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Linguistic and Pragmatic Mechanisms of Humour in Written English Jokes

Ibrahim Thaher

University of Hail

Abstract: The study examines how English speakers use specific language to make jokes humorous through a pragmatic lens. The study employs a qualitative, corpus-based approach to analyze written jokes. The study collects these English jokes only from Facebook. This paper uses Attardo and Raskin's (1991) General Theory of Verbal Humour. It argues that English jokes often make us laugh by setting up an expectation and then breaking it with wordplay or changing the meaning. The findings show that wordplay and odd contrasts are key parts of written English jokes. Cultural references and social stereotypes may also make them funnier. The study finds that written jokes offer useful data to explore how language form, meaning, and humour connect. This study analyses jokes through five major linguistic categories: puns and lexical ambiguity; incongruity and script opposition; register shift and stylistic contrasts; and syntactic ambiguity. The study shows that puns and lexical ambiguity play a significant role among these five mechanisms.

Keywords: English jokes, humour, pragmatics, incongruity, puns, implicature

INTRODUCTION

Humour plays a significant role in everyday talk, and jokes are one of the most popular and well-known ways people use it. Humour may seem natural and casual, but it depends on the language used, the society, the interactants' culture, and how we acknowledge things. A joke works by leading the addressee to understand it one way, then revealing a different, surprising meaning. This way of understanding jokes can be explained through linguistic devices like polysemy, register shift, homophony, and syntactic ambiguity, as well as pragmatic mechanisms such as irony, presupposition, and implicature.

Earlier research shows that jokes can be methodically analysed as spoken texts. According to Raskin's (1985) Theory of Humour, a text is humorous if it conforms to two semantically opposing scripts. Attardo and Raskin (1991) extended this approach in the General Theory of Verbal Humour, identifying other resources involved in joke formation, including situation, narrative strategy, logical mechanism, target, and language.

This study examines English jokes taken from Facebook rather than interview-based or spoken conversational humour. Written jokes are suitable for linguistic studies and analysis because their wording is fixed in written resources and can be investigated repeatedly. They also give the researcher ample space to examine the pragmatic features of humour and to analyse the lexical and grammatical features of written jokes. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What linguistic devices create humour in written English jokes?

2. How do pragmatic mechanisms contribute to the interpretation of written English jokes?
3. What patterns of incongruity and script opposition can be identified in the data?

This study includes five sections. The literature review in Section 2 presents various studies that addressed humour and jokes from different perspectives. The methodology addressed in Section 3 clarifies the data and the data collection. Section 4 focuses on the analysis of jokes gathered from Facebook. Section 5 connects the results to the study's focus on humour theory and summarises the findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Humour and Jokes

Humour includes laughter, irony, satire, amusement, parody, and playfulness. A joke is a specific type of humour. In general, jokes are words society chooses that usually carry implicit meaning and are understood by people within the same culture. People like joking, and they tell jokes to laugh. Dynel (2009, p.1284) claims that "a joke is commonly considered the prototypical form of verbal humour". In a similar context, Hetzron (1991, p.65-66) states that a joke is:

> *a short, humorous piece of oral literature in which the funniness culminates in the final sentence, called the punchline… In fact, the main condition is that the tension should reach its highest level at the very end…as for its being "oral," it is true that jokes may appear printed, but when further transferred, there is no obligation to reproduce the text verbatim, as in the case of poetry*

Hence, a joke is basically short and designed to present an unexpected move in people's communication. Various jokes include a setup that forms an expectation, which is then disrupted. Traditionally, studies on humour relate it to tension relief, social play, and psychological roles. Martin (2007, p.37) relates humour to social play, tension relief and psychological function in that he claims that:

> *As humans developed greater cognitive and linguistic abilities, complex patterns of group interaction, and the ability to infer the intentions and mental states of others, humour and laughter, while originating in rough-and-tumble social play, came to be used for additional purposes relating to social communication and influence, tension relief, and coping with adversity. The psychological functions of humour can be classified into three broad categories: (1) cognitive and social benefits of tf ; positive emotion of mirth, (2) uses of humor for social communication and influence, and (3) tension relief and coping*

Here, we find that jokes are not humorous simply because they include unfamiliar words or specific situations. People's humour relies on the hearer's ability to understand the text. A joke may use a word or phrase with two meanings, a sentence with two structures, or a situation perceived in an unexpected, new manner. This highlights the role of jokes and makes it a creative area for analysing their semantic and pragmatic aspects.

Salayeva et al. (2024) investigate the linguistic and stylistic aspects of joke-based humour in English society and clarify key aspects of discourse connected to everyday, playful, and personal communication. English speakers use many morphological features influenced by phrasal verbs, which make joke texts more colloquial; neologisms are also noted, serving to surprise or impress the audience with an unusual word in the punchline. Statistical analysis of syntactic structures shows that simple sentences are the most common in jokes.

Lutfi (2016) examines English jokes from a semantic-pragmatic perspective. This research studies English jokes from cognitive and humour perspectives and traces their unfolding meaning within a cognitive-semantic and pragmatic framework grounded in humour, creativity, and wit. Lutfi (2016) concludes that humour is built on violating or reversing expectations, such as an unexpected punchline. English jokes illustrate how deviations from expected outcomes generate amusement, such as a soldier throwing a dog instead of a person. In addition, this study shows that issues like ambiguity and semantic profiling are essential to joke construction, as many jokes involve mismatches in speech acts, violations of conversational maxims, or faulty reasoning, all of which contribute to humour.

Modiry Rad's (2022) study of English joke structures and humour from a socio-discourse perspective sheds light on how jokes are used on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. This study illustrates that humour relies on mental flexibility, shared knowledge, and the ability to suspend disbelief. Additionally, addressees interpret jokes through inferential activities, drawing on contextual information and implicatures to understand humour. This study also highlights that Jokes usually reflect cultural issues, political discourse, and social norms, and that humour facilitates social bonding, expedites interaction, and can criticise or satirise authority. Finally, this study shows that jokes usually defy logical and moral expectations, providing a means for social commentary and cultural critique.

From another angle, Setiawan's (2025) study investigates 80 erotic jokes since she first made content about it, based on an analysis of 80 erotic jokes found in the data source. The study linguistically classifies metaphors, slang, polysemies, homophones, metonymies, homonyms, and sound changes. The study is expected to inform future research on humour and pragmatics. The study indicates creative wordplay on humorous topics using surprise, metaphors, and multiple meanings. It also highlights the role of context and pragmatic principles in humour comprehension.

Jaroenkitboworn's (2020) study examines the use of English jokes on Facebook to promote linguistic and humour competence, exploring the mechanisms, types, and pedagogical applications for enhancing EFL learners' joke competence. This study relies on data collected from Facebook, a well-known platform for sharing English jokes, with responses indicated by emoticons like laughter. Jaroenkitboworn (2020) examined over 200 posts, with 74 jokes selected based on response criteria and playful content within a specific timeframe. The study classified jokes by structure and analysed the logical mechanisms that promote humour, using frameworks like GTVH. The study findings show that most jokes are mixed-code messages, highlighting verbal and visual interactions. Additionally, humour mechanisms usually involve puns, faulty reasoning, false analogies, and satire to create

playful incongruity and laughter. Puns range from simple homonymy to more complex sound similarities and often appear as punchlines or in multi-mechanism jokes.

In general, the studies alluded to above investigated jokes from various angles. Jaroenkitboworn's (2020) study explores humour found on social media, such as Facebook jokes, and in educational content. It examines slang by analysing language figures such as puns and false analogies, identifies themes, and reviews how it functions. Meanwhile, Setiawan's (2025) study investigates jokes within the slang context of erotic jokes elicited from social media, specifically Instagram. It examines jokes from lexical categories and applies Cooperative Gricean maxims. Modiry Rad (2022) views jokes through social discourse and relevance theory, arguing that a person needs context to interpret them. It does not provide readers with the linguistic features needed to study jokes in written texts. Lutfi (2016) connects two linguistic fields, semantics and pragmatics, and predates much social-media humour, but it does not apply GTVH systematically. Salayeva et al. (2024) highlight linguistic and stylistic classification and description rather than addressing jokes through a pragmatic approach to interpretation; however, they focus on stylistic features. Finally, Martin (2007) analyses jokes from the perspective of psychological theory of humour. It does not address jokes through a text-based analysis of linguistic-pragmatic features elicited from written jokes.

In brief, previous studies have investigated various linguistic features and shed light on different pragmatic interpretations of humour; however, few have used these features to examine written jokes in English. In this context, more research is needed on how linguistic features activate pragmatic reinterpretation and how such reinterpretations generate patterns like text opposition and incongruity. This study investigates this gap by examining the humour mechanisms of linguistic and pragmatic features in written English jokes through the lens of the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH).

Script Opposition and Verbal Humour

Raskin's (1985) Theory of Humour is one of the leading theories that inspire linguistic theories of humour and jokes. According to Raskin's (1985, p.99) theory, any text can be humorous because it overlaps with two main scripts, and humour arises when these scripts conflict. Hence, a script is a well-organised form of knowledge connected to a word, a specific situation, or the kind of event. For example, a joke could start with a script tied to a common social scene, like seeing an old friend or a chat between a doctor and a patient. The punchline presents another script that conflicts with the first, such as criminality, death, or professional incompetence. The reader is expected to revise their interpretation, and this shift can generate humour. Raskin's (1985, p.113) model identifies major kinds of script opposition, including possible versus impossible, actual versus non-actual, and normal versus abnormal. Such oppositions help clarify why jokes represent issues such as absurdity, exaggeration, taboo, or unexpected role reversal.

The General Theory of Verbal Humour

Attardo and Raskin (1991, p.297) modified the General Theory of Verbal Humour (henceforth GTVH) by expanding Raskin's (1985) earlier theory. The theory adds five further knowledge resources: a logical mechanism that explains how the joke presents the incongruity and

resolves it. Situation, which represents the setting or the place where the joke is communicated; target, which refers to the addressee or any individual or people being mocked and laughed at; narrative strategy, which represents the way the joke is represented, such as a question-and-answer frame or short communicative talk; and language, which represents the choice of the joke's expressions and wording or any representation of phonological and syntactic features in the joke.

This framework helps this study because it presents analysis at various levels. A joke could include a pun at the language level while also holding a script opposition at the semantic level. For instance, a joke built on the term *interest* may exploit its emotional and financial meanings, while the broader humour may arise from the contrast between professional success and personal failure.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study is qualitative and uses a corpus-based research design. The primary data comprise English jokes gathered from Facebook. The study explains and interprets language patterns rather than analysing numbers or testing hypotheses. This study is corpus-based because the jokes can be compared and coded, and they form a structured collection of texts.

The study does not employ questionnaires or interviews. This decision is suitable because the study focuses on examining the linguistic construction of English jokes, not on testing addressees' or readers' reactions. Written jokes are helpful to individuals interested in English culture because they provide stable evidence and text that can be analysed in depth.

The data comprise 25 written English jokes gathered from Facebook only. Facebook was selected as the main data collection tool because it contains a wide range of accessible written English jokes for diverse humour groups and the general public. This study used purposive sampling and gathered humorous written jokes relevant to the study's core and the pragmatic mechanism of humour employed. Incomplete English and duplicable jokes, as well as non-English jokes, were discarded. Because the data were accessible to a wide range of people, individual consent was not needed.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This section analyses 25 written English jokes collected for the study. The analysis qualitatively explored the jokes to identify the linguistic and pragmatic mechanisms that create humour. The analysis is organised around the main humour mechanisms identified in the data: puns and lexical ambiguity; syntactic ambiguity; incongruity and script opposition; irony and pragmatic inference; and register shift.

The analysis demonstrates that humour in written English jokes rarely relies on a single feature. Generally, a joke includes a word-level pun while also emphasising a broader contrast between two contexts, situations, or interpretations. Raskin’s (1985, p.99) Script-based Semantic Theory of Humour explains that jokes rely on two conflicting semantic scripts. Attardo and Raskin’s (1991) General Theory of Verbal Humour supports this view,

seeing logic, situation, language, and storytelling as connected tools. Below is a list of humour mechanisms and an analysis of jokes.

Puns and Lexical Ambiguity

Puns are one of the well-known mechanisms in language. According to Simpson and Weiner (1989), puns depend on two fundamental principles:

1. The use of a word that suggests two or more meanings or associations.
2. The use of two or more words that sound similar but have different meanings, creating a humorous effect (Simpson and Weiner, 1989, p. 1393).

A pun occurs when a word or phrase supports two interpretations because it has multiple meanings or because it resembles the sound of another word. This creates a temporary interpretive conflict that the reader resolves once they recognise the secondary meaning.

Joke 1

I used to work in a shoe-recycling factory, and it was sole-destroying.

This humour relies on the near-homophony between "sole-destroying" and "soul-destroying." The term "soul-destroying" typically describes work that is extremely boring or depressing. However, since the speaker worked with shoes, "sole" refers to the bottom part of a shoe.

The pun is working here because both meanings are relevant. The reader interprets the joke as a complaint about work, then acknowledges the shoe-related meaning. This sudden reinterpretation creates incongruity, a central feature of verbal humour.

Joke 2

I told my suitcase there would be no holiday this year. Now I am dealing with emotional baggage.

The key phrase is *emotional baggage*. Idiomatically, it refers to unresolved personal problems or experiences. In travel, *baggage* refers to luggage. The joke combines these meanings by giving the suitcase human feelings.

The setup introduces a travel scenario in which a person talks to a suitcase about a cancelled holiday. The punchline then brings in a psychological element through the idiom "emotional baggage." The humour comes from the contrast between the literal object, the suitcase, and the phrase's abstract emotional meaning.

Joke 3

The banker gave up his job because he lost interest.

The noun *interest* has two related but distinct meanings. In finance, it refers to money charged on a loan or paid on savings. In everyday language, it refers to attention,

curiosity, or enthusiasm. The joke first makes it seem like the banker got tired of his work, but the work setting brings in the financial meaning.

The joke is effective because both meanings of "interest" fit a banking context. The reader shifts from the broader meaning of "interest" to the specific financial interpretation, creating a moment of reinterpretation. This example illustrates polysemy, which is when a single word has multiple related meanings.

Joke 4

I'm reading a book about anti-gravity. It is impossible to put down.

The phrase *put down* is ambiguous. In relation to a book, it means to stop reading it. For a physical object affected by anti-gravity, it means placing it on a surface. The joke presents an impossible situation: because the book is about anti-gravity, you cannot physically put it down.

The humour relies on the actual communication between the phrasal verb's literal and intended meanings. At first, the reader acknowledges "*put down*" in its conventional reading-related meaning; then they reinterpret it literally in relation to gravity. This creates a contrast between a normal reading experience and an absurd physical situation.

Joke 5

I used to be a mathematician, but I had too many problems.

The word *problems* have two meanings. In mathematics, problems are exercises or questions to be solved. In everyday life, problems are difficulties or troubles. The joke creates humour by letting both meanings apply at once.

The speaker in this joke started it by presenting himself as a mathematician, someone who is a professional. However, the joke ends with the speaker having 'too many problems', and this represents that the speaker has many personal difficulties. So, the connection between the term 'problem' and mathematician can be understood in the context of mathematics and is linked to mathematical exercises. Therefore, the humour arises from lexical ambiguity in the joke rather than a sudden change in meaning; it arises from an unexpected event represented in the joke.

Joke 6

I bought some shoes from a drug dealer. I do not know what he laced them with, but I was tripping all day.

This joke depends on two vague words: *laced* and *tripping*. In shoes, *laced* means shoe laces, whereas *tripping* could mean stumbling. In drugs, people use laced to mean that someone has added a substance to something, while tripping describes the experience of a drug's effects.

The joke deliberately places an ordinary shoe term in a criminal, drug-related context. Initially, the reader makes sense of the items through the shoe script. The humour here comes from this sudden move between two incompatible frames.

Jokes 7

Why is ‘Dark ‘spelled with a k, and not a C? Because you can’t see in the dark.

This joke uses a homophone-based **pun.** The humour comes from the fact that the letter "**C**" and the verb "see" sound the same and are pronounced /siː/.

The supposed meaning of this joke is literal as follows:

No one can see anything in the dark. However, the joke additionally generates another reading:

Someone cannot **C** in the dark.

In this situation, "**C**" stands for the letter, as it would replace "**K**" in the word *dark*. Because "C" sounds identical to "see," the sentence probably means:

1. A person cannot see in darkness.
2. A person cannot replace the letter **C** with "see" in the word *dark*.

Joke 8

Why did the scarecrow win an award? Because he was outstanding in his field.

This sentence suggests that being outstanding means being amazing or very good at something, but scarecrows are often standing out in a field, and that play on words is the core of puns. We can also say that this joke is corny or cheesy, which means cliché or outdated, or so stupid that it is funny.

Joke 9

What do you call a small mum? Minimum.

This joke plays on words and the similarity between mini and small. It is a lexical pun based on polysemy. However, one might say, what do we call the big mum? The maximum. Or what do you call a small wife? Microwife. The receiver may accept this extension of similar ideas, as it is playful and carries a sense of humour. However, the wordplay in "big mum" for maximum and "small wife" for microwife carries a double meaning: it's funny and humorous, but it also degrades the image of the female character.

Syntactic Ambiguity

Some jokes depend not on individual words but on a sentence's grammatical structure. Syntactic ambiguity occurs when one sentence can be interpreted in more than one way because of its grammatical organisation.

Joke 10

"I saw the man with the telescope."

This joke carries ambiguity. It has two interpretations:

1. **Interpretation 1:** *I used a telescope to see the man.* The phrase "with the telescope" modifies the verb saw.
2. **Interpretation 2: I saw a man carrying a telescope.** Here, *with the telescope* modifies the noun **man**.

This joke comes from the second interpretation, which is unexpected: the speaker seems to be describing a man who is holding a telescope. The joke describes how the speaker saw that man. Therefore, the phrase "**with the telescope"** could refer to either the verb or the noun, creating structural ambiguity.

Joke 11

The teacher said to the student, "You cannot sleep in my class." The student replied, "If you did not talk so loudly, nobody could."

The humour in this joke relies on the ambiguity of the word *"class*." The teacher intends to say here that the students are not allowed to sleep during the lesson. The student's reply sees the phrase as a location, highlighting that the teacher's loud voice means no one can sleep in the classroom. However, the student interprets it as a criticism of the teacher, and the shift in responsibility heightens the humour.

Incongruity and Script Opposition

Joke 12

A woman walked into a café with a duck on her head. The waiter asked, "Can I help you?" The duck replied, "Yes. Please get this woman off my head."

At first, the joke prompts the reader to think the woman is the customer and the duck merely an odd accessory. The punchline challenges that assumption by making the duck the speaker and the woman the problem.

The humour arises from reversing the expected participant roles. In a normal cafe script, the human customer asks for service, and the waiter responds. Here, the duck becomes the customer, while the woman becomes an inconvenience. This absurd role reversal creates opposition in the script.

Many jokes depend on incongruity as a basic mechanism for interpreting jokes. A joke usually begins with a known scenario, then shifts to an unexpected aspect that deviates from it. In this context, Attardo and Raskin (1991, p.310) suggest that humour arises from a sudden clash that creates a surprise when our expectations are upended, leading hearers to reassess the joke's context.

Joke 13

A man went to the doctor and said, "Doctor, I keep thinking I am a pair of curtains." The doctor replied, "Pull yourself together."

The joke begins with a medical scene: a patient tells the doctor about a psychological problem. The patient expects to receive medical advice. But the unexpected response of

the doctor, *" Pull yourself together*, is a cultural expression indicating "control your emotions," but its direct meaning describes what curtains do.

Therefore, this joke carries two levels. First, at the pragmatic level, the doctor offers the patient a conventional idiomatic reply. Second, the semantic level, based on the direct and obvious meaning, is absurd because it treats the patient as if he really were curtains. The humour comes from the contrast between the serious medical situation and the literal interpretation of the idiom.

Joke 14

I told my doctor that I broke my arm in two places. He told me to stop going there.

The ordinary meaning of the patient's claim, "*in two places*," usually means there are two fractures in the patient's arm. Meanwhile, the intended meaning is to assess the two places as they are physically referred to, usually places the patient goes to. The doctor's suggestion to stop visiting the two places the patient talked about is unreasonable since the broken bones are in his body, not in those locations.

Here, the humour relies on a purposeful misinterpretation. The doctor's response relies on the literal wording rather than the medical advice. It highlights the contrast between the doctor's purposefully misinterpreted advice and the patient's earnest claim.

Joke 15

My friend asked me why I was reading a book upside down. I told him it was a mystery novel.

This joke relies on the word *mystery*. A mystery novel is a kind of fiction that explores crime or dangerous events. Hence, the speaker makes the book's physical orientation part of the mystery. The reply is absurd, as turning the book upside down does not make its parts mysterious.

The humour here comes from a deliberate misunderstanding between the actual situation and the genre label. The speaker uses mystery to discuss the book's technical side; however, it does not address the joke's core problem.

Joke 16

I asked the librarian if the library had any books on paranoia. She whispered, "They are right behind you."

The joke plays on paranoia, the fear that other people are watching or following you. The librarian's whisper and the phrase *"right behind you*" carry a sense of threat implied by the language of a dangerous situation.

The humour comes from the librarian's answer, delivered in an unusually dramatic whisper. The books are physically behind the speaker, but the delivery makes the context feel like a conspiracy. The joke therefore consists of a library text delivered like a suspense or thriller script.

Joke 17

A man told his wife, "I am going to make you the happiest woman in the world." She replied, "I will miss you."

The joke starts with a romantic promise. The wife's supposed reply could be appreciation or affection. However, the wife understands the promise as her husband preparing to depart, and thus as a sign of death or departure.

The joke's humour relies on implicature, which Yule (2010, p.149) describes as “an additional conveyed meaning”. The wife's response does not obviously mean that she expects her husband to leave or to disappear. However, the reader is expected to infer this intention from her response. The joke comes from the difference between the husband's romantic idea and the wife's lack of enthusiasm.

Irony, Implicature, and Pragmatic Inference

Several jokes depend on the gap between what is said and what is hedged and intentionally implied. To a certain extent, jokes rely on irony, as the meaning departs from the speaker's original intended meaning. In this context, Sperber (1981, p.295) states that "… irony is analysed as a trope: an utterance with a figurative meaning that departs from its literal meaning in one of several standard ways.” Certain kinds of figurative language, including irony, sarcasm, understatement, and intentional misunderstanding, are key tools in this discussion.

Joke 18

"How was your day?"

"Well, I did not get arrested, so I would call it a success."

The speaker's response is ironic, as the speaker defines success in obviously low terms. The literal meaning of the statement is positive; however, the reader interprets it as a difficult, disappointing day.

The humour relies on the misunderstanding between the expectation of a successful day and the speaker's unexpectedly low standards. The joke also includes innuendo that being arrested, or getting arrested, was a real possibility, which adds humour.

Joke 19

"I am not saying you are bad at cooking."

"Thank you."

"I am saying the smoke alarm is your biggest fan."

The first speaker starts the joke about what sounds like reassurance. The next sentence contradicts the reassuring impression. The smoke alarm introduced in the word " *fan*, stands for an admirer and for a device that blows air.

The joke works as an implicature. First, the reader takes it as a compliment; then, by linking it to criticism, the term *"fan*" becomes a pun, connecting praise to the smoke alarm's actual function.

Joke 20

"You have a beautiful voice."

"Thank you."

"Yes, it would be a shame to waste it on singing."

The compliment immediately becomes an act of undermining the speaker's self-image. Thus, the phrase *"a shame to waste it on singing*" implies that the speaker's voice is not beautiful for singing, even though it is described as beautiful.

The joke uses irony and a pragmatic contradiction. The speaker employs praise in the language but criticises the speaker, as his voice is not nice. Anyone who hears this response would likely think it's a shame to waste it on singing, which suggests it carries a negative meaning in this context and heightens the humour.

Joke 21

"I have been on a diet for two weeks."

"How is it going?"

"I have lost two weeks."

It is expected from the speaker's reply that he/she has lost weight. However, the speaker deliberately understands "lost" as referring to time, not weight. The answer is directly related to the question; hence, it deviates from its intended meaning.

This joke creates ambiguity and confusion by using "lost" as an intentional play on words, causing misunderstanding because it makes "lost" mean weight lost rather than losing time. So the speaker uses the unintended meaning to deliver a humorous answer, suggesting that the diet failed.

Register Shift and Stylistic Contrast

Here, another essential mechanism is the deviation between formal and informal language. Humour arises when legal, professional, medical, or standard language appears in an ordinary communicative situation. This aligns with the *language* resource in the General Theory of Verbal Humour.

Joke 22

"I am writing a formal complaint about this staircase."

"What is the problem?"

"The situation is a step in the wrong direction."

Here, the use of ' *a step in the wrong direction*' implies a hidden meaning that something shows negative progress. In the vein of a staircase, it stands for a literal, physical step. The formal use of ' *formal complaint*' *creates* a bureaucratic register that contradicts the theme of the subject.

In this joke, the speaker shifts and uses wordplay that most joke-tellers use to heighten the humour. The receiver acknowledges the joke as it carries an idiomatic critique of the staircase and an acknowledgement of the literal step. Humour happens because the formal language clashes with the mention of the staircase.

Joke 23

"This meeting could have been an email."

"Actually, it could have been a strongly worded sigh."

The first line is a typical workplace complaint, suggesting the meeting was unnecessary. However, the second speaker concurs with the first but highlights the criticism through the humorous use of *a "strongly worded sigh*."

This joke represents humour shaped by a collaboration between genre and register. So, the phrase 'A strongly worded' appears in formal writing, while the phrase 'a sigh' appears in colloquial language. This mix of formal and informal language creates a hybrid expression that adds humour. Thus, this joke introduces workplace text and makes it accessible to readers with enough knowledge of the joke's specific context.

Joke 24

"The Wi-Fi password is the name of my first pet."

"Was it not 'Fluffy'?"

"It is now. Someone changed it after reading the sign."

The joke's meaning relies on a misunderstanding. The password stands for the owner's first pet. However, the second person understands the instruction as a call to rename the pet and then use the new name as the password.

From this misinterpretation of the intended pragmatic message, the sense of humour emerges. The instructions aim to develop a shared understanding of what a password is and how to use it properly. The second person considers the sign a set of actions to perform rather than information to use. This contrasts the intended hidden meaning with the ridiculous literal interpretation.

Joke 25

“British tanks may be equipped to make tea, but you're a tank equipped to make ice cream.”

In this joke, the speaker makes a comparison between a British tank and the addressee, represented as 'you tank'. Here we find the playfulness of words in that the speaker says that the addressee 'you' makes ice cream, which stands for sperm and carries a sexual connotation.

FINDINGS

This study analysed 25 jokes and identified several recurring patterns. The research reveals that puns and lexical ambiguity often appear in jokes with words like baggage, interest, and tripping. These jokes illustrate how a lexical term can represent double meanings and generate an unexpected reinterpretation.

Another key issue in the study of jokes is incongruity. Lots of jokes begin with a normal scene, like a patient seeing a doctor, talking in a café, or working, then add something silly or surprising. This supports the view that joke comprehension moves from an initial interpretation to a second, opposing one.

The analysis shows that pragmatic mechanisms matter. To understand jokes based on irony or misunderstanding, the addressee should acknowledge more than the obvious meaning of the words themselves. For instance, the response "I will miss you" in Joke 17 does not directly state that the speaker wants the other person to leave, but this meaning is strongly implied. Table 1 below shows the fundamental mechanisms used to analyse the jokes in this study.

Table 1: Main humour mechanisms in the data

Mechanism	Number of Jokes	Examples
Irony and pragmatic inference	4	Jokes 18,19, 20, 21
Puns and lexical ambiguity	9	Jokes1-9
Register shift and stylistic contrast	4	Jokes 22,23,24,25
Syntactic ambiguity	2	Jokes 10,11
Incongruity and script opposition	6	Jokes 12-17
Total	25	

Note: Some jokes contain more than one mechanism. The table records the dominant mechanism in each case.

Summary of Findings

The analysis of the 25 jokes above reveals several recurring patterns. It shows the prominence of puns and lexical ambiguity, represented in many jokes based on terms like tripping, *interest*, baggage, *problems*, and *laced*. These jokes show how a single word carries double meanings, activating unexpected interpretations.

Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates the prevalence of incongruity, as many jokes start with a known or ordinary situation, like someone's visit to a doctor or an interaction in a public place such as the workplace, before representing an unexpected and absurd element. This reinforces the idea that understanding a joke requires moving from the first interpretation, which is usually not the intended one, to a second one that is generally the opposite and the intended meaning.

The analysis also shows that pragmatic mechanisms are important. Jokes based on irony, implicature, and deliberate misunderstanding require the reader to infer meaning beyond the literal words. For example, the response “I will miss you” in Joke 17 does not directly state that the speaker wants the other person to leave, but this meaning is strongly implied.

Next, register shift plays a role similar to irony and pragmatic interference, contributing significantly to humour by placing language in an unexpected stylistic context. Technical vocabulary and workplace-related language become humorous when used in everyday interactions and specific situations. This highlights the idea that written English jokes rely on the word's semantic meaning, context, and shared social understanding.

Finally, the table above shows that syntactic mechanisms were uncommon in the written English jokes, with only two jokes showing this mechanism, suggesting that the collected data relies more on lexical and pragmatic humour than on grammatical structures. This indicates that written English jokes convey humour through semantics and pragmatics, using irony, script opposition, and implicature mechanisms rather than syntactic ambiguity. Hence, while syntactic ambiguity adds its imprint to humour in some English written jokes, it seems to have a secondary role rather than a dominant role.

In general, this study presented jokes across five major categories. These included puns and lexical ambiguity, incongruity and script opposition, register shift and stylistic contrasts, and syntactic ambiguity. Although puns and lexical ambiguity were the dominant mechanisms, the same joke could fit more than one category.

Recommendations

Future research should broaden data collection tools by adding social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, and include interviews to elicit real-situation jokes. Additionally, the study should include sociolinguistics and sociopragmatics to deepen the study of jokes from various linguistic perspectives. Finally, future studies should examine male and female jokes and consider gender variations and age specificity, as each generation uses jokes suited to its age.

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