

## REPRESENTATION OF IRONY IN WHATSAPP GROUP CHAT

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores the representation of irony in WhatsApp Group chats, aiming to identify the types of irony and narrate the meaning of the irony used. A case study was geared under Perrine's (1966) and Leech's (1981) analysis of the type of irony. Moreover, the result disclosed that touches of sarcasm were the favorable choice of irony to express the participants' feelings. Sarcasm was detected by using uppercase characters, exclamation marks, and teasing words. Hyperbole and understatement were the second participants' favorite to use to exaggerate reality and make a dramatic situation. Furthermore, implementing irony in daily conversation with decent knowledge is significant to flourish and enrich their linguistic adequacy to avoid misunderstanding and know the appropriate situation manual students' exploitations of irony will.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Frequently, some dialogues overshadow the actual meaning of the topic because of the endeavor of irony instead of expressing their true feelings. The irony is a nonliteral linguistic technique in which the speaker implies exceeding expressions defined by a conflict between two distinct levels of meaning: The speaker's literal utterance is almost the inverse of the speaker's intended purpose in terms of evaluation (Booth, 1974; Muecke, 1969). Communication is an essential part of daily life in spoken and written language. Through communication, people are connected and share their feeling and thought. Nevertheless, people often misinterpret the speaker's intended meaning; sometimes, the speakers also express misleading ideas generating miscommunication. Hence, a firm presentation and comprehension of the real meaning are consequential. Understanding irony is among the endeavor to elevate our comprehension of a communication topic. The irony is substantial in communication. It can be the instrument of a moral lesson (i.e., 'Socratic irony')



(Vlastos, 1987), mockery, contempt (Wilson & Sperber, 1992), protection strategy while facing criticism (Brown & Levinson, 1987), or expressing creativity in writing (Veale & Hao, 2009).

Irony can reveal multiple communicative purposes (Ritschell et al., 2019). The irony is mainly used in direct and indirect constant conversation in-group members. Nowadays, people prefer online media than face to face communication (Anshari et al., 2019). They are not in the same place, and both cannot see their expression while communicating, which constantly lead to misunderstandings. People also use irony in online communication to express their intended opposite meaning to avoid hurting their interlocutor. Many experts explain the theories about how people use and understand irony (see Kreuz & Glucksberg, 1989; Gibbs & O'Brien, 1991; Kao & Goodman, 2015; Gal, 2019; Gibbs, 2000; Kreuz, 2020; Mauchand et al., 2020; Mavlonova & Ruziyeva, 2020). The social aspect of ironic language used is among the theories. Hendayanti et al. (2022) viewed speakers of irony pretending to comply in some cases with their interlocutor, implying irony's prominent role in avoiding hurting people.

Thus, fostering Indonesian students' understanding of irony may alleviate their interaction in the community concerning Indonesian people's indirect intended meaning in frequent cases. Manipuspika (2014) unpacked her finding by stating that Indonesian people often hesitate when they want to ask and answer given questions compared to English-speaking people. The hesitation may occur because the Indonesian culture of talk must consider their interlocutors' feelings. Thereby, elevating students' understanding of irony is essential to avoid misunderstanding between the speaker and interlocutor. They may comprehend when their interlocutor used irony or not (Kowatch, 2013). Having adequate knowledge of irony allows them to know whether or not their interlocutor feels comfortable with the topic. Mastering irony also allows us to be good interlocutors because we know when we should change or even stop the topic. In addition, irony offers the speakers to speak freely without hesitating to hurt their interlocutors' feelings by stating the opposite meaning concept (Gerrig, 1984).

Furthermore, some inquiries on the importance of mastering irony had previously been conducted. Nevertheless, their focuses were on the field of parenting (Banasik-Jemielniak et al., 2020) and textual teaching (Khamdamovna, 2021), leading the researchers to delve into contextual teaching (CTL) which corresponds with nowadays Indonesia's teaching ideology (Independent



Curriculum/ *Kurikulum Merdeka*). Contextual teaching may confront students with the real situation (Glynn et al., 2004). Thus, the CTL is the best method to improve students understanding with its six advantages (Satriani et al., 2012). In addition, the researchers plot what forms of irony are mostly used in a conversation, and what probably the meaning of the irony used as the research questions of the study.

Gibbs (1994) suggested five primary forms of irony: jocular, sarcasm, rhetorical questions, hyperbole, and understatement. They reflect different characteristics of a speaker's idea of expectation or reality. Therefore, the researchers were catalyzed to analyze and investigate these forms in online communication, especially in WhatsApp groups.

For example, in WhatsApp Group Class:

- A : Sukanya orang di *negara berflower* ini memperibet suasana. Tinggal bilang masuk kalau masuk, enggak kalau enggak aja pun ribet banget.  
(People in a flourishing country like to complicate the condition. Just say “Yes” when there is a class, “No”, when there is no class)
- B : *Terlahir toxic ya gitu.*  
(Born with toxic)

In example A, the speaker said *Negara berflower*, implying the Indonesian people are unsmart and not literally intelligent people. Next, *terlahir toxic ya gitu* (*born with toxic*) is considered irony.

WhatsApp group was plotted as the field of the study because daily communications constantly occurred on the platform. The researchers expect that the investigation may contribute to the computational data in linguistics. In addition, the study investigates what forms of irony mostly used in a conversation, and what probably the meaning of the irony used. This study was limited to the theory of Gibbs (1994), distinguishing irony into five forms: jocular, sarcasm, rhetorical questions, hyperbole, and understatement in online communication on WhatsApp Group. Furthermore, the investigation focused on the students' chat group on WhatsApp, grasping the English Literature class of 16 B in the State University of Medan, North Sumatera. Moreover,



this research is expected to theoretically and practically enrich the student's knowledge of using irony and may be a reference for future inquiries exploring the same scheme. Finally, this study may validate the significant role of irony in online communication, especially in WhatsApp groups.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The current study portrayed a case study approach to intimately scrutinize the irony in the WhatsApp group in written words. Creswell (2008) stated that the approach suited the current study in investigating a program, event, process, or individual(s). The data gathering technique is capturing and classifying the words, phrases, and sentences from the group chat.

#### **3.2 Participant**

Thirty-six students consisting of twenty-six female and ten male students were in the WhatsApp group. Most of the participants were in their early 20s. However, the researchers only focused on eight students, five female and three male students, while discussing the lecturer's attendance in the class based on a simple random sampling technique. The technique may cover the approximate results with an equal chance to be picked as samples of the study (Donald et al., 2010).

#### **3.3 Material**

Eight students' 30-minute conversations were recorded in WhatsApp group chat of public speaking at one of the state universities in Indonesia. These conversations took place while they waited for the lecturer. Two students were asked to record the group's conversations. Likewise, the written chats were visible and all participants knew the recordings would be analyzed as part of a class project. However, there was no mention of an interest in irony. Although the students who record the conversations also took part in some of the collected and analyzed conversations, they did not speak sarcastically or attempt to elicit irony, sarcasm, or both in any way. It was challenging to say that the presence of the tape recorder influenced the participants' behavior while the project took place. Thus, many sociolinguists argued that data collected from situations where participants were aware of being recorded accurately reflected their daily social relationships and speech styles (Tannen, 1984). Furthermore, the participants immediately ignored the tape recorder as they were swept up in the flow of the talk.



### 3.4. Data Analysis

The students' chats were collected and transcribed. The recorded-transcriptions were then descriptively classified based on Gibbs (1994) forms of irony.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study presented the forms of irony found in the WhatsApp group of English Literature students. The utterances were captured from the group chat when the students faced the problem of whether or not they had a class. The result of this study disclosed that the 6 of 17 utterances produced by 8 students mostly use sarcasm in WhatsApp group to express their feeling and thought. The others use hyperbole and understatement to exaggerate reality and make a dramatic situation. The result is also shown in the table below.

4.1 Table. The Students' Statement in a WhatsApp Group Chat

No	Participants	Statements	Indicator	Forms of Irony
1	Morrein	AKU AJA YANG UDAH DI UNIMED BILANG BESOK	Uppercase	Sarcasm
2.	Bertha	(I ALREADY IN UNIMED, BUT I SAY TOMORROW) MASUK GAK HOII!	Uppercase and exclamation mark	Sarcasm
3.	Windy	(DO WE HAVE CLASS OR NOT111)	Phrase (negara berflower = flowered country)	Hyperbole
4.	Rui	Sukanya orang di <i>negara berflower</i> ini memperibet suasana, tinggal bilang masuk masuk, kagak kagak, ribet banget.	Word (toxic)	Sarcasm
5.	Windy	(People in this <i>flower country</i> like to complicate the atmosphere, just say come in, it's okay or not, it's really complicated).	Phrase (memperpanjang Bahasa: prolong)	Understatement
6.	Sheila	Terlahir <i>toxic</i> ya gitu	Word (api = fire)	Hyperbole
7.	Larry	(Born toxic, huh?)	Dikit-dikit marah	Understatement
8.	Larry	Jangan <i>memperpanjang bahasa</i> , jawab aja singkat biar puas juga gitu	Word (sunatan: circumcision)	Jocularly



9.	Robert	(Don't prolong the language, just keep it short so you're satisfied too)	Dramatic expression	Hyperbole
10.	Rui	Kalau bisa dipadamkan <i>api</i> kecil gausah dipercikkan lagi minyak lampu biar terbakar.	Verb (memercik: splashing)	Understatement
11.	Janet	(If you can put out a small fire, don't sprinkle the lamp oil again so that it burns).	Malas sebenarnya: Lazy actually (against the individual/herself)	Sarcasm
12.	Janet	Netizen memang suka lebay, <i>dikit-dikit marah</i> .	Uppercase and mention the name	Sarcasm
13.	Janet	(Netizens really like to be lazy, a little angry).	Gak kan?: Isn't that right	Rhetorical Question
14.	Larry	Santai aja dong guys, kek mau <i>sunatan</i> aja harus serious	Kuburan: graveyard	Hyperbole
15.	Sheila	(Just relax, guys, seems that you want a circumcision, you have to be serious)	Dikacangin: besotted.	Hyperbole
16.	Rui	Jika kelak kami tak bisa bersama, setidaknya dia pernah mengaminkan apa yang aku semogakan.	I'm not that psycho who's treating someone 'toxic' without any reason.	Understatement
17.	Janet	(If in the future we can't be together, at least he has confirmed what I wished for).	Jangan hanya belajar sopan buat chat dosen, tapi juga pada sesama manusia: Don't just learn to be polite to chat with lecturers, but also to fellow humans	Sarcasm
		Bukan <i>memercik</i> kakak, cumin reminder aja buat kita supaya tau appreciate and respect sama komting. Begitu ya gausah toxic maksudnya.		
		(Not splashing brother, just a reminder for us to know how to appreciate and respect komting. So, don't be toxic, I mean).		
		<i>Malas sebenarnya</i> memperpanjang tapi masih ada pihak yang mau. Ya maaf harus kuladeni.		
		(Lazy actually extends but there are still those who want. Yes sorry I have to).		

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Btw tolong ya, saudara RYO yang suka melabelkan orang lain dengan buruk, kalo gak suka sama orang lain jangan cari alasan buat ngerendahkan mereka. Kalo gak suka ya tinggal bilang, jauh, jangan suka nyindir. Maaf cuma mengingatkan

(Btw please, RYO brothers who like to label other people badly, if you don't like other people, don't look for an excuse to look down on them. If you don't like it, just say it, stay away, don't be sarcastic. Sorry just reminding)

Gini ya, kan udah perjanjian semalam kalo hari ini bakal pergantian kelas. Kan bisa dibilang sama mam, "saya sudah beritahu pada anak kelas mam bahwa hari ini ada kelas ganti dan mungkin beberapa dari mereka yang rumahnya jauh udah dalam perjalanan." Memang mam itu bakal marah kalo kelas hari ini terpaksa diadakan karena nasib kami rumahnya jauh udah berangkat. *Gak kan?*

(You see, it was an agreement last night that today there would be a class change. You can say it's the same as mam, "I have already told the class that there is a changing class today and maybe some of them who live far away are already on their way." Indeed, the mother would be angry if today's class had to be held because our fate was far from home. Isn't that right?)

Harusnya aku senang kalo grup rame, gak kek *kuburan* lagi.

(I should be happy when the group is busy, not like a graveyard anymore.)





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Aku *dikacangin*.

(I'm besotted).

People have a reason how they behave. ***I'm not that psycho who's treating someone 'toxic' without any reason.*** Okay sorry for everybody. The case is closed.

Setidaknya belajarlal tata karma melabeli orang lain. Jangan asal ngomong abistu minta maaf lalu kelar. Mau apapun alasan kau, kau gak berhak ngelabelin orang lain sesuka kau di depan public. ***Jangan hanya belajar sopan buat chat dosen, tapi juga pada sesama manusia.*** Hanya mengingatkan.

(At least learn the etiquette of labeling other people. Don't just say sorry and then finish. Whatever your reasons, you have no right to label other people as you like in public. ***Don't just learn to be polite to chat with lecturers, but also to fellow humans.*** Giving a suggestion only).

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Statements 1 “*AKU AJA YANG UDAH DI UNIMED BILANG BESOK*” (I ALREADY IN UNIMED, BUT I SAY TOMORROW) and 2 “*MASUK GAK HOII!*” (DO WE HAVE CLASS OR NO!!) from Morrein and Bertha illustrated the second form of irony, sarcasm. The utterances indicated sarcasm because all the characters were uppercased and used an exclamation mark. Capitalizing the characters may include the utterance into sarcasm because using capitalization was among sarcasm's features (Camp, 2011). Moreover, *Negara berflower* in statement 3 included hyperbole because she exaggerated the literal meaning of *Negara berflower* or developed country. Nevertheless, Indonesia is still a developing, not a developed country, like her intended meaning.

In addition, Rui started a new problem with his statement when he said “*terlahir toxic ya gitu*” (was born with toxic). It also referred to as sarcasm because it may bother the other group members and hurt their hearts as situated by Alba-Juez et al. (2014). Thus, Windy suggested them by using “*Jangan memperpanjang Bahasa*”, indicating understatement because she did not want the problem to be more complicated. Sheila showed her agreement with Windy by saying “*Kalo*

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*bisa dipadamkan api kecil gausah dipercikkan lagi minyak lampu biar terbakar*”, she indicated *api* and *minyak lampu* (fire and gasoline) to be the problem, but actually, the problem was not that big. Sheila's extreme exaggeration included her statement into hyperbole (Burgers et al., 2016).

On the other hand, Larry implied using understatement by saying *"Netizen memang suka lebay, dikit-dikit marah"* because Larry knew that the previous hyperbole statements expressed anger that could be understood as sarcasm (Kunneman et al., 2014). Howbeit, when his statement was reacted by Sheila and Windy, he tried to make a joke by stating *"santai ae dong guys, kek mau sunatan aja, harus serious"*. It looked like he wanted to make the situation better. Using understatement was a good point to downgrade their tempers because the use of understatement may evoke the interlocutors to stay calm (Hübler, 1983). Understatement may also distract our interlocutors' anger when we intentionally and unintentionally hurt their feeling (Grice, 1989). *"Jika kelak kami tak bisa bersama, setidaknya dia pernah mengaminkan apa yang aku semogakan"* from Robert tried to make a dramatic expression. This statement referred to hyperbole because what the speaker said was out of context. Even though he wanted to calm the situation, the speaker's utterance seems like he exaggerated and hyperbole.

Another understatement in this chat was Rui's stating *"memercik"* (splash the fire). He provoked the problems but chose the verb *"memercik"* to make an understatement. Juli perceived Rui's statement by stating *"Malas sebenarnya memperpanjang tapi masih ada pihak yang mau. Ya maaf harus kuladeni"*. This statement illustrated sarcasm because she emphasized the statement and satirized someone in the group. Moreover, Janet also added her statement as sarcasm because she mentioned a name in uppercase and responded Janet's sarcasm by *"melabeli orang lain dengan buruk"*. Janet also posed a rhetorical question because she critically explained the problem's assertion. Moreover, Larry's statement tried to calm down the members, saying their solitary; he exaggerated it by using *"kuburan"* (grave), symbolizing the synonymous hyperbole word. Larry's statement might present a new nuance to the study because hyperbole was chosen instead of an understatement knowing the use of understatement is to downgrade the interlocutors' tempers in a conversation (Grice, 1998). Furthermore, Sheila felt ignored, she posted *"Aku dikacangin"* (*I am*



beaned). She used "kacang" or bean as a verb instead of the verb "I am ignored," including hyperbole. The meaning of "bean" in Indonesia was synonymous to "ignore". It was different from its English actual meaning (fool). Therefore, Sheila inferred "bean" as ignored and it was included as hyperbole. The different meanings occurred because different parlors and cultures were triggered. Indonesians' interlanguage continuum influenced their understanding of a context (Selinker, 1972). In addition, Rui defended himself by saying, "I'm not that psycho labeling someone "toxic" without any reason." This statement tried to convince the previous speakers that he had a reason for labeling someone. The statement was included as an understatement. Finally, Janet responded to Rui with sarcasm because she asked him to learn about politeness.

In addition, based on the description above, 6 of 17 statements in that group chat were sarcasm. The indicators were all uppercase characters, exclamation marks, and rant or harassed words. Likewise, sarcasm was not only pointed out to a person but also to a situation as shown in Morrein's statement. She did not address her anger toward a person but at the situation. Her case corresponded to Alba-Juez's et al. (2014) definition of sarcasm as negative irony that could be addressed to a person, thing, or even situation. 5 utterances reflected hyperboles because the sentences used dramatic expressions and symbolized words. Moreover, the rest were understatements with 4 utterances, jocularly, and rhetorical questions with 1 utterance each. The indicators of understatement were using the simple opposite word and making a conclusion. At the same time, jocularly occurred when the speaker tried to make a joke in an inappropriate situation. Sometimes, jocularly had a specific goal of creating a better atmosphere when a problem existed. The rhetorical question existed here when the speakers had already given the information, but the interlocutors still asked a question that actually did not need an answer.

Furthermore, the irony was one of the most powerful tricks in daily conversation to express humor, criticize people, or convey displeasure (Gibbs, 2000). Nevertheless, people employed different forms of ironic language; they hid their intended meaning behind the literal words. Thus, the words constantly confused their interlocutors, assuming the opposite of their intended meaning. The irony is unique because it mutes the negative meaning conveyed by an ironic statement (Dews



et al., 1995). Inexorably, people used irony with varying purposes and intentions forging it strenuous to understand. Ironic utterances achieved their communicative intent primarily by reminding listeners of some preceding event, even if not all such reminders are echoic or refer to actual or implied utterances (Kreuz & Glucksberg, 1989).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, people used irony with varying intentions in WhatsApp groups: expressing humor, implying criticism, or conveying displeasure. They could freely express their feelings and thoughts. People fancied sarcasm rather than the other forms of irony. Sarcasm was detected by using uppercase characters, exclamation marks, and teasing words. Generally, they justified themselves and did not want other people to judge them easily. Considerably, implementing irony in daily conversation with decent knowledge of each irony function is significant to avoid misunderstanding and know the appropriate situation manual. Furthermore, students' exploitations of irony will flourish and enrich their linguistic adequacy.

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