[...]

[506] SL: yeah at least there is something on public speaking / fear public speaking

[507] KM: so that means this student actually / should actually deserve 1.5

[508] SM: i agree with you actually

[509] SL: yeah actually but then (*kesian*)  
(pity)

@ (all laugh)

The conversation above involves senior lecturers and a junior colleague. SL and KM are senior lecturers while SM is a junior lecturer. The excerpts are an extension of humour

from Example 25, lines [398-404]. The lexical item *kesian* expressed by SL [line 509] towards the student invite laughter from the rest of the members thus highlighting similar opinions on the essay they are currently discussing. The lexical item *kesian* implies their empathy towards the student who actually does not qualify to get any marks.

Most of the participants share the same ideas with KM that the particular essay deserves half a mark [line 507]. This highlights the similarities with the members of the group that have the same views with SL to award some marks for the essay. The humour also indirectly strengthens camaraderie within the participants.

Example 29 illustrates the turns that were allocated through self-selection. In line [506], SL holds the turn and expresses her opinion that the student has put forth a point in her essay that deserves to be awarded marks. KM, who is the chairperson grabs the floor and supports SL's claim by stating that the student ought to get half a mark [line 507]. SM takes the next turn to give his rationale of awarding the marks [line 508]. However, he is interrupted by SL who states her agreement with KM's claim [line 509]. SL finishes her turn with *kesian* which generates laughter from the team members. It can be seen that SM (junior lecturer) is interrupted by SL (senior lecturer) because of the different status they hold. The chairperson allows the other members to contribute in the conversation without restricting their turns.

#### **d. Share**

The occurrence of humour that functions to let the audience know something about him/her is 10.42 percent and it was the least popular type of humour produced by the

academicians as can be clearly seen in Table 4.2. This type of humour was commonly utilised by female colleagues to impart information about themselves during the discussions.

Example 30, lines [162-167] present an example of self-deprecatory humour where the Dean of NAS directs a joke to herself and becomes the target of the humour.

### Example 30

Meeting 1: The Dean of NAS who is attending another discussion in the same venue as Meeting 1 interrupts the discussion.

- [...]  
[162] DE: (*sempena lawatan?*)  
(in conjunction with a visit)  
@ (all look at DE)  
[163] SL: ha?  
[164] DE: *sempena lawatan dalam English apa? / sempena?*  
(what is in conjunction with a visit .../ in conjunction?)  
[165] FD: in conjunction  
[166] SL: ah / (<in conjunction>  
@ <nods head>  
@ (FZ nods head)  
[167] DE: ah:: / (dok mari) / (interject:::tion)  
(can't think of it)  
@ (all laugh)

The conversation above involves senior lecturers and a junior colleague. SL and DE are senior lecturers while FD is a junior lecturer. In line [164], the Dean of NAS (DE) who is having a discussion with the other staff members in the meeting room interrupts the TESL camp meeting and inquires about a particular word in English language (the lexical item *sempena*). FD responds by suggesting the word *in conjunction* [line 165]. DE then directs a joke at herself by stating that the word did not come across in her mind [line 167] which produces laughter from the participants.

DE's contribution is perceived humorous since she (DE) mocks herself since she cannot retrieve the word *sempena* in English language. Further, DE extends the joke that displays her sentiment since she is unable to translate the word *sempena* in English language thus inviting more laughter from the team members [line 167].

This is an instance typical of self-deprecatory humour where the speaker anticipates embarrassment and faces loss; hence responds by turning the source of the embarrassment into a subject of humour (Holmes, 1998:3). As stated earlier, DE mocks herself and this protects her face needs. As put forth by Hay (1995), self-deprecatory humour soften the face threats of speakers and acts as a defense strategy. The speakers receive sympathetic positive response from their interlocutors thus helping to foster solidarity among them (Hay, 1995). The data also suggests that power differences between DE and her subordinates are reduced through the use of self-mockery.

Example 30 demonstrates an interruption from an outsider, DE who attends another discussion with other staff members at the same venue. Although she is not involved in the discussion, the team members stop the discussion and allow the interruptions by DE. DE creates an open discussion to gain feedback from the other members [line 162, 164]. FD takes the turn and responds by stating *in conjunction* [line 165] and his turn is supported by SL [line 166]. SL grabs the floor and provides an appropriate response to FD's turn. Shortly, DE produces self-deprecatory humour [line 167] that generates laughter from her subordinates. She continues her turn and asserts another self-mocking remark [line 167] which also gains laughter from the members.



The example illustrates that DE, who is in highest position at NAS is allowed to make interruption because of the status she holds. She not only takes the highest proportions of turns [line 162, 164, 167] but also dominates the conversation. The turns allocated in these extracts are mainly through self-selection and a continuation by the current speaker (DE).

Example 31, lines [427-429] illustrate an incident where ZN shares a memory during her childhood with the other team members.

#### Example 31

Meeting 1: ZN reminisces about a memory from her childhood about painting a mural.

[...]

[427] ZN: yeah i used to do it / when i was small / *orang datang je dia orang* (xxx)  
(people came and they)

*dekat pasu yang dia paint / (dua orang sepasu ke / so)*  
(at the vase they) (two persons per vase)

@ (WW and FZ laugh)

[428] FZ: *comel:::*  
(cute:::)

[429] ZN: seriously that's what they did

All the interlocutors (ZN and FZ) in this excerpt are junior lecturers. In line [427], ZN relates her memory about painting vases from her childhood with a task of painting a mural which is organised by Tadika Terengganu. The task is arranged for the students who are involved during the TESL camp. ZN's anecdote about her childhood [line 427] invites laughter from WW and FR who claim that the painting activity is an adorable thing to do [line 428]. In this instance, ZN shares a personal experience about her in the meeting and positively strengthens solidarity with her colleagues.

Example 31 illustrates the turns which are produced by the female junior lecturers. In line [427], ZN who was directed to brief on the painting activity informs the other members that she used to perform the activity when she was younger. WW and FR respond to ZN and laugh at her contribution. ZN takes the turn and convinces the team members that she has the experience of painting vases [line 429]. The turns in this example are through self-selection and they were only taken by the female participants namely ZN, FR and WW. The turns may be influenced by the similarities that the female participants shared with their other female colleagues.

Example 32, lines [521-524] present another example of ZN who reveals about herself to RS.

Example 32

Meeting 3: ZN explains about the specific language objective of the lesson plans that are going to be prepared by the participants of TESL camp.

[...]

[521] RS: what would be language objective of the lesson plan?

[522] ZN: <oh specific language objective / okay it's okay / it's just that / for instance we are going to teaching rhyme / we just want to tell them>  
@ <looks at RS and explains>

[523] RS: you don't have (to to)

@ (ZN laughs)

[524] ZN: <it's okay> / we just want to tell them / we just want to tell them what is actually rhyme / learning rhyme is fun for instance / *sebab macam* for (because it seems) also we write poems we did come out with rhyming skill right / so it's really hard / we just wanna say because one of the assessment that i proposed / *dalam* lesson plan i *cakap* / *kalau* for instance / cat and cap / they rhymes (in) (write) (if) / so maybe the kids (xxx) / ah *macam tu lah* / do you have any suggestion (like that) *ke* opinion *ke?* / i never <teach / younger kids> (or) (or) @ <laughs>

In this excerpt, RS is a senior lecturer while ZN is a junior colleague. In line [521], RS asks about the specific language objectives of the lesson that the students will be going to teach in the kindergarten during the TESL camp. ZN responds and explains about the objective of the lesson plans. Whilst explaining, she states that she does not have any experience teaching young children [line 524].

The laughter by ZN [line 524] is another instance of self-deprecatory humour where the laughter functions to defend herself from embarrassment. By directing a joke on oneself, the speaker shows trust in the interlocutors while sharing a person's weakness with the interlocutors. In this instance, ZN publicly states and shares that she is inexperienced in teaching kindergarten children thus showing one of her limitations in her teaching skills.

Before finishing her turn, ZN asks an opinion from RS, a senior colleague which deters ZN from seeming arrogant [line 524]. This shows evidence of creating solidarity between senior and junior academicians.

Example 32 demonstrates the turns that were allocated through selecting the next speaker. In line [521], RS directs a question to ZN who is in charge of this activity. ZN takes the turn and explains thoroughly about the objective of the lesson plans [line 524] without being interrupted by the other interlocutors. The extracts present that the participants in the meeting are attentive listeners as there is no instance of interruptions or overlapping talks. The chairperson allows RS to allocate turns to ZN and does not restrict the allocation of turns by other participants.

Example 33, lines [428-435] demonstrate NB sharing her personal feelings with the rest of the team members when it comes to awarding marks for the students' essays.

### Example 33

Meeting 4: KM asks the marks NB has allocated for an essay that was written by a particular student.

[...]  
[428] KM: 1.5 / okay supporting paragraph  
[429] NB: three  
[430] KM: a three? / yes next / okay next organisation  
[431] NB: three  
[432] KM: hang on hang on / organisation also three  
[433] NB: convention two / concluding one  
[434] KD: make it eleven  
[435] NB: (...) (but i mean i need the pleasure)  
          @ (all laugh)

In this excerpt, KM is a senior lecturer and also the chairperson of the meeting while NB is a junior colleague. In line [429, 431 and 433], NB states that she awards half a mark for the supporting paragraph, three marks for the organisation of the essay, two marks for conventions of the essay and one mark for the concluding sentence. The overall marks that were suggested by NB is 10.5. Hence, KM suggests NB to increase the overall marks to 11 [line 434]. Further, NB suggests that it will be more exciting to allocate low marks for the essay [line 435].

NB responds and states a sarcastic remark *but i mean i need the pleasure* [line 435] that indicates that she does not intend to give high marks for the students' work. Her remark derives laughter from the participants as she reveals the way she allocates marks for that particular essay. By asserting the way she awards marks, NB discloses her "true colours"

to the interlocutors. The members of the floor find her way of allocating marks amusing so much that they burst into laughter and this strengthens solidarity among them.

Example 33 demonstrates the turns that are managed coherently without any interruptions and overlaps. The chairperson, KM allocates turn to NB [line 428, 430, 432, 434] who suggests marks to be awarded for the essay that they have discussed. Although KM does not allocate the turn explicitly to NB but she (NB) is able to recognise the turn that was given to her. Since it was NB's turn to state the marks, it is understood that the floor was for NB to take. The example demonstrates that turns were selected by the current speakers. It is also apparent that the interlocutor (NB) is able to make contributions at possible points of TRPs thus minimising the occurrence of interruptions and overlaps.

It is clear that humour that worked towards rapport building among colleagues at NAS had numerous functions. These functions included sharing, highlighting similarities or capitalising on shared meaning, clarifying and maintaining boundaries as well as teasing.

### **4.3 Distribution of Turns**

This section describes the frequency of number of turns in each meeting recorded. In totality, 3848 number of turns was compiled from the four recorded meetings. The number of turns in each meeting is depicted in Table 4.3.

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>No of turns</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Meeting 1	1461	37.97%
Meeting 2	383	9.95%
Meeting 3	1324	34.41%
Meeting 4	680	17.67%
<b>Total</b>	3848	25%

Table 4.3 Frequency of Number of Turns

Meeting 1 was the longest meeting recorded while Meeting 2 was the shortest; hence the number of turns for both meetings appeared to have the highest (39.97%) and least number of turns (9.95%) respectively as illustrated in Table 4.3. This proves that the duration of a meeting influences the total number of turns. The next section presents the distribution of turns among all speakers in the meetings recorded.

#### **4.3.1 Turn Distribution among Speakers**

The data revealed that the turn distribution among speakers in all meetings were disparate. It is observed that the position and responsibility a person holds in a meeting influence the number of turns taken. Table 4.4 depicted the number of turns made by each speaker in the four meetings recorded.

Meeting	No	Speakers	Position of Lecturers		No. of turns	Percentage
			Junior	Senior		
Meeting 1	1	<b>SL (Chairperson)</b>		✓	<b>418</b>	<b>32.15%</b>
	2	SM	✓		247	19%
	3	MM	✓		224	17.23%
	4	ZN	✓		144	11.08%
	5	WW	✓		127	9.77%
	6	FZ	✓		119	9.15%
	7	<b>FD</b>	✓		<b>21</b>	<b>1.62%</b>
					<b>1300</b>	<b>14.29%</b>
Meeting 2	1	<b>NZ (Chairperson)</b>		✓	<b>65</b>	<b>16.8%</b>
	2	ML		✓	60	15.5%
	3	AR (Vice chairperson)		✓	48	12.04%
	4	ES		✓	43	11.11%
	5	HM		✓	42	10.85%
	6	AK		✓	30	7.75%
	7	AN		✓	23	5.94%
	8	TP		✓	14	3.62%
	9	AL	✓		14	3.62%
	10	MM	✓		13	3.36%
	11	DB	✓		10	2.58%
	12	MS	✓		8	2.07%
	13	FZ	✓		8	2.07%
	14	TK		✓	5	1.29%
	15	SS	✓		4	1.03%
					<b>387</b>	<b>6.64%</b>
Meeting 3	1	<b>ES (Chairperson)</b>		✓	<b>326</b>	<b>24.6%</b>
	2	AN		✓	242	18.27%
	3	SL		✓	222	16.77%
	4	MS	✓		153	11.57%
	5	ZN	✓		115	8.69%
	6	RS		✓	88	6.65%
	7	SM	✓		53	4.00%
	8	SS	✓		32	2.42%
	9	MM	✓		30	2.26%
	10	KM		✓	27	2.02%
	11	FZ	✓		17	1.28%
	12	FD	✓		5	0.38%
	13	JN	✓		5	0.38%

	14	FR	✓		5	0.38%
	15	RR		✓	5	0.38%
					<b>1325</b>	<b>6.67%</b>
Meeting 4	<b>1</b>	<b>KM (Chairperson)</b>		✓	<b>208</b>	<b>30.59%</b>
	2	SL		✓	119	17.5%
	3	AZ	✓		55	8.09%
	4	WW	✓		55	8.09%
	5	SM	✓		38	5.59%
	6	MS	✓		37	5.44%
	7	NB	✓		33	4.85%
	8	AL	✓		31	4.56%
	9	KD		✓	26	3.82%
	10	FD	✓		21	3.09%
	11	FR	✓		9	1.32%
	12	FZ	✓		7	1.03%
	13	DB	✓		7	1.03%
	<b>14</b>	<b>FH</b>	✓		<b>5</b>	<b>0.74%</b>
					<b>651</b>	<b>6.84%</b>

Table 4.4 Number of Turns for Each Speaker

It is evident that all the participants in each meeting made conversational contributions during the discussions except for Meeting 2. The transcript revealed that not all members in Meeting 2 made contributions in the discussion. There were three speakers i.e. FZ with 8 turns (2.07%), TK with 5 turns (1.29%) and SS with 4 turns (1.03%) who did not actually involve themselves in the discussion. Further, these participants were found engaged in small talk with the person(s) sitting beside or near them. The turns which subsumed overlapping talk of more than three speakers were omitted. Also, small talk among the speakers was also excluded from the tabulation.

The highest number of turns taken in all four meetings was 418 (32.15%) by SL during Meeting 1. Meanwhile the least turns taken was 5 (0.38%) which were initiated by junior



and senior staff in Meeting 3 i.e. FD, JN, FR and RR. It is noted that some of the transactions were long, primarily contributed by the persons who were responsible for reporting on a particular topic while others consisted of short utterances. Thus, this explains the unequal distribution of turns taken by the speakers. Besides, the team members who were responsible for reviewing and explaining the issues discussed had high proportions of turns as well. This shows that the responsibility a person holds plays a crucial role in turn-taking.

From the data, it is evident that the chairperson in every meeting received the highest proportion of turns. The chairperson who took the highest turns was SL (Meeting 1) with 418 turns (35.15%). It is followed by ES (Meeting 3) with 326 turns (24.2%), KM (Meeting 4) with 208 turns (30.59%) and NZ (Meeting 2) with 65 turns (16.8%). The general responsibility of the meeting chair is to open and close the meetings, specify goals of the discussion, distribute turns, ensure the development of the interaction and achieve consensus. As put forth by Singh (1992), the chairperson is the leader who steers the meetings thus it is expected that the responsibility of the meeting chairs influence the number of turns taken. All the meetings recorded were chaired by senior lecturers. Meetings 2 and 3 were chaired by male senior lecturers, ES and NZ while Meetings 1 and 4 were led by female senior lecturers, SL and KM respectively.

The participants who took proportionally fewer turns than the chairperson were amongst the senior staff with the exception of Meeting 1. They were ML with 60 turns (15.5% in Meeting 2), AN with 242 turns (18.27% in Meeting 3) and SL with 119 turns (17.5% in Meeting 4) who are of higher position. These speakers are the important people to confer

and report about the agenda discussed in each meeting. This shows that responsibility influence the number of turns a speaker has. It is noted that Meeting 1 was dominated by the junior colleagues; hence they were found taking the turns freely without being challenged by the senior staff. Amongst the junior team members, SM appeared to be the most junior staff that made frequent contributions and interruptions during the meeting after the chairperson with 247 turns (19%).

#### **4.4 Other Findings**

It was observed that there was evidence of occurrences of other linguistic choices such as illocutionary particles, honorifics and titles, local dialect and code-switching. The linguistic choices were employed from time to time in the meetings with the purpose of smoothening and easing the communication. Besides, it was also found to be effective to stress or when emphasising pertinent points during one's turn. The next section presents the respective linguistic choices found in the recorded meetings.

##### **4.4.1 Illocutionary Particles**

It was discovered that the academicians in this study employed illocutionary particles such as *lah* and *kan*. It is also observed that the use of the particles indicates the notion of informality among the colleagues. The following examples demonstrate the use of particles that were utilised by the participants during the recorded meetings.

Example 34, lines [310-312] demonstrate the use of particle *lah* [line 312] by HM.

Example 34

Meeting 2: AR asks the team members the marks that should be allocated for the essay discussed in the meeting.

[...]

[310] AR: but have to explain why okay / if they answer yes / no / or i don't know / what's the <mark?>

@ <smiles>

[311] SS: half half

[312] HM: zero **lah** / zero / it's not relevant

All the interlocutors (AR and HM) in this excerpt are senior lecturers except for SS. The use of *lah* by HM emphasises that the answer is irrelevant and does not deserve any marks.

Example 35, lines [293-295] illustrate the use of particle *kan* [line 294] by SL.

Example 35

Meeting 1: SL asks the team members about the number of stations for the “explore lit” activity.

[...]

[293] SM: twelve stations or six stations?

[294] SL: twelve / <kita twelve **kan**?>

@ <looks at FZ>

[295] SM: i think six only / if i'm not mistaken

In this excerpt, SL is a senior lecturer while SM is a junior colleague. It is observed that the use of *kan* was also employed to express uncertainty. Hence, the discourse particle *kan* signals a request for confirmation from the other team members.

The participants disregard the formalities in the meetings by employing particles while discussing. This situation also explains that they were comfortable utilising informal linguistic choices with each other.

#### 4.4.2 Honorifics and Titles

It is revealed that the chairperson and the participants in this study were found utilising honorifics and titles such as *puan*, *encik*, *cikgu*, *tuan haji* and doctor to address each other. The use of honorifics and titles is to signal respect with regards to their respective social status and educational background. The subsequent examples illustrate the use of honorifics and titles that were employed during the course of the meetings.

Example 36, line [154] presents MS who addresses RS, who was previously a teacher before he joined NAS with the title *cikgu*, as a sign of respect.

##### Example 36

Meeting 3: MS assigns all the members the location they should guard during an activity namely “explore lit”.

[...]

[154] MS: okay and then / **cikgu** RS will in charge at station five / the gazebo

In this excerpt, RS is a senior lecturer while MS is a junior lecturer.

Example 37, lines [1023-1024] demonstrate the use of honorific working title *doctor* [line 1024] by AN to address RR.

### Example 37

Meeting 3: SM asks AN whether the lecturers and the students are allowed to take photos inside the Gong Kedak's airbase.

[...]

[1023] SM: most of us have camera right / hand phone camera

[1024] AN: it goes without saying nothing / maybe **dr.** RR is the only who without er / the camera on the phone

In this excerpt, AN is a senior lecturer while SM is a junior colleague. The respective title is employed to signal respect to RR who holds a Ph.D.

Example 38, line [480] demonstrates the use of honorific title *tuan haji* that was used by ES to address RS.

### Example 38

Meeting 3: ES asks RS whether he understands the explore lit activity that was brief by other members.

[...]

[480] ES: okay / <got it **tuan haji** RS?>  
@ <looks at RS>

Both interlocutors in this excerpt (ES and RS) are senior lecturers. *Tuan haji* is a title given to Muslim men who have performed the hajj and it is used to indicate respect.

Example 39, line [853] illustrates ES, the chairperson addressing SL using the honorific title *puan* as a sign of respect.

### Example 39

Meeting 3: ES asks SL to explain on the merit system that is going to be utilised during TESL camp.

[...]

[853] ES: the merit / em / <puan SL / the merit>  
@ <looks at SL>

In this excerpt, ES and SL are senior colleagues. It is observed that the terms of address employed by the chairperson differed as it was influenced by the rankings of the speakers. This can be observed that in Meeting 3 where the chairperson addressed RS, the senior male lecturer and other female lecturers using social titles such as *tuan haji* and *puan*. Other colleagues who are in the symmetrical rank or junior staff were referred to by their respective first name. Jariah Mohd Jan (1999:393) stated that aspects of honorifics and address terms reflect one's respect for the age, sex and social status of the participants in verbal talks. The chairperson in the meetings is conscious of the differential status of senior colleagues and junior staff within the discussions.

#### **4.4.3 Local Dialect**

The researcher discovered from the analyses of the transcripts that some of the English educated professionals in this study shifted from English Language to Terengganu dialect during the meetings. Since the majority of the participants were mainly from Terengganu, the use of Terengganu dialect was found occurring throughout the four recorded meetings. The participants tend to shift or alternate from English Language to Terengganu dialect in their interactions. The following examples demonstrate the use of local dialect by the participants during the four meetings recorded.

Example 40, lines [340-342] demonstrate the use of Terengganu dialect *rama* that illustrates the meaning for ‘many’.

Example 40

Meeting 2: The participants discuss marks that should be allocated for the students for yes/no questions.

[...]

[340] NZ: so it's clear / yes or no / no marks

[341] AK:

**rama:::**  
(many)

[342] HM:

**rama:::** *betul*  
(many will get correct  
answers)

All the interlocutors (NZ, AK and HM) in this excerpt are senior colleagues. AK and HM employed the lexical item *rama* to refer to the students who will obtain marks if their answers are considered correct.

Example 41, lines [325-326] illustrate HM who asks SS about the marks that should be given to a particular student by code-mixing.

Example 41

Meeting 2: HM inquires from SS whether the answers that they have discussed in the meeting should be awarded marks.

[...]

[325] SS: half mark

[326] HM: **wi gok** half mark? / no  
(also awarded)

In this excerpt, HM is a senior lecturer while SS is a junior colleague. The lexical item *wi* implies the meaning ‘give’ and *gok* denotes ‘also’.

Example 42, line [488] illustrates SL code switching to the Terengganu dialect and also Malay during her turn.

Example 42

Meeting 1: SL distributes refreshments to the team members.

[...]

[488] SL: <eh apa nak kabo sat ni?> / em / okay / i (*catu ya*)  
(what was the thing I want to tell earlier?...ration)  
@ <distributes biscuits to female participants>  
@ (laughs)

SL, who is a senior lecturer utilises the local dialect *eh apa nak kabo sat ni* in recalling the things that she wants to explain before she resumes with the respective turn. The code-switching implies the meaning “what was the thing I wanted to tell earlier?” and the lexical item *catu* means ration. The switches help her to convey her meaning effectively which eventually derives laughter from the participants. Code-switching here reduces a communication barrier and helps create solidarity between the interlocutors.

The local dialect employed by the participants helped ease the conversation especially when the speakers were constrained in finding suitable words in English. This situation also explains that the meetings were conducted informally as they were allowed to utilise Terengganu dialect during the discussions.

The switches to Terengganu dialect could also indicate camaraderie and solidarity. Since majority of the participants were locals thus, they seem more connected through the same dialect they share. This is confirmed by Morais (1995:33) who stated that the use of native



language would appear to be motivated by a desire to signal membership and establish goodwill.

#### 4.4.4 Code-switching in Malay-English Language

Besides local dialect, the members of the floor also switched to Malay for any equivalent words that they couldn't find in English Language during the interaction. This situation is observed in every meeting recorded where the participants regardless of status were found style shifting into Malay. The participants seemed comfortable using Malay besides English Language in their official discussions. Since the meetings in this study were found to have aspects of code-switching thus the meetings recorded can be classified as informal.

Example 43, line [322] demonstrates HM code switching to Malay in her turn.

##### Example 43

Meeting 2: The team members discuss the marks that should be allocated for the particular essay.

[...]

[322] HM: **betul dah dia jawab** / what to elaborate when we answer no?  
(she answered correctly)

HM, a senior lecturer switches to Malay as well to convey her meaning that the particular student has answered correctly. The switching appears to help convey her meaning in a more straightforward manner.

Example 44, line [574] illustrates KM, a senior staff highlighting her points by code-switching to Malay.

#### Example 44

Meeting 4: KM asks the participants who has allocated two marks for the particular answer to state their reasons for doing so.

[574] KM: the sequence is there / so we would like to listen / who gave two? / AL oh AL gone / there's one more / **siapa lagi seorang lagi** / okay NB why two? (who is the other person)

KM queries the team members who have allocated two marks for the particular answer they were discussing. She code-switches in her turn *siapa lagi seorang lagi* in order to immediately gain feedback from the team members. The switch helps the speaker to deliver the message briskly.

Besides, the use of native language gives the humorous effect and it is enjoyed by the participants. It is observed that the participants utilised local dialect and also native language in order for them to produce humour. The joke is easily produced and perceived using their native language. The following examples demonstrate the mixing of Malay that produces laughter in their discussion.

Example 45, lines [1340, 1340, 1343-1345] demonstrate the participants resorting to use Malay to express their intended meanings easily.

#### Example 45

Meeting 1: FZ and WW recall a past event whilst discussing materials needed during the TESL camp.

[...]

[1340] SM: *jangan lupa loceng untuk pertandingan ya*  
(don't forget a bell for competition)

[1341] WW: ting::: ting:::

[1342] MM: ah healer

[1343] FZ: <nanti kena tepuk tangan>  
(we will have to clap hands)

[1344] WW: @ <laughs>  
FZ <begini>  
(like this)

[1345] FZ: @ <claps hand>  
(<masa debate hari tu>  
(during ... that day)

@ <laughs>

@ (FZ and WW clap hands and laugh)

All the interlocutors in this excerpt i.e. FZ, WW, SM and MM are junior colleagues. FZ and WW recall a particular past event where a bell was forgotten during a debate competition. Consequently, the respective judges had to clap their hands to signal that the time allocated for the debaters was concluding. FZ and WW utilise Malay during their turns and their contributions invite laughter from themselves.

Example 46, lines [741-742] illustrate MM and SM using Malay in their turns.

#### Example 46

Meeting 1: MM teases SM by associating the joke pulled by SM earlier with a controversial issue about a sex video of a particular Malaysian politician, AU.

[...]

[741] MM: <dia tengah buat video AU tau>  
(she is making a video of AU you know)

@ <points to the researcher>

[742] SM: oh okay / (<eh (dia record ke?>)

(eh is she recording?)  
@ <looks at the researcher>  
@ (all laugh)

Both interlocutors in this excerpt i.e. MM and SM are junior colleagues. Previously, SM produces a sensitive joke about married life which was directed to MM. MM reasserts his power and initiates a joke to contest SM. MM creates a joke by relating a controversial issue about a sex video of a particular Malaysian politician, AU and states that the researcher was actually recording AU's video and not recording the meeting [line 741]. Further, SM jokingly responds by extending the joke, agreeing and pretending that he is not aware that the researcher was recording a video. The conjoint humour which was built by SM and MM generate great laughter from the participants.

It is noted that there was a tendency to code-switch especially in interactions where the number of junior participants was dominant. A great deal of switching of Malay equivalents took place in Meeting 1 (see Appendix B). However, in other meetings, the junior participants were found to shift less to their mother tongue. This situation implies that the junior staff were particularly comfortable utilising the native language with colleagues of the same position. As for the other meetings (Meetings 2,3 and 4), the senior lecturers employed more of this communication strategy rather than the junior participants. The differing positions seem to be an influencing factor in producing humour. The junior staff was found to resort conveying messages in English Language and minimising the use of Malay and local dialect in a context where more senior colleagues were present.

In summary, the use of local dialect and Malay in the meetings recorded inevitably depicts that the participants are comfortable with each other. The extensive use of Malay and local dialect appear to help convey their messages easily and help the team members communicate effectively. The use of this communication strategy gives evidence that the communication process is successful as there were instances of laughter derived from the turns that subsumed native language and local dialect.

Code-switching does not imply low proficiency. Instead, competent speakers of English in this study shifted to native language or local dialect in an attempt to close the social gap and at the same time foster solidarity. According to Kow (2000), code-switching is a common strategy utilised in order to establish rapport and ease communication with the audience. Thus it can be concluded that this communicative strategy aids in the process of conveying messages easily and establish common ground with the interlocutors.

#### **4.5 Other Findings Revisited**

The other linguistic choices such as illocutionary particles, honorifics and titles, local dialect and code-switching as employed by the participants in the study show that these aspects worked towards fostering solidarity, cooperativeness and to signal respect among the participants. Moreover, when local dialect and code-switching to Malay were utilised by the participants, these linguistic choices helped to some extent boost the production of humour.

## **4.6 Summary**

It is discovered that humour is a relevant source that can be used to wield power and at the same time build rapport in workplace setting. The next section summarises the findings on the functions of humour found in this study. Moreover, it also discusses the domination of the production of humour as well as the organisation of turns which subsumed humour found in this study.

### **4.6.1 Enacting Power**

On the whole, the findings of this study indicate that humour that works to enact power and build solidarity are equal with 25 percent respectively as found in the meetings recorded (see Table 4.2). Generally, humour produced was interspersed with laughter as an indication of support for the humour.

According to Hay (1995), the general functions of the taxonomy of humour referred to the effort made by the participants to appear witty during the conversation. It is discovered that many instances of humour in this study were attempts performed by the team members to appear amusing. The male participants of higher status were usually found to produce humour and they stood out in the crowd by making contributions during their turns or other people's turns. The data is parallel with Hay's (1995:119) study which discovered male participants often used humour for the sole purpose of impressing, appearing funny or creating a positive personal identity.

Meanwhile in symmetrical relationships i.e. during Meeting 1, the male participants also demonstrated the tendency to dominate when producing humour to appear witty. However,

in pre-determined contexts where status is apparent, the male participants in the lower positions did not compete to produce humour and those in higher positions were found dominating to create jokes regardless of gender. The data suggested that position plays an influential role for a person to be able to create elements of humour in contexts where status and authority are apparent.

As discovered by past researchers, (Sollit-Morris, 1997; Holmes and Marra, 2002b and Arfeen, 2009) humour is a powerful tool to boost speakers' power. The data in this study revealed the same results. Though the occurrence of repressive humour was relatively infrequent, but the functions are clearly demonstrated by senior lecturers who are of higher authority whereby they enact power on junior colleagues to gain compliance. It is also discovered that the control functions of humour is an effective strategy employed by senior lecturers over other senior lecturers by making them agree with their views on a particular issue.

The humour which was directed to colleagues of same status can be clearly seen in Meeting 2 where ML utilised humour in order to make AR conform to acceptable answers that were also agreed by the other team members (see Example 7). Since they are of the same status, performing directives is seen inappropriate. Hence humour is produced to show dominance and mitigate the impact of the directives. The findings of the study are parallel with Holmes and Stubbe (2003:133) who stated:

*Decision making thus an uneasy mix of authority based and consensual in style, which proves a constant source of contestation and challenge, often delivered in a superficially humorous tone to render it more palatable.*

(ibid.)

The humour found in the study was limited in terms of subversive humour. The instances found were mainly utilised by subordinates who have close relationships with the people of higher rank i.e. SM opposing to SL's claim (see Example 1) and MM challenging AN's power (see Example 9). Other subordinates who have a distant relationship with the colleagues of higher authority were found not producing subversive humour. The occurrence of subversive humour by subordinates supports the assertion by Locher (2004) that power fluctuates and can be exercised by groups of people regardless of the status they hold in a hierarchical environment.

On the other hand, teasing that was enacted towards people of the same status with the intention of boosting power was utilised by the academicians of a higher rank. For instance, AN who is a Canadian produced the highest amount of humour in comparison to the other senior staff. His humour was basically directed randomly to any subordinate i.e. MM, ZN SM, SL and FZ. An instance of humour employed among colleagues of the same status, is the example when AN challenged the power of RS who is the most senior lecturer in Meeting 3 through the use of humour (see Example 15).

Another significant finding was the reassertion of power by RS which was directed to AN as 'payback' after being ridiculed in front of their colleagues (see Example 16). The humour produced among them (RS and AN) involved sarcasm, criticism and challenge of power with the attempt to degrade one's status in the meeting. Humour in this category has the potential to initiate conflict since the colleagues were challenging each other. This suggests that humour is employed indirectly to increase one's status and power in a conversation after the speaker or the interlocutor's power was challenged.



Humour which may foster conflict occurred the least in all the four meetings recorded thus there is no significant findings in the use of humour by junior lecturers to senior lecturers. From the findings, people in higher authority were found initiating humour that has the tendency to foster conflict compared to junior staff. This can be seen when AN was ridiculed by TP and ML, both of whom are senior lecturers, whilst discussing the marks that ought to be awarded for a particular student's answer (see Example 13). Humour that was directed to AN could have brought on the conflict because of the contradictions and opposition of views.

The findings also discovered that humour was employed to ridicule those who have deviated from the on-going discussions. It was found that both junior and senior lecturers employed this type of humour to laugh at the deviates. This can be seen in one of the example where a senior colleague, AN directed a sarcastic comment towards all the team members who were not aware of the pertinent matters he explained in Meeting 2 (see Example 10). Another example is illustrated by MM, a junior lecturer, who challenges AN's status who had deviated from the course of the discussion and thus was 'lost' (see Example 9). In this category, status does not play a significant role as MM has challenged his colleague who is of a higher position (AN in Meeting 3).

Hay (1995) has characterised humour as a discourse which may function to control the behaviour of the interlocutors. The findings in this study revealed that participants of higher authority produced humour that controls the direction of discourse. For example, in Meeting 2, AN was challenged by ML and TP through the use of humour and sarcasm whilst they were debating on the marks that should be awarded for the particular essay (see

Examples 13 and 14). Their (ML and TP) use of humour is seen as wielding power i.e. by controlling and influencing the decisions to be taken for the particular matters. Consequently, ML and TP managed to make AN and the rest of the team members conform to their views. Such behaviour is said to promote position of power and authority among the speakers involved. However, there is no instance of junior colleagues who employed humour to control and influence the behaviour of the participants.

The overall analysis demonstrated that humour is a tool that can be utilised to indirectly wield power over participants of the same status or of a lower hierarchy. Through humour, the superiors and senior colleagues may mitigate the impact of directives and minimise the face threatening acts of the interlocutor. Hence, they appear less authoritarian whilst getting the subordinates to conform to their instructions. This demonstrates that those in higher authority employed humour in order to enact power implicitly on subordinates or colleagues of the same status, control the contribution of other participants which might lead to a conflict; as found also in Western workplace settings (Arfeen, 2009; Holmes and Stubbe, 2003, Sollit-Morris, 1997). On the other hand, the junior colleagues were also found to utilise humour to create a boundary between those who deviated from the discussion.

#### **4.6.2 Rapport Building**

Although humour is used to contest for power by superiors and subordinates in meetings, humour undeniably helps foster solidarity among colleagues in workplace context as well. The data revealed that humour occurred mostly at topic transition points and at the closings of the meetings. This type of humour enhances camaraderie among colleagues as it

releases pressure and provides a sense of belonging within the members. This is also confirmed by Holmes and Stubbe (2003) who stated that humour and jokes that were produced during the breaks during meetings help maintain solidarity among the participants.

It is noted that all the meetings with the exception of Meeting 2 did not employ humour during the preamble of the meetings. Meeting 2 was the only one where the chairperson utilised humour in the opening, where he informed the participants to create jokes in order to assist the researcher in collecting data. In response, this generated hilarity from the rest of the members.

Teasing was discovered as the most effective strategy that functioned to create solidarity. The instances of teasing occurred mostly in Meetings 1 and 3 where many instances of conjoint humour were discovered. As mentioned earlier, Meeting 1 which had the participation of a majority number of junior lecturers (6) of the same status and Meeting 3 had almost equal number of junior (7) and senior lecturers (8) demonstrated humour that was predominantly positive and collaborative. Despite the presence of status and power in Meeting 3, solidarity based teases were commonly employed by both superiors and subordinates. The teasing did not include harsh ironic comments but was more of constructive criticisms that helped maintain solidarity.

It is worth noting that the team members collaboratively constructed humorous sequences that were built upon one's humorous contribution. The participants regardless of status were found to be supportive in extending humour thus resulting in more laughter from the

rest of the members. The participants utilised humour to make the discussions more interesting and attempted to reduce the tension while arriving to a consensus on awarding the students' marks (see Examples 17, 20, 25 and 26). Besides adding jest to lighten the situation, humour presented a strong evidence of fostering solidarity among the academicians.

Apart from teasing, humour was also utilised while participants were sharing information with their colleagues. It is revealed that humour that functions to share information about one's personal experience was employed by female participants regardless of position. Anecdotes were commonly presented as a discourse strategy to impart childhood memories or personal experiences to the participants (see Examples 31, 32, and 33). The data also revealed the Dean of NAS disclosing her incompetence by producing self-deprecatory humour and directing a joke at herself (see Example 30). This suggested that the female participants create solidarity by sharing information with the interlocutors which is also consistent with Hay's (1995) findings.

On the other hand, there was no evidence found in all the recorded meetings showing male participants disclosing personal information about themselves during the meetings. In Meeting 2, the male participants were only found reminiscing past events related to the topic of discussion. Hay (1995) stated that males are more focused on task based activity rather than imparting personal experience. The study discovered only one evidence of reminiscing past events which was presented with humour; in which RS was ridiculed by AN because of his inefficiency during the previous activity with the students (see Example

3). Other examples where men remind each other of previous incidents were demonstrated briefly without the intervention of humour.

Humour was also utilised to celebrate shared ideas among the participants. This basically occurred during Meetings 2 and 3 where the participants primarily were ridiculing the answers that were written by their students. Besides, humour was also produced when the participants made jokes about allocating marks for the irrelevant answers. Humour can be interpreted as a strategy used by the academicians to relieve their frustrations off their students' work; instead of getting agitated and irritated.

As put forth by Hay (1995), humour creates boundaries and at the same time maintains solidarity among colleagues who deviate from the shared values. Boundary marking humour was found employed by both superiors and subordinates in this study. However, this type of humour hardly occurred in the recorded meetings. The example of a subordinate challenging the deviate of a higher authority was performed by MM which was directed towards RS (see Example 21). Meanwhile MM was also ridiculed by SM, who is also a junior lecturer like him, because of the different view he had with the group (see Example 20). It is discovered that boundary humour did not involve extreme criticisms thus this proves that humour strengthened ties among them.

The data also revealed that the topic of discussions in meetings influenced the occurrence of supportive humour. Meeting 1 which comprised six junior lecturers and a senior lecturer produced the most humour functioning to maintain solidarity since majority of the participants are of the same status. In addition, the topic which was reporting and finalising

results of the TESL camp project was less intense. In comparison with Meeting 3, the number of participants of junior and senior lecturers were equal thus asymmetrical relationships were established among the participants. Also, the focus of the discussion was to arrive to a consensus on marking schemes hence, there were limited occurrences of humour in the meeting.

The overall findings of this study indicated that though humour functions as a tool to build harmony in meetings, it was not produced that regularly in meetings since the total occurrence of humour is only 25 percent of the total meetings recorded. However, it is interesting that solidarity based humour is collaboratively constructed by junior and as well as senior members. This explains that humour strengthens ties between junior and senior colleagues despite the different status they occupy.

#### **4.6.3 Domination of the Production of Humour**

The findings of the study discovered that the chairpersons in each meeting received the highest number of turns. As stated by Singh (1992), the chairperson is the leader who steers the meetings thus it is expected that the number of turns taken by the chairpersons to be the highest amongst other speakers. It is revealed that the turns were allocated by the chairpersons during the meetings. The data also indicated that turns were also allocated by other speakers especially during the medial phase of the meetings. Besides, the senior staff was also found to initiate and close topics during the meetings. The findings are parallel with Baljit Kaur's (1994) findings who stated that the members of the floor had equal rights to initiate and close a particular issue; which however is contradictory with conventional meetings where all transactions are opened and closed by the chairperson.

The distribution of turns of all speakers in the meetings was found to be disparate. This is because numbers of turns were influenced by the responsibilities a person holds over a topic. This is in tandem with the assertion put forth by Kollock, Blumstein and Schwartz (1985:35) who claimed that factors such as responsibilities, duties and privileges influence the number of turns a person receives in any conversation. The findings in this study revealed that responsibilities such as reporting and reviewing of particular topics encouraged the number of turns a person had. This situation could be seen in Meeting 1 (See Appendix B) in which MS and ZN dominated a large portion of exchange in one turn because she was responsible to explain about one of the activities during TESL Camp.

It is also worth noting that the status a person holds in meeting influences his/her number of turns in the production of humour. It is discovered that senior lecturers produced more humour and dominated the floor in comparison with the junior lecturers in all the meetings recorded with the exception of Meeting 1. The meetings (Meetings 2, 3 and 4) which involved senior lecturers such as RS, AN, ES, ML, KD revealed that position influences domination in producing humour. The senior lecturers i.e ES, AN and RS were found initiating humour with the purpose of appearing amusing and entertaining the participants (Meeting 3) and their humour was created while providing details to the team members and also during other team members' contributions.

As noted in the earlier section, the analysis shows that RS and AN; who are senior staff were found challenging each other's status in Meeting 3. AN, a native speaker from Canada was the participant who produced most humour in comparison with the local team

members. Humour may be a common practice for participants of different cultures while holding discussions in a meeting. It is also noted that the humour was directed randomly to the junior staff i.e. SM, MM, ZN and FD whereas for senior lecturer, RS was the only target of humour for AN to direct his humour to. AN was found aiming his humour at RS with the purpose of ridiculing him and opposing to RS' views (see Examples 3 and 4). Once AN directed his humour to RS, RS took the turn and made interruptions to challenge AN (see Example 16). RS' turns which subsumed humour were relatively short, quick and related to the topics discussed and his spontaneous contributions elicited laughter from the team members.

The 'payback time' between AN and RS suggests that humour and interruptions were the strategies utilised by AN and RS as a way to avenge since both of them were found challenging each other's status during the meetings. Hence, this caused AN and RS to receive amongst the highest proportion of turns in Meeting 3 besides the chairperson (see Table 4.4).

Majority of junior staff was comfortable in using humour in a symmetrical context. For instance, in Meeting 1, most of the humour was generated by SM and MM and the humour they produced was found to be extended by a colleague of the same status. Female staff i.e WW, ZN, FZ were observed to be more involved in the production of humour in comparison with other meetings where the position and rankings were apparent (Meetings 2 and 3). A similar situation was also demonstrated in Meeting 4 where the participation of the junior lecturers was higher than the senior staff.



In comparison with the humour produced by junior lecturers in a hierarchical environment, it was discovered that the junior staff did not produced much humour unlike in Meeting 1 because of predetermined context of status and position. There were only a few instances that demonstrated male junior staff producing humorous contributions in asymmetrical context i.e. by SM and MM (see Examples 1, 9 and 11). Also, both of them were observed extending the humour initiated by the senior lecturers i.e AN and ES. It is discovered that male subordinates who have close relationship with senior staff collaborate on each other's humour. This is proven in situations where MM, who has close relationship with ES and AN extended ES and AN's humour despite of the status he holds (Meeting 3). Besides, MM was also found challenging the senior staff i.e. AN and RS (see Examples 9 and 21) who are of higher ranking. This reflects the assertion put forth by Handford (2010) who stated that relationship of the speakers is one of the contextual factors that influences the social action performed by participants in the meetings.

It can be concluded that position and status are apparent factors influencing the number of turns and the production of humour among the academics in asymmetrical contexts; which Fairclough (2001:36) described as unequal encounters. These findings are in line with Jariah Mohd Jan (1999) who discovered that those in higher authority had the advantage of controlling the conversation and dominating the floor compared to individuals who were in the lower rank. This could be so even with the production of humour in meetings as well.

Another reason for the superiors being the dominant force during all the discussions recorded except for Meeting 1 is because of a sign of respect by subordinates towards the superiors. According to Asma Abdulllah (1990:10) in *Influence of Ethnic Values at the*

*Malaysian Workplace*, social formalities are extremely important among Malaysians as one's social status in the community should be accorded due respect. This study found that the junior staff showed respect to those in authority by not interrupting during the senior colleagues' turns. This can be proven by the number of turns which were mostly taken by the senior staff except Meeting 4 (see Table 4.4). Since Meeting 4 was mostly participated by the junior staff thus the discussion was mainly dominated by them.

#### **4.6.4 Turn-Taking Patterns accompanying Humour**

The turn-taking patterns accompanying humour was analysed based on SSJ Turn-Taking Model (1974) (see Section 2.8, Chapter 2). The first rule of the model demonstrates that the turns are allocated by the current speaker. The data ascertained that there were two allocation techniques that were utilised by the current speaker in selecting the potential speaker. The first technique is through naming and signalling through body language (Sacks et al., 1974). Through this strategy, the current speaker selects the next speaker by mentioning the name of the potential speaker(s). This technique is very direct where the person that is selected is aware that he/she has to take the next turn.

The current speaker can also allocate turns through glancing i.e. by looking at the potential speaker. This technique can be seen utilised in Example 4 where AN looked at RS and directed a joke towards him. RS took the next turn eventhough he was being ridiculed by AN and his fellow colleagues. This strategy is the most applied strategy found in all the four meetings recorded. Another instance is illustrated in Example 15 where AN allocated the next turn to the chairperson, ES by glancing. ES, who is the glance-selected recipient (Sacks et. al.,1974) took the next turn and responded to AN's query. Another technique

that was employed by the current speaker is by using hand gestures. The data suggested that another alternative of allocating turns were through pointing at the next speaker. This technique is apparent as the current speaker directly requests the potential speaker to take the floor by pointing at him/her.

The second technique that was employed by the current speaker in allocating the next turn is through open discussions. With this strategy, the current speaker opens the floor to the participants who wish to make a contribution. Pronouns such as 'who' and 'anyone' are used to invite the participants to take the floor. Through this technique, everybody has the chance of getting the turn and make contributions related to the topic discussed. The findings in this study demonstrated that the speakers recognise the point of possible completion of the previous speaker's turn.

The second rule of SSJ Turn-Taking Model (1974) states that a turn is selected through self-selection which appeared to be the most popular rule applied for the speaker to gain the floor. This technique is mostly utilised during the medial phase of the meetings. In this study, the members who were in-charge with the on-going topic self-selected themselves to report and review the respective issues. It was also discovered that interruptions occurred during the self-selection since the participants were seen competing to gain the floor as the meeting proceeded.

According to Sacks et al. (1974), interruption markers and false starts are examples of signals that can be employed by a speaker who wishes to contribute in the conversation. However, it is found in this study that interruption markers such as *excuse me* and false

starts were not greatly utilised by speakers who attempted to make intentional or unintentional humorous contribution whilst grabbing the floor. Instead, interruptions were made spontaneously without any conscious strategy such as by inserting backchannel device. Yet, the interruption marker *excuse me* was found employed by MS and TK but their turns did not subsume any humour.

Interruptions were found primarily made by superiors rather than junior staff. It was carried out during the turns of team members of the same status and also during the junior participants' turns. This situation demonstrated a sign of power play by those of higher ranking as they were competing to gain the floor and dominate the conversation. Overlapping and interruptions frequently occurred in these meetings but there were only a few instances where interruptions and overlapping subsumed humour in all the four meetings.

The third rule of SSJ Turn-Taking Model (1974) states that a turn will be given to the current speaker when neither rule (a) or (b) is executed. As a result, the current speaker gains the floor and continues his/her speech. The rule can be seen utilised mostly during the chairpersons' and the staff's turns where they were responsible for the issues discussed. However, the study discovered only five instances of turns which subsumed humour that employed the third rule as depicted in Table 4.5.

In sum, there were a few turn allocation techniques employed by the participants in order for them to produce humorous contributions. First, the current speaker selected the potential speaker through naming, body language i.e. glancing and pointing, and opened

the floor for discussion with other team members. This strategy was mainly utilised by the chairpersons or senior lecturers.

Secondly, the participants self-selected themselves and competed to produce humour during the interaction. Both senior and junior lecturers were found to utilise this strategy to create jokes. The turns were constructed collaboratively where the humour was jointly developed. Such behaviour is said to promote support and solidarity within the team members. Interruptions and overlapping talks occurred whilst the participants were selecting themselves and competing for the floor. Yet, it was observed that interruptions by subordinates were not as forceful as the superiors, as also indicated by Morais' (1994:222) in her analysis.

Finally, the participants were also found to create humour during his/her current turns. However, only five instances of humorous contributions were found and they were all employed by the senior lecturers. The turns constructed by the superiors were longer which indicated position of power among the academicians.

Based on the data analysis of this study, it appeared that self-selection is the most popular strategy employed by both senior and junior lecturers in the production of humour. It can therefore be deduced that status plays a crucial role in taking control of the floor to produce humour as the participants in higher position were found to be more dominating in the production of humour during the meetings.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of findings on the functions of humour and the turn-taking patterns accompanying the production of humour in the recorded academic management meetings in tandem with factors influencing power and solidarity. It then proceeds to propose a few recommendations for future research in workplace discourse and humour in relation to the concept of power and solidarity. The conclusion of the findings is further presented in concurrence with Hay's taxonomy functions of humour (1995).

#### 5.1 Functions of Humour

With reference to the first research question on functions of humour in tandem with the manifestation of power and solidarity in academic management meetings, it was found that humour manifested with power had numerous functions. These functions included teasing team members, controlling the behaviour of the participants, creating boundaries for those straying away from the discussion during the course of the meeting and initiating conflict among the speakers and the interlocutors.

The data analysis found that humour worked towards degrading one's status in the meeting during the 'payback time' which was demonstrated by the senior lecturers. It is interesting to see both senior lecturers, AN and RS employing humour as a strategy to implicitly

challenge each other's power (see Example 15). After AN directed his humour to RS, RS re-directed humour towards AN to avenge him (see Example 16). This was as payback for ridiculing him in the presence of his other colleagues. The challenge occurred during the medial phase of the meeting and gradually ended before the closing of the meeting.

Apart from this, the findings from this study provide evidence that AN, a native speaker from Canada was the participant who produced most humour in Meeting 3 in comparison with other local team members. AN was found utilising humour with the purpose of teasing the target team members, while providing details and reviewing the issues raised. Besides, AN's other spontaneous turns apart from making him appear amusing, were found to be relatively short, quick and related to the topics discussed. This could be regarded as a construction of solidarity through humour.

The Canadian's traits could also be deduced as different communities reflecting distinct workplace cultural norms in relation to the production of humour. Although the finding in this study is made based on a sole Canadian participant, the researcher argues that the Westerner seemed more comfortable employing humour even in a formal context such as academic meetings. This can be further justified from previous studies on humour by Holmes and Marra (2002c:1707) that the amount and styles of humour produced by the participants help establish and identify distinctive aspects of the culture of different communities. This indicates that humour is pervasive and it is commonly utilised in the Western workplace setting. In referring to the Malaysian academic context, it can be concluded that the Malaysian workforce comparatively did not utilise much humour as the findings indicated only 25 percent of humour was found in the four meetings recorded.

In analysing the functions of humour that control the contribution of the powerless counterparts, the findings revealed that repressive humour was used by the superiors while issuing directives or passing criticisms to the junior participants. Repressive humour was utilised to signal mistakes of others and control their contributions during the meetings. Through repressive humour, the team members of the higher ranking gain compliance by getting participants to agree with their views and conform to their instructions. This is in fact confirmed by Fairclough (2001:38) who advocated that power in discourse has to do with powerful participants “controlling and constraining the contributors of non-powerful participants”.

The use of repressive humour also helps downtone directives thus minimising the face threatening acts of the interlocutor. By applying this type of humour, the senior participants appear less authoritarian while performing directives since the enactment of power play is less explicit. Thus, the researcher asserts that the use of repressive humour by the senior academicians in the Malaysian academic context functions primarily to maintain positive relationships with their colleagues.

It is also noted that humour functions as controlling the contributions of the interlocutors of higher positions. Senior lecturers were found to utilise humour over other senior lecturers who had opposing views while discussing marks for a particular student’s essay (Meeting 2). In this case, the researcher observed that humour worked towards gaining compliance and controlling the behaviour of the senior lecturers who had different views. For this reason, it is undeniable that humour is an effective weapon to subjugate the behaviour and contribution as well as to retain conformity with those who are of



symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships. It appears that the academic management meetings in NAS generally have a pre-determined context of power, status and social relationship since some of the senior members wield power to oppose opinions of others or those who stand up to present their views.

While for junior lecturers, subversive humour was utilised to implicitly oppose those of higher authority. The male junior lecturers were generally found resorting to humour in order to argue on the distribution of tasks during the TESL camp meeting. Further, the junior team members were also found employing subversive humour to challenge those in higher authorities who had deviated from the discussions. Subversive humour helped them to implicitly degrade the senior participants' status and power in the meetings. This way, the junior staff appeared less defiant or rebellious whilst expressing disagreement. The use of subversive humour minimised the occurrence of conflict that may have arisen because of disagreement and challenges made to those of higher authority. Subversive humour provides the idea that power fluctuates and it is not only exercised by people in the higher hierarchy but also by those people who are powerless.

In maintaining camaraderie, humour was utilised to indicate solidarity functions through friendly teasing. It is worth noting that both senior and junior team members collaborated in extending each other's humour during these occasions. The occurrences of "all-together-now" i.e. AATN (Coates, 1989) are evidences of solidarity existing among the academicians whereby the colleagues who shared the same views interrupted to support and add humour during the current interlocutor's turn. The male participants were found contributing humour during other participants' humourous turns thus reflecting

camaraderie. As stated by Coates (2007:32), since supportive humour is jointly constructed, many commentators see its chief function as being the creation and maintenance of solidarity as also found in this study.

Apart from teasing, there were also acceptable boundaries that were created for team members who had differing views and deviated from the course of the discussion. Boundary marking humour was found employed by both superiors and subordinates in this study. Thus humour is regarded as a tool to enhance solidarity especially when the use of humour i.e. friendly teasing which is approved by the rest of the team members.

Humour also functions towards boosting solidarity among colleagues when capitalising on social knowledge as well as through sharing personal stories. This was observed among female participants who imparted their childhood memories and their experiences while allocating marks for poor essays written by their students. The female participants were found utilising self-deprecatory humour while disclosing their incompetence with the other team members. For instance, the Dean of NAS directed a joke which provoked embarrassment for her and a humorous response from the other team members. This certainly worked towards enhancing in-group solidarity. Sharing personal information was discovered as a strategy that was utilised mostly by the female participants in their attempt to maintain camaraderie.

While Malaysian women build solidarity through disclosing personal information and by joking at their own expense, Malaysian men maintain camaraderie through interrupting and extending on one another's humour. Such collaborative behaviour indicates support and

common ground among them. This finding is in tandem with David et al. (2006) and Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (2006) who found that female friends tend to impart self-disclosing humour compared to males.

Another significant finding in this study is the use of other linguistic choices such as illocutionary particles, honorifics and titles, local dialect and code-switching from English Language to Malay by the participants in the study. The researcher strongly opines that these aspects were employed to foster solidarity, cooperativeness and signal respect among the participants. Moreover, when local dialect and code-switching to Malay were utilised by the participants, these linguistic choices helped to some extent boost the production of humour. Hence, it is worth noting that these communication strategies serve as instruments that help foster camaraderie among the academicians.

## **5.2 Turn-Taking Patterns accompanying Humour**

During the initial phase of the meeting, the turns were generally allocated by the chairperson. As the meeting progressed, the conversational style turned to being more casual and less rigid in terms of organisation. The participants seemed to disregard the formalities during the meetings as humorous contributions were made. Based on the SSJ Turn-Taking Model (1974), the humorous turns were constructed through three turn-allocation techniques. These three were utilised by both the senior and junior staff in creating jokes. The respective techniques involve selecting the potential speaker, self-selecting and the current speaker continuing contributing during his/her turn. The data suggested that the organisation of turns which subsumed humour basically adhered to the second rule of SSJ Model of Turn-Taking (1974).

The technique demonstrated that turns were taken through self-selection where the members of the floor will select themselves in order to make their respective contributions. This rule was discovered as the most applied rule by the participants especially for those in higher status in their attempt to produce humour. This technique also denotes power play between the speakers as they compete to gain the floor and contribute to the interaction.

In tandem with the second research question on turn-taking patterns accompanying the production of humour during the academic management meetings, the findings revealed that the occurrence of humour was influenced by several factors. The first key factor is status and positions of the participants. In meetings where the status is apparent, it was discovered that the senior lecturers tend to dominate in the production of humour. On the other hand, the junior staff was found to initiate more humour when the higher ranked people were not involved or were the minority during the discussions. As stated by Jariah Mohd Jan (1999), those in higher positions have the advantage of controlling and dominating the floor in comparison with those who are in the lower hierarchy. The results in this study give evidence that status and position that one occupies influence the production of humour in an asymmetrical context.

It is noted that the humour produced by senior and the team members occurred whilst they were reporting and reviewing the issues discussed. Besides, humour was also initiated during the turns of other team members. This explains the interruptions and overlapping talk which was carried out by the participants during the production of humour while the participants were seen competing to gain the floor as the meeting proceeded. While the senior members were enacting power over those in the lower rank, the junior participants

were seen competing to gain power. This situation reveals that the interlocutors in this study realised the status they hold within an interaction as most of the humour were produced by the senior participants in asymmetrical contexts. In symmetrical contexts, on the other hand, the junior team members were comfortable initiating humour among themselves. The findings discovered that status and rankings are features that influence the domination in producing humour.

In general, the findings prove that the interruptions made by the participants to produce humour within the four meetings were not treated as intrusive. It is observed that the instances of interruptions depicted in these meetings were collaboratively constructed where the participants were found providing humorous contributions during other colleagues' amusing turns. Such cooperative interruption indicated the participants were actively extending and supporting on each other's humour. This is parallel with the assertion put forth by Coates (1996) who stated that interruption is a vital aspect among female friends to sustain collaborative floor and to maintain solidarity.

The second factor that influenced the occurrence of humour is the underlying purpose and the topics involved during the meetings. Meetings which discussed pertinent issues such as arriving to a consensus on a marking scheme for a particular exam paper (Meetings 2 and 4) received fewer proportions of humour compared to the meetings which revolved around more casual topics (Meetings 1 and 3) such as discussing the activities for the TESL camp project. The participants were found producing more laughter and humour in Meetings 1 and 3 since the issues raised were less intense in comparison with Meetings 2 and 4.

The close rapport among colleagues was the third factor that influenced the production of humour. Junior staff members who are close with senior academicians are more likely to produce humour either to challenge or build solidarity with the participants. The findings in this study suggest that the close relationship with the senior staff encouraged the occurrence of humour produced by the junior staff in asymmetrical contexts. A context such as this helps reduce the differences of power. The junior staff members were seen as being more comfortable extending and adding on to the humour initiated by the senior lecturers. This finding is in tandem with Handford's (2010) assertion on the relationship of the speakers as being one of the contextual factors influencing social action, which in this instance is the production of humour by participants in academic meetings.

Apart from these factors, a person's personal traits of being able to produce jokes also encourage the occurrences of humour in meetings. Production of jokes not only entertains but fosters solidarity when the rest of the group appreciates the jokes. Several of the male and female participants who initiated humour throughout the meetings did so to de-stress themselves from the serious discussion during the course of the meetings and also to lighten the atmosphere. Further, their humorous spontaneous turns boosted the number of turns taken in the meetings.

The researcher concludes from the analysis of this study that self-selection is the most preferred technique utilised by the participants during the production of humour. The participants were found comfortable producing humour spontaneously without waiting for turns to be allocated. This technique was applied mostly by the participants of higher

position. As such, ranking is a key factor that influences the domination and the production of humour in the case of senior academicians during the academic management meetings.

### **5.3 Recommendations for Future Research**

This study aspires to make a small contribution to the growing body of research in the field of sociolinguistics. Moreover, it is hoped that it will initiate interest among researchers particularly in the area of workplace discourse and humour in examining the concept of power and solidarity.

The study can be extended to other types of meetings apart from departmental meetings. Meetings such as top management level meetings or staff meetings amongst non-academic staff will possibly provide insights on different ways of enacting power and building rapport among colleagues. Besides, meetings in informal settings such as friendly or personal discussions will impart significant findings as the occurrence of humour would certainly be different in nature. As humour in a casual context is expected to occur more frequently, hence this will demonstrate other techniques of power play and solidarity.

Moreover, future researches could be carried out in examining different types of workplace discourse strategies such as negotiations (Shanmuganathan, 2008), directives and requestives (Hadina Habil, 2003), disagreements (Paramasivam, 2007), interrogations (Yoong, 2010) and decision making. Investigating these discourse strategies in other workplace contexts such as in hospitals, factories and courtrooms could yield similar or different findings. Apart from that, other informal and common places such as fish markets, shopping malls and restaurants in the Malaysian setting would definitely trigger

diverse findings and it ought to provide distinct results in comparison to an academic setting.

Besides, future researches could investigate gender aspects as gender serves as an important factor to managing power and solidarity in workplace. The use of discourse strategies based on gender variation and styles may present variant findings in comparison with what had been found this study; which were primarily analysed from the perspective of symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships.

This study limits the functions of humour to those which were highlighted by Hay (1995). Hence, it certainly would be fruitful to extend the research to other mechanics of humour such as word play, irony, jocular abuse and banter which have been investigated by other researchers (Chiaro, 1992; Norrick, 1993). Styles and strategies used in humour could also be an alternative avenue to be further investigated.

Similar to Western countries, the use of humour among Malaysians is pervasive and ubiquitous. Malaysia is a multi-cultural society comprising three dominant ethnic groups which are the Malays, Chinese and Indians, thus Malaysian jokes are also no exception to culturally-based humour. This provides an immense base for research in the area of discourse strategies to seek comparative findings based on the various cultural backgrounds of the different races in Malaysia. Various techniques of power play and humour could be encountered as each race could produce humour differently thus providing a variation of humour. It is hoped that this study will encourage more



exploration of other aspects of humour and fulfill the void in the research on humour which is relatively unknown and an unexplored area in the Malaysian context.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

The study found that taxonomy functions of humour which was designed and employed by Hay (1995) for friendship conversation could also be utilised to categorise the types of humour that occurred in a formal context such as an academic management meeting. Although humour was not found to be employed at all times during the meetings since the findings indicated only 25 percent humour was found in the four meetings recorded, humour is perceived as one of the components of workplace discourse that can be used to challenge a person's status or to construct solidarity in the Malaysian workplace context.

The study delineated that humour which functions within Malaysian academic management meetings are similar with the functions of humour in Western friendship interactions (Hay, 1995) which are tease, control, bound, conflict, highlight/capitalise and share. It is clear that humour can be correlated with the concept of power and solidarity which functions to exercise power and to maintain camaraderie among colleagues.

Key factors such as ranking and responsibility influence the use of power play when humour is employed with the purpose of teasing, controlling and constraining the contributions of the interlocutors and creating a boundary between those who deviate from the discussions. In this study, humour primarily acts as a channel of solidarity when it functions through friendly teasing and boundary marking, highlighting similarities or shared knowledge and disclosing of personal stories to the team members.

It is clear at this juncture that humour is an effective strategy as well as a strong tool for analysing power play and rapport building in asymmetrical and symmetrical contexts in Malaysian academic meetings. The findings in this study strengthen the assertion from the empirical work conducted in the West that any show of power and solidarity could be formed through humour.

*...joking at work plays an important regulatory function by providing a means of expression that assists group cohesion, deflects attention from the dehumanising aspects of work and acts to preserve the existing power hierarchy.*

(Noon and Blyton, 1997: 159-160 in Taylor and Bain, 2004:6)

The researcher in this study concludes that Malaysian academic management meetings are no exception to humour operating as a powerful discourse. Academicians employ humour with the purpose of not only achieving power during the course of interaction but to reinforce camaraderie with either their senior or junior colleagues.

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