DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SMS JOKES: A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON OF JOKE STRATEGIES IN PERSIAN AND ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

SMS is the newest, easiest, and cheapest mode of communication technology uses nowadays and SMS jokes are one of the most widespread kinds of communication opportunity for people. Through SMS jokes people express their philosophical, psychological, sociological, anthropological, and political concerns. In this study, 2400 Farsi and 1500 English SMS jokes are examined to check the underlying strategies used in them for creating fun and laughter. A typology of 20 strategies is presented, analysed, compared, and contrasted by the researchers. The results show that English uses all the 20 strategies while Farsi uses only 19 strategies. There are also similarities and differences in the way people of the two different cultures use these strategies as well as in the frequency of the use of such strategies.

Keywords: *SMS, the language of SMS, the functions of SMS, SMS jokes, joke strategies*

INTRODUCTION

When Barack Obama wanted to announce his choice of his future vice president, he sent a text message to journalists, Democratic Party senators, and supporters. This aroused emotions in the media and the public. One *New York Times* journalist characterized the event as Mr. Obama's widest use of a newfound medium in the history of presidential campaigns. A National Public Radio reporter considered it as the most highly anticipated text message in human history. According to an Associated Press report, Obama's campaign team wanted to attract additional supporters by doing so. The medium itself was also a powerful message. Obama's move was interpreted as a sign of promising to be a man of change, a man of the people, and of participatory democracy (Thurlow & Poff, 2011). This is an example of how a

medium talk for someone, how discourse works, and how language use fulfil social functions. This shows how SMS is creating its special discourse.

People acquire, express, and reproduce their ideologies, that is, their ideas or 'belief systems' through discourse, that is, by spoken or written communicative interaction, usually in an indirect manner. Ideologies are fundamental beliefs that control and organize other socially shared beliefs and attitudes, for example, a racist ideology may affect attitudes about immigrants, or a feminist ideology may affect public reactions toward abortion, or they may affect cultural values like freedom, equality and justice (Van Dijk 2006). Ideologies have social functions in the sense that they are indicators of social conditions and that they organize groups' actions, interactions, and social practices. Discourse analysis helps us understand the structures of text and talk and how people indicate their semantic intentions and interpretations and the cognitive abilities that underlie the human use of language (Johnstone 2008; Van Dijk 2006). In this regard, SMS, as a new form of communication facility, and SMS jokes as fresh opportunities to express ideologies have structural and discoursal characteristics worth studying.

MOBILE COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES: A REVIEW OF OPPOSING VIEWS

Mobile text messaging, which is also known as SMS (short message service), text messaging, mobile email, or just texting, has become a common means of keeping in touch especially among young people. It is also available for pocket PCs, desktop computers, and even landline telephones, although it is associated more with mobile phones. Nowadays, we also have MMS (multimedia message service), although the basic simple text messaging has sustained its popularity among people (Adebola 2011; Thurlow & Poff 2011; Lin, 2005).

The development of any communication technology brings excessive hype and hysteria, especially about the kind of cultural, social, and psychological impacts it has on people and societies. Regarding mobile use, we have both optimistic and pessimistic views. On one hand, there are mobile communication companies that talk about the good features of this technology like closer human relationships, closer family ties, and instant and perpetual connectivity. It is also an example of the human need for social intercourse, and a kind of communication imperative. On the other hand, cultural studies researchers generally have a pessimistic tone in their opinions about the social and cultural implications of this new technology (Lin 2005; Thurlow 2003). Williams (1983), for example, believes that people normally use mobile to communicate with special friends and family members, and ignore the need for communication with others; this leads to a kind of 'privatization'. He states that constant use of mobile communication leads to a loss of human connectivity whose result will be a disconnected society and a gradual loss of traditional ways of life so highly valued by societies and especially by the elderly.

Cooper (2001) believes that modern technologies and especially mobile convert the world into 'a resource' to be utilized; when people are constantly on call or in touch, they are 'instrumentalized' by others. For example, employees have no more excuse of not answering mobile phone calls or not responding to text messages sent by their boss. Cooper's views don't seem to be plausible as enabling people to be in constant touch with others is the most highly appreciated feature of mobile and that employees can find other excuses like lack of credit or discharged batteries; this is also true for those who think that in some cases this technology has turned into a means for controlling husbands or wives. Another view directly

related with the use of text messaging is that texting has a deleterious impact on literacy, standard language use, and especially on the popular notions of 'good communication' (Thurlow & Poff, 2011). Yet, there are others (e.g. Chiluwa, 2008; Lenhart, et al, 2008) who believe that texters almost always recognize that language is context specific and that they don't necessarily view texting as 'writing' admitting that they are far apart in the way they use the language to realize their functions. Whatever position we may adopt toward mobile communication and text messaging, the trend ahead is clear and we cannot change it.

The Functions of SMS

Texting was at first developed commercially in the early to mid-1990s and has since gained great popularity as mobile technology has spread around the world. SMS has both *relational* functions, i.e. doing sociability, and *transactional* functions, that is, information exchange (Thurlow & Poff 2011). Regarding the relational functions of SMS, there are many researches done. A research in Japan (Ito & Daisuke 2003) showed that Japanese youth uses SMS mostly because it provides opportunities for private conversation free from adults' surveillance. In Taiwan (Yeh 2004) SMS is used to negotiate subtle gender relations, especially among couples in situations like quarreling, making romantic advances, or when they do not want to hear each other's voice. It is because SMS is more indirect and will reduce the embarrassment of face to face interactions. It also leaves something pleasurable for future remembrance (Lin 2005). Simple uses of SMS for sending greetings, congratulations, condolences, and jokes are cases of the relational functions of SMS. When SMS is used for commercial or official uses, its transactional function is activated; it can be used as a means for advertisement, media broadcasting, in medicine for patient reminders, by doctors for aftercare treatment, etc. But, sometimes, it is practically impossible to separate the relational intent from the transactional intent. Even information exchanges somehow serve social concerns. Using SMS for participating in television contests and using SMS in political campaigns for introducing the candidates or registering voters are good examples which show this overlap of functions (Thurlow & Poff 2011).

The Language of SMS

There are technical restrictions for texting including the small screen size, its limited character space, and users trying to save touches of the handset keys; these limitations have motivated the evolution of a special language for texting (Daaring 2002). Eco (2002) believes that SMS as one of the most practical aspects of mobile is very necessary as this is the age in which the diminutive, the brief, and the simple are highly prized. Thurlow and Poff (2011) drawing on Grice's maxims, specify three keys pragmatic maxims for text messages: (1) *brevity and speed*, (2) *paralinguistic restitution*, and (3) *phonological approximation*. Brevity and speed are commonly manifested in abbreviated language. Paralinguistic restitution seeks to redress the loss of socio-emotional or prosodic features such as stress and intonation present in oral interactions, or gestures and facial expressions which are present in face to face interactions but not in texting; this is usually fulfilled by using punctuation marks, symbols, or creating ASCII codes in which letters are combined and arranged in a way to show an image or picture.

Phonological approximation (e.g. 'novern' for 'northern' or Americanized forms like 'gonna', 'bin', 'havin' for 'going to', 'been', and 'having' respectively) is a kind of accent stylization which is obvious and crucial in oral interactions but again not in texting. SMS has a novice language; over-looking orthographic or syntactic rules (e.g. minimal use of punctuation marks where they *must* be used, and omission of auxiliary verbs, personal pronouns, and

function words), using compressions (e.g. 'coz' for because), using abbreviations (e.g. 'Nov' for November or 'txt' for 'text'), using letter-number homophones (e.g. '4' instead of 'for' or 'four'), creating verbal illustrations of names (e.g. 'kt' for 'Katie'), using phonetic spelling to create verbal effects (.e.g. 'hehe' for 'laughter' or 'muaha' to express a frightening laughter), using typographical linguictic devices for adding prosodic impact (e.g. 'quick quick'), phonetic writing (e.g. 'cu' for 'see you' or 'chu' for 'chew'), use of uppercase lettering or capital letters for emphasis (e.g. 'YOU r guilty' or 'u r a SUUUPER man'), using multiple punctuation for emphasis (e.g. is it true!!!???), and g-clipping like 'jumpin' and 'showin' for 'jumping' and 'showing' are among the characteristics of SMS language (Rafi 2011; Thurlow & Poff 2011; Thurlow 2003).

The Structure of Jokes

A joke is an orderly sequence of sentences (written or spoken) working as a unit intentionally used by a writer or a speaker to amuse the hearer or the reader; it is a mini-text which has clear points of start and ending (Jodlowiec 2012). A joke has two parts: the setting and the punch line. The setting works like an introduction providing access to a set of assumptions or the background knowledge necessary for interpreting the joke. If the background knowledge is shared by the interlocutors, the setting is shortened as much as possible. A good setting establishes a situation or an expectation, is short enough to keep keen attention, is easy to understand for the audience, and usually constitutes the serious part of the joke. The punch line is the second part of the joke leading to the climax followed by an outburst of laughter from the audience; it provides a contrast to the setting, incongruence, surprise, or exaggeration. The punch line contains the funny part of the joke (Jodlowiec 2011; Murphy 2008). One-liners, also called garden-path sentences, are exceptions in this regard because they usually don't have any setting or have a very short setting.

Functions of Jokes

Society, discourse, and social cognition are connected conceptually and ideologies are reproduced and expressed in discourse and communication (Van Dijk 2009). Jokes make one of the most commonly-used kinds of discourse in any society and the rhetoric of jokes and social life are closely connected; jokes in their very structure are models that imitate the interactions of language and social life and reflect people's reactions to social events (Muhawi 2002). Also, jokes, like any other kind of talk, have a psychological basis; they reflect the social and psychological states of people. Many of the ideas and emotions that we fail to express directly can be disguised in the form of jokes. We can break restrictions by communicating our thoughts through jokes. We can hide our strong reasons and motives behind jokes, reasons like a bid for love, desire for appreciation, coping with anxiety, expressing erotic and hostile wishes, showing off, etc. (Hui-Ru Hong 2002). The jokes may be used to express superiority, to show defiance of superiority, to establish a group ideology, to break restrictions, norms, and taboos, to degrade or mock others, to free oneself from moral inhibitions, to show off wit, and to express social bonding in groups or to sustain difference; they are used to support racism by including or excluding an ethnic group or they can even be used by minority groups to cope with racialism or by the dominant group to naturalize racial differences (Weaver 2011; Park et al, 2006; Moran 2003). Humour can act as a social lubricant and a humanizing agent which has an important place even during the most serious of times; it can energize people and leave them feeling a lot more alert, it can work like a mind-break, it can reduce anxiety,

it shows creativity, it builds trust in the workplace, and it smoothes the most serious things by creating fun ways to tackle hard problems (Martyn et al. 2011).

Strategies Used in SMS Jokes

Ideologies are expressed and enacted by discourse through a number of discursive structures and strategies (Van Dijk 2006). This is also true for SMS jokes. In addition to using the features of SMS language, SMS jokes involve special strategies which distinguish them from other kinds of SMS. These strategies are used to create fun; they center either around a *linguistic play* or an *ideological play* or both. The linguistic play makes use of those features of language, which may be considered deviated forms in ordinary discourse or the common use of language. Using words with multiple meanings which create lexical ambiguity and using incomprehensible metaphors which bring about semantic remoteness, transposition of words and creating grammatical ambiguity, which results in formal remoteness, combinations or repetitions of words that jar the ear (incongruity of words), incongruity of letters (e.g. breaking the rules for vowels and consonant clusters), and uncommon lexical usage (e.g. new portmanteau words) is all considered deviations in common language use (Vahid 2002), although they are the rhetorical devices which help produce literature. For ideological play, texters rely on the readers' shared knowledge of social, political, geographical, anthropological, economic, and historical events. Some jokes are intensely context-dependent and people who make or forward these jokes want to create social bonding through shared humour and taboo breaking (Thurlow 2003). A major strategy for ideological play is creating incongruities in what is said, between what is said and the situation, or between what is said and what is done. What makes us laugh is feeling of superiority over someone who behaves in a dumb way, our surprise at the incongruity of something, or our released anxiety. Seeing our frustrations and concerns reflected back at us by someone who seems to understand a similar predicament or situation, and the levity found in these jokes which are reactions to those predicaments improve our mood (Martyn et al. 2011). In addition to the effect of linguistic play or ideological play, good timing and taking the best advantage within the context are of crucial importance; an important difference between SMS jokes and other kinds of jokes is the very fact that most SMS jokes are made, sent, and forwarded in line with recent events in a society; this clearly makes them more effective and funny.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the above-stated considerations, the present study addressed the following questions:

- RQ1. What linguistic and ideological strategies underlie SMS jokes which make them funny?
- RQ2. What similarities and/or differences in Farsi and English in the use of such strategies can be specified?

METHOD

The data for this study was collected from different sources including friends who sent to the researchers their recent SMS jokes through cell phones or e-mail, Internet sites, and

SMS magazines. These various sources were chosen to ensure the diversity of data and generalizability of the results.

Twenty four thousand Farsi SMS jokes and 1500 English SMS jokes were collected and analysed for their underlying strategies. As there was no framework in the analysis of SMS jokes, the first thing to do was to create a typology of these strategies. Then, the presence, the frequency of these strategies, and the way they were used by the two languages were investigated.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Different strategies with different frequencies were observed in SMS jokes. In total, 20 strategies were identified, which are explained briefly below through examples from both Persian and English. One important point to remember is that sometimes a joke uses more than one strategy and there is overlap in the underlying strategies used, but usually one of them is dominant, which has been considered in our classification. The strategies include: the use of ambiguity, mismatch between utterance and context, ethnic slurs, group stereotypes, phonological similarity, juxtaposition, code-switching, exaggeration, reference to special social and historical events, rhythm and poetry, misinterpretation or mistranslation, indirect criticism, use of contradiction, misleading the mind, oxymoron, sophistication, creating images, question-answer riddles, using abbreviations, and absurd SMS.

The Use of Ambiguity

Using ambiguity which is a common strategy is a play on double meaning. It can be lexical, i.e., a word in a sentence has two meanings both of which are true in that sentence, or structural, that is, the structure of the sentence allows for two different interpretations. In Persian SMS jokes, only lexical ambiguity was observed in this study. Puns can be used as an important source for creating ambiguity. A pun is a humorous verbalization that has two interpretations couched purposefully, manifesting itself in one form or two very similar forms (e.g. homonymy, polysemy, or homophony) but allowing for two different interpretations by the audience (Dynel 2009). A pun works like a riddle establishing rapport and pleasing the audience when he/she solves it because it flatters the audience's intellectual capabilities (Mulken et al. 2005).

A Farsi Sample for Lexical Ambiguity:
*Khanoomeh mire bank poole yaranahasho begire, karmande bank mige poolo mibarid ya berizam be hesabe **jari**toon? Khanoom mige: elahi **jari**m bemire. Berizesh be hesabe khodam.*

A woman goes to the bank to receive her subsidized money. The bank teller asks her: "Will you take it or should I put it in your **checking** account?" The woman says: "May God kill my **sister-in-law**. Put the money in my own account."

In this joke the word 'jari' in Persian has two meanings 'checking' or 'current' account and 'sister-in-law'. As women are notorious for their relationship with their sisters-in-law, this creates fun and laughter. A reference to *subsidized money* given to people by the Iranian government per month and the connotation which comes to the Iranian reader's mind, to the problems this money has caused, intensifies the humour of this joke.

An English Sample for Lexical Ambiguity:
Success is a **relative** term. It brings so many **relatives**

In this joke the first 'relative' means not absolute and the second 'relative' means family, acquaintances, and kin.

An English Sample for Structural Ambiguity:

Teacher: Tomorrow, here will be a lecture **on Sun**.
Student: Sorry, I will not be able to attend it.
Teacher: Why?
Student: My mother will not allow me to go so far.

In this joke, the phrase **on Sun** creates two meanings: about the Sun, and over the Sun, so the student who is ignorant of the necessities of the situation of a classroom misunderstands the meaning of the sentence.

Mismatch between Utterance and Context

Many jokes are derived from serious events and situations in our daily life (Martyn, et al, 2011). Sometimes what is said is incongruent with the present situation creating an atmosphere of fun.

A Farsi Sample
Ghazanfar dare ba narenjak bazi mikone, behesh migan mitereke ha. Mige eyb nadare yeki dige daram

Ghazanfar is playing with a grenade. People say: Don't play with it; it may explode. He answers: Don't worry, I have another one.

Ghazanfar, a famous fictitious character in Iran who is famous for being candid and simple-minded, thinks of this dangerous situation, that is, the possibility of the explosion of the **grenade**, in a way as if it were just a **balloon**, thus ignoring the danger and saying something which does not match the context.

An English Sample
The best way to propose to a girl: Take her to the sea, ask her to sit in a boat, then take the boat to the sea, then say to her: "Marry me, or leave my boat."

Surely, asking someone to leave a boat in the middle of the sea is something irrational; this mismatch between utterance and the context produces laughter here.

Ethnic Slurs

Every community has its target groups for its ethnic slurs and racial discrimination. This kind of joke is usually targeted at ethnic minorities pinpointing their points of weakness or

difference; it can take other forms like people of the capital vs. people of small cities, and standard language vs. local varieties.

A Farsi Sample
*Be **torke** migan delkharashtarin sahneyi ke didi chi boode? Mige: Too zelezeleye Bam dashtam ye bacha ro khak mikardam, hey migoft amoo man zendeam.*

A **Turkish** man is asked to tell about the saddest event in his life. He answers: " During the earthquake of Bam City, I was burying the body of a kid and he kept telling me: "I am alive, I am alive."

In this joke, Turkish people are shown to be simple-minded people who can't understand simple things.

An English Sample
5 differences between **Turkish** and ET: ET looked better, ET learned English, ET came alone, ET had his own bike and wanted to go home!

In this joke a strong objection to **Turkish immigrants** has been expressed through the comparison between the fictitious character ET, a creature that comes to the Earth from space and then leaves, with Turkish immigrants, thus criticizing the government for not taking actions against immigrants.

Group stereotypes

Another strategy for creating fun in jokes which is similar to the above strategy is providing stereotypes of different groups; these groups include different professions, social groups, or political groups especially opposing ones.

A Farsi Sample
*Taraf edeaye payambari mikone, migan ketabet koo? Mige ketab nadaram **jozveh** migam.*

Someone claims to be a prophet sent by God. People ask him; "Where is your book then?" He answers: "I have no book, I will give you a **pamphlet**."

In this joke, a straight criticism is presented against teachers, especially university teachers who use **pamphlets** instead of well published books. The idea is intensified when a covert analogy is made between teachers and prophets and the fact that the most famous prophets had a book, and the fact that in Iran there is the belief that a teacher's job is as spiritual and valuable as the job of a prophet.

An English Sample
A typical student flips a coin and thinks. If head, will go to sleep. If tail, will watch a movie. If stands, will listen music. If stays in air, will study.

This joke is a typical one about students who are reluctant to study and look for ways to escape from studying.

Phonological Similarity

Sometimes, homophones are used to create a funny situation or to create a contrast which leads to laughter.

A Farsi Sample
*Kaleske kalameyi ast dar esfahan baraye eshare be **miveye naras**.*

Carriage is a word in Isfahan which refers to **a fruit which is not ripe yet**.

Here, the joke is founded on the phonological similarity of a whole sentence in Isfahani accent 'kaleske' meaning 'It is not ripe yet.' and the standard word 'kaleske' meaning 'carriage'.

An English Sample
What did the turkey say to the chicken?   **Gobble, gobble**.

Here the word 'gobble' which is actually the characteristic sound made by a turkey cock comes to be interpreted as 'eat' in the context where a turkey and a chicken meet.

Juxtaposition

Collocation has always attracted attention and one of the criteria for literary expertise is the writers' ability to innovate collocations. By putting two or more words together, we can create extra meaning that is not inferred from the use of just one word. This is also the same for juxtaposing two or more sentences to create bound fun; we would rather call it "bound fun" because the delicacy and the fun of the whole joke will not be understood if we use just one sentence out of a collection of sentences; actually, the first sentences design the setting of the joke for the punch line to be effective.

A Farsi Sample
*Vakoneshe mardan be range mooye jadide **hamsar**:*
tehrani: vay azizam mah boodi mahtar shodi
lor: harchi dermiyarem sare mah be ashghal bamal saret
tork: bebakhshid khanoom ba man ezdevaj mikonid?

The reaction of men to the new color of the hair of their **wives**:
Tehrani: Wow, my darling, you were pretty, you are prettier now.
Lor (an ethnic group in Iran): Whatever I earn, you just buy garbage to put on your hair.
Turkish: Sorry lady, will you marry me?

If you just use one of the three sentences, no laughter will result but juxtaposing them creates a big laughter. The first sentence which shows a normal reaction of men leads to the second one which shows the anger of the husband and then we reach the punch line which is the

simple-mindedness of Turkish people. Although this joke can be classified under the category of 'ethnic slurs', it's better to consider it as one belonging to 'juxtaposition' category because the presence of the other two sentences intensifies the effect of the joke greatly.

*An English Sa*mple
Calendar of love:

January = Rose	February = propose	March = gift	April = lift
May = chatting	June = dating	July = miss	August = kiss
September = marriage	October = broke up	November = rest	December = next

In this joke the months of the calendar are put together each one showing the steps of a marriage. The fun lies in the fact that everything is happening so fast which is not rational when we want to decide for our life. The climax of the joke which releases our tension and deep thoughts and concerns! is the last month 'December' which brings a burst of laughter.

Code-switching

This happens especially in situations we have diglossia or situations we have different dialects; the switches of the codes, i.e. languages or dialects, usually happen in an inappropriate way and this creates a funny atmosphere. This change of code can be between two different languages or within just one language which has two or more varieties, registers, styles, etc.

*A Farsi Sam*ple
Ghazanfar ba ye dokhtare khareji namzad mikone. Mikhad jelo mamanesh kelas bezare be namzadash mige: I love you. Namzadesh mige: I love you too. Ghazanfar mige: I love you three.

Ghazanfar is betrothed to a foreign girl. He decides to show off in front of his mother, so he says to his fiancée: "I love you." His fiancée answers: "I love you too." Ghazanfar says: "I love you three."

In this joke, Ghazanfar (a fictitious character in Iran) whose English is not so good or focuses on something else mistakes 'too' for 'two' and this mistake is the essence of the joke.

*An English Sam*ple
side effect of excess study

A guy went to a restaurant, he wanted to see the menu but he forgot what it is called. He asked the waiter syllabus lana zara

Exaggeration

Sometimes jokes are made by exaggerating one aspect of an event or object usually in a negative way. Exaggeration or hyperbole jokes usually start with a common image, and then highlight one or more aspects of the same image to such an extent that the following pictures in the minds of the readers become ridiculous and funny (Strong, 2008).

*A Farsi Sa*mple
Khar bekhar ama az irankhodro nakhar

Buy a donkey but don't buy anything from Irankhodro.

The makers and senders of this one-liner SMS are dissatisfied with the quality of the cars made by *Irankhodro*, the biggest car-making factory in Iran; the discontent is so great that they believe buying and riding a donkey is better than buying the products of this factory. The exaggeration strategy used is funny if you have had the experience of buying *Irankhodor* cars of course; this is the prerequisite knowledge to understand the sarcasm in this joke.

An English Sample
Guide: I welcome you all to Niagara Falls. These are the world's largest waterfalls and the sound intensity of the waterfall is so high, even 20 supersonic planes passing by can't be heard. Now may I request the ladies to keep quiet so that we can hear the Niagara Falls?

The joke uses exaggeration to criticize ladies for their being talkative. The double comparison between Niagara Falls and the supersonic planes, and between the ladies and Niagara Falls adds to the fun of the joke.

Reference to Special Social and Historical Events
Many jokes are people's reactions to social events; people have come to distinguish SMS as an easy and effective medium which is easily accessed by all for showing their content or discontent with or just the funny point in events around them. Sometimes, joke makers allude to historical events or characters to clarify their points better. They may also involve distortions in the form of phoneme, word, or even phrase substitution, subtraction, or addition to available materials such as famous quotations, poems, or slogans.

A *Farsi Sample*
harja sokhan az etemad ast man her her mikhandam mahmood reza khavari

Whenever trust is talked about, I start laughing. Mahmood-Reza Khavari

This joke has an explicit reference to the recent embezzlement known as the Great Embezzlement in Iran which was committed by Mahmood-Reza Khavari, the former manager of Melli Bank of Iran who escaped to Canada. At the beginning of this joke, which is not the funny part of course, the slogan of Melli Bank is used 'Whenever trust is talked about', and the second part of the slogan 'the name of Melli Bank glows' has been replaced by 'I start laughing'.

An English Sample
One thing's for sure about Clinton. He sure doesn't neglect **domestic affairs**!

The joke has a clear reference to Clinton's affair with a young woman in The White House. The ambiguity of the term 'domestic affairs', also meaning internal problems of the country, helps create the punch line.

Rhythm and Poetry

The use of rhythm and poetry is another strategy which is used to create fun. If the same ideas are expressed in ordinary non-literary language, nothing will be funny anymore. A common technique in Iran is to borrow famous verses from famous poets and change part of it.

> *A Farsi S*ample
> *Bejoz ghome shohar ke virangarand bani adam azaye yekdigarand*
>
> Except for the husband's relatives who are destructive Adam's sons are body limbs, to say;

This joke entails changes to a famous poem by the great Iranian poet *Sa'di* and his famous verse which has been carved on the United Nations building entrance. The real verse reads:

> Adam's sons are body limbs, to say;   For they're created of the same clay
> Should one organ be troubled by pain,   Others would suffer severe strain, (Vahid, 2004)

> *An English* Sample
> I love yr smile, yr face, yr eyes. damn, I am good at telling lies

In this joke the poem is followed by a surprise ending; the sweetness of the beginning verse and the bitterness of realizing the fact that what was said at first is just a lie creates a cold fun.

Misinterpretation or Mistranslation

Another widely used strategy both in Farsi and English is misinterpretation by a person or mistranslation which leads to misinterpretation; this in turn, will lead to misunderstanding and a verbal or physical reaction which is in contrast with real circumstances. The reader of such jokes is aware of everything observing the whole scene and this leads to laughter.

> *A Farsi Sam*ple
> *Ghazanfar mire talime ranandegi, migan chetor bood. Mige khoob bood vali in morabiye man kheyli adame mazhabi bood. Man harja mipichidam migoft **ya hosein**.*
>
> Ghazanfar decides to learn driving. After his first training session, his friends ask him how the training had been. He says; "It was OK. but my coach was very religious; whenever I reached a U-turn, he used to say **Jesus Christ**!

The fun of this joke lies in Ghazanfar's misinterpretation of the reaction of his coach. The coach cries YA HOSEIN (an expression of fear calling an Imam, something like Jesus Christ in English) at U-turns because he is afraid of the reckless driving of Ghazanfar, but he thinks that the coach is a religious person.

*An English Samp*le
A baby mosquito came back after its 1st flight. Dad asked how did u feel? He replied dad it was wonderful. Everyone was clapping for me.

Interestingly, this SMS joke is a close equivalent of the Farsi one above. The fun of this joke lies in the baby mosquito's misinterpretation of the clapping of people; he thinks people have been applauding his efforts for his first flight without knowing what danger he has escaped, that is, people trying to kill him.

Indirect Criticism

A common strategy in SMS jokes is indirect criticism of different issues. In this strategy, instead of attacking something in a straightforward method, the consequences are listed. The lengthy nature of these kinds of jokes is the main difference of this strategy with other strategies used for objection or complaint. Sarcasm and irony also use indirect forms of speech or writing; here, the literal impact of an ironic utterance is opposite to the implicit meaning intended by the speaker. The copresense of at least two different interpretations and the contextual mismatch of the context and utterance help increase the effect of irony. There is also a general agreement that irony invariably conveys the speaker's evaluation (Dynel, 2009; Attardo, et al, 2003).

*A Farsi Sa*mple
*Salam. ma hal nadarim sms beferstim bad began chaharshanbeh eyde chaharshanbe ham began panjshanbe eyde akharesh ham befahmim doshanbeh eyd boode. Hamine ke hast. Az hamin emro*oz eydetoon mobarak.

Hi. I am not in a good mood to send you an SMS, then understand that Wednesday is Eid, then on Wednesday they say Thursday is Eid, then we come to know that Monday has been the Eid. That's how it goes. From now accept my congratulation for Eid.

If someone doesn't have the background knowledge of Muslims' *Fetr Eid* (the festive day after the last day of Ramadan when Muslims celebrate their success of fasting for one month), he/she will not understand the cold sarcasm in this joke. As the Lunar Calendar based on which Muslims do many rituals is not fixed and depends on seeing the MOON, a common problem which is repeated every year is deciding on the last day of Ramadan. On one hand, people are banned from fasting on *Fetr Eyd* and on the other hand, they must know exactly when Ramadan ends so that they can have weddings or trips or so, but most of the time they will not know anything about the end of Ramadan until the very last moments. Sometimes there are even mistakes like the mistake the King of Saudi Arabia did in announcing the end of Ramadan in 2011. This joke is an indirect criticism of this problem which affects people's lives in different ways.

*An English Sam*ple
A new study finds that it takes humans 30% longer to lie than it does to tell the truth. See, that's why political speeches are so long.

This joke clearly accuses politicians of lying but it does it in an indirect way. Sometimes a direct attack has less effect than a direct one. The strategy that the joke has used is the one used highly by politicians of course!

Use of contradiction

A contradiction between what people say, what people think, and what they do creates funny situations. Paradox jokes in which a statement contradicts itself are of this kind.

*A Farsi Sa*mple
pesarjan begir bekhab. Shabe ghadr shabe **bidar Mandan** *nist, shabe* **bidar shodan** *ast.*

Darling, just sleep. Ghadr Night is not the time for **avoiding sleep**; it's time for **awakening**.

The joke is using a contradiction between what people do and what they should actually do at Ghadr Night, a very important night in the fasting month of Ramadan; Muslims believe that the destiny of the next year will be decided for the people on this night, so they stay awake and pray. Some people don't know the real hidden meaning of these prays and cannot benefit from their staying awake because no awakening of their conscience happens.

*An English Sam*ple
Your future depends on your dreams, so go to sleep.

Usually, our future depends on our efforts to achieve our dreams and no one can reach his/her dreams by sleeping. An ambiguous use of the word dream in this joke creates fun.

Misleading the Mind

Another strategy which is used widely in both languages is to mislead the mind of the reader of the SMS. At first the reader is exposed to serious sentences and then at the end something which he/she doesn't expect is mentioned; the punch line is usually something negative about the reader or something positive about the sender. The result is always a surprise ending.

*A Farsi Samp*le
ba marefat, khoshtip, khosh akhlagh, mehraboon, cheghadr az khodam tariff kardam. Ye kam to az khodet begoo.

Having manly characters, handsome, well-mannered, kind, I talked a lot about myself. Now, it's your turn to tell about yourself.

*An English Samp*le
U R 100% beautiful, U R 100% lovely, U R 100% sweet, U R 100% nice, and U R 100% stupid to believe these words.

In both jokes the reader of the SMS thinks that all the nice features mentioned are addressed to him/her but the punch line is something against what he/she thinks.

Oxymoron

A strategy which is used in English but not in Farsi is the use of oxymoron. An oxymoron is usually defined as a phrase in which two words of contradictory meaning (e.g. deafening silence) are brought together. The way it creates fun is to put some oxymorons together leading to the last one which is the funniest one among all; it actually uses the juxtaposition technique to intensify the effect.

*An English S*ample
- Clearly misunderstood!
- Exact estimate
- Small crowd
- Act naturally
- Found missing
- Fully empty
- The only choice
- Pretty ugly
- Seriously funny
- Original copies
  &
  The mother of all
- happily married!!!

Sophistication

In this kind of joke, a deliberately invalid argument displaying ingenuity in reasoning is presented in the hope of deceiving someone; it is a kind of falsification by the use of sophistry, i.e. misleading by means of specious fallacies.

*A Farsi Sam*ple
yeki be refighesh mige shenidam too zarf shostan be zanet komak mikoni? mige khob mage chiye? oonam too rakht shostan be man komak mikone

Someone tells his friend: "I have heard that you help your wife with the dishes?" His friend answers: "What's wrong with that? She helps with the clothes in turn."

In this joke, the friend who wants to hide his being henpecked talks in a way as if washing the clothes is his own duty and that his wife compensates for his help.

*An English Sampl*e
Practice makes perfect ….. but nobody's perfect …… so why practice?

Creating images

Sometimes, SMS makers and senders activate the readers' minds by making a comparison of some abstract idea with something more tangible and more concrete. The readers' trying to connect these abstract and concrete images leads to a moment of illumination which is funny. It can be done in the form of a simile or a metaphor.

A Farsi Sample
eshgh *mesle* ***saate sheni*** *mimoone. hamzaman ke ghalb ro por mikone maghz ro khali mikone*

Love is like a **sand watch**. It fills the heart but empties the brain.

The image of a sand watch which has two parts, one up like a man's brain or head and one down like a man's heart, is the key to understand the bitter sarcasm in this joke.

An English Sample
Since light travels faster than sound, people appear bright until you hear them speak.

This joke makes a comparison between people's face and light, and people's speaking and sound. The idea is that when people start speaking you will come to know them better and that usually what people say shows their low character and stupidity. In Iran, there is a proverb which goes "The art and the weakness of a man will be hidden as long as he keeps quiet".

Question-Answer Riddles

Another strategy which is used in both languages, though more in English, is the one which takes the form of a riddle which consists of some questions and answers; they usually ask for finding a similarity between two things which are semantically far from each other, a difference between two things, or the reason for an event.

A Farsi Sample
Midooni shebahate zane dovom ba enerzhiye hasteyi chiye? Ba inke har do haghe mosalame ma hastan vali ma nemitoonim be oona dastresi dashte bashim hata dar hade azemayesh

Do you know the similarity between the second wife and nuclear energy? Although both are our absolute rights, we can't have access to any of them even for experimentation.

This joke asks for the similarity between the second wife and nuclear energy. A reference to the famous slogan in Iran "Nuclear energy is our absolute right" intensifies the effect. The comparison brings into the mind of the reader the idea that men should be allowed to marry more than one woman!

An English Sample
What is the similarity between Bill Gates and me?
Don't know?
He never comes to my house and I never go to his house.

Using Abbreviations

Another common strategy used in SMS jokes is using abbreviations to introduce new ideas; another version is to suppose that an ordinary word is made of the initial of some words.

A Farsi Sample
Zndgy (pronounced zendegy) az to olgoo migire. z zaviyeye negahe to, n navaye kalame to, d dargahe abrooye to, g gisooye parishane to, y yaroo sarekari baba

ZNDGY **(Life)** is based on you: **Z** *zaviyeye negahe to* (your view point), **n** *navaye kalame to* (your tone of voice), **d** *dargahe abrooye to* (your eyebrow), **g** *gisooye bolande to* (your long hair), **y** *yaroo sarekari baba* (I was just fooling you!).

An En*glish Sample*
My heart problem has reached a critical stage. Doctor says there r only 2 options left: ICU or UC Me.

In this joke the abbreviation ICU which is a medical ward for seriously ill patients frightens the reader. Then the reader comes to realize that ICU has been used as the initials for I See You. This leads to a sigh of relief followed by laughter. Sometimes we can find fun in the most serious things!

Absurd SMS
Here something is said which is inconsistent with reason, or logic, or common sense. This incongruity invites ridicule.

A Farsi Sample
yaroo miofte too chah mige shans avordam tahesh soorakh nabood

Someone falls into a deep well. When rescued, he says: "Thanks God the bottom of the well was not open."

An English Sample
Birdy birdy in the sky   dropped a poopy in my eye   I dont worry I dont cry   Im just happy that cows cant fly

In the Farsi joke the idea of the bottom of a well being open, and in the English joke the idea of a cow flying are absurd ideas.

DISCUSSION
Generally, in this study, 20 strategies in SMS jokes were identified. Seven out of these twenty strategies were purely of a linguistic nature, including the use of ambiguity, phonological similarity, code-switching, rhythm and poetry, misinterpretation and mistranslation, oxymoron, and using abbreviations; they used the linguistic resources available in the structure or the lexicon of a language to create fun. The rest, including a mismatch between utterance and context, ethnic slurs, group stereotypes, juxtaposition, exaggeration, reference to special social and historical events, indirect criticism, use of contradiction, misleading the mind, sophistication, creating images, question-answer riddles, and absurd SMS mostly used ideological plays to create fun, using social, political, anthropological, and historical resources in the society. The only strategies which were not observed in Farsi were *oxymoron* and *structural ambiguity*. The following differences were observed between the two languages:

No case for structural ambiguity was observed in Farsi, although lexical ambiguity was used freely. This difference is mainly because of the differences between the structure of Farsi and English. For example, using repetition and synonyms, which are a characteristic of Farsi doesn't leave any room for structural ambiguity.

The next difference is that Farsi texters use the strategy of "mismatch between utterance and context" twice as much as English texters do. This is compatible with the fact that in Persian literature and the Iranian society, there are many fictitious characters such as *Ghazanfar*, *Molānasreddin*, *Bohlool*, etc. who are famous for their low understanding about the situation, though sometimes their remarks include heavy sarcasm in which they criticize people, especially kings and people of power.

Moreover, it seems that "ethnic slurs" is used heavily in Iran showing that different ethnic groups in Iran try to pinpoint the weaknesses of other groups, or their own superiority over others through jokes. Sometimes these jokes circulate all over the country, as it is the case for different ethnic groups in Iran, like Lor people for being simple-minded, Turkish-speaking people for being simple-minded, Rashti people for being unbiased, Isfahani people for being Scottish, and Tehrani people for being spoiled or being clever, and sometimes these jokes are just specific to a certain geographical area, as it is the case with Hamedani people for being stingy, Malayeri people for their going to Hamedan for even the smallest needs and shopping, etc. English jokes of this kind are made and sent to others about ethnic minorities like black people, American Indians, red-colored inhabitants, and immigrants, especially Chinese and Turkish. More recent jokes focus on Arabs and Middle East immigrants; this shows how people, and even jokes, are affected by political debates and propaganda. These kinds of jokes serve to establish group identity, to sustain difference, or to declare superiority over others (Moran, 2003). There are strong pessimistic views about these kinds of jokes. Many people consider them as offensive. Salehi (2011) believes that these kinds of jokes are new in Iran dating the phenomenon back to a short time before the revolution of Iran; he believes that making jokes about Lor, Turkish, Arab, Azeri, Kurdish, and Balooch people was and is an attempt for separating these races and breaking the unity and solidarity of different races of Iran. On the other hand, Park et. al (2006) have a positive view toward these kinds of jokes concluding that, for example, comedies starring racial minorities have facilitated racial tolerance and acceptance of minorities by the mainstream culture of the United States.

Contrary to 'ethnic slurs', the number of English jokes using group stereotypes is more than that of Farsi. English people make fun of different groups almost four times Iranians do. In Farsi, teachers vs. students, fathers vs. children, mothers vs. children, doctors vs. patients, and a favourite one, that is, husbands vs. wives are the target of these kinds of jokes. In English, in addition to these groups there are stereotypes for different university disciplines (mathematics vs. physics), doctors vs. nurses, customers vs. barmaids, the blue-collar vs. the white-collar, etc. There are also many mama jokes, computer jokes (about computer experts and computer addicts), marriage SMS (in which the main themes are either women who are very eager to trap and marry a man, or the foolishness of a man who wants to marry, or ladies' love of jewellery, shopping, and appearance, unhappy spouses, husbands betraying wives, etc.), bar jokes, exam jokes, blonde jokes, cricket jokes, college jokes, etc. English people include more groups, especially professions, in their jokes. One reason for this may be the fact that "profession" is a determining factor of social class in England and especially the United States but not in Iran; people in England and the United States are more concerned about their jobs and there is a hidden competition between people so as to show that their

jobs are superior over other jobs. The point here is that for all these groups there are defined characteristics known by all people and an explicit or implicit reference to these characteristics creates laughter. We even have jokes inspired by famous characters, for example, Clinton jokes or Mr. Bean jokes in English, and Jokes about "Ostad Asadi" (a football player famous for his mistakes, which had disastrous results for the National Football Team of Iran), "Ali Daei" criticized for his insistence to play football and his bad record in the World Cup of 2006, in Farsi. These kinds of jokes circulate the country as long as these characters are at their jobs or they are salient and effective in the society; they diminish after a while and lose their *freshness*, an important aspect which intensifies the effect and the fun of the joke.

Also, in Iran, the strategy of "phonological similarity" is frequently used when the joke teller or sender wants to show the difference between the standard Farsi language which is Tehrani Farsi in Iran and other local varieties of Farsi. In English, this strategy is mostly used to find a similarity between animal sounds and real words, though we have some rare cases of this kind in Farsi too.

The next is that "juxtaposition" is used more in English jokes; one reason may be that these jokes have a lengthy character and people of Iran, who are concerned a lot about their costs try to avoid using lengthy SMSs. Another difference found is that Iranian people use more "exaggeration" joke, which is exactly a reflection on the culture of the Iranian people, a reflection on the fact that they are used to exaggerate; this is seen a lot in their everyday life and Persian literature.

Also, Iranian people are a lot concerned about social and political issues, especially after the Islamic revolution of Iran which has a record of an election per year and the involvement and interest of Iranian people in talking about such issues even if they have no expertise in these issues; this has led to Iranian people' overuse of the strategy "reference to special social and historical events". This may also be a reflection of the fact that Iranian people find SMS jokes the easiest way to express their ideas and reactions to social and political events.

Regarding the use of the strategy of "misleading the mind", a common technique in Faasi is to start with a famous sentence or proverb or quotation and then change the last part of the sentence in a way that is not expected. In English, this kind of joke which leads to a kind of cognitive incongruity is widely used for *April Fool* jokes, a concept which is absent in the Iranian culture.

Sophistication is also a good indicator of the culture of the Iranian people; they use the "sophistication" strategy almost four times English people do. Iranian people are skilled at justifying their acts through sophistry, especially when they have done something wrong and they need a way out.

Also, Iranian people seem to be more imaginative and creative in making comparisons between abstract and concrete notions; they do so almost two times more than English-speaking people. And finally, using abbreviations is more common in English maybe because the Latin alphabet used by the English language lends itself more easily to create such jokes.

An interesting case was also observed. The presupposition of the researchers was that Iranian people use "rhythm and poetry" more because they are more concerned with literature and especially poetry, but the results showed that there is no significant difference in the use of this strategy by Iranian and English texters. The following tables summarize the results of the corpus analysis done in this study.

Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4: SMS Joke Strategies and Their Frequencies
Farsi (2400 samples) and English (1500 samples)

	Use of Strategies					
	The use of ambiguity		Mismatch between utterance and context	Ethnic slurs	Group stereotypes	Phonological similarity
	Structural	Lexical				
Farsi	0	32	96	296	184	32
Percentage	1.33		4	12.33	7.66	1.33
English	8	62	30	20	471	19
Percentage	4.66		2	1.33	31.4	1.26

	Use of Strategies				
	Juxtaposition	Code-switching	Exaggeration	Reference to special social and historical events	Rhythm and poetry
Farsi	48	32	160	176	128
Percentage	2	1.33	6.66	7.33	5.33
English	67	20	23	20	93
Percentage	4.46	1.33	1.53	1.33	6.2

	Use of Strategies			
Misinterpretation and mistranslation	Indirect criticism	Use of contradiction	Misleading the mind	Oxymoron
70	26	176	480	0
2.91	1.08	7.33	20	0
27	24	110	260	21
1.8	1.6	7.33	17.33	1.4

	Use of Strategies				
	Sophistication	Creating images	Question-answer riddles	Using abbreviations	Absurd SMS
Farsi	160	136	56	16	96
Percentage	6.66	5.66	2.33	.66	4
English	27	41	39	80	38
Percentage	1.8	2.73	2.6	5.33	2.53

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Language is an intrinsic part of our everyday reality and we put our linguistic knowledge to use to give shape to our internal thoughts (Widdowson 2007). People negotiate, realize, or reject ideologies and even identities through the use of language, a factor for expressing our thoughts stronger than cultural artefacts such as dress, food, housing, etc. (Wardhaugh 2006). Human cognition and human experience are closely related to humans' use of language (Johnstone 2008). An important manifestation of language is making jokes about different issues. People use SMS as a new form of communication technology which is fast, cheap, and indirect in the sense that they can freely express their thoughts and ideologies without having to see their audience face to face. SMS can fulfil both transactional and sociability functions; people exploit the sociability aspect of SMS through SMS jokes. Similarities between strategies used by different nations show how the concept of "global village" is spreading and the fact that there is a transfer of cultures between cultures and that technologies may bring new concepts and cultures with them. The differences also show the local dyeing of these concepts. SMS jokes may be the most common way of expressing concerns by people. Victor Borge, the Danish comedian, says, "humour is something that thrives between man's aspirations and limitations. There is more logic in humour than anything else. Because, you see, humour is truth."

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