Post-punch Line Humor Booster: A Neglected Component of Persian Online Jokes

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Abstract

The present research examined the underlying structure of Persian online jokes to shed light on how humor was realized (and reinforced) in this genre of verbal humor. In light of our previous research within the framework of General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), we noticed that a number of Persian online jokes contained an additional post-punch line component. It was hypothesized that this seventh component served as a 'humor booster'. That is, it was a supplemental element to reinforce the humorous effect of Persian online jokes. To test this hypothesis, initially such jokes were identified in a corpus of Persian online jokes. They were then scrutinized based on GTVH. In the next phase, through two questionnaires, 70 Persian native speakers rated the funniness of two versions of the same Persian jokes. In the first version, the jokes did not contain a humor booster. In the second one, however, they included this component. Mixed results were obtained. Thus, an interview was conducted with 20 of the respondents. Controlling for gender as a moderator variable, the findings generally supported the hypothesis that 'humor booster' was an appropriate label for this final constituent. This study may contribute to the relevant literature by illuminating a somewhat neglected (or equally emergent) aspect of online jokes.
Keywords: Humor booster, Online jokes, Persian humor, Verbal humor, Gender, GTVH

INTRODUCTION

The quality of a literary or informative work that makes the character or situations seem funny, amusing, or ludicrous is called humor. It has been around for as long as there has been humanity. In observing our behavior in daily life, we certainly find out that humor illustrates a central aspect of our routine conversation (Ghodsi & Heidari-Shahreza, 2016). This is why the study of humor has absorbed the interest and consideration of researchers for centuries. Although humor has been a neglected area in linguistics until very recently, in recent years the study of humor occupies an important place in research in linguistics (Masaeli & Heidari-Shahreza, 2016). Among the various kinds of humor, the focus in this work is on jokes. Jokes are relatively self-contained and

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are typically re-used in a wide range of settings. This is not to decline that there are certain requirements before a joke is appropriate in a particular context. Jokes are small, which renders them more manageable for the analysis (Ritchie, 2004, p.15). Among different linguistic-based humor theories, the humor theory emphasized here will be the General Theory of Verbal Humor (Attardo & Raskin, 1991).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: GTVH

A broadening of the Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH) was presented in Attardo and Raskin (1991). The revised version of the SSTH was called the "General Theory of Verbal Humor" (GTVH). The revision of the SSTH consisted mostly of broadening its scope. Whereas the SSTH was a "semantic" theory of humor, the GTVH is a linguistic theory "at large"—that is, it includes other areas of linguistics as well, including, most notably, textual linguistics, the theory of narrative, and pragmatics broadly conceived. These broadenings are achieved by the introduction of five other Knowledge Resources that must be tapped into when generating a joke, in addition to the script opposition from the SSTH. The following sections will introduce the six KRs:

Language KR

Language consists of the linguistic choices supporting the decisions made in other Knowledge Resources (Attardo, 2008). It is the parameter in charge of not only the wording and syntax of the joke but also how the different elements of the joke are arranged (Attardo, 1994).

Narrative Strategy KR

Narrative strategy is a use of certain narrative techniques and practices to achieve a certain goal. It can be divided to three general types: Descriptive, dialogue and third one is combination. Descriptive consists of narrative, expository (essentially side remarks and descriptions of characters or situations as fact) or a combination of these two. Dialogue consists of answer and question; produced by one character, dialogue (conversation between two or, very seldom, several characters), thoughts (inner monologue), text (e.g. a menu, graffiti) or a combination of these. Combination: It includes any combinations of the first two types (Aromaa, 2011).There surely exists dramatic (hence, non-narrative, under certain definitions) humor and obviously there are lots of visual humor (e.g., cartoons) which are not obviously narrative (in the sense that it does not "tell a story," which is not to say that it cannot be paraphrased as one). It may be discussed the narrative strategy is in fact a rephrasing of what is known in literary theory under the name "genre." This claim is rather misleading. Genre theory is a subfield of literary history which classifies (historical manifestations of certain) text types.

Target KR

Target is the individual/object/idea being made fun of – the "butt of the joke" (Attardo 1994, p.224). Information in the KR contains the names of groups or individuals with

(humorous) stereotypes attached to each. The names of people or groups that have humorous stereotypes associated with them are used here. If the joke is not aggressive and doesn't necessarily make fun of something, it has "an empty value" at this level (Attardo, 224). The choices of the groups or individuals that fill the parameter are regulated by the type of stereotype and mythical scripts studied by Zhao (1987, 1988). Davies (1990) provides a good overview of how different groups target at different other groups, and has a sociological explanation of their choices. Some research has been done in this area, which has shown that the original definition of target as a group or individual needs to be broadened by the inclusion of ideological targets (Karman, 1998), i.e. groups or institutions that do not have a clear constituency, but may nevertheless be made the subject of ridicule (examples are "marriage," "romantic love," "the establishment," etc.).

Situation KR

Any joke must be about something (changing the light bulb, road playing golf, etc.). The, situation includes all the 'props' of the joke: the objects, participants, instruments, activities, etc." (Attardo, 1994, p. 24). A joke will always have a Situation (like Script Opposition), but some jokes will emphasize it and others will disregard it (Attardo, 1994).

Logical Mechanism KR

Logical Mechanism is the parameter that brings the two opposing scripts together (Attardo, 1994). The logical mechanism is by far the most problematic parameter. Originally (Attardo & Raskin 1991), it was defined mostly by example, although the connection with the scant literature on local logic and justification was pointed out, as was the strong resemblance to Hofstadter and Gabora's (1989).

Script opposition KR

 Script Opposition is seen as the incongruity of the SSTH (Attardo, 2008). This is the one parameter that every joke will contain (Attardo, 1994). The script oppositions fall into three classes: actual vs. non-actual, normal vs. abnormal, and possible vs. impossible. The three classes are all instances of a basic opposition between real and unreal situations in the texts. These three classes of oppositions are then instantiated in more concrete oppositions. (Attardo, 1994, p. 204) Raskin lists five of the most common oppositions: good/bad, life/death, obscene/non-obscene, money/no money, and high/low stature (Raskin 1985, p. 113-114; 127). These oppositions are seen as "essential to human life" (Raskin, 1985, p. 113); they certainly are very basic, but the difference in level of abstraction between the three basic types of opposition and the five instantiations should be noted. While it is unlikely that any culture would present a different list of three types of basic opposition, it is perfectly likely that different cultures would show quite a different type of lower-level instantiation.

METHODS

The major hypothesis in this study was that the final constituent in some of the Persian online jokes could reinforce the humorous effect. Hence, it was labeled 'humor booster'. To test this hypothesis, initially, a corpus of Persian online jokes was probed to spot such jokes. Afterwards, they were scrutinized based on GTVH to single out their post-punch like elements (i.e., the humor boosters). Subsequently, the hypothesis was checked against the judgment of a group of Persian speakers as laid down in the following:

Participants

70 Persian native speakers, including males and females from various age groups and sociocultural backgrounds filled in the questionnaires. 40 of the participants also took part in the follow-up interview. Table 1 to 3 present the relevant demographic information.

Table 1. The distribution of gender in the initial and final phases

Gender	Initial Phase (V1)	Final Phase (V2)
Male	15.4%	20%
Female	84.6%	80%

Table 2. The distribution of age in the initial and final phases

Age	Initial Phase (V1)	Final Phase (V2)
6 to 13	3.8%	2.2%
13 to 19	5.8%	6.7%
19 to 35	50%	53.3%
35 to 50	38.5%	33.3%
50 & more	1.9%	4.4%

Table 3. The distribution of education in the initial and final phases

Education Level	Initial Phase (V1)	Final Phase (V2)
Diploma or less	38.5%	28.9%
BA	46.2%	56%
MA and more	15.4%	15.6%

Materials and instruments

Two versions of the same questionnaire, V1 and V2 were made using Google docs. The first version, V1, contained ten Persian online jokes from which the humor booster component was removed. V2, the second version, also had the same jokes. However, the humor booster, this time, was included (see Appendix A and B for the joke sample). The questionnaire had a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 'not funny', to 'a little funny', 'funny', and finally 'very funny'. Moreover, an unstructured interview was used with a special focus on the role the humor booster component in the jokes' funniness.

Procedure and data analysis

The following steps were taken to collect the intended data:

Firstly, the humor questionnaires (V1 and V2), with a two-week interval, were sent online to the participants. The participants were asked to fill in the questionnaires. The responses, then, were analyzed and the descriptive statistics regarding the participants' gender, age and education were extracted. Since mixed results were born, an unstructured interview was employed so that the researchers could delve deeper into how the participants regarded the Persian online jokes in general and the humor booster component in particular. The interviewees' opinions were recorded for further qualitative analysis.

FINDINGS

In the following, results obtained from conducting the survey and the interview are presented:

Questionnaire

The participants' responses to both versions of the humor questionnaire were analyzed to discern any gains in the degree of funniness in the jokes. In other words, we looked for any increase or decrease in the humorous effect of each joke due to the inclusion of the humor booster component. The initial analysis did not indicate any significant pattern; some jokes were rated more humorous in the second questionnaire than the first one, while some others not. A second look at the jokes, however, revealed that 'target' KR, that is who was ridiculed by the jokes could be to some extent at work. Therefore, the jokes were divided into two categories: the jokes which were gender-biased, ridiculing males or females and the ones targeting neither. Tables 4 and 5 show the participants' ratings in the first and second questionnaires, controlling for the gender variable. Generally speaking, the participants rated the jokes higher (i.e., more humorous) the second time when the humor booster was added to them.
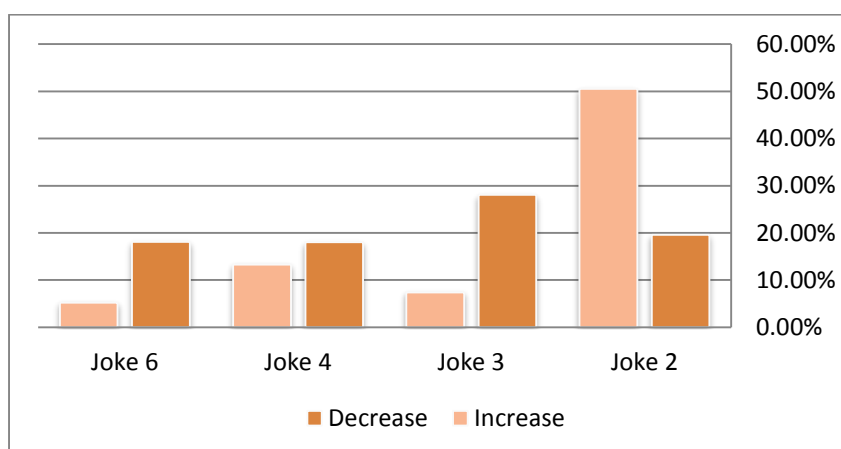
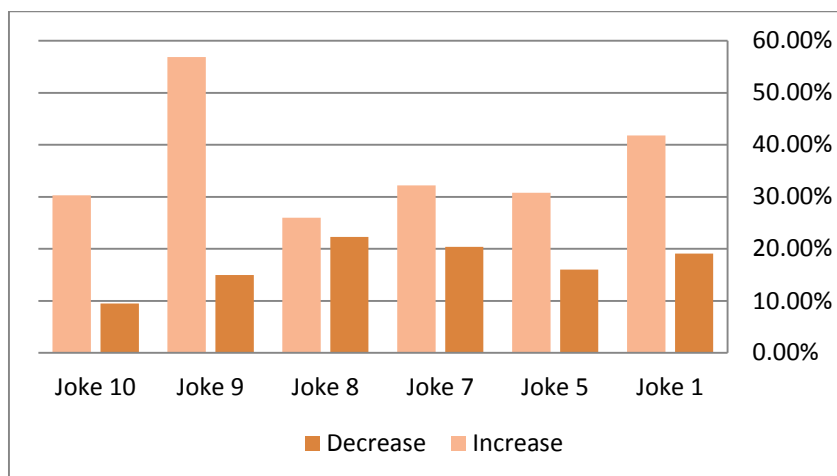**Figure 1.** The participants' ratings for gender-biased jokes

Figure 2. The participants' ratings for gender-unbiased jokes

Interview

In order to make sure that the results of both questionnaires (V1, V2) were reliable, the researchers randomly selected 20 participants for an interview. More than half of the participants were female. They emphasized that because the target of some of the jokes was females so they did not like them. Putting this factor aside, they believed that the jokes were funnier the second time (i.e., when the humor booster was included). In general, 80% of the participants agreed upon the humorous effect of the humor booster component. The rest of the interviewees (20%) had mixed opinions regarding this final constituent, not much in favor of the hypothesis (see Fig. 3). On the whole, this interview together with the participants' ratings in the first and second questionnaires supported, although not strongly, the hypothesis.
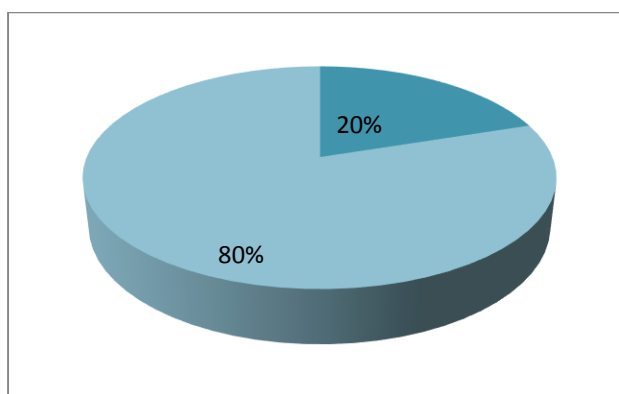
Figure 3. The percentage of the interviewees' agreement and disagreement

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the joke structure based on General Theory of Verbal Humor. In order to illustrate the amount of the risibility of the jokes, the researcher selected ten jokes which were common among people on virtual places then and made two kinds of questionnaire. Both of the questionnaires were the same but there was a

little difference between them, in order to show the humor booster; in the second questionnaires some sentences were added at the end of the jokes.

In the case of the gender of the participants, as shown in the above figures, there was a significant difference between genders of participants in both questionnaires, more than half of participants were females. In fact in this research gender bias occurred and this had some effect on the results because some jokes were about females and it was clear that they did not like them (see Heidari-Shahreza, 2014b; Heidari-Shahreza, Vahid-Dastjerdi & Marvi, 2011 for some gender studies in an Iranian context).

Another concern in this research was the 'recency effect', it means that because the time between two questionnaires was short, the participants may have not paid attention to the jokes especially to the additional sentences which added at the end of each jokes. This might have altered their judgments on the humorous effect of the humor booster component.

As the final word, this study may be insightful other researchers in sociolinguistics, linguistics and psychology. Also, from the perspective of pedagogy jokes especially within the broader perspective of culture and language, may be helpful. Language teachers, for instance, can include jokes in their teaching materials. In this regard, culturally-loaded words, can be highlighted through jokes in a way that is both amusing and informative (see Heidari-Shahreza, 2014 a; Heidari-Shahreza, Moinzadeh & Barati, 2014).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Persian jokes

Note: The **bold** parts indicate the jokes' humor booster component.

۱. دوستم الان داشت دوغ و قهوه رو مخلوط میکرد:|
گفتم این دیوونه بازیا چیه؟ گفت دوغ خواب میاره قهوه بیداری میاره
میخوام ببینم مخلوطش میتونه ادم وارد دنیای خواب و بیداری کنه؟
به نظرتون امیدی برا خوب شدنش هست؟ دکترا که جوابش کردن :((

۲. مورد داشتیم....
دختره رفته امتحان رانندگی بده، افسره پرسیده آیینه کجاست؟
دختره گفته تو کیفمه....... بدمش؟
وایسا دنیا....... من میخوام پیاده شم..........

۳. پسره قیافش دو ریال به اگزوز موتور گازی بدهکاره
استاتوس زده : سلام خوشگلتون اومد!!!!!!!! یعنی شلوارکردی این اعتماد به نفسو داشت الان ساپورت بود :((

۴. دختره تو فیسبوك استاتوس گذاشته :
" جدیداً خیلي لاغر شدم چي كار كنم ؟!" منم زیرش كامنت گذاشتم :" برو بر عکس رو تردمیل بدو خوب میشي"
چرا بلاكم كرد ؟! خدا مي دونه چرا بلاكم كرد

۵. امروزنگ زدم خونه بامامانم كارداشتم،بابام حس شوخ طبعیش گل کرده صدای زن درمیاره،منم فکرکردم داداشمه!!! بهش گفتم:حوصله شوخی ندارم الاغ ؛صدات مثل میمونه،نازکشم میکنی؛گوشی روبده به مامان!! داداشم اس داده شب نیاباباعصبانیه!!!
به نظرتون ناراحت شد؟؟!

۶. خانوم شما چقد زشتی=خفه شو کثافتتتتتتتتتتتتتتتت
خانوم شما چقد خوشگلی= خفه شو آشغال عوضی کثافت :| **من تو خلقت این موجود موندم اصن!!!**

۷. فقط به ایرانی می تونه یه شامپو بگیره در عرض یک هفته اون رو تموم کنه و توش رو پر آب کنه و یک ماه دیگه استفاده
کنه!
هنر نزد ایرانیان است و بس

۸. من بچه که بودم بیشتر از اینکه از گم شدن بترسم از پیدا شدن میترسیدم! وختی پیدا میکردنم ینی جوری میزدنم که ...
اصن ولش کن بغض راهِ گلومو بست.

۹. یکی از تفریحات ناسالمی که دارم اینه که :
هر وقت میریم شهربازی چندتا پیچ و مهره با خودم میبرم
هر وسیله ای که سوار میشیم به بغل دستیم که اصولا آدم ترسوییه میگم : یا خدا این دیگه از کجا باز شد؟؟
دکترم رفتم گفتن خوب نمیشی

۱۰. ما همه بهشتی هستیم!!!
لامصب از بس آنلاینیم وقت گناه کردن نداریم
بهشتیا لایک کنن :()))(

Appendix B: Persian jokes (English translation)

Note: The **bold** parts indicate the jokes' humor booster component.

1. My friend mixed Dough and coffee: |
"Are you crazy?" I said.
"Dough causes sleep and coffee causes wakening. I want to see if someone mixes them, then he would get into the worlds of dream or not.
Do you think there is any chance for his getting back to normal life? Doctors have no hope.

2. We had a case in which....
A girl had a driving test;
the officer asked "where is the mirror?"
"In my bag. Should I give it to you? "She said.
Just stop the world, I want to get off!!

3. The boy looked like an ugly monkey,
His status: I am your pretty! **Such a confidence!**

4. Her Facebook status:
"I got too thin recently, what should I do?!"
"Go run on the treadmill in the opposite direction!" **Why should she block me? God knows...**

5. Today I called home, to talk to my mom. My dad's sense of humor had flourished and talk to me with female voice. I thought he was my brother!!! I told him: I'm not in the joking mood ass!
Your voice is like a monkey, don't make it thin; Give the phone to Mom!
My brother sent me an SMS that "don't come home tonight. Dad got mad!
Do you think he was upset?

6. Miss! How ugly you are = shut up dirt!
Miss! How beautiful you are = Shut up bitch littered dirt!
I never understood their creation!!!

7. Just in Iran a shampoo is finished within a week and then filled with water to use within a month! **This is Iranians' art!**

8. When I was a kid, I was afraid much more of being found rather than getting lost!
When I was found I was so beaten that … **A lump in my throat does not let me to talk!**

9. One of my crazy recreations is:
I get some bolts whenever I go to an amusement park, and when getting on anything I show them to the person on my side, who, principally is a timid one, and say: O God, where does if come from? **My doctor said I'm not getting cured!**

10. We are all heavenly!
We are online all the time and don't have any time to do any bloody sin!
Heavenly ones do like the sentence!