



Ain Shams University
Faculty of Women for Arts, Science and Education
The Department of English Language and Literature

A Linguistic Study of Humor in Bassem Youssef's "Al Bernameg" & Jon Stewart's "The Daily Show": A Multi-Modal Integrated Approach

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English Language and Literature
Women's College for Arts, Science and Education
Ain Shams University

By

Nouran Omar Abd Al Hamed

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Master's Degree in Linguistics

Under the Supervision of:

**Dr. Ali Gamal Eddin
Ezzat**

Professor of Linguistics
Faculty of Education
Ain Shams University

**Dr. Heba Mohamed
Ibrahim**

Associate Professor of
Linguistics
Faculty of Women, Arts,
Science and Education
Ain Shams University

**Dr. Mohamed Mohamed
El Nashar**

Lecturer of Linguistics and
Translation
College of Language and
Communication
Arab Academy for Science,
Technology and Maritime
Transport

2017

Summary

This study sets to discover the linguistic tools used by satirists to exaggerate the defects of their society, to criticize them, and to influence people's attitudes with the intention of social reform. The two political shows that are selected to be the core of this study are: *The Daily Show* of Jon Stewart and *Al Bernameg* of Bassem Youssef. The study analyzes the selected episodes of each show by employing two approaches: The General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), and Norris' Multimodal Interactional Approach (Norris' MIA). It aims to prove that humor is generated through either GTVH's parameters or Norris' verbal and non-verbal modes, or through integration between them. For this particular purpose, the dissertation is divided as follows.

Introduction

The introductory part presents the context, purpose, scope, and rationale of the study. Moreover, it includes the research questions.

Chapter One: Review of Literature

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first is concerned with an historical overview of humor; the forms of humor, its functions, the characteristics of jokes, and the traditional theories of humor. The second part gives a general idea of the concepts of discourse, critical discourse analysis (CDA), multimodal discourse analysis (MDA), and the genre of political satire shows, and its impact on people.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The chapter includes two parts. The first part elucidates the two approaches adopted in the analysis of the data under investigation, namely, the GTVH and Norris' MIA. The second part presents data collection, recording, transcription, and the procedure of data analysis.

Chapter Three: The Syrian Crisis Episodes

This chapter provides an analysis of the *Al Bernameg* episode and *The Daily Show* episode that revolve mainly around the Syrian crisis, under the two approaches, i.e. GTVH and Norris' MIA. In the Syrian crisis episodes, Youssef and Stewart mock their Presidents' (Morsi and Obama) stance towards solving the crisis.

Chapter Four: Commenting on the Presidents' Attitudes in Foreign Countries

The chapter focuses on analyzing the two episodes that center mainly on ridiculing the Presidents' attitudes and speeches in foreign countries. *Al Bernameg*'s episode criticizes Morsi during his first trip to Germany, while the *The Daily Show*'s episode mainly ridicules Obama on his first trip to Israel. Moreover, it mocks the American government's standpoint towards the Palestinian crisis.

Chapter five: Ridiculing the Muslim Brotherhood Episodes

The majority of *Al Bernameg*'s episodes in 2013 revolve around the idea of mocking Morsi and MBs. However, the researcher selects episode no. 21 from *Al Bernameg* due to the fact that there are several examples where Youssef blends the verbal with the non-verbal communicative modes to create laughter and to send underlying messages. As regards *The Daily Show*, the researcher selects an episode where Stewart comments on Youssef's conviction by the MBs, because of insulting Morsi and Islam.

Findings and Conclusion

This part is dedicated to the most important results of the research. The results show that humor is vital, as it helps in relieving agony and tension. Moreover, it reveals that the similarities between the two shows are more than the differences, with respect to the linguistic tools that are used by the two hosts. However, there is a slight difference in the usage of some tools, such as the LA parameter, the modes of proxemics and music. Furthermore, the current study concludes that Stewart and Youssef send implicit messages and mock the political regimes in their countries in a humorous way through integrating the verbal with the non-verbal communicative modes. In addition, it is noteworthy that utilizing verbal and non-verbal communicative modes to create humor in these shows helps the hosts to reflect and reveal dominant ideologies in their countries. Through utilizing these modes in a humorous way, they manipulate the audience's perception of reality and redirect their way of thinking.

Abstract

The study sets to discover the linguistic tools used by people to exaggerate the defects of their society, to criticize them, and to influence people's attitudes with the intention of social reform. The two political shows that are selected to be the core of this study are: *The Daily Show* of Jon Stewart and *Al-Bernameg* of Bassem Youssef. The reason for the selection of these two shows is that they have similar ideas, with some variations in the tools used by each. One of the important aims of this study is to reveal that the use of non-verbal communicative modes is essential and sometimes more significant than words in conveying humor and satire. Youssef and Stewart rely on non-verbal modes such as gestures; gazes, proxemics, color, images, and music to criticize those who have power or authority over them. The study analyzes the selected episodes of each show by utilizing two approaches: The General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), and Norris' Multimodal Interactional Approach (Norris' MIA). It aims to prove that humor is generated through either GTVH's parameters or Norris' non-verbal modes, or through integration between the two approaches. The study shows that Stewart and Youssef use verbal and non-verbal communicative modes with varying degrees. Moreover, the results uncover that the similarities are more than the differences in the linguistic tools that are used by each host. It is also noted that the two hosts integrate the verbal modes with the non-verbal communicative modes in all examples. Such integration plays a crucial role in attracting the audience and assists in delivering their implicit messages effectively and in a humorous way.

Key words: political satire shows, the General Theory of Verbal Humor, multimodal discourse analysis, Norris's Multimodal Interactional Approach.

Acknowledgments

All praise and thanks to Allah, the benevolent and the merciful, who gave me the strength and will to finish my dissertation.

I would like to express my deepest thanks to my supervisors. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Ali Ezzat for his great guidance and to Associate Professor Heba Ibrahim for her careful reading. My thanks go to Dr. Mohamed Al Nashar for his help throughout the course of my work. They have always encouraged and motivated me to continue with my work.

To Dr. Azza Heikal, Dean of College of Language and Communication, and all my colleagues, especially Mennah, Alaa, Yara, Israa, Mai, Sofia, Nival, Engy, Nashwa, and Dina, I would like to express my gratitude for their continuous help and support.

I would like also to thank my parents and my brother, the backbone of any success I have achieved through my life. They always support me both emotionally and spiritually. Special thanks are due to my lovely daughter, the Unknown Soldier, who is unaware that she is my source of inspiration and motivation.

Table of Contents

Summary.....	ii
Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgments	v
Table of contents	vi
List of Figures.....	x
List of Abbreviations	xi
Introduction.....	1
0.1 Context of the Study.....	1
0.2 Purpose of the Study.....	3
0.3 Research Questions.....	3
0.4 Data Collection.....	3
0.5 Scope of the Study	5
0.6 Rationale of the Study	6
0.7 Thesis Outline	6
Chapter One: Review of Literature	9
1.0 Introduction	9
Part I.....	9
1.1 Humor	9
1.1.1 Historical review of humor.....	10
1.1.2 Characteristics of Jokes	11
1.1.3 The Functions of Humor	12
1.1.4 The Concept of Humophobia	13
1.1.5 Forms of Humor	14
1.2 Traditional Theories of Humor	16
1.2.1 The Incongruity Theory.....	17
1.2.1.1 The incongruity-resolution theory	19
1.2.2 The Superiority Theory	21
1.2.3 The Release Theory.....	22
1.2.4 Veatch's Moral Theory of Verbal Humor.....	22
1.2.5 Raskin's Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH)	24
1.2.5.1 Main hypothesis of SSTH	24
1.2.5.2 Compatibility & oppositeness	26
1.3 Humor Tools and Techniques	28
1.3.1 The Structure of Pun	28
Part II	31
1.4 Discourse: Definition and overview	31
1.4.1 Discourse and Intertextuality	32

1.4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).....	32
1.4.2.1 Ideology	35
1.4.2.2 Discourse, ideology and power	37
1.4.3 Media Discourse	39
1.4.4 Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA).....	40
1.4.4.1MDA approaches	43
1.5 The Genre of the Study: Political satire Shows	45
1.5.1 Al- Bernameg and Its Actual Influence	46
1.5.2 The Daily Show with Jon Stewart and Its Actual Influence	48
Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Methodology	50
2.0 Introduction.....	50
2.1 General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH)	50
2.1.1 The KRs	51
2.1.1.1 Language (LA).....	51
2.1.1.2 Narrative Strategy (NS)	52
2.1.1.3 Target (TA).....	53
2.1.1.4 Situation (SI)	54
2.1.1.5 Logical Mechanism (LM).....	54
2.1.1.6 Script Opposition (SO)	58
2.1.2 Joke Similarity	58
2.1.3 Criticism of the GTVH	62
2.1.4 El-Arousy's Modifications of the GTVH	64
2.1.5 Attardo's Five- Level Representation Model	66
2.2 Norris Multimodal Interactional Approach (MIA)	68
2.2.1 The Notion of Mediated Action	71
2.2.2 The Notion of mode	72
2.2.3 The Verbal Communicative Mode: Spoken Language	74
2.2.4 The Non- Verbal Communicative Modes	74
2.2.4.1 Posture (Body Position).....	74
2.2.4.2 Proxemics	76
2.2.4.3 Gestures	77
2.2.4.4 Gaze	79
2.2.4.5 Print	80
2.2.4.6 Music	81
2.2.4.7 Object Handling & Color.....	82
2.2.5 The Notion of a Foreground -Background Continuum	83

2.2.6 The Notion of Modal Density	84
2.3 Linguistic Tool Kit	87
2.4 Procedure of Data Analysis	88
2.4.1 Downloading and Transcription	89
2.4.1.1 Spoken language Transcription	90
2.4.1.2 Multimodal Transcription	90
2.5 Preceding Studies	91
Chapter Three: The Syrian Crisis Episodes	94
3.0 Introduction	94
3.1 Al-Bernameg Episode about the Syrian Crisis	94
3.1.1 Examples from Al-Bernameg	94
3.2 The Daily Show Episode about the Syrian Crisis	110
3.2.1 Examples from The Daily Show	110
3.3 Conclusions.....	119
Chapter Four: Commenting on the Presidents' Attitudes in Foreign Countries Episodes	121
4.0 Introduction	121
4.1 Al-Bernameg Episode about Morsi's First trip to Germany	121
4.1.1 Examples from Al-Bernameg	121
4.2 The Daily Show Episode about Obama's First Trip to Israel	131
4.2.1 Examples from The Daily Show	131
4.3 Conclusions.....	141
Chapter five: Ridiculing the Muslim Brotherhood Episodes	142
5.0 Introduction	142
5.1 Al-Bernameg Episode about Ridiculing the Muslim Brotherhood	142
5.1.1 Examples from Al-Bernameg	142
5.2 The Daily Show Episode about Ridiculing the Muslim Brotherhood	161
5.2.1 Examples from The Daily Show	161
5.3 Conclusions.....	170
Findings and Conclusions	172
References	175
Appendices: Sample Texts.....	188
Appendix I: Al-Bernameg Selected Episodes	188
Appendix II: The Daily Show Selected Episodes	199

List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Types of humorphobia.....	14
Figure 1.2: Forms of humor.....	14
Figure 1.3: The three families of humor theories.....	17
Figure 1.4: A simplified version of Suls's incongruity -resolution model.....	20
Figure 1.5: A small fragment of semantic network.....	26
Figure 1.6: Polysemy: one form with multiple related meanings.....	30
Figure 1.7: Homonymy: accidentally similar in form: unrelated meanings.....	30
Figure 1.8: Discourse as text, interaction and context.....	34
Figure 1.9: A combination between image, writing, and color.....	43
Figure 2.1: Analyzing the anchor joke.....	62
Figure 2.2: The six knowledge resources of the GTVH.....	62
Figure 2.3: El –Arousy's modification of the GTVH.....	65
Figure 2.4: Attardo's five-level hierarchy.....	66
Figure 2.5: The stratification of semiotic systems.....	70
Figure 2.6: Smaller systems of representation of 'gesture'.....	73
Figure 2.7: Different positions of posture.....	75
Figure 2.8: Types of gestures.....	77
Figure 2.9: Music used as an embodied and disembodied mode.....	82
Figure 2.10: The use of object handling mode and gaze.....	82
Figure 2.11: Action and modal density; modal complexity and modal intensity..	84
Figure 2.12: Multiparty interaction.....	85
Figure 2.13: Simultaneous higher-level actions performed on different horizontal levels of attention/ awareness.....	87

List of Abbreviations

CDA-Critical Discourse Analysis

GTVH-General Theory of Verbal Humor

KRs- Knowledge Resources

LA-Language

LM-Logical Mechanism

MB-Muslim Brotherhood

MDA-Multimodal Discourse Analysis

MIA- Multimodal Interactional Approach

NS-Narrative Strategy

RT- Relevance Theory

SI-Situation

SO- Script Opposition

SSTH- Script – Based Theory

SSTH-Semantic Script Theory of Humor

TA-Target

Introduction

0.1 Context of the Study

In observing our everyday behavior, it is to be noted that all of us react with humor and laughter even in the most difficult situations. Therefore, it is recognized that humor represents a central aspect of our daily life, and it is a fact that all humans naturally participate in humorous speeches and behaviors. Latta (1998) illustrates that "[h]umor is a genuine mystery. Here is something every normal person has experienced countless times. Undeniably, it constitutes an important facet of human life" (p.3).

Bergson (2005) states that several attempts have been made to define the concept of humor. Numerous philosophers, such as Aristotle and other thinkers, have considered the questions: "why do many forms of speaking make people laugh and other do not? And what is the meaning of humor?" (p.1). Most recently, during the last few decades, the language of humor has been the subject of discussion and studies in various areas of research including philosophy, linguistics, psychology and sociolinguistics. It has attracted linguists over the past 25 years in an attempt to define the concept of verbal humor and to describe its essence. Therefore, the researcher has selected the language of humor to be the core of the study.

This study conducts a linguistic analysis of humor in two political satire shows: *Al-Bernameg* and *The Daily Show*. The researcher chooses the data under analysis from media, as media plays a vital role in people's life. Matheson (2005) illustrates the essentiality of media nowadays by affirming that peoples' interests are shifted to media; either printed media (i.e. newspapers and magazines), or electronic media (i.e. radio and television), because media plays a crucial part in society. He adds that members and institutions form the shared world of a culture. In other words, they construct all the meanings that people attach to the world

(p.1). Matheson (2005) clarifies that media professionals have the ability to speak on TV or to write in newspapers or magazines in "authoritative ways about the world" (p.2). He illustrates that those professionals in media are able to make claims to know what is really occurring and what other individuals feel. Media discourses keep the people updated and informed about what is happening around them.

The hosts of *The Daily Show*, Jon Stewart, and *Al-Bernameg*, Bassem Youssef, are comedians. Therefore, humor is the fundamental part of the two selected shows. It is noteworthy that such shows make a combination between politics and humor, because this combination has increasingly attracted the attention of many people over the past decade, especially in the late night shows all over the world. The researcher has specifically selected these two shows, because they have similar ideas with slight variation in the tools used by each host.

The study conducts a contrastive analysis between the selected episodes from *Al-Bernameg* and *The Daily Show*. According to Krzeszowski (1990), the terms 'contrastive studies', 'contrastive analysis', and 'contrastive linguistics' are used interchangeably (p.11). According to Fisiak (1981), contrastive linguistics is "concerned with the comparison of two or more languages in order to determine both the differences and similarities between them" (p.1). Therefore, the researcher selects the contrastive analysis, because it compares two different languages and shows the similarities and differences. Moreover, such a type plays a crucial role, as according to Leonardi (2007), contrastive analysis helps in identifying "characteristics which would not be so evident from adopting a normal linguistic analysis" (p.65). This is pointed out by Opdycke (2013), who states that "while *Al-Bernameg* does have similarities with its US counterpart, the use of the comic frame as a voice for the oppressed within an emerging democracy produces some important differences" (p.1). It is to be noted that the differences between the two selected shows do not only exist in the varied levels of democracy in Egypt and

U.S., but also there are culture differences between the two shows, since the current study is dealing with Egyptian and American political satire shows..

0.2 Purpose of the Study

The main objective of this study is to show the essentiality of verbal and non-verbal communicative modes, and how several implicit messages are delivered through integrating them. The study employs the Multimodal Discourse Analysis approach, which focuses on how meaning is made by multiple modes of communication, e.g. gesture, images, music, gazes, and proxemics, and these modes of communication are the modes on which Youssef and Stewart depend in their shows while they are sending their implicit messages in humorous ways.

The aim of this study then is to:

- uncover the messages that the satirical shows convey, specifically implicit ones,
- investigate different modes of communication, verbal such as language; and non-verbal such as music, proxemics, gestures, images, gazes, and colors, and to
- identify the role of language and the linguistic tools used by hosts of the political satirical shows.

0.3 Research Questions

The study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How do Stewart and Youssef send messages, particularly implicit ones, and mock the political regimes in a humorous way?
- 2) How are the verbal and non-verbal communicative modes integrated in the selected episodes?
- 3) Do Stewart and Youssef utilize the same communicative modes in handling the same topics?

0.4 Data Collection

According to Norris (2004), "[d]ata collection is always interlinked with the theoretical, methodological, and analytical decisions that influence the analysis" (p.62). The episodes of *Al-Bernameg* are downloaded from the website

www.youtube.com, while the episodes of *The Daily Show* are downloaded from the website <http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos>. The videos selected are confined to three episodes in each program. The researcher has selected the episodes of the two programs that were presented at the same period, i.e. February to June 2013, after Morsi has been elected the President of Egypt.

The episodes that are analyzed in 'Al-Bernameg' are:

- 1) Episode no. 12 that is aired on February 8, 2013. This episode revolves around the idea of criticizing Morsi during his first trip to Germany as Egyptian President. Furthermore, it is premised on showing how Morsi leaves a bad impression, since his first trip to Germany reflects to what extent Morsi is not the right person to be the President of Egypt.
- 2) Episode no.21 which is broadcast on CBC on April 12, 2013. The main topic of this episode is criticizing the MBs and their media, as well. It could be argued that there are several episodes of *Al-Bernameg*, especially this season (i.e. season 2), where Youssef ridicules the MBs. However, the researcher selects especially this episode, because Youssef is focusing, in the first two parts of this episode, on criticizing them. Moreover, there are several examples where laughter is created by means of a composite of the two approaches (GTVH & Norris' MIA). In this episode, another topic is taking second focus, i.e. Youssef's comment on his conviction by the MBs.
- 3) Episode no. 28 that is broadcast on June 21, 2013. This episode mainly focuses on ridiculing Morsi's stance towards the Syrian crisis. In addition, Youssef criticizes Morsi concerning several wrong decisions, such as the appointment of Luxor governor who was previously accused of planning and implementing many explosive acts.

-The Episodes which are taken from 'The Daily Show', that are parallel to Youssef's episodes, are: