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Gender-based Analysis of Sarcasm in Instagram Comments: A Case Study of Piers Morgan's Show.

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Abstract

The current study tackles sarcasm in Instagram comments and specifically from a gender-based perspective. It deals with how men and women use sarcasm in their comments on social media and specifically on Instagram. The study aims at analyzing 80 out of 600 comments from Piers Morgan's show 'uncensored' using Camp (2011) model of sarcasm for analysis. The model categorizes sarcasm into four types: propositional sarcasm, lexical sarcasm, 'like' prefixed sarcasm and finally illocutionary sarcasm. The study uses a descriptive qualitative method in gathering and examining the data. The findings of the study show that men use sarcastic comments more than women in general. However, one type is used more by women than men.

Keywords: sarcasm, gender, Instagram, uncensored, comments

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تحليل السخرية في تعليقات الانستغرام من منظور النوع الاجتماعي : دراسة حالة برنامج بيرس مورغان.

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المستخلص

تتناول الدراسة الحالية السخرية في تعليقات الانستغرام، وتحديدًا من منظور الجنس (ذكر /انثى). تتناول الدراسة كيفية استخدام الرجال والنساء للسخرية في تعليقاتهم. تهدف الدراسة إلى تحليل 80 من أصل 600 تعليق من حساب برنامج بيرس مورغان "غير خاضع للرقابة"، باستخدام نموذج كامب (2011) للسخرية. يُصنّف النموذج السخرية إلى أربعة أنواع: السخرية الحرفية، والسخرية المعجمية، والسخرية المسبوقة بـ "like"، وأخيرًا السخرية الانجازية. تستخدم الدراسة منهجية وصفية نوعية في جمع البيانات وفحصها. تُظهر نتائج الدراسة أن الرجال يستخدمون التعليقات الساخرة أكثر من النساء بشكل عام. ومع ذلك، يُستخدم نوع واحد من السخرية أكثر من الرجال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السخرية، النوع الاجتماعي، انستغرام، غير خاضع للرقابة، التعليقات

1. Introduction

The human ability to manipulate words is astonishing and it is the main agitator for most linguistic studies. Sarcasm as a linguistic phenomenon is a manipulative way of forming words to mean something other than what is said.

Like other linguistic terms, sarcasm has many definitions. Some of the definitions can mistakenly consider it a synonym of irony. Sarcasm is different from irony in aspects that will be clarified thoroughly by defining the term. Baldick (2001) defines sarcasm as forming speech to say something and meaning something else in its basic form. Poria et al. (2016) define sarcasm as a sharp, bitter, or cutting expression or remark, a way to hurt others in an indirect way.

Manser (1996) states that sarcasm entails harming others through speech in both written or spoken form, especially with tone of voice. Furthermore, the person who uses

sarcasm is viewed as being more insincere, impolite, humorous, with a more aggressive and anger-provoking tone (Kareem & Najm, 2024).

The term originally derived from the Greek verb” sarkazein” which means to “ cut the flesh” and this enhances the image of being aggressive and cruel when using sarcasm (Briggs, 1978).

Generally speaking, the purpose of using sarcasm can vary according to context but it can be one of the three: to show wit, whimper, or evasion. The negativity and hostility in the sarcastic line serves the speaker’s purpose. Another common purpose of sarcasm can be to criticize and make the addressee look trivial and silly (katyana (2019). Sarcasm is not easily understood, so speakers and listeners must share an idea of what is said to infer what is behind it. Sarcasm doesn’t have a clear meaning (Caucci & Kreuz, 2012).

On the difference between sarcasm and irony, crystal (2004) in his encyclopedia of English language states that sarcasm can be considered as verbal irony in which only the speaker is amused, and the listener is offended and disrespected (Wahab & Ahmed, 2024).

Noticeably, it is assumed that the essence of using sarcasm is to cause pain by ironical or harsh words. It is claimed that irony may be the basic device in creating sarcasm, although it is not essential for a sarcastic line to be ironic. Abrams (2012) states that sarcasm can be considered as equivalent to irony but there is a difference in intonation, and this opinion is supported by Crystal (2011) who states that tone has a crucial role in personal communicative attitudes like sarcasm and anger. There are two elements related to sarcasm that may not necessarily be ironic: implied negative meaning and existence of a target (Joshi et al., 2018).

To explain the nature of sarcasm, there are four points to consider: the first point is the speaker says something and means something else or even the opposite. There is obviously a metamessage. The second point is that the meaning of the utterance must be aggressive and mean. It is intentionally used to hurt the listener. This is a key aspect of sarcasm. Third, there must be some kind of absurdity or oddness between the words and

message. Finally, the context must serve the interpretation of the sarcastic utterance (Baragona & Rambo,2018).

2. Power and gender communication

Power and gender relations in communication and language have been the center of linguistic discussions for a long time. The language of women more likely shows less power than men's. Women tend to talk in a more polite and prestigious way than men. Therefore, women use linguistic constructions like deference, mitigation and politeness strategies more (Lakoff, 1975). Historically, women have roles that entail subordination; hence the use of these strategies is essential. In contrast, men use strategies that show domination and a higher societal rank (ibid, Holmes, 1995).

Sarcasm, as a linguistic phenomenon, entails a fair usage of power. It enables speakers to show anger, criticism, and even mockery in a deniable method (Camp, 2011). From a gendered perspective, sarcasm can focus more on power; seemingly men tend to use sarcasm as a way to show dominance or to mock others (Coates, 2013). Women, on the other hand, might employ sarcasm more strategically, often softening it with humor or indirectness to align with societal expectations of femininity (Holmes, 1995).

These patterns are not fixed; they can shift depending on the context, individual traits, and cultural influences. On social media platforms like Instagram, where boundaries between public and private communication often blur, these borderlines seem more complicated. Women may use sarcasm as a tool to challenge traditional power structures and change stereotypes. In contrast, men might opt for more subtle or playful expressions of sarcasm in environments where overt aggression is less socially acceptable (Herring & Kapidzic, 2015).

Through an analysis of Instagram comments, this study seeks to explore how these gendered power relations are reflected in modern digital interactions. This exploration not only deepens our understanding of sarcasm but also provides insight into the shifting relationship between gender and language in online contexts.

3. Sarcasm and Gender

Lakoff's (1975) study is one of the most prominent studies in the field of language and gender. It tackles the language of women and the effect of feminist language on the social interactions among men and women. Lakoff considers women language to be secondary, while men's language as primary because of certain circumstances specifically at the time the study was conducted. She insists on the difference between men and women's ways of speaking. This idea ignited the same concept in the works of Brown and Levinson (1980) (Culpeper, Haugh, & Kadar, 2017).

The language women most likely use is featured with indirectness and politeness to show closeness and power to the addressee. When it comes to sarcasm, men tend to use more sarcastic comments than women, even if the intention is not clearly sarcastic. As for women, they tend to be more sarcastic when the intention is clear and there is sarcasm. Most linguists in this field agree that sarcasm is used more by men than by women. Basically, women use indirectness as a politeness strategy and it is known that women tend to be politer than men, generally speaking (Colston & Lee, 2004).

The frequency of using sarcasm between men and women has always been under study. It is assumed that both men and women have different intentions in using sarcasm with different pragmatic functions. Most linguists agree that men participants are more likely to be sarcastic than female participants. However, Adjei and Bosiwah (2015) argue that women are more likely to self-report as sarcastic. In their study, Colston and Lee (2004) and Ivanko et al. (2004) asked participants to choose certain response from several ready responses. They found that men tend to choose sarcastic responses.

3.Types of Sarcasm

Linguists generally present different classifications for sarcasm. Abulaish and Kamal (2018) list seven categories of sarcasm: self-deprecating, brooding, deadpan, polite, obnoxious, manic, and raging. Sundararajan and Palanisamy (2020) classify sarcasm into

four types namely Polite, Rude, Deadpan, and Raging. There are other classifications, like the one Camp (2011) presents.

Camp (2011) classifies sarcasm into four types: propositional sarcasm, lexical sarcasm, prefixed sarcasm, and illocutionary sarcasm. This study adopts this classification to analyze sarcasm.

3.1 Camp's Classification

Camp's (2011) classification is based on a pragmatic categorization. The types she presents are based on the idea that sarcasm means the opposite of what is said or an altered form of the text. Camp (2011) states that the four types are related to semanticism, expressivists and implicature theories, but do not completely depend on a particular one.

Considering semanticism, sarcasm is addressed as an inverted meaning, while expressivists do not think of sarcasm as having a meaning, rather it is a difference between a dissociative attitude related to some elements in the utterance. She confirms that these two parties see sarcasm as the opposite ends of a scale, although both insist on inverted meaning in understanding sarcasm. But sarcasm requires a broader scope to be analyzed fully. Camp (2011) states that the three approaches all meet at a certain end. The three agree that sarcasm depends on what is said in truth conditional terms.

3.1. 1. Propositional sarcasm

Propositional sarcasm is the most obvious form of sarcasm presented. It simply entails the opposite meaning of a fact like the example in Camp (2011):

1. Jame's must be a real hit with the ladies.

Understanding this statement may require context to signal the opposite meaning, that is James doesn't really know how to deal with women. This analysis is closely similar to that of Grice's implicature model, in the aspect that the speaker intends the opposite of what is said with a negative attitude mostly. Moreover, it may be presented through metaphor:

2. She's the Taj Mahal.

Although the speaker presents the woman to be on top of a scale of beauty, but he sarcastically implies the complete opposite. Generally, propositional sarcasm is pragmatically related to an "evaluative scale" and the listener/reader may implicate the contrary of what is said with respect to the scale.

3.1.2. Lexical sarcasm

lexical sarcasm basically depends on the idea of inverting the meaning of at least one expression in a sentence for the sentence to be sarcastic. It presents the closest analysis of sarcasm to a semantists. Just like propositional sarcasm focuses on an evaluative scale, lexical sarcasm focuses more at certain expressions at the extreme end of the scale, words like genius, inspired, thrilled etc; sarcastic sentences convey the opposite connotation, for example:

3. That's an amazing work!

Sarcastically, it implies the complete opposite, i.e., it is a horrible work. Moreover, lexical sarcasm also requires some allusive or comparative expressions like 'so', 'such a ' and ' like that' .

4. David is such a genius to get a C in his final exam.

The allusive expression highlights the targeted expression to give the sentence its sarcastic value.

Some might argue that propositional and lexical sarcasm are similar in certain aspects, however, lexical sarcasm focuses on the targeted evaluative expression, while propositional sarcasm focuses on the entirety of the sentence. Furthermore, lexical sarcasm mostly employs an expression at the extreme end of a scale like 'brilliant', 'dazzling' etc.

3.1.3 'Like'-prefixed sarcasm.

This category of sarcasm only combines with declarative sentences and it depends on the conventional meaning of the expressions and pragmatic procedures. Sentences which are prefixed with 'like' adheres the listener/reader to deny that content, for instance:

5. Like I have talked to George in weeks.

It might be reasonable to consider "like and as if" to function as forms of sentence negation if the original form is 'it's not like/as if.', for example:

6. Like that's a good idea. '

7. As if she can pass the final exam.

3.1. 4. Illocutionary sarcasm.

This category targets speech acts with an illocutionary force other than simple assertion. Moreover, it can include senses of implicatures that express evaluative attitudes like pity, admiration or surprise to create a contrast between what is said and the underlying meaning. The speaker's intended meaning is indirectly communicated through implicature with certain tone of voice or context. For example:

7. Thanks for holding the door.

The speaker is being sarcastic in the sense that the other person didn't hold the door for him/her, he/she uses sarcasm to highlight the person's failure to act. The sarcasm depends on the hearer's recognition of the difference between the literal statement and the implied truth, which may hold a sense of mockery. Another example:

8. Wow, great job on the painting.

After someone sees a bad work on the painting, the speaker is not actually complementing the painter but using sarcasm to highlight the failure of the act.

4. Methodology

4.1 The model

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method in gathering and examining the data. The model adopted for this study is that of Camp (2011). The model has four categories: propositional sarcasm, lexical sarcasm, 'like' prefixed sarcasm and finally illocutionary sarcasm.

4.2 Data collection

The data of this study are a total of 600 comments from the Instagram account of Piers Morgan's show 'uncensored'. The documentation involves reading comments and collect the sarcastic ones then analyze what type of sarcasm is used according to Camp (2011) model and trying to identify whether the user is male or female, and then check which type of sarcasm is mostly used by males and females.

The following is the link for Piers Morgan show 'uncensored'

<https://www.instagram.com/piersmorganuncensored/?hl=ar>

5. Analysis and Discussion

The process of analysis involves Camp (2011) model as explained above. Consequently, the following table (1) shows the type of sarcasm and the total number of each type out of the 80 comments and it also shows the percentage of each type and whether the user is male or female.

Type of sarcasm	Total count	Percentage	Male com.	Female com.
Propositional	30	37.5%	20	10
Lexical	22	27.5%	14	8

'like' prefixed	15	18.7%	5	10
Illocutionary	13	16.25%	9	4

Table (1)

Frequency and percentage of the types of sarcasm.

After reading more than 600 comments on the account of Piers Morgan's show 'uncensored', the researcher selected 80 comments from different Instagram users both males and females. From the 80 comments, 30 were propositional sarcasm and 22 were lexical sarcasm, 15 were 'like' prefixed sarcasm and 13 illocutionary sarcasms. Of the propositional 20 were by males, 10 by females; as for the lexical 14 were by males and 8 by females. Like prefixed were 5 by males and 10 by females, finally illocutionary 9 by male and 4 by females.

The table shows the highest occurrence is for propositional sarcasm of 37.5%, mainly because it is more direct than the other types. Men use it more than women seemingly because women tend to sound indirect even in their sarcastic comments. Social norms and politeness strategies play a crucial role in the usage of the types by both men and women. For example:

@carol.espiritosanto :So good there's so many therapists out there nowadays.

The user comments on the absurdity of the discussion that makes everyone sound as a therapist while obviously they are not. Therefore, she sarcastically focuses on the idea through propositional sarcasm.

Second highest is lexical sarcasm of 27.5%, Men also tend to use it more than women because men most likely focus on certain words to show sarcasm, for example:

@thetruthspeaksforitselfs: Wow.. now you have a guest who justifies 07/10 massacres . great work.

The user sarcastically criticizes the guest by using the phrase 'great work' on something he believes is not great at all.

As for 'like' prefixed sarcasm, it has 18.7% usage percentage. More women tend to use this type than men, seemingly because it is more indirect than the other types. For example:

@catracha7 :As if the globalists and their depopulating plan is going great!

The user uses a conspiratorial phrase with a sarcastic tone by using words like 'globalists' and 'depopulating plan'. She doesn't really believe in that but actually ridicules it.

The last type, illocutionary sarcasm has 16.25% which is the least among the types of sarcasm, more likely because illocution depends more on the tone of the voice and context which may not always be found in social media in general. In a comment like:

@maxshemesh :Don't forget, he's a GREAT ACTOR 😁

the user talks about Kevin Spacy. The use of caps locks in 'great actor' signals the sarcastic tone. It focuses more on how the phrase is said rather than the literal wording.

Conclusions

It is concluded that sarcasm as a linguistic phenomenon is found in social media comments, including Instagram. The type of sarcasm that is recorded with the highest use is propositional sarcasm. The users managed to sarcastically write something while entailing the complete opposite. It is concluded that users intend to play with specific words to be sarcastic, therefore lexical sarcasm has the next highest percentage. Both types require directness in being sarcastic, hence Men use them more than women. As for 'like' prefixed sarcasm, women tend to use it more than men mainly because of its indirectness. The last type with the least percentage is illocutionary sarcasm. It depends more on tone of the voice and context, hence its usage in Instagram is not as common as the other types.

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