

Phonological Wordplay in the Dad Jokes YouTube Channel

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v11i3.2383>

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A B S T R A C T

Humor in spoken interaction often relies on phonological manipulation to create ambiguity and generate comedic effects. This study aims to analyze the types of wordplay found in the Dad Jokes YouTube channel and to examine how sound-based manipulation contributes to humor creation in spoken interaction. The data were analyzed using Dirk Delabastita's theory of wordplay, which includes homonymy, homophony, homography, and paronymy. This study employed a qualitative descriptive method by identifying jokes containing wordplay from selected videos in the *Celebrity Dad Jokes* playlist. The findings showed that paronymy was the most dominant type, occurring in 62 out of 120 identified data, followed by homonymy (30 data), homophony (27 data), and homography (1 datum). The results also demonstrated that prosodic features, particularly pauses and intonation, contributed to humor creation by triggering ambiguity, reinterpretation, and surprise through wordplay. The study concludes that phonological features play a significant role in shaping humor in spoken dad jokes on YouTube.

Keywords: *Dad Jokes, Humor, Phonology, Wordplay*

Article History:

Received 23rd April 2026

Accepted 19th May 2026

Published 23rd May 2026



INTRODUCTION

Humor plays an important role in human communication because it helps people build social relationships, reduce tension, and create engagement in interaction. In everyday life, humor is often used to make conversations more enjoyable, strengthen interpersonal bonds, and create a more relaxed social atmosphere. Smiling, counting blessings, seeking out laughter, spending time with humorous people, and using humor in conversation can also positively influence mental health and well-being (Kargupta, 2023). In both face-to-face communication and digital media environments, humor is frequently employed to attract attention, maintain audience engagement, and strengthen connections between speakers and audiences. Because humor often relies on language manipulation and creative interpretation, it also provides valuable insights into how linguistic features function in communication. One of the most common ways humors is created in language is through the manipulation of sounds and meanings, particularly in jokes and verbal interactions.

Humor often arises from the creative manipulation of language. Many jokes rely on sound-based features such as similarity in pronunciation or phonological ambiguity to create humorous effects. These sound patterns are examined within the scope of phonology as one of the branches of linguistics. Phonology concerns the language-specific selection and organisation of sounds to signal meanings. (McMahon, 2020). This implies that phonology deals with how sounds are not only chosen but also arranged to function meaningfully in a language. Lodge (2012) explains that phonology describes how speech sounds are organized and generated within a language system and examines how these sounds represent differences of meaning. Furthermore, the goal of phonology is to understand the implicit system of rules that enables speakers in interpreting and manipulating the sounds of their language (Hayes, 2011). In other words, phonology encompasses the internalized system of sound patterns within the mind as well as the analytical study of how those sounds operate in human

language. In this sense, phonology explores how sounds function to create meaning, how they are structured, and how they interact in speech.

From a humorous perspective, the manipulation of sound becomes particularly significant when it generates alternative interpretations and shifts in meaning. This view aligns with Berger's (1976) conception that humor often arises from disruptions at various linguistic levels, whether in syllables, words, phrases, or meanings. This mechanism is especially relevant to phonological humor, where speech sounds can be arranged to create ambiguity or layered meanings. Furthermore, Beeman (2016) explains humor as a performative accomplishment drawing on linguistic, gestural, and visual elements to create audience enjoyment. In this context, speakers may intentionally manipulate sound structures for humorous purposes, and operations such as adding, omitting, or substituting segmental sounds often become effective strategies for producing humor in everyday interaction (Romadlani et al., 2023). Therefore, phonological manipulation can be understood as one of the fundamental mechanisms within linguistic humor.

One notable form of sound manipulation in linguistic humor is reflected in wordplay. Delabastita Dirk (1996), describes wordplay as the use of linguistic structures that exploit similarities in form while producing differences in meaning, creating communicatively significant effects through ambiguity and reinterpretation. This kind of humor stimulates cognitive engagement as the listener is momentarily "tricked" by the language, leading to reinterpretation and amusement. Among the various types of wordplay, phonological wordplay, which focuses on similarities in sound rather than spelling or grammar, has proven to be very effective in spoken conversation. As Dirk Delabastita suggests, wordplay can be systematically classified into types such as homonyms (identical sound and spelling), homophones (identical sounds, different spelling), homographs (identical spelling, different sounds), and paronyms (slight differences in both spelling and sounds), each offering a different way of manipulating linguistic forms to generate humor.

Phonological wordplay is particularly effective in spoken language, where listeners rely primarily on auditory input rather than written symbols. These sound-based manipulations reflect the broader nature of humor as a multidisciplinary phenomenon spanning linguistics, literature, psychology, philosophy, sociology, and cognitive neuroscience (Adesoye, 2018). In phonological wordplay, humor emerges through similarities in pronunciation that prompt listeners to reinterpret what they hear. Lew (1997) explains that phonological humor arises when a single phonetic form allows multiple possible interpretations, leading listeners to momentarily entertain different meanings. This process often produces surprise and amusement as ambiguity is recognized and resolved. Furthermore, because humor frequently carries socio-cultural, political, or economic meanings, successful interpretation requires sufficient background knowledge (Okhuosi, 2022). Thus, humor depends on the listener's ability to detect and resolve phonological ambiguity, highlighting phonological awareness as a key factor in humor comprehension. Consequently, phonological wordplay represents a cognitively engaging form of humor and offers valuable insights for linguistic research, particularly within phonological studies.

One genre of humor that makes frequent and effective use of phonological wordplay is dad jokes. Jokes are verbal or physical gestures intended to evoke amusement and laughter (Martin & Ford, 2018), and dad jokes form a specific subtype characterized by brevity and pun-based punchlines, often delivered as one-liners, dialogues, sentences, or question-answer formats (Miranto, 2020). Hye-Knudsen (2021) explains that dad jokes are intentionally predictable and harmless, functioning as a form of anti-humor that fathers use as playful teasing and bonding. This aligns with cultural portrayals such as in American sitcoms, where fathers are stereotypically associated with "lame," pun-driven humor based on wordplay and multiple meanings (Папаяні, 2019). Taken together, these definitions show that although dad jokes may appear simple or unsophisticated, their humor relies on phonological ambiguity, homophones, and sound-based reinterpretations that require listeners to detect subtle similarities and rapidly shift their interpretation to understand the punchline. Although often

seen as corny, dad jokes rely on phonological ambiguity and reinterpretation, demonstrating a surprising level of linguistic creativity (Dwi Khumaeroh Sa'adah et al., 2024).

In recent years, dad jokes have gained new popularity across online platforms, especially video-sharing media where presentation and delivery play a crucial role. YouTube has become one of the most influential spaces for producing and disseminating humorous content because it allows creators to engage audiences through verbal, visual, and performative elements. Bernad-Mechó & Girón-García (2023) show that humor serves as an effective engagement strategy on YouTube, enhancing attention and strengthening communicative relationships. This aligns with the growing scholarly interest in humorous discourse on YouTube, which increasingly transcends conventional comedy boundaries and illustrates the evolution of digital entertainment (Vera et al., 2024). As a platform that accommodates diverse genres, YouTube also enables humor to become a highly appealing category, since audiences tend to feel more engaged when comedic material incorporates narrative or situational elements (Sultan et al., 2024).

Within this landscape, the Dad Jokes YouTube series (@AllDefDadJokes) by All Def exemplifies how linguistic humor thrives in digital media environments. The format features two speakers exchanging wordplay-based jokes in a face-to-face setting, attempting to make one another laugh while maintaining a serious expression. This minimalist setup highlights the linguistic mechanisms behind dad jokes, especially phonological features such as pronunciation, intonation, rhythm, and timing. Because the humor relies heavily on verbal manipulation and phonological play, the series offers an authentic context for examining spoken wordplay and the dynamics of humor delivery in online audiovisual settings.

The previous study about wordplay analysis is a sociolinguistic study by Syahputra, Seli, and Syafitri (2024), entitled *The Sociolinguistic Analysis of Dad Joke on the YouTube Channel YeahMad*. This study focused on identifying types of jokes, including wordplay, used in the YeahMad YouTube videos. The researchers used Meyer's (2015) classification of seven types of jokes, such as wordplay, irony, anecdotal humor, and sarcasm. Out of 109 dad jokes analyzed, 29 were identified as wordplay. The study revealed that dad jokes are linguistically rich and often depend on sociocultural contexts to be understood.

The second study is *Wordplay or Not Wordplay (The Indonesian Version of Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland)* by Setyaningsih & Antaniami (2019). This research analyzed the wordplay in the source text and its Indonesian translation using Dirk Delabastita's and Leech's theories. It classified 50 examples of wordplay, with paronymy being the most frequent. It also discussed the translation strategies used, finding that "wordplay to non-wordplay" was the most commonly applied. The study highlights the difficulty of translating wordplay while maintaining the original humor and linguistic creativity of the source text.

Another previous study by (Bonita & Novalinda, 2021), entitled *Strategies in Translating Wordplay in Perahu Kertas Novel from Indonesian to English*, focused on the Indonesian novel *Perahu Kertas* and its English translation *Paper Boat*. The study used Delabastita's wordplay typology and translation strategies to analyze 20 wordplays. Most of them were phonological, with homonymy and homophony being the most dominant. The researchers found that the most frequently used translation strategy was "wordplay to wordplay," suggesting the translator made efforts to preserve the humor and form of the original expressions.

This study shares similarities with previous research by applying Delabastita's classification of wordplay, including homonymy, homophony, homography, and paronymy, and by focusing on wordplay as the central linguistic phenomenon. It also aligns with Syahputra et al.'s study in using the Dad Jokes YouTube series as the data source. However, this research differs in its analytical perspective. While Syahputra et al. adopted a sociolinguistic approach, this study emphasizes linguistic structure and sound-based wordplay within a phonological framework. In contrast to Setyaningsih's and Bonita's studies, which analyzed written literary texts and translation strategies, this research examines naturally spoken wordplay in audiovisual media without interlingual translation. Moreover,

it highlights phonological features and oral delivery as key elements in humor construction, aspects that remain underexplored in previous studies.

Although previous studies have examined wordplay in translation, sociolinguistic humor, and phonological manipulation in comedy, the research specifically focusing on phonological wordplay and prosodic features in spoken dad jokes on YouTube remains limited. Existing studies also tend to focus more on written texts or general humor classification rather than on how sound patterns and oral delivery contribute to humor creation in audiovisual interaction. Therefore, the research objectives of this study are to identify the types and sound differences of wordplay found in the Dad Jokes YouTube videos based on Delabastita's classification and to analyze how prosodic features contribute to humor creation through wordplay.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design. According to Sandelowski (2001), qualitative research is often defined by the absence of numbers, as well as by a critique of numerical approaches, which are associated with the supposedly superficial concerns of post or neopositivist researchers with how much and how many. This perspective emphasizes that qualitative research focuses more on describing and understanding phenomena rather than measuring them quantitatively. It is less interpretive than an interpretive description approach because it does not require the researchers to move far from or deeply into the data, nor does it demand a highly conceptual or abstract level of analysis compared to other qualitative designs (Sandelowski, 2000). In this approach, researchers actively collect and interpret data as part of the research process, using an open and flexible design rather than the structured rigor typically associated with quantitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). In conducting such research, various general methods may be applied to support the process of analysis and interpretation. These include classification, description, comparison, sampling, induction and deduction, as well as explanation and interpretation, both in qualitative and quantitative approaches (Aulawi et al., 2018). Furthermore, Creswell (2014) states that qualitative research focuses on understanding how people interpret social phenomena through versatile procedures, natural data collection, and inductive analysis that develops themes from the data.

Data

The data in this study consist of spoken language involved in phonological wordplay recognized as dad jokes.

Data Sources

The data source in this research consists of video content from the dad jokes series published on the official Dad Jokes YouTube channel (@AllDefDadJokes) specifically from a playlist entitled Celebrity Dad Jokes, which contains a total of 24 videos. This playlist features various celebrities participating in a humorous game format in which two individuals or two teams take turns delivering dad jokes to one another. The objective of the game is to make the opposing participant or team laugh; each successful attempt that causes laughter earns points, and the participant or team with the highest score is declared the winner. However, only 20 videos were selected as the primary data for analysis, as four of the videos are compilation episodes presenting collections of previously released "best of" dad jokes rather than original standalone contents.

Data Collection

In this study, the data were collected through the following steps; (1) watching videos from the selected playlist, (2) transcribing the spoken jokes from the selected videos, (3) identifying jokes that contain wordplay, (4) highlighting the punchline words from the dad jokes, and (5) briefly explaining the meanings of the punchline words and the intended meanings.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted through several systematic steps; (1) the highlighted jokes were reviewed to ensure that they contain clear instances of wordplay, (2) the highlighted jokes were classified based on Delabastita's theory, including categories such as homonymy, homophony, homography, and paronymy, (3) the highlighted jokes' phonological features were analyzed to identify how sound-based elements contribute to humor creation, and (4) examined the contextual aspects of the jokes, including delivery style and cultural references, to support a deeper understanding of meaning and interpretation.

Data Coding

To facilitate data identification and analysis, each datum was assigned a specific code. The code consists of the video number (V) and the sequence of wordplay within the video (W). For example, V1 W3 refers to the third instance of wordplay found in the first video.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section presents the findings of the study, focusing on the analysis that aims to identify and examine the types of wordplay found in the collected dad jokes from *Celebrity Dad Jokes* playlist on the Dad Jokes YouTube channel. The findings were classified based on Dirk Delabastita's theory, which categorizes wordplay into four types that derived from similarities in sound, namely, paronymy, homonymy, homophony, and homography. The distribution of each type of wordplay found in the data is presented based on the frequency of occurrence, from most to least frequent, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of Wordplay in the Dad Jokes YouTube Channel

Type of Wordplay	Occurance
Paronymy	62
Homonymy	30
Homophony	27
Homography	1
Total	120

In total, 160 dad jokes were collected from 20 videos included in the selected playlist. All jokes were carefully screened to ensure that they were appropriate and free from offensive content, such as discrimination, hate speech, or explicit vulgar language. This step was necessary to maintain the relevance and ethical suitability of the data for academic analysis. After the screening process, the jokes were further examined to identify the presence of phonological wordplay. From the total dataset, 120 jokes were identified as containing phonological wordplay, which then became the primary focus of the analysis in this study.

The identified wordplay types were classified based on Delabastita's categorization of wordplay. The results of this classification are presented in Table 1, which shows the distribution of each type of wordplay found in the dataset. As illustrated in the table, paronymy appears as the most frequently occurring type, with 62 occurrences out of the total analyzed data. This finding indicates that a large number of dad jokes rely on words that have similar but not identical pronunciations, which create humorous effects through subtle phonological differences.

The second most frequent type is homonymy, which occurs 30 times, where a single word shares the same spelling and pronunciation but carries different meanings, allowing the joke to create ambiguity that leads to humor. This is followed by homophony, with 27 occurrences, where words have identical pronunciation but differ in spelling and meaning. Meanwhile, homography appears only once, making it the least frequent type found in the dataset, which suggests that dad jokes tend to rely more on sound-based similarities rather

than spelling-based similarities, as these jokes are typically delivered in spoken form and rely heavily on auditory perception to generate humor.

Discussion

After presenting the findings on the distribution of phonological wordplay identified in the collected dad jokes, this section discusses each type of wordplay in further detail. Referring to Delabastita's classification, each type is examined through selected examples from the dataset to illustrate the sound differences and similarities that occur in the punchlines. The discussion focuses on how these phonological features contribute to the creation of humor in dad jokes. The following subsections present the discussion of each type of wordplay found in the data, starting with paronymy, followed by homonymy, homophony, and homography.

Paronymy

Paronymy refers to wordplay involving words that have similar but not identical pronunciation. According to Delabastita (1996), this type of wordplay occurs when phonological similarity between words creates ambiguity or unexpected interpretations. Based on the findings presented in Table 1, paronymy appears as the most frequently occurring type in the dataset, with 62 occurrences. This indicates that many dad jokes rely on slight differences in sound to produce humorous effects.

Data 1 (V1 W2)

*Did you hear Mentos is coming out with a women's-only candy?
It's called a female empower-mint.*

The humor in this jokes relies on the phrase "empower-mint", which functions as the punchline. This expression plays on the phonological similarity between "empower-mint" and the word "empowerment". The joke separates the word "empower-mint" into two elements, "empower" and "mint", with "mint" referring to the candy brand Mentos mentioned in the setup. Although the pronunciation of "empower-mint" closely resembles "empowerment", the altered form introduces a new interpretation related to candy. This slight difference in sound and structure creates a playful reinterpretation of the original word. The phonological similarity between the two forms allows the punchline to simultaneously evoke the concept of women's empowerment and a mint-flavored candy, which produces the humorous effect.

Data 2 (V7 W4)

*What did the judge say to the dentist?
"Do you swear to tell the tooth, the whole tooth, and nothing but the tooth?"*

The humor in this joke is created through the phonological similarity between the words tooth and truth. The punchline imitates the well-known courtroom oath: "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?" In the joke, the word truth is replaced with tooth, which relates to the profession of the dentist mentioned in the setup. Although the two words have slightly different pronunciations, they share similar phonological features, making them sound closely related when spoken aloud. The intonation and rhythmic pattern of the sentence also resemble the original oath, allowing the audience to recognize the familiar expression before noticing the altered word.

Data 3 (V15 W3)

*What is Bruce Lee's favorite drink?
Wa-ta!!!*

The comedic effect of this joke arises from the modified pronunciation of the word water, which appears in the punchline as wa-ta. This altered form resembles the stylized martial arts yell commonly associated with Bruce Lee in popular culture. By presenting the word in this exaggerated phonetic form, the joke creates a connection between the expected answer, which refers to a drink, and Bruce Lee's iconic fighting shout. Although wa-ta is not an exact pronunciation of water, the phonological resemblance allows the listener to recognize the intended word. Moreover, the intonation and dramatic delivery of "Wa-ta!!!" mimic Bruce Lee's famous battle cry, which further strengthens the humorous effect by evoking the character's well-known vocal expression.

The dominance of paronymy in the dataset indicates that spoken dad jokes tend to rely heavily on near-sound similarity rather than exact phonological equivalence. This pattern may occur because slight phonetic differences are more flexible and easier to manipulate creatively in spoken interaction while still remaining recognizable to listeners. Unlike homography, which depends more on written representation, paronymy is highly effective in oral humor because the audience processes the joke primarily through auditory perception. In audiovisual contexts such as YouTube videos, this type of wordplay also becomes more effective through prosodic delivery, including exaggerated pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation, which help emphasize the phonological resemblance between words. These findings suggest that humor in spoken dad jokes is strongly influenced not only by linguistic ambiguity itself but also by the way phonological similarity is performed and perceived during interaction.

Homonymy

Homonymy refers to a type of wordplay in which a single word has the same spelling and pronunciation but carries different meanings (Delabastita, 1996). In humor, this linguistic feature allows a word to be interpreted in more than one way, which often leads to humorous interpretations in the punchline. In the dataset of dad jokes analyzed in this study, homonymy appears 30 times, making it as the second most frequent type of wordplay. The following examples illustrate how a single word with multiple meanings can produce humor in the jokes.

Data 4 (V5 W4)

*Why did the wife divorce her overweight husband?
Because he kept cheating... on his diet.*

The humor in this joke is created through the word “cheating,” which functions as the punchline and carries two different meanings. In the first interpretation, cheating is commonly associated with being unfaithful in a romantic relationship, which leads the audience to assume that the husband was disloyal to his wife. However, after the word “cheating,” the speaker briefly pauses before continuing with the phrase “on his diet.” This short pause creates a moment of suspense that reinforces the initial interpretation related to marital infidelity. When the sentence is completed with “on his diet,” the meaning of cheating shifts to another interpretation, referring to breaking dietary rules by eating restricted food. The pause and timing of the punchline guide the audience toward the first interpretation before revealing the second meaning, which ultimately produces the humorous effect of the joke.

Data 5 (V12 W3)

*There was a witch that was casting spells at the mall...
now I'm Forever 21.*

The humorous effect in this joke emerges from the phrase “Forever 21,” which can be interpreted in two different ways. The setup introduces a witch casting spells, which leads the audience to expect a magical consequence affecting the speaker. After a brief pause following the setup, the punchline states “now I'm Forever 21,” which initially suggests that the spell has caused the speaker to remain twenty-one years old indefinitely. However, “Forever 21” is also recognized as the name of a popular clothing store commonly found in shopping malls. The reference to the mall in the setup subtly prepares this alternative interpretation. This dual meaning connects the idea of magical eternal youth with the name of the store, creating the humorous twist in the punchline.

Data 6 (V6 W1)

*What does a bee tell his wife with messy hair?
Honey... comb your hair.*

The humor in this joke emerges from the phrase “honeycomb,” which allows two related interpretations. In the punchline, the bee says “Honey... comb your hair,” with a slight pause between the words “Honey” and “comb.” The word “honey” functions as a term of address used toward a spouse, while “comb your hair” is a common expression used to tell someone to tidy their hair. However, when the words “honey” and “comb” are heard together, they resemble the word “honeycomb,” which refers to the hexagonal wax structure produced by bees. This phonological similarity connects the everyday phrase with a term closely associated

with bees. The pause between the two words further highlights this dual interpretation, allowing the audience to recognize both meanings and creating the humorous effect of the joke.

The frequent occurrence of homonymy in the dataset demonstrates how spoken humor often depends on semantic ambiguity created by a single phonological form. In many cases, the jokes intentionally guide listeners toward a more common or expected interpretation before suddenly shifting to an alternative meaning. This reinterpretation process becomes particularly effective when combined with pauses or delayed punchlines, as listeners are given time to establish an initial assumption before the humorous meaning is revealed.

Homophony

Homophony is a type of wordplay in which different two or more words share the same pronunciation while having different spellings and meanings (Delabastita, 1996). This similarity in sound allows the listener to interpret a word or expression in multiple ways, which often becomes the source of humor in the jokes. In the dataset examined in this study, homophony occurs 27 times, placing it as the third most frequent type of wordplay found in the collected dad jokes.

Data 7 (V2 W3)

*What do you call a man with no body and no nose
Nobody knows.*

The humor in this joke is created through the phonological similarity between the expression “nobody knows” and the phrase “nobody nose.” In everyday usage, “nobody knows” is commonly interpreted as a statement indicating that no one knows the answer. However, when related to the setup of the joke, the phrase can also be understood literally as “no body, nose,” describing a man who has neither a body nor a nose. Phonologically, /'noubədi nouz/ (nobody knows) can be reinterpreted as /nou 'bɒdi nouz/ (no body nose) because “nobody” resembles “nobody” and “knows” shares the same pronunciation as “nose.” The humorous effect of the joke arises when the listener recognizes that the same pronunciation can simultaneously represent the common expression and the literal description presented in the setup.

Data 8 (V8 W2)

*Why is a pig's tail like waking up at 4 AM?
It's twirly.*

The humorous effect of this joke arises from the phonological similarity between the word “twirly” and the phrase “too early.” In the punchline, “twirly” literally refers to the curled or spiral shape of a pig’s tail. However, the setup also mentions waking up at 4 AM, which is commonly considered too early. In pronunciation, /'twɜ:li/ (twirly) closely resembles the pronunciation of /tu: 'ɜ:li/ (too early). In rapid speech, the phrase too early may be articulated in a reduced form that sounds very similar to twirly. This similarity in sound allows the punchline to connect the physical characteristic of the pig’s tail with the experience of waking up at an extremely early hour.

Data 9 (V18 W3)

*What do you call a fruit that mimics other fruits' actions?
Honey-see honey-dew.*

The humor in this joke is created through the phonological similarity between the phrase “honey-see honey-dew” and the common expression “monkey see, monkey do.” The original idiom monkey sees, monkey do describe a situation in which someone imitates the actions of others. In the punchline, the expression is modified by replacing monkey with “honey” and do with “dew,” which refers to honeydew, a type of fruit. When pronounced, /'hʌni du:/ (honeydew) is identical to /'hʌni du:/ (honey do). This similarity in pronunciation allows the listener to recognize the original idiom while simultaneously interpreting the modified phrase as a fruit-related expression. The substitution maintains the rhythmic and phonological pattern of the original idiom while introducing a new meaning connected to fruit, which produces the humorous effect of the joke.

The use of homophony in the analyzed jokes highlights the importance of auditory similarity in spoken humor. Because homophones share identical pronunciation despite having different spellings and meanings, listeners initially interpret the utterance based on familiar expressions before recognizing the alternative meaning introduced by the joke. This demonstrates that phonological humor relies heavily on listeners' phonological awareness and their ability to rapidly reinterpret spoken expressions. Furthermore, the findings support the view that humor in spoken interaction is closely connected to sound perception, since the effectiveness of homophonic wordplay depends largely on how accurately the audience recognizes phonetic similarity during real-time communication.

Homography

Homography is a form of wordplay involving words that are spelled the same but have different meanings (Delabastita, 1996). Because the written forms are identical, such words can lead to more than one possible interpretation depending on the context in which they are used. This characteristic allows a joke to be understood in different ways by the audience. In this specific analysis, homography was the least common phonological device, appearing only once of the total data.

Data 10 (V9 W2)

What did the game say to the game system?

Please console me.

The humor in this joke arises from the word "console," which has the same spelling but carries different meanings depending on the context. In the setup, console refers to a video game console, a device used to play video games. However, in the punchline, "console me" can also be interpreted as a request for emotional comfort. Although the word is spelled identically in both cases, the meanings differ, and the pronunciations involve different stress patterns. The noun console referring to a gaming device is typically pronounced /'kɒn.səʊl/, with the stress on the first syllable, whereas the verb console, meaning to comfort someone, is pronounced /kən'səʊl/, with the stress on the second syllable. This contrast in meaning enables the word to be interpreted in two ways within the same context.

The limited occurrence of homography in the dataset suggests that this type of wordplay is less effective in spoken dad jokes compared to other phonological categories. Since homography primarily relies on identical spelling rather than sound similarity, its humorous effect is more commonly associated with written language. In spoken interaction, audiences cannot directly observe orthographic forms, making sound-based categories such as paronymy and homophony more dominant and accessible. Nevertheless, the analyzed example demonstrates that homography can still produce humor in oral discourse when contextual cues and stress patterns help listeners distinguish between different meanings of the same written form.

The Role of Prosodic Features in Wordplay Humor

The analysis of phonological wordplay in the selected dad jokes reveals that humor is not produced solely through sound similarity, but is also significantly shaped by the way the utterances are delivered in spoken interaction. Prosodic features such as pauses and intonation play a crucial role in guiding listeners toward interpreting ambiguous expressions and recognizing the intended punchline. These prosodic elements not only structure spoken language but also emphasize particular parts of an utterance that carry humorous meaning, making the reinterpretation process more noticeable and effective. Prosody itself can be understood as the phonological aspects of speech that extend beyond individual sounds, including rhythm, stress, and intonation, which contribute significantly to how spoken language is interpreted (Fox, 2002). Through these features, speakers are able to signal shifts in meaning, highlight ambiguity, and control the timing of information delivery. In humorous discourse, prosodic cues therefore function as important signals that prepare the listener for reinterpretation, enhance the element of surprise, and ultimately strengthen the comedic effect of wordplay.

Building on the role of prosodic features in spoken humor, rhythm, as the overall pattern of speech, provides the broader framework within which timing operates as the temporal

organization of utterances. In this sense, timing becomes an important aspect of how jokes are delivered. Timing in jokes can be understood as the management of pauses and speech rate, especially in controlling the interval between the setup and the punchline, which allows the audience to process and anticipate the humorous effect (Attardo & Pickering, 2011). One of the most noticeable ways this appears in practice is through the use of pauses. Pauses refer to brief moments of silence that give speakers time to plan what they are going to say and allow listeners to process what has already been said (Schwarz, 2009). In jokes, pauses often occur right before the punchline, creating a short moment of suspense that leads the audience to expect a certain meaning before the joke shifts to an alternative interpretation. Based on the findings of this study, pauses are most frequently used in homonymy-based wordplay, where a single word carries multiple meanings. This can be explained by the need to control how listeners interpret the ambiguous word, as pauses give them enough time to settle on an initial, more expected meaning before being guided toward a different interpretation. As a result, the shift in meaning becomes more noticeable, strengthening the element of surprise and enhancing the overall humorous effect.

The next prosodic feature is intonation, which plays an important role in shaping how listeners interpret wordplay. Different intonation patterns can indicate whether an utterance functions as a question, statement, or exclamation, while also highlighting certain words within a sentence. Intonation is a system of pitch variation involving tone, tonicity, and tonality that not only organizes discourse meaning but also contributes to humor by directing listener attention, shaping expectations, and supporting the interpretation of wordplay (Tench, 2011). In humorous contexts, speakers often manipulate pitch or exaggerate intonation to make the punchline more noticeable and to signal humorous intent. This is further discussed by Wennerstrom (2011), who highlights two relevant patterns in humorous discourse, namely deaccent and L+H* pitch accent. Deaccent refers to the reduction of pitch prominence used to signal given information, as seen in the joke "I only know 25 letters of the alphabet. I don't know y," where the final word y may be delivered with reduced prominence, encouraging the listener to initially interpret it as the letter before realizing its homophonic meaning as why. In contrast, L+H* pitch accent involves a rising pitch movement that marks contrast and highlights alternative meanings, as illustrated in "I'm reading a book about anti-gravity. It's IMPOSSIBLE to put down," where the exaggerated stress on impossible emphasizes the double meaning between difficulty and literal inability due to anti-gravity. These patterns function as cohesive devices that guide listener interpretation and can contribute to incongruity, which is central to humor. Intonation plays an important role in joke telling and is largely responsible for the successful performance of a joke, since capturing the audience's attention depends on avoiding a flat or monotonous delivery. In dad jokes, shifts in pitch or exaggerated intonation can draw attention to the key element of the punchline, making the phonological similarity more salient and easier to recognize. In this sense, intonation complements pauses by not only marking the arrival of the punchline but also influencing how it is perceived and understood by the audience.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has demonstrated that phonological wordplay plays a central role in the construction of humor in spoken interactions presented on the Dad Jokes YouTube channel. By applying Delabastita's classification, the analysis reveals that paronymy is the most dominant type, followed by homonymy, homophony, and homography, indicating that dad jokes predominantly rely on similarities and slight differences in sound to create ambiguity, which then triggers reinterpretation and produces humorous effects. The findings further confirm that auditory perception is crucial in spoken dad jokes, as listeners must recognize phonological similarities in real time to interpret the intended meaning. In addition, this study highlights the significant role of prosodic features in shaping humor, where pauses contribute to control timing and create temporary ambiguity before the punchline is revealed, while intonation directs listener attention toward particular words or meanings that carry humorous

significance. These results suggest that humor in dad jokes is not solely dependent on linguistic structure but is also strongly influenced by phonological realization in spoken discourse. Overall, this study contributes to phonological and humor studies by demonstrating how sound patterns and prosodic features interact in spoken wordplay within audiovisual media. The findings also imply that spoken humor can be better understood through the analysis of both linguistic structure and oral performance. For future research, further studies may examine other forms of digital humor, compare different social media platforms, or explore audience responses to phonological wordplay in spoken interaction.

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