

Ambiguity, Inference, and Relevance in Kurdish Humour

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the interaction between ambiguity, inference, and relevance in Kurdish humour discourse within a pragmatic framework. It attempts to investigate how ambiguous Kurdish expressions: lexical, syntactic, or pragmatic, function as cognitive shooters that lead listeners toward humorous interpretations through processes of inferencing. Intentional ambiguity is the basic element that humour in both Kurdish and English often relies on. It requires the listeners to select among competing interpretations and reach optimal relevance. By analyzing a set of Kurdish humorous written and spoken conversations, the study detects the pragmatic mechanisms through which humour is structured and built via the interaction between prearranged meaning and contextual inference. The findings show that ambiguity should not be considered a communicative failure, but it is a strategic method that requests inferential engagement, producing cognitive pleasure and surprise. The present research highlights the universality of inferential humour processing while emphasizing culture-specific patterns in Kurdish humour construction and comprehension.

Keywords: ambiguity, inference, relevance, Kurdish humour.

INTRODUCTION

Humour is deeply established in the complications of literature, history, politics, and social life, and is often characterized by quick intelligence, indirect irony and punning, and a philosophical ability to produce light-heartedness in hard times. For non-native speakers, and even for the natives or linguistic insiders, the punchline of a Kurdish humorous expression can be an indefinable phenomenon. Indeed, the laugh that explodes naturally in a native context regularly weakens when translated, not only due to linguistic gaps, but also because the humour is strongly tied to unexpressed cultural conventions, historical implications, and intricate linguistic play. Such a gap between the practice of the humour by native speakers and its clarification (or failure) for a non-native indicates the existence of a central mechanism of communication. In other words, the interaction between what is overtly spoken and what is covertly inferred. It is at this relationship of ambiguity, inference, and relevance that this work is positioned.

Ambiguity

Ambiguity and 'ambiguous' come from the Latin word (ambiguous) which is coined by combining ambi- (which means "both") and agere ("to drive"). Ambidextrous combines the same prefix with dexter (meaning skillful). So each of these words carries the meaning of "both" in its history; one with the sense of "both meanings". Ambiguity may be used to refer either to something (such as a word) which has multiple meanings, or to a more general state of uncertainty (Murphy, 2001).

Some writers and authors use ambiguity on purpose in writing to cover a character's intentions, or to deceive the readers for the sake of mystery and excitement. It can also be employed as a literary device intended to lead

readers, listeners, and/or observers to “a deeper, more personal meaning than might be conveyed by the words or images used in a piece of prose, a poem, or a work of art”. (Boone, 2007)

Sentences and expressions containing jokes and touches of humour often find their humorous influence through ambiguity in the language. Ambiguous linguistic structures frequently have more than one meaning and sense. These different meanings can provoke diverse and humorous senses in specific contexts. In many humour and jokes, writers usually play with words to convey double reference. Consequently, ambiguity becomes a significant means of producing puns in jokes, or riddles. Ambiguity is also intentionally used in different contexts to stimulate a sense of wit, make a sentence more attractive, or make listeners curious about it. Some newspaper and media headlines and advertisements are ambiguous to attract the readers' attention and provoke their curiosity to read more (Seewoester, 2009).

Charina (2017) claims that ambiguity arises when a sentence has more than one implication. Ambiguity may result from an ambiguous lexicon in which one word possesses more than one meaning or because of the syntactic structure of the sentence (word order). The context also contributes to determining whether the sentence could be interpreted differently and thus turn out to be ambiguous. Ambiguity has become one of the distinct phenomena in the history of language studies and semantics in particular.

Another important function of ambiguity is as a language device frequently used to generate puns or touches of humour by providing different insights into how playing with words can influence the interpretation of meaning leading to humorous or funny senses. Due to the multiple interpretations caused by ambiguity, diverse senses of a particular sentence may complicate the meanings and present dissimilar comprehensions which may provoke humour in certain contexts. This idea is supported by previous studies such as Tabossi (1988), Laurian (1992), MacDonald, et al (1994), Gorfein (2001), Duffy et al (2001), Giora (2003), Zabalbeascoa (2005), Lew (2009).

Ambiguity is of different types. It occurs at different linguistic levels. The main two types are lexical and syntactic ambiguity. Both types are used to create humour and it is mainly caused by these two types of ambiguity.

Lexical Ambiguity

Lexical ambiguity is caused by polysemous words or homonymous words. Syntactic ambiguity is caused by word order. Lexical ambiguity occurs at the word level, while syntactic ambiguity occurs at the sentence level.

Lexical ambiguity is considered the clearest and the most common type of ambiguity. It takes place when a certain word or lexeme possesses an extra meaning or multiple meanings. In a sentence like "William has a bat", the word "bat" refers to either an animal or a kind of stick used in baseball, so it is lexically ambiguous. Lexical ambiguity can be classified into two subtypes: homonymous and polysemous. Murphy (2010) differentiates between the two arguing that when a couple of words have an identical spoken or written form but possess different separate unrelated meanings, it is considered a case of homonymy, while when it has different related meanings, it is a case of polysemy (Makroum, 2021).

Homonymy is the case when certain words have identical spelling and/or pronunciation but refer to different unrelated meanings. Homonymy encompasses three sub-types: homophones, homographs, and absolute (Krovetz, 1997).

Homophones are words that have the same pronunciation but with different spellings and different meanings. For instance, the word (flour) and the word (flower) are pronounced identically /flaʊ/ but they have different spellings and are pronounced the same /flaʊə/, but their meanings are quite different (flour means powder made from grain, and flower means part of a plant) (Beretta & Poeppel, 2005).

Homographs are words with identical spelling but with different pronunciations and different meanings. The word "read", for example, is a homograph since it has two different ways of pronunciations (/ri:d/ and /red/) with two distinct meanings (present and past of the verb read) (Panman, 1982).

Absolute homonymy: It takes place when a couple of words possess both the same spelling and the same pronunciation with different meanings. For example, the word (lie) is absolute homonymy since it has one form in writing and pronunciation but two different meanings (a flat position of the body) or (speaking falsely) (Makroum, 2021).

Apresjan (1974) described “the polysemy of a word A in a given language with the meanings ai and aj as being regular if “there exists at least one other word B with the meanings bi and bj, which are semantically distinguished from each other in exactly the same way as ai and aj (...).” Examples in English are terms for animals, which (with some exceptions) can be used to denote either the animal or the meat of that animal (e.g., chicken, rabbit, turkey, etc.)” (p.16).

On the other hand, irregular polysemy is defined by Apresjan (1974) as cases in which semantic discrepancy between the meanings A1 and A2 for a word A is not possibly found in another word of the assumed language. Consider the verb “run” in English: it has different senses for running miles, running a restaurant, running late, running on gasoline, etc.

Deane (1988) believes that providing an account of these terms (polysemy, homonymy, etc.) may help to analyse many unsettled problems. He maintains that polysemy is problematic due to its position in the shades between “category identity” and “category distinctness”. He also suggests that the gradient could be handled in terms of “relevance”: two items fit in separate categories only to the extent that “shared information” and “contrasting information” are irrelevant.

Structural Ambiguity

Hirst (1987) basically classified structural ambiguity into three types: attachment ambiguity, gap-finding and filling ambiguity, and analytical ambiguity:

- Attachment ambiguity mostly concerns the problem of modifier placement. A very common example is that of prepositional phrase which either modifies the verb (be a case slot-filler) or an immediately preceding the noun phrase.
- Gap-finding and filling ambiguity occurs when a transformed element has to be back to its original position before transformation and there are more than one position fits.
- Analytical Ambiguity takes place when the nature of the constituent is itself in doubt, i.e. one it has more than one analysis.

Structural ambiguity, also referred to as grammatical or syntactic, is the case when the identical arrangement of words possesses two or more meanings that are generated by diverse phrase structure analysis (Fromkin et al. 2017). The term ‘structural ambiguity’ suggests that these ambiguities arise as a result of different structures. Some linguists state that structural or syntactic ambiguity occurs when the built-up sentences lack formal indicators to elucidate their structures.

Oaks (2010) states that syntactic ambiguity, also called amphiboly or amphibology, is a case in which a sentence could be interpreted in more than one way because of its structure. Syntactic ambiguity exists not because of the variety of meanings of individual words, but due to the relation among the words and clauses of a single sentence, and the sentence structure implied thereby. When a reader can reasonably interpret the same sentence as having more than one possible structure, the text meets the definition of syntactic ambiguity.

Igiri (2017) claims that structural ambiguity takes place because of the syntagmatic order of the words. She maintains that structural ambiguity may be a function of the constituent structure. For example: ‘beautiful girl’s dress’ - in this structure, the ambiguity occurs in terms of a difference of the constituent structure. Under one interpretation one has ‘girl’s dress’ which is beautiful - the words girl’s and dress form a constituent. Under the second interpretation - one may have dress of a beautiful and girl that are brought together to form a constituent.

Inference

Generally, inference can be viewed as the process of grasping a particular conclusion or decision by means of logical reasoning or by the support of evidence, which takes them out of the circle of being than just assumptions. Inferencing is a significant skill for humans to communicate as it helps them to choose the part of a text to uncover meanings, themes and intentions. Pragmatic inferencing is the process of reaching a conclusion from known facts or evidence. Thus, inferences are logical conclusions based on observations and prior knowledge. They are only indirectly triggered by explicit language structures (Levinson 1983).

As suggested above, inferences are made all the time, whether people are communicating or not. For Sperber (1994) inference is the term of psychology to refer for what ordinarily called ‘reasoning.’ Inference starts from primary assumptions arriving, through a series of processes, at some conclusion. He adds that what modern psychology has shown is that reasoning continues all the time – unconsciously, easily, and fast. When psychologists mention inference, they refer essentially and foremost to ‘this ever-present mental activity’.

Clark (2014) claims that it is easy to show that people infer ‘reason’ all the time and so quickly. When people communicate, they might think about how rapidly they react to what others say in a conversation. He adds that anyone who has analyzed recordings or transcripts of discourse will certainly have observed how frequently speakers interrupt one another or could react before another person has ended stating a particular proposition.

Logically, inference can be seen as any mental step that permits somebody to grasp a conclusion based on proof or reasoning. It is an informed assumption that is comparable to a conclusion or a deduction. In many situations where something is uncertain and there are bits of data or hints, humans are expected to have inferences. For instance, when people make inferences while reading, they use evidence offered by the writer to draw their own logical conclusions (Boghossian, 2014).

Relevance Theory (RT)

The RT theory can be summarized in three main points:

- a. the speaker’s decoded meaning of the utterance is well-matched with a set of various interpretations in the same context;

- b. these interpretations are considered in terms of availability;
- c. listeners depend on a strong standard when choosing the most appropriate interpretation; and

This standard makes it possible to choose one interpretation among the range of possible interpretations, to the degree that when a first interpretation is chosen as a candidate to connect the intended interpretation, the listener stops at this point (Stroińska & Drzazga, 2017).

In short, the cognitive and communicative principles of relevance are the foundation stone statements of Relevance Theory. They collaboratively provide an integrated, psychologically based account of human communication, highlighting proficiency, inference, and cognitive low-cost. These values help elucidate not only language use, but wider communicative behaviors, providing influential tools for analyzing pragmatics, discourse, and even non-verbal communication.

Relevance theory is a pragma-cognitive theory of communication initiated by Sperber & Wilson (1986, 1994) depending on Grice's third maxim of relevance. It aims to identify the fundamental mechanisms, imbedded in human psychology, which enlighten how humans communicate (Sperber & Wilson 1986). The theory receives some of Grice's ideas, while departing significantly from them (Grice 1975). As a pragma-cognitive theory, it is concerned with the inferences that the addressees make when attempting to recognize the addresser's communicative intentions relying on what the addresser has coded verbally, whether orally, written, or typed, or nonverbally via gestures, body movements, or facial expressions.

The theory also tackles the expectations of relevance that speakers produce when selecting an utterance or text to convey their ideas to other people involved in the interactions. Finally, RT also concerns the conceptual representations that motivate communication and in the mental processes that actively function in communication.

RT is an inferential approach to human communication. It aims at elaborating on Gricean idea that human communication is distinguished by the manifestation and recognition of intentions. The main concept of relevance theory, is that cognitive processes of human minds are supposed to acquire a huge cognitive effect as possible and little processing effort as possible (less effort, more effect).

Humour

Although humour is a universal phenomenon, yet its devices differ across human cultures and languages. Humour in Kurdish, just as in other languages, usually depends on ambiguity, inference, and contextual prompts, turning it to an interesting topic to be analyzed by Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). RT theory interprets how addressees deduce meaning beyond literal meaning or denotations of words, which is generally significant in comprehending Kurdish jokes, puns, and satirical tales.

Ambiguity, as has been discussed earlier, in which a word, structure, or phrase has various meanings, is a strategic tool in Kurdish humour. Studies show that Kurdish jokes often use:

- Lexical ambiguity in which words that has double meanings produce unanticipated punchlines. For example, the Kurdish word "*gurg*" can mean "wolf" or "hunger" in Kurmanji Kurdish. A speaker may play on this to create a joke: "*Gurg keta malê*" ("A wolf entered the house" or "Hunger entered the house") (Madhat & Mustafa, 2013)
- Phonetic ambiguity in which similar-sounding words (homophones) showing diverse meanings produce humour. For example, the word "*Sipî*" (which means white) has the same pronunciation of the word "*Sîpî*" which is a Kurdish name, may lead to puns.

Research on Kurdish tradition (e.g., Hassanpour, 1992) focuses on how oral traditions employ ambiguity for humorous impact, demanding the listeners to involve in fast reinterpretations.

Tawfiq & Hussein (2020) believe that early and modern Kurdish jokes disturb the type of language deviances with social fluctuations and historical expansions, which exhibit the track of Kurdish society's tastes and partialities. They maintain that deviances from precise principles of cooperation and Grice's theory has been established the standards to determine the degree of linguistic deviations and how they arise. In addition, 'Rîştey Mirwarî' for old jokes and 'Nuktekani ehol' for 'modern jokes' have been selected to demonstrate these linguistic deviations to explore a perfect comparison between selected two periods of Kurdish society enhanced by data and statistics.

Humour in Kurdish often contains political irony and social comments, where meaning is indirect rather than shown directly due to historical censorship (Sheyholislami, 2011). This is in harmony with RT emphasis on the importance of context.

Humour in Kurdish flourishes on ambiguity, inference, and contextual relevance, to be a persuasive issue for linguistic analysis and pragmatic exploration. Studies concern Kurdish sociolinguistics like (Haig & Matras, 2002) and those humour studies who are founded on RT (Yus, 2016) confirm that Kurdish jokes necessitate dynamic cognitive integration, where the addressee has to reinterpret the intended meanings to understand the humorous content. Thus, one can say that Kurdish humour is not only a matter of wordplay but also concerns cultural knowledge shared by communicators and cognitive integration which creates an attractive zone for further studies in pragmatics and cognition.

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METHODOLOGY

The present research uses a qualitative research design that depends on pragmatic analysis. The methodology includes:

Data Collection

The samples of the study are chosen from Kurdish humorous interactions. Data has been gathered from the following sources:

- Primary Sources:** Two of the most well-known books in the Kurdish literature (Rishtay Miriwari and Cheshti Mijewr), the famous Kurdish series play (Bezmi Bezim: the laughing of laughing).
- Secondary Sources:** Kurdish programs and episodes on TV, humorous sketches on YouTube, and written jokes from Kurdish websites, social media pages like Facebook, Instagram, etc.

Model of Analysis:

The present work adopts Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986) as the fundamental theoretical framework as it is a cognitive-pragmatic theory of communication which theorizes that human cognition is navigated towards the maximization of relevance, a domain of inputs that offers helpful cognitive effects for the minimum needed processing effort.

Accordingly, the theory is principally compatible for the analysis of humour in the present research for many reasons:

- Inference-Centered: the study concentrates on the cognitive inferential processes of the listener rather than just a linguistic aspect of language.
- Interpreting ambiguity: the study provides a strong model showing how listeners deals with ambiguity by analyzing inferential hypotheses against their context and choosing the most relevant one that meets their anticipation of relevance.
- The humorous effect itself can be dealt with as a collection of cognitive influences (e.g., contextual inferences, poetic impact, feeble implicatures) that stem from the successful management of incongruity produced by an ambiguous incentive.

Analysis

In the coming pages, we investigate the complicated and culturally nuanced world of Kurdish discursal humour, inspecting how ambiguity functions as a principal mechanism for producing humour and social intimacy. Humour, away from being only linguistic diversion, is a cultured cognitive and pragmatic marvel that is based greatly on shared cultural knowledge and inferential thinking. Through the samples analyzed, it will be investigated how Iraqi Kurdish speakers deliberately use numerous forms of ambiguity, viz. lexical, phonological, and pragmatic to create levels of meaning that are both humorous and weighty.

The short trip from any utterance to understanding contains a serious cognitive process: the addressee should process the ambiguous speech, produce possible inferences, and eventually choose the interpretation that provides the optimal relevance, the maximum cognitive output for the minimum processing effort, deeply rooted in a particular cultural context.

Sample 1

A: نەمە بۆ ئەوها لاوازی

B: ريجيم ئەكەم

A: ريجيم مەكە، زۆر ناشرينه لاشت /rijim maka, zor nashrina lasht/

B: بەرمیلی وەکو تو جوانه؟ /barmili waku to jwana?/

Translation:

A: Why are you such a thin person?

B: I am on a diet

A: Don't be on a diet, your body is so ugly.

B: Is it nice to be as barrel as you are!?

Speaker B's final response "Is it nice to be as barrel as you are!?" produces humour via metaphorical ambiguity and ironic offence, functioning as a relevance-based humorous revenge to speaker A's body-related remark. This humour stems from the pragmatic interaction between literal and non-literal inference of the word "barrel" for overweight metaphor. A metaphor that is processed inferentially via different interpretations:

1. **Literal Inference (Rejected as Irrational):** Speaker B's utterance can be taken literally, a comparison between speaker A's physical structure to a barrel. Anyway, this inference is definitely cancelled as it is logically impossible and contextually irrelevant. It also violates the maxim of quality (truthfulness). Thus, the listener is forced to seek another contextually relevant inference depending on non-literal inferencing.
2. **Compliment Inference (Rejected as Incongruent):** Speaker A less likely means that speaker B might be ironically complimenting, being barrel-like is somehow "good-looking" or "beautiful." Nevertheless, this clashes with the ironic tone, violates the maxim of relation, and is consequently cast off as implausible.
3. **Metaphorical-Ironic Inference (Most Relevant):** The intended meaning of speaker B is to direct a metaphorical insult. Visualizing A's body as a barrel, speaker B teases speaker A's body appearance, entailing obesity, roundness, or ugliness. The ironic expression "Is it nice to be as a barrel as you are?") converses the direction of irony: while speaker A criticized speaker B for being too skinny, speaker B reacts by exaggerating speaker A's fatness.

Based on Relevance Theory, addressees attempt to abstract the inference that produces the highest cognitive effect with the minimum processing effort. Thus, the literal inference of the word "barrel" is directly excluded as irrelevant. On the contrary, the metaphorical inference "you are overweight" needs minimal inferential processing, since Kurdish natives are culturally equipped with animalistic or object-based metaphors for physical qualities. Accordingly, the humorous inference is the optimally relevant interpretation because it accomplishes highest contextual effect (offense-based humour) with the least cognitive effort.

Concerning cognitive and cultural relevance, for Kurdish listeners, the word "barrel" metaphor immediately triggers the culturally shared picture of fatness and roundedness, causing laughter rather than hostility. The proposed humour is interpersonal and situational, depending on the common cultural tradition that spoken mocking and hyperbolic offences are acceptable among intimate colleagues or friends.

The same exchange in other cultures could be understood as disrespectful or hostile, due to divergent traditions concerning body-connected humour. As a result, the relevance and humour of this expression are strongly culture-bound, working successfully within Kurdish pragmatic norms but possibly misinterpreted elsewhere.

Sample 2:

A: بوچی وەر مەقەمەکەت بە سپینتی بەجێهێشتوو؟ /bochi waraqakat ba spiti ba jeheshtwa /

B: هەندیک جار، بێدەنگی باشترین وەلامە /handek jar, bedangi bashtrin walama/

Translation:

A: Why did you leave the paper white?

B: Sometimes, silence is the best answer!

Speaker B's reply "Sometimes, silence is the best answer" is metaphorical and philosophical. It creates a humorous and deflective effect via irony and figurative expression. It stimulates many inferences, some of which are intentionally illogical or contextually incompatible to back up the humorous and ambiguous effect. The possible inferences are:

1. Literal inference (rejected as absurd): considering the expression at surface level would denote that the physical state of the word "silence" (i.e., the absence of noise or sound) has been given as a written "answer" on a paper in the exam. This would be illogical as silence cannot be written on a paper. In addition, speaker B violates the maxim of relation because his reply to speaker A does not match the question about the blank paper of the exam and is presented in a vague, metaphorical way.
2. Action-based inference (rejected as implausible): It may be inferred that speaker B is literally suggesting that his silence (i.e., not writing) has been the actual answer to the exam paper's prompt. While this inference associates the test blank paper to the notion of silence, it remains a redundant and unsatisfying answer to the question "why," failing to offer a real reason and thus magnifying the evasive humour.
3. Proverbial (philosophical-rebound) inference (most relevant): the phrase "silence is the best answer" is a well-known proverbial and philosophical technique of telling that rejecting to participate or respond is the wisest option of action in particular situations, such as when encountering irrationality, provocation, or an

unanswerable question. This last inference lines up with Sperber & Wilson's relevance theory, as it gives the most contextually appropriate and humorous meaning. Speaker B is not clarifying the exam blank paper but is justifying his inaction with an eternal proverb, thereby cunningly evading a substantive response.

The humorous and smart effect is accomplished via 'optimal relevance' when the addressee quickly realizes the proverbial rebound rather than a literal clarification. For interlocutors familiar with this famous proverb, the inference is easy and appreciated as a funny reply.

In another context, for instance if a speaker asked "Why didn't you argue with him?" the same reply would be understood directly as advice. In this example, its matching to an exam blank paper produces a certain, self-justifying humour. This highlights the humour's dependence on collective cultural and verbal information for successful inference.

The intended employment of a proverb in "Sometimes, silence is the best answer" performs a pragmatic function by obliging the addressee to cancel literal inferences and interpret the culturally rooted wisdom employed as a defensive tool. According to Relevance Theory, the most reasonable inference is the last one which costs the least processing effort, creates optimal cognitive effects, and suits the context of an unanswered exam paper.

In view of that, metaphorical language in such cases does not represent an obstruction, but a strategic maneuver to enhance a humorous and deflective content, relying on the addressee's cultural and linguistic knowledge without which the answer loses its intended effect, and revealing how common proverbs form linguistic meaning and humour.

improve humour, provided that the listener has the needed cultural knowledge.

Sample 3

A: ئەو دەلێی پوری لە خەستەخانەیە / awa dale Pori la xastaxanaya/

B: ؟ لۆری /Lori?/

Translation:

A: He is saying that his aunt is in hospital

B: Truck?

Speaker B's reply above (Lori "Truck?") seems humorous due to phonological ambiguity. The word "Pori" phonologically resembles the word "Lori" which is intentionally employed to produce a nonsensical and humorous confusion. Thus, multiple inferences can be provided:

1. **Literal Inference (Rejected as Illogical):** Understanding "Lori/truck" literally means that speaker A's aunt is a truck which violates the maxim of relation. The reply is contextually irrelevant to speaker A's statement about a woman being in the hospital. This inference fails to carry humour and produces incongruity.
2. **Mishearing Inference (Implausible):** This inference suggests that speaker B sincerely misheard "Pori/aunt" as "lori/ truck" due to phonetic or rhythmic similarity which provides a superficial explanation that lacks intentional humorous content and represents a communicative breakdown rather than a deliberate humour.
3. **Phonological-Ironic Inference (Most Relevant):** This inference is the most relative one in which the intended humour works through:
 - a. Phonological play: Manipulating the minimal pair *pori* (aunt) and *lori* (truck), which are different only in their initial consonant sound.
 - b. Ironic trick: Pretending misunderstanding to produce illogicality by replacing a familial relation with a truck.
 - c. Contextual incongruity: Putting side by side the serious context of being in a hospital with a haphazard ordinary entity.

The humour succeeds to achieve optimal relevance through immediate recognition of the *pori-lori* phonetic resemblance, incongruity by matching the anticipation of concerned medical follow-up with the absurd truck reference, and social intimacy by employing common linguistic knowledge to produce playful absurdity. However, low relevance in other cultures I expected without phonological awareness and could cause:

- a) The phonetic similarity to remain unnoticed,
- b) The reply to look as a non-sequitur or hearing problem
- c) The humour to be completely lost, causing confusion.

In this Kurdish exchange, ambiguity utilizes phonological humour to produce verbal play via immediate phonetic employment to show linguistic quickness by employing sound similarities and mitigate serious conversation via unexpected irrationality. Therefore, the third inference is the most suitable because it lines up with Relevance Theory (least processing for Kurdish speakers), reveals Kurdish conversational patterns of

employing minimal pairs for humorous expressions, and increases humour through unexpected contextual shift from seriousness to absurdity.

Consequently, this type of jokes works because Kurdish interlocutors know the pori-lori phonetic connection, the illogicality of the substitution produces humorous surprise, and the cultural repeated occurrence of such wordplay makes it immediately identifiable.

Sample 4

- A: منیش له گهلتان دیم /mnish la galtan dem/
 B: به جدیتته؟ حالی خۆت بونیوه؟ /ba jdita? Hali xott biniwa?/
 A: ؟ لۆ /Lo?/
 B: سهگهک له جلکهکانت تیر نه پیت /sagak la jlkakant ter abet/

Translation:

- A: I am also coming with you
 B: Are you serious? Are you aware of your appearance?
 A: Why?

B: A dog can get enough of your clothes.

Speaker B's final statement ("*A dog can get enough of your clothes*") is humorous due to metaphorical ambiguity and exaggeration in mocking A's clothes. The humour in the above sample comes from the ambiguity of the metaphor, which can be interpreted and inferred in multiple ways:

1. **Literal inference (Rejected as Nonsensical):** at the surface level of the statement, a dog could literally "*get enough*" (eat or be satisfied by) speaker A's clothes, is ridiculous and illogical. Thus, it violates Grice's maxim of relation, as it does not suit speaker A's question "*Why?*" as a response.
2. **Warning inference (Implausible):** speaker B might be warning speaker A that a dog is actively eating his clothes (A's clothes). However, this inference is contextually irrelevant, as there is no prior mention of a dog.
3. **Metaphorical-Insult inference (Most Relevant):** the intended meaning is that speaker A's clothes are so filthy and disgusting that even a hungry dog, known for eating almost anything, would not eat them. This is an exaggerated, ironic insult meant to mock speaker A's appearances humorously.

To achieve optimal relevance, humour:

- a. is immediately recognizable to those familiar with Kurdish metaphorical humorous conventions.
- b. the addressee quickly discards the literal meaning and infers the exaggerated insult,
- c. requires minimal cognitive effort for cultural norms.

However, low relevance in other cultures may take place without understanding the exaggerated ironic purpose of such metaphors in Kurdish humour. The humour may seem confusing or excessively harsh for other cultures.

The humour is active in this sample because of the metaphorical exaggeration (the comparison between clothes and disgusting food). The absurd image of a dog rejecting clothes intensifies the insult humorously. Also, cultural specificity of Kurdish humour often uses animal metaphors (e.g., dogs and donkeys) for humorous ironic insults, making this type of humour immediately recognizable to native speakers. Finally, the statement aligns with Relevance Theory, as it provides the highest cognitive product (humour) with the minimum cognitive effort for the intended receivers.

Sample 5

- A: ههناز به چینه؟ / Hanar ba chana /
 B: سهی کهوچک به ۵۰۰ دیناره / Se kawchk ba 500 dinara /
 A: شیرینه؟ / Shirina? /
 B: نا، فارهاده / Na, Farhada /

Translation:

- A: How much does pomegranate cost?
 B: Every three spoons cost 500 dinars
 A: Does it taste sweet?

B: No, it is Farhad.

Speaker B's reply "No, it is Farhad" includes humorous effect that stems from pragmatic and homonymous ambiguity, deliberately using the homonymies 'shirin' as a taste of sweet fruit and a proper personal female name in Kurdish 'Shirin'. This ambiguity produces two inferences as shown below:

1. **Literal Inference (Rejected as Irrational):** considering the reply "Farhard" by speaker B literally, as the identity of the pomegranate, flouts the maxims of quality and relation, as it is logically impossible and contextually inappropriate to be a reply to a question about taste.
2. **Intentional Ironic Inference (More Relevant):** this inference seems more reasonable. The anticipated humour works through:
 - 1) Semantic play: using the homonymous overlap between the word 'shirîn' (sweet) and the personal female name 'Shirîn'.
 - 2) Cultural reference: reminding people with the celebrated Kurdish romantic couple 'Farhad and Shirîn' like 'Romeo and Juliet' in English.
 - 3) Ironic acting: pretending misunderstanding by shifting dialogue to the story of the name 'Shirîn' instead of the intended taste "sweet".

Optimal relevance and minimum cognitive effort is successfully achieved in the Kurdish context through direct realization of the Shirîn/Farhad cultural combination, incongruity by connecting the predictable taste assessment with the unexpected personal name response, and cultural fluency via indicating rapid jocularity through playful cultural connotation.

Anyways, low relevance in other cultures is anticipated. Without cultural-linguistic familiarity the homonymous punning remains undistinguishable, the romantic denotation has no significance, and the answer seems as a non-organized or represents a communication breakdown.

To conclude, the humorous content works in this example because Kurdish native speakers mechanically understand both meanings of the word 'shirîn', the cultural schema of the love story of 'Farhad and Shirîn' offers direct contextual outlining, and the superficial misunderstanding demonstrates verbal swiftness rather than linguistic incompetence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The main findings can be displayed in form of table. The tables below classify the main devices of ambiguity and types and functions of humour detected in the samples. In table (1) below, Kurdish humour utilizes several forms of ambiguity. Lexical ambiguity uses words with multiple meanings, while phonological ambiguity plays on words that sound similar to create gags. Metaphoric ambiguity employs non-literal images to convey indirect blame, and pragmatic ambiguity hides a true intent, such as a criticism, behind a different type of statement. Finally, cultural proverbs package complex social critique into brief, traditional sayings whose meanings are inaccessible without shared cultural knowledge. This is because pragmatic ambiguity allows for expressions of socially risky or serious sentiments in a deniable way, making it a key mechanism for managing social hierarchies and cultural taboos while producing laughter".

Table 1: Types of Ambiguity in Kurdish Discourse Humour

Type of Ambiguity	Explanation	Example	Central Function
Lexical Ambiguity	one lexeme with many meanings	"Radar" (device vs. gossipy person)	To create confusion fixed by cultural meaning.
Phonological Ambiguity (Minimal Pairs)	Employing lexemes differ in one phoneme.	Qurban (sacrifice) / Qairan (crisis),	To create gags and pretend mistakes for humorous outcome.
Metaphoric Ambiguity	Employing a metaphor where the image is not intended to be understood literally.	"Even donkeys couldn't eat it" (it was distasteful).	To convey indirect offences, blames, or social observation.
Pragmatic Ambiguity	The utterance's purpose is ambiguous (e.g., is it a question or an exclamation?).	"Are you walking on eggs?!" (literally a question vs. comment on lateness).	To shield the real intent (frequently a criticism) by another speech act.

In table (2) below, the analyzed Kurdish humour serves specific social functions. Ironic mocking pretends to admire someone to actually deliver a criticism, reinforcing social norms through teasing. Ironic rejection uses illogical or metaphoric justifications to refuse a request without direct conflict. Cultural wordplay relies on puns and shared linguistic knowledge to build intimacy and display wit. Hyperbolic exaggeration uses impossible contrasts to emphasize a point memorably, and proverbial humour applies traditional wisdom to personal situations, making criticism feel more objective and culturally grounded. Also, the analyzed Kurdish humour in

table (2) below performs certain social functions. Ironic mocking pretends to praise a person as a way of delivering a criticism, reinforcing social norms through playful teasing. Ironic rejection employs absurd or metaphorical reasons to turn down a request without open confrontation. Cultural wordplay depends on puns and mutual language knowledge to create closeness and showcase intelligence. Hyperbolic exaggeration makes use of highly unlikely opposites to stress a point in a memorable way, and proverbial humour uses the wisdom of the past as the basis of making a personal situation, thus, criticism seeming more objective and culturally rooted.

Table 2: Types and Functions of Humour in the Kurdish Samples

Type of Humour	Explanation	Example	Social Function
Ironic offense / Mocking	Pretending to admire or literally infer something to actually convey an offence or criticism.	"I wish I were as man as you" (meaning you are not manly)	To criticize someone's appearance, personality, or manners within the harmless boundaries of teasing. Strengthens social norms.
Ironic Refusal / Rejection	Via an illogical or metaphoric justification to castoff a request or proposal.	"Am I a coaster?!" (I don't have a big car to transport you)	To reject a request without direct conflict, saving the requester's face.
Cultural Wordplay & Puns	Humour relies on phonological similarities (minimal pairs) and cultural connotations.	"No, it is Farhad" (responding to "is it sweet?").	To show intelligence and verbal swiftness. To produce intimacy via shared linguistic and cultural knowledge.
Hyperbolic Exaggeration	Employing extreme, impossible contrasts for funny effect.	"Slaughter a camel for him" (do the impossible)	To stress a point (e.g., the degree of failure, terror, or hopelessness) in an intense and unforgettable way.
Proverbial Humour	Using a traditional proverb to a new, often routine situation.	Via "Indian movie" to mean a lie	To frame a personal situation within shared cultural wisdom, making the criticism feel impersonal and objective.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the widespread analysis of the Kurdish discursal samples, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The supreme consistent conclusion is that understanding and perceiving Kurdish discursal humour are highly culture-based. It has been noticed that the anticipated, humourous content is practically always the one that necessitates particular cultural knowledge to be inferred appropriately. The absence of the shared cultural context makes the joke seem irrelevant, ridiculous, or simply puzzling.
2. Ambiguity is not a communicative breakdown but a measured and tactical device for producing humour. Native speakers purposefully use ambiguous structures to request the addressee into a cooperative process of inferencing, reinforcing social ties through shared understanding.
3. Concerning the present research, Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory perfectly visualizes the cognitive process of comprehending humour in ambiguous structures. Audience regularly process the message, produce different explanatory hypotheses (inferences), choose the most relevant inference according to the context and cultural information, spontaneously eliminating the literal inferences, and finally grasp the humourous intent via successful choice.
4. One of the principal functions of humour in Kurdish is to convey irony, criticism, offences, or denials in a socially satisfactory style. Ambiguity and irony offer reasonable deniability, permitting speakers to talk about sensitive subjects like body appearance, clothes, intelligence, and failure without producing direct hostility.
5. Kurdish discourse humour displays cases of an amusing collection of linguistic creativity that greatly depends on phonological play, lexical devices, metaphorical outlining, cultural proverbs, and hyperbole.

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