A Transitivity Analysis of Linguistic Sexism in Egyptian Comic Posts on Facebook

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Abstract

This study looks into how gender is portrayed in Facebook memes that were shared between 2020 and 2021 on the "Asa7be Sarcasm Society" page. Using qualitative and quantitative approaches based on Halliday's Transitivity System, the study looks at how gender roles are represented in these memes. The researcher focuses on the two transitivity processes namely: material and relational processes as the tools of analysis. The reason behind choosing these specific tools is that they are found to be the most employed in the data selected. The study shows the prevalent use of material processes, specifically when depicting women as dependent on men, especially when it comes to money. Relational processes were also common, with women being portrayed as whining about their lack of material belongings and relationships. Men, on the other hand, were known for the tendency to save resources, especially money. The study highlights how amusing posts may have a significant influence on normalizing different life issues and advances our understanding of gender representation in online discourse.

Keywords: gender representation, Facebook memes, Critical Discourse Analysis, Stereotypes, Sexism

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المستخلص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة كيفية تصوير النوع الاجتماعي في ميمات فيسبوك التي تمت مشاركتها على صفحة "Asa7be Sarcasm Society" في 2020-2021 باستخدام نهج نوعي وكمي يعتمد على نظام هاليداي الانتقالي، بحثت الدراسة في كيفية تمثيل أدوار الجنسين في هذه الميمات . ويهتم الباحث بعمليتين انتقاليتين هما العملية المادية والعملية العلاقية كأدوات تحليلية. والسبب في اختيار هذه الأدوات بالأخص هو أنها كانت الأكثر ملاحظة في البيانات المختارة. وتظهر الدراسة انتشار استخدام العمليات الماديه، بما في ذلك تصوير المرأة على أنها تابعة للرجل، خاصة عندما يتعلق الأمر بالمال. وكانت العمليات العلاقيه شائعة أيضًا، حيث اشتكت النساء من نقص الممتلكات المادية والعلاقات الاجتماعية . ومن ناحية أخرى، كان الرجال معروفين بميلهم إلى الحفاظ على الموارد، وخاصة المال. توضح الدراسة كيف يمكن للمنشورات المضحكة أن يكون لها تأثير كبير على تطبيع قضايا الحياة المختلفة وتعميق فهمنا لتمثيل الجنسين في الخطاب عبر الإنترنت.

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1. Introduction

Sexist humour is an example of symbolic violence (Bemiller & Schneider, 2010). One of the media used to communicate sexiest jokes is Facebook platform. It became an integral part of many young and adult generations. Despite its advantages, one can certainly assert that it destroyed several concepts and ideologies through shared posts; among which are humorous memes. The use of sexist language and gender stereotypes not only discriminate against one set of people but can also promote hatred and even violence against the targeted group (Nayef & El Nashar, 2014). Many studies have tackled sexism in comic posts (memes) in different languages; English, Nigerian, etc. or in different media platforms like Pinterest, Twitter or TV. Sitcoms, however, the study here sheds light on the sexism against both genders (males and females) in Egyptian Arabic memes on the Facebook page "Asa7be Sarcasm Society". The study also looks into how both genders perceive and respond to these amusing memes using Critical Discourse Analysis.

1.1 Rationale of the Study

This study is conducted to investigate linguistic sexism against women and men in Arabic internet comic posts (memes) as well as examine whether they react differently to these memes or not. It is worth mentioning that the reason behind choosing Facebook memes as the core data is that social media became a powerful tool, especially in recent years. It has enabled people from all over the world to communicate and express their thoughts. Many Facebook pages exist solely to provide humorous memes about current events and trends. "Asa7be Sarcasm

Society" is one of these pages, having more than 16 million followers on Facebook platform. Unfortunately, millions of people share these memes and help promote these sexist jokes, and that is why this study is conducted.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Although some studies have been found scrutinizing internet memes, barely non has investigated linguistic sexism against both, men and women in Arabic Egyptian internet memes. Moreover, the current study also seeks to investigate how both women and men react to these sexist jokes and if their reactions are different.

These humorous memes help in shaping and promoting the stereotyping images of both genders, therefore, controlling their social life. Adding to that, humorous memes proved to be a fatal and serious threating tool. That is because memes give indirect and implied messages and meanings and an excuse to tolerate sexism (Woodzicka & Ford, 2010). They act as being approved by society, or at least part of society.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The main aim of the study is to investigate the linguistic sexism presented in Egyptian Facebook comic posts (memes) through understanding the relationship between social media, humour and gender inequality. In this section, the main and sub-objectives will be addressed.

1. Investigate how humour is used to promote sexism in Facebook comic posts (memes).
2. Examine the reactions and comments of both genders toward the comic posts.
3. Unveil the underlying messages conveyed through the stereotypical utterances in the posts

1.4 Research Question

1. How is gender represented in the Facebook memes under investigation?
2. How does humour play a vital role in shaping stereotypical images in society?

2. Methodology
2.1 Data Collection

The data chosen for this research were collected from 'Asa7be Sarcasm Society' Facebook page. Choosing memes as the main data in this

research has three main reasons, first, they became widely popular recently, especially among the young generations. Second, memes have this critical quality of portraying cultural relations and ideologies and stereotypical images humorously hence, weaken the influence of the sexiest language used. Last, the reactions towards those memes were so obvious and therefore tangible making it easy to measure the agreement/ disagreement of different genders towards them. The main focus of the selected data is on the humorous comparison between women and men in different situations and how each one of them reacts in the context provided. Using the analytical tools of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), this study aims to investigate the representation of both genders in sexiest Facebook memes in the period between January 2020 and January 2021 in one of the most popular Egyptian sarcastic pages, namely: Asa7be Sarcasm Society. The study also aims to scrutinize how each group reacted to these memes by analysing the first relevant comments in each post. The data collected are mainly humorous, posted by both men and women, and shared by thousands of people. The researcher narrowed the sample by thoroughly choosing memes based on popular themes. These sets were chosen because they are widely spread and shared.

2.2 Themes details

The memes were collected manually by going through all the posts that were shared in the last two years (2020, 2021) on "Asa7be Sarcasm Society" page. The data consist of 20 Arabic memes (with their translation) along with their first 30 relevant comments.

The main themes chosen for this study are as follows:
1. Money and Finance, and how each gender talks/ deals with money-related topics
2. Relationships
3. Social class
4. Expressing themselves (needs, likes and dislikes) self-representation

3. Theoretical Framework
3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

In the 1970s, a critical interest was shown in the relation between texts, their production and interpretation, and social interaction, which later on become known as Critical Linguistics (CL) (Wodak, 2001). Both Critical Linguistics (CL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) are linked and used correspondently (ibid.).

By the 1990s, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has emerged as a new term as a result of the cooperation between different scholars like Teun van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Gunther Kress, Theo Van Leeuwen and Ruth Wodak. Since this study's main concerns are power, ideology and context, this section will focus on Van Dijk's theories in CDA.

For van Dijk, Critical Discourse Analysis is more than being a theory that can be implemented or a direction of research, it is rather a "discourse analysis with an attitude" which can be integrated with any area of study that is related to the social sciences and humanities. (van Dijk, 2001, p. 96). According to Van Dijk, CDA studies how language and speech in social and political contexts legitimize, reproduce, and challenge social power abuse, domination, and inequality (van Dijk ,2000, p.1). In other words, CDA's main focus is the relationship between discourse and the upholding or challenging of power structures. It puts oppressed groups' issues and challenges first in an effort to aid them in their battle against social injustices (van Dijk, 2001).

Critical Discourse Analysis links between discourse, cognition, and society. This broad definition makes CDA a framework that analyses all sorts of communication like face-to-face interactions and language in a variety of contexts and media. Moreover, CDA is interested not only in discourse as written texts, but in 'communicative event', which includes "conversational interaction, written text, as well as associated gestures, facework, typographical layout, images, and other 'semiotic' or multimedia dimensions of communication" (van Dijk, 2001, p. 98).

3.1.1 Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG)

Systemic Functional Grammar by Halliday is a method for investigating the various types of linguistic choices that are utilized for specific purposes (Halliday, 1994). It is the theory where the development of grammatical study extended from the sentence level to the discourse level.

For Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) there are three kinds of grammar in English, namely: 'theme is the grammar of discourse', and 'mood is the grammar of speech function', finally, 'transitivity is the grammar of experience.

For Halliday, there is a distinction between function and meta-function. Function, is the grammatical meaning of words, while meta-function is related to the context beyond the structural meaning that might be understood through different aspects such as the social roles and worlds of both the speaker and the listener, resulting in the interpretation of the

speaker's intended meaning. Halliday then specified three meta-functions for language, i.e. ideational, interpersonal, and textual Halliday (as cited in Anggraini, 2018). The theories of the transitivity system play an important part in the ideational function, by which the grammatical system is achieved. The Ideational function is divided into two sub-functions; logical and experiential. The transitivity system is related to the experiential sub-function.

In the past, verbs in English were distinguished as transitive and intransitive only, relating to whether they take objects or not. Halliday further explains that verbs taking objects or no is not our main concern (Bustam, 2011), thus, he introduced the "transitivity processes", where a verb or the "Process" itself is connected to the "Participants", and the "Circumstances". In the Transitivity processes, Halliday introduced six types of processes namely: material, mental, relational, verbal, existential, and behavioral as explained below.

3.1.1.1 Material process
According to Halliday (1994, P. 109-110), material processes are related to actions and doings. Material processes are not always indicative of concrete, physical happenings, they can also relate to abstract activities and events. They involve participants namely 'Actor' and 'Goal'.
Example: The boy   brought   the gift
            Actor-   process-   goal

3.1.1.2 Mental process
For the mental processes, Halliday (1994) states that they are processes of "feeling, thinking, and seeing". They are related to the internal mind and can be classified into four sub-types (Halliday, 1994, P. 118).
- perceptive (processes of seeing, hearing, etc.) I heard this song before.
- cognitive (processes of deciding, knowing, understanding, etc.) Ex: I don't understand Spanish.
- desiderative (processes of wanting, etc.) Ex: I want some juice.
- emotive processes of liking, hating, regretting, etc.) Ex: I don't like shopping.

The processes include two participants: 'Senser' and phenomenon, the 'Senser' is the one who feels, sees or thinks, and the phenomenon is that which is sensed, felt, thought, or seen.

3.1.1.3 Relational process

Relational process is process of 'being'. The relationship between the participants is set without stating that one is affecting the other. According to Halliday, the English system operates with three main relational processes types: (1) Intensive "x is a" (2) Circumstantial "x is at a" (where "is at" stands for "is at, in, on, for, with, about, along, etc.") (3) Possessive "x has a" (Halliday, 1994, P.119). Examples below are provided for illustration (Table 1):

Mode / Type	Attributive	Identifying
Intensive	John is wise.	John is the monitor. The monitor is John
Circumstantial	The meeting is on Tuesday.	Yesterday is the fifth. The fifth is yesterday.
Possessive	Peter has a piano.	The piano is Peter's. Peter's piano is that piano.

Table 1 (Halliday, 1994)

2.1.1.4 Verbal process

Verbal processes are the processes of saying. The first participant is called 'Sayer' who can either be a human or anything that has the ability of saying or delivering messages. The other participants are: Receiver, Verbiage, and Target. The receiver is the one who is being addressed, the verbiage is the "name for the verbalization", and the target is the entity targeted by the process of saying. The examples are shown in table 2 below for clarification.

Sayer	Process (verbal)	Target	Receiver	Verbiage
He	told		me	the truth
The report	says			that there is an accident
She	praised	him		

Table 2 (Halliday, 1994, P.140)

2.1.1.5 Existential Process

Existential processes represent the actions of being and happening. They indicate the existence of an object without making additional predictions about it. These processes exist at the meeting point of material and relational processes. These processes typically have verb to be, and usually the word 'there'. There is only one participant in the existential processes which is 'Existent'.

Examples:

There is an apple on the table

Life exists in the pace. (Halliday, 1994)

2.1.1.6 Behavioral Process

Behavioral processes depend mainly on human processes either physiologically or psychologically like smiling, breathing, dreaming, etc. there is only one participant in these processes namely 'behaver'. Halliday recognizes five types in these processes as shown below (Halliday, 1994):

a) processes of consciousness represented as forms of behavior, e.g. look, watch, stare, listen, think, worry, dream

b) verbal processes as behavior, e.g. chatter, grumble, talk

c) physiological processes manifesting states of consciousness, e.g. cry, laugh, smile, frown, sigh, snarl, wine

d) other physiological processes, e.g. breathe, cough, faint, yawn, sleep; (v) bodily postures and pastimes, e.g. sing, dance, lie(down), sit(down)

Table 3 shows the six processes with their participants:

PROCESS TYPE	Category meaning	Participants, directly involved	Participants, obliquely involved
material: action event	'doing' 'doing' 'happening'	Actor, Goal	Recipient, Client; Scope; Initiator; Attribute
behavioural	'behaving'	Behaver	Behaviour
mental: perception cognition desideration emotion	'sensing' 'seeing' 'thinking' 'wanting' 'feeling'	Senser, Phenomenon	Inducer
verbal	'saying'	Sayer, Target	Receiver; Verbiage
relational: attribution identification	'being' 'attributing' 'identifying'	Carrier, Attribute Identified, Identifier; Token, Value	Attributor; Beneficiary Assigner
existential	'existing'	Existent	

Halliday & Matthiessen (2014, p. 311)

4 Transitivity Analysis
4.1 Transitivity Processes in the four themes

Processes by occurrences	Material	Mental	Relational	Behavioral	Existential	Verbal
Girls	17	4	9	3	1	1
Boys	12	7	10	2	2	4
Percentage						

Table (4)

In theme 1, the analysis reveals that the most frequently found process, as perceived by the female respondents, is the material process. Following this, the relational process is observed to be the second most prevalent category, while the behavioral process ranks third in terms of frequency. Notably, both existential processes and verbal processes have been identified on only one occasion each within the analyzed memes. The mental process did not appear in any detectable cases across the sample, suggesting that it was not present in the context of meme content as evaluated by the participants. On the other side, the relational processes were the most frequent ones according to males, followed by the mental processes. Existential and verbal processes rank third in terms of frequency just as Material and Behavioral ones.

For the second theme, it appears that both males and females have similar frequencies according to the material processes, following is the relational process. Males show different frequencies than females in the third place where the formers employ mental and verbal processes, while the latter use Existential processes. Finally, both males and females have shown no employment of behavioral processes in the 'Money' theme.

According to the 'Relationships' theme, both males and females show almost identical occurrences for the processes. Both employ material processes, followed by mental, then relational, and behavioral. Both show no use of the existential processes. Males only use verbal process once, while females show no use of this process.

It is interesting to notice that in the 'Social Class' theme, men used material processes four times, whereas women used this kind of process only once. This suggests that there is a big difference in how the two sexes use this strategy. In contrast, both groups' frequency of the other processes was discovered to be the same.

According to Table (4), The examination of process frequencies indicates that the most often used processes in the selected memes are consistently

the material and relational processes. Following that, the next section provides a detailed analysis of the material and relational processes as they are presented in the four themes.

4.2 Female transitivity Processes
4.2.1 Female Material Processes

Number of Meme	Actor	Material Process	Goal
2	I I I I	will <u>travel</u> <u>come back</u> will <u>head</u> to will <u>travel</u>	to Al Sahel Alexandria to El Gouna
4	My friend Nada	Plays broke	Rough the nail on my pinky
5	I	scored	99%
7	I I	<u>leave</u> am <u>buying</u>	your house food
9	you	buy	me
10	I	won't go out	
11		buy one, get one free offer	
13	What you	were doing	
14	Someone	<u>share</u>	with you every detail
15	you	did <u>search</u>	for them
18	I	used	coconut body splash

Table 5

According to the previous table, the types of actions associated with females can be classified into three main categories, verbs related to money like buy, get, etc. where the actor is usually the male figure who is going to spend money on her. This situation reflects the portrayal of women as dependents who rely on men in different situations. Second, verbs that are related to physical activities like travel, where she is the actor doing the action. Using mobility actions challenge the traditional norms that women (specially Egyptians) are restricted to travel alone.

Third, verbs that emphasize the stereotypical idea of females' concern about their feminine outer look like 'use' (coconut body splash), 'play rough', and 'break' ironically followed by nail, and pinkie suggesting that women are preoccupied by their appearance.

The material processes that these memes have described might in each instance either support, defend, or contradict traditional gender ideas. Hence, there is a complicated relationship between adhering to and deviating from gender norms in the actions, which range from exhibiting independence and personal achievement to participating in typically feminine activities.

4.2.2 Female Relational Processes

Number of Meme	Carrier	Relational Process	Attribute
1	I	hardly have	any clothes
3	I	don't have	any friends
5	It	Is	so unfair
	I	have	uncounted grades
10	I	don't have	enough money
12	It	is	for skincare
13	we	weren't	together
14	to	have	someone
15	you really	are	Weird

Table (5)

In the relational processes, participants are related to their identities or descriptions. The previous table shows that women frequently voice complaints when they employ verbs in relational processes. In particular, five of the nine relational processes found in the samples involve women complaining about things they don't have enough of, such as money, friends, or clothes displaying a lack of relationships and material possessions. This implies that women are often portrayed as whiners or complainers. The visual aspects however, contradict with these verbal processes where for example the female character complains of not having enough clothes, the closet in the background shows the opposite. The mobile screen that shows tens of notification alerts confute the

statement "I don't have any friends" which indicates the feelings of isolation or social disconnection. This might be interpreted that females feel underestimated, she needs to feel surrounded by many friends, have new clothes, get the final marks to feel complete and proud. In "what were you doing when we weren't together?" and "marriage is to have someone who protects, shares with you…" reflect on how women feel unsecured and her need for reassurance in her relationships. The second statement defines the traditional standard portrayal of men as protectors and the stereotypical image of women in relationships seeking security and mutual support which are appreciated and may be especially highlighted or valued from a female perspective. This can be seen in the emphasis on sharing and protection.

4.3 Male Processes

4.3.1 Male Material Processes

Number of Meme	Actor	Material Process	Goal
5	I	got	45%
8	I	pay	the barber (in installments)
11	I	will conserve	my money
	I	won't spend	(much)
	I	must go	shopping
12	You	bought	Soaps (for 1300 pounds)
13	it (heart)	to eat again	
15	I	won't find	any woman
16		Fry	It for me
19	(you)	Add	tahini
20	you	Make	It (a big deal)
	I	will make	it (a fancy deal)

Table (6)

For the material processes, all the actions that convey money spending underscore a conflict between saving and spending which in both cases reflect the image of men as the ones in charge of financial issues. All the verbs that come with money, the actor insists on not spending much (conserve, not spend), even in the phrases "must go shopping" and "you

bought soap for 1300 LE" they are uttered ironically and meant to criticize women's desire to spend money.

It can be noticed that almost all the verbs are used to communicate a humorous idea implicitly or explicitly; in "I got 45%" for instance, the statement challenges the stereotypical image of men who are required and expected to prove academic success. Moreover, both "fry it" and "add tahini" demonstrate how people employ everyday decisions to navigate social and cultural situations; they also reveal cultural heritage, personal preferences, and occasionally resistance to accept things that are unfamiliar or overly showy. These decisions, made in particular social contexts, provide an insight into the complicated ways that gender, culture, and personal identity intersect in day-to-day living. In particular, they demonstrate how males express their preferences and identity in settings where violating social norms is not always acceptable.

4.3.2 Male Relational Processes

Number of Meme	Carrier	Relational Process	Attribute
4	I	am	fine
6	I	am	at the café
7	(Where) They	Is are	the meat and chicken in the freezer
10	(Where) we	Will have	lunch
11	I	have	no excuse
12	(if) it I	Is have	for skincare no excuse
13	I	was having	my pre-fast meal
17	you	Are	the flower

Table (7)

Table 7 shows men describing their state, location or their needs in a more direct way than females. Based on analysis, the use of verb to be is employed to describe either a location like "I am at the café", and "where

is the meat and chicken?" or to describe a positive state like "I am fine" and "you are the flower". It is worth noting that four of the relational processes employed here aim at criticising females using implicit sarcasm. In "if it <u>is</u> for skin care, I <u>have</u> no excuse" the relational process "is" combined with "I have no excuse" ironically communicates the speaker's refusal to the typical norm that skincare costs are acceptable and should not be disputed when asked by a female counterpart and that he has no option but to buy her these products. In "where will we <u>have</u> lunch?" the speaker (male) indirectly communicates the idea of satisfaction in that he doesn't have enough money, however, he excitedly asks about the place where they will eat. Last, in "I was having my pre-fast meal" the speaker is explaining that he was having his last meal before fasting, the obscenity and the irony in this situation come from the context as the girl was accusing him of cheating, but his argument was that he was having his last meal (relationship) before fasting.

From this analysis, it can be concluded that men use relational processes to either convey a direct message describing their state, or indirect message criticizing women in certain topics. Almost all the nouns or adjectives that followed the relational verbs were positive like 'fine' and 'flower' unlike the females' use of relational processes that were followed by negative words like 'unfair' and 'weird'.

5.Results and Discussion

As for the material processes, the analysis shows that women are shown to be more dependent on men regarding finance, hence promoting the stereotypical image of men as independent and responsible for the financial support. As for men, they are shown more conservative who face a struggle between spending money to please women and saving it.

The analysis further shows that in relational processes, males are depicted as being more direct about their state or needs unlike women. Based on the memes, men tend to mock others or even themselves humorously in different situations, especially in relationships, not only to reduce stress, but to avoid direct confrontation or conflict.

The analysis of memes under the 'Social Class' theme reveals differences between both genders. Women are always depicted as coming from high social class asking for fancy food "medium-rare steak" and using high-end personal care products. Men, on the other hand, are portrayed as having an earthly and simple mindset. In terms of musical preferences, women are depicted appreciating foreign musicians who are recognized for their more refined sounds, while men are linked to regional Mahraganat bands, indicating a difference in cultural and social choices.

It is worth noted that although the man's answers seem light-hearted, they indirectly make fun of the woman's tastes, and it is obvious that he finds fulfilment in the simple things in life and doesn't need to live a complicated or artificial life. For instance, the man's reply to the woman calling him "weird" (using an English word), is "you are a flower" (ward in Arabic). This plays on the similarity between the two Arabic words and also humorously suggests that the English word was either intentionally misinterpreted or misunderstood.

In general, the memes engage in deeper observations on the relationship between gender and class perceptions in Egyptian society while at the same time making light of gender stereotypes and social class indicators.

6.Conclusion

The investigation into the depths of Egyptian Facebook comedic posts has revealed the complex ways in which humour interacts with social class beliefs and gender stereotypes. The study demonstrates how comedy, despite its seeming innocence, has two sides: on the one hand, it entertains, but on the other, it both upholds and challenges social norms.

Employing CDA, the study comes into the conclusion that women are frequently portrayed as being financially dependent on males, as whiners who lack material and social wealth, or as representatives of higher social classes with refined tastes. In contrast, men are portrayed as individuals who have financial responsibilities but are pleased with simplicity, and handle social class differences with humour and a casual attitude.

Fundamentally, these memes serve as a platform for the public mind to express its views, prejudices, and goals in addition to serving as a mirror to the social reality of today. Moreover, the study shows that laughing at these humorous memes and reacting towards them make it easier to normalize the idea of accepting these stereotypes and living with them.

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