# Study of Humor Generation Mechanism of Lining Drop from the Perspective of Cognitive Schema

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**Abstract.** Humor law is very important in the tact principle. Humor law includes several maxims, and the maxim of going by chance and giving up is an important way to produce humor. Generally speaking, this law is realized by the ways of arising to fall, lining drop, and falling after having a rest etc. Lining drop refers to a kind of utterance structure that turns suddenly after listing regularly. Its structural formula is "A1, A2 …An, -A (B)". Based on the analysis of several examples, the humor generation mechanism is studied from the perspective of cognitive schema in this paper. It can be concluded that the maxim of lining drop uses the means of "induction and overthrow" and "contrast to conventional reasoning" to produce humor.

**Keywords:** Cognitive schema; lining drop; humor.

## 1. Introduction

The study of humor can date back to the fourth century B.C. during so many years, scholars from different fields have adopted different methods to study, and humor is studied from the perspectives of linguistics, rhetoric, aesthetics, philosophy and psychology. Among them, the linguistic study of humor is most mature[1]. Linguists mainly use the cooperative principle, relevance theory, presupposition theory, speech act theory, Neo-Gricean and other theories to analyze humor and most of the researches apply related principles into utterance analysis, for example, many scholars analyzed the generation mechanism of verbal humor in foreign sitcoms, variety shows, domestic sitcoms, films, skits and crosstalk from the perspective of cooperation principle[2-4]. But few studies involve in the domestic scholars' exploration and supplementary research on the related theories, for example, when talking about the Neo-Gricean of conversational implicature, Zhenyu Suo added a new principle, that is, the principle of appropriateness, which has three maxims: politeness, humor and restraint. Until now, there is almost no study about Zhenyu Suo's theory. In order to make up for this research gap, promote the innovation of humor related theoretical research and further use in text analysis, and analyze the generation mechanism of verbal humor more thoroughly and comprehensively, it is necessary to analyze the humor generation mechanism of special speech forms from the perspective of cognitive schema. In this paper, cognitive schema is used as the theoretical framework and verbal language text of lining drop as examples, the generation mechanism of humor is studied which also proves that cognitive schema theory can scientifically analyze this type of verbal humor.

## 2. Cognitive Schema

The concept of schema was first put forward by I. Kant (1781), and then it was used and derived new ideas. The emergence of modern schema theory is generally believed to be related to the early work of psychologist F. C. Bartlett, "remembering: a study in experimental and social psychology" (1932). As pointed out by psychologist Glotti, schema is usually used to refer to something larger than a single concept, which integrates general knowledge about the real world with information about special events. A large number of cognitive practices proved that schema is the basis of cognition, and it will reorganize, understand and memorize the information obtained later after it is formed in the brain[5]. The important points in cognitive schema theory are as following:

First, schema is a kind of packaged information, in which there are fixed contents and changing elements. Moreover, this kind of information package is not disordered, it has organization and structure. Schema is a large organized information unit, which is used to represent concept,

situation, time and action in memory, and arrange the chaotic and unstructured information in real experience in good order. For example, the schema of "he finished university study" includes concrete steps of "primary school—junior middle school—senior middle school— university", and these concrete steps also exist in human brain in sequence.

Second, in schema theory, this kind of information package is stored in an abstract way rather than concrete examples one by one. Some psychologists compare schema to a blank questionnaire to be filled in. Moreover, a schema is not fixed and unchangeable. It varies with the situation and is adjusted appropriately according to the specific situation. Therefore, a schema can be adapted to many different scenes, and the information which appeared greatly different can be formed into systematic knowledge.

Third, one schema does not exist in isolation, but keeps close contact with other schemas. Many schemas can also form another larger and more complex schema, so we can describe and analyze human behavior from small to large, from simple to complex. Because of this, schema theory can be used to not only explain a sentence, but also analyze a more complex discourse.

Fourth, when people recognize and understand the external world, the schemas in their brains will play an important part. To a certain degree, it can be called thinking stereotype, which makes human thinking along a certain direction and within a certain range. The thinking framework provided by schema is helpful for effectively inferring the default value of something.

Last but not least, schema is an active processing process rather than a passive knowledge unit, and applying schema is a construction process. Some psychologists have pointed out that schema is an active organization that responds to the past or experiences, and it must be available at any time and can be adapted to any related response. This application is not simply to match with the information in the real situation, but to actively select schema, use it to organize and discover the relevant information in the reality, and even to slightly modify schema to adapt to reality.

## 3. Lining Drop

When talking about the new Grice's theory of conversational implicature, Zhenyu Suo (1999) added a new principle, namely, the tact principle, which has three laws: politeness, humor and restraint. There are six maxims in humor law[6,7]. This paper focuses on the law of going by chance and giving up, which includes several realization ways such as arising to fall, lining drop, and falling after having a rest etc. the humor generation mechanism of lining drop is studied from the perspective of cognitive schema in this paper. The humor generated by this way belongs to plotless humor.

Lining drop is a kind of utterance structure that first lists regularly and then turns suddenly. In terms of structure, it is divided into two parts: lining in the front and drop in the back. Lining could include   one lining or several linings, that is, to list several related things, so that the hearers' has a clear tendency towards a definite direction, when the tendency accumulated by listing gradually strengthens, it suddenly drops, which is out of the hearers' expectation and unsuitable to their inference, in this process humor is generated. The structure formula of lining up is A1, A2 …An, -A (B) [6]. "A1, A2, …An" refers to all the things listed by a group of neat and parallel clauses or sentences, while the last clause or sentence suddenly turns to the opposite thing"-A" or "B" which is related to "A1, A2, …An" literally but is different from them in meaning. Lining drop in the structure is divided into two parts, one is more important than the other and the other is used to highlight and serve. They are interdependent and indispensable.

There are two types of lining drop. First, the horizontal parallel contrast lining drop, by citing a number of related facts, gradually juxtaposing and accumulating, could form a tendency. Second, the vertical progressive lining drop, that is to say, the listed related facts are logically combined in a unified structure in a progressive way, and there are relationships among the facts such as primary and secondary, early and late. In terms of artistic function, lining drop is mainly reflected in three aspects: first, lining drop can cause twists and turns, ups and downs, and a strong dramatic effect in plot; second, it is helpful to excavate and reveal the characteristics of the characters and deepen the

theme and ideological connotation of the works; The third is the turn from the accumulation of lining to the logical collapse of drop, which makes readers feel funny in the contrast between expectation and out of expectation, and shows the humorous and ironic value of the works. Lining drop is frequently used in literary works, comic dialogues and utterance communications, For example, in the comic dialogue "five pens" there is a dialogue:

A: What is the meaning if there is a pen on my T-shirt?

B: It means you graduated from primary school.

A: Oh! What if there are two pens?

B: Junior middle school.

A: Then what if three?

B: Senior middle school.

A: There are four.

B: Then you go to university

A: What if five? It means I am a university professor?

B: No, it means your job is repairing pens.

According to the logic reasoning in the above dialogue, the level of education is represented by the number of pens, five pens should mean the education level that is higher than university, but suddenly it drops, five pens mean pen repairers, in which process, humor is generated and hearers burst into laugh.

For another example, a mobile text message is as follows: If your ears itch, it means someone want to hear you; if your eyes itch, it means someone wants to see you; if your lips itch, it means someone wants to kiss you; if your body itches, it's time for you to take a bath.

According to the logic in the short message text "ear itch" represents "want to hear", "eye itch" represents "want to see" and "lips itch" represents "want to kiss", "body itch" should not mean "it's time to take a bath". So the last sentence is a drop and all the above sentences are linings.

## 4.　The Humor Generation Mechanism of Lining Drop

Schema theory holds that when people understand new information, it must be compared with the original information that has been stored in memory. Through this process of judging thinking, people can successfully understand and receive information. That is to say, before people accept new information, they have stored countless knowledge in their minds, including personal experience, factual knowledge or learned knowledge, etc. According to schema theory, all knowledge is grouped into certain units which are schemas, the processing of new information is the process of interaction between the existing knowledge and the new information. When readers first come across new information, they search for the schema in their brain that can explain the information. This search process is a selection process. Once the schema stored in memory is connected with the information provided by the language material, the new information can be understood and obtained. This connection will also help the reader to deduce the new information. Even if the second half of the information is missing, the reader will add the missing part of the information according to the relevant schema. The constraint function of schema restricts people's thinking to a certain direction and scope when they recognize and understand the external world, it could help effectively infer the default value of something. If the missing part of information is inconsistent with the reader's addition, that is to say, if the limited direction and scope of thinking are different from the information given by the author later, the reader will choose another cognitive schema to reprocess and reunderstand the information. An effective information processing procedure is a cognitive process of continuously activating and enriching the existing schemas in the reader's mind and forming new schemas.

In the above example "five pens", the speaker first established several linings: one pen represents primary school, two pens represent junior middle school, three pens represent senior middle school and four pens represent university under the guidance of linings, hearers activate a schema in their brain, that is, the more pens there are, the higher the education level. Hearers limit their thinking to

one definite direction: five pens must represent a kind of people with higher education level than university. But the speaker overthrows this direction of induction, more pens do not represent the higher education level, and the default information given by the speaker forces readers to establish another schema—people who repair pens usually wear a lot of pens on their clothes. Starting from this schema, they reprocess and reunderstand information. In this process, readers or listeners can't help laughing and humor is generated.

In another example, readers follow the inducing direction—body parts itching means someone missing you, but the speaker overturned the guidance direction and forced the reader to establish a new schema—the body will itch if dirty, and you should take a bath if dirty. Because of this, it became a successful funny text message. It is in the inducing of several lining and overthrow of one drop that humor is generated.

## 5. Summary

According to the above rules, the humor of lining drop lies in that it first induces the readers to activate a schema by using one or more linings. According to this cognitive schema, readers can infer and add the latter part of information, and then find that the missing part information given by the author is totally different from the reader's conventional reasoning, and the speaker himself overthrows this direction with the development of the dialogue, readers have to establish another schema to reprocess and reunderstand the information, in which process, humor is generated. It can be concluded that the maxim of lining drop uses the means of "induction and overthrow" and "contrast to conventional reasoning" to produce humor.

## Acknowledgements

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