

Forms and functions of jokes disseminated during the Covid-19 pandemic in Jordan

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Abstract

People in Jordan have suffered the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Jordanian government took some pre-emptive measures to curb the spread of the virus, including the announcement of indefinite curfew and nationwide strict lockdown. Humorous texts appear to be the people's key to escape from life stress, minimise the pressure of unpleasant situations and increase pleasure. Jordanian humour attracts our attention to find out what it does during the Covid-19 pandemic and investigate its structure. To pursue this aim, a sample of 50 jokes and memes were collected from Facebook and WhatsApp in 2020 and analysed using the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH). The researchers conducted a systematic and detailed analysis of the data relying on the six knowledge resources postulated by the GTVH, which are script opposition, logical mechanism, situation, target, narrative strategy and language. The analysis showed that humour can be viewed as a tool to release the tensions caused by Covid-19 restrictions on mobility and lockdown. It also revealed the people's comments on different aspects of their life during the pandemic, including but not limited to social contact, economic status and education. In most of the analysed texts, humour is playful and serves the function of decommitment. This study offers insights into Arabic humour discourse, showing how jokes may serve the emerging context and encourage conducting studies on humorous texts in various settings to show what roles they would play.

Keywords: humour, jokes, Covid-19, GTVH, binary opposition, Jordan.

1. Introduction

The Arabic proverb '*farrul baliyyati ma: yudhik*': 'The worst calamity is the one that makes you laugh' is introduced here as a guide to clarify the context of this study. This proverb may be used in the Arab world when someone is in a difficulty or confronts an undesirable situation but reacts with a laugh, instead of crying or being sad. It can also be used to describe a sarcastic joke about an unpleasant real-life situation. Similarly, this study tackles jokes that have emerged during an unpleasant and a difficult life situation- the Covid-19 pandemic. The jokes that the current study seeks to investigate were released during the Covid-19 pandemic in Jordan.

In Jordan, the first wave of Covid-19 began in March 2020. The outbreak of coronavirus forced the Jordanian government to enforce a group of martial orders, which have run the affairs of the Jordanian society during the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the prominent martial orders is the curfew. As a result, many different sectors have suffered the effects of the lockdown, and many aspects of the Jordanian society, mainly the economic, social and educational, have significantly been influenced by the pandemic. For example, all education sectors were closed so that the value of socio-academic interaction between students and teachers decreased (Abu-Elrob and Tawalbeh 2022). Also, some social practices like wedding ceremonies including invitations for celebration were suspended (Tawalbeh 2021). Many people faced difficulties during their stay at home. However, the pandemic did not stop the people's sense of humour. They sarcastically criticise and comment on different topics about health, society, economy, etc.

In a stressful situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, humorous texts like jokes would be helpful to release stress and talk about the truth softly (Riyono 2009). Jokes are the cause of laughter and source of pleasure (Freud 2003). Humour can play an important role in creating solidarity among interactants, as they engage in elaborating, repeating, or appreciating the humour (Attardo 2017). It can be said that humour shares a common feature of having fun and performs different functions according to the context in which it occurs.

Humorous texts can perform different social functions and affect the relation and communication between the participants engaged in conveying the humour. The social roles of humour, as summarised by Attardo (1994), fall into four categories: social management, decommitment, mediation and defunctionalisation. The function of social management is to manage communication between groups. It can be seen as either including the participants in the interaction and thus establishes a connection between them or excluding them from the interaction and weakening their groups' bond. The decommitment function relies on the idea that the speaker may retract what s/he said in an unpleasant situation without losing face. The speaker may want to test whether an action gains an approval from the receiver so that s/he performs that action with clear signs of non-seriousness. Humorous texts can also be used as a mediation tool so that they can initiate an embarrassing or aggressive talk. This function of humour is similar to the decommitment one as the speaker can deny the seriousness of the message. As for the defunctionalisation, as the term suggests, the function of language as a means of communication is deactivated. Instead, language is used for playful purposes. The current paper attempts to find which function of those given above (or other possible ones) can be performed by the Jordanian humour.

This paper investigates jokes and memes spread out during the Covid-19 pandemic and explores the function they would perform. Therefore, two questions are addressed here:

1. How are the jokes and memes issued during the Covid-19 pandemic formed?
2. What functions would these types of humour perform?

2. Previous research

Researchers have studied humour occurring in both written and spoken contexts. In the written context, Cancelas-Ouviña (2021), Mifdal (2022) and Pabel and Turnšek (2022) studied memes disseminated during the Covid-19 pandemic and showed some common functions of them, such as criticising current issues and laughing in difficult times. Cancelas-Ouviña (2021) analysed 644 memes disseminated via WhatsApp and presented some functions that humour performs, such as bringing out a humorous side in the face of adversity, criticising political issues and describing people's new lives. Mifdal (2022) analysed 460 memes posted on Moroccan Facebook pages and showed that Moroccans do not only use humour for attaining amusement, but also for criticising issues of common concern. Mifdal added that humour was used to mitigate tension, build social cohesion and criticise maladaptive behaviour. Similarly, Pabel and Turnšek (2022) investigated 80 internet travel-related memes and identified three themes: "playful aggression, making fun of one's longing for travel and making fun of new travel realities." These researchers showed that humour could be used to release tension and fear, enhance interactions and gain social support. These studies present an example of the role of humour during difficult times showing that it can take place and perform an action even in stressful situations like Covid-19.

Another study by Saude (2018) focused on the six knowledge resources (hereafter KRs) (see section 2.1) proposed by the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) (Attardo & Raskin 1991). Saude investigated the applicability of the KRs to articles in the satirical news publication. The researcher listed the jokes and then analysed them according to GTVH to identify whether the text type is structurally similar to jokes or not. It was reported that the GTVH seems to be the theory of joke text types because of the formulation of the KRs, which are joke centric. However, this study does not provide a detailed analysis of how the jokes instantiate the KRs.

The GTVH was also used to investigate different cultural reflections on jokes. For example, Al-Badawi et al. (2021) analysed some online Arabic jokes to examine the production of feminine and masculine gendered identities. The construction and organisation of the jokes have been described using the GTVH, which helped show the similarities between the jokes. This theory, as Al-Badawi et al. found, can be a reference analysis of traditional vs. new gendered roles in jokes. The results showed the occurrence of some new gendered identities and other conventional ones, which reflect the social change in gender roles in modern Jordanian society. This change is manifested in the role that females play in the new gendered identities, as they develop more control role than in the conventional identities. However, in another study that analysed jokes selected from Facebook and WhatsApp, Rashad and Azher (2018) concluded that the analysed jokes reflect a negative stereotypical image of women as empty-headed chatters.

In addition, Haider and Al-Abbas (2022) used the GTVH in their analysis of the jokes circulated on social media during the Covid-19 pandemic to examine how Arab women were stereotyped. Their conclusion goes in line with Rashad and Azher's (2018), as they concluded that jokes represent a poor social context for women because they were negatively stereotyped. Their study gives an example of applying the KRs to jokes focusing only on stereotyping Arab women. They categorised the analysed jokes into four themes, 'marital relations', 'habits and attributes', 'beauty and makeup' and 'violence'. The current study, however, categorised jokes into other different themes (as seen in section 4) in an attempt to show how jokes function in varied aspects of life in Jordan.

As for the occurrence of humour in spoken contexts, studies on verbal humour types were conducted for different purposes. For example, Azka and Hamzah (2019) conducted a study to find the frequent occurred types of verbal humour in two Talk Show television programmes.

These types are pun, joke, satire, parody, anecdote, farce, irony, sarcasm, tall tale and wit. The study compared the two television programmes by analysing the humour types according to the GTVH. Some differences in the occurrence of particular verbal humour types were spotted between the two programmes, which were attributed to the gender variable. The study compared the two programmes quantitatively; however, it would be more useful to add a qualitative analysis that reveals how the KRs are instantiated in each humour type and how they may serve the Talk Show itself.

In another example of verbal humour occurrence in the spoken context, Afdhal and Hamzah (2019) studied it in preaching to deliver religious teaching. The analysis of the data was conducted using the six KRs and showed nine types of verbal humour. The most frequent types are irony, wit and satire whereas the least frequent one is the joke. Afdhal and Hamzah state that these types could help deliver the preachers' teaching, advise people and criticise a situation conveniently. The study seems to suggest a useful way of using humour to serve the context in which it occurs.

The studies above analysed jokes selected from TV programmes and social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp to achieve different objectives. The present study attempts, by investigating jokes, to reflect the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on people's life in Jordan and conduct a detailed analysis of the structure of jokes and the roles they would play.

2.1 Theoretical framework

One useful model proposed to analyse the structure of jokes is Greimas' (1966) Isotopy-Disjunction model (as cited in Attardo 1994). Greimas' model consists of two parts: presentation and dialogue. The presentation part establishes the scene or the body of the joke while the dialogue part opposes the presentation. Similar to Greimas' notion of opposition, Raskin (1985) offered a significant theory to identify the humorous text. His semantic script theory of humour (SSTH) states that:

A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text if both of the conditions (...) are satisfied:

- (i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts
- (ii) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite in a special sense (...). The two scripts with which some text is compatible are said to overlap fully or in part on this text.

(Raskin 1985,p.99)

For Raskin, the oppositeness of scripts is a sufficient condition for a text to be funny. He clarified that opposition may have three types between 'real' and 'unreal' situations: actual vs. non-actual situation, normal vs. abnormal (unexpected) state of affairs and possible vs. fully or partially impossible situation. Raskin added that these types of opposition can have some aspects, belonging to these situations, which involve the dichotomies of good vs. bad, death vs. life, obscene vs. non-obscene and money vs. no money.

The SSTH was expanded into the GTVH by Attardo and Raskin (1991). The GTVH is used to analyse the sample of this study as it is more comprehensive than the SSTH; it would cover the various elements of a joke. It has broadened the scope of the SSTH, as it is a linguistic theory that covers some areas in linguistics, such as textual linguistics and pragmatics (Attardo 1994). In addition to the script opposition (SO) parameter offered by the SSTH, the GTVH postulated five other KRs to identify a joke. These are clarified below, as delivered in Attardo and Raskin's (1991) study.

1. Logical mechanism (LM) “accounts for the way in which the two senses (scripts, isotopies, ...) in the joke are brought together” (Attardo 1994, p.225).
2. Situation (SI) comprises some props such as the activity, participants, location, instrument and objects.
3. Target (TA) refers to individuals or a group being joked about and is determined by the stereotype associated with the joke.
4. Narrative strategy (NS) identifies the genre of a joke whether it is a riddle, a question and answer, a pun, etc.
5. Language (LA) refers to word choices and syntactic constructions used to create a joke. The content of a joke is expressed in this KR. A joke can be paraphrased in several ways without affecting its semantic aspect. With the support of the above-mentioned KRs, LA determines the wording and position of the punch line of a joke, which is the final position in most jokes.

One significant aspect about these KRs is that they are organised hierarchically. The choices in the lower KRs are determined by the choices in the higher ones (Attardo 2017). Moreover, the differences in the KRs determine the similarity between jokes, “with jokes based on higher knowledge resources being perceived as more different” (Attardo 2017, p.6).

Jokes in Jordan are characterised by some features that go in line with these KRs. These features, as summarised by Al-khatib (1999, p.267), include form of the joke, the situation, the butt of a joke, the opening passage and the concluding part. The ‘form of the joke’ is similar to the NS, as it describes the formulas of the joke, which can be a simple narrative, riddle or a dialogue. The ‘situation’ is the introduction of an event or series of events, which matches with the SI KR. The ‘opening passage’ is similar to the introductory script given in the SO. The ‘butt of a joke’ is introduced in the ‘opening passage’ and usually named as ‘someone’. The ‘concluding part’ is equivalent to the opposing script, as it gives the opposition in the punch line. These features would explain why the GTVH can be applicable to humour in Jordan. Another feature that Al-khatib addressed is that jokes are sensitive to context and timing. He explained that not all contexts and timing are appropriate for telling jokes. The current study, however, shows that jokes in Jordan occur and perform various functions in a context (covid-19) that can be deemed inappropriate for telling jokes. They also would improve the timing of people by releasing the tension caused by that context.

The GTVH can be applicable to Covid-19 humour in Jordan because it would be applicable to any type of humorous text (Attardo 1994), and because the collected jokes in this study include incongruity. This theory relies on the notion of incongruity, which is responsible for generating the humorous sense. Schopenhauer (1966, p.59) states that “In every case, laughter results from nothing but the suddenly perceived incongruity between a concept and the real objects that had been thought through it in some relation; and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity.” Haider and Al-Abbas (2022) added that incongruity is established by violating the expectations created in the first script of a humorous text. The explanation of incongruity by this theory highlights its strengths. Moreover, this theory offers a systematic framework for analysing humour into components, namely the KRs. Additionally, using it to analyse humour in Jordan would show that it can be a universal approach which helps better understand humour across different cultures.

The GTVH would also be applicable to the data of the present research which include verbal jokes or a combination of both verbal and visual jokes. This is because all the tackled jokes would represent the KRs and basically include opposition. Some of the jokes include a verbal part as an opening script which is opposed by a visual part. The latter can be interpreted into a verbal message represented by a surprising or a contrasting element which violates the verbal opening of the joke and generates humour. In addition, the visual part of the joke displays who

are joked about and refers to an event or a situation, which go in line with the KRs of TA and SI. Therefore, the visual jokes can be approached and analysed using the GTVH for the possibility of reading the images and linking them to the already given scripts.

3. Methods

3.1 Data collection and analysis

The data for this research were collected at a time when Jordan did not witness a noticeable surge in the number of infections, and most importantly at time the Jordanian government took some unprecedented and pre-emptive measures to curb the spread of the virus, including the announcement of indefinite curfew and nationwide strict lockdown (managed by the army and security forces) following the declaration of emergency martial law in mid-March 2020.

The researchers collected a sample of 37 jokes and 13 memes that were circulated on Facebook and WhatsApp. The sample was collected from April 1st 2020 until June 30th 2020. The selection criteria include, firstly, finding and selecting Jordanian humorous texts about any issue people dealt with during the Covid-19 pandemic. Secondly, the selected jokes and memes had the highest number of ‘likes’ and they were circulated on WhatsApp from different sources, namely friends and WhatsApp groups. Jokes that are not relevant to the Jordanian covid-19 humour are excluded. Their genre is a simple narrative, one-liner joke, descriptive, dialogue and a question-answer joke. The data were then classified into seven themes according to the topic that each joke tackles. These topics include social contact, marital relation, government support, education, the people infected with Covid-19, economic status and religion. Only Eight examples are presented in the results to represent these themes.

All of the selected data were analysed using the six KRs addressed above in section 2.1. The researchers began with the first KR (SO) to determine the first script (set up) and the second script, namely the opposition. These scripts were described in dichotomies, such as safe vs. unsafe and annoying vs. non-annoying. The researchers then determined the mechanism (LM) by which the two scripts are linked. The LM, in other words, shows how the incongruity introduced in the SO is resolved. The SI was described by reporting who (the participants) does what (the activity). The analysis also shows who/what is being joked about (the TA). The KR of NS was then determined to identify the genre. Finally, the LA presents the linguistic and the non-linguistic elements employed in the data and specifies the punch line.

4. Results and discussion

The data have been categorised into seven themes about varied aspects of people’s life in Jordan: ‘social contact’ (five jokes and three memes), marital relation (five jokes and three memes), government support (five jokes), education (four jokes and four memes), the people infected with Covid-19 (five jokes and three memes), economic status (seven jokes), and religion (six jokes). Each theme has been introduced by an explanation of the situational context to help understand the jokes and memes. There are four examples of jokes and four of memes that are given below to clarify the themes and show the role that humour plays in each of the aforementioned aspects. These examples are ordered below according to their popularity in terms of the number of likes and shares they have on Facebook and WhatsApp. For example, the first joke given below on the theme social contact has the highest number of likes. The six KRs are presented in tables 1-8 below and described under each example.

4.1. Social contact

One way to protect people from the spread of Covid-19 is by maintaining distance between them. People have to follow such instruction while doing their daily activities. The joke 1 below comments on such common practice showing that people have engaged themselves a lot in this activity.

Joke 1:

وانا بدرس بنتي تكتب الحروف بحكيلها اتركي مسافة لا تكتبيهم جنب بعض
بتحكي لي: اه عشان في كورونا
انهبلوا الأولاد

‘While I was teaching my daughter to write the alphabets, I asked her to leave a distance between them, not to write them close to each other.
She said: Ah, because of Corona.
The children lost their minds.’

Table 1. The KRrs of joke 1

SO	LM	SI	TA	NS	LA
Finger space between words vs. social distance - Safe vs. unsafe	False analogy and referential ambiguity	Distance in a writing activity - A father and his daughter	Reality of restriction on social distance	Dialogue	- Colloquial language - Metaphor

The SOs of finger space between words/social distance and safe/unsafe are used in this joke. The LMs of false analogy and referential ambiguity are employed to resolve the incongruity introduced in the SOs. The mechanism of false analogy appears when the daughter mixes the topic of ‘space between words’ with the topic of social distance, showing as if the consequences of the virus have been extended to spaces between words. The LM of referential ambiguity appears by having different interpretations of the noun *مسافة* (distance). The father asked his daughter to leave space between words in a writing activity. He used the noun *مسافة* (distance) to refer to finger space between words. The daughter connected the meaning of this noun with the imposed social distance to successfully create the opposition, which is applying social distance to the alphabets. The noun *مسافة* (distance) evoked the girl to employ the meaning of ‘distance’ instead of ‘finger space’ in a wider context (writing activity in addition to distance between people) so that she could switch the topic to the social distance imposed by the martial law. As for the TA, this joke is a playful comment on the reality of restrictions imposed during the pandemic and shows how children feel about it. The joke has a dialogue format that has the punch line ‘Ah, because of Corona’, which produces the humorous effect. It is developed using the pun (finger space literally/ social distance metaphorically). The punch line is followed by a comment line stating that ‘انهبلوا الأولاد’: the children lost their minds, making a generalisation about how the pandemic has influenced the children.

This joke would perform the defunctionalisation role of humour (Attardo 1994), as this joke is merely playful (see section 1).

Social contact was minimised by imposing curfew so that people had to stay at home. The meme 1 below would show a positive side of reducing social contact in spite of its negative side on thieves.



Figure 1. A meme (1) about the consequences of preventing burglary (Facebook 2020)

الناس كلها في البيت منها لله الكورونا

‘All people are at home. May God take revenge from Corona.’

Table 2. The KRs of meme 1

SO	LM	SI	TA	NS	LA
Home to isolate vs. home to prevent burglary	Juxtaposition and inferring consequences	Thieves are at a psychiatrist’s clinic, as people are at home.	Thieves	Simple narrative	- Colloquial language -Non-linguistic features

This meme instantiates the SOs of home to isolate/home to prevent burglary, present/absent and good/bad. The first script is introduced by the statement ‘all people are at home’ while the opposition is provided by the non-linguistic element which is a picture of a thief visiting a psychiatrist. Incongruity introduced in the meme is resolved by using the LMs of juxtaposition and inferring consequences. Juxtaposition helps establish the opposition by placing together and comparing the two scenes- thieves are in a psychiatrist’s clinic and people are at homes. The situation of thieves visiting a psychiatrist represents the consequences that can be inferred from the spread of the virus. This meme is targeted at thieves and is a simple narrative that ends in the punch line containing the formulaic colloquial expression ‘منها لله الكورونا: May God take revenge from Corona’. It is used as an invocation against Covid-19 and raises a complaint about the consequences of Covid-19, which reflects its negative side on thieves. As people had to stay at home, they would keep their homes safe from stealing. This expression, in addition to the picture, contributes to the generation of the humorous effect. Tsakona (2009) showed that an interaction between verbal and visual elements produces humour.

4.2. Marital relation

Although the previous section reveals a positive side of staying at home, the following meme (2) implies that husbands are not comfortable in their stay with their wives. It raises the topic of the lockdown and its possible consequences on husbands. The meme is likely to express a feeling of empathy with those husbands, as it suggests the following special offer:



Figure 2. A meme (2) about a remove to vacation (Facebook 2020)

‘Special offer: For 350 JD only. We come home wearing the dress of the epidemic committee and take you away from your wife for a 14-day trip to Wadi Rum and Aqaba.’

Table 3. The KRs of meme 2

SO	LM	SI	TA	NS	LA
- Remove for quarantine vs. remove to vacation - Annoying vs. non-annoying - Blessing vs. curse	False analogy	A special trip for husbands	Wives	Sales promotion	- Metaphor: quarantine is a trip - Non-linguistic features

This meme employs the SOs of remove for quarantine/remove to vacation, annoying/non-annoying and blessing/curse. The first script joke is about a special offer of 350 JD to be paid for some people wearing the dress of the epidemic committee. The script opposition begins when those people want to apply the 14-day quarantine in a form of a trip to husbands to stay away from their wives (at the beginning of the pandemic, a 14-day quarantine was applied to those infected with Covid-19). These scripts are linked together using the LM of false analogy by which the quarantine of 14 days, which is an unwelcome state of affairs, is compared to a trip. This meme is targeted at wives whom are considered a source of annoyance from their husbands’ points of view. The NS is sales promotion, which begins with the noun phrase ‘عرض خاص’:

special offer' followed by a description of the offer. The punch line uses the metaphor *بعيدا عن رحلة*: in which staying away from wives in a quarantine is described as a trip. This meme considers such kind of quarantine a trip as it offers a chance of staying away from home to husbands who get bored or bothered by the continuous contact with their wives during the lockdown.

There is a non-linguistic feature which consists of a picture of a group of people wearing masks and protective suits. Such a feature would take part in instantiating the opposition and add some fun to the meme. It is playful and serves the function of decommitment.

4.3. Government support

The Jordanian government had provided bread subsidy for poor and low-income Jordanians for three subsequent years before it stopped this support during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021. The following joke (2) suggests a reaction to this action:

Joke 2:

رسالة للحكومة الأردنية: يابتعطونا دعم الخبز أو بنرجع نبوس بعض بعض ☺ ☺ ☺

'A message to the Jordanian government: if you do not give us the bread subsidy, we will kiss each other again.'

Table 4. The KR of joke 2

SO	LM	SI	TA	NS	LA
- Kissing for pleasure vs. to spread disease - Committed vs. non-committed	Meeting demands otherwise breaking healthy patterns	Delivering a message to the government	Government	Simple narrative	- Colloquial language - A conditional sentence - Non-linguistic features

This joke employs the SOs of Kissing for pleasure/to spread disease and committed/non-committed. The LM of meeting demands otherwise breaking healthy patterns is used to resolve the incongruity presented in the SOs. The joke establishes the context before it presents the two scripts, as it tries to convey a message to the Jordanian government in a humorous sense. The joke is a simple narrative and is targeted at the government, who fails to commit to people. It creates the first script using the 'If' clause of the conditional sentence *'يابتعطونا دعم الخبز'*: 'if you do not give us the bread subsidy'. It ends in the punch line, the second script, which introduces the opposition in the main clause *'بنرجع نبوس بعض'*: we kiss each other again (kissing to spread disease). It should be noticed here that kissing, which is a common greeting in Jordan, has been suspended to stop the spread of the coronavirus. This joke states that some people will break the healthy pattern if the government does not respond to their request. However, to mitigate the imposition in this joke, there are some smile emojis which are decorating the text to add to it a sense of humour. Therefore, this joke would perform the role of decommitment (Attardo 1994), as it tries to convey an unwelcome message to the government and then retracts seriousness

from it using the given SOs and the emojis, which can indicate here as if someone says ‘I am joking.’ Such a decommitment would present the role of jokes in facilitating social interaction and minimising face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson 1987), as the people in Jordan would not use a face-threatening act while communicating with the government.

4.4. Education

To reduce the effects of Covid-19, schools have been suspended. While many people agreed with this decision, others did not, as they do not believe in the effectiveness of distant education. The opening of schools was delayed while many parents were impatiently waiting to send their children to schools. The meme (3) below criticises how long it takes for the schools to reopen due to the imposed restrictions on education.



Figure 3. A meme (3) about returning to schools after decades (WhatsApp 2020)

عودة الأولاد الى المدرسة بعد القضاء على فايروس كورونا

‘Children’s return to school after the elimination of the Coronavirus.’

Table 5. The KRs of meme 3

SO	LM	SI	TA	NS	LA
- Returning to school after reasonable time vs. after decades - School children vs. old people.	- Juxtaposition - exaggeration	Students’ state after the Covid-19 pandemic	Imposed restrictions on education	One-liner joke	- Nominal phrase - Non-linguistic features

The opposing scripts are of returning to school after a reasonable time/after decades and school children/old people. These scripts are joined together using the LM of Juxtaposition, as it shows a group of old students, who are not at any school age, sitting in classrooms. The LM also includes exaggeration, as distant learning is really operational. The SI describes the students’ state after the Covid-19 pandemic. This meme targets the imposed restrictions on

schools, which deprive students from onsite education. It consists of only one line that is responsible for the creation of the first script: declaring that students are going back to schools. The opposition in this joke is instantiated by a picture of old students sitting at their desks in a classroom. Such an opposition means that students took a long time to return to their schools, as the continuous waves of the virus have delayed the opening of schools several times. This meme would reflect the people's complaints about the long delay of school opening. It is in a playful context and serves the function of decommitment.

4.5. People infected with Covid-19

At the beginning of the pandemic and during the lockdown, few people in Jordan caught the virus. They were blamed for being infected and considered a threat of spreading the virus in the society. The meme 4 below criticises how some people have treated patients with Covid-19.



Figure 4. A meme (4) about visiting a patient infected with Covid-19 (Facebook 2020)

زيارة مريض مصاب بالكورونا
تقول صايدين ضبع وقاعدین يتفرجوا عليه

‘Visiting a patient infected with Corona.
It looks as if some people hunted a hyena and are watching it.’

Table 6. The KRs of meme 4

SO	LM	SI	TA	NS	LA
- Visiting a patient vs. a hunted hyena - Human vs. non-human	- False analogy - exaggeration	A patient with Covid-19 is trapped in a net.	The visitors at whom the criticism is directed.	Descriptive: a joke describes a picture.	- Colloquial language - Simile - Non-linguistic features

This meme employs the SOs of visiting a patient/a hunted hyena and human/non-human. The incongruity is resolved using the LM of false analogy, as the patient is likened to a hyena. Also the LM of exaggeration is employed indicating how such patients were treated. The first

script of the meme is represented by the nominal statement ‘زيارة مريض مصاب بال كورونا’: a visit to a patient infected with Corona’, which helps clarify the SI described in the picture. The word ‘تقول: as’ signals the simile between the patient and the hunted hyena. This simile instantiates the opposition in the second script ‘hunting a hyena and watching it.’ This joke has a descriptive format and is targeted at the visitors whom are criticised for how they deal with the patient. The function of the joke is social management (including social control) as it disparages the maladaptive behaviour of the visitors.

The given simile becomes clearer with the non-linguistic feature represented by a picture of a Covid-19 patient prisoned in a net. The picture also shows a group of people visiting the patient and wearing their masks. Such a scene of how the patient is treated may not be surprising as the people who got infected with the virus at the beginning of the pandemic may have felt outcast or have been looked at with unwelcome eyes. Those patients may have felt guilty as people consider them a source of spreading the virus and thus continuing the unwanted curfew period with its consequences.

4.6. Economic status

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the economic status has witnessed a significant challenge as many sectors have stopped their businesses, causing many people in Jordan to live in hard times. The following joke example 3 briefly describes the economic situation and tackles a possible consequence of the economic effect:

Joke 3:

؟؟؟ أردني بسأل أبوه متى بدك تجوزني

قاله والله يا يابه لو استمرت أوضاع البلد الاقتصادية هيك احتمال اطلق أمك

‘A Jordanian asks his father: when will you help me get married?
His father said: If the country’s economic status continues like this, I may divorce your mother.’

Table 7. The KR of joke 3

SO	LM	SI	TA	NS	LA
Marriage vs. divorce	Juxtaposition and inferring consequences	A son asks for his father’s permission to get married	Economic hardship	A question-answer joke	- Colloquial language - Conditional sentence

The opposing scripts presented in this joke are marriage/divorce, and the LMs of Juxtaposition and inferring consequences are used to resolve the incongruity. The TA is the situation of economic hardship being criticised. The NS is of a question-answer in which the answer is the punch line. The raised question by the son is a request to get married, which instantiates the first script. The father’s answer is given in the conditional sentence ‘If the country’s economic status continues like this, I may divorce your mother.’ The ‘If’ clause raises the father’s complaint about the economic status, and the main clause is the father’s indirect refusal of his son’s request. The father’s statement ‘I may divorce your mother’ performs the function of the second script and means that the father himself may not proceed with his

marriage; therefore, the son cannot get married. It can be inferred that the father cannot finance his son due to the consequences of the pandemic on the economy of the country. It can be seen that the mechanism of juxtaposition is a result of replacing the idea of marriage with divorce. The father's reply can be rephrased as: refrain from proposing marriage as my marriage may not last. It can be said that this joke would reflect the people's complaints about low economic. It serves the function of decommitment, as the father is not serious about divorce.

4.7. Religion

This theme is similar to the first one (social contact) in terms of how people get really involved in Corona-related topics (social distance and curfew) and mix them with other life activities. In the fasting month (Ramadan), people may forget that they are fasting and eat or drink something. In this case, they should complete their fasting. However, if they do this intentionally, they have to compensate for breaking their fast by fasting another day and paying some money. In the joke example 4 below, curfew overlaps fasting practices.

Joke 4:

الشعب الأردني بلش يتعايش مع الوضع... والدليل انو واحد رن على المفتي يسألو اذا نسي وطلع على الشارع يكمل الحظر ولا يقضيه.

'Jordanians have begun to adapt to the situation... The evidence is that someone asked the Mufti whether to continue the curfew or compensate it if he forgetfully went out to the street.'

Table 8. The KRs of joke 4

SO	LM	SI	TA	NS	LA
Breaking curfew vs. fasting	False analogy	An enquiry about what someone should do when he breaks the curfew.	How curfew is compared to fasting	Simple narrative	Colloquial language

The SO of breaking curfew/fasting is instantiated in this joke, and the incongruity is resolved using the LM of false analogy as breaking the curfew is likened to fast breaking. The joke above establishes the context by reporting that Jordanians have begun to adapt to the situation- the Covid-19 pandemic. The evidence of this adaptation is given in the joke using the scripts breaking curfew vs. fasting. The first script of this simple narrative joke is represented in the 'If' clause of the conditional sentence, which is directed to the Mufti (a muslim legal scholar), asking about breaking the curfew by going outside to the street forgetfully. The second script, which constitutes the punch line, is provided by the reported question in the main clause 'to continue the curfew or compensate it.' The verbs 'يكمل: continue' and 'يقضيه: compensate' preceded by the verb 'نسي: forget' turn the context from a curfew break into a fasting break. These lexical items are usually connected to and occur during the fasting month, and many people usually use them to ask about the ruling of eating or drinking something forgetfully. This joke is playful and performs the function of decommitment.

5. Conclusion

This study analyses a sample of jokes and memes disseminated during the Covid-19 pandemic to show how they are formed and find out the functions they would perform. Using the six KRs (SO, LM, SI, TA, NS, LA) put forward in the GTVH by Attardo and Raskin (1991), the researchers conducted a top-down analysis of the collected data. The analysis shows that the six KRs contribute to the identification of the jokes, as can be seen in section 4. It reveals that joking in Jordan is systematic and rule-governed (Al-khatib 1999). Jordanian jokes have a particular form and butt, handle a situation, begin with a script and end with a punchline containing an opposing script.

The SO divides the humorous text into two scripts, which would facilitate understanding the joke. These scripts most importantly include the opposition, which gives the analysed texts a humorous sense. This lends support to Raskin (1985) and Tsakona (2009) in stating that oppositeness of scripts creates humour. The LM helps bring the scripts together and resolve the incongruity introduced in the scripts (Haider 2022). The mechanisms that most often appeared are false analogy and juxtaposition. Such mechanisms would allow the audience to match one script with another opposed one by drawing funny similarities between them or placing them together so that humorous comparison is likely to emerge. The SI informs the audience about the activity which would generate humour. The TA may contribute to the humorous sense, as knowing who/what is joked about may make the text funnier. Criticising the target would elicit laughter (Haider 2022). The NS displays different genres of the analysed jokes, such as simple narrative, one-liner joke, dialogue and a question-answer joke. The LA includes both linguistic and non-linguistic elements, which contribute significantly to the instantiation of the six KRs. Some of the linguistic elements that have been employed are conditional sentences, formulaic expressions, similes and metaphors. It seems that colloquial language is dominant in most of the texts as it is usually more commonly used by and closer to many Jordanians. The non-linguistic elements are given in a form of emojis and, most importantly, pictures without which the SO, and thus humour, would make nonsense.

The findings of this study show that humour in Jordan throughout 2020 and early 2021 can be viewed as a tool to release the tensions caused by Covid-19 restrictions on mobility and lockdown. Moreover, people in Jordan used jokes to achieve some functions, which match those classified by Attardo (1994) (see section 1). These are decommitment, social management and defunctionalisation (playful purposes). Other functions that serve different social issues and life aspects also appear, such as expressing people's thoughts and perspectives, criticising the surrounding circumstances and reporting people's interests and needs. The results of this study go in line with Al-khatib's (1999) in using jokes to communicate information about different social aspects in Jordan, to attain humour and to disparage maladaptive behaviour.

The humorous texts analysed in this study reflect an image about how people in Jordan were influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic and how they reacted accordingly. The investigated texts tackled various aspects of life including social contact, marital relation, government support, education, economic status, people infected with Covid-19 and religion. This reveals the importance of using humour not only for releasing pressure, but also for addressing serious social issues (Mifdal 2022). Some jokes try to reveal the people's perspectives about and criticism of the low economic status, the way of treating patients who got infected with the virus and the consequences of staying at home on husbands and students. The use of jokes to deliver people's perspectives may have an effect on reforming aspects of social life, which meet people's interests (Ziv 2010). Some other jokes show how social distance and curfew have been given a lot of attention and overlap other people's topics, which would indicate that the people's thoughts have been occupied with the Covid-19 related topics. Despite the significance given to such practices to maintain people's health, jokes have made fun of them. In addition, the jokes

seem to have been used as a medium to declare the people's concerns and needs. For example, one joke tries to send a message to the Jordanian government about the people's need for bread subsidy. Some other examples report the people's interest in returning to schools and getting married. The investigated texts also try to reveal some positive sides of the Covid-19 pandemic, as can be noticed in examples 1 (figure 1) and 2.

This study contributes to the field of humour studies by offering insights into Arabic humour discourse, showing how Jordanian jokes are structured and how they serve and function in the emerging context. This study asserts the importance of the situational context in understanding jokes. It is hoped that this study would encourage researchers to investigate other jokes occurring in various events and find their contributions to the emerging contexts. For example, researchers may tackle jokes presented in TV shows and investigate their role in the arising topics.

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