“WOMEN IN JOKES”:
A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF JOKES ON PAKISTANI SOCIAL MEDIA IN LIGHT OF THE GENERAL THEORY OF VERBAL HUMOUR

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Abstract

Social relations of power are established and negotiated through discourse and joke telling is one strategy among many to do so. The present study is an attempt to examine the representation of women in jokes, circulated on Pakistani social media, by addressing four themes: representation of women in general, women exercising skills/intellect, women as life partners and representation of teenage girls/young women. The study employs the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) by Attardo & Raskin (1991) as a theoretical framework. From different social media sources like Facebook and Whatsapp, twenty jokes pertaining to women have been selected randomly and analysed on the basis of the GTVH’s six knowledge resources. The study reflects the realization that women are represented as talkative and ignorant beings, devoid of intellect; women as life partners are shown to be domineering and intimidating figures, and the representation of teenage girls/young women reinforces stereotypes circulated by patriarchy discourse. The significance of this work lies in the assumption that systematically analysing jokes about women may help in exposing casual sexism and empower women by provoking them to question instead of internalizing the stereotypes circulated through jokes.
Keywords
Gender representation, GTVH, sexist internet jokes, linguistic analysis, stereotypical representation

Introduction

In order to point out how the status quo of gender inequality and masculine hegemony is maintained in patriarchal societies, stereotypical representations of women need to be studied in a more indirect discourse, i.e., humour, to learn how language is employed and exploited to achieve this end. Martin is of the view that humour is inherently ambiguous; that is why it can be interpreted in multiple ways. Moreover, it helps in evading responsibility if not well received (e.g., “I was only joking”). Humour can be used to target behaviours or attitudes that are considered deviant and to influence the behaviour of others. In addition, “[humor] can be used to bring people closer together or to exclude them, to violate social norms or to enforce them, to dominate over and manipulate people, or to ingratiate one with others. Humor can also be used to reinforce stereotypes or to shatter prejudices,...to denigrate and express hostility” (Martin, 2007: 150). Jokes fall in the category of humorous discourse and are very popular and appreciated, which is why a huge number of jokes about women are easily available. Moreover, jokes can be disguised as casual sexism that very subtly discriminates against women by projecting their representation along negative stereotypes while depicting men in opposing images. This phenomenon can also be dubbed unthinking sexism, as it is so much entrenched in the psyche of all members of societies.

Much work has been done generally in the field of gender and humour. Kotthoff (2006) has discussed the marginalization of women’s humour in everyday life, by identifying four dimensions of joking with special reference to gender: status, aggressiveness, social alignment, and sexuality. Crawford (2003) has argued that women and men use humour as a tool for constructing their respective genders in same-gender and mixed-gender settings. Rappoport (2005, 102) puts forward the following generalizations about sexual humour that are unanimously agreed upon by all who are considered authorities on this subject. First of all, sexual humour is found almost in all societies of the world; secondly, mostly men tell these jokes, making joke-telling a practice of males that logically concludes their tendency to strengthen stereotypes circulated by patriarchal discourse. Lastly, women laugh more at jokes that are cracked at their own expense, which helps in making these jokes more acceptable.

Attardo (2001) states that Aristotle believed we laugh at individuals whom we consider ugly or inferior, which brings us joy at being superior to them. Consequently, laughing at women costs women their social standing and undermined representation.
Scruton (1986) states, “If people dislike being laughed at, it is surely because laughter devalues its object in the subject’s eyes” (in Morreall 1983, p. 168). Plato suggests that humour is in some ways offensive towards people with less power. Secondly, jokes promote a stereotypical representation of women. Signorielli (1989) maintains that such portrayal is directly proportional to sexist views about women in society. As Heba Nayef and Mohamed el-Nashar (2014) comment, “Gender stereotyping is a social practice that reflects cultural ideologies about gender roles and social relations between the sexes. These beliefs and ideologies get reproduced by such social practices” (p. 81). Jokes that solidify the stereotypes about women marginalize them in a very subtle way as under the guise of amusement: tolerance for sexism is promoted, and being on a lighter note responsibility is also easily denied (Woodzicka & Ford 2010).

Although any study is expected to be objective, Wodak (1989) is of the view that most any study in the social sciences is subjective, as it tends to result in justice for the wronged and marginalized. The present study keeps this aim as its objective. The following questions are asked in order to analyse jokes:

1. What linguistics patterns have been deployed in order to achieve what the joke is trying to achieve?
2. What messages do jokes try to convey about women?

Theoretical Framework

The study employs the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) by Attardo & Raskin (1991) as a theoretical framework. Twenty jokes have been selected purposively in which women either are present or are the subject in absentia. Most of the jokes have been picked from social media such as Facebook’s page Lateefay hi Lateefay (Jokes & Jokes), while a few have been taken from Whatsapp group chats in which such jokes are shared by friends. They have then been analysed on the basis of the GTVH’s six knowledge resources (KRs): (i) script opposition, (ii) logical mechanism, (iii) situation, (iv) target, (v) narrative strategy, and (vi) language. The jokes about popular female figures have not been included as they are mostly recycled from general jokes about women. Moreover, this study specifically focuses upon the representation of common women in different spheres, which is why the jokes have been divided into four different themes: Representation of women in general, Women exercising skills/intellect, Women as life partners and Representation of teenage girls/young women. Finally, Linguistics-based jokes rely upon the exploitation of linguistic resources to generate a humorous effect (Servaité, 2005), but in this study all jokes have been translated from Urdu to English; their funniness is caused, not by linguistic manipulation, but rather is due to their content.
General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH)

Victor Raskin and Salvatore Attardo developed the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) in their article entitled “Script theory revised: joke similarity and joke representation model” (Raskin & Attardo, 1991). GTVH includes Script Opposition (SO), as one of six levels of independent Knowledge Resources (KRs) that Raskin had stated in his Script-based Semantic Theory of Humour [SSTH] (Lew, 1996). What follows are the KRs of this theory (Ruch, et al, 1993).

Script Opposition (SO)

This KR deals with the script opposition that was developed in the SSTH. It denotes two opposing scripts that are present in all humorous texts. This is considered the most abstract KR of the six. Oring (1992) has argued that Script Opposition is a formalized version of incongruity.

Logical mechanism (LM)

The logical mechanism explains the way in which two opposite scripts are brought together and incongruity is resolved. Cited in Masaeli & Heidari-Shahreza, (2016) Attardo proposed that the LM is responsible for the resolution of the incongruity introduced in the SO. However, this congruity has to be resolved partially for a joke to remain funny; otherwise it turns into a riddle (Oring’s theory 1992, 2003).

Situation (SI)

Any joke should include some kind of event or Situation which is also dubbed as 'props' that can be objects, participants, instruments, or activities. While some jokes rely more on situation, some others can do almost entirely without it.

Target (TA)

The KR of target picks the butt of any joke. Some jokes are not aggressive which means they do not ridicule someone or something and their value is empty for TA. Typically, however, this category helps in developing and solidifying stereotypes (Masaeli & Heidari-Shahreza, 2016).

Narrative strategy (NS)

The KR of NS deals with the narrative organization of a joke, it can be a simple narrative or a dialogue, and it may appear in question and answer format.
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Language (LA)

The LA knowledge resource is termed as the actual verbalization of a joke, which is responsible for its text. It takes into account all the linguistic components of the text at all levels of the joke.

Analysis and Discussion

Following are the four themes in which the data set of jokes has been divided pertaining to different themes, five jokes each have been selected for a single theme.

1. Representation of Women in General

This section deals with those jokes that talk about any woman without tagging her in a specific role for example a wife or a working woman etc. They have individually been analysed using the six components (the KRs) of GTVH.

Joke 01. Pur Sakoon Safar (A peaceful journey)

Train kay dabbay main do auraten larr rahi thin. (Two women were fighting in a train carriage.)
Ek aurat: “Khirki khol do warna mera dum ghut jayega aur main mar rjaungi” (One woman: “Open the window otherwise I will be suffocated and die.”)
Dusri aurat: “Agar khirki kholi tou mujhay pneumonia ho jayega.” (Second woman: “If you will open the window, I will catch Pneumonia.”)
Jab larai bohat barh gai tou ek buzug bolay, “khirki thori dair kay lie kholkar band kardo. Ta kay ek aurat pneumonia say mar jay aur dusri dum ghutney. Aur hum sub ek pur sakoon safar kar saken” (When they fought a lot, then an old man said, “Open the window for a while and close it after some time. So that one woman dies of pneumonia and other due to suffocation, and we all get to have a peaceful journey.”)

Analysis

In this joke, the SO is REASONABLE/UNREASONABLE women. An additional SO will be TALKATIVE/NOT TALKATIVE women who are causing nuisance for fellow passengers as well. Incongruity introduced in the SO is resolved in the LM, which is inferring consequences in this particular joke. It resolves the incongruity partially by suggesting that if the window is opened one woman will be catching Pneumonia and die as a consequence, while closing it for a short period will cause the death of other due to
suffocation. This result resolves the incongruity that the women are talkative and their silence will be a reward for the passengers, ending their suffering.

The situation is that women are travelling along with other passengers, presumably males and females both. The target of the joke is women, at whose expense the joke has been cracked. However, SO is higher in the hierarchy of KRs so it determines the target as well; hence the idea that women are tagged as unreasonable and talkative beings seems more appropriately to be target of this joke. It is a simple narrative that has a punch line in the form of a dialogue, a connector that is explained as a resolution phase. A sage man has been selected to end the conversation, which reflects the notion that the stupidity of women can be countered by sagacity, which in the voice of a male helps to build a positive image of men at the same time.

Joke 02. Do Batooni auraten aura am (two talkative women and a mango)

Do auraten bohat dair say aam kay darakht kay nichay bethi baten karrahi thin (Two women had been sitting under a mango tree and talking for a long time.)
Ek dum say ek aam nichay gira (all of a sudden a mango fell down.)
Ek aurat: “Aray January main aam kesay gir gaya? (One woman: “Oh how can a mango fall in the month of January?)

Aam: “Pak gaya tum dono ki bakwas sun sun kar” (Mango: “I have been ripened by listening to all your non-sense jabber.”)

Analysis

The SO in this joke is POSSIBLE/IMPOSSIBLE and additional SOs are TALKATIVE/NON TALKATIVE women and HUMAN/NON HUMAN (a fruit) entities. Exaggeration has been used as the logical mechanism that partially resolves the incongruity that constant talking of women can cause even a fruit to be ripened before its due natural time. Exaggeration also hints that it is impossible for a fruit to be ripened unnaturally, which helps in setting and promoting the image of women’s incessant gibberish as unnatural and annoying, even to non-human entities.

The situation is not clearly mentioned in explicit terms, but it can be inferred from the cultural context of Pakistan that probably the women are sitting in a house under the tree, which suggests that generally women are located in private spheres. The target has been determined by the SO that preys upon the widespread stereotype about women that they talk incessantly. This joke is a simple narrative that ends in a punch line, which means it contains a connector in the form of a resolution phase. The joke uses a pun to create a
humorous effect as it plays on the word *ripened*. The ripening of a fruit takes place after certain conditions are fulfilled, particularly that of a time span. In the joke, the talking of the women has been shown to have this effect, with the duration of time replaced by nonsense talk. Use of the word *jabber* reflects the annoyance of the mango, establishing the fact that women are capable of annoying even mangoes, hence are nonsense chatterboxes.

**Joke 03. Ek khamosh aurat (A Silent Woman)**

_Agar ek aurat khamosh ho tou us ki nabz zarur check karleni chahye_ (If a woman is silent, then do check her pulse. /Check if she is still alive.)

**Analysis**

The SO of TALKING/SILENT, and additionally DEAD/ALIVE and ACTUAL/NON ACTUAL, have been used in this particular joke. Incongruity introduced in the SO has been partially resolved by using the LM of inferring consequences. It has been suggested that women are talkative to the extent that if they are quiet even for a while, they might not be breathing anymore. This joke also employs the LM of exaggeration, suggesting that women can never stop talking. Comprised of a single statement, the joke does not have any situation in particular. The SO of talking /silent suggests that women have to be chosen for a target that reinforces the stereotype. The joke is in the form of a simple statement. Linguistically it is a conditional sentence which starts with a conditional _if_, which means that if one condition is there, then one should look for its logical consequence.

**Joke 04. Bijli aur auraten (Electricity and Women)**

_Agar bijli auraton kay zuban chalany say peda hoti_ (If the electricity were generated by women’s tongues working (talking incessantly)) _Tou Pakistan puri dunya ko bijli farahum kar raha hota_ (then Pakistan would have been supplying electricity to the entire world.)

**Analysis**

The SO has been instantiated by TALKATIVE/NON TALKATIVE women and additionally PRODUCTIVE/NON PRODUCTIVE activities. The incongruity has been resolved by using the LM of inferring consequence. The joke gives a hypothetical scenario that if women of Pakistan could do something productive with their tongues/talking, they would have helped the whole world, implying that women are incapable of doing anything productive. The joke also employs the LM of exaggeration that tries to establish that women are not productive. There is no situation in the joke and the SO of talkativeness and non-productivity assumes the target of women. The joke is in the form of a declarative
statement. It is not comprised of different parts; rather there is continuity. Linguistically it is a subjunctive statement.

Example 05. Bay zararaurat (Harmless Woman)

Ek aurat mukammal tor par bay zarar hoti hai aur tashaddud par bilkul yaqeen nahi rakhti (A woman is completely harmless and does not believe in violence)
Wo bilkul ek farishtay ki tarha hoti hai, dunya ki sub say muhazzib insan (she is like an angel, the most mannered human being in the world.)
Jab tak us ki nail polish na such jaye (Until her nail polish dries.)

Analysis

The SO has been instantiated as VIOLENT/NON VIOLENT and additionally as ANGEL/DEVIL, MANNERED/UNMANNERED and HARMLESS/DANGEROUS person. The incongruity has been resolved by using the LM of faulty reasoning and exaggeration. The joke implies that a woman can be couth and genteel only when she is putting on a specific cosmetic that requires her to be still. Otherwise, she usually is a dangerous and violent creature. This reasoning is not only faulty, but it exaggerates the extent of irrationality and violence a woman is supposed to possess.

The situation is missing in the joke and the SOs of violence vs. nonviolence and mannered vs. unmannered person assume the target of women in general, depicting them as unruly and violent. The joke is in the form of a simple narrative that sets the expectation in the first part, and by using the conjunction until reverses the effect of what has been proposed earlier. The language is simple and loaded with adjectives that help in generating a stronger impact for the punch line in the final statement.

2. Women Exercising Skills/Intellect

There are many jokes in which women either are agents and perform something or are commented upon about their performance. In this section those jokes have been selected that discuss how skilful women are and how they use their intellectual capabilities.

Joke 01. Ek aurat car chalaty hue (A woman driving the car)

Doctor: "Jab tumhaye pata tha k ek aurat gari chala rahe hai tou tumhre sarak say dur chalay jana chahye tha" (Doctor: When a woman was driving the car, then you should have gone far away from the road.)
Mareez: “Konsi sarak? Main tou park main laita tha!!” (Patient: “What road? I was lying in the park!!”)

Analysis

In this joke the SO of GOOD/BAD or SKILLED/AMATEUR drivers has been used. It creates the incongruity that woman are not skilled drivers so they need to be treated differently from men. The logical mechanism of ‘almost’ situations has been used in the joke: a doctor states that if a woman was exercising her skill as a driver, the patient should have avoided that situation by clearing the road for her. The situation is resolved by the patient’s reply that he had not been on the road at all. The joke implies that women are unfit for the public sphere.

In this joke a woman is not actually present, but her performance regarding the use of a skill is under discussion. No physical context is present, but the conversation is going on between a patient and a doctor, suggesting that the person has been hit and is now at a hospital. The SO of good/bad drivers hunts the target of women, reinforcing the stereotype that women are unreliable and incompetent as compared to men. The joke is in the form of a dialogue, and instead of a jab line, it has a punch line in which humour is generated by the final statement.

Joke 02: Auraton kay baray main ek dilchasp baat (Fun fact about women)

Wo apney shohar kay coat par 20 meter door say larki ka ek baal dekh sakti hain (They can see a hair of a girl on their husband’s coat from 20 meters away,) Lekin gari park kartay hue 2 meter dur khumba nahi dekh saktin (but they cannot see a pillar 2 meter away while parking a car.)

Analysis

The SOs of SHORT-SIGHT/LONG SIGHT, EXPERT/AMATEUR and SKILLED/UNSKILLED women have been instantiated in the joke. Incongruity introduced has been resolved by using the LMs of parallelism and exaggeration. The two statements are parallel as actions described have been compared, although one is opposite to other. Moreover, the exaggeration has been adopted to enhance the effect that a woman has the ability to spot a tiny hair from 20 meters, which seems almost impossible, while she cannot see a pillar 2-meters away while parking. This false analogy helps in establishing the idea that women are incapable of performing tasks and unfit for public spheres. A wife confronting her husband about infidelity can be inferred as the situation and the SO of unskilled and amateur drivers assume the target of women, framing them as bad performers. This joke is in the form of simple statements that are parallel structurally. Although both statements
comment on women’s abilities, the first one sets the stage and the conjunction of opposition but helps in highlighting the stark comparison.

**Joke 03: Kitabi aur amli ilm (Theoretical and practical knowledge)**

*Kitbi aur amli ilm main kya farq hai? (What is the difference between theoretical and practical knowledge?) Larkian computer main 99/100 number leti hain (Girls score 99/100 in computer studies) Phir bhi theek say computer tak on nahi karna ata (Still do not even know how to turn on a computer properly.)*

**Analysis**

The joke employs the SO of THEORETICAL/PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE and additionally TECHNO DUMB/EXPERT and KNOWLEDGE/IGNORANCE. The LM of vacuous reversal has been employed in order to partially resolve the incongruity introduced in the SO. The term vacuous means empty and it essentially is a meaningless opposition, a false reversal. The first part of the joke discusses the knowledge aspect which is reversed in what follows next: that although girls have certificates of knowledge, they cannot justify that, which also employs the LM of proportion. The situation is that of taking a test on computer skills, and the SO of dumbness and ignorance assumes the target of women. The joke reveals a deep-seated sense of inferiority on the part of the (presumed) male speaker; he is threatened by the high performance of the women and denigrates their incapacity to perform basic skills, such as turning on the computer. It is a simple narrative that begins by posing a rhetorical question and subsequently answers it, creating a dramatic effect. The first statement sets the stage and prepares the reader/listener psychologically; hence, when a girl is presented as dumb, the reader understands why and believes in it.

**Joke 04. Taza Khabar (Breaking News)**

*Tariq road wali ATM jam hogai hai, aur kaam nahi karrahi (ATM @ Tariq Road is jammed and not in working condition)
Kyun ki ek aurat nay apni balo wali pin machine main daal di jab us n kaha pin enter Karen. (Because a woman put her hairpin in the machine when it said, “Enter your pin.”)*

**Analysis**

Th SOs of JAMMED/FUNCTIONAL machine and INTELLIGENT/DUMB persons have been used in this joke. The LM of referential ambiguity has been instantiated in the joke, which occurs when a word or phrase in a sentence may refer to two or more things or characteristics while the ambiguity is resolved contextually. In the Pakistani context, the
word *pin* stands for an ATM pin number as well as a hairpin, so when the ATM machine required a pin it referred to the number, but the woman being stupid mistook it for a hairpin. She clearly could not decipher the meaning of *pin* from the context, thus signifying her lack of intelligence.

The woman in the joke is not currently present at a place; rather she had been there and did something, so now her action is being commented upon. The situation can be inferred from the statement that it is outside the house, and the existence of a banking machine reinforces the idea that women are unfit for public spheres. The target is a woman, which has been assumed due to the SO of intelligence vs. dumbness. Language is sensational in the beginning as the connotations of the phrase *breaking news* arouse the curiosity and a sense of immediacy. Gradually, the hype is lowered by actually unfolding what happened; the punch line helps in generating the humorous effect. Humour is generally not generated by exploitation of linguistics resources when a joke is translated from one language into another (Urdu to English in this case), but this joke uses a pun on the homonym *pin*.

**Joke 05: Fire Brigade (Fire Brigade)**

_Ustad:_ “Batao wo konsa shouba hai jahan par auraten kaam nahi kar skti hain?” (Teacher: “Tell me one profession where women can’t work?”)
_Talib-ul-am: Fire Brigade_ (Student: Fire Brigade)
_Ustad:_ “Aesa kyun?” (Teacher: “Why so?”)
_Talib-ul-am: “Kyun ki un ka kaam aag lagan hai, aag bhujana nahi”_ (Student: Because their job is to start a fire not to extinguish it.)

**Analysis**

The SO in this joke is GOOD/BAD workers and additionally COMPETENT/INCOMPETENT workforce. Role reversal has been used as the LM. The incongruity of a good vs. bad worker has been resolved partially by reversing the role of women. It reflects the notion that a woman cannot be part of a specific work force as she is in habit of ruining things instead of fixing them. The woman is not actually present, but she is the topic of discussion.

The situation is that of a classroom where young minds are nurtured and it is expected that their vision will be broadened. But the negative stereotype about women, that they are not good at performing professional duties, causes them to be selected as the target of this joke. The NS is in dialogue form with the pattern of ABAB and the final statement contains the punch line. The language of the joke is simple and a humorous
effect is generated by hypothetically raising questions and answering them. One speaker elicits a linguistic response by throwing out an interrogative statement while the other responds in answer.

3: Women as life partners

A huge number of jokes are available online that pertain to the legal relationship of marriage between a man and a woman. Outside of jokes, the image of a woman as a wife is very distinct in Pakistani society as is observed in the following jokes.

**Joke 01: Taveez (The Charm)**

_Aurat_: “Jab bhi mera shohar ghar ata hai mujhay marna shuru kar deta hai” (Woman: “Whenever my husband comes home, he starts beating me.”)

_Baba_: “Jab bhi wo ghar aye tum yeh taveez apny danton kay nichay dab Lena.” (Baba (A spiritual guide): “As soon as he arrives, put this charm under your teeth.”)

_Panch din baad_ (After five days)

_Aurat_: “Taveez danton kay nichay rakhnay say mujhy bahut madad mila hai, ab mera shohar mujhay kuch nahin kehta” (Woman: “Putting that charm under my teeth helped me a lot, now my husband does not say anything to me at all.”)

_Baba_: Yeh faida taveez say nahin balkay munh band rakhnay say hua hai.” (Baba: “This benefit did not come from the charm but rather from keeping your mouth shut.”)

**Analysis**

The SO of ACTUAL/NON-ACTUAL is present in the joke and additionally VIOLENCE/NON-VIOLENCE, GUILTY/INNOCENT woman and PROVOCATIVE/UNPROVOCATIVE behaviour. The incongruity of these SOs is resolved by using the LMs of faulty reasoning and inferring consequences. The woman is being beaten by her husband and the act is justified by reasoning that she is foul-mouthed. This joke not only normalizes domestic violence but puts the blame solely upon women. The wife has been dubbed as provocative and guilty and her husband as unprovocative and innocent, consequently leading to justification of domestic violence against women.

The situation is that of a woman visiting a sage man, showing that she herself cannot manage her affairs and a male has to provide her guidance; this dialogue helps to create opposing images for men and women, one being rational and the other irrational and stupid. The target of aggression is a woman owing to the SO of guilty/innocent and provocative/innocent. It is a simple narrative dialogue, a conversation between two people
who are discussing the problem and its solution. Humour is generated in the final statement, a punch line.

**Joke 02. Sharafat (Nobility)**

_Bivi: “Meri sharafat dekhen main apko bina dekhay shadi kay lie haan kardi thi” (Wife: “Look at my nobility, that I married you without even seeing you first.”)
Shohar: “Aur meri sharafat dekho main nay tasveer dekh kar bhi na nahinki” (Husband: “And look at my nobility, that I did not say no even after seeing your photo.”)

**Analysis**

The SOs in this joke can be labelled as NOBLE/MORE NOBLE and SIMPlE MINDed/SHARP MINDed person. To partially resolve the incongruity, a LM of parallelism has been used. The wife brags about her nobility, that she did not demand to even see a picture of her husband at the time of betrothal, referring to a cultural practice in Pakistan. Owing to the practice of marriages arranged by parents, prospective life partners are shown pictures of each other. The husband in parallel claims that he deserves even more credit as he consented after looking at the picture of his future wife, implying she was not pretty enough. The joke suggests that women have to live up to a body image, failing which they are treated condescendingly.

The situation has not been mentioned, but it can be assumed that husband and wife are sitting somewhere comfortably enough to muse about their marriage. It can be observed that the target of the joke has been assigned by the SO. This joke presents two opposing images—one of condescending and independent men and the other of dependent and looked-down upon women. The NS of a dialogue between the two has been employed in the joke. The wife passes a comment trying to establish a fact that she is noble but this statement of hers does not require a linguist response; hence it is not a question but rather more of a rhetorical statement. At the level of language, the husband has the punch line, putting him on a higher pedestal of power. This discussion also signifies that power has been vested in the hands of the male; he can say no and has final authority. It can be argued that a role reversal of dialogues would disturb the power setup: for example, what if the woman said the first line and the man the second one?

**Joke 03: Computer**

_Bivi: “Jaan, yeh computer meri command kay mutabiq kaam nahi kar raha” (Wife: Dear this computer is not working as per my command.)
Shohar: “Begum yeh computer hai, shohar nahi” (Husband: Darling, this is a computer, not a husband.)

Analysis

The SOs of OBEDIENCE / DISOBEDIENCE and INTIMIDATING / NON INTIMIDATING persons have been instantiated in this joke. The LM of false analogy has been used in the joke. The incongruity is that a woman wants a machine to be under her control, which is compared to her dominance over her husband’s actions. The analogy is false as the command given to a computer cannot be equated with a woman’s ordering her husband to act according to her whims. On the contrary, women are represented only as domineering; instead it is always a patriarchal figure that makes decisions and practically everyone has to acquiesce.

No physical context has not been provided, but it can be assumed that the couple is at their home. The SO of intimidation assumes the target of women who are stereotyped as such. The joke is in the form of a dialogue between a husband and his wife. The first statement poses a problem and the second one point out why it is so. Moreover, the word command is a homonym that works as a pun and helps in generating humour. The command in reality is the privilege of men, while in the joke it has been associated with the woman.

Joke 04: The thermometer

Ek doctor nay thermometer mareez aurat kay munh main rakh kar usay munh band karny kay lie kaha (A doctor put a thermometer in the mouth of a woman patient and asked her to close her mouth.)
Jab shohar ne usay itna chup dekha to doctor say pucha, :Yeh cheez kitnay ki ati hai?” (When the husband saw that she was so quiet, he asked the doctor, “How much does this thing (thermometer) cost?”)

Analysis

The SO of INCESSANT TALKING/QUIET woman has been employed in the joke. An incongruity is resolved by using the LM of inferring consequences. A thermometer in the mouth of a woman makes her shut her mouth temporarily, so the husband infers that if he can buy that thing(which is a thermometer) he will be able to shut his wife’s mouth permanently. The punch line suggests that she is mostly offering gibberish and needs to be hushed with the help of something. The situation has not been described explicitly, but the presence of a doctor and patient suggests that they are in a doctor’s office and the woman
is going through her check-up, while the presence of her husband reflects on the fact that in Pakistani culture women are escorted and do not move independently. The SO of nonsense talking assumes the target of women who are dubbed so.

The joke is mostly action-based: the first half describes only actions, and the punch line is in the form of a question, whereby the joke ends without any answer. The question actually generates the humorous effect as there is no need for an answer. The job is done by asking the question alone which assumes that a husband wants to know the price because he wants to buy one and keep his wife permanently silent.

**Joke 05: Fazulbaat (Nonsense)**

Shohar: “Tum kabhi is kuttay ko apny hukam par chalna nah iski ha pao gi” (Husband: You will never succeed in making that dog obey you!)

Bivi: “Fazul baat, siraf sabr karny ki zarurat hai, shuru main mujhay tum haray sath bhi bihad mushkil hui thi” (Wife: Nonsense! it’s only a matter of patience, I had a lot of trouble with you at first.)

**Analysis**

The SOs of OBEDIENCE/DISOBEDIENCE, CONTROLLING/NON CONTROLLING and INTIMIDATING/NON INTIMIDATING woman have been used in the joke. The LMs of analogy and inferring consequences have been adopted to resolve the incongruity introduced in the SO. The training of a dog and exercising control over it has been compared with the dynamics of a husband-wife’s relationship. Secondly, the consequence has been inferred that if patience is practiced, then the woman one day will succeed in making that dog obedient as had been the case with her husband. This joke paints her as domineering and intimidating, while at the same time her husband appears subservient and obedient; yet on the contrary, males get to have covert privileges. The situation can be assumed that husband and wife are either at home or they may be outside taking their dog for a walk. The SO of dominance and control assumes the target of women. This joke is in the form a dialogue, and the punch line has been uttered by the wife. In contrast to reality, the word nonsense suggests that the tone of the wife is dismissive and that she has the upper hand, as is strongly reflected in her language.

4. Representation of Teenage Girls/Young Women

For this category those jokes have been selected that refer to females as girls. In Pakistani culture, the term girl denotes either teen-age girls or young unmarried women.

**Joke 01. Mobile phone ki charging (Mobile phone’s charging)**

Mobile phone ki charging aur larkion ki shopping kabhi khatam nahi hoti (Mobile phone’s
charging and girls’ shopping are never completed/done with.)

Analysis

The SO in the above joke can be traced as COMPLETE/INCOMPLETE or FINISHED/NOT FINISHED and additionally SOs of SATISFIED/NOT SATISFIED and SPENDTHRIFT/THRIFTY. The LM of false analogy and parallelism has been used in this joke to partially resolve the incongruity. The script opposition of women being never satisfied with enough shopping and being spendthrifts cannot be appropriately considered a counterpart of the idea of charging a cell phone; hence the analogy is false and the two phenomena are not parallel to each other. This joke particularly does not involve any situation; the young women target, however, is quite clear. The joke is a simple narrative and is comprised of a single statement. The language is simple, and an analogy has been used to compare the two activities. The punch line and the connector comprise the joke itself.

Joke 02: Ghalati (Mistake)

99% Larkian apin ghalti nahi mantin aur jo 1% maan bhi Jaen tou adhay ghantay bad kehti hain (99 % of girls do not admit their mistakes and the other 1 %, if they do admit it, say so only after half an hour,)
Ghalti wesay tumhari hi thi” (“By the way the mistake was yours.”)

Analysis

Girls being REASONABLE/UNREASONABLE has been used as an SO in the joke. Moreover JUST/UNJUST and MANIPULATIVE/INGENUOUS persons have been used as additional SOs. The LM of proportion has been employed in which a number is considered in comparative relation to a whole. The incongruity of a disproportionate number of girls admitting their mistake has been resolved by suggesting that even the 1 % tend to cancel the effect of admitting it, anyway. The LM of exaggeration has also been deployed and girls are shown as unjust and manipulative. The situational context is not present in the joke but the script opposition of being unjust and manipulative has assumed the target of girls. The joke is in the form of a declarative statement, hence technically recording a fact. The language is simple and incorporates numeric and statistical figures which have been blown out of proportion.

Joke 03. Ekbhikaari (A Beggar)

Bhikari: mushay 100 Rs day dain, main nay chayepinaih (Beggar: Give me 100 Rupees sir I
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want to have a cup of tea.)
Aadmi: Lekin chaye tou sirf paanch rupay ki ati hai (Man: But tea costs only five Rupees)
Bhikaari: Meri girlfriend bhi chaye piyegi (Beggar: My Girlfriend will also have tea.)
Aadmi: Ek bhikari kibhi girl friend hai (Man: Even a beggar has a girlfriend.)
Bhikaari: Nahi janab, girlfriend nay tou bhikaari bana dia (Beggar: No sir, my girlfriend has turned me into a beggar.)

Analysis

The SOs of POOR/RICH, BEGGING/GIVING, SQUANDER/THRIFTY and BEING WITH A GIRL/NOT HAVING ONE have been employed in this joke, and the LMs of inferring consequences and exaggeration used. The joke suggests that the beggar used to be a reasonable man with a respectable life style, but then it can be inferred that his girlfriend made him spend so much that he has turned into a beggar. There is exaggeration as well as in the idea that the actions of a girl led the man from riches to rags. This idea makes the girl appear thriftless and ruining, while an opposing image of the man appears to a victim and an innocent figure. In this particular joke, a girl is not actually present, but the whole joke revolves around her. The SO of squandering money assumes the target of a girl. It is in the form of a long dialogue, which has a pattern of ABABA. A man and a beggar are conversing, and the punch line is given in the final statement.

Joke 04: Kano main suraakh (Holes in ears)

Ek surakh larkion kay kaan main paidaish kay waqt say hota hai (Girls have one hole in their ears since their birth (for hearing))

Chaar, paanch wo khud karwa leti hain (They get four to five (holes) by piercing.)
Sunti wo phir bhi kisi ki nahi hain! (Still they do not listen to anyone!)

Analysis

The SOs of TALKATIVE/NON TALKATIVE and RATIONAL/IRRATIONAL people have been used in this joke, while the LMs of false analogy and faulty reasoning have been used to resolve the incongruity of the SO. Girls in Pakistan, as in many cultures, pierce their ears for putting jewellery on. The holes that girls get after piercing have been compared to natural holes for hearing, but the analogy is false and based upon faulty reasoning, as these holes perform entirely different functions. Moreover, one is biological and hence natural while the others are dependent upon one’s personal choice. There is no girl present but rather one is being talked about. The SOs of talkative and irrational person
take on the target of girls. The joke is in the form of a simple narrative that goes on to describe a feature of females (holes in their ears). A humorous effect is generated by using the word hole as a pun and the punch line is given as a connector in the end.

**Joke 05: Google**

*Ek larka: Main soch raha tha ke Google larka hai ya larki (Boy 01: I was wondering if Google is a boy or a girl). Dusra Larka: 100% larki hai, kyunki wo kabhi apko baat mukammal karnay ka moqa hi nahi deti, jumla purahonay say pehly hi mashwaray denay shuru kardeti hai (Boy 02: It is 100% a girl. Because it never lets you complete what you are saying. Even before you complete your sentence, it starts suggesting solutions.)*

**Analysis**

The script oppositions of TALKATIVE/NON TALKATIVE girls and ANIMATE / INANIMATE objects have been adopted in the joke. These incongruities are partially resolved by using the LMs of analogy and faulty reasoning. The incessant talking of girls has been compared to an online search engine that works efficiently and gives suggestions even after typing one single word. The reasoning used is faulty as a search engine is inanimate and works with a different mechanism, while girls talking is a human phenomenon. This analogy suggest that girls are unreasonable nonstop talkers who do not listen to others. There is no explicit situation mentioned and no girl is actually present in the joke; rather she is being discussed by two boys indicating that they are the ones who shape opinions to be held about girls. The SO of being talkative assumes the target of girls. The joke is in the form of a dialogue between two boys. The first one poses a question and the other one gives an answer along with a rationale for his belief. A numeric is used as well, employed to register the conviction. There is no specific punch line, although usually there is one with a short sentence structure. Instead, the second boy’s whole statement serves the function of generating humour; if any part is omitted it will be at the cost of humour.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

Following Attardo & Raskin’s (1991) General Theory of Verbal Humour, a linguistic analysis of jokes demonstrates the fact that language is used as a tool and is mainly controlled by men as joke-telling is their practice. It reflects and helps in maintaining negative stereotypical images of women, which eventually culminates in social injustice directed at women. Jokes discussed under the theme of representation of women in general depict them as empty-headed chatterboxes; their talk is not only incessant, it has no
productive outcome, and in most of the cases is shown to cause a nuisance for other listeners. Additionally, women are also presented as uncivilized and irrational.

Jokes where women are shown performing tasks in public spheres reflect that they are unfit for such tasks and are ridiculed for trying to do something. In most cases they are shown to lack intelligence and are unskilled. Those jokes that talk about women as life partners tend to present a skewed and contorted image of reality. The women are painted as domineering and controlling while in reality they are made to follow the lead of their husbands. These jokes promote opposing images of innocent and obedient males and controlling wives. Women as wives are also shown to be talkative and chatty. Representations of the girls depict them as thriftless and incessant talkers who are unreasonable. All of these stereotypes have been promoted by patriarchal discourse; their internalization will cause even women to laugh at their own expense without being able to understand that they are causing harm to themselves.

This study makes it clear that jokes promote societal devaluation of women who are taken lightly, owing to being targets of many jokes and stereotypical representations. Moreover, in many jokes, men appear to be rational and witty in opposition to women. It is therefore suggested that such representations need to be challenged; dismantling the stereotypes will help spread awareness among women. The present study is one attempt to highlight the casual sexism that women are subjected to. Because of such jokes, women are subtly made to internalise the discourse of patriarchy, as women themselves forward and post such jokes and laugh at them unflinchingly. Lastly, in order to raise consciousness of the problem, such studies need to be multiplied.

References


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