A Structural and Functional Analysis of Moroccan Jokes

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ABSTRACT: The present study purports to be a contribution to the study of language in relation to society. This paper sheds some light on the structural and functional aspects of jokes in the Moroccan society. In fact, its rationale is to pave the way to further comparative cross-cultural analyses. These can help to testify whether jokes of different cultures have similar or different functions and structures and, accordingly, whether this similarity or dissimilarity is reflected inthe structure of societies.

KEYWORDS: jokes - joke-telling – narrative – comparative - humor – Horgan –Sacks – cross-cultural - Labov – structure – folktales – categorization - Propp –typology – political - ethnocentered - off**-**color – blasphemous – miscellaneous.

INTRODUCTION

A joke is a narrative that someone says to cause amusement or laughter, especially a story with a funny punchline i.e. a brief oral narrative with a climactic humorous twist. It is in the punchline that the audience becomes awarethat the story contains a second, conflicting meaning. This can be done usinga pun or other word play such as irony or sarcasm, a logical incompatibility, nonsense, or other means. Hetzron (1991) offers the definition:

"A joke is a short humorous piece of oral literature in which the funniness culminates in the final sentence, called the punchline… In fact, the main condition is that the tension should reach its highest level at the very end. No continuation relieving the tension should be added".

(Hetzron, 1991: 55-6)

Jokes and joke-telling are deeply interrelated and telling a joke is actually a cooperative effort in Grice's terms; it requires that the teller and the audience mutually agree in one form or another to understand the narrative which follows as a joke. If we consider Grice's Cooperative Principle in this case, both the teller and the audience, in a joke-telling session, cooperate, each on his own, in order to reach the objective of the session, which is actually understanding the punchline and exploding into laughters.

It is also true that jokes are culture-specific and that missing some aspects of culture might hinder the comprehension of the joke leading to the appreciation of the punchline. This situation happened to Helmke, M. (2007), who acknowledged that "Here was an aspect of Moroccan culture that I had been missing completely. Immediately the joke made sense and I appreciated the humor of it." This pushed him to write a book on humor and Moroccan cultureto explain the cultural dimension behind every joke.

In another paper, "Different Moroccan jokes: a sociolinguistic typology", Icategorized Moroccan jokes into five types according to their topics. The five types are political, ethno-centered, off-color, blasphemous and miscellaneous. Inthis paper, I will analyze Moroccan jokes structurally and functionally. More specifically, I will use this typology of Moroccan jokes to find out if there is anycorrelation between the narrative structure of the joke and its type. To phrase it otherwise, I will check if this categorization of Moroccan jokes into five types isreflected through different narrative structures.

1. Some models of analysis

According to me, there are three models of analyzing the narrative structure of tales/jokes that stand out, namely, Propp (1968), Labov (1972) and Sacks (1974). In his analysis of Russian folktales, which is both empirical and inductive, Propp delineates the structure of the tale in terms of the same sequence of its elements as they are narrated. Prop remarks that both constantsand variables are present in the tale, where variables are exemplified by differentprotagonists who behave differently and where the function is constant throughout the various versions of the same tale. Functions, which are the basic components in Propp's analysis of the folktale, are defined in terms of nouns like interdiction, flight, seizure, etc. "Function is understood as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance of the course of the action" (Propp, 1968: 21). This way, Propp is not considering his notion of "function" to be related to the outside effects of the folktale, e.g. maintenance of social values and beliefs. So, Propp's historical study of Russian folktales is mainly taxonomic.

Labov, who analyzed the narratives of non-standard Black English children, came up with an overall structure of narratives.

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According to Labov, a narrative is "one method of recapitulating past experiences by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which –it is inferred— actually occurred" (Labov, 1972: 359). Briefly, a fully-formed narrative may be constituted of six adjacently placed parts: 1) abstract, 2) orientation, 3) complicating action, 4) evaluation, 5) result and 6) coda. It is not necessary that all six of these be present in every narrative; for example, some narratives will not have an abstract while others may not have a coda. Additionally, these components need not appear in a specific order, and each may be present in a variety of ways.

The abstract functions as an advertisement or an invitation to listen, while the orientation section sets the time, persons and situations of the narrative. Following orientation is 'the complicating action', which refers to the actual events of the narrative, the occurrences that move it ahead. The evaluation is a means used by the narrator to indicate the raison d'être of his narrative. Following this is what Labov calls the 'result' or 'resolution': this, basically, is the conclusion. At this point, the narrator indicates that the story has come to a close and that a final action has occurred. Finally, there may be a coda when the narrator points out the relevance of the story by connecting it with every-day life, or with other events that fall outside the story frame.

So, according to Labov, a complete narrative begins with an orientation, proceeds to the complicating action, is suspended at the focus of evaluation before it concludes with the resolution and returns the listener to the present time with the coda.

According to Sacks, a joke is composed of "three serially ordered and adjacently placed types of sequences, which he calls the preface, the telling and the response sequences" (Sacks, 1974: 337). The preface is rather an offer to tell or a request for a chance to tell a joke, together with an initial characterization of the joke and some reference to the time of its occurrence or reception and to its donor.

Actual responses to an offer might range from an acceptance to asking for a delay or refusal altogether. Besides, once the first recipient accepts the offer, a second one need not intervene to grant his acceptance, unless he intends to refuse that offer. Thus, the first recipient's reaction can be on behalf of all the other recipients depending on their respective reactions.

After the acceptance of the offer, the telling proceeds on, which might be interrupted in case a recipient fails to hear some just produced fragment of the joke. Finally, the response sequence can be an overall evaluation of the success of the joke. A usual response is laughings that partially overlap, but silence can also ensue a joke. This is an indicator of its failure which can be imputed to some defect of the joke or of its telling. If the joke is successful, a recipient's failure to understanding it is concealable through a spurious laughter. A delayed laughter is better retained lest the recipient be deemed as lacking sophistication to understand jokes.

Sacks' structural analysis of jokes into three sequences claims to be applicable to all types of jokes built in the form of stories. He exemplifies it by only one dirty joke without making any reference to different categories of jokes, which could or could not conform to his analysis.

2. The structure of Moroccan jokes

In this part, I will try to find out if there is any correlation between the narrative structure and type of Moroccan jokes. In other words, I will ascertain if my categorization of Moroccan jokes into five types is reflected through different narrative structures. The following analysis will reveal whether there is any such correlation or not. No preconceived narrative structure has been taken as a specific framework to analyze Moroccan jokes. However, Sacks's analysis of jokes and Labov's treatment of narratives have been taken into consideration.

The first striking feature of Moroccan jokes is the similarity of their initial strings, as those numbered **J1** in the typology of (Fathi, 2019). Since these strings serve to introduce the joke, it is germane to name them "the opening sequences". In this labeling, the opening sequence is less inclusive than Sacks's "preface" which includes, inter alia, the offer, the source and the reception time, which are not particularly necessary to introduce Moroccan jokes. Labov's notion of "abstract" is more pertinent to Moroccan jokes because sometimes the opening sequence might not appear altogether. In this case, the joker begins his joke by some pseudo abstract linking it to the previous joke, if any, as in:

- dar   bħal hadak lli ħsel   mʕa   mert xu-h
- Did   like   that who was caught with   wife brother-his
- Like the one who was caught with his brother's wife

After this short abstract, the joke proceeds on which is thematically similar to the previous one. However, most of the time, the opening sequence is uniform and this regularity is reflected in its constituents, which are of a limited number. Three of these are very recurrent, namely,

- /gal-lek/, /hada (hadi) (hadu)/, /waħed/
- /told-you/, /(this) (these)/, /one/
- This is one

The second item in any of its variants for feminine and plural is obligatory while the other two are partially mutually exclusive. However, all three constituents may appear in one opening sequence. So, the basic opening sequence, if any, has one of the following

three variations:

- gal-lek	hada	
hada	waħed	
gal-lek	hada	waħed

The final vowel of the second item /hada/ alternates with /u/ or /i/, which are number and gender markers, respectively. The third item /waħed/, which does not always mean "one" as it may be followed by (cf. Fathi 2019) /ʒuʒ/ "two" or even /r-rebʕin/ "forty", is deleted altogether when the protagonist(s) is/are personally named.

This point leads us to the second common feature of Moroccan jokes, which is that the string after the opening sequence reveals the protagonist(s) and time and place of the joke, if necessary. Actually, this string in the presentation of the joke is genuinely the first string of the joke proper while the opening sequences are only preliminary strings. Following Labov's model terminology, it is appropriate to label the strings setting persons, time and place as "orientation" sections since they have virtually the same function as in Labov's narratives.

After the opening sequence and the orientation section, the joke proceeds on to the complication of the story. This complication is carried out via different actions performed by the protagonist(s). It should be noted that such actions are not inherently complicated; rather, they are actions which, by their very nature, create some suspense as to what action(s) would ensue and to what extent they are jocular and funny.

These complications are directly related not to the theme of the joke, which is the basis for the typology provided in (Fathi, forthcoming), but to the specific story of the joke. It is the case that a theme can be reflected through more than one specific story, each with a different type of concomitant complication dictated by the story of the joke.

The complicating section provides the basis for an ensuing resolution, which, in its turn, can take different forms depending on the previous complication of the joke. Therefore, it seems that there is a dialectal interrelation between complication and resolution in a joke. The resolution is, then, the outcome of the complication. In fact, more than one complication can occur in the same story, followed by a related resolution.

Basically, it is the nature of the resolution, not the complication, which makes the joke funny. Resolutions are also referred to in the literature as the punchline of the joke, the gist of the joke, on which the joker lays all the hope to reveal the success of the joke. Most often, resolutions are exaggerated actions, caricatures stressing certain features to cause amusement or ridicule. In other cases, resolutions are either unrealistic or inappropriate for the situation provided by the complication.

The resolutions serve to trigger the final section of the joke, which is the response sequence. Resolutions also affect and condition the response sequence because if they "appropriately" fit, they can determine the success of the joke. In this case, a joke is deemed as successful if it is responded to by prolonged laughing. However, the response sequence can sometimes be only a silence even when the joke shows some organic unity among its constituents. This failure can be attributed to many a reason, namely that the joke itself was previously known to the audience, or part of it, or that the recipients did not appreciate that particular type of joke due to their very nature or mood or, simply, that there is a defect in the joke-telling. It is the case that not everybody masters the knack of telling a joke properly. In a joke-telling, verbal skill needs to be backed by body gestures, facial expressions and great dexterity.

It has been shown that different types of Moroccan jokes have virtually the same opening sequences. Basically, they also have the same orientation, complication and resolution sections in terms of their roles within the story. The response sequences which are indicative of the success of the jokes are practically the same because jokes are potentially meant to make the recipients laugh.

Given these conclusions, it can be safely stated that there is no correlation whatsoever between structure and type of Moroccan jokes. Therefore, Moroccan jokes are categorized into five types in terms of their topics, but into one type in terms of their narrative structure. The overall narrative structure of Moroccan jokes can be schematized as follows:

1) - Opening sequence
2) - Orientation section
3) - Complication section
4) - Resolution section
5) - Response sequence

This rigorous hierarchical sequencing of sections is to be strictly observed if the joke is to be successful, jocular that is.

Here is a joke from the typology of (Fathi, forthcoming) to illustrate the different parts of a Moroccan joke:

J2.1   gal-le-k   had-a   wa

	told-to-you	this-masc. sing. marker		one

This is one

J2.2 ʃ-ʃelh xeḍḍar

the-berber green-grocer

Berber green-grocer

J2.3 ʒa ʕand-u waħed xajna Came to-him one bloke and a guy came to him

J2.4	u-huwa	jhez	waħed	ʒelbana	u-kal-ha
	and-he	took	one	peapod	and-ate-it

took a peapod and ate it

J2.5 ʃaf-u ʃ-ʃelh u-huwa jsxef
saw-him the-berber and-he faintedseeing him, the Berber fainted

J2.6 ʒaw n-nas kajfejq-u fi-h b-waħed l-beṣla
came people waking up-they in-him with-one the-onionSome people helped him come to with an onion

J2.7 melli faq gal li-hum djal-men l-beṣla when woke up told to-them of-whom the-onionWhen he woke up he asked whose onion it was

J2.8	gal-u li-h	djale-ek
	told-they to-him	of-you

Yours, they told him

J2.9	u-huwa	jmut
	and-he	died

and he died

J2.10 ha ha ha ha ha
(extended laughings)

In this case, **J2.1** would be the opening sequence while **J2.2** would be the orientation section. The complication section here goes in both **J2.3** and **J2.4**. The resolution section for this complication is in **J2.5**. Unusually, in this joke there is another complication section in **J2.6** and **J2.7** for which there is another resolution in **J2.8** and **J2.9**. Obviously, **J2.10** constitutes the response sequence. There is, then, no way to provide an alternative typology of Moroccan jokes in terms of their narrative structures. Therefore, the content typology provided in (Fathi, 2019) is, as it stands, adequate to the extent that it accounts for Moroccanjokes which are built in the form of a story, be it factual or fictitious.

In the light of Labov's analysis of narratives and with the overall narrative structure of Moroccan jokes provided, structural distinctions between narratives proper and jokes can be set up. Basically, an abstract is not necessary for jokes,if not to test whether the joke is already known to the audience, while it is an inalienable part in narratives. On the other hand, narratives do not have a systematic opening sequence as is the case for jokes. Orientations, complicationsand resolutions are structurally the same in both jokes and narratives, only that orientations in jokes do not always need to specify the time and place of the joke.

An evaluation section whereby the teller gives the rationale behind his narrative is utterly lacking in jokes, probably because jokes have certain functions which need not be verbally stated time and again to be properly understood by the audience.

In narratives, codas are needed to return the recipients to the present time after the narrative has ended or to signal the end of a turn at speaking; in jokes these functions are inferred by the recipients immediately after the resolution to whichthey respond.

Finally, narratives are factual and not fabricated while jokes are, on the whole, fictitious. Still, jokes can also be based on real events which are, then, molded and seasoned to fit into a joke, through exaggeration or caricatures of the actionsand events of the story.

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3. The functions and distribution of Moroccan jokes

Moroccan jokes, which are of five types in terms of their contents/topics but of one type with regard to their narrative structures, carry different functions in the Moroccan society. Two types of functions of Moroccan jokes can be distinguished, namely, inherent and ancillary or by-product.

3.1   Inherent functions; they are initially meant as the principal function/purpose of the joke and the joke-telling. They have, then, a certain primacy over ancillary functions. Actually, jokes are inherently meant for relaxation and humor's sake; other functions are not intended beforehand. There is virtually no specific time for joke-telling; any time will do, provided the audience is in a mood of welcoming jokes and fun. Most of the times, jokes come to fill a time gap as during breaks between courses at the faculty or while waiting for the bus. In fact, there is no specific time for humor; it is contingenton the specific situation in which the joker and his recipients gather.

Another inherent function of Moroccan jokes is communicative, in that jokes help to establish and maintain contact between the joker and his audience. It is hardly the case that strangers tell jokes to each other, because joke-telling requires a certain previous knowledge of each other to know which type of jokesand topics are liable to be tackled without arousing any feeling of animosity or suspicion. Joke-telling explores some shared background knowledge on the nature of role relationships between the joker and his audience. Therefore, a situation of joke-telling is already indicative of a certain degree of intimacy that is obtaining between the joker and part, if not all, of his audience.

3.2   Ancillary functions: these are not subordinate in importance to the inherent functions, but rather they are not initially intended; the fact that such functions are by-products in no way undermines their significance. Two functions of this type can be distinguished, namely, ordering conversation and imparting views and ideas. When a joker starts his joke, he does not necessarily intends it to order conversation and its course by having the recipients respect his turn at speaking and listen to his joke. Nor does the joker intend to communicate ideas and views through his joke. Rather, these functions come as upshots of the joke(s) and the joke-telling.

So, in a joke –telling situation only two parties are involved, the joker and his audience. The joker is the one relating the narrative while the audience isattentively listening and waiting for the complication with its concomitant resolution in order to evaluate the joke positively or negatively in the response sequence (cf. Sacks et al. 1974). In other gatherings where jokes do not constitute the bulk of conversation, more than one encounter can occur at the same time so that the conversation is not organized because there is an overlap or random ordering of encounters.

However, in a joke-telling situation one or two members of the audience may interrupt the joker but merely to ask for a recapitulation of some just missed fragment of the joke. The interruption is, then, pertinent to the course of conversation, which remains ordered. After the first joker has finished his joke, the floor is free for any other potential joker to venture his own joke, either in the same or a different type, depending on whether the previous joke(s) stimulated any other(s).

Most of the time, jokes of a given situation of joke-telling seem to rotate around one topic, namely, the one triggered by the first joke(s) in the session. Such jokes themselves might be triggered by a real life scene. Actually, there can be groups of jokes in a session; if the first joke is off-color, the ensuing jokes, almost always, will deal with the same topic until some joker ventures to tell a joke of a different type, by which another differing group of jokes, more or less linked to the previous one(s), will have begun. The joke-telling situation can, then, involve one or more types of jokes.

Different types of jokes can also serve, unintentionally, to impart ideas or views.For instance, political jokes can show the political tendencies and attitudes, not necessarily of the jokers themselves, but of different social layers; these politicaltendencies are usually the result of the type of policies adopted by the authoritiestoward citizens. Political jokes can indicate the extent to which people feel oppressed to express their stances toward the political system.

Off-color jokes pinpoint the subjects which are considered taboo and which are to be avoided if one's verbal behavior is to be appropriate. Some taboo subjects are not universal; so, in that case, off-color jokes can serve to show the particular taboos of different societies and cultures.

Blasphemous jokes show the extent to which joker and audience conform totheir religious beliefs, if any. If someone is excessively enthusiastic in his religious beliefs, he is less likely to bear up with irreverent jokes, let alone telling them himself. If, on the other hand, he is tolerant enough and open- minded, he would not mind telling or listening to such type jokes.

Ethno-centered jokes also can serve to impart ideas, views and attitudes, though not intentionally. Mainly, such jokes show that there are indeed different "ethnic" communities that constitute the Moroccan society. Besides, they reveal the cultural attitudes and stereotypes that obtain between different communities so that each community is stigmatized with aberrant behaviors. When these social stigmas are exaggerated, they create a sense of humor exploited by jokers to build upon successful "funny" jokes.

All in all, these different types of Moroccan jokes show the various topics to which Moroccans can respond merrily with prolonged laughters. These types of jokes play also a drastic role in the maintenance of social values and cultural attitudes which differentiate the Moroccan society from others. A different community having different values, attitudes and cultural beliefs will, accordingly, have different types of jokes reflecting them. In this sense, jokes can reflect some facets of the cultural identity of a community and, therefore, serve to distinguish between different societies with differing cultures, attitudes and values.

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3.3   Relative distribution of jokes: Can jokes also serve to distinguish between different layers of the Moroccan society? Judgments and generalizations in this section are mainly based on oral questionnaires and crude observations. These not only need statistical corroborations but are also contingent upon certain other variables which are specific to the situation in case. The relative distribution of Moroccan jokes can be tackled with regard to age and gender. In other words, to what extent do age and gender variables affect the relative distribution of Moroccan jokes?

By and large, it seems that the older generation, both males and females, seldom tell or appreciate jokes. To the question "do you tell jokes?", adult people are likely to respond, almost consistently, by "that's all that's wanting!". This state of affairs can be accounted for by three hypothetical reasons. Firstly, adult people, as they concede, do not have time for joke-telling, which is closely related to leisure time. They seem to be so busily involved with their struggle forlife to find spare time to tell/listen to jokes. Besides, even those who are not that busy just do not appreciate jokes. This leads us to the second hypothetical reasonwhich is that old age and life troubles have dissipated the merry mood that couldenable the elderly to appreciate and value jokes. There is wonder whether this is due to old age or a direct consequence of an unhappy childhood. Thirdly, the low frequency of occurrence of jokes among adult Moroccans can be attributed to the status of jokes themselves. The type of stories that adult Moroccans used to tell their children and grand-children were not jokes but, rather, long narratives which were not meant to make them laugh but to make them sleep. Probably, jokes as a sociolinguistic phenomenon have developed more with the younger generation but did not permeate the adult way of life so that they did not have prolonged exposure to them and, accordingly, did not develop any interest in them. Fowles & Glanz (1977) emphasize on exposure to jokes as one of the factors involved in humor, together with cognitive ability and attention to language forms and twists.

This is not the case with the younger generation which espouses all the different types of Moroccan jokes. So, the age variable can be a social determinant of the relative distribution of Moroccan jokes. It is the case that young people are prone to tell and appreciate virtually all types of jokes. This is probably due the excessive exposure to jokes which, as an instance of the creative aspect of language, come to be a handy means of expression. This could also be attributed to cognitive ability which tends to be more developed in young people owing to partial or complete schooling; however, literacy is not altogether a   decisive factor in this regard because even illiterate young people make excessive use of jokes, either actively or passively. Some are gifted in joke-telling while others can only appreciate jokes.

The relative gender distribution of Moroccan jokes can be dealt with at two levels: inter and intra gender distribution. Basically, this is pertinent again to the younger generation which makes excessive use of jokes.

Within joke-telling sessions of the same gender, all types of jokes can occur. Still, this is contingent upon the particular situation, which involves the degreeof intimacy between joker and audience, because every situation is a particular case. Other factors like role relationships and degree of intimacy among participants can largely affect the distribution of jokes and induce the joker to choose some types of jokes and abstain from others. However, while young males make use of all types of jokes, some young females are prone to express a certain disgust concerning blasphemous and even off-color jokes.

The relative distribution of jokes is more affected across both sexes. In an audience which is predominantly male with one or more female intruders, off- color jokes are eschewed depending, of course, on the kind of relationships that hold between the participants in a joke-telling situation. Again, these judgments are not conclusive because the presence of, say, some Berbers or strangers might also urge the joker to shun ethno-centered and political jokes altogether.

Therefore, the gender variable, unlike the age variable, is not a clear-cut determinant of the relative distribution of Moroccan jokes. Rather, the choice of particular types of jokes hinges upon the kind of relationship that holds between the participants in the particular joke-telling situation.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to make a sociolinguistic study of the structure and function of Moroccan jokes built in the form of stories. A joke is a narrative which potentially purports to make the audience laugh. Structure and function ofjokes, being different aspects, have been dealt with each in one section. In the first one, we tried to identify if there is any correlation between the narrative structure and type of jokes as detailed in (Fathi, forthcoming). We reached the conclusion that Moroccan jokes are basically of one type in terms of their narrative structure. In the second section, we identified two main types of function for Moroccan jokes, namely, inherent and ancillary functions. In a related sub-section, we focused on the relative distribution of Moroccan jokes with regard to the gender and age variables. It has been shown that the age variable is more dependable, than gender, to give an insight into the relative distribution of Moroccan jokes.

The scope of this paper could not allow dealing with other facets of jokes. For example, Moroccan jokes can be analyzed from a psycholinguistic point of viewin the light of Horgan's study. Such analysis could reveal whether joke-telling isan innate or acquired verbal ability. It could also account for the fact that some people never learn the proper way to tell jokes.

Other basic sociolinguistic studies could deal with Moroccan jokes in terms of their use by various strata of the Moroccan society. Such study could check whether social class distinctions, based on different variables, could affect,dictate or mold the function, type and distribution of jokes.

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An emphasis can also be laid upon comparative and cross-cultural sociolinguistic studies, which are revealing in more than one way. Such studies can provide the basis for more concrete analyses the results of which can be far more significant

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