

## A Linguistic Analysis of Para-jokes and Meta-jokes in Persian Verbal Humor

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### Abstract

The present study explored para-jokes and meta-jokes in Persian verbal humor. They were defined in the context of this research as the second and the third generation of jokes respectively. Such jokes rely on the intertextuality of humor. That is, the perception of humor used in para-jokes and meta-jokes entails a prior recognition of the original jokes based on which such versions are generated. In this study, first, a corpus of Persian online jokes was made. Then, in light of General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), the corpus was scrutinized to discern the percentage of para- and meta-jokes. The initial analysis revealed that only five and three percent of the corpus were represented by these jokes respectively. In the second phase of the study, 31 Persian speakers were interviewed to examine their recognition and perception of humor in a sample of such jokes. The findings indicated that para-jokes and meta-jokes were successfully recognized and perceived by only 30% and 45% of the interviewees respectively. Drawing upon GTVH, this paper elaborates on the contribution of such jokes in Persian verbal humor. Moreover, limitations of the study and suggestions for further research are briefly addressed.

**Keywords:** Para-joke, Meta-joke, Linguistic analysis, Persian humor, Verbal humor, GTVH

### INTRODUCTION

The present study investigated Persian verbal humor within the perspective of General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH). Many theories of humor have been developed by many prominent philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Schopenhauer, and Kant. (Ghodsí & Heidari-Shahreza, 2016). All these theories seek to answer why people laugh at certain situations, but they have no reaction in some other situations. In general, theories of humor can be classified into three categories: incongruity theory, hostility theory and release theory (Raskin, 1985).

## **Incongruity Theory**

According to (Morreal, 1987) incongruity theory is the most popular philosophical theory of humor. This theory spins around the cognitive elements of human beings. Wilson (1979) states incongruity theory is based on the contradictions in humorous situations and components of a joke. Thus, humor results from a discrepancy between what the recipient of a joke anticipates to happen and what actually happens (Masaeli & Heidari-Shahreza, 2016)

## **Hostility Theory**

Hostility theory, also known as disparagement theory, derision theory (MacHovec, 1988), superiority theory (Morreall, 1987) or disappointment theory and the theory of frustrated expectation (Allen, Steve, 1998) refers to Plato and Aristotle's works. These two philosophers stated that laughter results from the superiority felt against the inferiority of other people. According to Plato amusement is a kind of malice toward people who have no power (Morreall, 1987).

## **Release Theory**

This theory states that humor releases tensions and makes one feel liberated. One of the most prominent proponents of this theory is Sigmund Freud. He believed that humor was a means of complete pleasure.

## **GTVH Theory**

This theory was proposed by Attardo and Raskin (1991). This is a linguistic theory which relies on six knowledge resources (KRs) to explain how humor is created (Sadeghi & Heidari-Shahreza, 2016). These KRs are as follows:

*Language (LA)*: It refers to the language component and wording of a text.

*Narrative strategy (NS)*: It refers to the narrative organization of a text.

*Target (TA)*: It is about whom is ridiculed by a humorous text.

*Situation (SI)*: What humor is about, the topic.

*Logical mechanism (LM)*: It refers to the local, unsound logic of the humorous text.

*Script opposition (SO)*: This KR refers to two different and opposing scripts.

## **JOKE**

Joke is a well-organized narrative text that can display humor. It usually takes the form of a story or a dialogue and ends in a punch-line.

## Para- Joke

This kind of jokes can be referred to the previous generation of jokes. This second generation of joke which is called para-joke relies on the implicit intertextual reference to the original joke. In such jokes, the hearer laughs without having knowledge about the intertextual reference of the joke.

An example of Para-joke:

هیچ وقت شوهرتون رو به خاطر عیب هاش سرزنش نکنید!  
شاید اون به خاطر همین عیباش بوده که نتونسته با یکی بهتر از شما ازدواج کنه!!!!  
اینو خودم گفتم. حسین پناهی کار داشت. سلام رسوند.

Never reproach your husband for his faults!

Maybe it is just because of his faults that he could not have been able to get married with someone better than you!!!! I told this. Hossein Panahi was busy today.

## Meta-Joke

The next or third generation of the joke is called meta-joke. The hearer in a meta-joke anticipates hearing a joke but it is only a normal text. Lefort, Bernard, 1992: "the incongruity is that there is no incongruity in this type of joke".

An example of Meta-jokes:

Oh, my Goodness!  
When a person comes to become two;  
Then another to become four?  
Then, the [taxi] driver may come to take us.  
We are cooked in this hot weather.  
(It should not be always about love!)

ای خدا!!!!!!  
کی میشه ۱ نفر بیا  
دو نفر بشیم  
بعد یکی دیگه میاد سه نفر میشیم  
بعد یکی دیگم بیاد  
۴ نفر بشیم  
راننده بیاد بریم  
پختیم تو این گرما :)))  
(همش که نباید عاشقانه باشه والا)

## METHODS

The present research examined para-jokes and meta-jokes in Persian verbal humor as follows:

## Corpus

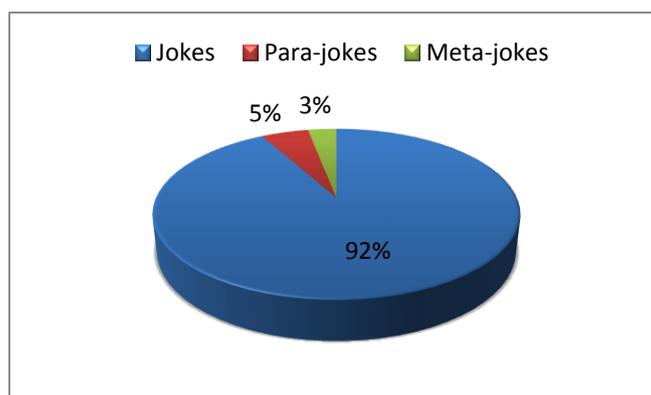
A corpus of 350 Persian online jokes was initially formed. To collect these jokes, various Iranian websites were visited. We also looked at the jokes on cell phone applications. Then, the collected jokes were analyzed to discern the proportion of para- and meta-jokes.

## Interview

To shed light on how para- and meta-jokes were recognized by Persian speakers, an unstructured interview was employed. 31 Iranians who were native speakers of Persian took part in the interview. The participants included both male and females from different age groups.

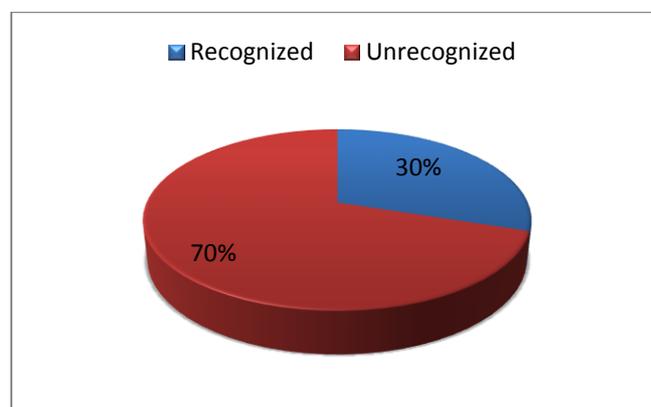
## RESULTS

As shown in Figure 1, only an insignificant proportion of jokes in the corpus belonged to either para-joke or meta-joke category. In other words, few jokes were regarded as the second and third generation of jokes.



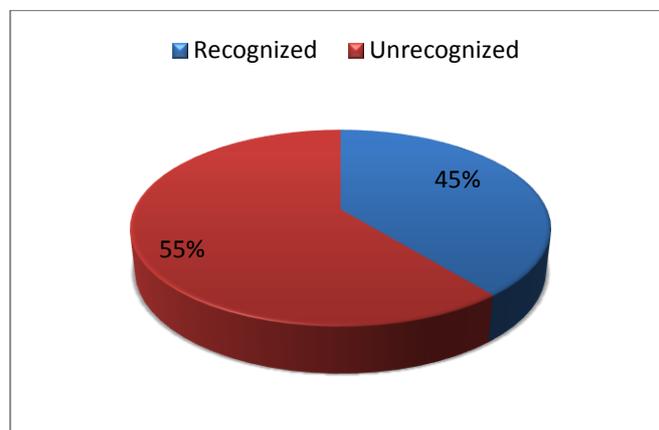
**Figure 1.** The percentage of jokes, para-jokes and meta-jokes in the corpus

Figure 2 shows the percentage of the interviewees who could successfully recognize the relationship between the para-jokes investigated in this study and the original jokes. 70 percent of Persian speakers could not recognize (or perhaps remember) the intertextuality of the jokes.



**Figure 2.** The percentage of para-joke recognition by the interviewees

Figure 3 indicates the percentage of the interviewees who could successfully recognize the relationship between the meta-jokes and the original jokes. Almost half of the Persian speakers could recognize the intertextuality of the jokes.



**Figure 3.** The percentage of meta-joke recognition by the interviewees

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study investigated different generations of Persian jokes in light of General Theory of Verbal Humor. As mentioned, GTVH has six knowledge resources which are known as KRs. The script opposition (SO), narrative strategies (NS), situation (SI), logical mechanism (LM), target (TA), and language (LA). Also, the second generation of jokes is known as para-Jokes and the third generation is known as meta-Jokes. The findings revealed that only a small part of the corpus belonged to the second and the third generation of the jokes (i.e., para- and meta-jokes). This, in turn, may imply that few jokes survive in the guise of new jokes. In other words, as humor is usually a reflection of the current affairs of a society and since any society is constantly facing new issues, jokes are most often in a transitory state. That is, they come and go recurrently. Moreover, the results indicate that a greater proportion of Persian speakers could not recognize para- and meta-jokes. That is, they were not able to associate these jokes with their original versions. This finding is also in line with the conclusion that jokes have often a transitory nature. In other words, Persian speakers forget jokes to make room for the new ones. Probably, the amusement aspect of jokes for some speakers weighs much more than the serious aspect of the jokes. Therefore, jokes may not receive their full attention.

To the best of our knowledge, this study was the first study on para- and meta-joke in Persian. Thus, its findings may be insightful and encouraging in different ways. First and foremost, this study emphasizes the significance of research on humor. Although in the guise of funniness, humor has the potential to unveil important aspects of the social life of human beings. Moreover, the recognition rate of para- and meta-jokes may also inform those interested in the long-term effects of socio-cultural trends and patterns.

This study was limited in a number of ways: Firstly, a small number of jokes were taken into account. Secondly, the findings were more generalizable if a larger sample of Persian speakers was employed. Finally, para- and meta-jokes were not examined within the other theoretical frameworks. Therefore, future studies may embark on investigating the same topic using larger corpuses of jokes and samples of participants. Moreover, interested researchers may explore para- and meta-humor in other genres of humor such as cartoons and films.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Para-jokes

#### Persian version:

۱. روم به دیوار ولی مورد داشتیم پسر به خاطر فوت اقوامش تا ۴۰ روز به ابروهایش دست نزده.
۲. سوار تاکسی شدم. راننده تاکسی گفت کار خودشونه. پرسیدم چی؟ گفت برای امنیت خودت بهتره بیشتر از این چیزی ندونی.
۳. تو گوگل سرچ کردم: زندگینامه شیخ بهایی گوگل گفت: باز بابات کنارت نشستته؟

#### English version:

1. I am ashamed, but I heard a case: The boy doesn't dress up his eyebrows for 40 days just because of one of his relative's death.

2. I got in to the taxi.....The driver said: "it's their fault". I asked: "what?"  
He said: "It is better for your security that you don't know more than this."

3. I was searching on Google: "The biography of Sheikh Bahaee".  
Google said: "Is your father sitting next to you again?"

### Appendix B: Meta-jokes

*English Version:*

1. One day someone gets on an airplane but suddenly the airplane crashes down.  
It was expected to be a part of a funny story, but accident does not inform beforehand!!!!

2. +18

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I am not in a good mood to say it. You yourself think of it in a bad way. You know it better.

3. Do you know what it is?

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I hate whoever that puts dots and then writes. Well, say (or write) above whatever you want to say.

*Persian Version:*

1. به روز یکی سوار هواپیما میشه یهو هواپیما  
سقوط میکنه...  
این قرار بود جک باشه اما حادثه خبر نمیکند!!

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+۱۸

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حوصله ندارم بگم خودتون فکرای بد کنید خیلی خوب بلدید که...

۳. میدونی چیه

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اینقدر از اینایی که نقطه نقطه میزارن ولی پایین حرف می زنن بدم میاد خب همون بالا بگو!