

Black humour in bumper stickers in Jordan

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Abstract

The paper examines black humour in bumper stickers in Jordan. The study has examined a corpus of 31 stickers selected from a larger corpus containing up to 285 stickers collected by the researcher himself while on the road. The study shows that the stickers with black humour cover four topics: the negative characteristics of the driver, the low value or the small size of the car, the miserable economic conditions of the driver, and finally lack of faith in life and people. These stickers are considered humorous since they voluntarily disclose top personal or family issues. In addition to the themes disclosed, the stickers utilise some linguistic devices that might arouse humour including metaphor, hyperbole, word ambiguity, irony and saying something that does not match reality. The paper has also found that the linguistic resources of black humour are no different from the resources of humour in general; however, the topics of black humour are all the time negative.

Keywords: bumper stickers, black humour, metaphor, hyperbole, irony.

1. Introduction

Humour is a human behaviour through which the initiator seeks to make the receiver laugh since he or she finds the humorous message understandable and of interest to him or her. In other words, humour is a collaborative social act (Veale, 2004). Humour is recommended psychologically and socially. Psychologically speaking, it helps people to forget worries and overcome problems since it amuses the speaker, the addressee and the hearer. Socially speaking, humour strengthens bonds with others. Humour is a human act that gathers people. Laughing with others is also good for de-stressing and boosting our mood.

The humour initiator, mostly in case of jokes, seeks to amuse self and others by conveying a message that in most cases goes counter to sound reasoning or in Al-Kharabsheh's (2008) words "[that] results from departure from normal cognitive schemes" (p. 1). In this respect, Farghal (2006) states that "joking, which typically results in laughter, is essentially an intentional act that evolves from both the joker and the joke itself, and is expected to be of interest to the listener" (p. 2). He further states that the joker flouts one or more of Grice (1975) maxims of conversation in order to create more interest and suspense in the joke.

Al-Kharabsheh (2008) states that a distinction should be made between two types of humour: intentional humour that is intended by the initiator to cause laughing or to make the receiver laugh, and unintentional, accidental or situational humour which results from the situation or where “the perceived humour is attributed to unintentional causes” (p. 2). The current study will largely focus on the first category i.e. intentional humour where the communicator, the owner of the car with stickers, is having the intention to arouse humorous effects on readers.

Jokes, the most common manifestation of humour, are considered intentional acts through which the initiator seeks to make the hearer laugh since the joke is of interest to him/her. Likewise, humorous bumper stickers are another manifestation of intentional humour since the driver has voluntarily decided to attach a funny statement on the bumper of his or her vehicle to make the reader in this case, whether he or she is another driver or a passenger or a pedestrian, laugh since the statement is first understood and second of interest to him or her. The sticker may contain an element of humour which may go against logical reasoning such as irony or hyperbole, or it may involve disclosing personal or family issues that make it humorous by others.

Bumper stickers are different from jokes in several aspects. First, the reader of the sticker has limited time and space to analyse the statement since it will disappear in a minute unless the vehicle is parking; this issue does not apply to jokes since the reader or the hearer has all the time and place to reread or to ask from the initiator to repeat the joke. Second, jokes are usually longer than bumper stickers in which the funny side resides in one sentence only. Third, in jokes, there are some introductory statements that develop in a progression leading to the final statement that includes the gist of the joke while in case of bumper stickers, the funny gist resides in one statement that must be understood momentarily to be funny. Fourth, a joke has a punch-line i.e. the climax of the joke or the funniest part, whereas in stickers, the sticker itself is the punch-line; bumper stickers are one-liners that are direct. In a joke, there is simply a conflict that is resolved once the joke is understood; however, in stickers there is no such conflict.

The study does not claim that the resources of black humour are different from those for humour in general; they may share the same resources. However, the topics of black humour can be different from those of humour in general. Black humour is mostly concerned with disturbing or unpleasant subjects such as disease, death, murder, violence, corruption, poverty, famine, racial and sexual stereotypes, war and terrorism. The term black humour (from French humour noir) was coined by the surrealist theorist Andre Breton in 1935 while describing the work of Jonathan Swift who utilised cynicism and scepticism to create humour of topics such death (Bloom, 2010).

Bloom (2010) states that irony is abundantly utilised in humour in general and black humour in specific. He adds that black humour is witnessed in the works of Shakespeare, Chaucer, and Swift. Dark humour turns taboo topics such as death, disease, poverty, etc. into humorous content. Sometimes the humour is not easily grasped since it requires a cultural background in order to be able to understand it. The humour may not be explicit; it is sometimes implicit and cannot be understood by outsiders who do not belong to the same speech community. This makes implicature (Grice, 1975) a key term in creating and interpreting dark humour. It requires deep understanding to appreciate the meaning.

Black humour differs from general humour in terms of themes, functions and audience reactions. As for the topics, black humour topics are always negative while general humour's topics are varied; they may target attributes, positive or negative, and behaviours, be it right or wrong. When it comes to functions, general humour's functions are entertainment and stress relieving, whereas black humour's functions are criticising and enabling people to bear taboos and intolerable living conditions associated with them. Finally, when the audience reactions are considered, the case is different. General or pure humour is appealing to a wide audience, and

socially acceptable. However, in the case of black humour, the audience reaction is not guaranteed since black humour is not easily understood; a fact which may lead to division of stance towards black humour. Some may favour it, while others may see it offensive.

The purpose of the study is not to determine the exact number of the stickers with black humour in comparison to the whole number of the stickers collected or to the number of stickers with humour; the goal is to unveil or to determine the resources – linguistic, pragmatic, or cultural – of black humour in bumper stickers in Jordan and to find out the topics of stickers with black humour.

2. Literature review

This section is divided into two sections. The first focuses on the studies that have tackled humour in general and black humour in specific in the Jordanian scene while the second focuses on studies concerned with stickers in Jordan.

2.1. Humour

Needless to say that humour is a human behaviour and restrictively a human feature that differentiates human beings from other creatures. This, being the case, accounts for the vast number of studies about humour universally and in the Jordanian scene. Hardly can one find a study about humour that has not cited Salvatore Attardo, who can be safely considered the most authoritative scholar in the field (for more details, see Attardo 1994, 2001, 2017, and 2020). However, since this paper is not intended to discuss theories of humour, and due to the vast literature about humour in this respect, the following paragraphs will be restricted to studies of humour in the Jordanian scene.

The existing research of humour in Jordanian Arabic (JA) has focused so far on the linguistic and translational aspects of humour, jokes in particular, whether they are verbal in face-to-face encounters or posted via the social media verbally or in writing. In the following paragraphs, these studies will be briefly reviewed; studies that handle resources of humour will be handled in detail.

Shakir and Farghal (1992) investigated means of cohesion and coherence in Gulf War jokes in Jordanian streets; Shunnaq (1996) studied the translatability of Jordanian rural jokes into English; Al-Khatib (1999) conducted a sociolinguistic study of joke-telling in the Jordanian society; Farghal (2006) investigated accidental humour in international public notices displayed in English. Al-Khrabsheh (2008) investigated accidental humour in Jordanian shop signs; Bader (2014) investigated linguistic pun expressions in Jordanian Satirical articles; and Al-Momani, Badarneh and Migdadi (2016) studied Jordanian political cartoons before and after the Arab Spring from a semiotic perspective.

Barahmeh (2023) states that all Jordanian literature on humour adopted one of two approaches: linguistic or translational. The studies that adopted the linguistic approach focused on the linguistic sources of humour including pun, polysemy, homophony, etc. The studies that adopted the translational approach, on the other hand, were concerned with the translatability of humour into English and focused on the problems and challenges in translating jokes. Barahmah (2023) said that most of these studies had found out that most translating problems result from translating cultural specific terms and concepts.

Al-Kayed (2019) investigated Jordanian jokes from a pragmatic perspective utilising Grice's Maxims to account for humour in the jokes. Discussing only six jokes, he found out that Grice's maxims: quality, quantity, and manner were each violated twice to criticise social, economic and cultural issues.

Farghal and Hamdan (2024) studied 75 jokes from a comic Jordanian program from 4 perspectives: the theme of the jokes, the social factors related to the participants in the joke, the structure of the Jordanian joke, and the resources of humour and the translatability of jokes. Of interest to our study is the section about resources of humour in jokes, they have found that humour in some jokes is culture-specific while in others it has linguistic resources including ambiguity, onomastics, idiomatic expressions and borrowing from English.

Conducting a linguistic analysis of humour related to Covid-19 in Jordanians' hashtags, Ali and Abu Farraj (2022) found that humour resulted from two sources: linguistic and cultural. In terms of the linguistic sources of humour, the researchers stated that these involve alliteration rhyming, homophones and paronyms, all categorised as the phonological level; conditional sentences and parallelism, both labelled as the syntactic level; and hyperbole, metaphor, and irony, all labelled the semantic level. When it comes to the cultural source, the researchers said that cultural humour was created by making reference to some famous figures like the Pope, or Pablo Escobar and a famous Jordanian dish.

2.2. Bumper stickers

When it comes to bumper stickers, several studies have tackled this topic from different perspectives; none of them is related to humour in general or black humour in specific. The studies will be given briefly in the following paragraphs.

Hazaymeh (2007) conducted a sociolinguistic study of written expressions on vehicles in Jordan in order to determine the influence of social factors, such as gender, age, level of education and place of living on the use of bumper stickers. Jaradat (2016) who carried out a content-based analysis of bumper stickers in Jordan classifying the stickers into various categories according to their topics, states that the purpose of most of the stickers is fun and humour since they are not serious and do not involve biting messages. Furthermore, he states that the sticker's humorous side is evident in their "lack of criticism of the most serious problems in Jordan including racism, nepotism, inflation, high taxes, political and economic corruption and refugees" (p. 253).

Barhoumah (2016) who studied the phrases written on vehicle structures in Jordan, classified the stickers into four macro-categories: traditional sayings which includes proverbs; religious phrases which may include verses from the Holy Quran and Hadith of Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him); love and flirtation phrases; and phrases that are assumed to protect the vehicles from envy which is believed to cause harm to the vehicle. Al-Momani et al. (2017) studied bumper stickers in Jordan from a structural perspective. Al-Momani et al. found that 90 percent of the stickers are sentences in the present tense. They further explained that "the combination of the three elements i.e. sentence, declarative, and simple is what facilitates the job for the drivers to write their opinions" (p. 91). Al-Momani et al. further said that imperatives and interrogatives are quite common since stickers are addressed to other drivers. Darwish and Al Rousan (2019) studied the content of car inscriptions in Jordan. They state that car inscriptions are one kind of graffiti. The researchers reported that stickers in Jordan could belong to one or another of the following categories: religion 36 %; philosophy 15%; advertisement 14 %; tagging 12%; futility and fun 6%; patriotism 5%; alliance 3%; brands 3%; romance 2%; instructions 2%; politics 1%; and greetings 1%.

The literature shows clearly that no study has focused on humour or black humour in bumper stickers, hence, the need for this study.

3. Methodology

The study utilises the qualitative approach to analyse the content of 285 stickers forming the corpus of the study, to come up with the purposive sample of stickers exhibiting topics of black humour. The corpus of the study i.e. the 285 stickers was collected by the researcher himself during 3 months extending from January 2024 to April 2024. However, new stickers were added daily whenever the researcher found a new sticker. Most of the stickers were intentionally collected by the researcher when he was roaming the streets looking for the stickers and unintentionally while commuting from his hometown, Irbid, the second biggest city in Jordan to Zarqa, the third biggest city where he works passing through Al-Mafraq.

The researcher recorded stickers on private vehicles only since the drivers are the owners of their cars and they can write the stickers they like on their cars. Commercial cars were excluded, their drivers are not owners, and any sticker written on the cars might represent the firm's or the institution's opinions or rules.

Following an in-depth analysis of the corpus, the researcher was able to select 31 stickers exhibiting the components of black humour i.e. being negative in content but causing humour. The stickers were analysed thematically and linguistically looking for resources of humour whether it be thematic, linguistic or cultural.

4. Questions of the study

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What topics are addressed in Jordanian bumper stickers with black humour?
2. What linguistic resources are employed in Jordanian bumper stickers to create black humour?
3. What cultural elements are employed in bumper stickers in Jordan to create black humour?

5. Significance of the study

Having reviewed most of the studies about humour in the Jordanian scene, it has been found that no study has previously investigated humour in bumper stickers before. Furthermore, bumper stickers can be safely viewed as a linguistic phenomenon that is worth studying by itself; it has its own features that make it distinct from other brief sayings like proverbs, mottos, slogans, etc.

In addition, bumper stickers provide us with reflections - social, economic, attitudinal and behavioural - about the Jordanian community in general and about car owners in specific. These stickers may enlighten the researcher about the problems and the issues this group of Jordanians suffers from.

6. Analysis and discussion

Black humour is humour dealing with or resulting from pessimistic, taboo, or socially sensitive topics such as death, disease, poverty, betrayal, and despair. Stickers which exhibit these topics were considered humorous since they involve disclosing for the public topics which are considered social taboos. The purposive sample shows instances of poverty, betrayal, and despair.

Following a thorough analysis of the stickers under study, it has been found that the themes of the stickers with black humour fall into one of the following four categories:

1. The negative characteristics of the driver
2. The low value of the car or its small size
3. The miserable economic condition of the driver
4. Lack of faith in life and people.

The resources of black humour in each sticker will be given when discussing them.

6.1. The negative characteristics of the drivers

The section is dedicated to stickers that show the negative characteristics of the driver. This group includes four stickers given below:

1. السائق سريع الإشتعال
The driver is flammable.
2. السائق أردني سريع الإشتعال
The driver is a flammable Jordanian.
3. السائق متوفى
The driver is dead.
4. السائق أحول
The driver is cross-eyed.

These stickers are intended to be humorous by the driver/writer himself who in examples (1) and (2) metaphorically viewed himself as a flammable material like plastic, alcohol, etc. The driver meant to say that he easily loses his temper, so you, as a driver/reader should be cautious not to argue with him or to commit a bad move that might force him to reach this stage. Linguistically speaking, the humour can be explained as motivated by the use of metaphor through which the driver pictures himself as a flammable person due to the fact that he loses his temper easily. The stickers can be interpreted as having the implicature that the unbearable pressures of life on this person have made him flammable and explodable at any time. Sticker (2) contains a cultural element that may instigate humour which is the use of the word Jordanian. Jordanians are generally stereotyped in the region for their seriousness, grimness, and sullenness. The driver/writer has meant to say that Jordanian and flammable make a good combination and collocation.

The third sticker presents a worse image for the driver/writer i.e. that he is dead already. The sticker has the implicature that you cannot hope to receive the lowest degree of appropriate courtesy from his side or that he has lost hope in life and people. The sticker here employs hyperbole or exaggeration to represent this gloomy image and to create humour.

Sticker (4) presents a mitigated image for the driver; he is simply cross-eyed. You as a driver/reader should be cautious as to how to deal with him; he may cross lanes without any indication. The driver here may not be telling the truth; he is simply joking with the drivers. If this is the case, he is flouting the maxim of quality; he is not telling the truth to joke with others. Furthermore, the sticker alludes to the cultural stereotype of cross-eyed people. They are known as headstrong and stubborn. There is even a proverb that says “أقرع لا تناقر وأعور لا تداقر” which means “a bold person, do not throw stones at, and a cross-eyed person do not argue with.”

The last point to mention in this context is that strabismus or the condition of being cross-eyed is a physical defect that is culturally not favoured; it is impossible that the driver is proudly announcing that he is cross-eyed. The driver is simply trying to urge other drivers to try to avoid him and to arouse humour.

6.2. The low value or the small size of the car

This group includes seven stickers; four that make fun of the small size of the car, and three make fun of the low value of the car with the sticker. The four stickers about the small size of the car are:

5. مصير الصغير يكبر
The destiny of the small (one) is to grow up.
6. بس أكبر بصير همر
When I grow up, I will become a Hummer.
7. همر بعد الرجيم
A Hummer after having a regime.
8. بس أكبر بورجيكم
When I grow up, I will show you.,

Stickers 5, 6, 7, and 8 implicate that the driver/writer owns a small car in size. In (5), the driver is having pity on himself; he is simply consoling himself that one day he might own a bigger car. He is making fun of his current situation that he owns a small car. The humour in the sticker stems from the driver's metaphoric perspective towards the car; he utilises personification in which he views the car as a human being that is very young in terms of age and very small in terms of size, but he is assuring others that this young small human being will be adult and bigger one day.

In (6) and (7), the same idea is presented in a different way. In (6), the small car is talking and is warning others that it will be a Hummer when it becomes adult. Again, personification is the resource of humour in the sticker. In (7), the driver/owner tells us that this small car was a Hummer, but it has gone through a strict regime after which she has lost so much weight. Again, personification is applied here to create humour.

In (8), the small car is talking and warning other cars that when it grows up and becomes an adult, it will show them what they do not like. Again, personification is employed here to create humour. The sticker, as well as all the previous ones, implicates that, due to his miserable economic conditions, the owner cannot buy a bigger one.

9. لا تغرك الفوكس الرينج بالدار
Don't be misled by the VW beetle, the Range (Rover) is at home.
10. الشبح مع المدام
The ghost is with the madam.
11. البورش في الدار
The Porsche is at home.

In these stickers, the driver/owner talks about the low value of the car. What is common to all these stickers is that the driver is certainly not telling the truth. It is almost impossible that the driver/writer is enjoying driving a very low value car while he has a Range Rover, a Mercedes, or a Porsche at home. He is flouting the maxim of quality in order to be humorous. In (9), the driver urges other drivers not to have a false impression that he only has this old Volkswagen beetle; he tells them that he has a Range Rover at home, which is absolutely not the case. In (10), the driver who is driving a low value car tells other drivers that he has a Mercedes car that his wife is driving at the moment. He in fact does not have another car or a wife. Again, the humour here stems from flouting the maxim of quality i.e. not telling the truth. However, the humour is intensified by using a cultural element which is the term "ghost" that Jordanians use to refer to Mercedes S600.

Similarly, the sticker in the case of (11) says that driving this low value car does not mean that he does not have another high value car, which is not the case. He is not telling the truth

and consequently flouting the maxim of quality to create humour. By doing so, the driver tries to construct the direct implicature that, due to his miserable economic conditions, he can only afford buying this miserable car. In other words, the driver is making fun of his miserable conditions.

6.3. The miserable economic condition of the driver

This group contains 7 stickers; all of them allude to the miserable economic situation of the car owner.

12. بنك الدم

The blood bank

13. هاض اللي بجلطك

This is what may cause you a heart attack.

These two stickers refer to the fuel tank which according to the driver/writer is consuming a considerable amount of his income. In (12), the fuel tank is referred to as “the blood bank” since he is complaining that he pays a lot to keep the car going. The scenario is the following: the driver’s economic situation is miserable; he has a decent car, and he has to keep the car running for various reasons. He feels whenever he fills it up with gas that he is using his blood. Metaphor is applied here to arouse humour; the fuel tank is the blood bank that takes from your blood on a daily basis. One can also say that exaggeration is also applied here. The driver/writer’s use of this term can also be viewed as exaggeration; he simply exaggerates when saying the fuel tank is a blood bank.

In (13), the driver/writer is complaining about the same cause, but he referred to the fuel tank by saying “This may cause you a heart attack.” The price of gas in Jordan is very high and is continuously rising, a fact which may force people with limited income to think all the time about necessary and unnecessary trips. In other words, the driver’s limited income and the rising prices of gas may restrict the driver’s freedom in using the car. Again, metaphor and exaggeration are applied here to arouse humour among readers.

14. لا تقول بكام جاية بذهب المدام

Don’t say “how much (I have paid for the car),” It came by the Madam’s gold (I bought it after selling the jewellery (gold) of my wife).

This sticker is humorous for several reasons. First, the driver/writer willingly disclosed a top family secret i.e. that he has sold his wife’s jewellery to buy a car. The driver says that he has no other option but to sell his wife’ jewellery. The sticker can be interpreted as having an implicature; the driver is alluding to his miserable economic condition. This, however, does not implicate that the wife has not agreed to sell her jewellery. She most likely agreed to do so since the car provides them with a means of free individual mobility. Finally, the use of the rhyme enhances the humorous sense of the sticker. In fact, the use of the word “madam” in Arabic is purposeful to rhyme with “how much,” though the word “madam” usually indicates prestige and being rich. The rhyme gives the sticker a poetic sense and helps readers memorise the sticker.

15. الحلوة خوخة أجت بعد دوخة

Peach the beauty has been obtained after dizziness.

16. قصة كفاح مش جاية بالمرتاح

A struggle story, not obtained easily.

In (15), the driver/writer described his car as “peach, the beauty” which has consumed all of his money and much of his time and efforts to buy. This explains the rest of the sticker “that it has been obtained after feeling dizzy.” He became dizzy due to the long time he spent and the efforts he exerted in saving money to buy the car, not to mention refraining from any indulgence of appetite or desires. The humour here stems from metaphor; the driver views his car as a beautiful woman whose name is “peach.” The humorous nature of the sticker is emphasised by the use of rhyme which helps readers and hearers to memorise and spread the sticker. Although the driver is praising the car, he is in fact complaining that it has consumed much of his time, efforts and health in order to be able to buy.

The same analysis applies to sticker (16) which describes the car as a struggle story that has not been obtained easily. He meant to say that the car has consumed much of his time, efforts and money in order to be able to buy. The humour in the sticker stems from hyperbole; the driver considers the process of buying his car a struggle story that is similar to other struggle stories whose aim is liberating one and one’s land and nation from oppression. He simply exaggerates to create humour and to make fun of his terrible economic conditions. The humour can also be accounted for in terms of metaphor; the process of buying the car is viewed as a struggle story. Whether it is hyperbole or metaphor, the humour in the sticker flouts the maxim of quality. The humour is further intensified by the use of rhyme between the words “كفاح” and “مرتاح”.

17. وراء كل رجل مديون امرأة.

Behind every indebted man is a woman.

This sticker is a modification of the well-known saying “وراء كل رجل عظيم امرأة” which attempts to say that a woman’s contribution in the success of a great man cannot be ignored; in fact, she can be considered the source of this success or greatness. The sticker on the other hand, presents a gloomier picture for a woman’s role in the life of man. It simply says that if you try to look for the source of bankruptcy of every broke man, a woman is surely the cause. This meaning is further strengthened by the use of “كل” “every”; this means that you will not find a broke man whose wife is not the source of his debts. The sticker uses the universal stereotype of women as the world’s leading spenders. There is a general mis/belief that women tend to expend/spend/waste money without worrying about high prices. This sticker resonates with the public manly saying “لولا النسوان بارت الأسواق” which translates as “but for women, markets would be empty.”

18. حتى عجهنم بنودي

Even to hell, we can take you

In this sticker which is written on a taxi, the driver/writer expresses his miserable condition; it seems that he suffers from shortage of passengers, and he is very eager to have passengers, or to give paid rides to passengers. This situation has pushed him to write the sticker to tell taxi riders that he can take them any destination they can think of including hell. The humour in the sticker is thematic. The idea that a person can or is proud to give a ride to hell is odd. The humour can be linguistic as well; it may involve exaggeration; the driver is simply exaggerating the idea that he can take any ride you may ask.

6.4. Lack of faith in life and people

This group is the largest group; it involves 13 stickers. The stickers themselves will illustrate the specific topics they express.

19. ليس على الدنيا عتاب كل من فيها كلاب.

No need to have remorse on life; all the people are dogs.

20. عند المصلحة تجيبك الكلاب مشتاقا

When in need, dogs will eagerly come to you.

21. البحر مالح والناس كلها مصالح

The sea is salty and people are all profiteers/run after their needs.

These stickers, though do not sound humorous, are humorous by readers. They involve flouting the maxim of quality by viewing all the people who will resort to you when in need as dogs. In other words, people will become intimate with you in order to achieve a personal benefit. The use of the quantifier “all” further intensifies this meaning. In (19), the driver/writer frankly states that one should have no remorse on life in general since all the people one deals with are dogs which, unlike in the western world, have no value at all in our culture; the streets are full of stray dogs that might, due to hunger, attack human beings themselves or their houses to get some food. The low value of dogs in the Jordanian scene and the reference to people using dogs is a cultural element that arouses humour in this sticker and the following one. Moreover, one can say that humour stems from the use of metaphor; referring to people as dogs. The humour is intensified by the use of rhyme which makes the sticker sound poetic. In (20), again the “dog” metaphor is used; the driver/writer refers to people as dogs who will eagerly resort to you when they are in need of you.

The sticker in (21) contains two simple sentences; one of them is a fact, which is “the sea is salty.” The second is a personal belief or opinion, which is “people run after their benefits/interests.” The personal opinion is joined to a fact to make it sound like a fact. In this respect, the theme is considered one resource of humour. Rhyme is another resource of humour the sticker shows; it helps readers memorise it. Hyperbole is a third resource of humour; the driver/writer says that all the people are profiteers. What is really interesting with the rhyming words is that both of them show the worst part of an element; the salt is the worst element in the sea and the interests are the worst part of human beings.

22. تحب تنخان تخون تتحب

(when you sincerely) love, (you will) be betrayed; (when you) betray, (you will) be loved.

Obviously this sticker is humorous due to the theme it involves. It states that when you love sincerely, the other side will cheat on you; however, when you cheat on the other side, you will be purely loved. The humour stems from the use of irony. In normal situations, when you sincerely love the other side, you expect pure love, and when you cheat on the other, cheating is what you expect. The sticker says the opposite i.e. love is met by betrayal and betrayal is met by love. The humour is made clearer by the juxtaposition between the self and the other. The other is the one who starts the betrayal and a consequence of the other’s infidelity, I (the self) cheated on him/her who in that case will love me. The last point to mention here is that humour is strengthened by the use of alliteration; all the words in the sticker begin with the sound /t/ which makes the sticker poetic and easy to remember.

23. عيني صارت مثل الباص قد ما نزل منها ناس

My eyes became like a bus which has dropped off so many passengers.

The sticker reiterates the recurrent theme in several other stickers which is lack of trust in people. The humour in the sticker stems from several resources. The theme that the driver/writer has lost trust in people is odd. It is innovative but accessible to all people. Linguistically speaking, the sticker makes use of simile through which the driver who unregretfully has forsaken so many unworthy-of-trust or deceitful people is compared to a bus which has dropped

off so many passengers. The sticker says that so many people have lost their esteem. Lexically, the sticker makes use of the ambiguity that resides in the word “نزل” whose meanings are used in varied contexts. In its literal meaning, it means “descend”; when used with a bus, it means “get off”; however, it is idiomatically used with the word “eye” to mean “to become disrespectful” or “to lose respect for a person.” Finally, the sticker makes use of rhyme between the words “باص” and “ناس” which gives the sticker a poetic flavour.

24. من كثر همومي، سقت عمومي.

Because of my worries, I became a public service driver.

25. عشقت السفر من ظلم البشر.

I love travelling because of people's injustice.

26. عندما انتهيت من صنع السفينة جف البحر.

When I finished building the ship, the sea became dry.

These stickers reiterate the same theme; the driver/writer has become a public service driver/taxi driver in (24) and a truck driver or a traveller in (25) due to the calamities he goes through, and the oppression he received from people. The vehicles in the stickers require long hours of driving. The difference between the two is that in the case of the public service driver in (24), he repetitively deals with people on a daily basis, while the truck driver has minimum contact with people. The humour in the two stickers is strengthened by the use of rhyme which makes the stickers sound poetic. Although the stickers on the surface signify deep tragic incidents, they are considered humorous by readers since they involve hyperbole or not telling the truth in which case they flout the maxim of quality. They may also flout the maxim of quantity; there may be other factors that have led him to drive a taxi or a truck.

Sticker (26) presents a very well-known image for despair, hopelessness, and disappointment. The driver/writer expresses an extreme stage of these concepts. The humour in the stickers stems from irony; the driver says that the sea has become dry when he has finished building the ship. Through this image, he is trying to say that despite all the efforts he is exerting in life, he receives no rewards; all his efforts have gone in vain. The irony stems from the idea that what has happened is against predictions and logical reasoning. It is impossible that the sea has all of a sudden dried. Humour can also be seen as resulting from hyperbole; the driver is exaggerating. It is also almost impossible that the sea has become dry in the blink of an eye.

27. انحرف بتتعرف.

Go deviant to be known.

In this sticker, the driver/writer expresses his personal belief that when a person becomes pervert or deviant in behaviour, people will know him or will even like him since he behaves in a manly rebellious manner. The sticker implies that a person who behaves normally or typically is and will not be known. The humour in the sticker stems from the theme; it is very weird to find a sticker that asks people to become deviant. The humour is intensified by the use of rhyme which makes the sticker easy to memorise and sound like a proverb.

28. لو كنت داري بحالي كان بكيت عحالي.

Had you known my conditions, you would have burst into tears on these conditions.

The driver/writer talks about his conditions that were- according to him- so miserable and marked by sadness, disappointment and discontent that would make you have pity on him when you know these conditions. The sticker is humorous thematically and linguistically. Thematically speaking, it is very weird and unacceptable for the person to voluntarily disclose and publicly a tabooed issue which is his miserable situation. Linguistically, the driver/writer can be considered as exaggerating; that his miserable condition would force you to cry.

Moreover, the stickers make use of the word “حالي” twice to make the sticker rhyme to have a poetic flavour.

The fact that a phrase which is repetitively used by Jordanians in the closed circles i.e. family and friends to describe their economically miserable conditions has been voluntarily disclosed by the driver is viewed as humorous adopting the old Arab proverb “شر البلية ما يضحك” which can roughly translate into “The worst calamity is sometimes funny.” In other words, the sticker exposed a Jordanian theme, which can be seen as a cultural aspect in the creation of humour in the sticker.

29. هدف حياتي طلع تسلل

The goal of my life is an offside.

The humour here is purely linguistic. It stems from ambiguity i.e. the multiple meanings of the word “هدف”. In a very similar manner to English, the word has two meanings: “a goal in life” and “a football goal.” Apparently, the driver/writer has purposefully mixed the two fields of the two meanings saying that the goal of his life has been considered an offside i.e. is illegal, cannot be achieved, or is unrealistic. By this, he means that nobody appreciates what his goal in life is.

30. لا تسرع يا بابا ماما بتجوز غيرك

Don't speed Dad, Mom will marry another man

This sticker is a modification of the well-known saying “لا تسرع يا بابا نحن بانتظارك” which literally means “Dad, do not drive in high speed, we're waiting for you,” and which is used to urge drivers not to drive fast. The sticker, however, fulfils the same function but in a gloomier picture. The driver meant to say that high speed is deadly and when you speed, you might have a car accident in which you might get killed. Consequently, Mom would be widowed, and she might get married to another man. The humour in the sticker stems from the modification that took place on the original saying and from the unexpected gloomy scenario presented. The sticker also means that a high-speeding driver does not appreciate his wife, family life or the other blessings he enjoys which might evaporate in a fraction of a second.

31. كل كلام الناس مكالمات لم يتم الرد عليها

All people's gossip is unanswered calls.

This sticker, like most of the previous stickers, is humorous though it represents a negative, rather, a pessimistic perspective towards life and people; it seems that the driver has gone through bitter experiences through which he lost faith in life and people. All these have led the driver/writer to believe that he should not pay attention to rumours and people's gossip since all this is worthless and may not be of any value. The humour in the sticker stems from using metaphor through which the driver viewed people gossip as unanswered calls. He meant to say that he does not pay attention to people's gossip since it does not bring any benefit, and since people only gossip about the bad aspects of a person and his/her life.

The stickers are generally personal. They do not exhibit any explicit or implicit political messages since these issues are taboos in Jordan. They are not offensive to others; people may not favour the content; however, they may not feel being negatively targeted by the stickers. They are considered humorous since they satisfy the required conditions of black humour i.e. being negative in meaning and exhibiting the known resources of humour. Moreover, as mentioned before, they involve disclosing publicly family issues like buying a car by selling his wife's jewellery, being frustrated from life and people, being poor and other issues that should have been kept confidential. By disclosing personal issues, the driver is not being offensive to

any person, he is being ironic of himself alone or is making fun of the negative conditions he is going through alone.

When comparing the resources of humour in the current study with the resources of humour in the previous studies in the Jordanian scene, one can safely say black humour utilises most of the resources mentioned in the previous studies. For example, ambiguity was named one resource of humour in Farghal's study (2006) of international public notices displayed in English; in Ali & Abu Faraj's study (2022) of humour related to COVID-19 in Jordanian hashtags; and in Farghal and Hamdan's study (2024) of Jordanian jokes. Metaphor, hyperbole, irony, alliteration and rhyming were considered as sources of humour by Ali and Abu Faraj's study (2022).

This study shows that the resources of black humour are no different from those used in pure humour. However, the topics targeted by black humour are different; they are mostly negative. Another difference between black humour and pure humour is that humour in general may target an incidental occurrence of a negative attribute such as being bankrupt or behaving foolishly, while black humour may target lasting states of these negative attributes such as bankruptcy of stupidity.

7. Conclusion

This paper has examined a corpus of 31 bumper stickers selected from a larger corpus consisting of 285 stickers collected by the researcher himself while on the road. The findings show that the stickers with black humour cover four varied themes including: the negative characteristics of the driver, the low value or the small size of the car, the miserable economic conditions of the driver, and finally lack of faith in life and people. What is really interesting about the stickers is that they involve criticism of the self directly; they do not involve any harm for others. They present the negative characteristics of the driver or his car in a funny way. The stickers may also disclose the personal information such as selling the driver's wife's jewellery to buy the car. He could not buy the car, so he was forced to sell his wife's jewellery.

When it comes to the resources of humour in the stickers understudy, it has been found that humour stems from two kinds of resources: thematic and linguistic. The first type is the least frequent and involves presenting the theme in an unusual way to make it funny or modifying a well-known saying to sound humorous. The stickers are funny since they involve criticising self directly or disclosing personal information. The linguistic resources include metaphor, which is considered one means of flouting Grice's maxim of quality, and which is the most common frequent of arousing humour in the stickers; hyperbole, which is also considered an instance of flouting Grice's maxim of quality, and through which the driver exaggerates to sometimes unimaginable extents the theme presented in the stickers; word ambiguity where one of the two meanings of a word is used in the context of the other; saying something that does not represent reality, which is also a device of flouting Grice's maxim of quality; and irony, another means of flouting Grice's maxim of quality, where the end goes against the predicted scenario. The humour obtained is further strengthened by the use of rhyme in some stickers and alliteration in one sticker to give the stickers a poetic flavour.

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