# Rendering Lebanese Political Caricatures from Arabic into English: Challenges, Strategies, and Contextual Awareness

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*Abstract*

*This study examines the challenges and strategies used by thirteen third-year translation students at the Islamic University of Lebanon when translating seven of Stavro Jabra's Lebanese political caricatures from Arabic into English. Employing a qualitative design, the research integrates Vinay and Darbelnet's model of translation strategies, Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, and pragmatic analysis. Data were collected through translation tasks and follow-up interviews with four participants. Findings reveal that literal translation and borrowing were the most frequently employed strategies across all caricatures, accounting for approximately 55% of total usage. However, this overreliance often reduced the humorous and cultural depth of the target text. Less frequent strategies included equivalence, adaptation, modulation, omission, and transposition, which students applied inconsistently. The analysis of tone showed that students tended to adopt formal registers even when casual or satirical tones were required. Grammatical and punctuation errors—such as omission of ellipses or misuse of question marks—further weakened the intended humorous effect. Pragmatic analysis indicated that while all students successfully conveyed political implications and personal deixis, they struggled to reproduce contextual humor and culturally bound expressions. The study concludes that translating political caricatures demands linguistic proficiency, cultural awareness, and strategic flexibility. It recommends specialized translation training that emphasizes humor, political discourse, and cross-cultural interpretation to enhance translators' competence in rendering political caricatures effectively.*

**Keywords:** Political Caricature Translation, Humor, Cultural Equivalence, Translation Strategies, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Pragmatics, Lebanese Political Discourse.

## Introduction

Political caricatures are satirical artworks designed to critique politicians and socio-political realities using humor and symbolism. Translating these caricatures is particularly complex because it demands not only proficiency in two languages but also a deep awareness of the political, cultural, and humorous references embedded in the original. Humor, which is central to caricature, relies heavily on wordplay, irony, and cultural allusions which are resistant to direct translation. To reproduce these elements effectively, translators must possess both advanced linguistic skills and contextual knowledge of the political environment. This requires a nuanced ability to convey satire while addressing the challenges posed by idiomatic structures, stylistic variations, and syntactic differences between the source and target languages. This task is highly complex when the source and target languages originate from distinct linguistic and cultural traditions such as Arabic and English, necessitating translators to navigate lexical, pragmatic, and cultural challenges.

### Political Caricature and Humor

Political caricature represents a dynamic and evolving art form that synthesizes visual exaggeration with pointed socio-political commentary. Caricature aims to critique political situations by emphasizing distinctive traits in an exaggerated yet recognizable manner. The power of political caricatures lies in their ability to communicate complex political messages succinctly and effectively through humor and symbolism, thereby shaping public opinion and fostering socio-political discourse. Additionally, caricatures function as instruments of resistance and critique, offering marginalized voices a platform to challenge dominant

political paradigms. As Mathur elaborated, political caricatures typically encapsulate satirical responses to political events and figures, leveraging partisan perspectives to expose or ridicule those in power [1]. Kleeman (2006) further emphasized that the effectiveness of political caricatures depends significantly on the audience's familiarity with political contexts, as humor and metaphorical representations require interpretive engagement to convey intended meanings.

Humor is central to political caricature, with caricaturists deploying humor to mediate critical messages effectively while entertaining audiences. Mellinger and Hanson highlighted that humor sometimes serves as a veil for implicit political critique [2]. Furthermore, caricatures frequently utilize humor to highlight repetitive linguistic patterns associated with politicians, thereby reinforcing messages through parody. Mulyati and Nugroho noted that humor in caricatures can function not solely to amuse but to provoke critical reflection, thereby enriching the multidimensional purpose of political satire [3]. The deployment of humor within caricature traditionally acts as a mechanism to spotlight incongruities and societal absurdities, enhancing the persuasive power of visual satire. Expert caricaturists skillfully manipulate humor to underscore political messages, often harnessing nuanced forms that engage cognitive and emotional faculties of diverse audiences. The universality of humor, although culturally mediated, allows for shared amusement across linguistic and national boundaries, contributing to a collective political consciousness.

### Challenges Translating Political Caricatures
Translators confront numerous challenges, mainly cultural, linguistic, and political. Cultural challenges arise from humor styles or references unfamiliar to the target audience, requiring intervention to bridge knowledge gaps. Linguistic challenges involve managing puns, idioms, and syntactic peculiarities that complicate direct translation. Politically, translators must balance fidelity to political contexts with the varied awareness levels of audiences, occasionally necessitating adaptive references. Challenges associated with literal translation, as noted by Garg et al and Al-Smadi, include preserving accuracy while fostering engagement and clarity in the target language, often requiring creativity and cultural mediation [4-5].

### Translation Strategies to Render Political Caricatures
The translation of political caricatures involves diverse strategies aimed at preserving both semantic meaning and humorous intent. Building on Vinay and Darbelnet's foundational work, Bin Awda identified primary strategies, including literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation [6-7]. Literal translation involves a direct, word-for-word correspondence and is useful for maintaining puns and wordplay fidelity but may risk awkwardness in the target language. As for transposition, it encompasses grammatical and syntactic adjustments, such as altering word order or voice, to align with target language conventions. Modulation, another strategy, changes perspective or expression to better fit target culture and language norms without compromising meaning. Equivalence, on the other hand, focuses on producing analogous effects through culturally relevant expressions or idioms. An additional strategy, adaptation, involves significant modifications or substitutions to contextual references to ensure target audience comprehension.

Moreover, borrowing, where terms are loaned directly from the source language, and omission or paraphrasing used selectively to accommodate spatial constraints inherent in caricature captions.

### Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) Theory and Pragmatic Analysis to Interpret Political Caricatures
Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory offers a tripartite metafunctional model—ideational, interpersonal, and textual—that comprehensively examines language use in political caricatures. The ideational metafunction addresses content representation through processes and participants, while the interpersonal metafunction concerns interactional dynamics between speaker and audience. The textual metafunction manages information flow and coherence in discourse. Pragmatic analysis complements SFL by emphasizing contextual meaning, speaker intention, and implicature—a concept where meaning extends beyond literal expressions. Critical pragmatic features such as deixis, presupposition, and speech acts underscore the complexities inherent in political caricature translation, where implicit meanings and social cues are pivotal.

### Existing Research on Translating Political Caricatures
Recent empirical research explores diverse facets of humor and caricature translation. Abdul Kareem and Al-Emara demonstrated that crowdsourcing combined with game theory can enhance political cartoon translation efficiency, despite notable semantic ambiguities [8]. In another study, Al-Kenani and Banda applied SFL to Yemeni political cartoons, revealing challenges in formality, coherence, and grammar. Similarly, Al-Sohbani and Muthanna identified lexical and cultural knowledge deficits as primary impediments for Arabic-English translators [9, 10]. In their research, Eldin and Nayyef (2016) focused on pragmatics in political cartoons, detecting significant use of deictic expressions, presuppositions, and indirect speech acts [11]. These studies highlight pragmatics' critical role in conveying subtle political meanings. Additionally, translators' strategy preferences have been analyzed by Hassan and Alsmadi, who found literal translation prevalent but complemented by modulation, omission, and adaptation strategies [5-12]. Moreover, investigations into audiovisual humor translation by Ali and Eljazouli and Azmi underscore the complexities of subtitling culturally sensitive humor, pointing to dominant strategies like preservation and reduction tailored to linguistic and cultural contexts [13, 14].

### Study Objectives and Research Questions
Despite their exposure to diverse translation courses, including consecutive, economic, legal, literary, and media translation, these students have not received specialized training in translating political caricatures. This presents a potential gap that undermines their ability to retain humor and nuanced political commentary inherent in such texts. This deficiency is significant given that political caricature translation uniquely integrates linguistic, cultural, and political competencies that extend beyond conventional translation paradigms. Previous research highlights several challenges attributable to this gap. Translators often struggle with cultural concept transferability and lexical equivalence in political caricature translation. Linguistic difficulties include managing syntactic complexity, idiomatic expressions, and culturally bounded terms, which can lead to loss of meaning or humor and inaccurate translations if not adequate-

ly addressed. The primary objective of this study is to explore the specific challenges faced and strategies employed by third-year translation students at the Islamic University of Lebanon in translating Stavro Jabra's Lebanese political caricatures from Arabic into English. This study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) What strategies do third-year translation students at the Islamic University of Lebanon adopt in translating Stavro Jabra's political caricatures from Arabic into English? (2) What are the principal challenges faced by these students when translating these political caricatures from Arabic into English?

### Limitations of the Study

The scope of this study is bounded by several limitations: the participant sample comprises only thirteen third-year translation students from two campuses of the Islamic University of Lebanon (Tyre & Khalde), which restricts the generalizability of findings. Data collection was confined to a specific timeframe in May 2024, potentially limiting longitudinal insights. Finally, the study's focus on a single type of political caricature authored by Stavro Jabra may constrain applicability to other styles or sources of political satire.

### Methods

**Table 1:** The 7 Caricatures by Stavro Jabra

| Caricatures | Year | Retrieved From |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Caricature 1 | 2015 | https://share.google/images/6rXisulKOIMarSKm6 |
| Caricature 2 | 2015 | https://www.instagram.com/p/-vTKM1nfH7/?igsh=eW1ydXJ4cmphdmgx |
| Caricature 3 | 2015 | https://www.instagram.com/p/0FN55nHfP3/?igsh=N2todGZpejg4bGcy |
| Caricature 4 | 2016 | https://www.instagram.com/p/BK8B9y7jroH/?igsh=eHY5c3p6MzJrNzUy |
| Caricature 5 | 2016 | https://www.instagram.com/p/BFRRtwSHfGK/?igsh=MXZwM3BzaWpta2g0dw== |
| Caricature 6 | 2016 | https://janoubia.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/kari-5.jpg |
| Caricature 7 | 2016 | https://www.instagram.com/p/BB4POTaHfAh/?igsh=NzF5YnhsNG4yZTlj |

The 4 participants who agreed to be interviewed individually for around 20-30 minutes shared their experiences translating political caricatures such as the ones by Stavro Jabra. They were asked to communicate what were the most challenging words/phrases to translate and to justify the use of strategies they employed to render the various caricatures from Arabic into English. The 4 interviews were recorded, transcribed, and interpreted using thematic coding. The anonymity and confidentiality were ensured

This qualitative case study examined the challenges faced and the translation strategies employed by thirteen third-year translation students in rendering seven political caricatures by Stavro Jabra from Arabic into English. Participants aged between 21 and 25 years and were enrolled in the Islamic University of Lebanon as follows: 10 from Tyre campus and 3 from Khaldeh campus. These participants volunteered to take part in this study and 4 of them, 2 males and 2 females, consented to be interviewed after the completion of the translation task.

### Data Collection and Analysis Methods

This study employed 2 data collection tools: political caricatures and individual interviews. The 7 caricatures by Stavro Jabra dating between 2015 and 2016 were selected based on their political and cultural relevance as well as their use of colloquial expressions, idioms, and humor (see Table 1). Participants were given 14 caricatures whereby each original Arabic caricature was followed by the same sketch after erasing the Arabic words to make room for the English translation (see Appendix A). Participants had around 30 minutes to complete the translation task of the 7 caricatures without the help of their mobile phones or the use of dictionaries. The data resulting from the translation task were analyzed using Vinay and Darbelnet's strategies, Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, in addition to pragmatic analysis.

to protect the privacy of the participants in this study.

### Results

The section below displays the results of the 13 students' translation of the 7 caricatures by Stavro Jabra using Vinay and Darbelnet's translation strategies, Halliday SFL framework, pragmatic analysis in addition to the interpretation of the individual interviews.

**Table 2:** The Analysis of Stavro Jabra's Political Caricatures Rendered from Arabic into English

| Caricature | | Vinay &Darbelnet's Translation Strategies | Halliday SFL | Pragmatic Analysis |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | جلسة انتخاب برّي: الرئيس جلسة مفتوحة حتى انتهاء الولاية يا حضرتك يعني بدك استيييذي و ما يعجبك النصاب و ما أكيد ... الفراغ بيعجبني...بس خليها عا الله ... وحزب | Literal (92%)<br>Equivalence (23%)<br>Borrowing (100%)<br>Omission (7%) | Casual T (38%)<br>Formal T(62%)<br>Declarative (100%)<br>Correct Pun (15%)<br>Wrong Pun (85%)<br>Conjunction (100%) | Existential (100%)<br>Factual Pre (100%)<br>Political imp (100%)<br>Personal d (100%)<br>Social deixis (92%) |

| # | Text | Strategies | Tone/Punctuation | Presupposition |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | فرنجية : مرشحنا الوال لا<br>يزال النائب ميشال عون<br>سليمان بيك...رح ضل<br>مع فريق ٨ آذار أو نعم ؟!<br>أكيد مع عون | Modulation (15%)<br>Literal (100%)<br>Equivalence (30%)<br>Addition (23%)<br>Borrowing (100%)<br>Omission (30%)<br>Transposition (15%) | Casual T (62%)<br>Formal T (38%)<br>Declarative (100%)<br>Interrogative (53%)<br>Correct Pun (15%)<br>Wrong Pun (85%)<br>Conjunction (100%) | Existential (100%)<br>Factual Pre (100%)<br>Political imp (100%)<br>Personal d (100%)<br>Social deixis (100%) |
| 3 | عون نور روزر برري في عين التينة<br>قليلي... هلقه تنيني رح تفص<br>معي أو نعم؟!<br>طمن بالك أكيد مع عون | Modulation (7%)<br>Literal (100%)<br>Equivalence (30%)<br>Borrowing (100%)<br>Transposition (38%) | Casual T (100%)<br>Declarative (100%)<br>Interrogative (76%)<br>Correct Pun (62%)<br>Wrong Pun (38%)<br>Conjunction (100%) | Existential (100%)<br>Factual Pre (100%)<br>Political imp (100%)<br>Personal d (100%)<br>Social deixis (23%) |
| 4 | الحريري زار سامي جميل في<br>الصيفي بالحريري الصيفي<br>و الرئاسة بعدها مصيفي...<br>الكتائب اللبنانية | Adaptation (15%)<br>Literal (100%)<br>Borrowing (100%)<br>Omission (23%)<br>Theorie Int (76%) | Casual T (38%)<br>Formal T (62%)<br>Declarative (100%)<br>Correct Pun (7%)<br>Wrong Pun (93%)<br>Conjunction (100%) | Existential (100%)<br>Factual Pre (69%)<br>Political imp (100%)<br>Personal d (100%)<br>Social deixis (46%) |
| 5 | الانتخابات البلدية و<br>الاخاتيرية تحديث الانتخابات<br>في بيروت 20.14% بالمية<br>قولكن لا ال 80 بالمية الباقيين<br>وين...ننين وين...اصواتن... وين<br>وجهن... ننين ننين | Adaptation (7%)<br>Literal (92%)<br>Equivalence (38%)<br>Addition (7%)<br>Omission (53%) | Casual T (100%)<br>Declarative (100%)<br>Correct Pun (15%)<br>Wrong Pun (85%)<br>Conjunction (100%) | Existential (100%)<br>Factual Pre (100%)<br>Political imp (100%)<br>Social deixis (23%) |
| 6 | عون يكلف الحريري و نصرالله<br>يكلف برري<br>يكون عندك أمل خاف الله و حزب<br>وما يكون نبيه برا | Adaptation (7%)<br>Literal (100%)<br>Equivalence (7%)<br>Borrowing (100%)<br>Omission (7%) | Casual T (92%)<br>Formal T (7%)<br>Declarative (100%)<br>Correct Pun (15%)<br>Wrong Pun (85%)<br>Conjunction (100%) | Existential (100%)<br>Factual Pre (38%)<br>Lexical pre (30%)<br>Political imp (100%)<br>Personal d (100%)<br>Social deixis (23%) |
| 7 | السفير الروسي زاسبيكين<br>زار الحريري<br>يا شيخ سعد... انتخاب الرئيس<br>شأن داخلي...<br>إيه... و كمان الازمة السورية شأن<br>داخلي...<br>الدفاع الروسية: طائرتان في<br>سوريا دمرت ١٦٠٠ موقع | Literal (92%)<br>Equivalence (15%)<br>Borrowing (92%)<br>Omission (46%) | Casual T (53%)<br>Formal T (15%)<br>Declarative (100%)<br>Correct Pun (38%)<br>Wrong Pun (62%)<br>Conjunction (100%) | Existential (100%)<br>Factual Pre (100%)<br>Political imp (100%)<br>Personal d (100%) |

The following abbreviations were used in Table 2 due to space limitations: Casual T: Casual Tone, Correct Pun: Correct Punctuation, Existential Pre: Existential Presupposition, Factual Pre: Factual Presupposition, Formal T: Formal Tone, Lexical Pre: Lexical Presupposition, Personal D: Personal Deixis, Political Imp: Political Implications, Theorie Int: Theorie Interpretative du sens, and Wrong Pun: Wrong Punctuation.

### Using Vinay and Darbelnet's Translation Strategies to Analyze Stavro Jabra's Political Caricatures

The analysis of Table 2 reveals that the 13 participants frequently employed literal translation and borrowing as their primary strategies for translating the seven political caricatures. For instance, in Caricature 1, borrowing was used for the term [برري] (Berri), directly transferred as "Berri," while literal translation accounted for translating the phrase [برري: جلسة انتخاب الرئيس مفتوحة حتى انتهاء الولاية] as "Berri: the presidential election session is an open session until the end of the Term." These two strategies dominated Caricature 1's translations, with 92% of participants applying the literal strategy and 100% employing borrowing. Conversely, equivalence was utilized by 23% of students, who rendered [برري] as "Mr. Nabih" or "Mr. Berri," and omission was applied by 7% who excluded elements such as [برري: جلسة انتخاب الرئيس مفتوحة حتى انتهاء الولاية]. يعني يضرتك يا ستييذي بدك للنصاب و ما يعجبك [أكيد بيعجبني... بس خليها عا الله ... و حزب] resulting in the TL: "So, Mr. Berri you want the quorum. For sure I like but leave it for the lord and his party." While the omission strategy was acceptable, it proved less effective than borrowing or literal translation.

In Caricature 2, borrowing and literal translation were uniformly adopted by 100% of the students. For example, [فرنجية : مرشحنا الاول لا يزال ميشال عون] was rendered as "Frangieh: our first candidate is still 'Michelle Aoun'," and [سليمان بيك... حر ضل مع فريق ٨ آذار أو نعم ؟] as "Sulayman bek so you decided to stay with unified March 8th alliance or you will change your opinion." Modulation altered meaning in 15% of cases by interpreting [مرشحنا الاول لا يزال النائب : فرنجية] as [ميشال عون] "Frangieh: our decision is to elect," and transposition changed word order in 15%, converting the phrase [ح ضل مع فريق ٨ آذار أو نعم ؟] into "Aoun is still as the prime candidate." Equivalence was observed in 30% translating [عون] as "Mr. Michael Aoun," while omission affected 30%, evidenced by eliminating "deputy" in the phrase. Addition was employed by 23% through phrases like [ح ضل مع فريق ٨ آذار أو نعم ؟] translated as "Are you still with 8 March party or with Aoun?!"

Caricature 3 demonstrated full application of borrowing and literal translation by all students for terms such as [عون], [بري], and [عين التنية], rendered as "Aoun," "Beri," and "Ein el teni," respectively. Literal translation of the sentence [عون يزور بري في عين التنية. قلي... قله تنيي تصف حر معي أو من؟!نمط] [نمط كالك مع عون] became "Aoun visits Berri at Aintineh. Tell me now... Now you will support me or You will support Aoun? Relax Absolutely I support Aoun." Equivalence in translating [نمط كالك أكيد] to "Don't worry, rest assured" occurred in 30% of cases, transposition modified word order in 38%, and modulation was noted in 7%, changing [نمط كالك] to "Chill." For Caricature 4, borrowing and literal translation were again unanimous across students. Names such as [الحريري], [سامي جميل], and [الصيفي] were retained as "Al Hariri," "Sami Jmail," and "Sayfi." Literal rendering of [الحريري زار سامي جميل في الصيفي] as "Hariri visited Sami Elgmayel in Sayfi" was consistent for 100%. Theorie interpretative du sens was applied by 76%, evidenced by translations of [الحريري بالصيفي و الرئاسة بعدها مصيفي] as "Hariri in Saifi and president hasn't been elected yet." Omission characterized 23% who deleted words like [الكتائب اللبنانية], and 15% employed adaptation for [مصيفي], translating it as "her vacation."

In Caricature 5, literal translation was predominantly inappropriate, evidenced in 92% of student translations such as ["الانتخابات البلدية و الاختيارية تحديث الانتخابات في بيروت 20.14% بالميه"] rendered as "Municipal and elections. The percentage of the votes in Beyrouth 20.14%." Adaptation was effectively utilized by 7%, correctively translating [أصوات] as "votes." Omission dominated in 53%, deleting phrases like ["الاختيارية تحديث",] while addition was minimal at 7% to insert words such as "will continue." Equivalence appeared in 38%, maintaining balance by translating [قلكن لا 80 بالميه] [بالقيين وين ؟ نين] as "Where do you think that the remaining 80% are at… where are your voices."

Caricature 6 exposed limitations of literal translation and borrowing, with all participants employing these methods for names such as [عون], [الحريري], and [نصرالله]. Literal translation accounted for translating [عون يكلف الحريري و نصرالله] [يكلف بري. يكون عند كل أمل خاف الله و حزب و ما يكون نبيه برا] as "Aoun assigns Al-Hariri and Nasrallah assigns Berri. Have some hope beware of Allah and his party and don't let Nabih out." Adaptation appeared in 7% for [الله و حزب] retained as

"Allah w hezbo," equivalence was also 7%, and omission was similarly 7%.

In Caricature 7, 92% utilized literal translation and borrowing, applying terms like [زاسبيكين], [شيخ سعد], and [الحريري] directly as "Zasbikin," "Sheikh Saad," and "Al Hariri." Literal translation was adopted for [قسلة السفير الروسي زاسبيكين راز الحريري] as "Russia ambassador Zasbikin visited Hariri." Omission was significant, with 46% deleting essential components such as [ترمد ١٦٠٠ موقع]. Equivalence was employed in 15% of cases for names like [شيخ سعد].

In brief, the findings unveil that literal translation and borrowing were the pervasive strategies (100%) across caricatures 2, 3, 4, and 6, and to a slightly lesser degree (92%) in caricatures 1, 5, and 7. Adaptation surged in caricature 4 at 15%, and modulation (15%) was predominantly observed in caricature 2. Equivalence appeared markedly in caricature 5 (38%), while omission peaked in caricature 5 (53%), illustrating varied application of strategies within individual caricatures.

### Analysis of Tone and Grammatical Elements Using SFL Framework

Regarding tone, Halliday's SFL framework revealed a spectrum between formal and casual registers across the caricatures as shown in Table 2. For instance, caricatures 1 and 4 exhibited a predominance of formal tone with 62% of participants choosing formal wording, such as translating [حريري] to "Mr. Saad" to convey seriousness. Similarly, in caricature 1, terms like [استيذ] were translated as "sir," "Estez," or "Mr. Nabih," reflecting a more formal style. In contrast, caricatures 3 and 5 were rendered entirely with casual tone (100%) to capture the humor intrinsic to the original text, as seen in the translation of phrases like [وينن... وين اصواتن... وين وجوهن] into "Where are they... Where are their voices... Where are their faces." Caricature 6 also mainly maintained a casual tone (92%). This tonal variation suggests that students could deploy casual language effectively when humor was obviously presented but struggled when humor required more subtle interpretation. In terms of sentence types, declarative sentences dominated all translations (100%). For example, the phrase [جلسة انتخاب الرئيس: بري جلسة مفتوحة حتى انتهاء الولاية] was accurately translated into the declarative "Berri: the presidential election session is an open session until the end of the term." However, interrogation structures posed difficulties. While caricature 2 saw 53% of students correctly form interrogative sentences, caricature 3 had 76% inappropriate use of question marks added where none existed in the source text. Moreover, participants demonstrated an inconsistency in the use of punctuation. In caricature one, almost all the students failed to include the ellipsis in the phrase أكيد ما بيعجبني بس خليها عا الله و حزبو, which reduced the ironic tone. Similar omissions were observed in caricatures two, four, and seven. Students often added question marks where none existed or removed them when necessary. In caricature five, more than half of the participants inserted question marks incorrectly, while in caricature six some added exclamation marks that distorted the intended meaning.

### Pragmatic Analysis Results

According to the results in Table 2, pragmatic examination of the translated caricatures found that 100% of students conveyed

political implications across all caricatures and consistently used personal deixis in referencing prominent political figures such as [سليمان بيك] "Sleiman Beik", [الحريري] "Hariri", and [عون] "Aoun". The caricatures also contain political commentary, such as in caricature 5, where the phrase [قولكن ال 80 بالمية ...وين اصواتن... وين وجوهن...] underscores voter absenteeism — translated as "The percentage of election in Beirut 2014. Where are the rest of 80%? their votes? Who are they?" Social deixis appeared variably depending on caricature context. Existential and factual presuppositions were also manifest throughout, reinforcing the political messages embedded in the source texts. All students included direct speech acts, adhering closely to the present tense and immediate tone used in the original, conveying a sense of immediacy and engagement.

### Analysis of Individual Interviews

The individual interviews with 4 participants were analyzed using thematic coding. They offered deeper insight into the cognitive and cultural challenges encountered during the translation task.

### Challenges in Translating Political Caricatures

Participants acknowledged that political caricatures comprise a complex blend of political commentary, cultural references, satire, idioms, sarcasm, wordplay, puns, and humor. One participant noted that such caricatures function as political letters and opinions articulated through nuanced linguistic techniques. Another highlighted that humor and cultural specificity, such as the reference [الرئاسة بعدها مصيفي] or the phrase [البايقين وين... وين], make literal translation difficult as these elements are deeply embedded in Lebanese political culture. Moreover, participants frequently encountered obstacles in conveying the cultural and political context. For example, words like [مصيفي] and [بالصيفي] pose translation difficulties due to their allusion to specific Lebanese locales with political connotations. Attempts to render these terms literally as "on hold" or borrow terms like "Sayfi" often failed to transmit the humor and cultural weight intended. A participant shared that the phrase [قله تيني] was particularly challenging, as no direct equivalent in English captures the political humor conveyed. Additionally, when addressing specific caricatures, particularly those involving figures like Sami Gmayel and Saad Hariri, participants expressed difficulty grasping the underlying political nuances and cultural context necessary for an effective translation. This resulted in strategies like borrowing, literal translation, and occasional adaptation to maintain audience comprehension while attempting to preserve the original message's humor and intent.

### Frequently Used Translation Strategies

Regarding translation strategies deployed to sustain humor, responses varied. One interviewee found Slayman Frangieh's caricature the most humorous and chose word-for-word translation to preserve the playfulness. Others used adaptation, such as modifying [كمان الزمة السورية شأن داخلي] to resonate with an American-speaking audience. Strategies like paraphrasing and omission were also applied to balance clarity, brevity, and humor, especially given the spatial constraints inherent to caricature translation. When handling puns, idioms, and complex wordplay, several participants leaned on literal and borrowing strategies. They did so with varying success, as some idiomatic expressions lacked clear equivalents — for instance, translating the phrase [خاف الله و حزبو] literally as "fear God and his party" or adapting it for cultural relevance. Limited space in caricatures necessitated condensation strategies such as shortening phrases, omitting repetitious information, or selecting short vocabulary. One participant mentioned writing in smaller fonts to retain space for visual elements.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Vinay and Darbelnet's model, Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics framework, and pragmatic analysis were employed to examine the 7 translated political caricatures by Stavro Jabra. Interviews provided in-depth understanding of the strategies used in the translation task in addition to the obstacles faced by the participants. The results analyzed earlier are discussed below aiming at answering the 2 research questions.

### RQ1. What strategies do third-year translation students at the Islamic University of Lebanon adopt in translating Stavro Jabra's political caricatures from Arabic into English?

As shown in Table 2, the most frequently used strategies were literal translation and borrowing, consistently applied in all 7 caricatures. Borrowing was evident in the treatment of political names such as Berri, Aoun, and Hariri, while literal translation was observed in the direct rendering of political statements. However, this reliance on literal and borrowing strategies often decrease the humor and cultural depth in caricatures. Other strategies such as equivalence, adaptation, omission, modulation, transposition, and addition were used less frequently and inconsistently. For example, in caricature five, over one third of the students used equivalence effectively to translate وين اصواتن as votes, while more than half applied omission, deleting necessary cultural markers. Adaptation appeared most clearly in caricature four, where some students translated مصيفي as her vacation to indicate delay in the presidency. Modulation appeared in caricature two, while transposition was most evident in caricature three. Addition was rarely used, and when applied, it was often ineffective. The divergent application of strategies within the same caricature underscores participants' uncertainty and inconsistent grasp of translation frameworks. For example, in Caricature 1, while 92% used literal translation on phrases like [خليها عا الله ... و حزبو] ("but I'll leave it to Allah... and his party"), 23% preferred equivalence by rendering it as "keep it to God and Hizballah." Similarly, in Caricature 2, borrowing was unanimous for [سليمان بيك] as "Sleiman Bek," but 30% applied equivalence by translating it as "Minister Sleiman." The results of the interviews showed that the 4 interviewees often employed literal translation when possible but acknowledged the necessity of adaptation or paraphrase when direct equivalence risked losing humor or meaning. One student admitted that literal translation did not capture the meaning of قله تيني, and punctuation made it harder to convey humor. Some used adaptation to suit the expectations of the target audience. One of the students noted that he made the translation sound as if an American speaker had phrased it, in order to preserve humor. Others admitted to relying heavily on literal translation, describing it as the easiest approach even though it often failed to capture the intended message.

### RQ2: What are the Principal Challenges Faced by These Students When Translating these Political Caricatures from Arabic into English?

As mentioned earlier, the use of Vinay and Darbelnet's model and interview results showed inconsistency in strategy selection revealing challenges participants faced during the translation task. The analysis of tone revealed important inconsistencies. Halliday's framework showed that caricatures one and four displayed the highest use of formal tone, even though humor and casualness were required. Caricatures three and five, by contrast, showed full usage of casual tone, which better reflected the satirical nature of the texts. Caricature six was also predominantly casual. These findings indicate that students often misjudged when to employ humor or informality, which weakened the effectiveness of their translations. Declarative sentences were consistently accurate across all caricatures, but interrogatives were frequently mishandled. Caricature three displayed the highest correct use of interrogatives, yet caricature two revealed that less than two thirds of the students maintained proper question structure. Such patterns demonstrate limited awareness of how humor and meaning are shaped through grammar and sentence type.

Moreover, punctuation usage was equally inconsistent. Critical signs such as ellipses, question marks, and exclamation points were frequently omitted or misused. For example, approximately 92% of students failed to retain ellipses in caricature 4's phrase [الحريري بالصيفي و الرئاسة بعد ماده مصيفي...], which was translated as "Alhariri is in Al Saifi and the presidency is still vacant." Similarly, ellipses were omitted in 85% of translations of caricature 1's [أكيد ما بجعجعينب... بس خليها عا الله ... وحزبو]. These punctuation lapses undermine the intended tone and rhythm, indicating a general lack of awareness regarding the functional importance of punctuation in political caricatures. on the other hand, pragmatic analysis was less challenging revealing more consistent results. All students recognized the political implications embedded in the caricatures. Personal deixis, such as references to Aoun, Hariri, and Sleiman Bek, was evident in every translation. Social deixis varied, with the highest frequency in caricature two and the lowest in caricature seven. Factual presuppositions were most evident in caricatures one, two, three, five, and seven, while existential presuppositions appeared in all texts. These pragmatic features show that students could identify political figures and contexts, yet their handling of tone and humor limited the overall accuracy of their translations. Additionally, thematic analysis of the interviews reinforced these findings. Students emphasized difficulties with cultural references, idioms, and wordplay. One participant explained that it was hard to explain بالصيفْي or مصيفي to an English audience, as these words simply do not exist in English. Participants also described how they tried to manage space by omitting repetitive phrases or using shorter equivalents.

## Discussion

The findings of this study highlight both the linguistic and cultural complexity of translating Stavro Jabra's Lebanese political caricatures from Arabic into English. As shown in the results, the thirteen translation students primarily relied on literal translation and borrowing, strategies that Vinay and Darbelnet classify as direct procedures [6]. This overreliance on surface equivalence reflects a limited command of indirect strategies such as modulation, adaptation, and equivalence, which are essential when dealing with humor, idioms, and culturally embedded political discourse. Such outcomes confirm earlier studies indicating

that student translators tend to choose literal translation for its apparent accuracy but often fail to reproduce the stylistic and pragmatic effects of the source text. Moreover, the challenges identified in tone, grammar, and punctuation further reinforce the theoretical insights presented earlier [5-12]. According to the analysis using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, this study highlights the dominance of formal tone (E.g. 62% in caricatures 1 and 4).

Although humor and informality were required, students could not consistently align interpersonal metafunctions with contextual expectations. This mismatch parallels Al-Kenani and Banda's (2018) findings that EFL learners often mismanage formality when translating political cartoons, resulting in reduced communicative effect. Similarly, the omission or misuse of punctuation marks—such as ellipses or question marks—weakened the textual metafunction by disrupting rhythm and humor, echoing Dorri's discussion of how textual cohesion affects translation coherence. Additionally, pragmatic analysis of the data revealed that, while all students successfully conveyed political implications and personal deixis, many failed to reproduce social deixis and contextual humor [9-15]. The consistent recognition of political figures such as Berri, Hariri, and Aoun shows awareness of the ideational metafunction, yet the inability to transfer humor and satire points to a gap in pragmatic competence.

Additionally, the interviews further contextualize these results by revealing students' reliance on literal translation as a coping mechanism rather than a deliberate strategy. Their justifications—such as limited familiarity with Lebanese political history or fear of distorting meaning—reflect what Al-Sohbani and Muthanna identified as insufficient cultural literacy in Arabic–English translation programs [10]. The imbalance of reconciling linguistic fidelity with communicative effectiveness in cross-cultural satire translation is also highlighted by previous research [13-16]. Furthermore, the consistent errors in tone, punctuation, and question structure expose a pedagogical gap between theoretical knowledge and applied translation skills. As proposed earlier, translating political caricatures requires mastery of all three metafunctions—ideational, interpersonal, and textual—combined with pragmatic sensitivity to implicature, deixis, and presupposition. The findings confirm that while students could identify explicit political meaning, they struggled to capture implicit humor and cultural nuance, thus validating claims by Mathur and Chtatou that satire translation is an advanced competence demanding both linguistic creativity and deep cultural awareness [1-17].

## Conclusion

The combination of Vinay and Darbelnet's strategies, SFL framework, and pragmatic analyses, supported by thematic interview insights, reveals the multifaceted challenges translation students face when working on political caricatures [17-20]. These challenges include proper tone selection, syntactic adaptation, punctuation accuracy, and navigating culturally specific humor. Students employed a range of translation strategies mostly literal translation and borrowing with less frequent use of omission, adaptation, paraphrasing, modulation, and transposition. Also, participants frequently struggled to apply them effectively due to limited cultural and political knowledge [21]. Moreover, the study demonstrates that translating political car-

icatures from Arabic into English presents both linguistic and cultural challenges. Students often failed to capture humor, satire, and cultural references because of their reliance on literal and borrowing strategies. While declarative sentences and cohesive links were consistently accurate, interrogatives, punctuation, and tone were often misapplied [22-25]. Cultural and pragmatic nuances were either omitted or inadequately adapted, leading to translations that lacked clarity and effectiveness. The interviews revealed that students were aware of these difficulties but often felt unprepared to handle them. They admitted that literal translation was the easiest option, yet it left the caricatures flat and humorless [26].

Political caricatures are an important cultural product in Lebanon, and their translation into English can provide international audiences with insight into Lebanese political life. By equipping translation students with the necessary skills, strategies, and cultural awareness, their work can become both accurate and impactful, preserving the humor and critique embedded in the original caricatures. The findings underscore the importance of specialized training to enhance translators' linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic competence for translating humor-rich political caricatures authentically and intelligibly [27-29].

## Recommendations to Better Rendering Political Caricatures

In order to improve student performance, several recommendations can be made. Translation curricula should include specialized courses focusing on humor, satire, and political discourse, with a strong emphasis on practice. Training should highlight not only literal and borrowing strategies but also equivalence, adaptation, modulation, and omission, showing students when and how to apply each effectively [30]. Attention should also be given to punctuation and sentence structure, particularly the role of ellipses and interrogatives in shaping tone. Cultural competence must be prioritized by exposing students to the political and social contexts of caricatures, comparing Arabic and English satirical texts, and engaging them in exercises that highlight cultural references. Finally, the results of this study underscore the imperative for targeted training in political caricature translation and contributes to understanding the nuanced interplay between humor, politics, and language in the translation process [31, 32].

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**Appendix A: Caricature 1 (2015)**



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