

سلوبية الفكاهة في الصور الساخرة على الانترنت: تحليل تداولي متعدد الوسائط

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الملخص

هذه الدراسة تستقصي أسلوبية الفكاهة في الصور الساخرة على الانترنت من خلال تحليل تداولي متعدد الوسائط، مع التركيز على التفاعل بين اللغة والعلاماتية البصرية والمراجع الثقافية في تشكيل الفكاهة على الانترنت. بالاعتماد على مبادئ غرايس التعاوني (1975) وانتهاكه كمصدر للمعنى الضمني، إلى جانب النظرية العامة للفكاهة اللفظية عند أترادو (2001)، يحلل البحث كيف تعمل السخرية والمبالغة والتناص والتناقض في المنشورات الساخرة على الانترنت على بناء الفكاهة والنقد الاجتماعي. تتكون المجموعة قيد الدراسة من 150 منشوراً ساخراً منشوراً على نطاق واسع من تويتر وإنستغرام وريديت (2022-2024)، ولا سيما تلك التي تشير إلى شخصيات سياسية (مثل دونالد ترامب، فولوديمير زيلينسكي) وأيقونات الثقافة الشعبية (مثل تايلور سويفت، إيلون ماسك) والأزمات العالمية (مثل كوفيد-19، تغير المناخ). باستخدام إطار كريس وفان ليوين (2006) للخطاب متعدد الوسائط، تقوم الدراسة بتفكيك التآزر بين التفسيرات النصية والصور البصرية والإمكانات الرقمية (الهاشتاغ، الإيموجي، والصيغ مثل "الحبيب المشتت" أو "منشورات دريك"). تكشف النتائج أن فكاهة المنشورات الساخرة غالباً ما تنبع من الانحراف الأسلوبي بما في ذلك التهجنة غير القياسية، ("u mad bro") والتبديل الرمزي المتعمد (المزج بين العربية والإنجليزية في صفحات المنشورات الساخرة الشرق أوسطية)، والطبقات متعددة الوسائط التي تضخم الانفصال الساخر. من الناحية التداولية، تعتمد المنشورات الساخرة على المعرفة الخلفية المشتركة، مما يخلق جماعات داخلية بينما يستبعد الخارجين، مما يعزز بذلك الهوية والمجتمع. يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على الدور المتطور للمنشورات الساخرة كفولكلور رقمي، حيث تلتقي الأسلوبية والتداولية لتشكيل الفكاهة المعاصرة والنقد السياسي والتواصل الثقافي

الكلمات المفتاحية : الأسلوبية، الفكاهة، المنشورات الساخرة على الانترنت، التداولية، غرايس، أترادو، تحليل الخطاب

Stylistics of Humor in Internet Memes: A Pragmatic and Multimodal Analysis

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Abstract

The paper explores internet meme stylistics of humour by means of a pragmatic, multimodal approach that examines the combination of language, visual semiotics and culture in creating Internet humour. Using the Cooperative Principle of Grice (1975), which is a principle of verbal cooperation violation, as a basis of implicature, the analyses of the use of irony, hyperbole, intertextuality, and incongruity in memes to form humour and social commentary were based on the attentive reading of the Cooperative Principle and the General Theory of Verbal Humor determined by Attardo (2001). The collected corpus consists of 150 popular memes, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit (2022–2024), specifically those mentioning political figures (e.g., Donald Trump, Volodymyr Zelenskyy), pop-culture icons (e.g., Taylor Swift, Elon Musk), and crises occurring in the world (e.g., COVID-19, climate change). The analysis based on the multimodal discourse theory introduced by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) breaks down the synergy of the textual captions, visual visuality, and digital affordances (hashtags, emojis, and formats like “distracted boyfriend” or “Drakeposting”). The results show that meme humour can be based on stylistic deviation, such as non-standard orthography (“u mad bro”), intentional code-switching (Arabic-English blends on Middle Eastern meme pages), and multimodal layering, which enhances ironic distance. Memes are pragmatic in the sense that they are dependent on a common background knowledge establishing in-groups and leaving out outsiders, which serves to strengthen identity and community. This study emphasizes the changing the role of memes as digital folklore where stylistics and pragmatics intersect to create modern humour, political critique and cultural negotiation.

Keywords: stylistics, humor, memes, pragmatics, multimodality, Grice, Attardo, discourse analysis, internet culture.

1.1 Background of the Study

Humour has been a key issue of linguistic and literary research since classical rhetoric and the modern linguistic theories. In the digital era, though, humour is being mediated more by memes, short communicative fragments that co-exist as text, visuals and cultural innuendos that are easily disseminated. The internet memes have based on the conceptualisation of memes by Richard Dawkins (1976) as the cultural replicators, this internet meme has become a discourse practice all over the world that entertains, criticises, satirises, and addresses the socio-political realities. Incongruity, irony, exaggeration and parody are some of the devices used to examine humour in stylistics. However the internet meme has a more complex version a multimodal text where stylistic aspects in language are inextricably linked to images, emojis, colours and even platform features (hashtags, retweets, comment threads). What ensues is a hybrid discourse which requires a pragmatic approach to consider the implicit meanings, knowledge shared, and the cultural allusions that generate humour.

Memes tend to find humour in conscious breaches of conversational maxims, flouting quality (exaggeration), relevance (non-sequiturs), quantity (understatements), or manner (ambiguity) as Cooperative Principle of Grice (1975) suggests. As an example, the trendy “distracted boyfriend” meme is a recontextualization of a stock photo that labels it with labels that are not related and even ironic and therefore breaks expectations but is based on universal inference. In the same vein, the General Theory of Verbal Humor by Attardo (2001) can be handy in explaining the process of incongruity and script opposition that lie at the core of meme-based humour. Moreover, memes are multimodal artefacts. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue that meaning-making in visual texts is based on layout, colour, gaze and framing. Memes that mix these visual components with language indicators (slang, abbreviations, or even code-switching) are an example of how stylistics have to extend beyond written communication into multimodal communications. As an example, some commonly created memes in the Middle East can feature Arabic-English hybrids, e.g., “yalla chill” or “wallah bro,” and indicate that the stylistic ingenuity is rooted in the specificities of the local linguistic ecology. So what makes the stylistics of memes interesting is that they cannot be examined as the text or image but as pragmatic-multimodal assemblages that define the contemporary humour, identity and social critique.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although the idea of memes has become the focus of increased scholarly attention, most research has focused on either sociological approaches (memes as digital folklore or political commentary) or technological approaches (virality, circulation, algorithms). Much fewer have offered a stylistic and pragmatic interpretation of the systematic description of the construction of humour at a linguistic, semiotics, and contextual level. The weakness that the research is trying to overcome is the absence of comprehensive frameworks of meme humour analysis. The stylistic processes of irony, exaggeration and intertextuality have not been well studied without

such frameworks, and so have the pragmatic processes (implicature, presupposition, shared knowledge) which allow humour to have effects on audiences.

1.3 Aims of the Study

This research aims to:

1. Examine how stylistic devices such as irony, exaggeration, intertextuality, and code-switching contribute to humor in internet memes.
2. Investigate how pragmatic mechanisms, especially Gricean implicature and Attardo's humor scripts, are employed in meme communication.
3. Explore the multimodal interplay between text, image, and digital affordances in shaping humor.
4. Analyze the role of memes in identity construction, cultural negotiation, and political critique across global and local contexts.

1.4 Questions of the Study

1. What stylistic features characterize humor in internet memes?
2. How do pragmatic strategies, particularly the flouting of Grice's maxims and the activation of humor scripts, generate meme humor?
3. In what ways do multimodal elements (visuals, captions, emojis, hashtags) contribute to the construction of humor in memes?
4. How do memes reflect and reinforce cultural identities, political attitudes, and online communities?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The current research is a major contribution in various aspects. To begin with, it broadens the scope of stylistics, modifying traditional linguistic analysis instruments to the purpose of systematic study of digital, multimodal textual artefacts. Secondly, it contributes to the study of pragmatics by clarifying the way implicature, presupposition and shared knowledge are deployed in the constricted, hybrid modes of meme communication. Third, it challenges the culture and politics, with memes often satirizing political leaders, e.g., Donald Trump, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Elon Musk, or Taylor Swift, thus acting as a central mechanism of shaping the public opinion and identity performance. Combining the frameworks of Grice (1975), Attardo (2001) and Kress & van Leeuwen (2006), the present research provides an interdisciplinary analysis model that can be used to bridge the gaps between stylistics, pragmatics and multimodality. Furthermore, it prefigures memes as modern-day folklore (Shifman, 2014), which, therefore, proves that the humour is not only entertainment but also a tool of negotiation, critique, and resistance in the digital culture.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

The sample of empirical data called a study includes one hundred and fifty memes found on Twitter, Instagram, and Reddit in 2022–2024, meaning that both the global and regional discourses are covered. Although the discussion is largely about the English-language memes, it explicitly uses the examples of the Arabic code-switching, thus, representing the localized stylistic practices. The focus is narrowed to the specific type of memes that include humour but not other types—e.g., motivational, informational, or purely aesthetic memes. Also, the paper does not seek any quantitative determination of the reception of the audience; rather, it preempts the creation of humour through a discourse-analytic lens.

2. Theoretical Background and Literature Review

The literature review discusses the theoretical backgrounds of the stylistics of internet memes based on pragmatic theories of humour and multimodal discourse analysis. Previous literature stresses the idea that meme humour is often based on incongruity created by means of interaction between the verbal text and visual image as well as common knowledge of the culture. In a pragmatic perspective, emergence of meaning is achieved due to implicature, presupposition, irony and contextual assumption as opposed to formal linguistic expressions. The body of literature also testifies to the fact that the memes are multimodal texts, in which the stylistic choices—such as the selection of typeface, layout, the choice of images, and the structure of captions—intersect to create the humorous effect, which makes memes an interesting object of current analysis of digital stylistics.

2.1 Theories of Humor

In the linguistic study, humour is conceptualized as an issue of language and discourse practices. Incongruity theory relates humour with breach of anticipated semantic/structural habitats and thus, brings out laughter through unexpected interpretative alterations. The superiority theory is achieved via linguistic tools like irony and sarcasm which prove to put speakers in a dominant position by revealing the faults or inadequacies of others. Relief theory explains humour as a communication tool that is used to de-escalate emotional or social tension by the use of light-hearted, playful humour.

2.1.1 Classical Theories

The field of humour has a long and rich intellectual history, dating back to the ancient days when the early philosophers tried to explain its social, moral and psychological aspects. In his dialogue *Philebus*, Plato (360 BCE) took a humour approach that was to be later termed as superiority theory. He believed that laughter is often a result of feeling superior to others especially when one is an eyewitness of the misfortunes, errors or the absurdities of the people around them. Humour in this conception would be innately social and moralistic: it reinforces the social order and hierarchy of the society by highlighting the weakness of others to invoke a sense of pleasure in dominance or mastery. Similarly, Aristotle (*Poetics*, 335 BCE) related humour to ridicule and he states that comic aspects are corrective as they expose folly, pretence or weakness

of morals. To Aristotle, laughter was not just a form of entertainment but it had an ethical aspect, a socially approved medium of criticism that could strengthen the unity of the community. These initial attitudes established the foundations of centuries of philosophical discussion on the subject of humour, with a focus on its relational and evaluative nature.

In the seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes (1651) developed the superiority theory, in his masterpiece, *Leviathan*, and presented laughter as a “sudden glory” which one feels when he/she sees himself or herself as having a comparative advantage over other people. The notion of humour as developed by Hobbes was based on the social relations of interaction and human psychology, which implied that humour is pleasurable based on the perceived differences in status or competence. This interpretation echoed later ideas on social hierarchy and dominance hence drawing out the continued applicability of the superiority concept in explaining why human beings find amusement in the blunders or weaknesses of other people. Although the superiority theory focuses on the external social processes, the relief theory gives attention to the internal psychological mechanisms. In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud (1905) hypothesized that the humour is used to discharge pent up psychic energy and suppressed emotions. Freud believed that jokes and comedy stories help people to address socially forbidden thoughts or feelings in a socially acceptable way hence deliver an emotional catharsis. Laughter, in that, is not just a social signal, but a release valve of unconscious desires and anxieties, and is, in a way, an expression of the multifaceted role of humour in the mental life and well being of a person. At the same time, the incongruity theory, which was formulated by Immanuel Kant (1790) in his *Critique of Judgment* and developed by Arthur Schopenhauer (1819) in *The World as Will and Representation*, postulated that humour is a result of the detection of the presence of an incongruity between expectation and reality. Once a pattern or logical sequence is broken in an unexpected but cognitively understandable manner, it will trigger amusement. This view prefigures the cognitive aspect of humour and emphasises the role of mental processing, pattern recognition and surprise in creating laughter. This theory of incongruity thereby provided the foundation to contemporary cognitive and lingual theories of humour, where the effects of semantic ambiguity, wordplay and unforeseen meaning changes, are examined as the means of comedic effects. These foundational theories have been the basis of the current research over the years, which has contributed to the gap between philosophy, psychology, linguistics, and media studies. Contemporary researchers admit that humour is multifaceted: it is also social, emotional, cognitive and cultural. The superiority, relief, and incongruity paradigms remain analytical prisms that humour may still be studied in various situations, both in everyday life and in the mass media, literature, and in the digital culture. Knowledge of such historical views does not only place the present studies of humour in the context of intellectual tradition but also indicates the timeless nature of classical theories that have been used to explain the reasons behind human laughter and what laughter tells us about the mind and the society.

2.1.2 Modern Linguistic Theories of Humor

The study of humour in modern linguistics has increasingly taken the pragmatic and conversational aspects of humour. One of the core concepts in this direction is the Cooperative

Principle introduced by Grice (1975) who assumes that effective communicative situations rely on the adherence of the speakers to four conversational maxims: quantity (providing the right amount of information), quality (being truthful), relation (staying relevant), and manner (being clear and orderly). The conscious violation of these maxims often results in humour and thus creates unforeseen or incongruent outcomes indicating a sense of mischief. An example is the internet memes, where exaggeration or hyperbole is habitually against the maxim of quality, since captions present unrealistic or exaggerated situations. Similarly, ridiculous and irrelevant or peripheral comments interfere with the maxim of relation, creating a comic effect of shocking the audience with an unexpected connection or lack of connection between picture and text. This kind of pragmatic manipulation proves that humour is not a feature of semantic content but instead it is very directly connected with social cognition, situational considerations and the ability of the audience to perceive possible intended meaning behind literal language.

In continuation of the pragmatics of humour, Victor Raskin (1985) came up with the Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humour (SSTH), which focuses more on the cognition processes behind the understanding of humour. In SSTH, humour is created when a text or utterance can be interpreted in two incompatible scripts, e.g. something that is “serious” and something that is “playful,” and it is the viewer's responsibility to resolve the conflict. This bilateral interaction is especially relevant to the analysis of meme humour, where visual and textual components often create one script and at the same time invert it with another one, creating levels of irony or absurdity. The foregrounding given by Raskin predicts the role of audience inference in humour processing with the view that comprehension requires identification of, and various semantic frameworks.

Following the semantic approach of Raskin, Salvatore Attardo (1994, 2001) developed the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH), a multi-dimensional theory of the analysis of humour in genres, such as jokes, narratives, and, most recently, digital content. Attardo determines six Knowledge Resources (KRs) contributing to the creation of humour: (1) script opposition, the cognitive conflict between anticipated and actual meaning; (2) logical mechanisms, the thinking processes that connect scripts; (3) target, the person, group or concept the humour addresses; (4) situation, the contextual background within which the humour occurs; (5) narrative strategy, the formal and stylistic manner of presenting the humorous content; and (6) language, the lexical, phonological and syntactic means that are used to express the humour. This approach allows scholars to break down the functioning of humour in a systematic way, and it does not only show what makes a joke or meme funny, but also how social, cultural, and linguistic knowledge combine to create amusement.

Besides these background structures, the current literature has examined how digital communication platforms especially social media influence humour in new manners. Memes, GIFs and short-form videos often make use of multi-modal incongruities, combining text, images, and audio to achieve effects which could be in violation of several conversational maxims at the same time. The combination of two scripts of Raskin and Attardo's KRs provides a sound instrument to perform an analysis of such content since humour can be generated by the capacity of the audience to perceive cognitive incongruities, as well as, social commentary

embedded in multimodal forms. As researchers like Shifman (2014) and Miltner (2018) note, meme humour can tap into the existing cultural expertise, political occurrences, and online subcultural conventions, which proves that humour is a linguistic and sociocultural phenomenon. The strict use of these theories sheds light on why digital humour is not just a temporary entertainment; it is a place of negotiating identity, social critique and collective understanding. Therefore, the combination of Gricean pragmatics, Raskin's script-based semantics, and Attardo's GTVH illustrates the complex mechanisms of humour, showing how language, cognition, and context interact to produce amusement. This overlapping of theories demonstrates the importance of the multi-level analysis of the issue of humour in modern times when digital media keep reshaping the way jokes, memes and other humorous phenomena are created, shared and perceived.

2.2 Stylistics and Humor in Language

Stylistics researches how the conscious use of language in choice contributes to the creation of humor. Ambiguity, wordplay, surprising phrasing and breaking of traditional rules of conversation are some of the techniques used to create comic effects through creation of surprise, incongruity, or even playful puns in meaning.

2.2.1 Stylistics as a Discipline

In the most general sense of the term, stylistics is the study of linguistic choices and the influence they have in the context (Wales, 2014). Other theorists like Leech and Short (2007) emphasize the role of the discipline in being a medium of interpreting literary and linguistic analysis by offering methodological means of analyzing creativity of creating texts in ordinary use. The digital turn has resulted in stylistics expanding to include the new media discourse, hence, enabling the consideration of online humor, hashtags, and memes. This shift indicates the growing acknowledgment that even though digital texts are informal and multimedia (and multimodal), they remain patterned, structured and purposefully designed, which makes them reasonable objects of the intensive investigation of linguistic and literary study. Stylistics provides a structure through which the nuanced interaction between form and function can be clarified and how the decisions made in relation to vocabulary, syntax, imagery, and visual arrangement can all add together to create the communicative and aesthetic effect of online content. In the context of internet humor, stylistic methods are used to explain how composers can use language and semiotic means to produce comic effects. Memes, such as those, often use lexical innovation, such as neologisms, loanwords and punning misspellings, to increase relatability and humor. In addition to lexical choices, the stylistics addresses lexical issues like irony, exaggeration, and parallelism, syntactic and rhetorical structures responsible to the structure of the jokes and direct the way the audience should be understood. In addition, multimodal stylistics applies these principles to visual and audio contents where visual and typography and digital editing effects are analyzed in relation to text to create a meaning. Through the combination of traditional literary analysis tools with modern discourse analysis, stylistics would help the researcher decipher the processes of humor in digital settings, and consequently, how online viewers interpret, spread and co-construct meanings through mischievous linguistic ingenuity.

2.2.2 Stylistic Devices in Humor

The creation of humor is regularly based on a substantial variety of stylistic devices which influence its outcome and meaning. Irony and parody are example of this, where humor can be created by bringing out discrepancies between reality and appearance or by duplicating the existing forms with the aim of revealing its absurdity (Simpson, 2003). These devices are usually used to encourage the audience to be aware of the common knowledge or cultural norms, which in turn helps to create a feeling of belonging and entertainment. Hyperbole and understatements, similarly, play around with scale and intensity as they exaggerate or downplay elements of a situation to achieve the effect of causing laughter (Dynel, 2009). These approaches focus on looking at discrepancies between expectation and perception, which hits the cognitive theories of humor, including Script-Based Semantic Theory, that was proposed by Raskin, which predicts the foregrounding of conflicting interpretations. Other instruments such as allusion and intertextuality play on the prior text, cultural artifact, or historical event and make use of the prior text to create humor through recognition and redefinition (Kristeva, 1986; Hutcheon, 2000). Involving the use of already known scripts and re-contextualizing them, humor producers create multi-layered meanings that are rewarding to the audience knowledge. Similarly, code-switching and register shifts are stylistic devices, which create humorous effects through contrasting language norms in one act of communication (Albirini, 2016). Switching of formal and informal register, dialects or languages is a regular occurrence that brings about surprise, highlights the social and cultural processes and makes the humor more accessible and relatable. Memes are an example of how stylistic creativity can be applied in multimodal environments in the digital sphere. Plays with orthography like intentional misspellings like “doge” rendered as “such wow,” make ordinary words a symbol of identity and amusement. Memes Visual-textual contrast Visual-textual juxtapositions, e.g., Drakeposting, take advantage of the dissimilarity between pictures and captions to create ironic or exaggerated significance. Moreover, memes often combine high and low registers, e.g. Shakespearean or formal English to everyday contemporary situations, thus creating incongruity that is linguistic, cultural, and cognitive. These stylistic devices show that humor in the text of the Internet is not accidental, but a carefully designed phenomenon, depending on the interaction of language and elements of visual art and collective cultural knowledge to attain not only entertainment but also interaction.

2.3 Pragmatics and Humor

Pragmatics is preoccupied with the fact that humor develops out of the mismatch between what is said and what is meant in a given contextual scenario. It is concerned with the manipulation of implied meanings, rules of conversation and shared knowledge by speakers to create an effect, like irony, sarcasm, and wit, and witty double entendres which completely rests on the interpretive abilities of the listener, and the listener's interpretation.

2.3.1 Implicature and Presupposition

Memes, and humor in general, are very inferential and dependent on background information. Grice (1975) argues that when applicants are unwilling to respect conversational

maxims, that will create implicature, and the hearers will need to deduce implicit meanings. The meme “This is fine” (a dog in a burning room) assumes that people are already familiar with the metaphor of personal or political crises.

2.3.2 Relevance Theory

Sperber and Wilson (1995) speak that the relevance leads the direction of communication and humor may depend on low but very salient contextual clues. Memes can be used as an example since they condense a joke into one image and one caption, thus requiring viewers to re-learn the cultural context within those images.

2.3.3 Humor and Politeness

Politeness is also overlapped with humor. The politeness theory by Brown and Levinson’s (1987) explains how humor may help to tone down face threatening behavior or increase social criticism. An illustration of such a balance is the political memes of laughing at political leaders like Donald Trump or Boris Johnson and the feeling of unity with the group.

2.4 Multimodality and Meme Analysis

Multimodality is the study of the creation of meaning by memes by using a combination of a number of different modes such as image, text, and layout. The way to deconstruct a meme is to consider the combination of its visual and written captions, both of which often combine to create humor or criticism out of juxtaposition and familiar cultural references.

2.4.1 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

The memes are not strictly speaking linguistic texts. Compositional strategy, salience, and framing are the aspects of meaning in visual communication, as Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) state. Memes combine visual grammar and linguistic humor, creating multiple meanings of the memes (that are not confined to one medium or another).

2.4.2 Memes as Digital Folklore

Shifman (2014) conceptualizes memes as cultural units and takes part in spreading, mutating, and adapting and thus creating a part of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006). Remixing brings about humor, which is co-created by communities. The meme of the Distracted Boyfriend, in its turn, has been translated into different languages and cultures, with each version also demonstrating localized humor, though the essence of the story remains the same.

2.4.3 Pragmatic Multimodality

In recent research (Forceville, 2009; Bateman, 2014), it has been highlighted that multimodal texts are based on inferential reasoning. The memes are a product of this need since they present audiences with the need to combine textual information, images, and common contexts to achieve the intended humor.

2.5 Studies on Humor in Memes

A growing body of research focuses specifically on memes:

- Dynel (2016) analyzed memes as humorous digital discourse, highlighting irony and multimodality.
- Milner (2016) described memes as forms of participatory media and political satire.
- Bulatovic (2019) studied Serbian memes, showing how cultural identity is constructed through humorous multimodality.
- Al-Azzawi (2020) examined English borrowings in Iraqi Arabic memes, noting code-switching as a stylistic device.
- Ross and Rivers (2017) explored political memes in the U.S., arguing they serve as both satire and civic engagement.
- Huntington (2020) analyzed meme humor during COVID-19, showing how humor mitigated collective anxiety.

These papers show that there is an increase in the acceptance of memes as an object of serious linguistic and cultural analysis, although most of them do not provide a synthesis of the stylistic–pragmatic–multimodal perspective, which this study attempts to offer.

3. Methodology

Methodology is the syntactic, theoretical study of the procedures and guidelines used in a subject of study. It provides the "how" of research and describes the procedures, techniques and logic to be followed in gathering and interpreting data. Proper methodology will make the process transparent, replicable and suitable to address the research questions hence determining the validity and reliability of the results.

3.1 Research Design

The research design of the current study is a qualitative descriptive research that involves a discourse analysis, instead of a statistical generalization. This design would work best due to the context-specific nature of humor in memes, which is culturally determined and multi-modal and which cannot be measured with a quantitative approach. Rather, the qualitative analysis enables the researcher to explore the interaction between stylistic devices, pragmatic strategies, and multimodal resources in particular memes to create humor. This design is based

on the previous research in the field of humor and online discussions, including Dynel (2016) and Shifman (2014), who highlighted the necessity of close and context-specific analysis of online humorous texts.

3.2 Corpus Selection

The corpus is comprised of 150 memes gathered on three significant platforms Twitter, Instagram, and Reddit during the period of January 2022 and December 2024. The choice of these platforms was due to the fact that they are amongst the most productive and circulating sites of memes, and their participation cultures are unique. The purposive sampling was employed to select the memes where there was a variety of topics, styles, and cultural references.

The selection criteria included the following:

1. Memes had to be humor-oriented, explicitly constructed to elicit laughter or amusement.
2. Memes had to contain both textual and visual elements, allowing for multimodal analysis.
3. Memes had to reflect social, cultural, or political issues, such as references to global figures (e.g., Donald Trump, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Elon Musk, Taylor Swift) or events (e.g., COVID-19, climate change, wars, and elections).
4. Memes had to achieve a minimum level of visibility and circulation, measured by shares, likes, or reposts, indicating that they resonated with online audiences.

This method made the corpus representative of the modern meme humor and rich enough to be analyzed stylistically and pragmatically. The selected memes were categorized thematically into three broad groups:

- Political Memes, including satire of leaders, elections, and international conflicts.
- Pop Culture Memes, referencing celebrities, movies, music, and entertainment.
- Everyday Humor Memes, addressing daily struggles, relationships, technology, and lifestyle.

This thematic differentiation enabled the researcher to make comparisons about the variations of stylistic, pragmatic, and multimodal strategies in different situations. As an illustration, political memes typically have to resort to irony and parody to criticize power, whilst pop culture memes typically must resort to intertextuality and exaggeration. Compared to everyday memes, which are more likely to take advantage of situations that people can relate to, any everyday meme is more likely to pig on them with understatement and absurdity.

4. Analytical Framework

A stylistic and pragmatic analysis is an analytical structure in which the linguistic form is combined with the linguistic meaning in context. It studies both the textual aspects of a

communication (word choice, structure, and sound patterns, etc.) and their roles in a given social interaction, to generate effects such as humor, persuasion or irony for a specific audience.

4.1 Stylistic Analysis

The stylistic aspect of the analysis is based on the linguistic feature that brings humor. Based on Leech and Short (2007) and Simpson (2003), stylistic analysis involved the use of irony, hyperbole, parody, intertextuality, code-switching, and orthographic play. As a case in point, memes intentionally misspelling words (“doggo,” “boi,” “smol”) were evaluated as an example of orthographic deviation, whereas those that rephrased Shakespearean lines to be comic were evaluated as a stylistic parody. It is this level of analysis that places emphasis on the fact that linguistic creativity has humor within it.

4.2 Pragmatic Analysis

The pragmatic dimension used Grice’s Cooperative Principle (1975) and Attardo’s General Theory of Verbal Humor (2001). The memes were discussed based on the manner in which they violated the rules of conversation and were dependent on implicature, presupposition, and script opposition. An example would be a meme of a politician saying, “Trust me”, and a clown picture, which breaks the maxim of what is true, thus creating humor when people do not believe. On the same note, Attardo’s framework was used to determine script opposition (e.g., “serious vs. absurd” or “success vs. failure”) to be a key feature of meme humor.

4.3 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

The multimodal aspect was based on Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) Grammar of Visual Design and Forceville (2009). Items like colour, framing, direction of gaze, salience, were observed in relation to textual captions. Components of the multimodal ensemble that mediate meaning were approached as emojis, hashtags, and layout. As an example, the semiotic intensifier of using the fire emoji (🔥) to either overemphasize praise or catastrophe in a meme was examined.

The combination of the three dimensions in the analytical framework allowed studying memes as a hybrid communicative act, meaning that the combination of linguistic, pragmatic, and visual resources results in humour.

5. Data Collection Procedures

Memes were acquired by manual means by searching platforms and tracking the hashtag (#meme, #politicalmemes, #relatable, #dankmemes). Screen shots were stored and indexed using metadata, such as platform, date, topic, and statistics of engagement. Caution was observed to incorporate memes of international and local features, especially Arabic-English code switching of memes of Middle East. This process has provided cultural diversity in the dataset.

In order to maintain ethical standards, usernames and identifiable data of meme contributors was anonymised unless the memes were already a part of publicly, widely shared discourse.

6. Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis proceeded in three steps:

1. Descriptive Analysis: Each meme was described in terms of its visual and textual composition.
2. Stylistic-Pragmatic Analysis: Humor was analyzed according to stylistic devices (e.g., irony, parody) and pragmatic mechanisms (e.g., implicature, script opposition).
3. Multimodal Analysis: Visual and semiotic elements were examined using Kress and van Leeuwen's framework, focusing on how images, emojis, and layout interacted with text.

The information was coded and thematically sorted which made it possible to cross-compare the political, pop-culture and everyday memes. Results were then generalised to determine common trends of humour throughout the corpus.

6.1 Stylistic Devices in Memes



The figures suggest that the stylistic device that is the most used in memes is irony (28%). This is an indication of a cultural bias towards indirect humour, in which the meaning intended is the opposite of the literal meaning. In the case of academic struggles, we can give an example whereby memes tend to dramatize situations sarcastically, giving them an appearance of being more disastrous than they are.

The issue of parody (24%) also becomes an important stylistic device, especially choosing the template of especially popular memes like the one known as the "Distracted Boyfriend" or the "Drakeposting." This observation fits with the fact that memes are intertextual cultural artefacts that derive humour in the work of identifying the template and its new environment (Shifman, 2014).

The most frequent (16.6%) is hyperbole providing dramatisation of the most usual frustrations, particularly, the emojis of 🧠 or 😭 that make the exaggeration more dramatic.







Evidence of creative manipulation of language is found in the orthographic deviation (19.3%), and code-switching (12%). Deliberate misspellings ("u mad bro????") imply that it is informal and only a part of a subculture, whereas code switching to Arabic-English ("Ana broke my phone wallah 😂") is evidence of the local innovation in meme humour. Combined, these devices demonstrate how the stylistics create humour that is social and playful.

Table 1: Frequency of Stylistic Devices in Memes

Stylistic Device	Example Meme Caption/Text	Frequency (n=150)	Percentage (%)
Irony	"When you say <i>just five more minutes</i> and it's 3 AM"	42	28%
Parody	Meme template of "Distracted Boyfriend" applied to politics	36	24%
Hyperbole	"This exam will literally kill me 	25	16.6%
Code-switching	"Ana broke my phone wallah 	18	12%
Orthographic deviation	"u mad bro???"	29	19.3%

6.2 Pragmatic Strategies in Meme Humor

Meme humor involves pragmatic strategies that are used to produce humor.

The most commonly violated maxim is Manner (32%), by being chaotic, having excessive emojis, and haphazard formatting. It is an expression of the digital affordances of memes, in which clutter itself is a stylistic strategy that is amusing. The example is a meme, which constantly shows LOL LOL LOL (""), overmocks the situation and the culture of online exaggeration altogether.

Quality (27.3%) is breached when memes say things that are not true and say them sarcastically, like saying that the COVID is over, relying on dubious sources. It is due to such memes that misinformation is criticized, and the memes are also entertaining.



Quantity (22per cent) (22%) humour is caused by under-sharing or over-sharing information. One sentence, Finished my 4000 -word paper... title page finished  ("Finished my 4000-word essay... title page done "), suggests procrastination, but does not directly mention it. Lastly, memes do not respect Relation (18.6%), in which the response given is irrelevant or absurd. An example is a romantic question that was answered with a pizza answer yesterday ("I had pizza yesterday") and it is funny because it violated relevance in a conversation. The findings assert that humor flourishes on the breaches of cooperative communication as Attardo (2001) argues.

Table 2: Flouting of Gricean Maxims in Memes

Maxim Flouted	Example	Frequency	Percentage
Quantity	"Finished my 4000-word essay... title page done ✓"	33	22%
Quality	"COVID is over, my uncle said so on Facebook"	41	27.3%
Relation	Q: Do you love me? A: I had pizza yesterday	28	18.6%
Manner	Overloaded emojis and chaotic text formatting	48	32%

Implicatures expose the indirect communication of meaning by memes. The Musk-Thanos meme compares the business purchases of the tech billionaire to a conquest of space and time, a move of greed and unrestricted ambition. This is a disguised political criticism in the form of humor.

The "Online classes = Netflix + Zoom minimization" meme ("Online classes = Netflix + Zoom minimization") is a meme that creatively points out the propensity of students to multitask and implies that students are disengaged in evaluating educational practices in the context of COVID-19.

The gas price meme, with skull emoji (💀), blows economic suffering out of proportion, to the extent of "death." Despite the hyperbole, it is echoing real money worries and making mass frustration comical. Implicatures can therefore be seen as shared cultural codes, where humour only works when the viewer realizes that it contains an underlying reference.

Table 3: Implicature in Memes

Meme Example	Implicature	Function
"Elon Musk buying Twitter be like [Thanos collecting stones]"	Musk is power-hungry and seeks control	Political critique
"Online classes = Netflix + Zoom minimization"	Students are disengaged from online learning	Social commentary
"Gas prices in 2023 💀"	Life is financially unbearable	Hyperbolic complaint

6.3 Multimodal Features in Meme Humor

A very important element in humour is the visual meme templates. The most popular format is the Drakeposting format (18 1/2) (18%) where users can accept or reject actions in opposing panels. It is based upon juxtaposition and is commonly used with politics, fashion, or technology.

The “Distracted Boyfriend” (14) (14%) template is popular as a template in parodying changing allegiances particularly in the political arena where the term boyfriend is a symbol of a politician crossing the floor.

The Wojak/Feels Guy (12.6- 15.3) (12.6%) and SpongeBob mocking text (15.3) (15.3%) are examples of emotional and sarcastic humour respectively. The two resonate well with younger internet users, who treasure ironic detachment. Remarkably, 40 percent of memes are created in the emerging and custom-edited formats (40%). This goes to show how the meme culture is dynamic as novelty and adaptation maintain the humour.

Table 4: Visual Templates Used in Memes

Template Name	Example Context	Frequency	Percentage
Distracted Boyfriend	Applied to political alliances	21	14%
Drakeposting	Approving/disapproving political actions	27	18%
Wojak/Feels Guy	Expressing existential crises	19	12.6%
SpongeBob Mocking Text	Used in sarcastic tones	23	15.3%
Others (Custom edits)	New viral formats	60	40%

The use of emojis illustrates the amplification of humour by use of non-verbal symbols. The most widespread is the 😄 emoji (30 in percentage) (30%), which is the emblem of mutual fun. Even its overuse is comic, ridiculing the culture of over-reaction. The SK skull emoji (25.3) (💀, 25.3%) dramatises the negative experience, makes it a dark humour. In the case of students, they use it to refer to exams or increasing gas prices and make hardships seem symbolic, as “death.” The klubn clown emoji (14.6 %) (🤡, 14.6%) is an emoji that is used to ridicule foolish conduct usually used on politicians or influencers. The crying emoji (20 9) (😭, 20%) makes sadness ironic and the flame emoji (10 9) (🔥, 10%) makes chaotic situations ironic, e.g. Everything on fire 🔥 but we are okay (“Everything’s on fire 🔥 but we’re fine.”). Emojis therefore serve as visual boosters to humour which extends beyond text, and in many cases, is coded with a cultural meaning.

Table 5: Emoji Usage in Memes

Emoji	Function in Humor	Frequency	Percentage
😂 (Face with Tears)	Exaggerating laughter	45	30%
💀 (Skull)	Hyperbolic death = extreme reaction	38	25.3%
🤡 (Clown)	Mocking foolishness	22	14.6%
🔥 (Fire)	Irony/critique of chaos	15	10%
😭 (Crying)	Exaggerated sadness	30	20%

6.4 Cross-Cultural Meme Humor

The stylistic playfulness that is evident in code-switching in memes is localized. The former is a mixture of English and Arabic (“wallah”), which is another way to strengthen authenticity and local identity. This kind of humour is much appreciated by the Middle Eastern viewers but outsiders who do not share the same cultural-linguistic background may find it very offensive. The second one is humorous, making the opposition between the command (mother) and pleasure (Netflix) with references to Arabic “habibi” and English. The impact is comic tension that is common with bilingual users. The third critique attacks politics as elections are termed in Arabic as “ya3ni joke,” a combination of Arabic phrase and English to stress corruption or uselessness. This demonstrates that memes are serving as a means of political resistance with humour covering more frustrations.

Table 6: Examples of Code-Switching in Memes

Meme Caption	Language Blend	Stylistic Effect
“Ana broke my phone wallah 😂”	Arabic-English	Casual realism, local humor
“Mama said study, but Netflix said habibi chill”	English-Arabic	Comic tension between duty and leisure
“Election results ya3ni joke”	English-Arabic	Political satire

7. Discussion

The results of the present research prove that memes are not mere jokes on the internet but multimodal complex texts, the intersection of stylistic creativity, pragmatics, and culture to produce humour. According to the stylistic criterion, the most typical device employed in the sampled memes were irony (28%) and parody (24%). This corresponds to the General Theory of Verbal Humour (2001) by Attardo which focuses on the central processes of humour, namely incongruity and opposition. The memes survive on contradictions—between appearance and

reality, anticipation and delivery, or cultural conventions and any deviation. The high frequency of irony is an indicator of a digital culture in which humour is commonly played out by the means of detachment and sarcasm, similar to the fact that online humour is largely dependent on implicit meaning, just as Dynel (2016) argues. Parody, in its turn, plays on the basis of intertextual recognition, which confirms the fact that memes are “remixed cultural units” as demonstrated by Shifman (2014). The fact that the meme templates are reused in a rather playful way shows that communities reuse familiar visuals but give them new meanings.

Pragmatically, the analysis has shown that humour is commonly generated by violation of Gricean maxims, especially the manner and quality. The most common violation of the maxim of manner (32 per cent) (32%) was repeated frequently with deliberate application of jumbled visuals, haphazard repetition of emojis, and overstated formatting. This is indicative of the affordance of digital platforms, in which surplus itself has become a comical approach. Also, the maxim of quality was violated extensively (27.3 per cent) (27.3%), since memes tend to be based on intentional falsehoods, sarcasm, or exaggerated statements. The outcomes of these findings highlight the framework proposed by Grice (1975) in addition to demonstrating its imaginative re-use in digital environments: instead of focusing on collaborative communication, the memes intentionally disrupt it to get people to laugh. Implicature in meme humour was also brought out as very important in the study. An example of meaning implication, as opposed to meaning proclamation, is the combination of memes that equate the Elon Musk to Thanos or that the gas price is “death” itself using skull emojis (☠️). This supports Sperber and Wilson’s Relevance Theory (1995) which asserts that humour can be dependent on the audiences capacity to deduce unstated meanings. The humour would fail without mutual knowledge of the culture. In this regard, memes rely on the so-called “common ground of irony” that Gibbs (2012) defines as the ability of communities to decode and value humour founded on shared understanding.

Multimodal analysis showed that humour cannot be separated with visual affordances of memes. The most used templates such as Drakeposting or Distracted Boyfriend take up more than 30 per cent of memes analysed, revealing that recognition of format is core to meme literacy. The emojis, in particular, 😂 and ☠️, serve as abbreviations of exaggerated emotional expression, and it proves that non-verbal digital icons have become their own language of humour. This is in line with the multimodal discourse theory as postulated by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), which states that meaning cannot be limited to words but is created during the interaction between various semiotic resources. Memes are an example of this interaction: the combination of text, image, typography, and emoji creates humour, and ineffective in the case that it was simplified into one mode.

Lastly, code-switching memes also highlight the local adaptation of humour around the world. An example of Arabic-English blends, e.g. where the user uses the term “wallah” in the context of breaking their phone, is an example of bilingual speakers applying their own cultural identity to meme humour. These conclusions are in line with Albirini (2016), who highlights the importance of code-switching in identity performance. By mixing Arabic and English together, the meme creators not only enhance the degree of humour but also reinforce in-group cohesion

within bilingual users and, at the same time, indicate the cultural specificity in the global meme environments.

Conclusion

This paper aimed at exploring the stylistics of internet memes humour using a pragmatic and multimodal approach. The results substantiate the idea that memes are fertile areas of linguistic and cultural creativity since stylistic (irony, parody, deviation), pragmatic (maxim flouting, implicature), and multimodal (templates, emojis, hashtags) converge to generate humour. Memes are not random jokes, instead they are digital folklore that spreads social commentary, political criticism and cultural identification playfully, but in highly effective ways.

It was found out that meme humour is dominated by irony and parody, whereas violating the maxim of manner and quality gives fertile soil to pragmatic play. The implicature became an important process, demonstrating that meme humour relies on the shared background knowledge and cultural literacy. Multimodality, e.g. templates and emojis enhances humour, featuring visual and symbolic shorthand that the audience perceives instantly. Moreover, code-switching memes exhibit the process of localising global formats, which proves the flexibility of memes to the context of particular language and culture.

To sum up, memes are among the most significant genres of humour of the digital era that combine the stylistics, pragmatics, and multimodality in the forms that are reflective of the modern patterns of communication. They do not just reflect the society but also serve as instruments of entertainment, worries, frustrations, and political satire through humour. The paper is important to the study of stylistics and discourse analysis as it provides a methodological approach to studying memes as cultural texts. Future research could expand the corpus across more languages and platforms or examine psychological response to memes and enhance the insight into the digital humour globally.

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