

HUMOR IN AMERICAN POLITICAL NEWSPAPER HEADLINES: A WAY OF TRIGGERING DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: Humor, often restricted to laughter, amusement, and comedy to mention but these humoristic representations, is more than that. Without demarcating itself from them, it focuses on absurdity and the unusual of some aspects of real life. One can thus present it as a state of mind that performs what is comic, ridicule, and absurd. Thus, humor endeavors to paint the picture of a society going adrift. In this article, humor is more than a mere tool of exposing society's shortcomings. It manages to call for a social change. The change so expected is realized through forms of humor like irony, satire, and puns encapsulated in some American political newspaper headlines such as *The ONION*. Humor of such a kind holds a healing function. So, encapsulating humor in political newspaper headlines provides the reader with funny ways to trigger social change that leads development. With reference to a relevance-theoretic approach, the article explores humor as a way to trigger development.

Key words: headlines, humor, irony, newspaper, political, puns, satire.

Résumé: L'humour, bien souvent réduit au rire, à l'amusement et à la comédie pour ne citer que ces représentations humoristiques, en est bien plus. Sans toutefois s'en dissocier, il met l'accent sur le caractère absurde ou insolite de certains aspects de la réalité. L'on en vient alors à le présenter comme étant une forme d'esprit qui se penche sur le comique, le ridicule et l'absurde. Ainsi, l'humour tend à s'illustrer dans la peinture d'une société en proie à la dérive. Dans cet article, l'humour se veut plus qu'un simple outil d'exposition des tares de la société. Il va jusqu'à en appeler à un changement d'ordre social aboutissant au développement. Le changement tant attendu passe par la mise en exergue de certaines formes de l'humour comme l'ironie, la satire et les jeux de mots, visibles dans des titres de journaux politiques tel que *The ONION*. L'humour sous de telles formes, revêt un caractère curatif. En recourant à l'approche théorique de la pertinence, on familiarise le lecteur avec une façon plus comique se susciter le développement.

Mots clés: humour, ironie, jeux de mots, journaux, politique, satire, titres.

Introduction

Two terms: social and change, are quite sufficient to cover the nominal 'social change'. Far from being a mere association of distinct parts of speech to account for a grammatical orientation, social change appears to be a concept that helps understand the way human interactions and relationships shape human behavior at a social and cultural level. Its purpose is to create a kind of world any individual wants to live and believe in. As such, a social change can emerge from social movements like strikes, opposing discourses, sharp criticism to name but a few. Social change can also be real through humor, that ability to perceive the ludicrous, the comical, and the absurd in human life and to express these usually, without bitterness. In fact, humor embedded in political newspaper headlines can trigger social change that straightforwardly leads to development. Hence: Humor in American Political Newspaper Headlines: A Way of Triggering Development.

There is a great deal to address the concept of development in a particular way: through humor. This is so because it is experienced that the usual ways to tackle the social issues like development often face opposition. These usual ways, not exhaustive, are: holding opposing discourses, engaging oneself in social movements such as strikes, producing sharp criticism. The fact of facing opposition lies in the fact that no one in power, no government can accept being roundly criticized without reacting accordingly. Thus, the paper gains importance as it favors understanding about the possibility to smoothly trigger development. The smoothness at stake complies with the use of humor seen as something funny.

By encapsulating humor in political newspaper headlines, it is intended to provide the reader with funny ways to call for a social change, a step before any development. This can be reached by carefully addressing the following questions: What are the traces of humor embodied in political newspaper headlines? To what extent these traces can lead to reaching development? What is the relevance of encapsulating humor in headlines? In three parts analysis conducted with reference to a relevance-theoretic approach, a pragmatic approach to human communication, answers will be brought to these questions. The first part focuses on the stylistic figures as forms of humor. The second part lays emphasis on the pragmatics of humor even able to entice development. The last one illustrates the extent to which resorting to humor is welcome, benefit to stir up social change, a step prior to development. All this operates with a lens to explore the healing function of humorous language.

1. Conceiving Social Change through Humor

There is no static society. This indicates that change at any level is continuously perceived in a given society. Society, thus, undergoes some changes over the time. One thing to bear in mind is that the change at stake is not automatic. It is but motivated. The motivation lies in the ability of individuals to create conditions of their well-beings. If it is noticeable that many possibilities are offered to trigger good living conditions, it is, however, remarkable to posit that among these possibilities, humor is high on the list. Humor, writes S. Attardo (2017, p. 4), “evolved through Ben Jonson’s early 17th-century adaptation of the concept as a basis for comic characterization in terms of which an extravagant or affected emphasis on personal peculiarities made an individual subject to ridicule”. This conception of humor confers its semantic representation. One is willing to admit that laughter or everything comic that leads to the ridicule complies with humor.

A facet of humor is its pragmatic representation. Within, humor is no longer addressed as a matter of ridicule as does its semantic configuration. An example of a pragmatic representation of humor is when it is embodied in political newspaper headlines. In fact, humor embedded in political newspaper headlines seems to demarcate itself from the semantic perception to side with the pragmatic one; which is but an academic approach to experience humor. As M. Dynel (2011, p. 1) puts, “when considered in academic terms, humorous phenomena tend to lose their potential to induce amusement and laughter”. The reason of humor to lose its ‘potential to induce amusement and laughter’ is explained by M. Dynel (2011, p. 1) in the following: “This is obviously not because researchers lack sense of humor but because, preoccupied with the nature of humorous concepts, analysts only aim to recognize and dissect data and are usually not in the right frame of mind to enjoy them”. This is especially true when it comes to address politics, not through mere political discourse, but through humor.

When newspaper headlines are often used to tackle a political issue, they become conspicuous. This is so because political sphere is not one made up of games. As such, politics doesn’t only reflect the set of activities that are associated with making decisions in groups, or other forms of power relations between individuals, such as the distribution of resources or status. It also reflects criticism. On this basis, politics is all about exposing individuals’ misconducts, making judgments in the hope of bringing out change, social change. Doing so, politics, using specific

language like humor, heals. This way of dealing with politics can be realized through a form of humor known as satire.

1. 1. Satire as Humor Trace to Trigger Development

Derived from the Latin word ‘satur’ and later ‘satura’ meaning ‘a mixed dish’, satire can be defined as the art of making someone or something look ridiculous. The ridiculousness opens the door to raise laughter in order to embarrass, humble, or discredit its targets. With satire, what is at the center stage is the use of humor. Put it simply, satire appears to be a way of using humor to show that someone or something is weak or bad. One can thus understand the definition of satire suggested by Z. P. Toh and E. M. Brou (2021, p. 157-158) in the following: “Dealing with satire, it is a process that consists in exposing or ridiculing conduct, doctrines, or institutions in order to better human institutions or society”. Z. P. Toh and E. M. Brou draw attention that beyond the ridicule, there is something to grasp: building an idealized society by healing its pains through satirical language.

In the headline *(1) Bush: Our Long National Nightmare of Peace and Prosperity Is Finally Over* (January 17, 2001), satire is visible. The headline is caricatured by *the ONION*, an American satirical digital media company and newspaper organization that publishes articles on international, national, and local news. In fact, *(1) Bush: Our Long National Nightmare of Peace and Prosperity Is Finally Over* is nothing but a bit of speech held by Georges Walker Bush. This follows a context of eight years’ presidency assumed by Bill Clinton, from 1993 to 2001 which ends with the election of Georges Walker Bush as President of the United States of America.

The headline at stake is a satirical one because it is critical of eight long years characterized by unprecedented economic inflation, a sharp increase in crime, and the other ills that plague United States of America during President Bill Clinton’s two terms. Even if nominals like ‘unprecedented economic inflation’, ‘sharp increase in crime’ are not expressive in the headline, there is good reason to think of them because of the presence of the phrase *Nightmare of Peace and Prosperity* in the headline. Indeed, *Nightmare of Peace* is another way to insinuate that public safety is under threat. This can even lead to situation where people’s peace of mind is disturbed.

Disturbing someone’s peace of mind is the worst thing that can happen. Likewise, *Nightmare of Prosperity* indicates the absence of any wealth on behalf of American people. The idea is that poverty is widespread in the United States of America especially, during Bill Clinton’s

presidency that last eight long years. One can thus realize that the dispreferred term *Nightmare* as in *Nightmare of Peace and Prosperity* is used to satirically portray President Bill Clinton's mismanagement of power. The following headline from *the ONOION* can help understand the way satire works through newspaper headlines: (2) *Black Man Given Nation's Worst Job* (November 5, 2008). By referring to *Black Man*, it is Barack Obama, the forty-fourth President of USA who is targeted. In effect, the headline recapitulates the difficult task to be accomplished by Barack Obama elected as the President of the United States of America on November 4, 2008, if he wants to get the national economy back on its feet. The superlative *Worst* as in *Worst Job* conveys the idea of the most undesirable job to be done. What a task!

If it is given opportunity to comment upon the headline, one would have presented it as the summary of a chaotic economic situation undergone by American people just before Barack Obama becomes President. In fact, the USA President elected on November 5, 2008 will be charged with overhauling the nation's broken-down economy, repairing the crumbling infrastructure, and having to please more than 300 million Americans and cater to their every whim on a daily basis. In addition, the *Black Man* will have to spend four to eight years cleaning up the messes other people left behind.

The referential 'other people' is used refer to the members of the previous government, the head of which is George Walter Bush. By *Black Man Given Nation's Worst Job*, it is understood: it is given to Barack Obama the nation's worst job where the agent almost missing can be identified: George Walter Bush. So, a paraphrase can be: George Walter Bush has given to Barack Obama the nation's worst job. There is a worst job to be faced by Barack Obama because bad decisions, even worst decisions have been taken by the former President to govern the United States of America. Indeed, throughout George Walter Bush's term of office, it has been noticed the fact that life has grown less affordable and less secure. Examples of life unaffordability and insecurity do not lack.

President Bush's record of fiscal incompetence and mismanagement and Republicans' close ties with special interests have helped lead to both lower wages and skyrocketing costs for basic necessities like gas, health care, and college tuition. As an alarming indicator of how bad things have gotten, consumer confidence hit a five-year low and the Expectations Index dropped to a 35-year low, a level not seen since the Oil Embargo and Watergate. Since then, these two measures have continued to decline. As one can see, the headline *Black Man Given Nation's Worst Job* implicitly pictures the idea of President Bush's incapacity to make life affordable to American people. On this basis, satire is expressed. Editing headlines like (1) *Bush: Our Long National Nightmare of Peace and Prosperity Is Finally Over* and (2) *Black Man Given Nation's Worst Job*,

complies with the idea to make Presidents change their minds, their ways to govern. Another form of humor embedded in headlines is pun.

1. 2. Pun as Humor Trace to Trigger Development

Holding a unique definition of a pun appears to be an experience almost unrealizable. Albeit definitions ascribed to puns may result in having some common points in terms of what is essential to know with puns, linguists, from one to another one, define a pun in different ways. Each one of the linguists focuses on whether the interest in defining a pun correlates with the sameness of the sound perception notably, homonymy/paronymy or the fact of considering more than one meaning with the same word or the same sentence structure; that is, lexical ambiguity/structural ambiguity.

Pun as a linguistic unit is easy to make. This easiness with which a pun is made refers to the fact that it can just be the product of a slip of tongue. In another case, a pun can be used to stereotype; that is, expressing opinions based on “the collection of semantic associations that are firmly connected with a particular word or the beliefs about characteristics of typical examples of natural classes (cats, roses, water) in normal situations” according to H. Bussmann (2006, p. 1122). It can also be used to deride, to mock, to belittle, to laugh at, and chiefly, to denounce or to criticize so as to call for a change. Using puns to denounce or to criticize is but calculated to heal.

The denunciative function of pun is plausible in newspaper headlines. This can be seen in the following: (3) *Enjoy the Foot Long in Jail* issued on August 20, 2015. This headline is a property of the New York Post, an American political newspaper which presents a play on ‘Enjoy’ and ‘in Jail’. The following question can help understand such a play: How is it possible that one can ‘Enjoy’ ‘in Jail’ (enjoy in a jail) knowing the meaning of ‘enjoy’ and ‘in jail’? To enjoy is to receive pleasure or satisfaction from something. According to A. Stevenson (2010, p. 10726), to enjoy is to “take delight or pleasure in an activity or occasion”. In this definition, ‘pleasure’ can be presented as a key word. It contrasts with the nominal ‘in jail’ which figures out a place where one’s thinking and behavior can hugely be affected.

A reason for which the headline “*Enjoy the Foot Long in Jail*” captures one’s attention is the realization of the pun based homophony: *Enjoy – in Jail*. Since ‘jail’ can be equated with ‘prison’, the nominal ‘in jail’ also equates ‘in prison’. Thus, “*Enjoy the Foot Long in Jail*” can be phrased as follow: ‘*Enjoy the Foot Long in prison*’. But, this eventual headline would entice less attention in terms of sonority or ear sensibility. So, holding ‘*in Jail*’ instead of ‘*in prison*’ follows an objective, that of creating a certain sensibility that is a pleasure to hear. This technique of creating an ear sensibility is done with respect to what is called pun based homophony; and this is realized through the duo: *Enjoy – in Jail*, a humorous way to denounce in order to call for a change.

“*Enjoy the Foot Long in Jail*”, indeed, announces the expected guilty plea of the former Subway spokesman Jared Fogle on child pornography charges. Obviously, it is known that child pornography is undignified of human beings, especially for child. Exposure to pornography harms children and youth by normalizing sexual violence, creating unrealistic expectations for intimate partners and relationships, and increasing the risk of addiction. So, the headline “*Enjoy the Foot Long in Jail*” with the punning words *Enjoy – in Jail* is not used to mock the guilty who will stay long in prison because accused of having sex relationship with children. Rather, it challenges adults involved in a pornographic relationship with children in order to give up such a shameful, undignified practice.

Pun is also expressed through Chicago Tribune’s headline: (4) *Trump Impeach* (December 21, 2020). The headline is indicative of the first impeachment trial of Donald Trump. It charges the 45th president of the United States with abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. “*Trump Impeach*” showcases a situation in which President Donald Trump is impeached or undergoing an impeachment. But, understanding “*Trump Impeach*” in this way is not easy for all newspaper headlines readers. In fact, phrased like this, “*Trump Impeach*” may lead one to think that it is President Donald Trump who impeaches or performs the action of impeachment. On this basis, “*Trump Impeach*” can be equated with ‘*Trump to Impeach*’ where ‘*Trump*’ is the subject, and ‘*to Impeach*’, the infinitive verb.

If the editor of Chicago Tribune wants readers to understand “*Trump Impeach*” as Trump undergoes an impeachment then, he should, for example, write: “... *to Impeach*” where the three dots represent the subject, the entity who impeaches Trump. This analysis allows one to admit that there is a play on the word ‘*Impeach*’, that is, whether ‘*Impeach*’ holds Trump as the subject that performs the action of impeachment or Trump as the object which undergoes the action of impeachment. This play on the word ‘*Impeach*’ is nothing but a pun.

The common opinion, on the basis of news happened in USA political area, however, knows that when the term ‘*Impeach*’ is linked to ‘*Trump*’, it is nothing but the president Donald Trump undergoing impeachment imposed officially by the United States House of Representatives. The reason of this is known: abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. Through this, it is a call for awareness that a President can misbehave and misconduct. One can thus understand puns as a type of language that plays a crucial role in conveying subtle critiques, humor, and social commentary across various media like newspapers, showcasing their denunciative function.

The punning word ‘*Impeach*’ works as a ‘disjunctive’ to use the word of S. Attardo (1994), because it forces the passage from the first sense (sentence 1: *Trump to impeach*... or simply *Trump impeaches*...) to the second one (sentence 2: *Trump is impeached* by the United States

House of Representatives or the United States House of Representatives impeach Trump). A ‘disjunctor’, according to S. Attardo (1994), is any element of the sentence that forces the passage from the first sense (s1) to the second one (s2). As one can see, the ‘disjunctor’ is presented as a technique of disambiguation. It allows, as it were, overcoming an ambiguous phrase or sentence. Like pun, irony is pervasive in newspaper headlines.

1. 3. Irony as Humor Trace to Trigger Development

Irony can be defined as a stylistic device that figures out a difference or contradiction between what is said or done and what is meant or expected. From this understanding of irony rises two types of irony: verbal irony, focusing on the gap between what is said and what is meant, and situational irony which occurs when something happens which is completely different from what is expected to happen. Dramatic irony can be added to the list to account for the existence of three main types of irony. As M. Dynel (2011, p. 8) observes: “A list of irony types is thus compiled, embracing conferred irony, situational irony and dramatic irony, among others”. For the case under study, one only refers to verbal irony to postulate that newspaper headlines designers write headlines that signal a contradiction between what is written and what should be understood. It becomes understandable why, for K. Wales (2014, p. 240), irony is found “when the words actually used appear to contradict the sense actually required in the context and presumably intended by the speaker”. From this, it can be admitted that a binary opposition in terms of the conveyed meaning is irreversibly attached to verbal irony.

One can bear in mind that the immediate and visible effect of irony on both reader and listener is but a humorous one. But, beyond the humorous effect lies awareness rising even able to trigger development. This is apparent in *The New York Times*’ headline: (5) *A View of a Life More Like ‘The Sopranos’ Than the Apprentice* (February 23rd, 2019). The headline is the depiction of President Donald’s real personality by Michael Cohen, a longtime lawyer and fixer of Donald Trump’s. This depiction is also directed toward Trump Organization, a hard-charging, happy, successful business according to Donald Trump. In the headline: “*A View of a Life More Like ‘The Sopranos’ Than the Apprentice*”, nominals like ‘*the Sopranos*’ and ‘*the Apprentice*’ need to be explained for the sake of understanding the said headline.

‘The Apprentice’ is a show on the television channel called NBC (National Broadcasting Service), an American English-language commercial broadcast television and radio network. Through ‘The Apprentice’ on NBC, Donald Trump has constantly presented a gilded image of his

business, the Trump Organization. As a response working against such a gilded image of Donald Trump's business known as Trump Organization, Michael Cohen describes a business, and a campaign, in which lies and threats are routine and embarrassing stories are bought and buried, all in service of the boss: Donald Trump.

'The Sopranos' is referred to as any person who acts or behaves like Anthony John Soprano, a fictional character and the antihero protagonist in the HBO (Home Box Office) television drama series, portrayed by James Gandolfini. Thus, a passionate viewer of 'The Sopranos' who reads the headline "*A View of a Life More Like 'The Sopranos' Than the Apprentice*" will quickly be aware of the fact that the 'life' it is focused on is a debased one. This is so because, Soprano, that fictional character is a member of the Italian-American Mafia.

As the related 'life' is that of Donald Trump the lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen is depicting, it goes without saying that it is the President Donald Trump's personality which is, by the same token, debased. A paraphrase of the headline can be: Donald Trump's life is less than 'The Apprentice' and more than 'The Sopranos'. Admitting that Donald Trump's life is less than 'The Apprentice', is a way to convey the message that the presentation of that gilded image of Trump Organization by Donald Trump himself on 'The Apprentice', an American business television channel, contradicts with the reality. This is where the irony lies.

By contending that Donald Trump's life is more than 'The Sopranos', it is another way to inform the opinion that Donald Trump is no one but a sinister person, a criminal as referring to 'The Sopranos' is, by the same way, referring to the members of the Italian-American Mafia, or a person who acts as 'the boss of his North Jersey crime family'. Such a gloomy description paints a negative picture of President Donald Trump personality. Through this, it is a call for awareness that a President can misbehave and misconduct. The task, thus, is not restricted to the exposition of Donald Trump's dereliction. There is, through the use of stylistic device like irony, a willing to present humorous language as one that heals.

The comparison of superiority 'more ... than' as in "*A View of a Life More Like 'The Sopranos' Than the Apprentice*" is telling. It tells that Donald Trump's life more resembles that of the 'The Sopranos' main character than the good image of Trump Organization its owner tends to present. Thus, by use of a linguistic unit like comparison, Michael Cohen sensitizes the public opinion about a possible misconduct of any President. This way of sensitizing sides with what is known as irony, that weapon of wit used to address important social issues. It is relevant because it reveals the incompetence of some political leaders. Irony, indeed, matters for more than one reason, but its main goal is to raise people's awareness about the current state of affairs and to challenge their viewpoints by using humor. It helps people confront the unpleasant reality and see the world as

it is, so that they can improve it. On this basis, irony is seen as a useful weapon of world reconstruction. Put it simply, irony is a healing language. It is also present in *The Los Angeles Times*' headline: (6) *Farewell, Londonistan?* (February 2nd, 2002).

'Londonistan' is a sobriquet referring to the British capital known as London, overloaded by Muslims along with their Islamic culture. In 'Londonistan', the suffix '*stan*' used by several countries in South and Central Asia is equated with the lexeme 'land'. So, by resorting to the Islamophobic sobriquet 'Londonistan', the focus is not put on the ordinary citizens living in London, but on the practitioners of Islam as religion who live in the British capital. The fact is that 'Londonistan', because of their machinations, their suspicious dealings, and terrorist acts they often experience are seen as Jihadists. A Jihadist is a Muslim extremist, one who believes that most people, including Muslims are unreasonable and unacceptable. Such a person carries out supports acts of terrorism.

Often called "Europe's terrorist heaven", Britain and its capital known as Londonistan were places where a significant number of Jihadists struggling in Afghanistan and North Africa settled. Thus, for some of the Jihadists, London was a retirement home. For others, it was a communications base. For a few, it was a logistical and financial center. And for all, it was a haven. By resorting to 'haven' to designate the place where Jihadists live, it is another way to insinuate that London is all about a place that offers not only asylum to Jihadists, but also protection and good living conditions. It is thus justified that observers equate the British capital with the periphrasis "Europe's terrorist heaven".

The polite greetings term '*Farewell*' indicates a wish of happiness or safety at parting, especially a permanent departure. It can be equated with 'goodbye', a good riddance clue. If '*Farewell*' is said in a situation that happily signals a permanent departure then, "*Farewell, Londonistan?*" is an ironic headline. In fact, the headline paints the image of Muslim extremists, say Jihadists living in London who have been arrested by the British police. They have been arrested because of the desolation they create in the British capital long ago known as a peace town. The desolation at stake are many in nature: bomb attacks causing a lot of damages such as the destruction of goods and services as well as the death of many people. Thus, the irony in the headline lies in the fact the term '*Farewell*', in its civility context cannot be addressed to '*Londonistan*', people known as dangerous ones. So, *Farewell, Londonistan?* Stands to sensitize terrorists to give up their dehumanized practice which is but terrorism.

2. Reading Beyond Verbal Humor: The Pragmatics of Humor

Verbal humor is humor performed by means of linguistic unit known as signifier. The stated signifier takes into account stylistic humoristic devices like pun. It is fundamentally opposed to the other type of humor called referential humor. Drawing the distinction between verbal humor and referential humor, S. Attardo (2017, p. 2) writes: “the former is purely semantic/pragmatic and does not depend on the linguistic form (the signifier), whereas the latter crucially does. In practical terms and simplifying a little, verbal humor is comprised of puns, ambiguity-based humor, or humor”. The idea is that pun and other forms of verbal humor like irony, satire to name but a few “exploit characteristics of the signifier to bring together incongruous semantic or pragmatic meanings” pursues S. Attardo. In this paper, one is only concerned with verbal humor.

2. 1. Linguistic Orientation of Verbal Humor

In S. Attardo’s (2017) understanding of verbal humor, two significant linguistic orientations have to be taken seriously: the semantic and the pragmatic orientation. The semantic orientation is all about semantics, that domain of linguistics dealing with meaning. As T. E. Zimmermann and W. Sternefeld (2013, p. 1) put: “The subject of semantics is the systematic study of the meaning of linguistic expressions like morphemes, words, phrases, sentences, or even texts”. From this, it is understood that semantics is more than explaining a lexeme, that linguistic unit which corresponds to the set of inflected forms taken by a single word.

Verbal humor often relies on clever manipulation of language, context, and expectations to create comedic effects. The semantics of verbal humor involve analyzing how meaning is generated and manipulated within linguistic structures to produce laughter or amusement. A key aspects of the semantics of verbal humor is embedded in ambiguity and multiple meanings. In fact, verbal humor exploits ambiguity in language. This can involve pun, where a word or phrase has multiple meanings or sounds like another word with a different meaning. One can also hold incongruity as an aspect of the semantics of verbal humor. Indeed, verbal humor often arises from incongruity; that is, a mismatch between what is expected and what actually occurs in a linguistic expression.

An orientation of verbal humor is the pragmatics it induces. When the Discourse Analysis (DA) tool known as pragmatics is evoked, one automatically associates it with the study of how the meaning of both spoken and written discourse is related to the context in which that speech and writing occur. As such, pragmatics is specifically concerned with how speakers’ shared interests and purposes shape discourse. Emphasizing pragmatics, Z. P. Toh seems to offer a comprehensive definition. He puts:

Interactions between people are unavoidable in society. These interactions give room to many invisible meanings. The investigation of which is known as pragmatics. In other words, pragmatics is

the linguistic field that looks for invisible meanings. It deals with the way language is used. It takes into account the speaker meaning, the word meaning, or even the sentence meaning, the context, the listener's interpretation, the language used. It is also grounded on what is communicated rather than what is said, the way social distance is expressed.

(Z. P. Toh, 2021, p. 13)

If pragmatics sees about “the linguistic field that looks for invisible meaning” as tends to insinuate Z. P. Toh then, one is eager to understand what is meant by the pragmatics of humor since humor complies with funniness, laughter, amusement to name but a few which lead to the ridicule, a tangible manifestation of a mocking or humiliating act. What is expected to understand from the pragmatics of humor is not a probable materialization of humor itself that focuses on some linguistic units to produce what is funny, comic, and ridicule.

2. 2. The Pragmatics of Humor

The pragmatics of humor explores how humor is created, interpreted, and understood within the context of communication, focusing on the relationship between language, meaning, and social context. By the pragmatics of humor, indeed, one is expected to comprehend what lies beyond the comic and ridicule effects of humor. Indeed, besides the comic and the ridicule conveyed by humor, there is something of indescribable importance to grasp: awareness rising that prompts a change at a social level. Social change is set to stir up development; that is, the process in which someone or something grows or changes and becomes more advanced, whether it's in an individual, a community, or a field of study. It encompasses many domains like healthy, education, technology, economy to name but a few. Development, writes R. Pais (2022, p. 62) is “a process that creates growth, progress, positive change, or the addition of physical, economic, environmental, social, and demographic components”. It is a global representation of what is vital to human beings.

The awareness-raising role, the social change role of humor is held under the label of the pragmatics of humor. In fact, awareness-raising is approached as a process that seeks to inform and educate people about a topic or issue with the intention of influencing their attitudes, behaviors and beliefs towards the realization of an intended objective. As R. Sayer (2006) observes:

To raise awareness of something good, bad or indifferent is to promote its visibility and credibility within a community or society. To raise awareness is also to inform and educate people about a topic or issue with the intention of influencing their attitudes, behaviors and beliefs towards the achievement of a defined purpose or goal.

(R. Sayer, 2006, p. 11-

12)

By informing and educating people, awareness raising, through humorous language like satire, irony, and puns contribute to heal these people.

In simple terms, raising awareness means making people conscious about a problem or issue. So, the need to make a certain topic or issue more visible within a community leads to awareness raising. The goal is to make people understand the importance of social issues and find support to address them. In this perspective, awareness-raising should be understood as a social issue; that is, a problem that affects many people within a society. This is plausible through humor. From the headline (1) *Bush: Our Long National Nightmare of Peace and Prosperity Is Finally Over* to the headline (6) *Farewell, Londonistan?*, humor is pervasive through its various forms like pun, satire, and irony. Beyond the humor portrayed by these headlines, it is taught the necessity to abandon any misconduct, misbehavior, dereliction on behalf of any individual: from the ordinary individuals to those in power. Abandoning misconducts is another way to lay the foundations of sustainable development. As one can see, this way of trigger development is but welcome. Better, it works the ability to heal.

3. Advantage of Resorting to Humor for the Search of Development

3.1. The Search of Development through Social Movements

Development can be triggered by social movements like strikes, opposing discourses, sharp criticism to mention but a few. In fact, social movements are set to bring about social change, say development. They consist of groupings of individuals or organizations that focus on specific political or social issues. What is at the center stage of social movements is the necessity to fight against inequalities, discrimination, and deprivation in order to entice development. Examples that illustrate social movements do not lack. One can think of the French Revolution in the 18th century, termed as a radical movement which brought about social change and development not only in France, but also in Europe and in other nations. In the 19th century, Europe labor movements were

based on Marxism, that is, based on the class struggle. Unification of Germany in 1990 and the collapse of Soviet Union are two important events in Europe which brought about development in Europe. India too, has witnessed several movements as Backward Classes, Nationalist, Dalits, Caste, Youth, Tribal, Farmers', and Women's movements.

3. 2. The Search of Development through Humor

If it is acknowledged the role of social movements in the sense of triggering social change, it can, however, be put forward that, what goes wrong with social movements is its almost irreversible characteristic of generating damages. This is so because it experienced that the usual ways of tackling social issues like development often face opposition. The fact of facing opposition lies in the fact that no one in power, no government can accept being roundly criticized without reacting accordingly. The accordingly reaction can be observed through repression.

According to J. Earl *et al.*, (2022), repression is distinguishable from general governance in that it is committed to prevent, reduce, and/or control non-institutional challenges such as protest, social movements, and activism. It is, pursue J. Earl *et al.*, (2022, p. 1), "a broad concept that historically includes actions or policies that are meant to, or actually do, raise the costs of activism". The actors of repression are governmental ones. Indeed, governmental actors including militaries and police, as well as private entities have long tried to prevent, limit, or otherwise control protest and social movements, most often by trying to control movement activists, movement organizations, and movement tactics.

Physical and legal coercion are used to repress protesters and movements. Overt coercion is also used as form of repression. In fact, coercion, threat, or the use of punitive measures against individuals in order to force them desist from specified actions are means by which social movements can be stopped. The idea is that, it is not uncommon to see social movements facing opposition, say repression. It is experienced that this might result into causing death or damages of real importance. That is why instead of resorting to social movements like strikes, opposing discourse, and sharp criticism to denounce, criticize in order to call for a social change, the starting point of any development, this paper suggests the use of humor, that human language seen as a double-edged knife even able to smoothly, funnily trigger development. The double-edged knife feature of humor resides in its ability to both hurt and heal. It hurts because it criticizes and denounces people's misconducts. It heals because, through denunciation and criticism, social change becomes a reality and, therefore, development becomes plausible. So, the interest using humor in political newspaper headlines is grasped: trigger development through the ridicule.

Conclusion

Humor performed by means of its various forms can trigger a change observable at a social level. This is known as social change; that is, the way human interactions and relationships shape human behavior. The paper presents more than one form of humor as a way of calling for social change so as to trigger development. Whatever is it pun; that is, the form of wordplay in which some features of linguistic structures simultaneously combine two unrelated meanings, or irony, that style of writing/speech in which there is a humorously noticeable difference between what is said and what is intended, humor can be expressed through political newspaper headlines.

Be it satire; that is, a literary device intending to arouse a person's disapproval of something by holding it up to ridicule, humor can also be performed through political newspaper headlines. Dealing with humor in that way entails opening the room for fostering social change. This is set to infer that the fact of encapsulating humor in political newspaper headlines is not motivated by the willing to producing humorous effect in the reader, nor the willing to conveying news. If not, mere lexical items instead humoristic representations can do it. What draws attention by resorting to humor complies, indeed, with the search of something new in the society: changing the society in the sense of helping people distance themselves from any misconduct, dereliction. The objective of this is to build a society seen as model. Doing so, it is revealed the healing function of language.

The paper shows that the use a stylistic device as form of humor is conducive to the notion of the pragmatics of humor. The notion indicates that the use of humor is not always intended to generate humorous effects. Resorting to humor in a particular context is another way to expose people's shortcomings, to denounce, to criticize, and therefore, to call for a change seen as the starting point of any development. For this to be, it is demanded from the reader the ability to see beyond what is visible. As M. Dynel (2011, p. 6) writes: "the pragmatics of humour encompasses a full spectrum of studies on the forms, workings and functions of humour, regarded as a form of language use, both at the production end and at the reception end". The pragmatics of humor being addressed in these terms, the idea is to familiarize the reader with skills to read beyond what is written.

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