

On the appreciation of English punny jokes by Arabic-speaking EFL learners

Abdul Salam Mohamad Alnamer, Abdel Rahman Mitib Altakhaineh
Al Ain University of Science and Technology, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates

Sulafah Abdul Salam Alnamer
Emirates Falcon International School, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates

The study reported in this paper measured the extent to which Arabic-speaking EFL learners appreciate English punny jokes. It aimed to identify the challenges those students face with certain types of such jokes and identify explanations for these challenges. For the purpose of the study, a test of 16 punny jokes from four types of punny jokes, namely, *look-alike*, *sound-alike*, *close-sounding*, and *texting* was developed and distributed to 60 Arabic-speaking EFL learners. Generally, the results show that Arabic-speaking EFL learners have little appreciation of English punny jokes. This paper discusses the challenges that Arabic-speaking EFL learners face when they encounter any of the four types of punny jokes. Finally, the paper concludes with pedagogical implications and with some suggestions for further studies.

Keywords: punny jokes; second language acquisition; humour; Arabic-speaking EFL learners

Introduction

A pun is a type of wordplay used to communicate wittiness and humour (Bussmann, 1995; Crystal, 1995; Hartmann & Stork, 1972; McArthur, 1992). It is a play on the lexical meaning and/ or unrelated similarity between words either semantically or etymologically (Bussmann, 1995; Crystal, 1995; Hartmann & Stork, 1972; McArthur, 1992). Puns are conditioned by two elements: previous knowledge of different multiple meanings of a word and the context where multiple meanings of a pun word are acceptable (Brown, 1956). Puns require previous knowledge of multiple meanings of a word, because if there is only one known meaning, the result is recognition rather than a pun (Brown, 1956). Consider the following pun constructed by William Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet*:

Romeo: Not I, believe me. You have dancing shoes
With nimble **soles**: I have a **soul** of lead
So stakes me to the ground I cannot move. (Act 1: scene IV)¹

Here /səʊl/ suggests two words: *sole* and *soul* with different meanings. If the audience knows both of them, then /səʊl/ is perceived as a pun. No pun results if /səʊl/ suggests only one word.

The second important element by which the pun is conditioned is its context. In the aforementioned example, Shakespeare humorously describes Romeo's misery after his

girl, Rosaline, left him by suggesting how his sadness is weighing him down, so he cannot dance as happily, and hence, as lightly as his interlocutor Mercutio. Exploiting the homophones *sole* and *soul*, Shakespeare created a pun to convey Romeo's misery. A *soul of lead* here denotes heaviness while *nimble soles* denotes gracefulness. *Nimble soles* describes Mercutio's shoes, suggesting he is dancing happily. *Lead*, a heavy metal, suggests the heavy sadness which made Romeo unable to dance. Hence, when communicated orally, this pun leaves the listener trying to disambiguate /səʊl/ and decide whether *sole* or *soul* is intended. This pun only works because of its context.

The colourfulness, catchiness and humour of puns have attracted the attention of researchers in EFL and ESL classrooms (Hodson, 2014; Lems, 2013; Lucas, 2004). In fact, it has been argued that understanding jokes can help L2 learners feel more comfortable in their new language (Lems, 2013) by lowering the affective filter. According to Krashen (1982), a low affective filter is important in successfully learning a new language. However, quickly processing a joke based on wordplay is difficult for L2 language learners (Bell, 2002); so is best reserved for those of advanced proficiency (for examples see, Berwald, 1992; Deneire, 1995; Richard, 1975; Schmitz, 2002). It seems that the ubiquity of humour makes the appreciation of the target language humour necessary for EFL/ESL learners who aspire to advanced proficiency in the language (Lucas, 2004).

The focus of this study is Arabic-speaking EFL learners. Little attention has been given to Arabic-speaking EFL learners and their appreciation of humour. In this study, puns have been chosen among all types of humour because Arabs enjoy playing with words to communicate humorous and ambiguous messages. This study investigates whether this sense of humour extends to the participants' use of a foreign language. Specifically, it investigates the appreciation of puns by Arabic-speaking EFL learners, the challenges these learners face with certain types of punny jokes, and the causes of these challenges. More generally, the paper will offer comments on the importance of embedding humour in EFL and ESL classes.

Literature review

Researchers have highlighted the importance of humour in EFL and ESL classrooms. For instance, Wanzer (2002) views humour as an instructional tool that helps teachers enhance their effectiveness. Skinner (2010) argues that humour helps students retain more information and maintain attention which, in turn, creates a positive learning environment. Forman (2011) maintains that incorporating different forms of humour, including puns, in classrooms produces social amusement.

Hodson (2008), investigated the challenges of high-level Japanese EFL learners face in understanding humorous texts. Looking at their responses to five English jokes of different types and levels of humour, he found that shorter, more lexically-dense jokes using specific key vocabulary are found less funny than longer, less lexically-dense ones that allow participants to compensate for the jokes' relatively high vocabulary level and then to appreciate their humour.

Elsewhere, Hodson (2014) found that humour competence training for university EFL students, using a combination of explicit teaching of humour theories, such as the ambiguity theory, the relief theory, and the superiority theory, knowledge schema, teacher- and learner-led analysis of humorous texts (including puns) and student presentations improves participants' understanding of English humour.

Semiz (2014) examined the comprehension of linguistic ambiguity in language-based jokes analysing the responses of Turkish EFL learners to twelve English jokes of 3 types: lexical jokes, syntactic jokes, and phonological jokes (see Table 1). These learners achieved an average level in understanding linguistic ambiguity in jokes. The learners also performed better in understanding the jokes involving lexical ambiguity than in the jokes involving phonological and syntactic ambiguity. Lastly, lexical jokes were found to be the funniest.

Table 1. Examples of the joke types used by Semiz (after Semiz, 2014)

Joke Type	Example
lexical	"I have changed my mind." "Thank Heavens! Does it work any better now?"
phonological	I keep reading 'The Lord of the Rings' over and over. I guess it's just force of hobbit.
syntactic	A pretty girl walked into a little dress shop and said to the manager: "May I try on that two-piece suit in the window?" "Go right ahead" said the manager, "It might help business."

It seems that most previous studies viewed humour from a pedagogical perspective by focusing on the importance of incorporating different types of humour in EFL and ESL classrooms. Few studies give punny jokes attention, especially from a linguistic viewpoint; empirical studies pertaining to punny jokes are very few (see, for example, Hodson, 2008; Lucas, 2004). There are no previous studies measuring Arabic-speaking EFL learners' appreciation of jokes. This study aims to partially fill this gap by addressing the following research questions:

1. Do Arabic-speaking EFL learners understand punny jokes?
2. Do Arabic-speaking EFL learners face challenges in understanding certain types of punny jokes? If yes, what are the challenges in understanding punny joke?

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study were 60 Arabic-speaking EFL learners in Al Ain University of Science and Technology (AAU). Their mean age was 22. They were all enrolled in one of the mandatory university modules called *Effective Communication Skills in English 2 (English 2)*. The participants were considered advanced learners of English, all having achieved IELTS scores higher than 6 (this classification of learners into levels by their IELTS scores is consistent with the practice of other researchers see, for example, Alnamer, 2017; Altakhaineh & Rahrouh, 2015; Altakhaineh & Zibin, 2017; Khan & Al-Namer, 2017). Advanced students were expected to be able to infer the hidden funny message behind the test puns.

The test

The test of this study consisted of 16 punny jokes of the four types of the pun classified by Lems (2013): 4 sound-alike puns, 4 look-alike puns, 4 close-sounding puns, and 4 texting puns (see Appendix A). The test reused Lems' (2013) own test puns. The test was checked by a linguist and a professor in literature to ensure its objectivity and suitability for the participants in this study. Before distributing the test, the participants were assured that their participation was voluntary, and that it would have no impact on their academic results. Then they were provided with clear instructions regarding what to do; they were to read the punny jokes and write whether or not they understood them. If they wrote (yes), that is, if they claimed to understand the jokes, they were to explain them. Any of the following answers for each pun question were classified as wrong answers: "no, I didn't understand the pun", "yes, I understood it" but with a wrong explanation of the pun, and no response at all. Participants spent more than thirty minutes on the test. In order to obtain more insight into the answers provided by the participants on the test, the researchers conducted an introspective session, asking 49 of the participants about their answers and the items they found most difficult on the test. The participants talked about their experience while doing the test.

Types of puns

This study adopts the contemporary classification of puns suggested by Lems (2013) who divides them into four types (Table 2) based on homophones, polysemous words, close-sounding words and instant texting. Lems (2013) explains that not all kinds of wordplay are pun, and not all puns are classified into these four types.

Table 2. Lems' four types of puns ((adapted from Lems, 2013)

Type	Description	Example	Explanation
sound-alike	based on homophones (i.e. words which sound the same but have different meanings and spelling)	Two peanuts were walking down the street, and one was a salted	The pun is in <i>a salted</i> which can be spelled in two different ways: <i>a salted</i> and <i>assaulted</i> , and have two different meanings yet the same pronunciation. Listeners can think of the two different meanings of /ə'sɔltɪd/. As the word <i>peanuts</i> is perceived as food, the sense of salted flavour is inferred, and the words <i>walking down the street</i> suggest the sense of assaulted because streets are where someone may be assaulted.
look-alike	based on polysemous words (i.e. words of the same spelling and pronunciation but with different yet related meanings)	Barry: What travels faster, hot or cold? Mary: Hot. You can always catch cold.	In Barry's question <i>cold</i> suggests relatively low temperature, whereas in Mary's answer <i>cold</i> suggests illness. Both uses of <i>cold</i> are spelled and pronounced the same, yet they have different in meanings.

close-sounding	The result of confusion caused by substituting one word for another which sounds like it with a small difference, whether this substitution is for one word or a part of a phrase	Question: How did you keep your dog out of the street? Answer: I took her to the barking lot.	A commonly used expression is “the parking lot” (i.e. a car park). <i>Parking</i> was substituted for <i>barking</i> (the sound made by a dog). These two words sound alike with the exception of the first consonant /p/ and /b/. Since the question is about a dog, the substitution produces a humorous effect.
Instant texting	Based on alphabetic, numeric, or simplified spelling	Question: Why is 10 scared? Answer: Because 7 8 9	The pun is in the numbers 7 8 9. Eight (8), the number, is pronounced the same as <i>ate</i> /et/ the past tense of <i>eat</i> . This pun humorously uses numbers. That is, 10 is scared of being eaten by 7 because 7 ate 9.

Statistical analysis

In this study, one-way ANOVA test employing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to ascertain whether there were statistically significant differences in the scores regarding the four types of puns by comparing the means of the four types. ANOVA is a statistical test that makes it possible to compare whether the variation between the scores for different types of figurative units is significantly different from that of items within each of these types (Charteris-Black, 2002; Zibin, 2016a, 2016b). Afterwards, a post hoc Tukey test was used to determine between which of the four types of puns the significant differences existed.

Results and discussion

Table 3 below shows an analysis of the correct answers for each punny joke, as well as totals for the joke type and their mean scores. The means of the scores obtained from the test show that the four types of puns were difficult to understand in general (only 37% of the participants were successful overall). The means of pun types 1, 2, and 3, were all lower than the passing grade 50%. The mean of type 4 puns exceeded the passing point but only by 5% so can still not be considered a satisfying outcome. In terms of levels of difficulty between these types, it is clear that type 4 puns (instant texting) were least difficult. Conversely, type 2 puns (look-alike) were the most difficult. Thus, the types can be ordered from the most difficult to the least difficult as follows: These results provide an answer to the first research question, which is concerned with the extent to which Arabic-speaking EFL learners understand punny jokes. Clearly the advanced learners in this study were largely unable to understand the puns in the test.

One-way ANOVA test was used to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in the scores regarding the four types of puns. Then post hoc Tukey test was used to determine which types are significantly different from one another. Tables 4 and 5 present those results.

Table 3. Analysis of correct answers for each punny joke (N = 60)

Type of pun	Joke	Correct answers	
		No.	%
Type 1: Sound-alike puns	Joke 3	16	27%
	Joke 6	22	37%
	Joke 9	22	37%
	Joke 16	24	40%
	TOTAL	84	
	MEAN	21	35%
Type 2: Look-alike puns	Joke 1	14	23%
	Joke 5	18	30%
	Joke 8	10	17%
	Joke 12	20	33%
	TOTAL	62	
	MEAN	16	26%
Type 3: Close-sounding puns	Joke 4	25	42%
	Joke 7	14	23%
	Joke 11	22	37%
	Joke 15	16	27%
	TOTAL	77	
	MEAN	19	32%
Type 4: Texting puns	Joke 2	52	87%
	Joke 10	26	43%
	Joke 13	28	47%
	Joke 14	26	43%
	TOTAL	132	
	MEAN	33	55%
All types	TOTAL	355	
	Mean	22	37%

Table 4. One-way ANOVA test results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1904.688	3	634.896	4.100	.032
Within Groups	1858.250	12	154.854		
Total	3762.938	15			

Table 4 demonstrates that there were statistically significant differences between the means of the scores regarding the four types of puns; p value was 0.032 which is lower than 0.05. This may indicate that even though the performance of the participants on the test was not satisfactory, some types of punny jokes were less difficult than other types as evidenced by the statistical significance in Table 4. However, since ANOVA indicates only whether there were statistically significant differences between the types in general, a post hoc Tukey is necessary in order to determine the statistical significance within these types (see Table 5). Through analysing the scores within the four types of puns, it can be noticed that the difference is most statistically significant between the scores of type 2 puns (look-alike puns) and type 4 puns (texting puns) as the p value is .027 which is lower than .05. The test also shows that there were no statistically significant differences between each type of the four and the other. This result suggests that there was only a statistically significant relationship between types 2 and 4. Thus, with respect to the second research question, which is concerned with whether Arabic-speaking EFL learners encounter challenges in understanding specific types of punny jokes and which types are most difficult, it is evident that these Arabic-speaking EFL learners face problems when they encounter punny jokes, in general, and that they found type 2 to be the most difficult and type 4 to be the least difficult.

Table 5. Post hoc Tukey test results

(I) type	(J) type	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
1	2	9.500	8.799	.708
	3	3.000	8.799	.986
	4	-19.750	8.799	.166
2	1	-9.500	8.799	.708
	3	-6.500	8.799	.880
	4	-29.250*	8.799	.027
3	1	-3.000	8.799	.986
	2	6.500	8.799	.880
	4	-22.750	8.799	.096
4	1	19.750	8.799	.166
	2	29.250*	8.799	.027
	3	22.750	8.799	.096

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Discussion of the test results

The following is a discussion of the challenges for the participants of this study presented by each of the four types of pun. The discussion addresses the pun types in order of difficulty and is based on the test results but incorporates learner comments from the introspection session conducted after the test.

Type 2: Look-alike punny jokes

Arabic-speaking EFL learners find type 2, look-alike punny jokes, more difficult than the other types of punny jokes (see Table 3 and 4). It is not surprising that Arabic-speaking EFL learners find problems with this type of punny jokes because those learners have little awareness of polysemy in English (Alnamer, 2017). This minimal awareness may divert their attention away from the punch-line of the joke, leading to a misunderstanding or delayed understanding of it. Some participants indicated that they did not think of extended meanings (and this is consistent with other research findings, see for example, Alnamer, 2017; Liu, 2013). For example, they did not think of *cold* as a seasonal illness in item 5 in the test. Hence, they understood the joke as *catching cold would freeze your hands* missing the punchline of the joke, probably, because of their limited awareness of the extended meaning of the word *cold*. Generally, in order to understand a polysemous word, it is important to pay special attention to the context in which the word occurs (Dash, 2008). However, in look-alike punny jokes, it is not only the polysemous words that are challenging; the context of the punny joke also has its own ambiguity, as some words may be unfamiliar. For example, in item 16, some students may not have been aware of the meaning of *watt*, a unit of power, which may have led to the lack of understanding of the intended punny joke. These sources of error may account for the low number of the correct answers with this type of punny joke.

Type 3: Close-sounding punny jokes

Type 3 punny jokes, close-sounding punny jokes, also elicited a low number of correct answers (32%) as shown in Table 3. This type of punny joke requires advanced English language proficiency (Lems, 2013). Although the participants in this study were considered advanced students and they were given enough time to read the jokes, listen to how these jokes sounded in their heads, and then process them, they found this type of punny joke difficult to understand. The low number of correct answers can possibly be attributed to participants' ignorance of the original word that was punned on, as shown in their answers to item 4 (The barber went to the bank and opened a shaving account). In this joke, the pun was on the word *shaving*, which was substituted for *saving*. Clearly, many participants did not know that there is a type of account called a saving account, or maybe they only knew it as an account, so they were not able to make any connection between the intended pun *shaving* and the original word *saving*, thinking that the existence of *shaving* in the item is normal because it is what a barber does.

Moreover, lack of knowledge of minimal pairs, which are words that differ in one sound, could make it difficult to understand close-sounding punny jokes. This can be illustrated through item 7 in the test (A skunk fell in a river and stank to the bottom). Many participants might have become confused reading this punny joke not knowing whether it was a joke or just a normal sentence or not even knowing where the pun was, so many participants left the joke unanswered or just restated the punny joke in different words as a way to explain it. The pun was on the word *stank*; the original word was *sank* which plays on the notion of the skunk sinking after it fell in a river. Many participants did not realise that the pun was on *stank*, possibly because they were unable to recall the word *sank* which, along with the word *stank*, form a minimal pair. Without access to this minimal pair they would have been unable to establish a connection between the two words.

Type 1: Sound-alike punny jokes

Type 1 punny jokes (sound-alike) elicited a low number of correct answers (35%) as shown in Table 3. Understanding this type of punny joke relies on the knowledge of a pun word's different versions, that is, a word's different spellings and meanings. This characteristic of homophones made understanding sound-alike punny jokes challenging for the participants of this study. Some participants indicated that they had mistaken one word for another, and that led to a wrong understanding of the joke. For instance, the pun in item 9 (Q: What are the strongest days? A: Saturday and Sunday, because the rest are week days), is on the word *week*; /wi:k/. Some participants, from those who claimed to understand the joke, probably mistook *week* for *weak*, thinking that "Saturday and Sunday are the weekend, the time when people rest, so they are strong, in contrast to the week days". Hence, it seems like the word *strongest* did not give any hint to the intended version of /wi:k/, which was *weak*, the opposite of strong. It is noteworthy that, generally, homophones pose some difficulties to EFL learners (Al-Jabri, 2006; Al Jayousi & Thaher, 2011), especially the fact that an English phoneme can be represented by different graphemes (letters). Other participants may have thought that *week* was the actual opposite of *strong*, not paying attention to the spelling or, perhaps, not having knowledge of the two versions of /wi:k/. Although they understood the intended joke, yet not as a result of awareness of a certain wordplay in item 9; some explained it without any reference to any pun and also wrote "not funny".

The previous example of punny jokes, item 9, also illustrated that ignorance of the culture where these puns were created can lead to a misunderstanding of the whole pun. In the Arab world, Friday and Saturday are the weekend days, in contrast to western countries, where the weekend is Saturday and Sunday. This fact could have played a role in the misunderstanding of item 9 joke which reflects western culture. This western contextualisation of puns may not be surprising because English puns are made in the English language and thus would, inevitably, reflect the culture of the countries speaking that language, especially as a first language. Nevertheless, this special feature contributes further to the challenges of understanding puns by L2 learners outside those contextual cultures.

Type 4: Texting punny jokes

Type 4 punny jokes, texting punny jokes, produced the highest number of correct answers among the 4 types of punny jokes (55%) as shown in Table 3. Texting punny jokes may not be jokes, yet the way they are punned makes them funny, more interesting, and faster to use than regular or full words. This is because they are based on using the sound and/or spelling of alphabet letters, numbers or symbols, or simplified spelling as a way to represent or spell a word (Lems, 2013). Compared to other types of punny jokes in the test of this study, the explanations of the texting punny jokes provided by all the participants were all correct; the answers that were considered wrong were those of 'no answer at all'. With modern use of instant messaging, this type of pun has started to be used among all users of phone texting applications because they are faster or easier to use. Such short cuts in language are common among those who use instant messaging frequently, perhaps particularly younger users. For example, they may prefer to write *ICU* instead of *I see you*, and *Gr8* instead of *great*.

Although this study did not aim to examine the effect of age on the participants' understanding of jokes it is worth considering whether the participants' young age (a mean age of 22) may explain why they excelled in explaining this texting type of punny jokes more than the other types. Perhaps their common use of messaging applications

makes this type of pun familiar ground for younger individuals. In this regard, as stated by Lems (2013), texting puns are created every day for more economical ways to convey messages, and they have also been a part of the lives of EFL learners in various countries around the world.

Conclusion and pedagogical implications

This study has provided evidence that Arabic-speaking EFL learners have little understanding of English punny jokes. This can be attributable to many reasons. Firstly, with regard to look-alike punny jokes, Arabic-speaking EFL learners have possibly little awareness of English polysemous words (Alnamer, 2017), and sometimes the context into which polysemous words are put could be ambiguous if unfamiliar words are used. Secondly, homophones pose some difficulties to EFL learners as one word may have more than one version, so Arabic-speaking EFL learners may mistake one word for another in a homophones-based punny joke, which would hinder their understanding of the joke. Thirdly, the possible ignorance of the western culture where English is spoken as a first language may make understanding culture-based punny jokes difficult. Fourthly, lack of vocabulary in certain disciplines of banking, medicine, or education, for instance, and unfamiliarity with certain minimal pairs may deviate attention from the punchline of a certain joke; especially close-sounding punny jokes. Finally, concerning texting punny jokes, although they are widely used nowadays, many Arabic-speaking EFL learners do not know many of these jokes. Hence, they are less likely to use them if they are texting in English.

Based on the results of this study, it is suggested that teachers of English should embed humour, in general, and punny jokes in particular, in the curriculum taught to EFL learners. Initial examination of the results of this study may suggest this advice is counter-intuitive, if puns are so difficult perhaps they should be left out of the curriculum. However, teachers need to be aware of, and to alert EFL learners' to, the ubiquity of English punny jokes and the importance of having a knowledge of puns in order to communicate well in advanced levels of English, especially since English has become a lingua franca. Furthermore, teachers should raise learners' awareness of the polysemous nature of many English words, homophones, minimal pairs, and English spelling, because a pun, in nature, is a 'wordplay' on these phenomena. Awareness of these phenomena would enable EFL learners to understand such jokes when cracked in their presence. In addition, teaching learners about puns gives them opportunities to play with words and produce their own English punny jokes thus providing a level of enjoyment and motivation. This will also help EFL learners discover the weaknesses in their productive English language skills.

EFL learners could also be encouraged to take responsibility for their learning by exposing themselves to English through reading, listening to native speakers of English, expanding their vocabulary stock in different disciplines, and learning different English phenomena, such as polysemy (see Alnamer, 2017), compounds (see Altakhaineh, 2016), homophones, and minimal pairs, all of which can help them appreciate the humour communicated in English.

Finally, it is clear that conducting the tests in a written format, while essential for collecting a large enough data sample, may itself have had some impact on participants comprehension of the jokes, especially those who may have difficulties in reading. Puns are essentially verbal humour so it would be a useful next step to conduct similar research by communicating the jokes to participants orally. This, and other research focusing on the use of humour in EFL classrooms, can improve understanding of Arabic-speaking

EFL learners' stances on humour in English and the factors that hinder their appreciation of that humour. Ultimately, this may contribute to helping learners achieve higher levels of proficiency.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers and the editor of *The Asian Journal of Applied Linguistics* for their useful comments on an earlier draft of the paper. I would also like to thank the participants of Al Ain University of Science and Technology. All remaining errors and inaccuracies are, of course, ours alone.

Notes

1. Cited from the 2006 edition of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Alexander, 2006).

About the authors

Abdul Salam Mohamad Alnamer is an assistant professor of American literature at Al Ain University of Science and Technology, UAE. His research interests are in the fields of American literature and translation.

Abdel Rahman Mitib Altakhaineih is an assistant professor of English language and linguistics at Al Ain University of Science and Technology, UAE. His research interests lie in the areas of morphology, lexical semantics, morphosyntax, applied linguistics, and psycholinguistics. He has published research papers in several journals, including: *Studia Linguistica*, *Lingua*, *Acta Linguistica Hungarica*, *Metaphor and the Social World*, *Research in Language* and *Sage Open*.

Sulafah Abdul Salam Alnamer is an English language teacher at Emirates Falcon International School, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates. Her main research interests lie in the areas of applied linguistics and second language acquisition.

References

- Al-Jabri, F. M. (2006). Common English spelling difficulties of Omani learners. In S. Borg (Ed.), *Classroom research in ELT in Oman* (pp. 88-93). Sultanate of Oman: Ministry of Education.
- Al Jayousi, A., & Thaher, M. (2011). *Spelling errors of Arab students: Types, causes, and teachers' responses*. (Unpublished MA thesis), AUS Sharja, UAE.
- Alexander, P. (Ed.). (2006). *The complete works of William Shakespeare*. London: Collins.
- Alnamer, S. A. S. (2017). On the awareness of English polysemous words by Arabic-speaking EFL learners. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 8(2), 112-121. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.8n.2p.112>
- Altakhaineih, A. R. M. (2016). Identifying Arabic compounds other than the Synthetic Genitive Construction. *Acta Linguistica Hungarica*, 63(3), 277-298.
- Altakhaineih, A. R. M., & Rahrouh, H. N. (2015). The use of euphemistic expressions by Arab EFL learners: Evidence from Al Ain University of Science and Technology. *IJEL*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v5n1p14>
- Altakhaineih, A. R. M., & Zibin, A. (2017). The effect of incidental learning on the comprehension of english affixes by Arabic-speaking EFL learners: Acquisition and application. *Research in Language*, 15(4), 405-423. <https://doi.org/10.1515/rela-2017-0023>
- Bell, N. D. (2002). *Using and understanding humor in a second language: A case study*. (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis), University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.
- Berwald, J.-P. (1992). Teaching French language and culture by means of humor. *French Review*, 66(2), 189-200.
- Brown, J. (1956). Eight types of puns. *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 71(1), 14-26. <https://doi.org/10.2307/460188>
- Bussmann, H. (1995). *Routledge dictionary of language and linguistics*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Charteris-Black, J. (2002). Second language figurative proficiency: A comparative study of Malay and English. *Applied Linguistics*, 23(1), 104-133. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/23.1.104>

- Crystal, D. (1995). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of the English language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dash, N. S. (2008). Context and contextual word meaning. *SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics*, 5(2), 21-31.
- Deneire, M. (1995). Humor and foreign language teaching. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, 8(3), 285-298. <https://doi.org/10.1515/humr.1995.8.3.285>
- Forman, R. (2011). Humorous language play in a Thai EFL classroom. *Applied Linguistics*, 32(5), 541-565. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amr022>
- Hartmann, R. R. K., & Stork, F. C. (1972). *Dictionary of language and linguistics*. London: Halsted Press.
- Hodson, R. J. (2008). Challenges for EFL learners in understanding English humour: A pilot study. *Journal of the Faculty of Global Communication*, 9, 25-45.
- Hodson, R. J. (2014). Teaching 'humour competence'. In *Proceedings of the sixth CLS international conference (CLaSIC 2014)* (pp. 149-161). Singapore: National University of Singapore Centre for Language Studies.
- Khan, S. S., & Al-Namer, L. A. S. (2017). The comprehension of English relative clauses by Arabic-speaking EFL learners. *International Journal of Education*, 9(1), 92-207.
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Lems, K. (2013). Laughing all the way: Teaching English using puns. *English Teaching Forum*, 51(1), 26-33.
- Liu, D. (2013). *Describing and explaining grammar and vocabulary in ELT: Key theories and effective practices*. London: Routledge.
- Lucas, T. (2004). *Deciphering the meaning of puns in learning English as a second language: A study of triadic interaction*. (Unpublished Dissertation), Florida State, Tallahassee, Florida.
- McArthur, T. (1992). *The Oxford companion to the English language* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Richard, W. (1975). If you say it's funny, I'll laugh. *Modern English Journal*, 6(1), 17-20.
- Schmitz, J. R. (2002). Humor as a pedagogical tool in foreign language and translation courses. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, 15(1), 89-113.
- Semiz, Ö. (2014). EFL learners' understanding of linguistic ambiguity in language-based jokes. *Journal of Narrative and Language Studies*, 2(2), 1-11.
- Skinner, M. E. (2010). All joking aside: Five reasons to use humor in the classroom. *Education Digest: Essential Readings Condensed for Quick Review*, 76(2), 19-21.
- Wanzer, M. (2002). Use of humor in the classroom: The good, the bad, and the not-so-funny things that teachers say and do. In C. L. Joseph & J. C. McCroskey (Eds.), *Communication for teachers* (pp. 116-125). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Zibin, A. (2016a). The comprehension of metaphorical expressions by Jordanian EFL learners. *SAGE Open*, 6(2), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016643144>
- Zibin, A. (2016b). On the production of metaphors and metonymies by Jordanian EFL learners: acquisition and implications. *Topics in Linguistics*, 17(2), 41-58. <https://doi.org/10.1515/topling-2016-0012>

Appendix A: The Test (Based on Lems, 2013)

IELTS score:.....

Age:.....

Please read the following jokes. Then write if you understand them. If you do, please explain why they are funny.

1- Q: What did the road say to the bridge?

A: You make me cross

Did you understand it?

Explain it:

.....

2- Hotel sign: Gr8 r8s

Did you understand it?

Explain it:

.....

3- Q: What kind of flower grows on your face?

A: Tulips!

Did you understand it?

Explain it:

.....

4- The barber went to the bank and opened a shaving account.

Did you understand it?

Explain it:

.....

5- Barry: What travels faster, hot or cold?

Mary: Hot. You can always catch cold.

Did you understand it?

Explain it:

.....

6- I practice my handwriting because it's the write thing to do.

Did you understand it?

Explain it:

.....

7- A skunk fell in a river and stank to the bottom.

Did you understand it?

Explain it:

.....

8- Q: What kind of bird is found at a construction site?

A: A crane.

Did you understand it?

Explain it:

.....

9- Q: What are the strongest days?

A: Saturday and Sunday, because the rest are week days.

Did you understand it?

Explain it:

.....

10- URAQT!

Did you understand it?

Explain it:

.....

11- Q: Where do sheep go to get a haircut?

A: The baa-baa shop.

Did you understand it?

Explain it:

.....

12- Q: What letter is never in the alphabet?

A: The one that you mail.

Did you understand it?

Explain it:

.....

13- R U L8?

Did you understand it?

Explain it:

.....

14- Why is 10 scared? Because 7 8 9.

Did you understand it?

Explain it:

.....

15- Q: How did you keep your dog out of the street?

A: I took her to the Barking Lot.

Did you understand it?

Explain it:

.....

16- Teacher: Tell me something that conducts electricity.

Student: Why, er...

Teacher: Yes, wire! Now name a unit of electrical power.

Student: A what? Teacher: Yes, a watt! Very good.

Did you understand it?

Explain it:

.....

Thank you!