A Linguistic Analysis of Social Attitudes in Selected Facebook Posts and Comments

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Abstract:

Being the largest social app in terms of logged in users, compared to other social apps such as YouTube and Twitter, with a number of more than 2.19 billion users, Facebook is a phenomenon by itself that needs an extensive study in many areas of research such as linguistics, psychology and sociology. This paper aims at identifying some features of Egyptian digital discourse and social attitudes by making use of the Echoic Mention theory of verbal irony and the Multimodal theory to explore the role images play in Facebook posts as well as the ironic statements in some posts and comments. The data in this research are from Facebook public pages that the researcher follows. The researcher analyzes a sample of four posts and the images accompanying them as well as some comments on these posts. The results show a clear connection between echoic mention use of verbal irony and the images people use in their posts. It also sheds light on the drastic development of digital discourse.

Keywords: Facebook posts, Comments, Social attitudes, Echoic mention, Multimodality.

1.1. Introduction

According to Statatista, Facebook has over 2.19 billion users in the first quarter of 2018! (Statatista "Number of Monthly active", 2018). This makes Facebook "the largest social app in terms of logged in users compared to You Tube 1.5 billion users, We Chat's 889 million, Twitter 328 million and Snapchat 255 million" (Costine, 2017). Such numbers may be the reason that many scholars in different fields and areas of expertise such as sociology, psychology and linguistics have recently tried to observe, analyze, and shed light on some phenomena related to social media in their research.

Facebook among many other social apps allows users to like, share, post, comment and most recently react to almost everything starting from the color of

the Kardashian dress to the current political and economic events taking place around the world. According to Dennis and Wood (2017), "Arab nationals are more likely than Americans to get news from social media and younger Arabs are more likely to trust it than their older compatriots". Therefore, in their survey in seven key nations including Egypt, Dennis and Wood found out that "eight in 10 Arab nationals (79 percent) say they get at least some news from social media".

As for Egypt, in an article written by Cairo Scene, a website that covers different topics about Egypt and the Egyptian society, it was mentioned that "Egyptians are addicted to social media, because according to the latest statistics 14 million of us cannot stop posting, chatting and liking everything in sight". The article also mentioned that the largest age groups that use Facebook range between 25 and 34 years old. Moreover, the author stated that such figures might have left many experts questioning whether the country is facing a growing problem of social media addiction, fueled by high-speed internet access and the instant gratification of 2014 smart phone technology (Egypt Addicted to Social Media, 2018).

Whether addicted to Facebook and other means of social media or not, one cannot deny the role social media played in some Arab countries during the period of the Arab uprisings.

In its report, the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) (2011) discusses the issue of social media and the huge role that it played in some Arab countries:

> While it sounded like a catchy sound bite, Tunisian activists were not calling the uprising in their country a "Twitter Revolution." yet no one was denying the pivotal role of the micro-blogging site either, or the role that social media will continue to play in Tunisia, Egypt, and the rest of the Arab world (p.16).

When it comes to the relation between Facebook humor and irony, it has been proven lately that despite lacking all the tools of Face-to-Face communication (FTFC), the internet is surprisingly a place that thrives on humor and sarcasm. In a face-to-face conversation, people might raise a brow, stress certain words or syllables and make some facial expressions or gestures to indicate that they are being ironic or sarcastic, so when they are typing on a computer, they are

expected to avoid irony and sarcasm completely for fear of being misunderstood by others. However, Facebook and other means of social media speak for themselves on this matter, as they are loaded with ironic and sarcastic content.

Recently, a closer look at the language people use in posts and comments on Facebook, one can notice that it is often or most of the time humorous and sarcastic. This might be due to the fact that, humorous and ironic language gives people the freedom to express their opinions and attitudes towards events with subtlety and discretion. In addition, using irony and sarcasm on social media increases the reactions and followers one might have. Therefore, the funnier and humorous one is on social media, the more followers and reactors one could easily get. Moreover, people often use social media to enjoy their time or to seek entertainment, therefore people use humorous and sarcastic language on social media simply to laugh and joke around.

The use of irony or sarcasm to mock events and people is very common in every society. People naturally use language and play upon words regardless of their race, gender, background or social status. Social media users use irony and sarcasm a lot not only to be ironic, but also to be humorous and funny. Humor can take different forms such as parody, irony and sarcasm as well as analogy, which may be considered examples of humor.

However, (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard and Hogg, 2006) see that the perception of humor differs from one culture to another, because "what is funny to one person may be offensive or incomprehensible to another… One humor category may appeal to one culture or country better than to the other" (p. 190). Moreover, the functions of humor are hypothesized to be also universal and they fall into two major categories: social management and de-functionalization. The first is related to the role of humor as means of social control, for example, to reinforce social relationships, to remedy embarrassing or unpleasant situations, or to gain attention or as a source of punishment for socially deviant behavior, that is, to point out the violation of rules. The second function is related to social play in which language is used for humorous purpose. (As cited in Guidi, 2017, p. 18).

This means that irony and sarcasm fall under the category of humor, which in itself plays an integral part of each society and has an undeniable role in forming and shaping societies. It may be also added that the increasing usage of social media in recent years gives more emphasis to the role humor plays in our lives.

This research sheds light on the role verbal irony plays and how people utilize it in the posts and comments on Facebook.

1.2. Significance and aim of the research

This research aims at identifying some of the features of digital discourse through the analysis of Egyptians' social attitudes on Facebook reflected in some posts and comments. It also investigates the function of mixing visual and verbal content in some posts and comments as well as the role this content plays in depicting social attitudes in the Egyptian community. Moreover, the study attempts to compare and contrast the number of posts with visual images to that of other posts with verbal elements only to find out which posts are prevailing or if they both have equal numbers.

1.3. Research Questions

Since its launching in 2006, Facebook among other applications of social media has always been the focus of much research in the field of linguistics. This research will focus on analyzing the language used by Egyptians to express their attitudes towards certain events taking place in society through their posts and comments. Therefore, this research will try to answer the following questions regarding social attitudes:

1. How Egyptians' social reactions or attitudes towards certain events in society are depicted in Facebook posts and comments whether verbal or visual?
2. What are the functions of mixing verbal and visual tools to convey meaning in digital discourse?
3. How will the analysis of social attitudes be useful in identifying features of digital discourse?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Studies on Echoic Mention Theory

More than 40 years have passed since Sperber and Wilson proposed their theory of echoic mention. Since then, a body of research and theses were written on verbal irony. The researcher selected relatively recent research on verbal irony and discussed them in details to shed light on the progress made so far on the topic.

This first research on verbal irony is an MA thesis written by Magua (2014). Magua's thesis was a case study on utterances of verbal irony in a language called Gikuyu spoken by the people of Bantu who live in the central province of Kenya. Magua (2014) collected her data through watching three comedy sitcoms

in the Gikuyu language and reading three Gikuyu narratives. She compared between two theories of verbal irony namely the echoic mention theory of verbal irony by Sperber and Wilson and the pretense theory by Clark and Gerrig (1984) to see how each account treats ironic utterances. She combined the two theories with the Relevance theory by Sperber and Wilson to check how the hearer achieved relevance and the amount of processing effort and the number of cognitive effects used by the hearer to understand the ironic utterance.

She analyzed the utterances first through pretense and then through echoic mention to decide which theory of verbal irony would require less effort from the hearer to achieve the intended meaning. She divided the sources of echoes of the ironic utterances into four main groups, which are, echoes of stereotypes, echoes of societal norms and values, echoes of societal expectations on an individual and echoes of the immediate context (what has been said earlier in context).

Finally, since Magua's research was done on the Gikuyu language spoken in the central province of Kenya, she noted that there is a high probability of misunderstanding in using verbal irony between speakers and hearers especially when the speaker and the listener are not from the same community, or have not been engaged in a conversation recently. The misunderstanding applies more to the use of echoic account of verbal irony since the speaker tends to echo what exists in the community or what had been said in an earlier discourse.

The second research on verbal irony was submitted by Karoui, Zitoune and Moriceau (2017) to the 3rd Conference on Arabic Computational Linguistics (ACLing). The paper was entitled: "Towards an Irony Detection System for Arabic on Social Media". The research was conducted on ironic tweets that carried specific hashtags such as #irony, #sarcasm and #sarcastic to reach accuracy and precision. The researchers used the concept of irony as an "umbrella term" to include a variety of ironic, sarcastic and parodic utterances. The topic of the ironic tweets was about some selected Egyptian and American presidential candidates. The reason for selecting political tweets was the fact that politics is considered the most criticized and discussed topic among other topics on social media.

The study aimed at finding out the following: First, to test whether state of the art features of irony detection whose efficiency have been proven in other languages such as French, English, Italian, Dutch and Japanese, will also be valid for Arabic

or not. Second, to find out the most suitable features of irony detection for the Arabic language among the various ones presented, and finally to analyze the main source of errors.

The researchers collected a total number of 5,479 tweets which resulted in 1,733 ironic tweets and the rest were non-ironic tweets but carried keywords related to the topic of the presidential candidates. The collected corpus consisted of tweets written in Standard Arabic, dialectal Arabic or a mix of Standard and dialectal Arabic such as Egyptian, Syrian and Saudi dialects, whereas other dialects such as Tunisian and Algerian have rarely been used. One of the challenges that faced the researchers while analyzing the tweets was the problem of misspellings and grammatical errors in some words as well as the "non- diacritic" Arabic language used in written tweets.

The researchers concluded by explaining that despite using a set of features most of which were surface features, the results for Arabic tweet classifications in ironic/non-ironic utterances were very encouraging 72.4%, compared to other languages such as French 93%, Dutch 30% and 79% for English, taking into consideration that the features used in these studies were not the same. The achieved results for Arabic are considered very promising since, unlike other languages, they did not rely on any morpho-syntactic tools.

2.2. Studies on Multimodality

The ideas Kress and van Leeuwen proposed in their book *Reading Images* can easily be applied in countless fields and areas of study. The researcher chooses two studies that applied Kress and van Leeuwen's ideas in two different fields.

The first study is a paper submitted by two scholars from the Yanching Institute of Technology in China. Yang and Zhang (2014) collected 13 images from Editorial articles as samples for their study. The source of these articles came from the Economist online magazine during the years of (2010) and (2011). The nature of the topics discussed in these images varied from economy, to politics, etc.

The authors focused mainly in their research on the representational metafunction that Kress and Van Leeuwen mentioned in their analysis of images. They combined Kress and van Leeuwen's theory of multimodality with Royce's theoretical framework of inter-semiotic complementarity as a research methodology. The researchers explained that nowadays the majority of newspapers and magazines add visual images related to the contents of the

newspaper or the magazine articles to help readers have a thorough understanding of topics and contents of such articles.

The first image that appeared in their paper, consists of seven persons sitting in one boat and these people are shown to be in a dreadful plight, behind them appears to be a torrential waterfall. According to Yang and Zhang, the process described in that image is a transactional action process. The seven persons depicted in the image are described as (actors) while their paddles are shown as (vectors) since they connect them to the waterfall, which is the (goal). The process in the waterfall itself is described as another action process, but it is a non- transactional process since there are no actors or goals depicted. (Yang & Zhang, 2014, p. 2566). The researchers then, chose seventeen sentences from the accompanying text to apply the framework of inter-semiotic complementarity. They explained that the text shows a clear link between the visually represented image and the verbally discussed problems.

Yang and Zhang (2014) concluded that their paper was an attempt to define the characteristics of multimodal discourse in English editorials. They explained that while advertisements and posters use pictures with only a few verbal sentences, editorials on the other hand, consider pictures as a major form of expression and therefore, equal weight is given to pictures and caricatures as well as to verbal text.

Torres (2015) conducted a different research on multimodality. She examined two images from an EFL textbook (English as a foreign language). The title of the book is, *World Link: Developing English Fluency* (2011) and it is designed for South Korean university students who are learning English as a foreign language. The researcher aimed at discovering what the ideologies embedded in EFL textbooks are and the relation of the images to the purpose of the textbook and the publishing company.

Finally, the researcher concluded that the images in the book showed some contradiction between the image and the written text. For example, the text was about a cheerful and friendly person describing his neighborhood, the accompanying image however, seemed to contradict the written message, as the person in the images is depicted from a long distance shot and was shown as a detached stranger. She also noted that English was used as a source of power. According to Torres, the visual analysis of the images showed English speakers

in America as symbolically more powerful through the vertical angle as well as the low angle, whereas, the non-English speakers were depicted from a high angle.

Other researches that the researcher likes to refer to briefly here are; Rezk's research (2018) who provided a pragmatic analysis of Facebook posts and status updates using Searle's Speech Act theory and Grice's theory of cooperative maxims. In addition, Zaki's research (2017) that was conducted on the pragmatics of Arabic religious posts on Facebook. Finally, the research at hand is the first attempt to combine both verbal irony and multimodal theories as opposed to the previously mentioned researches that dealt with each of the previous theories separately.

3. Data Collection and Methodology

3.1. Data Collection

The data for this research was collected from some Egyptian public pages on Facebook. The research examines four posts and their accompanying images if found. Each post discusses different topic such as economic, social, and political, etc. The selection of the posts is related to some popular trends and social events that took place at the time of the research. Comments are analyzed according to the level of irony and subtlety as well as the relevance of the comment.

3.2. Analyzing posts and comments:

Analyzing each post is as follows: First, the post and its related comments is translated into English, however the actual analysis is for the original language used in the post which is Colloquial Egyptian Arabic as well as informal and sometimes slang Egyptian Arabic. Second, the researcher provides a brief background on the topic the post is discussing. Third, an analysis of the written text of the post is given. Fourth, the image attached to the post is analyzed. Fifth, an analysis of one or two selected comments among the most ironic comments and reactions is provided.

In analyzing images, this research focuses mainly on the representational metafunction explained in the multimodal theory, bearing in mind, that the other two metafunctions are equally important and essential in analyzing an image, yet the researcher believes that this research is mainly concerned with depicting social attitudes through analyzing verbal content of the posts, visual images and comments. Therefore, the representational metafunction is the most relevant and efficient in analyzing images. Moreover, images form only one part of a three-

part process of analysis, and therefore the representational metafunction may be sufficient for the current analysis of images.

3.3. Theoretical Framework

This research adopts one theoretical framework that consists of two theories namely; the Echoic Mention theory of verbal irony by Dan Sperber and Dierdre Wilson (1981: 2012) discussed in their book *Meaning and Relevance* for the analysis of ironical statements. In addition to that is the Multimodal theory by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen (1996: 2006) explained in their book *Reading Images: The Grammar of visual Design* for the analysis of images in the posts.

3.3.1. Echoic Mention Theory

In Chapter 6 of their book *Meaning and Relevance* Wilson and Sperber (2012), claimed that the traditional account, or what they called the "Gricean account", that treated verbal irony as a figurative meaning that violates the maxim of truthfulness, is questioned for many reasons. Two of these reasons are, first; the way the traditional account implies a two-stage processing model in which a person has to test and reject the literal meaning of an utterance before considering a figurative interpretation. However, Sperber and Wilson (2012) explained that, experimental studies on both metaphor and irony suggest that some figurative interpretations do not take double the effort to be constructed compared to other literal interpretations. The second reason is related to the theoretical level of the traditional account and its inability to offer a clear explanation of the existence of metaphor and irony in the first place. If, according to the traditional approach, metaphor and irony cost more effort to process than their literal counterpart, yet yield no extra benefit, then their use is irrational and a waste of effort, the matter that Sperber and Wilson rejected as well. (pp. 124-125).

However, later on, Wilson and Sperber mentioned that Grice acknowledged that his explanation of irony was insufficient and he mentioned some other features of irony, which complements his account or points towards an alternative account (p.125). The ideas that became the milestone for Sperber and Wilson's new account of verbal irony were explained in their paper "Irony and the use-mention distinction" (1978) that was published in French first and then in English in 1981. In that paper, Sperber and Wilson proposed a complete change from the classical approach, and explained their new theory of verbal irony which focuses on attributing the echoing of thoughts to a certain individual or

people in general in order to convey a certain attitude. Their explanation of the new approach was:

> Irony occurs when echoing a thought, a belief an intention or a norm based expectation, and this thought is attributed to an individual, a group of people or people in general with the aim of expressing mockery, skepticism or a critical attitude to this thought. (p.125).

According to Wilson and Sperber, (2012) this approach of verbal irony implies that the speaker believes the opposite of what is said in an ironical utterance, but this is not the point, nor the meaning of that utterance. An example for that would be, when Mary says after a boring party, "That was fun!" Here she does not assert literally that the party was (fun) nor ironically that the party was (boring). She is however, expressing an attitude of scorn for example, towards the general expectation among the guests that the party would be fun. (p. 125).

3.3.1.1. Explaining the Echoic Mention and dissociative attitude:

According to Wilson and Sperber, echoic mention is defined as follows:

> We define echoic use as a subtype of attributive use in which the speaker's primary intention is not to provide information about the content of an attributed thought, but to convey her own attitude or reaction to that thought. Thus, to claim that verbal irony is a subtype of echoic use is to claim, on the one hand, that it is necessarily attributive, and, on the other, that it necessarily involves the expression of a certain type of attitude to the attributed thought. (P.128)

This definition indicates that, the attitudes conveyed in an ironic utterance are drawn from a spectrum of dissociative range, which varies quite widely, from amusement to different levels of resignation, disappointment, contempt, disgust, outrage or scorn (p. 130). Moreover, Sperber and Wilson (2012) mentioned that the easiest recognizable examples of echoic use are those that express the speaker's attitude or reaction to a thought overtly from an immediately preceding utterance. For example, when Jack tells Sue that he finished writing his paper and Sue replies (dismissively), "you finished your paper! How often have I heard you say that?" Here Sue is not intending to inform Jack about the content of the thought he has just expressed, but she is rather trying to convey her own attitude or reaction towards what Jack said which in that case is: "her disbelief".

To conclude, the previously mentioned example of Mary's utterance about the party: "That was fun", means that Mary might be dissociating herself from a variety of thoughts. Such dissociation varies from disappointment because of the predictions and reassurances from her friends that the party would be fun, which was not the case for Mary. Other levels of self-dissociation could be her attitude of resignation and contempt because this party in particular did not live up to her own hopes, desires and expectations about how parties should be in general. Finally, it is clear that Sperber and Wilson's account of verbal irony no longer accepts the classical account that treats verbal irony as simple infringement of the maxim of truthfulness.

3.3.2. Multimodal Theory

Living in a digital era nowadays, language is no longer the only means of communication. Image, color, sound and action symbols started to take over the process of meaning making. The role language plays in constructing meaning has retreated greatly especially on social media. This means that, multimodal communication, has replaced mono-modal communication in almost every aspect, and has become the mainstream of communication of human beings.

3.3.2.1. Multimodality and the Grammar of Visual Design

The ideas that inspired Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) for their book came from Halliday's book: *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, Halliday (2004) tried to produce an answer for what the basic functions of language are. He explained that there are three metafunctions to language. First, the ideational metafunction "which is a resource for construing our experience of the world that lies around us". The second metafunction is the interpersonal metafunction, which enables humans to enact their personal and social relationships with others as well as express their appraisals and attitudes towards them. The last metafunction is the textual metafunction, which relates to the construction of text. Halliday considered it as a facilitating function because it organizes the discourse flow and creates cohesion and continuity within the text (pp. 29, 640). In recent years, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996: 2006) adopted Halliday's views of SFL to study visual images and claimed that such metafunctions could be applied "to all semiotic modes and are not specific to speech or writing" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 42). They considered Halliday's three metafunctions as a main tool to analyze any human communication system. In their book: *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design,* Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) extended Halliday's metafunctions to visual images and renamed them

as; <u>representational,</u> <u>interactional</u>, and <u>compositional</u> metafunctions in correspondence to Halliday's Ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions.

-3.3.2.١.1. Representational Metafunction:

As previously mentioned, the representational metafunction is the only metafunction used in the analysis of images in the present paper, despite the fact that the other two metafunctions are equally important and essential in analyzing an image. The reason for choosing the representative metafunction in analyzing images is due to the nature of the analysis in this research, which is concerned with the relation between images and ironic and sarcastic text in Facebook posts. Therefore, the researcher believes that, the representative metafunction is the most relevant function when analyzing images in this research.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) explained that the representational metafunction, which corresponds to Halliday's ideational metafunction as "the ability of semiotic systems to represent objects and their relations in a world outside the representational system of a culture" and they explained that objects or elements in visual images are called "represented participants". They also differentiated between two kinds of participants: "interactive participants" who are people "who speak and listen or write and read, make images or view them" and "represented participants" which are "people, places and things including abstract things represented in images" (pp.47- 48). According to Kress and Van Leeuwen, representational meaning in images is divided into <u>narrative</u> and <u>conceptual</u> representations.

<u>Narrative representations</u> on the one hand, is the process that refers to "unfolding actions and events, processes of change and transitory spatial arrangements". (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 59) Narrative representations show participants that are connected to one another through invisible lines called vectors. It includes different kinds and processes such as; <u>action processes</u>, <u>reaction processes,</u> <u>speech and mental processes</u>, <u>conversion and geometrical symbolism</u>. <u>Conceptual representations</u>, on the other hand, are "processes involving participants in terms of their more generalized and more or less stable and timeless essence, in terms of class, or structure or meaning" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 79). It includes three subdivisions, <u>classification</u>, <u>analytical</u>, and <u>symbolic</u> processes. Classification process relates

participants to each other in terms of "their kind of relation, or taxonomy" (p.79).

3.3.2.١.2. Interactive Metafunction

The second metafunction that Kress and Van Leeuwen mentioned in the Grammar of Visual Design is the Interactive metafunction. This metafunction as opposed to the previously mentioned one is clearly about the real people who produce and make sense of the images in the context of social institutions. Interactive participants are the ones who regulate what should be said with the image and how it should be said as well as how to be interpreted. Interactive participants are the people who communicate with each other through images; the producer and the viewer of the image (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 114). The interactive metafunction has three subdivisions: the image act, social distance and point of view.

2.3.2.١.3. Compositional Metafunction

The final metafunction is compositionality. Compositionality refers to "the way in which representational and interactive elements are made to relate to each other and the way they are integrated into a meaningful whole" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 176). Kress and Van Leeuwen explained that compositionality relates representational and interactive elements through three interrelated systems, which are, information value, salience and framing.

4. Data Analysis

4. 0. Introduction

This section is devoted to the analysis of the posts, their accompanying images (if any) and some selected comments. This section is divided into smaller sections where each section discusses Egyptians' attitudes towards certain topics and events taking place around them. The selection of the posts depends on the availability of these posts. In other words, the researcher selected posts that she could provide links for later on at the end of the research, for reasons of authenticity. As for the comments, the researcher selected the most relevant comments to the analysis of the research and excluded irrelevant comments and those that may contain offensive and obscene content.

4.1. Sports' posts

The theme of sports is not one of the highly discussed topics on Facebook. However, when it comes to certain events such as the world Cup or an iconic football player or a match between famous national teams, Egyptians must have a say on the matter! An example is the world Cup that took place in Russia in 2018.

Egyptians had attitudes towards some events that took place during the World Cup. The following post shows people's attitudes towards certain events related to sports:

4.1.1. Cuper and the elimination of the Egyptian team from the World Cup!

Translation:

Cuper should never be fired, on the contrary, he should be granted the Egyptian citizenship, live among us and have a ration card to suffer for the rest of his life as his punishment for Egypt's scores in the World Cup!

Background on the post:

This post appeared as a reaction to the elimination of the Egyptian team from the World Cup that was held in Russia (2018). People began to vent out with posts similar to the above one, as they blamed Hector Cuper, the coach of the national team, back then for their loss and the disappointing scores of the Egyptian team.

Analyzing the text:

Jorgensen, Miller and Sperber (1984), in their paper "Test of the Mention Theory of Irony" argued that there are echoic utterances that refer to tacitly attributed or unexpressed thoughts, not of what is said but what is thought to be implied. Therefore, the echoing of thoughts in the ironic phrases "ميمشيش"(should never be fired) and "ياخد الجنسية المصرية"(should be granted the Egyptian citizenship)…etc, indicate that the writer tacitly implies that living in Egypt, being Egyptian and facing the hardships of the life in Egypt is an enough lifetime of suffering and

misery to any person! Therefore, granting the Egyptian citizenship to Cuper is a proper punishment for him, because according to the writer and so many Egyptians, he is the one responsible for the elimination of the Egyptian team from the World Cup! The writer of the post wrote that ironic statement echoing thoughts from the socially received opinion among Egyptians about the conditions of life in Egypt and attributed it to Egyptians in general or to anyone who may entertain or share the same ideas and beliefs. He did so to convey his attitude of contempt and scorn towards the coach of the national team back then and towards life in Egypt in general.

Moreover, Jorgensen, et al. (1984) argued that, the echoing of thoughts could be of "popular wisdom and socially received opinions". Therefore, in the above post, the writer could also be echoing a thought from the old proverb: "beggars do not choose". If according to the writer of the post, Egyptians are living a life of misery and suffering and they were eliminated from the World Cup championship, they have no right to decide whether Cuper stays as the coach of the national team or not, yet he still has given his opinion on the matter!

Analyzing the image:

The image shows a conceptual analytical process where the (Carrier) is the person shown in the image and the (possessive attributes) are his torn and dirty clothes, his slippers and his shabby appearance as a whole! According to Kress and van Leeuwen in an analytical picture "if there is neither a vector (narrative process) nor compositional symmetry, it serves to identify a Carrier and to allow viewers to scrutinize this Carrier's Possessive Attributes" (p.89). In this image, the possessive attributes help draw the viewers' attention to the appearance of the person in the image as he personifies Egyptians' state after losing the World Cup championship or Egyptians in general.

The image also contains a transactional reaction process because the glance of the (reactor) is directed towards another participant (the phenomenon) but it is not clear to the viewer what or who he is looking at. In addition to that, the Egyptian flag on the man's chest could be seen as symbolic attributive, which the post creator used as an indication of the way Egyptians think of themselves or the way Egyptians see themselves. Kress and van Leeuwen explained that, "a symbolic process is about what a participant means or is". If it includes two participants, the Carrier whose meaning or identity is established and the participant that represents the meaning or identity itself, it is called symbolic attributive (p.105). According to the authors, human participants in symbolic attributive do not

appear to be involved in an action, but rather posed there for the viewer, and their posture cannot be interpreted as narrative. Therefore, the Carrier is the man in the image whose identity is established in the image as Egyptian and the flag is the other participant that represents the identity of the Carrier.

4.2. Tourism posts

The topic of tourism is one of the least discussed or shared topics on social media. However, Egyptians could not ignore certain events that took place regarding the topic of tourism. Therefore, when the news about an ancient tomb that contains skeletons was found in one of the construction sites in Alexandria, Egyptians could not wait to give their opinions on the matter! Examples for that is the following post.

4.3.3. Best skulls on earth!

Translation:

An official with the team of Alexandria's tomb revealed that: the skulls' features show signs of virility and nobility, which suggests belonging to the military.

Reaction: Best skulls on earth!

Background on the post:

This post was a reaction to the announcement of an official working with the Ministry of State of Antiquities revealing the age and gender of the skulls that were found in Alexandria's tomb in August 2018. The tomb itself was found earlier in a construction site in the area of Sidi Gaber in Alexandria (AbdulMa'boud, 2018). The discovery of the tomb formed a huge piece of news to Egyptian as well as global media and people were waiting anxiously for the tomb to be opened.

Analyzing the text:

According to Jorgensen et al., (1984) echoing of thoughts could be of socially received opinions and popular wisdom (p. 114). The writer of the post is echoing thoughts from the socially received opinion among Egyptians that the Egyptian soldiers are known to be (Best soldiers on earth!). Therefore, the utterance "خير جماجم الأرض" or "best skulls on earth" is ironically used by the writer to convey his attitude of disbelief and skepticism towards the official's announcement, because how could he have predicted that the skulls belonged to the military and what evidence did he have to describe the skulls as bearing "شهامة" or "nobility"? This means that the writer is dissociating himself from that norm-based belief and from the official's utterance through ironically saying that if the skulls belonged to the military, then they must be best skulls on earth!

Analyzing the image:

The image contains several Conceptual processes. The first process is covert taxonomy. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) in covert taxonomies, "the superordinate is not shown but its appearance is inferred from the similarity between the subordinates" (p. 80). In this image, the subordinates are the skulls and the superordinate is the complete human skeleton itself and its existence is inferred from the skulls.

The other processes found in this image are unstructured analytical process and temporal analytical process. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) explained that unstructured analytical process shows "the possessive attributes of the carrier, but not the carrier itself. In other words, they show us the parts but not the way these parts fit together to make a whole" (p. 92). In this image, the skulls or the skeletons are the possessive attributes, whereas the carrier is the human being itself that does not appear in the image.

As for temporal analytical process, Kress and van Leeuwen pointed out that it is seen as a "process between the narrative and the analytical" (p. 94). They gave an example for an image of an ape as the beginning stage of humankind followed by successive stages until the stage of the human itself. The ape in this case is the carrier, which represents the concept of "time" instead of an object and the possessive attributes are the different stages shown as points in time. In this image, the skulls or the skeletons are the possessive attributes that represent the degradation of a human being after its body is buried for a long time!

Analyzing comments:

> **Dina Salah**
> رجوله ماشى بتبان لكن شهامه ازاى يعنى . بيوسع علشان الهيكل اللى جنبه ميضايقش
> Like · Reply · 39w

Translation:

Masculinity, sure, it is possible to identify, but what nobility is he referring to? A skeleton would free up space for another, in order not to be bothered**!**

Analyzing text:

As Sperber and Wilson (2012) mentioned the easiest recognizable examples of echoic use are those that express the speaker's attitude or reaction to a thought overtly expressed in an immediately preceding utterance. Therefore, the comment writer of this post echoed thoughts from the preceding utterance to describe her attitude of mockery and skepticism towards the official's statement through saying dismissively "شهامة إزاي يعني" or 'what nobility is he referring to?' She is dissociating herself from the official's exaggeration and impracticality of his statement about the nobility of the skulls. Therefore, she ironically suggested that a skeleton would free up space for another. Moreover, there is an implicit criticism towards the socially received idea of "whatever is military should be noble", which the comment writer skillfully rejected through dissociating herself from such ideology by wondering 'what nobility is he referring to?'

4.3. Political Posts

Politics forms a huge section on social media. This section discusses some of the events that took place in some Arab countries and worldwide and how Egyptians responded to such events in their posts.

4.3.1. The Sudanese Revolution

Translation:

An exact copy of our revolution not one more or less kiss!

Background on the post:

This post and so many others came as a reaction to the news that spread about the Sudanese revolution that occurred in late December 2018 when the Sudanese people ousted president Omar al-Bashir and the army sentenced him to house arrest. Egyptians began to compare the Sudanese situation to that of the Egyptians after the 25th of January revolution.

Analyzing the text:

The phrase "لا بوسة زادت ولا بوسة قلت" or "not an extra or less kiss!" refers to echoing of thoughts from different videos that were seen on the Egyptian television after the 25th of January revolution. Egyptians were shown kissing the heads of military soldiers and cheering for them as a sign of gratitude because the Egyptian army refused to shoot at protestors during the 25th of January revolution, which led to the end of the presidency of Mubarak. The writer of the post did so to convey his attitude of amusement and skepticism towards the fate of the Sudanese revolution and the obvious similarity between the Egyptian and the Sudanese situation. Moreover, the similarities in the situations of both the two revolutions shed more light on the way media in some Arab countries are almost identical in dealing with some situations. It also shows the role the army play in some Arab countries.

Analyzing image:

The image shows a narrative transactional action process. The main actor is the man kissing the head of the military soldier. The soldier plays the goal in that image because the vectors formed by the man's mouth and hands are directed to the soldier. The image also contains (locative circumstances) which relate participants to a specific place called setting. Setting requires a contrast between background and foreground. For example, the participants in the foreground overlap and partially obscure the setting. (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 72). In this image, the two men in the foreground (the actor and the goal) obscure the rest of the setting in the background to focus the viewer's attention on them.

4.4. Social Posts:

People feel the need to communicate with each other, which means it is inevitable to be social one way or another. That is what all the new platforms of social media depend on nowadays, and how they gained their popularity in the 21st century. From its name, it is clear that the term 'social media' enables people to be social, to talk about their social life, discuss it and form their opinions of others as well as of themselves. Egyptian on social media can talk about anything and everything! They always have something to discuss on Facebook and other means of social media, whether the talk is about education, public transportation, celebrities' news and even the weather! The following post is just one example of how social trends can take over people's lives!

4.4.1. Kiki Dance

Translation:

Kiki, God bless the old days when she used to dance to 'Ela'b Yala', such a lowly girl.

Background on the post:

The content of such post and so many others have gone viral on different platforms of social media such as twitter and Facebook. The origin of the name Kiki came from a song called "In my feelings" by a Canadian-American rapper called Drake. The Kiki challenge started immediately afterwards when a comedian named Shiggy posted a video of himself dancing to Drake's song. Since then, the video went viral and Drake's song skyrocketed to the top of the charts. The challenge itself involves a willing volunteer who opens the passenger door of a moving car and proceeds to dance to Drake's song "In My Feelings" (Chambers, 2018).
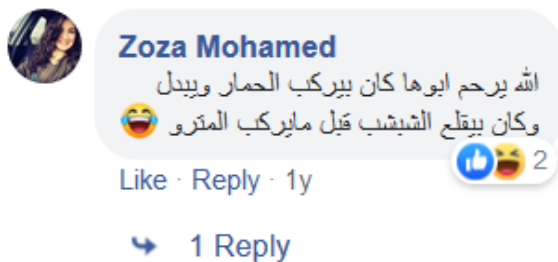
Analyzing the text:

In the phrase "يالا العب على بترقص كانت لما يرحم الله" or 'God bless the old days when she used to dance to 'Ela'b Yala', the writer ironically criticizes some girls in the Egyptian society who blindly started to follow the trend of Kiki dance. He creatively dissociates himself from these girls' pretense and vanity, as well as their false aspiration for modernity and civilization through performing the Kiki dance. He ironically says that such girls should go back to their roots when they used to dance to 'Ela'b Yalh', which was a famous Egyptian pop song back then.

Moreover, the writer used the phrase "الجزر بياعة بنت" or 'such a lowly girl' to refer that such girls came from low classes in society and they are trying to advance their status in society through dancing to Kiki, but still they cannot deceive anyone! The whole phrase is an echoing of thoughts from a famous Egyptian Comedy play. Using the image from the play and certain phrases is supposed to help the readers recall the connection between the ironic scene from the play and the situation of those who dance to Kiki song. Moreover, the post refers to Egyptian social strata and the way people aspiration to follow social trends to achieve higher status in society. In this post, the writer conveys his attitude of contempt and resignation towards society's pretense and vanity.

Analyzing the image:

The image includes conceptual analytical process. Analytical process shows participants "in terms of a part-whole structure. They involve two kinds of participants: The Carrier (the whole) and any number of Possessive Attributes (the parts)" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 87). In this image, the Carrier is the actor who plays the role of a country woman and the possessive attributes are the headscarf, his clothes and the necklace. The possessive attributes are left for the viewers to scan and scrutinize. Therefore, the readers are able to make a connection between the woman's clothes in the image and the ironic words of the post. The image in this post is taken from a famous Egyptian Comedy play in which the actor played the role of a low class woman. As a result, the viewers understand the echoing of thoughts between the scene of the play and the ironic words of the post.

Analyzing Comments:

Zoza Mohamed
الله يرحم ابوها كان بيركب الحمار ويبدل وكان بيقلع الشبشب قبل مايركب المترو 😂

Like · Reply · 1y

1 Reply

Translation:

God bless her father who used to cycle while riding on the back of a donkey and take off his slippers before boarding the Metro!

Analysis:

The above comment truly proves Sperber and Wilson's ideas of a successful case of irony which in their opinion can be recognized by any person who may entertain similar thought to that of the ironic utterance or expresses a thought with a similar content whose inappropriateness or inadequacy would be worth remarking on" (p. 136). Moreover, Simpson (2008) explained that the reason for using irony is the impact that it has on people's social dynamics, because it is a powerful way "of not saying". According to Simpson, when irony is used without compassion (as in irony and sarcasm), it allows us to attack without having to provide content. This means that the targets of irony and sarcasm in that case are

left to fill in the gaps themselves; and at the same time, the attack may be to some extent revisable. In other words, it is an indirect way of criticizing someone and getting away with it!

In the previous comment, the writer draws the readers' attention towards the same issue that the writer of the post referred to, which is the aspiration of some low classes in society to become more modern and civilized. The utterance "أبوها كان بيركب الحمار ويبدل" is used as an echoic use of what was previously mentioned in the post itself. Therefore, the comment refers to a fact that Simpson (2008) pointed out which is the private audience of the ironical utterance: "while irony is in part interactive, there is a significant role for irony in which the audience is private" (p. 131). The audience of both the post and the comment are private because irony rather excludes those who did not understand the ironical utterance and those who do not have enough information about the topic of the post. This means that those who understood the echoic use in the post from the play are the ones who understood the post, and those who made the comment are those who understood the irony intended in the post and the play, hence the idea of (private audience)!

5. Discussion and Conclusion

More than a decade have passed since the launching of Facebook. During that time, Facebook managed to become one of the largest social apps in terms of logged in users compared to other platforms of social media. Facebook innovates more ways of communication to its users other than posting, commenting and sharing. It recently allowed its users to react to anything and everything through five reactions (love, like, laugh, sad and wow). Facebook and other applications of social media have proven to have a tremendous effect on the world that we live in.

Although people created virtual worlds to connect them together and help them communicate with each other, yet people have redefined and reshaped the way social media is used. Through virtual worlds, people managed to instigate revolutions, change communities and reshape the real world! Such so-called virtual worlds have broken the boundaries between what is supposed to be an online world and the actual real world that people live in.

The research at hand included four posts; all extracted from Egyptian public Facebook pages. The posts discuss some trending events related to the Egyptian society and life in Egypt in general as well as events that took place worldwide. The analysis of the data shows that all the four posts include images in them. The role images play in these posts vary according to the use of the image itself. For example, three out of the four images were crucial to understanding the ironic text. Only the image that included skulls did not play a major role or had certain significance in understanding the ironic text. One might argue that if removed the ironic text is still understood, yet their existence add volumes to the ironic and sarcastic text especially because some of these images are taken from famous Egyptian movies and plays which adds to the culture specific nature of such posts.

The processes used in the analysis vary between narrative and conceptual processes. The conceptual process, whether conceptual analytical or covert taxonomy and temporal analytical is the main process that is used in three out of four posts. Only one post included narrative action process. Moreover, the attitudes found in the posts range between contempt, disbelief and skepticism as well as amusement. As for the comments found in the posts, the researcher selected two comments to analyze. The comments show how irony can bring people of shared background together. Moreover, the attitudes expressed in the comments can be the same as the ones expressed in the posts or they can be completely different attitudes.

The mixture of both verbal and visual content on Facebook plays an important role in helping people express their attitudes. Language alone is no longer the only means of communication yet it is still essential in conveying people's attitudes, especially the ironic and sarcastic language. Verbal irony is one of the ways that people use to express their feelings or refer to their attitudes on Facebook. It allows people to express different attitudes and perspectives towards a variety of topics without having to commit themselves directly to these topics. Moreover, the ability to come up with more subtle utterances in comments proves that irony not only helps people express their attitudes discretely on social media but it also creates sort of an exclusive audience; those who understood the ironic utterance and those who created it, leaving the victims of irony excluded from those private audience! This means that irony connects people together and helps them communicate with each other on different levels on social media.

Moreover, the use of certain actors from renowned movies and television shows, adds to the echoic effect of the verbal irony, because the readers are reminded of the roles these actors play as well as their facial expressions and tone of voice in certain scenes. This matter leads the readers to better understanding of the irony and gives them kind of privilege and exclusion between the writers of the posts and them. Therefore, they are able to come up with more hilarious and creative comments at the same time.

Answering the research questions proposed at the beginning of this research, the researcher proved that Egyptians' reactions and attitudes on Facebook are depicted either verbally or visually or as a mixture of both verbal and visual content. In addition to verbal and visual content, Facebook also enables its users to react to posts and comments via five emoji reactions (like, love, laugh, wow and sad) which people used on Facebook 300 billion times during the first year of launching them!

The role images play in posts, images can have the ability to replace words due to the rich and colorful meanings they add to the post or the comment. In addition to the image itself, the facial expressions and body gestures used in the image add more details and draw the viewer's attention the message that the user wants to convey. Images used alone without text in posts and comments totally support the old saying: "a picture is worth a thousand words!" However, when used as accompanying a written text, images can be seen as a compensation to the lack of facial expressions and bodily gestures needed especially in an ironic utterance. Moreover, images taken from a popular movie or a certain play or a TV Show add to the echoic use of the ironic utterance and enrich the cultural background of that post. In some posts, images are used as an expressive tool to add to the written words of the post or complete it to create a multi-level meaning by combining the text and the image.

Finally, some of the features of digital discourse that the researcher came across after the analysis of Egyptians' social attitudes on Facebook are; first, language, and how it is used on social media as well as the way it intersects with other modes of communication. According to some researchers, the search for typical features for internet language have been replaced by a more specific analysis on how different contextual extra-linguistic or para-linguistic elements are shaped in various types in digital discourse (Thurlow, 2017). Although the posts and comments analyzed in this research were mostly in Arabic slang and Egyptian

Colloquial Arabic, the codeswitching to other languages such as English and French is a phenomenon worth discussing.

Second, Egyptians like all users of Facebook, use language and images interchangeably on Facebook. Images and Facebook reactions draw the attention to the facts that language is no longer the only mean of communication used by people to describe themselves on social media, and to the role that other modes of communication play on social media. Such variation in modes of communication can be described as some of the para-cultural parameters previously mentioned. The combination of images and language adds volumes to the way people use social media to serve different purposes culturally and linguistically.

Third, digital discourse is culture specific, meaning that; giving people the freedom to connect worldwide, Egyptian people still managed to reflect their own cultural values and traditions on Facebook about events that take place world widely. An example from this research is found in the posts of Egyptians about the Kiki dance, which originally started in Canada and the United States, yet Egyptians managed to mock and criticize the dance using words and expressions that reflect their cultural origins.

Fourth, digital discourse is related to social attitudes, as the old saying goes "birds of a feather flock together!", Egyptian people use Facebook to express their social attitudes and opinions about a certain topic, which means Facebook is used as channel of expression by different sections of the Egyptian society.

5.1. Recommendation for further research:

Since sarcasm and irony is a worldwide phenomenon regardless of the culture or the background and since Facebook is worldwide as well, the researcher believes that a cross-culture research that involves sarcastic Facebook pages from different Arab , Asian and western nations is a possible field for future research. Comparing ironic and sarcastic statements accompanied with images from different cultures will certainly enrich the field of computer mediated discourse and digital discourse. It will also shed light on the similarities between these communities and the way people express their attitudes worldwide.

The researcher also believes that applying different theories of verbal irony such as Pretense theory, Allusional Pretense theory or Utsumi's model on different ironical statements would be also useful to detect whether certain theories of

verbal irony are associated with certain cultures or not. Moreover, the inter-semiotic complimentary framework introduced by Royce in his book *New Directions in the Analysis of Multimodal Discourse* (2007) is also worth investigating for further research in the field of multimodality.

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تحليل لغوي للاتجاهات الاجتماعية في بعض المنشورات والتعليقات على الفيس بوك
أسماء إبراهيم أحمد عارف
قسم اللغة الإنجليزية
كلية البنات للآداب والعلوم والتربية

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الملخص

يعد الفيس بوك من أشهر مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي حيث وصل عدد مستخدميه إلى أكثر من ٢.١٩ بليون مستخدم مقارنة بمواقع التواصل الاجتماعي الأخرى مثل تويتر ويوتيوب وغيرهم وذلك في الربع الأول من عام ٢٠١٩ فقط. الأمر الذي جعل الفيس بوك ظاهرة منفصلة تحتاج إلى دراسات مكثفة في مجالات علم الاجتماع وعلم النفس والمجالات الأخرى مثل علم اللغويات والعلوم الإنسانية. يهدف هذا البحث إلى تقديم تحليلا لغويا للاتجاهات الاجتماعية للمصريين على صفحات الفيس بوك من خلال تحليل الجمل المستخدمة في بعض المنشورات والتعليقات بالإضافة إلى تحليل الصور المصاحبة لتلك المنشورات. كما يهدف البحث إلى تحديد سمات الخطاب الرقمي والتعرف على الدور الذي يلعبه المزج بين الألفاظ والصور في المنشورات وعلاقة ذلك بالخطاب الرقمي. قامت الباحثة بتحليل عينة مكونة من أربعة منشورات بالإضافة إلى بعض التعليقات على بعض صفحات التواصل الاجتماعي المصرية مستخدمة نظرية الصدى والذكر في المفارقات اللغوية Echoic Mention Theory of verbal irony لسبيربر وويلسون (2012) ونظرية الوسائط المتعددة Multimodal Theory لكريس وفان لوفين (٢٠٠٦). أشارت نتائج البحث إلى وجود صلة وثيقة بين استخدام الصدى والذكر في المفارقات اللغوية في المنشورات والصور المصاحبة لتلك المنشورات، كما تلقي الضوء على بعض سمات الخطاب الرقمي التي صادفت الباحثة من خلال تحليل المنشورات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: فيس بوك، منشور، تعليق، اتجاهات اجتماعية، الصدى والذكر، الوسائط المتعددة.