



Mocking power: A pragmatic study of black humor as a tool in Bassem Youssef's political interview with Pires Morgan

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Article Information

Article History:

Received Jan 02/2025

Revised Jan 12/2025

Accepted Jan 19/2025

Available Online Sept. 1/2025

Keywords

Dark humor,
Political interviews,
Discourse analysis,
Cooperative principle,
Implicature.

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Abstract

The research includes introducing the personality of Prince Hisham bin Abdul Rahman and his moral qualities, how he was able to reach the Emirate of Andalusia after the death of his father, his confrontation with the revolutions that arose against him on the internal and external levels, and the conflict over the Emirate that occurred with his brothers due to the failure to appoint a guardian for the Emirate after Abdul Rahman Al Dakhel, so he was able Hisham, with his intelligence, political acumen, and good conduct among the people, overcame his brother Suleiman, who considered himself the legitimate heir to the emirate because he was the eldest, and was able to overcome him after his monopoly in the rule of Toledo, and he was exiled with his brother Abdullah to Morocco after he gave them their share of the money, Hisham bin Abdul Rahman was also able to eliminate the revolution of Said bin Al-Hussein, the revolution of Matruh bin Suleiman, and the Berber revolution, and the great role of the Sawaifs and Shawati in protecting the emirate, leading military campaigns against the Spanish and Frankish kingdoms, and his foreign relations with the Maghreb and the Abbasid state. The impact of dark humor, a type of comedy, comes from contrasting humor with the gravity of some subjects, like death, war, or political corruption. It regularly employs irony, cynicism, and sarcasm to draw attention to the absurdity of certain situations or to push the boundaries of social acceptance to elicit ideas. Paul Grice's conversational principles were applied as a framework in the research, such as the dark humor analysis method and the implied concept. Therefore, the goal of the current study is to pragmatically explore how dark humor functions as a strategic tool to critique authority and to achieve communicative objectives in interpersonal interactions, specifically in TV talk shows. This is exemplified by examining Bassem Youssef's interview with Piers Morgan, which showcases black humor for mocking power and engaging audiences.

DOI: [10.33899/radab.2025.156296.2293](https://doi.org/10.33899/radab.2025.156296.2293), ©Authors, 2023, College of Arts, University of Mosul.

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الاستهزاء بالسلطة: دراسة تداولية للفكاهة السوداء كأداة في المقابلة السياسية بين باسم يوسف وبيرز مورغان

سُرور كنعان ولي * ابناء مظفر يحيى **

المستخلص

يأتي تأثير الفكاهة السوداء، وهي نوع من الكوميديا، من موازنة الفكاهة مع جدية بعض المواضيع، مثل الموت، الحرب، أو الفساد السياسي. وتستخدم بانتظام أساليب السخرية، والتهكم، والتشاؤم لتسليط الضوء على سخافة بعض المواقف أو لدفع حدود القبول الاجتماعي من أجل إثارة الأفكار. تم اختيار مبادئ المحادثة لبول غرايس كمنهج لتحليل الفكاهة السوداء والمفهوم الضمني. لذلك، فإن هدف الدراسة الحالية هو فحص الفكاهة براغماتياً كأداة استراتيجية يستخدمها الأفراد لتحقيق أهدافهم في التفاعلات الشخصية، وخاصة في البرامج الحوارية التلفزيونية. يتم توضيح ذلك من خلال تحليل مقابلة باسم يوسف مع بيرس مورغان، حيث يتم إبراز الفكاهة السوداء كوسيلة للسخرية من السلطة وجذب انتباه الجمهور.

الكلمات المفتاحية : كوميديا سوداء، مقابلات سياسية، تحليل خطاب.

1. Introduction:

In all of its manifestations, humor has long been a vital component of communication, serving as a means of criticism as well as a social bonding tool. Among its many variations, black comedy stands out for its capacity to humorously address serious, usually taboo subjects. In the context of political discourse, particularly in English political interviews, black humor emerges as a rhetorical device with useful implications, offering a way to handle sensitive and complex topics. Morbid humor, gallows humor, and dark humor are some other names for black humor. It is a type of comedy that parodies topics that are typically regarded as taboo, especially those that are typically deemed too painful or serious to discuss in dramatic productions. Participants and comedians frequently use it to examine obscene topics by making their audience uncomfortable, thinking critically, and laughing. Most people agree that black humor is a beneficial aspect of life. It is typically discussed in terms of how it eases stress and makes it easier for us to handle daily circumstances.

This study examines the use of black humor by Bassem and the interviewee Pires Morgan to investigate how humor can be used as a communication tool. It accomplishes this by examining how black humor alters perceptions, lessens acts that could embarrass the interviewee, and occasionally even shifts the balance of power between the two parties. By studying how politicians employ black humor, we can better understand its underlying practical purposes, which include maintaining authority, avoiding criticism, and subtly criticizing opponents. Black humor is used by comedians, politicians, and even people having casual conversations to support and clarify their beliefs. Political humor is acknowledged as a crucial instrument at the nexus of humor and politics. In contemporary democracies, political interviews are a prevalent mode of political communication. In the mediated political culture, interviews have shown themselves to be important settings for political performances and identity negotiations. Pragmatic analysis can be used to identify humorous expressions that defy and violate the Cooperative Principle's tenets. The speaker will deceive the listener by failing to observe the maxims, causing them to infer meaning from the utterance (Cutting, 2005; Grice, 1989). The conversation's participants will eventually begin cracking jokes without recognizing it .

2. Statement of the Problem:

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While humor is commonly recognized as a tool for amusement, there is limited research on the use of black humor in political interviews. This highlights the need for a comprehensive study on its use in political interviews, considering its potential effects on public opinion and political communication dynamics. Both politicians and comedians use black humor for strategic purposes. Comedians use it to satirize public figures and social issues, while politicians use it to divert attention, emphasize important issues with a lighthearted exterior, or appeal to specific voting demographics. Therefore, a thorough study of the use of black humor in political interviews is crucial to understand its potential effects on public opinion and political communication dynamics.

3. Research questions:

The present investigation seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How is black humor recognized and identified in political interviews?
2. Does black humor have an effective role in political interviews?
3. What are the functions of black humor in political interviews ?
4. How does the use of black humor in the interview influence audience perception and interpretation of political messages?

4. Hypotheses:

The study hypothesizes the following:

- 1Black humor can be recognized and identified basically by violating Grice's maxims.
- 2Black humor has an effective role since it arises directly in response to precarious, dangerous, and/or traumatic situations or incidents.
- 3Black humor serves many functions in political interviews.

.5 Aim of the study

1. The research used to investigate one category of humor within a chosen discourse genre, namely, black humor in political interview between Bassem Youssef and Piers Morgan.
2. The study aims to show the verbal and non-verbal analysis of dark humor in the political interview of Bassem and Piers.
3. Besides, it investigates black humor as a combination of various linguistic tools of joke telling such as wordplay and punning, hyperbole, repetitions, timing, and paralinguistic choices.

6.Limitations of The Study:

The scope of this study is specifically limited to examining the use of black humor in the interview between Bassem Youssef and Piers Morgan. The study will focus on how Youssef, as a comedian, and Morgan, as a journalist, employ black humor to achieve rhetorical and strategic objectives, such as challenging political narratives, provoking audience reactions, or diffusing tense topics. By concentrating solely on this particular interview, the research excludes other forms of comedy, political interviews, or media interactions involving either of the figures .

7.Literature review:

Political discourse can be defined as a language of mass media or other institutions that is generally used in social and political spheres of communication. Van Dijk (1997) and Blommaert and Bulcaen (1997) defined political discourse as a politically limited genre that has its own lexicon and specific functions. According to Van Dijk (2002), political speech is essentially who speaks to whom, on what occasion, and with what intentions rather than by a topic or style.

The basis of political discourse occurs mainly in or around power, domains, resistance, persecution, rights, and the fight for rights. Politics and power have a big influence on the way people talk and think and are considered a type of language. Fairclough (2013) defines 'power' not only as the difference that exists between individuals participating during a conversation but also in terms of how people have different abilities to control texts and thus discourses are produced, distributed, and consumed. Bayley (2000) claimed that "power can only be exercised in social relation, and language plays a vital function in preserving these links, politicians exploit language to mold people's cognition ."

According to Abe (1998), political humor produced by the public and media usually takes the form of institutionalized comedy genres, such as jokes, cartoons, satirical TV or radio shows, humorous websites, humorous festivals, and so on (Kuipers 2008). The 'political interview', which is known as a kind of speech event (Hymes, 1972) or activity type (Levinson, 1983), involves interactional conventions, which assign well-defined roles to the interviewer and interviewee, and commit them to particular entitlements and responsibilities. The political interview dialogue, which is interviewer-monitored, is indicative of the interactants' status, position, and role, of the interdependence between the interviewee's public and private spheres, and of the ongoing discursive negotiation of power relations between interviewer and interviewee .

The relationship between language and politics is conspiratorially interacting. Paul Chilton and Christina Schaffner noted on the one hand that political action does not exist without the use of language. On the other hand, they claimed that "it is probably the case that the use of language in the constitution of social groups leads to what we call 'politics' in a broad sense" (Chilton and Schaffner, 2002, p. vi). The effect of humor on politics and public opinion as a crucial component of public discourse is one of the most discussed topics in humor studies.

8.Black humor :

Black humor is a type of humor that comes from stressful, traumatic, and life-threatening situations. The study focuses on black humor as a tool in the interview between Bassem Yousef and Piers Morgan as a political interview by using Grice's model. It is a form of dark or satirical humor that often touches on taboo subjects such as death, violence, or social taboos, has been used strategically in political communication. It enables public figures to address sensitive issues in a more palatable way, challenge political norms, or engage audiences in a manner that softens the impact of controversial topics. However, its effectiveness depends heavily on context, delivery, and audience reception, making it a powerful but risky tool in political discourse.

Studies have shown that humor in political interviews can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, humor allows politicians and comedians to distance themselves from serious subjects, disarm opponents, and engage with audiences in a less confrontational way. On the other hand, when misused,

humor can backfire, offending the audience or undermining the seriousness of the issue at hand. While previous research has explored the use of humor in political interviews broadly, there has been limited focus on black humor specifically, and its strategic role in influencing political narratives.

9. The Method of The Research

The objective of the study was to gain insight into political interview between Bassem Youssef and Piers Morgan that use black humor by applying Grice's theory of implicature to the discourse. The cooperative principle maxims proposed by Grice (1975) were used in this study's data analysis. Grice suggests four cooperative communication maxims. In his "Cooperative Principles," Grice (1969, 1989) puts forth the notion that conversation participants' contributions should be as instructive as necessary in light of the established goal and topic of discussion. He then observes that the cooperative principles are broken even in polite discussions between well-cultured individuals (Grice, 1989).

According to Grice (1975), interlocutors must adhere to implicit rules in order to communicate effectively. He presents the "Cooperative Principles," which are four maxims: the maxim of quantity, the maxim of quality, the maxim of manner, and the maxim of relevance. Whereas the maxim of relevance demands relevance (to the context and the situation) for the recent purposes of the conversation, the maxim of quantity expresses the proper amount of information (neither excess nor paucity), the maxim of quality asks to be truthful (don't say something for which you lack sufficient evidence), and the maxim of manner demonstrates clarity (avoidance of obscurity, ambiguity, verbosity, and keeping the order).

10.Data Analysis:

Piers Morgan Uncensored is among the most popular talk shows on television presented by Piers Morgan, and its episodes are distributed on YouTube. Throughout his interviews, he addresses a variety of subjects and problems. In one of the most watched interviews, Piers interviews the Egyptian comedian Bassem Youssef for an intense and passionate discussion about the October 7th attack.

The following analysis will focus on how black humor is employed in this interview, exploring its rhetorical strategies and the potential effects it may have on both public perception and political discourse.

Sample 1:

Piers asked a broad question about Bassem's reaction to the events in Gaza and gave him a warm greeting during his interview, expressing a wish to see him in a different setting.

PIERS MORGAN: First of all, what is your reaction to what happened on October the 7th?

BASSEM YOUSSEF: You know, it's just like those Palestinians, they're very dramatic. 'Ah, Israel is killing us,' but they never die. I mean, they always come back. You know, they're very difficult to kill, very difficult people to kill. I know because I'm married to one. I tried many times, couldn't kill her.

Bassem introduced his viewpoint on the situation and mockingly characterized the Palestinians, saying they are a very dramatic and difficult group to kill, using black humor.

Because it emerges from the speech's context, the implicature in this instance is conversational. By suggesting criticism or derision of the drama in the Palestinians' response to Israeli actions, Bassem uses

conversational implicature. An additional layer of implicature is added by the sarcastic tone, which conveys cynicism or disbelief about how serious the situation is.

Bassem's speech violates Grice's cooperative principle's quality maxim. Bassem Youssef uses the sarcastic phrase "very difficult to kill" to highlight the Palestinian people's tenacity despite dire circumstances. He also humorously adds a reference to his wife, who is Palestinian, saying he has "tried many times" to kill her, which highlights the sarcastic tone even more. His assertion is a sarcastic exaggeration intended to make people laugh rather than to present accurate facts. Since Bassem Youssef doesn't give a direct, serious response and the information provided is insufficient to answer the question in a clear or meaningful way, the maxim of quantity is also broken here.

Sample 2:

PIERS: I mean, there's a dark humor there, and I understand why. Because no—

BASSEM: It's not dark humor. I really try to get to her every time, but she uses our kids as human shields. I can never take her out.

Bassem's speech and the dire circumstances in Gaza highlight how hard life is there. Bassem responds to Piers' dark humor by saying that he is "trying to kill" his wife, but she uses their children as "human shields." This unexpected situation is where the humor lies. Change in circumstances. Bassem stated that as cynicism or sarcasm toward the media narratives and ongoing conflict. Bassem called attention to the ridiculousness of Israel's accusations that Hamas is using Palestinians as "human shields" in the conflict. People can use this type of comedy as a coping mechanism by laughing through hardship and life's harsh realities, even if that laughter is dark .

Bassem is frustrated with the constant conflict in Gaza. The dark humor of the Palestinians being continuously bombarded implies a feeling of helplessness and frustration with the circumstances. It is possible to interpret the portion about "killing" his wife as a way of showing his love for her, despite the fact it is given in a darkly comedic manner. The dark humor allows Bassem to express frustration and possibly even fear in a more palatable way than directly stating his emotions.

The maxim of relevance is flouted, Bassem begins by talking about the serious situation in Gaza, and the impact on his wife's family. However, when Piers mentions dark humor, Bassem gets off-topic and talks about how hard it is to kill his wife. This looks out of left field and is factually unrelated to the circumstances in Gaza .

Sample 3:

PIERS: Again, I understand the humor, but to be serious, Bassam, about this tonight, there is...

BASSEM: Okay, I will be serious. No, I will be serious. I was watching your interview with Ben Shapiro, and I'll tell you one thing. I think that Ben Shapiro is one of the smartest people who ever walked this Earth. He's very, very smart. I follow him, and I believe everything he said. And when he came out on your show, his solution was, and I quote, his solution was that the solution for this is for Israel to annex Gaza and to kill as many sons of b*tches as possible to make sure that this will never happen again. And anyone, anyone who calls for a ceasefire will be a terrorist sympathizer. So, God forbid—I don't want to be labeled as a

terrorist sympathizer—so, I agree with Ben Shapiro. I think we should kill as many sons of b*tches as possible .

Ben Shapiro is a conservative political analyst and attorney. Bassem agrees sarcastically to be serious at the outset. Then, implying the opposite, he mockingly commends Ben Shapiro's intelligence. The inflammatory phrase "kill as many sons of b*tches as possible" is used to highlight the absurdity of Ben Shapiro's solution. Bassem then employs sarcasm and exaggeration to highlight the violence in Ben Shapiro's proposed solution, as if he is terrified of being labeled a terrorist sympathizer for voicing his disagreement.

Here, Bassem Youssef criticizes Ben Shapiro's entire point of view using irony and sarcasm. His statement is ironic in that he denounces Ben Shapiro's viewpoint while feigning agreement with it. The audience is prompted to consider the ramifications of endorsing violence through the use of dark humor.

11. Discussion :

The examples of black humor used to criticize opposing viewpoints were discovered during the study of this interview between Piers Morgan and Bassem Youssef. According to this analysis, black humor can be used in political interviews to strengthen political criticism, reduce tension, and engage the audience. Given how delicate and complicated the Gaza conflict is, black humor is a particularly pertinent tool for audience engagement, interview dynamics management, and the successful delivery of important messages.

This study highlights the value of black humor and how it can be used to tackle difficult and weighty subjects. It is easier for the audience to comprehend and interact with the content when participants or the host break down barriers to allow their ideas or thoughts to be heard by addressing serious subjects with a dash of humor. Black humor is frequently used to reduce stress and foster a more laid-back environment, enabling more candid and fruitful communication. Criticizing particular politicians or policies and bringing attention to their tactics and improper use of power is another advantage of using dark humor .

Grice's conversational maxims in these exchanges involve either adhering to or violating these principles. In some situations, deviating from Gricean maxims may result in amusing circumstances. It's interesting to note that analysis has revealed that two maxims may occasionally go unnoticed simultaneously. The analysis of the interview data shows that all of the maxim's quality, quantity, relevance, and manner are flouted.

12. Conclusion:

The purpose of this study was to examine, using Grice's theory of implicature, the practical application of black humor in the interview between Piers Morgan and Bassem Youssef. The main research questions aimed to determine how black humor is used, what are the purposes of black humor in political interviews, does it serve a useful purpose, and whether there are any trends that demonstrate black humor outside of the characteristics and tactics of black humor in political interviews .

The analysis showed that purposeful disregard for Grice's conversational maxims is frequently a component of black humor in political interviews. This is demonstrated by the humorous outcomes that arise from disregarding each of the Cooperative Principles' maxims, including the maxims of quality,

quantity, relation, and manner. If the interviewer, comedian, or participants disregard the established maxims, they may purposefully or inadvertently veer the conversation into amusing situations.

The study demonstrated that, as a television program, the interviews gleaned from various TV series include a lot of dark humor in the conversation. Various types of black humor arise including clever responses to rhetorical questions, cutting remarks laced with sarcasm, and expressions layered with double meanings .

A strong framework for deciphering the humorous remarks' implied meanings was offered by applying Grice's theory. For example, when a comedian, interviewer, or interviewee humorously emphasized a policy's flaws, the implication was a sharp criticism of the policy's real flaws rather than its literal absurdity. Dark humor is a useful tactic for navigating politically sensitive subjects while preserving plausible deniability, as this study showed.

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