



*Routledge Studies on Asia in the World*

# HUMOUR IN ASIAN CULTURES

TRADITION AND CONTEXT

Edited by Jessica Milner Davis



# Humour in Asian Cultures

This innovative book traces the impact of tradition on modern humour across several Asian countries and their cultures. Using examples from Japan, Korea, Indonesia and from Chinese cultures in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, the contributors explore the different cultural rules for creating and sharing humour.

Humour can be a powerful lubricant when correctly interpreted; misinterpreted, it may cause considerable setbacks. Over time, it has emerged and submerged in different forms in all these countries but even today, conventions about what is appropriate in creating and using humour still reflect many traditional attitudes and assumptions. Using close examination, Milner Davis and her colleagues show how forms and conventions that differ from those in the west can nevertheless be seen to possess some elements in common. Examples include Mencian and other classical texts, Balinese traditional verbal humour, Korean and Taiwanese workplace humour, Japanese laughter ceremonies, performances and cartoons, as well as contemporary Chinese-language films and videos, as they engage with a wide range of forms and traditions.

This fascinating collection of studies will be of interest not only to students and scholars of many Asian cultures but also to those with a broader interest in humour. It highlights the increasing importance of understanding a wider range of cultural values in the present era of globalised communication as well as the importance of reliable studies of how cultures that may be geographically related differ in their traditional uses of and assumptions about humour.

**Jessica Milner Davis** PhD FRSN is an honorary research associate at both the University of Sydney, Australia, and Brunel University London's Centre for Comedy Studies Research. She is a member of Clare Hall, Cambridge, and a Fellow and Councillor of the Royal Society of New South Wales. She has twice served as president of the International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS) and founded and coordinates the Australasian Humour Studies Network (AHSN: <https://ahsn.org.au/>). An editorial board member for leading humour research journals and book series, her most recent books are:

*Satire and Politics: The Interplay of Heritage and Practice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) and *Judges, Judging and Humour* (with Sharyn Roach Anleu, Palgrave/Springer, 2018). With Jocelyn Chey, she has co-edited two volumes on *Humour in Chinese Life and Culture* (Hong Kong University Press, 2011 and 2013). Her 2006 book, *Understanding Humor in Japan* (Wayne State University Press), won the 2008 AATH book prize for humour research. In 2018, the International Society for Humor Studies presented her with its Lifetime Achievement Award for her interdisciplinary research in humour studies.

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# **Humour in Asian Cultures**

## **Tradition and Context**

**Edited by**  
**Jessica Milner Davis**

First published 2022  
by Routledge  
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an Informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalog record has been requested for this book

**ISBN: 978-1-032-00916-2 (hbk)**

**ISBN: 978-1-032-00918-6 (pbk)**

**ISBN: 978-1-003-17637-4 (ebk)**

**DOI: [10.4324/9781003176374](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003176374)**

Typeset in Times New Roman  
by KnowledgeWorks Global Ltd.

**This book is dedicated to Cecil Robert Burnett  
Quentin (1917–1979) who first introduced me to  
the rich cultural histories of Asia**





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## 4 Linguistic devices in traditional forms of Balinese humour

*Nengah Arnawa*

### Humour and the Balinese linguistic background

To begin this study of examples of traditional Balinese oral humour, it is useful to outline some background to the complex linguistic conventions of Indonesian languages, specifically those found in the island province of Bali. In 2020, the Language Center Office of the national Ministry of Education and Culture noted that Indonesia had 718 regional languages. This may increase in the future because recording and identification of regional languages are still ongoing. Of the present number, there are 14 regional languages with speakers equal to or exceeding 1,000,000, namely Javanese (84,300,000), Sundanese (34,000,000), Malay (13,040,00), Batak (7,045,000), Madurese (6,770,000), Minangkabau (5,530,000), Betawi (5,000,000), Bugis (5,000,000), Acehnese (3,500,000), Balinese (3,300,000), the Makassar language (2,130,000), the Sasak language (2,100,000), the Lampung language (1,834,000) and the Gorontalo language (1,000,000).

The Balinese language is used by over 3.3 million speakers who live in Bali Province as well as other provinces such as West Nusa Tenggara, Lampung, Southeast Sulawesi and others. The existence of the Balinese language outside the Province of Bali is related both to historical-cultural factors and to the government's transmigration policy. As a regional language, Balinese functions as a marker of identity and a social language for members of the Balinese tribes, and as a language in the realm of Hindu tradition, culture and religion. It also supports the Indonesian language and acts as a means of creativity.<sup>1</sup> One of the many creative functions of Balinese is to form humour.

Sociolinguistically, the Balinese language has a number of different speech levels called *angguh-ungguhing basa*. These have been identified and classified from various perspectives. Generalising from these various views, there are three levels, namely Balinese *alus* (high variety), *kepara* (general variety) and *kasar* (low variety). Balinese *alus* is used to show respect for speech participants in relation to both traditional and modern social status. Traditional social status reflects caste which is static because it derives from *purusa* (lineage). The concept of *purusa* relates to the patrilineal kinship

system which is determined based on the father or male line. In Balinese customary law, *purusa* has a broader meaning because it includes both men and women who have been given the status of men (Suwitra-Pradnya 2017). Women being accorded the status of *purusa* occurs in *nyentana* marriages (where women propose to men). *Purusa* lineage in the traditional Balinese stratification has four levels of caste, from high to low, namely: *brahman*, *ksatria*, *wésia*, and *sudra*. The *brahman*, *ksatria* and *wésia* castes are often classed together as the *triwangsa* group.

The Balinese *alus* language is used when the *sudra* caste speaks with a caste-member of the *triwangsa* group. Furthermore, modern social status is a dynamic hierarchy which also relates to one's position or office at any given time in a government organisation, for example, governor, regent, *camat* (head of the district); or in a customary organisation such as *bendésa* (customary leader), *patajuh* (deputy customary leader), *panyarikan* (customary secretary). Because respect is also shown to guests and strangers, the Balinese *alus* variety is used with them. Apart from relating to the participants, the use of Balinese *alus* also relates to speech events and topics. In traditional and religious activities or when discussing something that is purified and sacred, the *alus* variety of Balinese must be used. Given such sociolinguistic facts, the *alus* variety of Balinese is quite rare and even more rarely used for humour.

In Balinese, humour is largely an oral tradition that is widely found in *satua* or folk tales (fairy tales). Bali *satua* generally use Balinese *kepara* (general variety), sometimes mixed with Balinese *kasar* (low variety). In *satua*, these varieties are considered the most natural. This linguistic practice can be interpreted as reflecting the social fact that humour in Bali, as in many other places, is widely used in relations between equals, in relaxed and intimate settings and when topics are far from things that are holy and sacred. However, the message behind use of Balinese humour can often be serious, for example, conveying moral advice and even social criticism. This tradition of oral humour has been passed down from generation to generation. Balinese humour is found in both *kesusastraan Bali purwa* (classical Balinese literature) and in *kesusastraan Bali nyar* (modern Balinese literature), in the forms of *paribasa* (proverbs) and *satua* (folk tales). There have been many attempts to inventory this oral tradition of humour. Bagus (1976) and Kardji (1991) both carried out an inventory of *satua Bali sané banyol* (funny Balinese folk tales), such as those classified by the names of their leading characters, *I Belog*, *Pan Balang Tamak*, *I Bungklung* and others. Tinggen (1988) and Simpen (1980) inventoried *paribasa Bali* (the Balinese proverb) which covers a range of humorous linguistic constructs, such as *cecimpedan* (children's riddles in Balinese), *bladbadan* (a form of sound play with meaning transposition), *wewangsalan* (a kind of rhyme only two lines) and *cecangkitan* or *raos ngémpélin* (a puzzle based on ambiguity of meaning). In current developments, the oral forms of Balinese humour widely used in traditional theatre performances, such as *drama gong* (traditional



Figure 4.1 A traditional nighttime *wayang kulit* performance by Cenk Blonk with audience members of all ages, Jembrana District, Bali, August 2011.

Source: News-video still, Pemerintah Daerah Kabupaten Jembrana (Jembrana District Government), 25 August 2011, at: <https://images.app.goo.gl/qXouuL6aBh5SEcKX8>, accessed 13 July 2021.

drama accompanied by a Balinese orchestra, where each character has their own live dialogue), *séndratari* (drama that combines dance moves with dialogue, also with musical accompaniment, but where the dialogue between its characters is carried out indirectly via the puppeteer as intermediary), *bon-drés* (Balinese comic performing art using masks and a Balinese orchestra), and finally *wayang kulit*. This last is Bali's famous traditional shadow puppet theatre which today is not only performed live (see Figure 4.1) but also widely available in short films posted on YouTube and elsewhere.

The presence of humour in Balinese is also reflected in the availability of several terms related to the actions of using this oral tradition, such as *mage-gonjakan* (conversations that are not serious are usually punctuated with humour), *makedékan* (joking), *magegiakan* (laughing out loud), *mabebanyolan* (funny stories)—all meaning “joking with laughter”. The prevalence of humour in Balinese society has encouraged local television stations to broadcast regular *balé kedék* (“a vehicle for laughter”) which reflect the various forms of Balinese humour. This study concentrates on the linguistic forms of humour that are common to all these oral, written and performative contexts.

## Methodology

This study of *bebanyolan* (a general term for Balinese humour) uses a linguistic anthropological approach (Duranti 1997). It focusses on the uniqueness of the way that humour is implemented through linguistic tools such as lexical items, phrases and other grammatical constructions (Arnawa 2017b). Examples were collected from various written sources such as a collection

of *paribasa Bali* (Balinese proverbs) and a collection of *satua banyol* (funny folk tales); and from recordings of Balinese traditional art performances such as *wayang kulit*, *drama gong*, *séndratari* and *bondrés*. From the *paribasa Bali* collection, 37 pieces of data were obtained; the *satua banyol* collection yielded 23 examples; *wayang kulit* 8, *drama gong* 6; *sendratari* 4 and from *bondres* 18 were obtained.<sup>2</sup>

These data were collected applying the document recording method with each item recorded in a single unified context (Sudaryanto 1993; Gunarwan 2002). A selection was made from the whole corpus and, for validation purposes, the selection was triangulated by Balinese language and literature experts. After analysis using the anthropological linguistic approach, four linguistic constructs emerged as the most frequent vehicles for humour. In the following sections, discussion is organised according to these four traditional constructs.

## Four traditional Balinese joking constructs

### *Cecimpedan*

The first construct to be examined is the *cecimpedan*. Morphologically, the term comes from the root *cimped* (guess) to which is added the suffix {-an} and *dwipurwa* (reduplication of the first syllable) so that the word becomes *cecimpedan* which means guessing (Simpén 1980). Reflecting this morphological process, *cecimpedan* is in fact a Balinese puzzle, generally played by children but also by adults for fun. The game involves two people or groups in opposition to each other. Each group takes turns asking questions to the opposing group. Assessment is given based on the accuracy of the answers within a certain time duration. Semantically, there are two varieties of *cecimpedan*, one of which has onomatopoeic and the other associative patterns, and both use Balinese *kepara* (general variety) (Arnawa 2017a; 2019). *Cecimpedan* onomatopoeia is constructed using the abbreviation principle by keeping the end syllable as a rhyme to give interpretive support. An example is: *Apa cing dag?* (What is cing dag?).<sup>3</sup>

The phrase *cing dag* is an abbreviation of the two words *cicing* (dog) and *undag* (stairs) combined but maintaining the final syllable. Maintaining the final syllable in Balinese is a characteristic of colloquial variety or those speech levels that are generally used in casual and intimate conversation. Colloquial variety is mostly in the form of *kepara* but is sometimes mixed with *kasar* (low variety), depending on the level of familiarity of the participants. The higher the level of familiarity, generally the more frequent the insertion of *kasar*-variety vocabulary. In this case, following the principle of rhyme similarity, the meaning of the *cecimpedan*, *Apa cing dag?*, can be arrived at when it is paraphrased as *Cicing medem di undag* (Dog sleeping on the stairs). Interpreting the meaning of *cecimpedan* onomatopoeia in this way involves inductive logic based on phonetic motivation (Sumarsono

2007). *Cecimpedan* onomatopoeia are generally used and enjoyed by children under ten years of age, although they are not necessarily meant to evoke humour. The idea is merely a cognitive-linguistic game played in an atmosphere of intimacy and joy. So, what is cheerful and joyful is located in the atmosphere of the game, rather than in the structure of *cecimpedan* onomatopoeia.

On the other hand, *cecimpedan* associative are used by children of any age and including adults. They are generally constructed using whole words (without abbreviations) in an interrogative sentence. The formation of *cecimpedan* associative involves associating ideas with other people, events or things. Linkage of ideas occurs because of the match between one idea and another (Alwi et al. 2001). Interpretation of *cecimpedan* associative involves declarative reasoning and often causes a humorous reaction. Their challenging nature is shown by some examples collected from written data sources (Simpén 1980; Tinggen 1988) and shown below:

1. *Apaké jemuh belus, émbonin tuh?*  
What is it: wet in the sun, dry in the shade?
2. *Apaké medil bataran kena cungh?*  
What is it: shoots at the floor, hits the nose?
3. *Apaké macelep ka sisi?*  
What is it: to go into the outside?
4. *Apaké majujuk éndép, nyongkok tegeh?*  
What is it: when standing, short, when crouching, high?
5. *Apaké majujuk medem, medem majujuk?*  
What is it: when standing, asleep, when sleeping, standing up?
6. *Apaké ulung betén alihin ba duur?*  
What is it: falls below but sought above?
7. *Apaké celepang kekeh, pesuang kisut?*  
What is it: when put in, stiff, when removed, withered?
8. *Apaké songné cucuk, jitné égol-égol pesu putih keprat-keprit?*  
What is it: the hole is poked, her arse is swaying, bringing out something white?

Syntactically, *cecimpedan* in this format are constructed using the question word *apa* (what?). In Balinese, the vowel/a/in the open final position is pronounced /ə/ so it is read as [apə]. Balinese language has six question words, namely *apaké* (what), *nyén* or *sira* (who?), *kuda* (how much?), *dija* (where?), *ngudiang* or *ngéngkén* (why?), and *pidan* (when?). The common usage of *apaké* (what is it?) in *cecimpedan*, as exemplified above, reflects the fact that generally the question being asked is, what is something.

Semantically, however, these eight individual *cecimpedan* are differently constructed. *Cecimpedan* 1-6 use contradictory logic that creates an imbalance of reason and thus rely on incongruity as their source of humour. *Cecimpedan* 1 (What is it: wet in the sun, dry in the shade?) contains logical

contradictions. For example, the verb-form *jemuh* (dried) should correspond to *tuh* (dry) but is paired with *belus* (wet); and conversely, the verb-form *émbonin* (shaded) should correspond to *belus* (wet) but is paired with *tuh* (dry). The clever answer to *Cecimpedan* 1 is *lengar* (bald). By analogy, if *lengar* (bald) is dried in the sun, it will eventually get wet with sweat, whereas if it is shaded, the wet sweat will become dry. It is this game of conflicting logics that causes laughter.

Like the first example, *Cecimpedan* 2 (What is it: shoots at the floor, hits the nose?) takes advantage of logic drift. The noun *bataran* (floor) connotes the lower part of the house, while the noun *cunguh* (nose) is found on the upper part of the human body. On this basis, semantically *Cecimpedan* 2 asks what is something that hits the floor (bottom) but also hits the nose (top). To that question, the answer is *entut* (fart). The sound of a fart is analogous to the sound of a gunshot (shoot) and since the anal canal always faces downward, the “shot” will hit the *bataran* (floor). And when the *entut* comes out, Balinese people will cover their noses due to the unpleasant smell. This clever logical displacement from the realm of the warrior to that of the body and its natural functions is what triggers humour.

*Cecimpedan* 3 (What is it: to go in outside?) turns on the verb *macelep* which in Balinese means “to enter”. Something or someone who has entered something is supposed to be inside, as in *macelep ke kamar mandi* (going into the bathroom), meaning the person is in the bathroom. However, this *cecimpedan* reverses that logic, requiring that something is into but is also out. The unexpected and witty answer is *kancing baju*, “a (shirt) button”. A button on the shirt works by being inserted into the buttonhole until it comes out behind. The logic here plays with displacement of perspective so as to focus on the flat fabric of the shirt that possesses an “inside” and an “outside” rather than on an expected three-dimensional container such as a building or a room. This unexpected shift creates incongruity and surprise which are essential ingredients of humour.

*Cecimpedan* 4 (What is it: when standing short, but when crouching high?), presents two logical contradictions with the verb-form *majujuk* (standing) paired with the adjective *endep* (short), and the verb *nyongkok* (squats) paired with the adjective *tegeh* (high). Any creature will generally appear taller when standing than when crouching; but here that logic is reversed. The answer to *Cecimpedan* 4 is a dog, or maybe a cat or a monkey. The rationale for this is that when the four-legged beast stands up, its head, back and tail are on a horizontal line, whereas if it squats, the head, back and tail are in a vertical line or at least a diagonal one. Thus, the horizontal position causes the dog’s head to be closer to the ground than the higher distance in the vertical position.

In *Cecimpedan* 5 (What is it: when standing asleep, but when sleeping standing up?), the logical paradox is generated by the word pairs *majujuk–medem* (standing–sleeping) and *medem–majujuk* (sleep–standing). Many Balinese interpret this *cecimpedan* as almost pornographic because it



suggests an erect penis. However, this is not actually correct: the answer is the *telapak batis* (the soles of the feet). Isn't it the case that when a person is asleep, the soles of their feet are vertical to the floor (i.e., they are standing up) and conversely, when the person is standing, the feet are horizontal (i.e., asleep)? In Balinese, there are several *cecimpedan* which can be interpreted as sexually suggestive, but none of them have any explicitly sexual aspect. However, the possibility of these multiple interpretations can also cause laughter before the right answer is arrived at. For example, *Apaké nyemumuk selem, yén kebitang ngenah barak, yén celek makejengan?* (What is it: has a black mound, when opened looks red, if it is plugged in, twitches?). Balinese people are generally ashamed to guess this one because it seems to refer to sexual matters. Balinese people consider such humour to be unethical and therefore inappropriate to be conveyed in public. Thinking in sexual terms, the answer could be the vagina and its mucus lining, but the true meaning of the *cecimpedan* is *sumi matunjel* (a mound of burnt straw), because a burning mound of straw will look black, if it is opened, it will reveal red embers, and if it is plugged into an electrical current, it will shock the plug. That is the true, perfectly innocent answer, not at all related to sex. The wittiness in these two examples of *cecimpedan* occurs in two stages. First, the cuteness occurs when the *cecimpedan* construct is spoken. In this phase, the audience's mind seems to be focused on the phonography or pattern of the words and appreciating it which causes laughter. The next cuteness happens after the meaning is explained, which turns out to have nothing to do with the expected sexual meaning. This humour is caused by the participants' success in tricking the audience's logical predictions and expectations.

Returning to the list above, the sixth *cecimpedan* (What is it: fall below, sought above?) introduces a logical contradiction between *ulung betén* (to fall under) and *alihin ba duur* (sought above). If something falls, naturally the search for it must be made down below in the vicinity of where it fell, not sought above that point. But the answer is actually a common everyday experience summed up in one word: *tuduh* (the roof is leaking). When it rains and the roof leaks, water droplets must fall on the floor but residents or construction workers will look for and find their source up on the roof of the house. This simple resolution of the conundrum posed by the *cecimpedan* surprises and satisfies at the same time, creating laughter.

Based on semantic-cognitive processes, *Cecimpedan* 1–6 are all constructed using logical deviations and paradoxes that are perfect illustrations of humour based on incongruity theory, one of the three most widely recognised principles in humour. This theory emphasises that humour occurs when there is a mismatch between natural logic and a given objective, event or situation (Mulder and Nijholt 2002; Gibson 2019). Giving the correct answer to resolve this perception of logical incompatibility succeeds time and again in tricking the participants' thought-processes, causing laughter from the audience.

The semantic-cognitive process of *Cecimpedan* 7 and 8 is different from that of 1–6: these do not use contradictory logic. Both, however, are applications of the relief tension theory of humour. Conceptually, this theory sees humour as a spontaneous release of tension due to various causes (Morreall 2016) such that humour can be used to reduce physical and emotional tension. Many people perceive both *Cecimpedan* 7 (What is it: when put in stiff, when removed withered?) and *Cecimpedan* 8 (What is it: the hole is poked, her ass is swaying, bringing out something white?) as sexually suggestive. For people who think this way, both are interpreted as relating to a husband and wife (or man and woman) having sex. This interpretation perhaps arises because of the natural drive of the human libido, whereas the true meaning of *Cecimpedan* 7 is not related to sexual activity at all: it is simply *naar tebu* (to eat sugarcane). Aren't pieces of sugar cane stiff and hard when you put them in your mouth and doesn't the wilted bagasse get removed from the mouth after the sugarcane is chewed? The answer tricks those who are attracted to sexual thoughts.

In the same way, the meaning of *Cecimpedan* 8 is *anak nepung* (woman making flour). In the past, Balinese women made flour by pounding rice in a hollow mortar with a pestle. The process is as follows. First, the rice is put into the hollow mortar. Then the rice is pounded with the pestle and during this crushing process, the woman who is doing the pounding sways her hips and bottom. Lastly, during the pounding process, some white flour usually leaks out. So, this *cecimpedan* does not relate to the sexual act and its emissions. The semantic logic of both these *cecimpedan* employs an analogy that rests on the physical similarities of processes that could perhaps apply to the sexual act but more exactly matches a purely innocent explanation (Arnawa 2016).

### ***Bladbadan***

The second frequently occurring traditional humour construct found in the data examined here is that known as *bladbadan*. This is a Balinese proverb which is used in intimate and informal situations, very rarely in official speech events. *Bladbadan* are generally used for joking. Morphologically, the term comes from the root word *badbad*, plus the infix {-el-} and the suffix {-an}, forming the word *beladbadan*. Then by a syncope process with the phoneme/e/, *beladbadan* becomes *bladbadan* (Ginarsa 2009). Since in lexical semantics, the word *badbad* means “being drawn from a spool like a thread” (Warna 1978), *bladbadan* can be interpreted as a Balinese proverb form having an elongated morphological construction. Lengthening is done by changing words into phrases. Reflecting this process of elongation, *bladbadan* has three elements, namely: *giing/bantang* (frame), *arti sujati* (denotative meaning) and *sukse-manyané*, its associative meaning.

The following saying about a person called Ni Luh Sari is a good example (quoted from Arnawa 2017b):

*Ni Luh Sari sesai pesan majempong bebek*  
 Ni Luh Sari often has the crown of a duck  
 Ni Luh Sari often sulks

In this example, *bladbadan* applies to *majempong bébék* and its three elements are as follows:

Frame: *majempong bébék* (crested duck)  
 Denotative meaning: *jambul* (feathery outgrowth on a bird's head, i.e., crest)  
 Associative meaning: *ngambul* (sulking)

The denotative meaning of *majempong bébék* is “a crest” or *jambul*, which is linked with *ngambul* via an association process that rests on phonetic and rhyme similarities between the two words. Reflecting these three elements, *bladbadan* is a semantic transposition process with phonetic, lexical and syntactic emotive devices supported by morphological principles (Arnawa 2017b). The logic applied in the semantic interpretation process is an inductive analogy that rests on the similarity of form and sound between denotative and associative meanings (Sumarsono 2004).

In contrast to *cecimpedan* where humour arises from logical deviations, *bladbadan* is very much tied to its broader context of speech, and cannot be used independently or out of context. Speech interaction context greatly determines the intensity of humour in general, as Ortega (2013) has noted. This concept seems very relevant to *bladbadan* as can be seen in the dialogue shown in Table 4.1, taken from a *wayang kulit* episode performed by the well-known Balinese puppeteer Cenk Blonk (the artistic name of I Wayan Nardayana, b. 1966). Cenk Blonk is also the name of his contemporary shadow puppet show, originating from his hometown of Tabanan in Bali. It is named for two of the traditional clown figures (*punakawan*) in *wayang kulit*, Cenk and Blonk. As well as giving live performances, Cenk Blonk has many video recordings available on YouTube and his *wayang kulit* is one of the most popular in Bali today.

The dialogue presented for analysis in Table 4.1 does not feature Cenk and Blonk but a different *punakawan* pair called Délem and Sangut, who are present in every Balinese *wayang kulit*. Their dialogue occurs within the narrative of how the hero, Rama, has had his wife, Dewi Sita, kidnapped by the King of Alengka, resulting in war. The two clowns describe a plan to arrest Rama himself, introducing several *bladbadan* as they exchange quick-fire questions and answers. Délem is a fat man with an ugly goitre. He is the dominant protagonist of the pair, while Sangut is a thin man with a fickle, changeable character. The difference in character between the two clowns

Table 4.1 Sangut and Délem discuss the kidnapping of Rama

Délem:	<i>Cenek, jeg jemak I Rama ajak ka Buléléng tanggun danginé<sup>1</sup></i> In short, catch Rama and take to the east end of Buleleng
Sangut:	<i>Dija?</i> Where?
Délem:	<i>Diculik</i> Kidnapped
Sangut:	<i>Suud diculik?</i> After being kidnapped?
Délem:	<i>Ajak lantas ke Nusa Dua tanggun dajané<sup>2</sup></i> Then take him to the north end of Nusa Dua ...
Sangut:	<i>Dija?</i> Where?
Délem:	<i>Ditanjung</i> Kicked
Sangut:	<i>Suud diculik jak ditanjung?</i> After being kidnapped and kicked?
Délem:	<i>Ajak lantas ke dauh kota Negarané<sup>3</sup></i> Then, take him to the west of Negara town
Sangut:	<i>Kénkén?</i> How?
Délem:	<i>Dicekik</i> Strangled
Sangut:	<i>Suud diculik, ditanjung, kén dicekik?</i> After being kidnapped, kicked, and strangled?
Délem:	<i>Cara montor sing misi mesin<sup>4</sup></i> Like a motorcycle without an engine
Sangut:	<i>Kénkén?</i> How?
Délem:	<i>Séda</i> Dead

Source: From a video recording of a performance by Wayang Cenk Blonk of the episode *Sura Bhuta Gugur*, or *The Death of Sura Bhuta* (at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZgl6Q3K42E&t=1097s>, accessed 8 May 2019).

is often used to show off their wit and humour. These two puppets are shown in Figures 4.2 and 4.3; the first is pictured from the audience's point of view in front of the shadow screen on which the puppets appear, and the second reveals the scene behind the screen showing the hands of the puppeteer controlling the two puppets.<sup>4</sup> The dialogue in Table 4.1 is shown with numbers attached in bold to individual words to indicate the presence of *bladbada*n and corresponding to their analyses in Table 4.2. There are four *bladbada*n in this short excerpt in Table 4.1. They all play on names of places and objects, as is described in the list of elements provided in Table 4.2 and discussed below.

The main narrative of this extract is that Rama will be *diculik* (kidnapped) by Alengka troops, then *ditanjung* (kicked), then *dicekik* (strangled) until he is *séda* (dead). These four verbs of violent action are expressed using the *bladbada*n construction, causing laughter in the audience at the incongruity between the seriousness of the threatened action and the playful way

Table 4.2    Key to *bladbadan* in Table 4.1

1.	Frame: <i>Buléléng tanggun danginé</i> Denotation: east end of Buleleng <i>Désa Culik</i> Culik Village Association: kidnapped <i>diculik</i>
2.	Frame: <i>Nusa Dua tanggun dajané</i> Denotation: north end of Nusa Dua <i>Désa Tanjung</i> Tanjung Village Association: <i>ditanjung</i> being kicked
3.	Frame: <i>dauh Kota Negara</i> Denotation: west of Negara City <i>Desa Cekik</i> Cekik Village Association: <i>dicekik</i> being strangled
4.	Frame: <i>montor sing misi mesin</i> Denotation: motorcycle without engine <i>sepéda</i> bicycle Association: <i>séda</i> die



Figure 4.2 Délem (on the left) and Sangut, two of the many *punakawan* or clown characters in traditional *wayang kulit*, as they appear on the shadow screen for an audience.

Source: Photography by Nengah Arnawa at a live performance in Bali in 2019.



Figure 4.3 The *punakawan* characters, Sangut (on the left) and Délem as they appear from behind the shadow screen. Note the hands of the puppeteer as he cleverly manipulates the puppets with their detailed colouring.

Source: Photography by Nengah Arnawa at a live performance in Bali by the puppeteer, Cenk Blonk, in 2019.

in which the words are arrived at. The verb *diculik* (abducted) is introduced by the phrase *Buléléng tanggun danginé* (the east end of Buleleng). At the east of Buleleng is Culik Village. The name *Culik* is then transposed into the verb *diculik* (abducted), resulting in a construction of *Bladbadan* 1. The verb *ditanjung* (kicked) is similarly introduced with a location phrase, *Nusa Dua tanggun dajané* (the north end of Nusa Dua). At the north end of Nusa Dua is Tanjung village whose name is interpreted as the verb-form *ditanjung* (kicked) to produce *Bladbadan* 2. The verb *dicekik* (strangled) is expressed via another location phrase, *dauh Kota Negara* (west of Negara town). Here is Cekik village whose name of *Cekik* is interpreted as the verb-form *dicekik* (strangled), arriving at *Bladbadan* 3. Finally, the word *séda* (dies) is expressed via the phrase *montor sing misi mesin* (motorcycle without engine) which has the denotative meaning of *sepéda* (bicycle). Such a noun can be used as a basis to arrive at *séda* (to die) because of their rhyming similarity in this *Bladbadan* 4.

Given the quite serious narrative content of the extract above, the four *bladbadan* used in it introduce a number of humorous elements. As noted above, the speakers are two stereotypical clowns who invite the audience to laugh at them, creating elements of both superiority and incongruity. They themselves try to laugh at Rama, the princely character whose predicament is being talked about, by looking down on him and using him as the subject of a quick-fire question and answer session. Additionally, *Bladbadan* 1–4 all use clever word-play and manipulation of logic to prevent the concept of

Rama’s abduction and death from being taken too seriously. Instead, they direct the audience’s attention to the interplay of rhyming congruence and apparent incongruity as they set up the logic of their associative meanings.

Despite the strong implementation of superiority in the four examples above, not all *bladbadan* are developed using that theory, as is shown by the following examples taken from a printed collection (Srawana 1978: 34).

**Example 5.**

*Apang paturu malawar gerang, paturu cager* (literally, so that both are scarred, dried anchovies, just as faithful i.e., So that both are as faithful as dried anchovies sticking to each other).

**Example 6.**

*Yen ane luh luas, da ja mara madamar di langit, bulanan, kadong kone onggol-onggol cina malakar kedelé, tahunan, apang ane muani nu satia* (literally, if women travel for lights in the sky, let alone for months, although Chinese onggol-onggol is from soybeans, for many years the male will remain faithful, i.e., if the wife is away for months or years, the husband will remain faithful).

The *bladbadan* in Example 5 can be described in [Table 4.3](#) and Example 6 contains two *bladbadan* (6a and 6b), described in [Table 4.4](#).

*Table 4.3* Key to *bladbadan* in Example 5

5. Frame:	<i>malawar gerang</i> making lawar from dried anchovies (lawar is a traditional Balinese dish made with coconut)
Denotation:	<i>sager</i> a dish of dried anchovy with coconut seasoning
Association:	<i>cager</i> faithful

*Table 4.4* Key to *bladbadan* in Example 6

6a. Frame:	<i>madamar di langit</i> lights in the sky
Denotation:	<i>bulan</i> moon
Association:	<i>bulanan</i> monthly
6b. Frame:	<i>onggol-onggol Cina malakar kedelé</i> Chinese onggol-onggol made from soybeans [onggol-onggol is a Balinese snack made from sago]
Denotation:	<i>tahu</i> tofu
Association:	<i>tahunan</i> years

The purpose in using *Bladbadaan* 5 and 6 is for people to remind each other to remain *cager* (trustworthy enough to maintain their faithfulness), even if they travel or part ways for *bulan* (many months) or even *tahunan* (many years). In *Bladbadaan* 5, *malawar gerang*, the adjective *cager* is expressed through the denotative meaning *sager* (i.e., *lawar* made from dried anchovies). Because of the rhyming similarity, the noun *sager* is interpreted as the adjective *cager* (trustworthy enough to maintain faithfulness). In Example 6a, the adverb *bulan* (for many months) is expressed in the *bladbadaan* *mad-amar di langit* (lights in the sky), for which the denotative meaning is *bulan* (the moon), associated with *bulan* (for many months). The same semantic process occurs in Example 6b, where the adverb *tahunan* (for many years) is expressed through the *bladbadaan* *ongol-ongol Cina malakar kedelé* with its denotative meaning of *tahu* (tofu i.e., made from soybeans) which is then associated with *tahunan* (for many years).

Paying due observance to equality of relations between the speech participants, using any of these three *bladbadaan* is an effort to reduce the seriousness or formality of speech so that the atmosphere becomes more relaxed and less tense. On this basis, using *bladbadaan* such as Examples 5 and 6, is a form of coping humour which is an application of the relief theory of humour. Thus, both in structure and use, *bladbadaan* humour does not rest on only one particular humour theory.

### ***Wewangsalan***

Morphologically, *wewangsalan* derives from the root word *wangsal* (ward), which lexically means *arena* (Ginarsa 2009). In ancient times, the *arena* (or ward) was often used as a gathering place for Balinese people to chat. From the word *wangsal*, the word *wewangsalan* is formed through the morphological process of *dwipura* (reduplication of the front part of the word) and the addition of the suffix {-an}. The word is interpreted as an expression making fun of someone and pragmatically, *wewangsalan* are often used to mock or insult someone (Aridawati 2014). Ridicule or satire expressed through the construction of humour helps avoid tensions in social relationships and is found in most human societies, although some (like Japan) have stringent rules about when and where it can be appropriately used. In the Balinese data collected, *wewangsalan* occurred very frequently. In its pragmatic aspect, this witty humour is based on the relief of tension theory of humour, although it also employs superiority theory. The structure of *wewangsalan* is identical to that of traditional Balinese poetry consisting of only two lines, consisting of one line called *sampiran* and a second containing the meaning, with straight-forward poetical rhyme between the two, AA (Pusat Bahasa 2001). The following examples from Simpen (1980: 28) illustrate these qualities:

#### **Example 1.**

*Asep menyan majegau;  
nekep lengar aji kau*

Myrrh, incense, agarwood [all tree-names];  
covering baldness with a coconut shell



Table 4.5 Rhyming in *Wewangsalan* 1 and 2

1. <i>asep</i>	→	<i>nekep</i>	end rhymes /e/ plus /p/
<i>majegau</i>	→	<i>kau</i>	rhymes at end with diphthong /au/ consonants /g/ and /k/ are sounds produced by the same articulation
2. <i>buangit</i>	→	<i>lengit</i>	rhymes at end with the syllable— <i>ngit</i>
<i>kaligangsa</i>	→	<i>gasa</i>	rhymes at end with the syllable— <i>sa</i>

**Example 2.**

<i>Buangit kaligangsa;</i>	Buangit [tree-name], kaligangsa [tree-name];
<i>magaé lengit ngamah gasa</i>	work lazily, eat strongly

The first line of each *wewangsalan* is the *sampiran* which is generally more concerned with form than meaning: even its morpho-syntactic aspects are often neglected. The focus of *sampiran* is on the aspect of rhyme which will be used as a basis for giving meaning. The second line gives the interpretive meaning of each *wewangsalan* which rests on its rhymes with the first line. Semantically, the concept of meaning based on resonance applies to *wewangsalan*. Thus, the interpretation of its meaning rests on a phonetic device and it is this phonetic-semantic likeness that triggers laughter.

*Wewangsalan* 1 makes fun of people with *sirah lengar* (bald heads). For the Balinese, *sirah lengar* is identified with the coconut shell and covering a bald head with a coconut shell is considered completely futile work: it may hide the ugliness but it still looks bad. *Wewangsalan* 2 is used to make fun of those people who are lazy about work but still have strong appetites for eating. The entailment of both *wewangslan* rests on the following types of rhymes as shown in Table 4.5. Based on such rhymes, *wewangsalan asep menyan majegau* is interpreted by its audience as *nekep lengar aji kau* (cover the bald with coconut shells) and *wewangsalan buangit kaligangsa* as *magaé lengit ngamah gasa* (lazy to work, [but] so strong).

While in *cecimpedan*, humour arises because of a contradictory internal logical structure, and in *bladbadan* as we have seen it emerges from a broader context of use, in *wewangsalan*, it stems from the relation between *sampiran* and a meaning that rests on rhyme. Rhyme in *wewangsalan* can be formed through the processes of assonance and/or alliteration. Assonance is rhyme caused by the repetition of vowels, while alliteration repeats consonants (Kridalaksana 1993): both are used in the following Examples 3 and 4 (from Simpen 1980: 29).

**Example 3.**

<i>Délem Sangut Merdah Tualén</i>	Délem, Sangut, Merdah, Tualén [four Balinese <i>punakawan</i> puppets]
<i>medem bangun ngamah dogén</i>	sleep and awake, always eating

Table 4.6 Rhyme and interpretation in *Wewangsalan* 3 and 4

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3. <i>Délem</i>	→ <i>medem</i> ; repeating vowels /e/ and consonants /d, m/
<i>Sangut</i>	→ <i>bangun</i> ; consonant /ŋ/ and vowel /u/
<i>Merdah</i>	→ <i>ngamah</i> ; vowel /a/ and consonants /m, h/
<i>Tualén</i>	→ <i>dogén</i> ; repeating vowels /é/ and consonants /n/
4. <i>gamongan</i>	→ <i>omongan</i> ; repeating vowels /o, a/ and consonants /m, ŋ, n/
<i>kladi</i>	→ <i>dadi</i> ; repeating vowels /a, i/ and consonants /d/
<i>jahé</i>	→ <i>gaé</i> ; repeating vowel /a, é/

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**Example 4.**

<i>gamongan kladi jahé</i>	<i>lempuyang</i> , taro, ginger [three Balinese tubers]
<i>omongan dadi gaé</i>	talk can be made

The construction of the *sampiran* in these two *wewangsalan* does not pay attention to the morphosyntactic rules of Balinese language. The sole concern is for rhyme as the foundation for semantic interpretation. In both *wewangsalan*, the *sampiran* is only a group of words. In *Wewangsalan* 3, it is a collection of names of clowns in *wayang kulit* and *Wewangsalan* 4 simply groups names of different tubers. Assonance and alliteration between the *sampiran* and its interpretation can be described for both cases as shown in Table 4.6.

Evidently, the force of the humour in *wewangsalan* once again lies in the *sampiran*'s relationship with its interpretive meaning, resting on the harmony of rhyme. In all four examples of the relationship between *sampiran* and interpretive meaning involves assonance, because the vowel is the centre of sonority in the rhymes involved. In fact, the construction of any *wewangsalan* always involves vowel rhymes, whether accompanied by consonant rhymes or not. Phonologically, the appearance of assonance in each *wewangsalan* construct is triggered by the nature of the vowel as a syllable centre and, as Staroverov describes (2016), in sonority theory, each word has loudness peaks located on the vocoid. Because of this, the relationship between the *sampiran* and the meaning of *wewangsalan* always involves assonance, either with or without alliteration, as is demonstrated in the following two examples from Tinggen (1988: 25).

**Example 5.**

<i>Cekcek poléng temisi bengil</i>	Black lizard, dirty snail
<i>desek ngeréng yén gisi nengil</i>	Urge to scream unless it's held still

**Example 6.**

<i>Sintok pulasari</i>	[herbs and spices in Balinese]
<i>baang acepok nagih sesai</i>	granted once, ask many times

Table 4.7 Sonority in Wewangsalan 5

Sampiran	Interpretation	Sonority
<i>cekcek</i>	<i>deseq</i>	/e/
<i>poléng</i>	<i>ngeréng</i>	/é/
<i>temisi</i>	<i>gisi</i>	/i/
<i>bengil</i>	<i>nengil</i>	/i/

Table 4.8 Sonority in Wewangsalan 6

Sampiran	Interpretation	Sonority
<i>sintok</i>	<i>acepok</i>	/o/
<i>pulasari</i>	<i>sesai</i>	/i/

The peak of sonority in *Wewangsalan 5* lies in the vowels /e, é, i/, as is shown in Table 4.7. Meanwhile, in number 6, the peak of sonority lies in the vowels /o, i/, also shown in Table 4.8.

Pragmatically, Example 5 is used to make fun of a woman’s behaviour: if she is teased or pressed by a man, she will *ngeréng* (shout out loud), but if she accepts being held tight, she will *nengil* (be silent). *Wewangsalan 6*, however, ridicules someone who insists on repeating a request that has already been granted.

### Cecangkitan

The final traditional humour construct found in the data examined here is the *cecangkitan*, often also called *raos ngémpélin*. Morphologically, *cecangkitan* comes from the root word *cangkit* meaning “lexically tricky” and the term is applied to words that have ambiguous meanings (Warna 1978). The word *cecangkitan* is formed through the process of *dwipura* (repetition of the front part of the word) together with the addition of the suffix {-an}. A *cecangkitan* is made using words, phrases, clauses or sentences that are ambiguous and its alternative name reflects that ambiguity: *raos ngémpélin* is an ambiguous speech. *Cecangkitan/raos ngémpélin* are generally used to make fun of someone or something and to joke around. In traditional performances, *cecangkitan* are often used by the clown characters to arouse laughter in the audience, as is illustrated in Table 4.9. This extract is another episode from the same *wayang kulit* script performed by Cenk Blonk quoted earlier. The two *punakawan* characters speaking, Tualén and Merdah, are complaining about the cost of education. These two clown characters are illustrated in Figure 4.4. Tualén is an old man who has an ugly face with black skin, but a wise attitude. In contrast, Merdah is a female character who is very tolerant and can interact well with anyone.

In this excerpt, the phrase *dana BOS* means “school operational assistance funds”. However, Tualén cleverly interprets *dana BOS* as being “funds for the boss”. This difference in entailment results from the ambiguous

Table 4.9 Tualén and Merdah discuss the cost of education

Tualén:	<i>Biaya pendidikan mahal, sekolahé onya bisnis.</i> Education costs are expensive, schools are all doing business
Merdah:	<i>Bisnis?</i> Business?
Tualén:	<i>Guru ngaé les, guru ngadep buku, ngadep pakaian seragam ...</i> Teachers hold private lessons, sell books and uniforms ...
Merdah:	<i>Kadén suba ada dana BOS?</i> Aren't there BOS funds already? [BOS are governmental school funds]
Tualén:	<i>Dana Bos kan bosé maan dana ...</i> BOS funds are for the boss ...

Source: From a video recording of the episode *Sura Bhuta Gugur* (*Death of Sura Bhuta*), performed by Cenk Blonk (at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZgI6Q3K42E&t=1097s>, accessed 8 May 2019).

grammatical construction of the phrase *dana BOS*. First, the phrase itself is an acronym, the abbreviation of *bantuan operasional sekolah* (school operational assistance) funds. This is a Government of Indonesia program designed to reduce the financial burden on parents of students. Second, the phrase *dana BOS* can nevertheless be interpreted as meaning funds for boss(es). Both these semantic interpretations are possible because in



Figure 4.4 Merdah (on the left) and Tualén, two of the many *punakawan* or clown characters in traditional *wayang kulit*, as they appear on the shadow screen for an audience.

Source: Photography by Nengah Arnawa at a live performance in Bali by the puppeteer, Cenk Blonk, in 2019.

the Indonesian language system, word order is an important syntactical device (Kentjono 1984). Thus, word order in any phrase can indicate the origin of something, as in the phrase *orang Bali* which means “people from Bali”; but it can also mean the possessive, as in the phrase *baju Putu*, which means “Putu’s clothes” or “clothes for Putu”. This grammatical ambiguity is used by the puppeteer to arrive at the two different interpretations and is exploited to produce humour by being linked to a discussion that is a social critique of corrupt education officials.

*Cecangkitan* like this are generally used in casual verbal speech between participants who already know each other, who are close or intimate. The purpose of its use is to joke and generate laughter on shared themes. Some frequently used *cecangkitan/raos ngémpélin* quoted by Simpen (1980: 53) are:

**Example 1.**

*Lasan mati padang idup apang joan tanema*

**Example 2.**

*Tain cicing déngdéng goréng jaen*

**Example 3.**

*Cara janiné, anaké ngantén makejang beling malu*

**Example 4.**

*Batuné ento Culik-Culik bis makeber*

**Example 5.**

*Dalangé ento joh-joh pesan kupahan*

In *Cecangkitan* 1, there are three words as sources of ambiguity, namely *lasan*, *padang* and *joan*. Viewed as a monomorphemic word, *lasan* means “lizard”, but viewed as polymorphemic, then the word derives from the root *las* meaning “sincere”, plus the suffix {-an} to express a superlative. Based on this morphological process, *lasan* means “more sincere”. The same double interpretation occurs with the word *padang*. Viewed as monomorphemic, it means “grass”, but viewed as polymorphemic, *padang* comes from the root *pada*, which, in acquiring the suffix {-ang} becomes *padaang* and, undergoing a process of unifying vowels, becomes *padang* which means “being compared [with]”. Likewise with *joan*: when viewed as a monomorphemic word, *joan* means “pole”. However, when viewed as polymorphemic, *joan* comes from the word *joh* “far”, plus the suffix {-an} and so becomes *johan* and since the phoneme/h/weakens or causes lenition, it becomes *joan* which means “a bit far”. Given such morphological explanations, this *cecangkitan* contains rich ambiguity, yielding the following two possible interpretations, a and b:

- a More willing to die than live and at the same time be buried far away.
- b The lizard is dead, the grass is alive, but the pole is buried.

In the first interpretation, the speaker chooses to die rather than live; whereas in the second, speakers can be inferred to want to live still because the dead are lizards. The ambiguity is often used to joke and evoke laughter.

Ambiguity in *Cecangkitan* 2 lies in the polysemic word *déngdég*. Its two meanings are “drying” and “beef jerky”. The interpretive meaning of this *cecangkitan* is determined purely by intonation so that if the intonation is emphasised at the end of the word *déngdég*, it forms the clause *tain cicing déngdég* (dog turds in the sun). But, if the stress is applied at the end of the word *cicing*, it forms the phrase *tain cicing* (dog turd). Applying different intonation in this way gives this *cecangkitan* two syntactic contour variants, a and b, with ambiguous implications as follows:

- a *Tain cicing déngdég//goréng jaen*  
Dog turds are dried in the sun, fried delicious
- b *Tain cicing//déngdég goréng jaen*  
Dog turds, *déngdég* [jerky] is dried in the sun and fried delicious

For contour a, what is fried is *tain cicing* (dog turd) that has been dried in the sun. For contour b, what is fried is *déngdég* (beef jerky), while the mention of dog shit is just a trick or distraction. Appreciating the ambiguity of the two possible meanings triggers laughter for the audience.

In *Cecangkitan* 3, ambiguity resides in the adverb, *malu*. This is a polysemic word with two meanings, namely “in front of” and “beginning”. Given these semantic relationships, the phrase *beling malu* can be interpreted both as “early pregnancy”, that is, pregnant before marriage, and as “pregnant in the front”, that is, showing a pregnant stomach, which is of course at the front of the body. In Balinese culture, becoming pregnant too early has a negative connotation because it does not conform to accepted ethics and religious norms. Saying a woman is “pregnant early” can cause a dispute to arise because such an allegation relates to honour and self-esteem. But the second interpretation, being pregnant in front of the body (i.e., showing a baby bump), avoids this threat of tension. The ambiguity of this *cecangkitan* can be summarised in the following two interpretations:

- a These days, everyone gets married because they get pregnant early.
- b These days, everyone gets married and is pregnant in front.

The ambiguity of *Cecangkitan* 4 derives from the homonym, *culik-culik*. The homonymy of this word is caused by morphological factors. In Balinese, the word *culik* means “poke” and *culik-culik* means “pokes”, due to the reduplication process. So, *culik-culik* is a polymorphemic word. However, in the Balinese language, the word *culik-culik* also exists as a monomorphemic form meaning “the name of a crow-like bird”. As with *Cecangkitan* 2, the ambiguity here arises from giving a pause in utterance. The pause can be

given at the end of either the word *ento* or *culik-culik*, so that the syntactic contour is formed as follows:

- a*        *Batuné ento//culik-culik bisa makeber*  
             The stone//*culik-culik* (bird) can fly
- b*        *Batuné ento culik-culik//bisa makeber*  
             The stone is poked//can fly

In the first syntactic contour(a), those flying are *culik-culik* (birds); but in (b), what can fly is the stone after it has been poked or pushed. This second interpretation reflects a superstitious belief.

Ambiguity in *Cecangkitan* 5 arises from the polysemic reduplication of *joh-joh*. *Joh-joh* can mean “far away” which collocates with a place, but it can also be interpreted as “far away”, collocated with time or frequency. Thus, this *cecangkitan* can be interpreted either way, as follows:

- a* The puppeteer is very far away  
*b* The puppeteer rarely performs

In fact, the first interpretation is a form of praise implying that the puppeteer is very famous (so, remote from the speaker and hearer). Conversely, interpretation b is a form of ridicule implying that the puppeteer is not very popular and does not sell well in society. The contradictory nature of these two interpretations causes humour.

In general, the forms of Examples 1–5 reveal that the principal instrument for creating humour is vagueness of meaning. This is a natural result of the abstractness of language and several linguistic factors can trigger the appearance of vagueness of meaning. However, in these *cecangkitan* two factors dominate, namely variety of word form and phonetic factors (as noted by Sumarsono 2004). The various aspects of words and their forms include the semantic relations between homonymy and polysemy (Gan 2015). Polysemic words have more than one meaning and, homonymy arises as we have seen when two different words have the same form but each has a different meaning (Arnawa 2008). As noted above, words like *lasan*, *padang*, and *joan* in the first *cecangkitan*, *déngdéng* in the second, and *cuulik-culik* in the fourth are all homonymic, giving rise to multiple interpretations that cause laughter. The usage of words such as *malu* in number 3 and *joh-joh* in number 5 is ambiguous because of polysemy, but both homonymy and polysemy can cause ambiguity and *cecangkitan* happily combine the two. Apart from these lexical factors, semantic deception is also an effective source of humour in *cecangkitan*. It is supported by phonetic factors, namely pressure and pause, which produce different syntactic contours. This can be seen most clearly in *Cecangkitan* 2 and 4, where differences in intonation, such as pauses, pressure and tone, are reliable phonetic tools for producing imprecise interpretations. *Cecangkitan* are designed to be deliberately ambiguous as a way of generating humour.

## The social functions of *bebanyolan* in Balinese culture and conclusions

*Bebanyolan*, or “humour” in Balinese, is a highly popular genre of folk entertainment. There are many Balinese artists today who are known as *tokoh banyol* (humorous figures, or comedians). They include masters such as I Nyoman Subrata, alias Petruk (b. 1949) and I Wayan Tarma, alias Dolar (1954–2016) in the *drama gong*; I Made Mundra alias Sakuni (aged 62) in the *séndratari*; the puppeteer I Wayan Nardayana alias Cenk Blonk (b. 1966) and in the modern theatre, Puja Astawa (b. 1974) and many others. In Balinese culture, however, humour has never been merely empty entertainment but often serves other social functions. Because humour is a basic element in social interaction between humans, it is often used for very practical purposes, for example, to reduce tension and to avoid conflict. It is known to be an effective means of strengthening social relationships and bonds so as to improve group cohesiveness (Romero and Cruthirds 2007; Martin et al. 2003). While this concept of course applies universally, Balinese people are particularly closely connected by social bonds so that providing the experience of togetherness is often a priority. The institutions known as *banjar* and *témpékan* provide empirical evidence of how strong the notion of community is for the Balinese people and their framework of customs and culture. *Banjar* is the grouping of families within a traditional village in Bali which has autonomy, while *témpékan* is a smaller part of the *banjar* and does not have autonomy. Together, the two structures are responsible for law and religion and serve to cement custom and cultural observance. At even the smallest traditional gatherings and interactions overseen by the *banjar*, humour is frequently expressed spontaneously. Humorous remarks within these customary events are facilitated by the fact that, in general, participants are very familiar with each other and enjoy the intimacy of exchange.

*Bebanyolan*, in its many forms, is thus an important part of the Balinese oral tradition. It can be found in fairy tales and folk games as well as in traditional art performances. Balinese humour is often packaged in unique linguistic forms, including those examined in this study, *cecimpedan*, *blad-badan*, *wewangsalan* and *cecangkitan* or *raos ngémpélin*, all of which rely on semantic play (as illustrated above). With *cecimpedan*, intention and meaning are manipulated through a contradictory logic and hidden in interrogative sentences. If participants in a verbal exchange of *cecimpedan* can find the right answer, humour and laughter are sure to break out. Like other forms of riddle and joke around the world, the humour of *cecimpedan* rests chiefly on incongruity theory which sees laughter as generated by the appropriate resolution of a conflict of logic (Mulder and Nijholt 2002; Balmores-Paulino 2018; Oring 2016). However, some of the samples discussed above, such as in *Cecimpedan* 7 and 8, also reflect the relief theory of humour which sees humour as a means of reducing tension via a positive emotional charge



that reduces tension and anxiety (Morreall 2016; Mulder and Nijholt 2002; Suyasa 2010). *Cecimpedan* 7 and 8, as noted, do not use antonymy relationships between words nor contradictory logic, although like the other examples, they focus on lexical play as a trigger for humour. They carry out semantic manipulation via reference and collocation, but particularly with sexual connotations. As discussed above, these connotations have the effect of “steering” the audience to think that the phrases involved are about the taboo topic of sex and therefore causing tension. The surprise, then, is that the answers to both *cecimpedan* are practical and innocent! Thus, even in these two relief theory examples, words are manipulated and the meaning of the words is hidden while laughter appears when the unexpected answer is revealed.

The traditional form of *bladbadaan* is also a semantic and lexical game. The context-bound nature of this form has been noted above and this dependency on context is what gives rise to humour in *bladbadaan*. The lexical manipulation in the examples discussed is carried out by changing the word constructions to be longer and by transposing the lexical semantics. However, observing the context in which these *bladbadaan* examples are typically used, they can be seen as implementing the superiority theory of humour (Raskin 2008) in which speakers want to laugh at others. This use of humour aligns with the aggressive humour style (identified by Martin et al. 2003; Chen and Martin 2007) whereby humour is used to mock and belittle others, amusing the audience. However, not all *bladbadaan* are aggressive, as the discussion of Examples 5 and 6 demonstrated. In these, the position of those involved is equal: participants exchanging these *bladbadaan* want to remind each other of the importance of life-partners being equally faithful. Using *bladbadaan* to address this sensitive topic is an effort to overcome the seriousness of the situation in which the conversation takes place. Thus, use of *bladbadaan* in this context is an effort to reduce tension and reflects the relief theory of humour. This in turn aligns with the affiliative style of humour use (see Martin et al. 2003), where laughter is evoked through spontaneous expressions designed to promote tolerance between participants and maintain social relationships (Yue et al. 2014).

In the case of *wewangsalan*, banter is also conveyed spontaneously to maintain intimacy and relieve tension. In Examples 1 and 2 discussed above, an affiliative style of humour is used to address what would otherwise be embarrassing topics—someone trying to conceal their baldness and someone who is lazy about work but has a strong appetite. In Balinese society, a person with this second kind of character is often identified with I Cupak, a traditional figure in Balinese folklore who is lazy but greedy and eats a lot, someone to be mocked. Nevertheless, the choice of semantic topic and the pragmatic aspect of exchanging this humour reveal that this type of *wewangsalan* also reflects superiority theory in which laughter is conveyed in an aggressive style to criticise others. The clever construction of

the *wewangsalan* form serves to make the criticism more palatable and less socially disruptive.

The final form discussed here, *cecangkitan* or *raos ngémpélin*, rests on ambiguity with polysemic and/or homonymic words at the centre of the game. As we have seen, the homonymic or polysemic word is played with in different intonations so that it represents different meanings. That difference becomes a trap for the participants and it is in this trap that the humour of the joking lies. While this form is commonly used for jokes, it is rarely used in serious situations and therefore also represents an affiliative style of Balinese joke, serving to reduce tension and maintain close and intimate social relationships.

*Cecimpedan*, *bladbadan*, *wewangsalan* and *cecangkitan/raos ngémpélin* are all Balinese forms of humorous jokes that are based on semantic and lexical play. Their principal differences are structural but as the analysis has shown, they all rely on ambiguity and contradictory logic to produce humour and laughter. They more often play an affiliative and bonding role in society than an aggressive and critical one, but nevertheless serve as an outlet for social critique and the discussion of serious topics. Their importance to Balinese culture and its people is immense and their clever wit deserves to be better known outside their homeland.

## Notes

- 1 This is officially recognised by Regional Regulation No. 1/2018 (at: <https://jdih.baliprov.go.id/produk-hukum/peraturan-perundang-undangan/perda/24561> accessed 13 July 2021).
- 2 Sources are given below when each example is quoted and discussed.
- 3 Cited in Tinggen (1988); also in Winaya (2007).
- 4 Traditionally, audiences only viewed *wayang kulit* from the front of the stage, but today, a second audience may be seated at the rear. The rear view shows more of the puppet figures' artistically coloured carving, and of course, the strings by which the puppeteer controls them.

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