AN ANALYSIS OF JORDANIAN JOKES: A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF HUMOUR

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ABSTRACT: *The present study is a pragmatic analysis of Jordanian jokes within the framework of Grice's conversational implicature. The study aims at identifying the violation of Grice's Maxims that occur in Jordanian jokes, knowing the implied meaning of the violated Gricean Maxims in these jokes, and recognising the factors that influence the interpretation of these jokes. The sample of the study consists of 6 jokes elicited from WhatsApp and Facebook. The researcher categorised the data based on their type of violation by applying Grice's theory. Then, he analysed the implied meaning by using the theory of conversational implicature which was proposed by Grice. The findings of the study revealed that Jordanians violate the maxims to create laughter and to communicate social and economic meanings. Jordanians use humour created by the violation of the maxims to soften criticism or satire. In addition, the study showed that cultural and background knowledge plays a significant role in interpreting these jokes.*

KEYWORD: humour, jokes, implicature, pragmatics, Grice's maxims

INTRODUCTION

The current study is based on conversational implicature proposed by Grice (1975). Grice approaches conversational implicature by referring to the Cooperative Principle and its maxims. Grice suggests that people cooperate with each other in order to interpret language in interaction. So, he proposes the Cooperative Principle (CP) which states that "Make your contribution such as required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice 1975, 45). Grice also structures CP by proposing four maxims. The first one is quantity maxim. According to this maxim, the speaker must make his/her contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange and does not make his/her contribution more informative than required. The second maxim is quality maxim which suggests that a speaker should not say what he or she believes to be false or say anything that lacks adequate evidence. The third maxim is relation which states that the hearer's response should be relevant to the speaker's speech. The last maxim is the manner maxim which suggests that a speaker should avoid obscurity of expression and ambiguity and should be brief and orderly.

Grice (1975) suggested that when the interlocutors in a given conversation do not follow a maxim with an intention to communicate extra or implied meaning, a conversational implicature was created. The users of language may violate any maxim to create implied meaning. Violation of quantity maxim, for instance, happens when participants in conversations provide more or less information than is required. Consider the following example:

(8) Boss: Did you clean the table and wash the dishes?

Waiter: I cleaned the table.

The waiter in the previous example violates the maxim of quantity since he provides less information than required. The implied meaning suggests that the waiter did not wash the dishes.

Research Purpose:

The aims of this study are to identify the violation of the Gricean Maxims that occur in Jordanian jokes, to know the implied meaning of the violated Gricean Maxims in these jokes, and to identify the factors that may influence the interpretation of jokes (cultural and background knowledge).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents the available studies on humour and jokes. The notion of humour is an essential part of human life. It was addressed by many fields ranging from philosophy, psychology, literature to linguistics. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defined Humour as "the quality in something that makes it funny: amusement or the ability to understand and enjoy funny situations or to laugh at things". The notion of humour was addressed by many theories, such as superiority theory, relief theory and incongruity theory. The Superiority Theory was coined by Thomas Hobbes who defined humour as "the sudden glory arising from the sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others." According to Hobbe's view, humour involves the notion of superiority. Humour is produced when people laugh at other's shortcoming or bad luck.

According to Rutter 1997, relief theory has a clear physiological or psycho-physiological nature. This theory suggested that laughter can release tension and "psychic energy". This theory also assumed that people experience a pleasant sensation when humour replaces negative feelings like pain or sadness (Mulder 2002, 4). However, this theory has a weakness since it does not explain why people laugh or find things funny. The third theory is incongruity theory. Within incongruity theory, "The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between an established concept and a real object which have been connected by some relation, and the laugh itself is just an expression of this incongruity"(Schopenhauer 1883). According to this theory, humour includes some differences between what is normally expected to what happens (Holland 1982, 21)

Hassan (2013) investigated how and why Egyptians in January 25th Revolution and the Americans in Occupy Wall Street Movement use humour. This study explored how humour can be used as a strategy of nonviolent resistance to oppression and dictatorship. The study recognised the nature of humour based on Grice's Cooperative Principles and speech act theory. It also investigated the similarities and differences in the two events. Humour seems to have a powerful potential in facilitating outreach and mobilisation. The results of the study proved that humour is a form of resistance.

Hu (2012) investigated the verbal humour in the "Big Bang Theory" within the framework of the cooperative principle and the relevance theory. Within cooperative principle, humour is created when any of the four maxims is violated or flouted. Within the framework of the relevance theory, humour is viewed as an ostensive-inferential process. The study suggested that these two theories prove to be very efficient in explaining the creation of comic effects.

Linguists identified different types of humour, such as conundrum, joke, pun, and riddle. One of the basic types of humour is jokes. A Joke refers to a short text that is said in order to make others laugh. Merriam Webster defines joke as "something said or done to provoke laughter; especially: a brief oral narrative with a climactic humorous twist". Similarly, Ritchie (2004,16) defined joke as a "short text which, for a given cultural group, is recognizable as having, as its primary purpose, the production of an amused reaction in its reader/hearer, which is typically repeatable in a wide range of contexts."

Musyoka (2016) explored humour exhibited by Kikamba Radio Presenter named Sammy Mulinge of Athiani FM. The study analysed how Mulinge's jokes were perceived as humorous. The theoretical background of the study is based on Relevance theory. In addition, the study aimed at finding out how metaphor, irony, and hyperbole are used to create humorous effects and established whether stereotypes were humorous. The data consisted of 9 Mulinge's Kikamba jokes broadcasted in weekly Radio Program. The study showed that the humorous effects were expressed through explicatures and implicatures. In addition, the study showed that metaphors, stereotypes, irony, and hyperbole were used to make Kikamba jokes humorous.

Widiana (2014) explored how implicature is used to create humour in jokes that are published as Broadcast messages in the social network. The researcher collected tha data from Facebook and BlackBerry Messenger. The implicature found in these jokes are categorized into conventional implicature and conversational implicature. Then, implicature in these jokes is classified into different types related to gender, culture, and social phenomena. The study found out that context also plays an important role to determine such an implied meaning in these jokes.

Martin (2013) used relevance theory to study Lubukusu jokes. The data is from Lubukusu language, which was collected from primary and secondary sources. The researcher depends on his native knowledge of the usage of Lubukusu language as a primary source. The secondary data will be collected from the radio stations like "Mulembe", and West FM," the Internet, Facebook, e-mail, SMS and unpublished dissertations at the university of Nairobi Library. The finding of the study suggested that jokes perform different functions. First, they create humour for the purpose of entertainment. Second, they are used to send messages such as bad behaviour. The findings of the study found out that ambiguity plays a significant role in brings out the meaning of Lubukusu jokes pragmatically.

As it is clear from the literature review above that the study of Jokes in Jordanian Arabic was under researched; thus, the presents study attempts to investigate violation of Grice's Maxims that occur in Jordanian jokes, to recognise the implied meaning of the violated Gricean Maxims in these jokes and to identify the factors that influence the interpretation of these jokes.

METHODOLOGY

The data for the current study consists of six Jordanian jokes in the form of broadcast messages. The data were collected mainly from Facebook and WhatsApp between May and June 2018. After collecting the data, the researcher translated these jokes into English. The researcher collected the data first then analysed it with reference to Grice's conversational implicature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section, the researcher presents the results of the study followed by discussion of these results. The analysis of the data is based on Grice's conversational maxims.

1. Joke 1

The humour in this joke is created by violation the quality maxim. The image is for a man looking at a butterfly and a caption which consists of a statement written in Jordanian Arabic "when the internet is cut off, then you go out, and you will discover the world", and a question written in standard Arabic "Which type of birds is this creature?" It is clear from the image that what the man is looking at is not a kind of birds but a butterfly. In addition, it is a lie that if you go out, you will discover the world. Therefore, the maxim of quality is violated by not telling the truth in order to imply that Jordanian spend many hours at homes using the internet instead of doing outdoor activities. In addition, humour is created when the standard Arabic is used in non-standard/ informal contexts. It is well known that Jordan is an example of "diglossic" country in which there are two varieties: high and low variety. High variety is a standard Arabic which is used in formal and serious settings. High variety is used in mass media, literature and religious contexts. The low variety is the Jordanian vernacular dialect which is used in informal settings. Low variety is used in every day communicating, gossiping and chatting. Thus, in Jordan when the speaker switches from the vernacular to the standard language when the setting is informal, humour is created.

2. Joke 2

عملوا احصاء للسكان بالاردن

لقوا مليونيين سوري ونص مليون يمني ونص مليون ليبي ومليون عراقي

والاردني لسا ما لقوه!!

This joke is translated as follows:

"They do a population census in Jordan and they found: 2 million Syrians, 500 thousand Yamani, 500 Libyans and 1 million Iraqi. However, they are still looking for Jordanians!"

In this joke, the quality maxim is violated since it is impossible that in Jordan there are no Jordanians. This joke is used to refer to the demographic change occurred in Jordan. This change occurred due to the conflicts in Middle East and South Africa which force inhabitants

of these countries to escape to Jordan. Over the last ten years, Jordan accepted waves of refugees from Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen. According to recent statistics, Jordan hosts more than 1.2 million Syrians in refugee camps, villages and cities.

3. Joke 3

Humour in joke (3) is created via violation of manner maxims. The humour is created when the speaker's utterance is being ambiguous. The joke in (3) consisted of Arabic caption which can be translated as follows:

An Arab asks an American: what is your name?

The American: Sam Harry.

The Arab: "shut up, bastard!"

This joke is based on the homophonic relationship between "Sam Harry" /samhari/ (the name of American guy) and the Arabic word "سم هاري" (poison) /samha:ri/. This word is used in Arabic as an insult in which the speaker wishes for the hearer to die from poison. The misunderstanding between the speaker and hearer creates humour. The use of the word /samhari/ creates ambiguity which in turn produces humour.

4. Joke 4

ياباني سأل اردني شو تشتغل؟

الاردني: باحث

الياباني: كيف يعني؟

الاردني: باحث عن عمل.

This joke is translated as follows:

The Japanese: what do you do?

The Jordanian: "baaHith" (researcher or seeker)

The Japanese: in what field?

The Jordanian: 'a job seeker'.

The humour in this joke is created by using the ambiguous word "baaHith". The first meaning is "academic researcher", while the second one is "job seeker". The Japanese guy asks the Jordanian about his job and the Jordanian says "baaHith" (researcher or seeker). The Japanese understands it as an academic researcher while the Jordanian means a job seeker. In this joke, the manner maxim is violated since the word "baaHit" is ambiguous. This joke is used to refer to the phenomenon of unemployment in Jordan.

5. *Joke* 5

In Joke (5), there is no relation between the image and the caption. The image is for the actor Sylvester Stallone carring a machine gun. The caption says "I am a graduate from the university of Jordan". The humour is created when the reader figures out the relevance between the image and the caption. The violation of relevance maxim is used to criticise violence at the Jordanian universities. This joke is used by Jordanians to condemn vioelnce and to send an implied message that this behaviour is not accepted by jordanians.

6. *Joke 6*

الخطيبة: مكياجي بكلف 500 دينار..تقدر تعطيني اياهم

الخطيب: دهان الدار 500

This joke is translated as follows:

Fiancée: my makeup costs 500 JD. Can I have them?

Fiancé: painting of my house costs 500 JD

In this joke, the relation maxim is violated because the utterance made by the fiancé is not related to the utterance of fiancée (the fiancée asked her fiancé 500 JD for her makeup and the fiancé says that painting of his house costs 500 JD). The humour is created when this maxim is violated. When the fiancé violates the relation maxim, he criticises the high prices of cosmetics or he disvalues the exaggeration of using makeup by girls. The joke can be used also to criticise the high cost of weddings in Jordan.

The discussion of the results showed that Jordanians violated three maxims: quality (2 times), manner (2 times), and relation (2 times). It was also revealed that Jordanians violated these maxims in order to create humour which is used either to create laughter or to imply social,

economic and cultural messages. For example, joke (3) and (6) are used by Jordanian just to create laughter. However, joke 1 and 5 addresses different social phenomena i.e., addiction to phone and violence in universities, respectively. Joke (4) addresses social and economic phenomenon (unemployment). Joke (2) criticizes the acceptance of a large number of refugees especially from Syria because these refugees put pressure on Jordan's economy, demography, social services and security.

The analysed data also showed that cultural and background knowledge is needed to determine the implied meaning in these jokes. For example, it is impossible to understand the implied meaning of Joke 5 without cultural and background knowledge. Joke one consists of an image of a man with a gun and a caption" I am a graduate". The background knowledge is something like "sometimes students at Jordanian universities fight with each other and the cultural background is something like "Jordanians are nonviolent people". From both cultural and background knowledge, the implied meaning is clear (Jordanians condemn violence in universities).

CONCLUSION

The study investigated the Jordanian jokes within the framework of Grice's conversational implicature. It concentrated on how humour is created by the violation of Grice's Maxim in these jokes. It also highlighted the implied meaning of the violated Gricean Maxims in these jokes as well as the factors that influence the interpretation of these jokes. The sample of the study consists of six jokes taken from WhatsApp and Facebook. The results of the study showed that Jordanians violate the maxims to create humour. The findings of the study also revealed that Jordanians use humour created by violation of maxims to criticise softly social, economic and cultural issues, such as violence in universities, unemployment, and refugee crisis and internet addiction.

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