



Irony in Jordanian Arabic on Social Media: A Corpus-Based Analysis of Linguistic and Rhetorical Devices

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Abstract The study examines the linguistic and rhetorical devices used to express irony in Jordanian Arabic on social media. By analyzing a corpus of 67 ironic posts, the study identifies various forms of ironic expressions: pictorial texts, texts with emojis, and text only presented in Jordanian Arabic, Arabized words, Standard Arabic, or a mixture of them. The study reveals that irony is a complex phenomenon on social networking sites expressed through various linguistic and rhetorical devices, including sarcasm, jocularly, hyperbole, understatement, and rhetorical questions. The use of irony serves different purposes, such as conveying effective persuasive and evaluation messages that leave a deeper impact on the addressee's mind. It is a vital means of constructive criticism to criticize foolishness and corruption in both individuals and society. The study shows that irony is a universal and culturally specific technique, demonstrating distinctive cultural inherited features and in-group solidarity. It provides invaluable insights into the figurative usage of language, with theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords: *Corpus-based study, Irony, Jordanian Arabic, Relevance theory, Social media*

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1. Introduction

Irony is a fascinating linguistic and literary device that plays a crucial role in human communication (Garmendia, 2018; Pacheco Baldó, 2022; Sykora et al., 2020). It originated in Aristophanes, Socrates, and Homer's works to describe the rhetorical reception 'cheat a friend', when "a man calls things with opposite names" (Müller, 1995, p. 5). It is a type of figurative language that requires readers/hearers to infer and interpret the intended meaning behind the given expressions, as it often conceals or contradicts the literal meaning of words (Gibbs, 2001). It is found in almost every language and serves various psychological and social functions, such as expressing humor, evaluating and mocking, showing solidarity and social attachment, and signaling relational ambiguity (Bryant & Fox Tree, 2012).

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Analysis of ironic expressions has lately gained wide recognition and attention because of its significant influence on the target audience and the high level of eloquence and declamation characteristics it requires to elucidate the intended meaning (Baider & Constantinou, 2020). Recognizing ironic mechanisms is crucial to enhance understanding of cultures (Gornostaeva, 2019).

The proliferation of social media has led to an increase in texts laden with opinions and standpoints, making identifying irony a hot topic in research (Karoui et al., & 2019). Crystal (2011) claims that the revolution of the internet has resulted in a linguistic revolution, reflecting great attention paid to the language of social media rather than to the technology itself. On social media, people often use ironic expressions to convey their intended messages in a humorous, funny, and indirect way, making it hard for all people to identify and understand them. It is communicated in memes, political commentaries, conversational jokes, etc., via various grammatical, rhetorical, and lexical devices (Al-Khawaldeh & Al-Rabadi, 2023). Therefore, researchers (e.g., Al Khawaldeh, 2015; Georgiadi, 2023) call for more research on irony since investigating irony across languages and cultures helps researchers formulate more detailed theories of irony as a linguistic, cognitive, and social phenomenon. Wilson (2013) also calls for new theoretical accounts and experimental paradigms of irony.

Despite its importance, irony remains under-investigated in the Arabic context, particularly in the Jordanian context. Therefore, this study aims to bridge this gap by investigating the linguistic and rhetorical devices used to express irony in Jordanian Arabic over social media. The study's findings could contribute to a better understanding of the strategies used to express irony, revealing the socio-political issues that need to be understood and resolved. Ultimately, this study is expected to be a good step towards a detailed investigation of irony in the Jordanian Arabic context and a valuable contribution to the literature on contextual pragmatic models for detecting irony.

2. Theoretical Framework

Various theoretical models have attempted to conceptualize irony based on three principles that have been later developed into theories: "oppositional irony" (Grice, 1989), "echoic irony" (Sperber & Wilson, 1981), and "pretence irony" (Clark & Gerrig, 1984; Nakamura et al., 1995). Irony can be examined on diverse levels, including the word level, clause level, utterance level, and contextual level (immediate or remote; Chollakova, 2021). Grice (1975) assumes that verbal irony intentionally violates the maxim of quality (i.e., truthfulness; 'do not say what you believe to be false') (Levinson, 1983). Speech Acts Theory considers irony to be parasitic since it infects natural communication (Kumon-Nakamura et al., 1995; Witek, 2022). They believe that there are a set of conditions in which ironic expressions negate one or more of them: Input, output, propositional content, preparatory, sincerity, and essential. The pretense theory views verbal irony as a pretense since the ironist pretends to be an unseeing individual who communicates an idea to an unknown addressee (Clark & Gerrig, 1984). This constitutes a problem in the analysis since neither the unseeing person nor the unknowing addressee can be identified, and not all types of verbal irony can be described. Irony has also been examined from the politeness theories perspective, which considers expressing irony as a face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This is because interpreting an expression in a certain context, such as conveying irony, leads to face loss when the speaker utters ironic, aggressive, and critical expressions. Culpeper and Haugh (2014) state that sarcasm is the most implicitly used strategy to employ impoliteness.

Irony helps interlocutors disclose their cognitive and affectional states to each other through the coding and decoding of ironic utterances. This process is done in light of a particular contextual knowledge achieved by the intended mutual exchange of information benefiting from both verbal and non-verbal elements such as gestures, mimics, and intonation. Sperber and Wilson (1998) perceive irony as using an utterance in certain circumstances to symbolize or refer to any other object. They presume that verbal irony must be comprehended as echoic, considering the difference between usage and reference. In other words, expressing utterances alludes to the speaker's attitude of disapproval or contempt for other people's thoughts or opinions. This reference should always be relevant to the addressee so as to sufficiently interpret and understand the ironic utterance. Thus, irony is a unique form of interaction whose interpretation within the frame of the relevance theory is an interesting practice. What makes

this achievable are three major elements: ambiguity, inappropriateness in light of the context, and the speaker's intention (Attardo, 2000).

The present study adopts the main cognitive and communicative principles of relevance theory (Wilson & Sperber, 2004). This theory assumes that human cognition is geared to maximizing optimal relevance created by utterances. Thus, utterances in communication should be precise and predictable enough to raise certain relevant expectations in the addressees' minds that would guide them to understanding the speaker's meaning. In other words, such utterances are ostensive in the sense that they draw their addressees' attention to the fact that the speaker intends to convey a specific message and inferential in the sense that the addressee has to infer the speaker's intended message in light of their "literal meaning" and the addressee's real-world knowledge, sensory input, and other pertinent information. The study's theoretical framework also considers the pertinence of stimulus input to the addressee, as its processing in a certain context of obtainable assumptions generates a positive cognitive effect, which is the individual's true conclusion and representation of the world. This effect could be obtained through a contextual implication where the intended conclusion of the world is deducible from both the stimulus input and the context together.

Irony has been investigated from different perspectives. Fubara (2020) revealed that all Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram posts were in expressive and assertive forms, and the reactions to the issued posts indicated incongruity and were also verbally ironic. While humour appears in diverse guises (i.e., sarcasm, witticism, and pun), sarcasm was the major guise of humour utilized. Gibbs (2000) identifies five main types of irony: sarcasm, jocularly, hyperbole, rhetorical questions, and understatement. It was also found that jocularly with humor was employed more than sarcasm with an aggressive intent. Akhtyraska (2014) revealed that irony has a significant impact on the political domain and could be represented via figurative devices, including exclamation, rhetorical questions, antiphrasis, and metaphor.

Irony has also been investigated cross-culturally. Sigar and Taha (2012) explored the variation between literal and ironic expressions in both English and Arabic in texts from different sources. Ironic expressions are found alike in most situations in English and Arabic culture, though most of them differ in their usage across situations. They are expressed via different techniques in both languages, namely opposition, humour, and hyperbole. Arabic ironic expressions are found to be more figurative than those in English. Chakhachiro (2007) also found that though Arabic and English texts share various similarities regarding the grammatical, rhetorical, and lexical use of devices, they differ at the textual realization level.

Colston and Carreno (2020) explored the way speakers achieve persuasion using hyperbole and irony as a response to accusations of wrongdoing. Results showed that when accused speakers overstate denials (e.g., "I have never, ever stolen anything from this store"), they look relatively blameful relative to employing no exaggeration (e.g., "I did not steal from this store"). However, when accused speakers overstate ironic denials (e.g., "Oh sure, I have always stolen everything from this store"), they are viewed as relatively guiltless compared to using no exaggeration. Hirsch (2020) revealed that direct expressions were employed significantly more than humorous ones, but indirectness was utilized more to signify criticism toward the target politician. It was also found that irony and humor were almost always responded to with indirect comments.

In conclusion, the review of the literature highlights the importance of irony in different contexts and reveals its various linguistic and pragmatic components. Despite its significance in various contexts and languages, research is scarce on ironic and sarcastic expressions used in daily life in the Arabic and Jordanian contexts. Thus, this study is needed to provide a comprehensive understanding of irony and its use in the Jordanian context.

3. Methodology

3.1. Materials

The corpus consisted of screenshots of the ironic expressions posted on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, over the period 2015-2022. Only the relevant data were selected by searching posts including irony with or without the clear mentioning of specific keywords such as #سخرية#استهزاء,

تهكم # مسخرة (ʔistihza:ʔ# Masxara # Suxriya # tahakkum: #irony and #sarcasm). Networking with people (i.e., colleagues, friends, and family members) was also a great source of help for obtaining the corpus. They provided the researchers with screenshots of the ironic expressions posted on their pages and their friends' on various social media platforms. The posts were selected by the researchers and refereed by two linguists to make sure that they imply irony.

This is a corpus-based study that adopts a relevance-theoretic approach. It is generally claimed that corpus approaches can provide greater objectivity since they are data-supported, more generalisable, and clearer (Marchi, 2009). The fact that a corpus-based approach is more data-driven, descriptive, and interpretative makes the text structure a good starting point for a discourse processing analysis. The corpus-based analysis can not only explicate the reasons why linguistic choices are made, but it also helps researchers attain empirical evidence for the target notions (Chernyavskaya, 2018), strengthening its interpretative footing and contributing to the soundness and stability of interpretations (Marchi, 2009).

3.2. Procedure

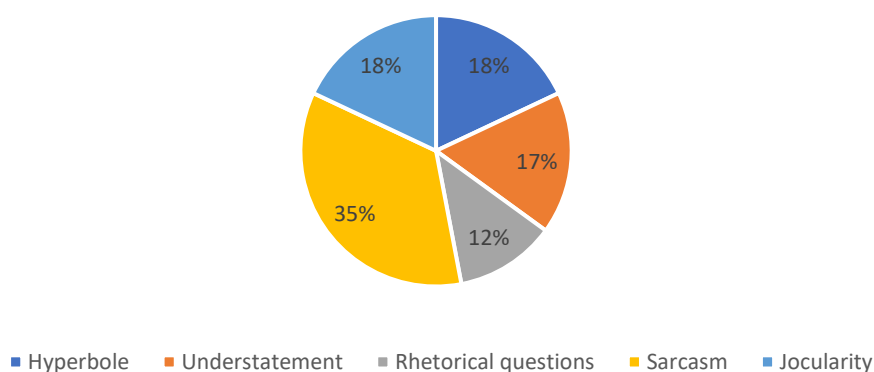
The researchers closely examined the posts to identify the common themes expressed and classified the posts according to them. The thematic analysis of the selected texts showed that they were targeting different identities across domains: Education, politics, economics, and social life. This type of analysis was a good approach for finding out something about people's values, opinions, and experiences from a set of qualitative data (Terry et al., 2017). A deductive approach was followed in particular as the data were analysed with some preconceived themes expected to be reflected in them. The collected posts were analyzed in light of Gibbs's (2000) model, which compasses sarcasm, hyperbole, rhetorical question, jocularity, and understatement to identify the mechanisms used to express irony in Jordanian Arabic (JA). This model was found to be the best one that comprised all the analyzed data (Hyatt, 2005; Koller, 2005). The study adopted the relevance-theoretic approach for analyzing the results (Wilson & Sperber, 2002). The posts were stimulus inputs that raised certain assumptions in a particular context that, along with the help of contextual implications, led to generating a true representation of the world.

4. Results

The analysis of the data revealed that irony is expressed to criticise different aspects related to education, politics, health, and social life. The nature of these posts was also found to be expressive and assertive. Several linguistic and rhetorical devices were used to express irony: sarcasm, jocularity, hyperbole, understatement, and rhetorical questions. Figure 1 shows the percentages of the strategies employed for expressing irony on social media in different domains. As shown, sarcasm appears to be the most frequently used strategy for expressing irony with a percentage of 35% followed by jocularity with a percentage of 18%, hyperbole with a percentage of 18%, and understatement with a percentage of 17%. The rhetorical question appears to be the least strategy participants resorted to for conveying irony, with a percentage of 12%. Below is an illustration of examples of each strategy.

Figure 1

Percentages of the Linguistic and Rhetorical Devices Employed for Expressing Irony on Social Media



4.1. Sarcasm

Sarcasm is a language that enables speakers to positively reflect a negative intent by conveying an intent that is counterfactual to the actual one.

Post 1

تطبيق _ سند بده مين يسنده #

راحت علي المحاضرة عشان بس افوت عالجاب ازمة مش طبيعية عشان نوربهم التطبيق

Sanad application needs one to support it. I missed my lectures to enter the university gate, which was unbelievably crowded for showing them the application.

This post shows that the Sanad application tops social media platforms and raises a wave of ridicule among citizens due to complaints received about the difficulty of registering and entering the application. The Jordanian street interacts with the mandatory decision to download the Sanad green application, complaining about the existence of severe malfunctions and the inability to complete the registration procedures. Many users of the application indicated that they suffer from certain problems, namely matching the image of their personal identity with the selfie image requested by the application and entering the different dates required by the green application to start working on their mobile phones. They expressed their astonishment at the obligatory decision to download and activate it, even though it did not work. They complained that it would be unreasonable to stop at the door of a bank, university, or even a mall for a quarter of an hour just to show them the application when the vaccination certificate suffices. They also claimed that the government should have worked on it carefully before forcing us to download and activate it.

Post 2



Raghadan Complex-Rama Allah

This post shows the severity of the incorrect answer given by a young woman and her colleague in the reception team at the Jordan Pavilion at “Expo Dubai 2020” to the questions of a reporter on a local TV channel. It indicates that the repertoire of Jordanians’ sarcasm over poor public, governmental, and

official performance is plentiful. The young man's wrong information about the Great Arab Revolt and the woman's incorrect information about "Ramallah" as a Jordanian, not Palestinian city, have captured an abundance of anger tinged with ridicule, other than something related to misery in education and poor qualification of competencies.

Post 3

رؤوس_دحرجة##فرع الأردن_الحجاج بن يوسف الثقفي

Heads_rolling# Jordan branch_Alhajaj bin Yousef Althaqafi

This post is a harsh, ironic reaction to the expression "heads will roll" used by the Minister of State for Media Affairs. This expression sparked a wave of ridicule and resentment on social media and raised the issue of political rhetoric and the communication of officials with public opinion. The Jordanian Minister of State for Media Affairs promised to roll the heads of those who leak an official document. The minister's speech came after Jordanian activists circulated a leaked document on social media about the decisions that the government will take to confront Corona, which constituted confusion in the Jordanian street. This post states that the Jordanian Minister is the Jordan Branch of Al-Hajaj Bin Yusuf Al-Thaqafi (95 AH - 714 AD), who was a military commander known for his brutality. The Umayyad Caliph Abdul Malik bin Marwan appointed him over Iraq, and it is attributed to him saying, threatening the people of Kufa, "I see heads that have ripened and the time has come to be harvested". Despite the fact that the usage of this expression was justified as a metaphor for the great aesthetics of the Arabic language, Jordanians assert that this expression should have been replaced by another expression (i.e., whoever leaks a document will be transferred to the judiciary" so as to preserve the prestige of the constitution. This post sheds light on the importance of media discourse as well as the appropriate usage of the aesthetics of the Arabic language according to context.

4.2. Jocularit

Jocularit is a pragmatic strategy that helps speakers convey a different meaning than the spoken one, without being strictly counterfactual, such as 'I think I'm allergic to love.' it assists speakers to outrage the addressees in a humorous way. The examples below illustrate this strategy.

Post 1

الجامعة: امتحانات الميـد سوف تبدأ بعد اسبوعين

ميـد شوو! انا لسا بسبب ع مصحح الرياضيات

University: the mid-term exams will begin after two weeks. What Mid-term? I am still reviled those who corrected the math exam.

In this post, the speakers try to criticize the educational system, in particular, the national exam "Tawjihi". People, in general, mock the way questions are formed. They are above the students' level. The committees are held responsible for writing questions inconsiderate of the student's actual level and the current situations they have been through due to the pressure and depression they go through. Students were under pressure because they had to study very hard to get high marks to be able to choose the university and the specialization they wanted and not to lose grants they could enjoy. In this post, the emotional status of the students is depicted; though they have started studying at university, they still suffer bad sentiments due to the national exam. People share posts and tweets concerning the many critical issues related to the Tawjihi exam to express their feelings, thoughts, and opinions so as to convey their intended sarcastic messages in a humorous, funny, and indirect way.

Post 2

لاكاسا دي بابيل سنكهة الاردن 🤔🤔🤔

شر البلية ما يضحك

La Casa de Papel in Jordanian flavour 🤔🤔🤔**Scourge of evil makes us laugh**

This ironic expression was a reaction to an incident of a bank subjected to armed robbery in the capital, Amman. The incident has resulted in a wave of ridicule and humor among Jordanians on social media platforms. This kind of operation was strange, especially as it was executed in broad daylight under the threat of a firearm. It sparked ridicule and widespread criticism of the government's economic policy on the one hand and the method of implementing the operation, which was described as "naive" on the other. There were sarcastic comments on the news about the failure of the robbery, especially that the criminal carried out the robbery in the morning, was arrested in less than an hour, and the money was returned to the bank.

Post 3

دانما خلي معك كيس فوشار كبير. عشان في ناس افلامها كثيرة

Always keep with you a big sack of popcorn, as there are people whose films are numerous



This post discusses a crucial issue in Jordanian society: the spread of rumors. Society witnesses a huge spread of incorrect information related to different significant issues related to the following sectors: public affairs, health, economy, politics, and society. Rumors have negative consequences on societies, among which are the spread of negativity, frustration, confusion, destabilized relationships, mistrust, and pessimism. Thus, people's concern about the exacerbation of the phenomenon of fake news in the digital world is increasing day by day, and what is more dangerous is the people's ability to believe these lies and rumors. People sometimes become more willing to accept lies and adapt to them than to accept and believe the facts.

4.3. Understatement

Understatement is a linguistic technique that speakers use to convey their ironical messages by clearly understating reality or by stating far less than was evident in the situation. The following post illustrates this strategy.

Post 1

بيدو اننا بحاجة لانشاء #معهد# او مدرسة# للمرشحين

لانتخابات النيابة لتدريسهم اصول النقاش والمداخلات وادبيات العمل البرلماني قبل الترشح للانتخابات, حيث تشمل شروط الترشح اجتياز الامتحانات المقررة بنجاح

#مجلس_النواب# الاردن 🇮🇪 🤔 🤔

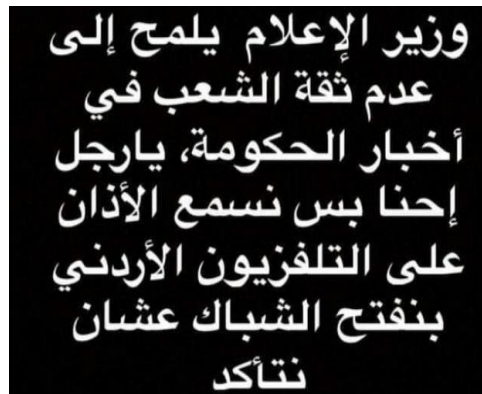
It seems that we need to establish # Academy #school for candidates for parliament elections to teach them the principles of discussion and entries and politeness of parliament work before nominating for elections, where the conditions for nomination encompass passing the required exams successfully...

#parliaments #Jordan



This post represents an irony in the quarrel and a clash of hands between a number of Jordanian parliamentarians, which took place in the corridors of the Jordanian Parliament. This incident sparked a storm of criticism and reactions on social media. The story began after the head of the Legal Committee tried, during a session devoted to discussing the constitutional amendments, to justify adding the word “female Jordanians” after the general word “Jordanians” in the amendment of Article number 6 of the Constitution, considering that it took place after consulting all specialists. He pointed out that the Article of the Constitution states that Jordanians are equal before the law, with no discrimination between them. An argument occurred between the deputies after some of them objected to this addition, and soon, the matter turned into a quarrel and a clash of hands between some deputies. The hashtag #House of Representatives topped the social media platforms, where people’s opinions varied between irony, underestimation, and indignation at the chaos left by the quarrel.

Post 2



The Minister of Information alludes to the people’s lack of confidence in the government’s news. Oh Man, we only hear the call to prayer on Jordanian TV. We open the window to make sure.

This post states that the Minister of Media alludes to people’s distrust in the government’s news. The speaker emphasizes the point by saying that even when hearing the calling for prayer on TV, people open the window to make sure of it. The loss of confidence could be attributed to the deterioration of the level of public services and the failure of the government to fulfill its promises, such as improving people’s lives, which continue to decline as a result of this government’s failure to perform the required tasks. When citizens do not see in the government and its members and representatives someone who truly represents them and speaks their voice and their pain, trust weakens or lacks, and their hopes are disappointed in the way government institutions work and what they provide to them. This, in turn, leads to frustration, indifference, bureaucracy, and lack of accountability as a result of poor performance, corruption, instability, and insecurity. It is worth mentioning that the success of economic policies and the government’s ability to achieve its stated goals are greatly affected by the level of political trust between citizens on the one hand and the government, its institutions, and representatives on the other.

Post 3

كلهم زي بعض سنعمل ... سنفعل ... سنحرص
وكلو عرط بعد اعلان النتائج وشوية دبك وطخ ... بالخ ببطل يبين

They are all the same: we will work ... we will do ... we will make sure It is all nonsense; after announcing the results and a little dance and shooting ... etc., they disappear.

This post shows that Jordanian election campaigns are a cause for ridicule on social media. The slogans and electoral propaganda of the candidates for the House of Representatives in Jordan sparks a wave of ridicule on social media. People consider them just fake propaganda and wonder how the candidates can expect that they will be convinced by these unconvincing slogans and phrases posted extensively on the roads until they become an obstacle for drivers. They call this visual pollution, which obstructs the movement of pedestrians, cars, and their vision of traffic as well as distracts the driver's attention, which in turn results in many traffic accidents. They also criticize their behaviour for hanging their photos with no candidates' programs and goals. Users of social media mocked some of the candidates' banners, which bore misspellings, some candidates used fictional slogans, and others used prophetic Hadith, at the end of which they wrote the phrase "Believe God Almighty." Jordanians are fully aware of the importance of the role of social website pages in shedding light on the elections, slogans, and programs so that every candidate realizes that he is under the microscope. Thus, they urged each other to elect a candidate who is conscious and aware of the interest of his/her voters, away from resonant political slogans, in order to reach an appropriate parliament and representatives. They assume the responsibility of spreading electoral awareness, urging people to participate in correcting the path of representation in Parliament, and using patriotic and guiding phrases that demonstrate that whoever wants change in Jordan for the better, the elections are his chance to do so.

4.4. Hyperbole

Hyperbole is a sort of language that is employed to express their non-literal meaning distinctly by exaggerating or overstating the reality of the context, such as 'I'm so hungry I could eat a truckload. The following examples clarify this strategy:

Post 1

Drop me off a little bit after the crocodile.

The sinking of the city center, the Roman amphitheater, and the Seventh Circle area in Amman as a result of heavy rainfall sparked the Jordanians' mockery and derision about what had happened to them. This post exaggerates the scene by stating that there was a crocodile in these floods so as to reveal

Jordanians' anger because several areas were sunk as a result of the weather storm the country went through. Jordanians accuse the government of not being adequately prepared for the onset of winter. This is mainly due to the infrastructure's failure to absorb the large amounts of rain that fell within hours. Jordanians circulated on social media footage from downtown Amman about disrupting traffic and drowning hundreds of cars as a result of torrential rain. All different types of ironic expressions prompted citizens to indirectly question the readiness of the capital's infrastructure and the suitability of road networks to cope with natural disasters and heavy rains. The reluctance to implement street repair workshops and violating the laws of public construction and infrastructure causes an imbalance in the structure of the roads and leads to the creation of large gaps in them. This situation is described as a kind of resistance and rejection of the painful reality and social pressures.

Post 2

غير الملقحين: لا بيت يأويهم ولا طعام يباع لهم او يهدى ... لا نتزوج منهم ولا يتزوجون منا ... لا بيع لهم ولا شراء ...
وليطردوا الى شعاب الجبال

The non-vaccinated: No house for them, no food sold or gifted to them ... no exchange of marriage between us ... no selling or purchasing ... to be expelled to mountains...

In this post, the speaker exaggerates the condemnation of those who are not vaccinated against COVID-19. The strict rules mentioned in the post for treating those vaccinated include no provision of housing, selling or gifting of food, no exchanging of marriage, and no selling to or buying from them. Besides, they are going to be expelled to the mountains. The speaker here has copied the items of the document issued by the Messenger prophet "Mohammad", peace be upon him, for implementing some security, social and political measures, among which was the conclusion of a treaty with the Jews of Medina. This post reveals the impact of the severe measures imposed by the government on people, resulting in uncertainty, fear, stress, and serious mental and social issues. It is worth mentioning that the Jordanian government, like other governments around the world, has taken some urgent measures to halt the spreading of the virus, such as social distancing, closing borders, self-isolation, and quarantine.

Post 3

يارب يخلص



Oh God, we wish it finishes 😞 . Hamza and Yousef have been in the same position for 10 years, waiting for the express bus to not be late for work.

This post shows one of numerous ironic expressions posted on the express bus in Jordan. The speaker here exaggerates the people who are in the same position waiting for the work on the express bus to finish. The banners hung by the Greater Amman Municipality to encourage people to use the express bus route sparked Jordanians' ridicule on social media. This ridicule came based on the Municipality's encouragement to use the express bus at a time when the Municipality had not yet completed the infrastructure work of the express bus project, as there were still many stages awaiting completion in order to finalize the project. Citizens commented that they had waited for the express bus project for 10 years, and it has not yet been completed.

4.5. Rhetorical Question

Rhetorical questions are pragmatic techniques used by speakers to express irony by implying either a humorous or critical assertion, but they do not necessitate a response. The following are examples of using strategy:

Post 1

هل يلتقي الرزاز الأوائل في التوجيهي في استاد عمان؟

Will Razzaz receive the kingdom's firsts in the Tawjihi exam at Amman International Stadium?

Various ironic posts are directed towards the educational system in Jordan. They mainly criticize the decisions taken by the responsible figures. In this post, people mock the fact that 78 students obtained a score of "100%" in the national exam "Tawjihi" in light of the epidemic COVID-19 situation, which sparked a wave of widespread criticism of the exam and the Minister of Education at that time. In this post, the irony is expressed using the rhetorical question technique. Because of the large number of full scores, the ironic expressions required if the Prime Minister at that time had decided to receive the kingdom's firsts, whose number is in the hundreds, at Amman International Stadium in order to honor them. It also appeared that more than nine thousand students for that season had obtained marks of more than "90%", which would cause a real crisis in the unified admission of all majors in public sector universities.

Post 2

احترنا فيكو نقوم ولا نقعد؟ اذا قعدنا قالوا قوم يا عماد , واذا وقفنا قالو

اقعدي يا هند

We are confused: shall we stand or sit down? If we sit down, they say, "Stand up, Imad", and if we stand up, they say, "Sit down, Hind"

This is a rhetorical question posted on what came to be known as the "chair incident" in the Jordanian parliament. This incident aroused great interest in Jordan between those who sarcastically dealt with it and those who supported the actions of the deputy who sat on the chair reserved for the prime minister. "Get up, Imad" is one of the "hashtags" launched by Jordanians, commenting on the parliament speaker's demand for the MP called "Imad" to leave the seat of Prime Minister. The MP sat on the chair in protest against the government's decisions, especially the increase in fuel prices. The incident reminded Jordanians of the phrase, "Sit down, Hind," which was previously addressed by one of the parliamentarians to his colleague called "Hind" in the parliament. The incident sparked several sarcastic comments, including what was stated that the government decided to take serious measures to prevent the seizure of chairs, and one of them published that the MP took the chair home.

Post 3

ارفض_امر_الدفاع_35_متاكدين_ياحكومة؟؟؟#

refuse the Defence_Order_35 Are you sure the government???

This is a rhetorical question; the speaker is wondering whether or not the government is sure about its decision. The hashtag #Reject_Defence_Order_35 was issued on social media sites in Jordan concerning the defense order, which entered into force Saturday 1/1/2022 and prohibits any person over 18 years old from entering any of the ministries, government departments, official institutions, public institutions, or any of the private sector facilities unless they received two doses of the vaccine, excluding those visiting hospitals and health centers as emergency cases. People criticized the defense order and called for a boycott of going to government departments and refraining from paying the dues for several days, considering that this would make the government retract the decision. They indicated that some people do not want to be vaccinated for many reasons and that the new defense order means forcing people to take the vaccine, and this is not acceptable. They considered that there is a contradiction between the government's statement that vaccination is not compulsory and the defense order. They also considered that the law violates human rights by preventing them from conducting transactions, transfers, work, and study without taking the vaccine.

5. Discussion

The study provides a thorough examination of the linguistic and rhetorical devices used to express irony across different domains in Jordanian Arabic on social media. The analysis revealed a significant finding concerning the crucial role that social networking sites play in the communication process. The spread of such modern means of communication has significantly contributed to the diffusion of a sense of humor among many people in Jordanian society, some of whom exceed the importance of the topic or event to make it ironic, but mostly by using jokes. Expressing irony on such platforms is a new method that reveals a lot about people's cognitive and emotional states about certain critical economic, political, and social issues. The language of these posts serves as a powerful means for not only conveying information, facts, and observations but also expressing attitudes, feelings, behaviour, and identities. The ironic expressions range from serious criticism of the foolishness and corruption of individuals, institutions, and societies concerning high prices, gender discrimination, poverty, and nepotism to mockery in general on many daily life issues. This finding is in line with other researchers' findings (e.g., Campbell & Katz, 2012) that irony conveys tension, passive attitudes, and dissatisfaction. The underlying intent seems not mainly to mock; rather, it recommends reconsidering plans for resolving critical issues. Thus, irony, if directed well, could be viewed as a constructive criticism technique that triggers the accommodating process of context-repair.

Another important finding shows that irony is a widely used figure of speech by Jordanians. It was also observed that the ironic expressions were written in numerous forms (textual only, pictorial texts, and texts with emojis using Jordanian Arabic, Arabized words, Standard Arabic). The analysis also showed that using hashtags (#) in most posts helps people convey certain messages and signify that they are related to a particular topic so people can follow the conversation in search. Such a trending feature reduces the use of more linguistic markers for indicting irony. Thus, this finding supports the hypothesis proposed by Kunneman et al. (2015) that hashtags are the digital extralinguistic non-verbal expressions that people use to convey irony and sarcasm.

Jordanians appear creative in varying the figurative techniques they use for expressing irony, which are sarcasm, jocularly, hyperbole, understatement, and rhetorical questions. Such rhetorical devices can get audiences' attention, deepen their impression, and involve them in interpreting the intended message and thus achieve the goal (Cui & Zhao, 2014). This finding supports Barbe's (1995) finding that irony can be realized by different figures of speech, including understatement, hyperbole, etc. Sarcasm and irony are dealt with as one category in Grice's Cooperation Principle since they violate the maxim of quality (Musolff, 2017). They have been interchangeably used for a long time as types of conversational

humour since they create a comic effect, even though they are not inherently humorous (Dynel, 2018). However, sarcasm is considered harsher than irony, so not all examples of verbal irony are examples of sarcasm, but all examples of sarcasm are ironic (Gibbs, 2000). This finding supports researchers' conception of a rhetorical question as an effectual strategy that produces fundamental aesthetic effects to attain greater expressive force and convey huge information on critical issues (Chikogu & Akpere, 2021; Najjar & Kadhim, 2021; Neyole et al., 2021).

With a large number of economic and social pressures, we find that joking has given people a door to vent the pressure they are experiencing. Jocular mockery is a complex pragmatic act that is accomplished through various interactional practices, among which is expressing irony (Goddard, 2006). This indicates that Jordanians circumvent their situation with humor and irony despite the fact that they were stuck with the "Kashra/grimace" feature for years due to their deteriorating economic situation (i.e., high rise of prices and costs of living, unemployment, and poverty). It was widely recognized in Jordanian society that a frown face reflects "manhood", "prestige", and "charisma". However, such finding reflects changes in societal values and beliefs as the prevailing impression of Jordanians being sullen and their facial features not knowing the way to joke or laugh has been alerted. It is also apparent that certain cues are used after ironic expressions to highlight the laughter, such as the particle and emoji signaling "😂", "hehe". These clues are utilized to orientate the addressees to join in to laugh about the mocking remark (Keltner et al., 2001).

The other significant finding elucidates irony as a unique form of communication whose interpretation may be intricate in certain contexts and cultures. What is distinctive in the analysis is that the ironies examined here are pretty complex compared to different types displayed in other irony-based research. Thus, an accurate interpretation of these ironic expressions necessitates certain cognitive, communicative, linguistic, and pragmatic capabilities. Some expressions are distinctively intricate to the extent that they require an integration of both the literal meaning of the utterances along with the addressee's sensory input, real-world knowledge, and other pertinent societal and cultural information. In other words, such utterances draw their addressees' attention to the fact that the speaker intends to convey a specific message and raise certain relevant expectations in the addressees' minds that would guide them to understand the speaker's intended message. While this finding supports Wilson and Sperber's (2004) relevance theory as utterances in communication should be predictable to raise certain relevant expectations in the addressees' minds that would guide them to understanding the speaker's ironic message, it is inconsistent with Grice's (1975) theory of "oppositional irony" since not all verbal ironic expressions implicate the opposite of the literal meaning. It is in line with Kenkadze's (2014) view of irony as a figurative meaning of an expression that can be coded and decoded with the help of contextual clues, either explicitly or implicitly. It meshes well with Colston's (2005) finding that societal and cultural variables may exert a greater influence on generating and interpreting non-literal language. Sharing the same interpretation of the ironic expressions serves to create an in-group feeling, as Lakoff (1990) suggests.

The analysis reveals diverse linguistic patterns, social structures, and cultural distinctiveness, which suggests numerous constraints on how ironic meaning is expressed and interpreted. The aforementioned ideas show that the usage of irony is distinctive. The ironic expressions contain implicit factors and are loaded with social and cultural features that make its interpretation not directly arrived at, particularly when the information is not fully and explicitly provided, and the addressee is not fully aware of the context or a member of the society. Such social and cultural features explain not only what triggers ironic interpretations but also which ones appear the most relevant. This study contributes theoretically to the literature on irony. It supports an overarching socio-contextual model of analysis of ironic expressions that integrate all already existent models where ironical utterances may be direct and indirect, implicitly representative of the desired image of the given context, and loaded with distinctive social-cultural features needed for reaching a good interpretation of the utterances. Thus, this finding supports Gornostaeva's (2019) hypothesis that "irony is a reflection of culture and forms the picture of the world of an individual, belonging to a certain culture, and of a nation as a whole" (p. 4152).

The findings have pedagogical implications as they highlight the importance of teaching the various representations of this figure of speech to students. They also have implications for future researchers

as they could also check the reliability of hashtags and include the pragmatic features that help to infer the context needed to understand the ironic reading. It is also recommended that they detect and analyze Jordanian comments on ironic posts in particular. Besides, examining gender-based differences in expressing and reacting to ironic expressions is a promising research idea that casts light on the communities' beliefs and attitudes. Conducting a comparative study on the expression of irony using a corpus of textual material across dialects, languages, and cultures is a brilliant research idea that could deepen our theoretical understanding. Furthermore, the EFL learners' competence in realizing ironic expressions, their strategies, and interpreting their functions is another significant research idea to be investigated further. The results of the analysis of the formal features of irony could be beneficial for building computational models to foster the automatic analysis of irony.

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