

Exploring Socio-political Satire in Iraqi Animated Sitcoms

استكشاف السخرية الاجتماعية والسياسية في المسلسلات الكوميدية المتحركة العراقية

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الملخص

غالباً ما تستهدف السخرية جوانب اجتماعية وسياسية عديدة في مختلف المجتمعات، مصورةً إليها كموضوع نموذجي للسخرية والنقد. وقد أصبحت مسلسلات الكوميديا المتحركة، بطبعها الفكاهي الذي يجذب الأطفال والبالغين على حد سواء، وسيلة شائعة بشكل متزايد للسخرية من السياسات الحكومية عالمياً. تتعقق هذه الدراسة في الأبعاد اللغوية والثقافية للسخرية في مسلسلات كوميدية عربية مختارة، مُحللةً أساليب لغوية محددة، وإشارات ثقافية، وخيارات أسلوبية تُسهم في إنتاج السخرية واستقبالها. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد الأساليب الساخرة المستخدمة في خطاب مسلسلات الكوميديا المتحركة لإظهار دلالاتها الأيديولوجية. تقتصر البيانات المُركزة على المسلسل الكوميدي العراقي «شلش من

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«*هي التك*»، وقد اختيرت الحلقة الرابعة من موسمه الأول بعنوان «الانتخابات والحالة المرشحة». هذا المسلسل من تأليف محمد خماس. يعتمد نموذج التحليل على دراسة سيمبسون (٢٠٠٣) لتحليل مشهدين مختارين (المشهد الثاني والمشهد العاشر). وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن أساليب الدمج، والحوار البيني، والتورية، والتلاعيب بالألفاظ أكثر استخداماً من غيرها من الأساليب الساخرة. علاوة على ذلك، تُعد ممارسات الحوار البيني، التي غالباً ما تشير ضمنياً إلى الهدف أو السياق، شائعة في المسلسلات الكوميدية الساخرة. كما خلصت الدراسة إلى أن البيانات تعتمد بشكل كبير على السخرية من الإشارات والأحداث ذات الطابع الثقافي الخاص، مثل مرشح الزوراء. كما تعكس البيانات فساد العملية الديمقراطية، التي تُسخر منها الحملات الانتخابية وعمليات التصويت.

كلمات مفتاحية: السخرية، مسلسلات الكوميديا المتحرّكة، الانتخابات والحالة المرشحة، الحوار البيني، والتورية.

Abstract

Satire often targets many socio-political aspects in various societies, portraying them as a typical subject of ridicule and critique. Animated sitcoms, with their humourous nature appealing to both children and adults, have increasingly become a popular medium for satirizing government policies globally. This study delves into the linguistic and cultural dimensions of satire in selected Arabic animated sitcom, analyzing specific linguistic devices, cultural references, and stylistic choices that contribute to the production and reception of satire. This study aims to identify the satirical methods used in the discourse of animated sitcoms to show the ideological implications. The data under the focus is limited to Iraqi animated sitcom “*«شلش من هي التك»*” (Shalash Min Hey Al-Tanak), the 4th episode of 1st season entitled “*«الانتخابات»*” (The Election) and “*«الحالة المرشحة»*” (The Hot Nominee) is selected. This sitcom is written by Muhammad Khamas. The model of analysis is based on Simpson's (2003) to analyze two selected scenes (scene 2 and scene 10). The study concludes that Merging, Interdiscursivity, Pun and Wordplay are much more frequently used than other satirical methods. Moreover, the interdiscur-

sive practices, which often serve implicit reference to target or context, are common in the satirical sitcoms. It also concludes that the data rely heavily on satirizing highly culture-specific references and events, such as *Al-Zawraa'* *nominee*. Also, the data mirrors the corrupted democratic process, which is ridiculed in the election campaigns and voting.

Keywords: satire, animated comedy series, elections and the candidate's case, intertextual dialogue, and pun.

1. Introduction: Satire

Identifying what “satire” means could be a difficult task. Satire, according to Vittali (2010, p.12), is incredibly hard to define. He says “if the moral standards and principles of the world are so easy and clear-cut, why should one bother with satire?” In this instance, individuals can learn what they already know without having to read satire. He also states that “the reasons why people watch or read satire are far more complex than moral guidance, the world is not black and white”. Satire may always be understood differently and with some degree of doubt. Nonetheless, Abdullatif (2014, p.22) identifies two challenges in defining satire: “Firstly, each scholar seems to define satire from the aspect that concerns him/her the most. Secondly, the difficulty of defining satire seems to stem from its ability to mimic other forms”.

According to Behrmann (2002), Brummack (1971) and Simpson (2003), satire is a communication style that is frequently linked to hostility, judgment, ridicule, play, laughing, and allusions to social standards. In addition to attacking power systems and offering social critique, it may also contribute to critical public discussions. According to Crittendon et al. (2011), satirists are frequently regarded as reliable authorities and have the ability to shape the opinions of the audience. Satire is unquestionably a crucial component of the political communication systems of today. Further, Test (1991, p. 12) argues that satire appears in a wide variety of humor genres (stand-up comedy, political cartoons). It also plays a variety of roles, depending on the culture and society being examined.

2. Methodology: Simpson's Model (2003)

Simpson's (2003) framework presupposes categories of contextual constraints that govern the process of satire perception and creation in addition to apparent language rules for classifying satire as a discourse.

2.1 Prime Phase

This stage, which Simpson (2003) refers to as the echoic irony, is the first ironic element of satire. "Echoic Theory" is studied by Sperber and Wilson (1998), who observe that irony operates as an echoic interpretation of a previous utterance, belief, or expectation. The satirist expresses a critical or ridiculing attitude toward a thinking or a speech having a similar substance to a prior concept assigned to a person, a group, or to people in general. Satire requires some prior discourse, utterance, or speaker to comment upon. However, a satirical prime varies from one to the next. It might have to do with politics, religion, a person's career, etc.

2.2 Dialectic Phase

The prime addresses the echoing aspects of satirist and utilizes the writer's world knowledge for satire production whereas the dialectic depends on text-internal discourse tactics and the knowledge of discourse.

3.2.1 Metonymic Methods

Simpson (2003, p.9) argues that "The umbrella category of metonymic satirical method embraces stylistic techniques that sustain a collision in-text that stays within the same conceptual domain."

2.2.1.1 Saturation

Saturation describes the process of repeating and exaggerating a specific theme until the reader/hearer is overwhelmed. According to Simpson (2003, p.198), "Whereas saturation is essentially more of the same, its opposite, attenuation, is less of the same." To exemplify, "In a world where coffee shops

outnumber the people, each café a beacon of caffeine-fueled enlightenment, you’re not just drinking coffee – you’re participating in a sacred ritual. Bow down before the almighty coffee bean!”. The overuse of vocabulary to describe a basic coffee shop experience satirizes the obsession of society with coffee culture by inflating how important it is.

2.2.1.2 Attenuation

Attenuation is the procedure of lessening the impact of a certain concept by employing humor or understatement. It is used to convey an indirect social remark while softening the intensity of the critique and making it more digestible. It entails understating specific language elements to express satire. For instance, the last commandment in George Orwell’s “Animal Farm” (1945) “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others”. Here, the revolutionary language has become softer, which paradoxically weakens the concept of equality.

2.2.1.3 Negation

Negation entails the rejection or inversion of propositions. This technique serves to draw attention to things that are untrue or not happening, which is important when attempting to frame meaning, especially in satire. It is employed to ridicule specific topics by focusing on altering the positive condition in a discourse. For example, “Sure, the CEO didn’t exactly manipulate the market to his advantage, he was merely... adjusting numbers creatively.” represents implicitly denying immoral activity by rephrasing it. Satire is emphasized via ironic separation from the reality.

2.2.2 Metaphoric Methods

The metaphoric approach is used in sarcastic discourse that involves particular strategies, establishing satirical relationships between various notional features.

2.2.2.1 Combination

Producing satire, one may simply combine two or more conceptual components using this method. Combination describes how many discourse modalities, genres, or linguistic elements coexist in a text to produce satirical meaning. To heighten the satirical effect, the scenario incorporates a variety of linguistic registers, from informal conversation to more official political discourse. To illustrate, “Welcome to Burger Flex – where you can grab a cheeseburger while hitting the treadmill!” highlights the conflicting health and lifestyle trends in society by fusing two incompatible concepts—fast food and fitness.

2.2.2.2 Merging

In this method, two or more ideas blend together to produce satire. It describes how several viewpoints, voices, or discourses come together inside a text to express ideas in a complicated style. It may entail blending the serious with the ridiculous, the formal with the informal, or even opposing ideologies. However, satire is used to criticize insufficient government action through merging a serious topic (climate change) with a disappointing reaction, as seen in the following example: “The government’s response to climate change was swift, promising a state-of-the-art emergency kit: a reusable shopping bag and a single solar panel.”

2.2.2.3 Interdiscursivity

Interdiscursivity is the interaction of many discourses or registers within the text. By putting discourses in conversation with one another, it highlights the linkages between many domains of language usage, such as politics, entertainment, and casual conversation, which enable deeper meaning to emerge. This technique often illustrates the relationship that results when a text uses elements from another text or discourse to critique a particular social, religious, or political issue.

2.3 Stylistic Hooks

Simpson (2003, pp.9–10) defines stylistic hooks, as “those lexico-grammatical devices that often establish, embellish, and sustain connections between the features of discourse that expound the prime, on the one hand, and the dialectic, on the other”.

2.3.1 Puns

According to Simpson (2003, p.20), “pun is a form of word play in which some feature of linguistic structure simultaneously combines two unrelated meanings.” Puns play a significant role in satirical writing as a whole since they help the discourse reach its intended goal. However, puns are wordplay that play with meanings and homophones to create satire. For instance, “After buying the entire candy aisle, he decided it was his sweet victory over self-control.”, the pun on “sweet victory” adds satire of overindulgence by playing with the dual meaning of “sweet”.

2.3.2 Wordplay

Wordplay is a stylistic device that is used to illuminate meaning, generate ambiguity, and engage the audience on several levels, particularly in jocular speech. It is the act of experimenting with words to create new interpretations in a satirical style. For example, “The politician wasn’t corrupt; he was just funding his future in a very creative way.” carefully changes the meaning of corruption to make it seem less unlawful by using the euphemism phrase “funding his future” to make fun of it.

3. Animated Sitcoms

Animated Sitcom is one type of situation comedies that employ animation. According to Stabile & Harrison (2003), prime time animated sitcoms have become more popular among American television audiences since “The Flintstones” became a huge hit in the early 1960s. It was the first animated series that was not exclusively aimed at children. A number of animated sitcoms have been made since the late 1980s as a result of the genre’s surpris-

ing popularity, including “The Simpsons”, “South Park”, and “Family Guy”. However, one prominent type of animated sitcoms is American family sitcom or “domesticom”, as Marc (1989) refers to it.

Throughout the Western world, animated sitcoms have long been an effective means of socio-political satire. Yet it took a while for this style to make its way to the Arab world. Several Arab producers have been making their own local animated sitcoms since the early 2000s and current satirical comments on public life and even political matters may be seen in the “national” animations of Dubai, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. These sitcoms are distinguished by intertextuality with local popular culture. However, the first domestic one was “Qut'a 13” (Block 13), which debuted in 2000 and was a Kuwaiti adaptation of “South Park”. Five years later, the first 3D animated sitcom, “Freej” (The Neighborhood), made its premiere. It aimed to promote Dubai culture, but the majority of Arab sitcoms that came after it have been more daring in their satire of social, political, and religious themes (Sayfo, 2015, p.p.81-82).

A modern type of satire in the Arab world is represented by adult animations. Animated sitcoms fall within the umbrella of “political animation”, as described by Wells (2002, p. 68), a form that was ideal for expressing political, moral, ethical, and even religious views. These sitcoms typically use allusive, responsive, or disruptive techniques to attack culture, with themes that tend to emphasize the absurd or the illogical. Since animated sitcoms are presumed to be innocent and fictional, they have a higher degree of relative freedom than their live counterparts. Wells (1998, p. 19) states that “the very language of animation seems to carry with it an inherent innocence which has served to disguise and dilute the potency of some of its more daring imagery”.

Arab animated sitcoms that operate under more rigid political and media structures are often amusing rather than satirical. Saudi MBC’s “Taish Eyal” (Family Affairs) is a somewhat conservative comedy with stories that frequently impart moral and educational messages to viewers. “Basant wa Diasty” (Basant and Diasty), building upon the more liberal Egyptian tra-

ditions, is comparatively daring in its satirical expression of socio-political issues. “Yowmiyat Bu Qatada wa Bu Nabeel” (The Diary of Bu Qatada and Bu Nabeel) is one of the most political sitcoms in Kuwait which addresses contemporary topics of local public discussions, including politics, religion, sports, education, and economy. Further, the majority of incidents in Arab sitcoms center on real-life social topics that are popular with their viewers and dominate public conversation. For example, A poor Iraqi guy who falls in love with a woman from a wealthy family is the subject of “Al-Ataak”, which addresses economic issues (Sayfo, 2015, p.p. 85-87).

4. The Data Analysis

Saturation has scored 6.6%, referring to the absurdity of the election process and the distribution of “rewards” following the election serve as symbols for the corruption of the political system that are the subject of this satire. To exemplify, “هي اخذت كل الكراسي و انته اخذت طبلة مكسورة” (She won all the seats, and you won a broken table) illustrates how Shalash, in spite of his dreams, is left with nothing but a cracked table, signifying the meaningless pledges.

Attenuation reaches the frequency of 13.3%, satirizing the process of election in Iraq. The casual and informal discussions of the characters minimize the significance of voter registration. For instance, the official’s statement “الانتخابات صارت لمن دب و هب” (I can’t bear with everyone who think they can register for the elections) means that the elections have become for anyone, even a bear and whoever shows up. It trivializes democracy and mocks its lack of integrity. In addition, serious political events, such as winning or losing elections, are minimized in the scenario to trivialities, as “طبلة مكسورة” (a broken table), which represents Shalash’s political failure.

Negation has achieved the percentage of 6.6%. The characters’ view of the election process as unnecessary or inconsequential exemplifies the idea of negation. For instance, “شلش: اتفايل بيه، لان ابو عزيز جيرانه جان عنده سكانيا 112 و انكلبت” (I find it optimistic. Because Abu Aziz, our neighbor, had this Scania 112 truck. It happened to flip over the Dibouni highway, but he came out uninjured. May Allah bless his soul.) dem-

onstrates that Shalash prefers a certain electoral list number because of a truck incident dismisses the significance of selecting an electoral list number, viewing it as a silly or superstitious act rather than a calculated political choice.

However, Combination has the lowest frequency 3.3%, showing the weak nature of elections and voting by fusing the political with personal attitudes. Shalash expresses his worry of election fraud in a humorous and absurd way, but it mirrors bigger social fears about votes being stolen or manipulated. By fusing serious political failure with humorous absurdity, «طلبة» (table) represents the hollowness of the election win and strengthens the satirical critique of the whole procedure.

Merging has the highest frequency in these scenes, which scores 20%, demonstrating this by the exchange between the hot nominee and Shalash. «اني و انته تحالف و نصير حيب واحد» (Let's make a mutual coalition and have a one pocket.) cleverly combines political coalitions with commonplace metaphors, such as making one wallet, to imply that political coalitions are driven only by self-interest. Further, when talking about “Dub” (a bear) and connecting it to a candidate's name «مرشح الزوراء» (the nominee of Al-Zawraa' Park), the literal and metaphorical are combined in a way that hilariously combines the animal kingdom with the political system used by humans. The ridiculing idea of selecting a list number based on tales from personal experience is combined with an actual governmental office, the elections commission, to further heighten the satire.

Similarly, Interdiscursivity also marks the highest frequency 20%, fusing language from several genres, registers, or sources in order to incorporate many meanings within a satirical setting. For instance, «طلبة بالمجلس البلدي خيرا» (A table in the municipal council is better than a sofa in the bush) employs interdiscursivity in a clear way by fusing political discourse with popular proverbial wisdom. The sentence reads like an old Arabic

saying، «عصفور باليد خير من عشرة على الشجرة» (a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush). The use of proverbial language implies a little of common sense, giving the remark the appearance of useful guidance. But rather than imparting knowledge, it amplifies the sarcastic tone by ironically juxtaposing the political environment with an informal, vernacular picture.

Pun has scored 13.3%, which suggests two intended meanings. On the surface, they may seem clear, but closer examination reveals a deeper funny meaning. For example، «شعلة نار حتى نحمي المتظاهرين» (We have set a fire to protect/warm up the voters) presents irony by using “شعلة” (we set fire). Normally, people view fire as destructive or harmful rather than as a safeguard. The contradiction between the behavior and the explanation is what gives birth to the comedy. Fire is offered as a safeguard as it typically denotes danger. The irony of the situation is found in how ridiculous it is—how can something as destructive as fire be utilized for protection?

Finally, Wordplay achieves 16.6%, adding further levels of meaning and produce sarcasm throughout language manipulation. For instance, Shalash's imitation of the saying، «العالم صاعدة بالحادة و عينها على الثانية» (People riding on a cheap vintage bus have their eyes on the hot chick) highlights people's attention to little, materialistic rewards while criticizing greed and the need for rapid profits.

Table (1:1) Satirical Methods of Scene 2 and Scene 10 (Total 30)

5. Conclusion

Based on data analysis, it has been concluded that Merging, Interdiscursivity, Pun and Wordplay are much more frequently used than other methods in this sitcom. Furthermore, a special type of phonologically modified word play is used in this sitcom, as in شعلنه نار حتى نحمي المتظاهرين (We set a fire to protect/warm up the protesters). The analysis indicates that interdiscursive practices (e.g., use of modified proverbs), which often serve implicit reference to target or context, are common in the satirical sitcoms. It also indicates that satire in the data reflects different social trends and cultural attitudes. This is because sensational concerns (e.g., الحادة الصاكة the hot nominee) are prioritized in this animated sitcom. The data rely heavily on satirizing highly culture-specific references and events, such as Scania Truck 112 and Al-Zawraa' nominee. The data mirrors the corrupted democratic process, which is ridiculed in the election campaigns and voting. Also, the themes reflect the intimidating attitude to political authority and people. Absurd names and themes are used to satirize real figures and events by selecting the names of the characters and combining unrelated events to achieve powerful satirical massages.

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