



Digital Sarcasm as Social Critique: A Pragmatic and Cyberpragmatic Analysis of Social Media Reactions

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Abstract*

This study investigates the use of sarcasm in social media comments responding to the comparison of corruption punishments in Indonesia and China. Using a qualitative approach with pragmatics and cyberpragmatics frameworks, the research identifies and analyzes the forms, functions, and contexts of sarcasm in digital discourse. Data were collected from high-engagement comments on platforms like Instagram and Twitter, focusing on posts criticizing the disparity in corruption sentences. Linguistic indicators such as hashtags, emojis, capital letters, and exclamation marks were observed, revealing sarcasm's role in conveying dissatisfaction. Pragmatically, comments served as tools for social critique, emphasizing protest against legal injustices and invoking moral values like fairness and transparency. Cyberpragmatically, the digital context amplified the emotional tone and increased the viral potential of the comments, enabling broader public discourse. This study highlights sarcasm's effectiveness as a means of public criticism, demonstrating how digital platforms facilitate creative and collective expressions of social dissatisfaction.

1. Introduction

Corruption is one of the structural problems undermining the governance system in many countries, including Indonesia. Major corruption cases are often accompanied by public dissatisfaction with the law enforcement process, which is considered not to deter the perpetrators. The punishment for corruptors in Indonesia, often in the form of imprisonment with a duration that is considered lenient, is often compared to the severe penalties applied in other countries, such as China. In China, it is not uncommon for corruption offenders to be sentenced to death or life imprisonment, which are considered more strict and effective in providing a deterrent effect.

These comparisons are often debated on social media, where people can express their opinions. In these discussions, sarcasm emerges as a popular form of linguistic expression. Sarcasm, as a form of indirect communication, is used by netizens to criticize, satirize, or even mock government policies and the legal system. For example, an

Instagram post comparing the punishment for corruptors in Indonesia and China pointed out that corruptors with a loss of Rp300 trillion in Indonesia only get 6.5 years in prison, while corruptors with a loss of Rp6 trillion in China are sentenced to death. This post, uploaded by the account @folkkonoha, caught the attention of the public with more than 49,000 likes and 9,000 comments. Netizens' reactions, including the use of sarcasm, reflected a profound disappointment with Indonesia's legal system.

Language develops as humans explore the complexities of communication in digital and non-digital contexts (Chubaryan & Danielyan, 2022). Sarcasm, as a linguistic phenomenon, has been studied in various disciplines, including pragmatics and cyber pragmatics. Pragmatics, which investigates how meaning is constructed in context, explores sarcasm through theories such as the Cooperation Principle and the Theory of Speech Acts (Searle, 1969; Grice, 1989). Cyberpragmatics, as a subfield that focuses on digital communication, extends this exploration by considering the nuances of sarcasm in online interactions (Chubaryan & Danielyan, 2022).

Sarcasm in linguistics often conveys implicit meanings that often contradict literal expressions (Camp, 2012). As a pragmatic tool, sarcasm relies on violating conversational maxims, such as violating the maxim of quality, to get its point across (Grice, 1989). In political discourse, sarcasm is a rhetorical strategy to criticize and convince, often highlighting social or ideological tensions (Kadhim & Mewada, 2023).

Research on sarcasm on social media has also highlighted the integration of textual, visual, and contextual cues in conveying sarcastic meaning (Bharti et al., 2022). This study confirms the role of multimodality in sarcasm detection, emphasizing the importance of algorithms that consider both linguistic and paralinguistic features (Hao et al., 2023).

With its cultural diversity and socio-political dynamics, the Indonesian context offers a rich terrain for exploring sarcasm in digital discourse. Using sarcasm in comparing corrupt sentences in Indonesia and China reflects an emotional response and critique of the legal system. This research is relevant for understanding the dynamics of language in social media and makes an important contribution to the study of pragmatics and cyber pragmatics. This research is expected to reveal how sarcasm is used to voice social criticism, highlight ideological tensions, and express public disappointment with legal justice issues.

2. Methods

This study uses qualitative methods with pragmatics and cyber pragmatics approaches to analyze sarcasm in social media comments and compares' punishment in Indonesia and China. This descriptive-analytical study aims to identify and analyze sarcasm usage's form, function, and context in digital discourse. Data sources come from netizen comments on social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook relevant to the issues raised. The unit of analysis includes comments that contain indications of sarcasm, either explicitly, such as the use of punctuation marks or specific words, or implicitly through context and nonliteral meaning. Data was collected by scraping to obtain high-engagement comments, followed by purposive sampling to select relevant comments. Each comment was coded based on sarcasm categories, such as irony, mockery, or hyperbole, and multimodal elements, such as emojis or visuals, were recorded.

Data analysis was conducted through several stages. First, sarcasm identification was conducted using linguistic and contextual indicators. Second, the data were categorized based on the type of sarcasm, such as criticism of the legal system or expression of disappointment. Third, pragmatic analysis was applied to examine violations of conversational maxims (Grice, 1989) and sarcastic speech acts (Searle, 1969). Fourth, cyber pragmatic analysis explores digital elements such as emojis, punctuation, and user interaction. Finally, interpretation was conducted to explain how sarcasm reflects public views on legal justice. Data triangulation was conducted using various social media platforms and peer discussions to verify interpretations and ensure validity and reliability. This research is expected to reveal the patterns of sarcasm in digital discourse and provide insights into how sarcasm is used as a critical communication tool in socio-political discussions.

3. Result and Discussion

In a news post by the @folkkonoha account, comments were found that had the potential to contain sarcasm, including

1.Comment: #MENUJUINDONESIACEMAS2045

Aspect	Analysis
Comment	#MENUJUINDONESIACEMAS2045
Linguistic	- Hashtag Usage: 'MENUJUINDONESIACEMAS2045' is a play on

Indicators	<p>words against the slogan ‘Indonesia Emas 2045,’ which should reflect an optimistic vision. However, the use of the word ‘anxious’ in place of ‘golden’ creates irony.</p> <p>- Sarcastic Tone: This hashtag shows dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs, which is considered unsupportive of such an optimistic vision.</p>
Pragmatic Function	<p>- Social Criticism Function: Conveys distrust of the government in achieving the vision.</p> <p>- Indirect Persuasion Function: Invites other readers to question the government's seriousness.</p>
Cyberpragmatic Context	<p>- Virality Effect: Hashtags are easily recognisable and can trend on social media, creating wider discussion.</p> <p>- Context of Digital Sarcasm: The combination of irony and distant future reference (2045) suggests uncertainty about Indonesia's progress.</p>

The comment ‘#MENUJUINDONESIACEMAS2045’ is an example of the use of sarcasm on social media that explicitly describes dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs. The hashtag is a wordplay on the slogan ‘Indonesia Emas 2045,’ where the word ‘anxious’ replaces ‘gold’ to create irony. Linguistically, the hashtag uses a sarcastic tone to show dissatisfaction with conditions considered unsupportive of such an optimistic vision. The use of this hashtag not only functions as an individual expression but also as a social critique. The pragmatic function of this comment includes social criticism of the government, which illustrates distrust of the government's ability to achieve the vision. In addition, this comment has an indirect persuasion function by inviting other readers to question the government's seriousness.

In the context of cyber pragmatics, these hashtags have viral potential because they are easily recognizable and can create broader discussions on social media. This virality effect allows the criticism contained in the hashtag to become a massive public concern. The combination of irony in the wording of the hashtag and the distant future reference (2045) reinforces a pessimistic impression of Indonesia's progress, which is particularly relevant in a digital context, where criticism is often conveyed implicitly. As such, this

comment reflects how sarcasm can be used effectively as a tool of social criticism in the digital age.

2. Comment: UU rampasan aset mana nih? Kok gak jalan???

Aspect	Analysis
Comment	Where is the asset seizure law? How come it doesn't work?
Linguistic Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct Question Tone: This comment expresses frustration through a rhetorical question. - Excessive Use of Question Marks: '???' emphasises the emotional tone, reinforcing the criticism of the legal system.
Pragmatic Function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protest Function: Expressing dissatisfaction with the implementation of corruption-related laws. - Institutional Criticism Function: Directing criticism at government institutions that are deemed ineffective.
Cyberpragmatic Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Structural Critique: Referring to specific regulations (Asset Forfeiture Law) to create credibility in criticism. - Digital Sarcastic Tone: The question 'How come it's not working???' implies distrust of the government's commitment.

The comment 'Where is the asset seizure law? How come it doesn't work?' shows a form of social criticism conveyed through rhetorical questions. From a linguistic aspect, this comment uses a direct question tone to express frustration with the legal system. The use of exaggerated punctuation ('???') emphasises the emotional tone, thus reinforcing the criticism of the legality and effectiveness of the asset forfeiture law. Pragmatically, this comment has two main functions: first, the protest function, which expresses dissatisfaction with the implementation of corruption-related laws, and second, the institutional criticism function, which is directed at the government or legal institutions that are considered ineffective.

In the context of cyberpragmatics, this comment highlights structural criticism by directly referring to a specific regulation (Asset Forfeiture Law), which creates credibility in its criticism. In addition, the digital sarcastic tone in the question 'How come it doesn't work???' implies distrust in the government's commitment to eradicate corruption. Through a combination of linguistic and digital elements, this comment effectively reflects

people's disappointment with the weaknesses of the legal system in the digital public sphere, as well as strengthening the discourse of criticism through social media.

3. Comment : Harus ramai-ramai naikin tagar #ripkeadilanindonesia

Aspect	Analysis
Comment	We must use the hashtag #ripkeadilanindonesia.
Linguistic Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hashtag Usage: The hashtag #ripkeadilanindonesia uses the term 'RIP' which is usually associated with death, creating a metaphor for the death of justice in Indonesia. - Inviting Tone: The use of the phrase 'must ramai-ramai' emphasises the importance of collective participation in voicing criticism.
Pragmatic Function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Function of Social Criticism: Expressing dissatisfaction with justice in Indonesia. - Indirect Persuasion Function: Invites other readers to get involved in voicing criticism through the use of hashtags.
Cyberpragmatic Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Virality Effect: Hashtags can easily trend on social media, extending the reach of criticism. - The Context of Digital Criticism: Hashtags become a collective communication tool to convey criticism on a massive scale.

The comment 'We must use the hashtag #ripkeadilanindonesia' reflects social criticism effectively delivered through social media. In linguistic analysis, the use of the hashtag #ripkeadilanindonesia creates a strong metaphor with the term 'RIP,' which is usually associated with death, to describe justice in Indonesia as dead. The tone of the invitation 'must ramai-ramai' emphasizes the importance of collective participation in voicing criticism, strengthening solidarity among social media users. Pragmatically, this comment functions as a social critique that explicitly conveys dissatisfaction with the justice system and an indirect call for persuasion to other readers to engage in a collective movement through the hashtag.

In the context of cyber pragmatics, the hashtag has excellent potential for virality, allowing the message to spread widely on social media and creating a more massive public

discussion. The hashtag is also an effective collective communication tool to criticize injustice on a large scale. As such, this comment is an individual expression and a means of mobilizing social criticism in the digital space. This comment confirms how social media can strategically, creatively, and collectively deliver critical messages.

4. Comment : Sudah jelas yang memberi hukuman kecipratan 😏

Aspect	Analysis
Comment	It's clear that the one who gave the punishment also enjoy it 😏
Linguistic Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sarcastic Tone: This sentence implies that the authorities benefit from light sentences. - Emoji Usage: The laughing emoji (😏) adds a tone of sardonic humour to the comment, reinforcing the sarcasm.
Pragmatic Function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Function of Satire: Conveys an implicit criticism that there is dishonesty or corruption in the justice system. - Function of Subtle Criticism: Criticism is not delivered directly, but through irony.
Cyberpragmatic Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sarcastic Digital Tone: The use of emojis in this context confirms that the criticism is delivered in the form of sarcastic humour. - Viral Context: Comments with this tone tend to attract attention and interaction (likes or replies).

The comment 'It's clear that the one who gave the punishment also enjoyed it 😏' is a form of social criticism conveyed through sarcastic tone and cynical humour. Linguistically, this comment uses a sarcastic tone to imply that the authorities benefit from light sentences. The use of the laughing emoji (😏) reinforces the impression of cynical humour, adding an element of mockery to the situation being criticised. In terms of pragmatic function, this comment acts as a satire that conveys an implicit criticism of the existence of dishonesty or corruption in the justice system. This criticism is not delivered directly, but rather through sharp yet subtle irony, making this comment an effective form of implicit criticism.

In the context of cyberpragmatics, this comment uses humour and emojis to create a sarcastic digital tone, making the criticism more interesting and relevant in a social

media environment. In addition, comments with this tone have a high potential for virality, attracting the attention of other users and generating interaction in the form of likes or replies. Overall, this comment demonstrates how elements of linguistics, pragmatics and cyberpragmatics can work together to deliver social criticism in a creative and engaging way on digital platforms.

**5. Comment : TOMBOL TIDAK SUKA TIDAK ADIL TIDAK MASUK AKAL!
Harusnya uang dikembalikan dan dimiskinkan...**

Aspect	Analysis
Comment	THE BUTTON DOES NOT LIKE UNFAIR DOES NOT MAKE SENSE! Should be refunded and impoverished...
Linguistic Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of Capital Letters: All words at the beginning of the comment are capitalised to emphasise anger and frustration. - Imperative Tone: The phrase 'The money should have been returned and impoverished' shows an emphatic statement of what should have been done.
Pragmatic Function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protest Function: Expresses dissatisfaction with a punishment system that is perceived as unfair. - Emotional Critique Function: Using strong emotions to highlight injustice.
Cyberpragmatic Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Digital Emotional Tone: The use of capital letters and exclamation marks amplifies expressions of frustration on social media. - Moral and Social Context: The critique calls for actions that are considered moral, such as refunding corruption and severe punishment.

The comment "THE BUTTON DOES NOT LIKE UNFAIR DOES NOT MAKE SENSE! Should be refunded and impoverished..." is a form of social criticism delivered emotionally and assertively. Linguistically, this comment uses capital letters at the beginning of the sentence to emphasize anger and frustration towards a punishment system that is considered unfair. Capital letters are a linguistic strategy often used on social media to grab the reader's attention and strongly emphasize the message. In addition, the imperative tone in the phrase 'Should be refunded and impoverished' indicates a stern

command, illustrating the author's view of what is considered a concrete step to uphold justice. This element emphasizes the message emotionally, making it stand out more in the digital environment.

In terms of pragmatic function, this comment has two leading roles. Firstly, as a protest function, it clearly expresses dissatisfaction with a punishment system that is perceived as unfair, calling for changes that are more in line with the principles of justice. Secondly, as an emotional critique, it utilizes strong emotions, such as anger and frustration, to highlight the injustice. This use of intense emotions significantly impacts readers, encouraging them to consider the inequity being criticized.

In the context of cyber pragmatics, this comment utilizes digital elements such as capital letters, exclamation marks, and imperative tones to reinforce the expression of frustration. This combination makes the comment more conspicuous on social media, allowing the criticism to gain wider attention. In addition, the comment's content calls for moral action, such as the return of the corruption proceeds and severe punishment for the perpetrators, reflecting the ethical and social values it seeks to uphold. This critique conveys dissatisfaction and builds a strong moral narrative in the digital space, inviting readers to think about the importance of social justice and honesty. This comment illustrates how linguistics and cyber pragmatics can work together to deliver practical, emotional, and attention-grabbing social critiques on digital platforms.

4. Conclusion

This study highlights the significant role of sarcasm as a linguistic and pragmatic tool for public criticism in social media discourse, focusing on comparing punishments for corruption in Indonesia and China. The findings demonstrate that users strategically employ linguistic features, such as sarcastic tones, hashtags, emojis, capital letters, and punctuation (e.g., exclamation marks and question marks), to enhance the emotional impact of their messages. These linguistic strategies express dissatisfaction and create irony and humor, making the criticisms more engaging and relatable to other users.

From a pragmatic perspective, the comments analyzed in this study primarily function as tools for expressing protest and dissatisfaction with the legal system. They highlight public frustration with perceived injustices, such as the leniency of corruption sentences in Indonesia compared to the stricter punishments in China. Moreover, these comments implicitly or explicitly demand moral and systemic reforms, emphasizing fairness,

accountability, and transparency. The use of satire, indirect persuasion, and emotional appeals further strengthens the effectiveness of these criticisms in mobilizing public sentiment.

In the cyber pragmatic context, digital features such as hashtags, viral potential, and multimodal elements (e.g., emojis and visual emphasis through capitalization) play a crucial role in amplifying the reach and resonance of these criticisms. These features enable users to attract broader attention, facilitate collective engagement, and create a sense of solidarity among like-minded individuals. The digital environment enhances the visibility of these messages and transforms social media into a space for collective expression and discourse on critical societal issues.

In conclusion, this study underscores the effectiveness of sarcasm in digital platforms as a means of public critique, demonstrating its capability to engage audiences, promote discourse, and challenge institutional practices. By examining the interplay between linguistic, pragmatic, and cyber pragmatic elements, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how digital communication shapes contemporary expressions of social dissatisfaction and the pursuit of justice.

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Foto

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