

Exploring Sarcasm in Different Movie Genres: A Case Study of Horror and Comedy Movies

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Abstract

This study explored how sarcasm was used in two contrasting movie genres, horror, and comedy, to understand its role in shaping tone, storytelling, and audience engagement. Drawing on Camp's theory, sarcasm is categorized into four types: propositional sarcasm, lexical, like-prefixed, and illocutionary sarcasm. The research uses a qualitative approach, analyzing selected films and their script to identify and classify 127 sarcastic utterances—66 in horror and 61 in comedy. The findings reveal that illocutionary sarcasm is the most common in horror (50.00%), complementing the genre's subtle and dark undertones. In comedy, propositional sarcasm takes the lead (37.70%), reflecting its playful and straightforward humor. Like-prefixed sarcasm appears the least in both genres, with 4.55% in horror and 3.28% in comedy. These results highlight how sarcasm adapts to each genre's narrative style and audience expectations. By shedding light on the contextual differences in sarcasm's use, this study offers valuable insights into genre-specific communication and helps deepen our understanding of sarcasm as a powerful linguistic tool in both entertainment and education.

INTRODUCTION

Sarcasm is a common form of communication used to add humor, critique, or highlight a point by saying the opposite of what is meant. In films, sarcasm plays an important role in shaping character relationships and driving the story forward, especially in genres like horror and comedy. While previous studies have explored sarcasm in various contexts—such as social media (Chayanti & Sabardila, 2020; Wiguna, 2021; Sitanggang, 2022; Yunitasari, 2019; Sari, 2023; Hindawan, 2022), individual films (Melawati, 2022; Saragih, 2024; Pasaribu, 2023; Elawati, 2023; Bachtiar, 2018), YouTube videos (Fitrawati, 2024; Azizi, 2024), cultural studies (Syafuruddin, 2021; Muharami, 2021), newspapers (Ali, 2023; Heru, 2018), TV shows (Bahri, 2023; Widianita, 2023), TV series (Shelldyrani, 2021; Andriadi, 2019), novels (Zamawi, 2020; Sukmaningrum, 2018), and political debates (Kadhim, 2023)—there has been little research comparing how sarcasm functions across

different genres. This gap is crucial to address because understanding how sarcasm adapts to various genres can shed light on its role in narrative styles, cultural communication, and audience engagement.

This research focuses on exploring sarcasm in two distinct genres: horror and comedy. By analyzing films from both genres, the study investigates how sarcastic language is used to shape character dynamics and reflect each genre's unique tone. Using Camp's framework, sarcasm is categorized into four types—illocutionary, propositional, lexical, and like-prefixed—to understand its patterns and distribution across the two genres. The findings reveal that genre significantly influences how sarcasm is employed, with horror using it for darker, more implicit tones and comedy leveraging it for humor and directness.

This study contributes to our understanding of sarcasm by offering a fresh perspective on how it functions differently in diverse narrative contexts. These insights are particularly valuable for teaching and learning about sarcasm, especially in contexts that require understanding cultural nuances and pragmatic language use. While the research highlights key genre-specific patterns, it also opens up opportunities for future studies to explore sarcasm in other genres and media, broadening our understanding of this versatile communicative tool.

METHOD

In this research, the researcher used the descriptive qualitative analysis method as the principal instrument of research. The researcher uses the descriptive qualitative analysis method because the analysis data consists of written text. This approach is ideal for interpreting and understanding textual data in-depth, as it focuses on describing and explaining the characteristics, context, and meaning of the data rather than quantifying it.

Using qualitative methods to analyze the sarcastic utterances made by characters in the movie scripts of "*Ready Or Not*" (Horror Genre) and "*Knives Out*" (Comedy Genre). This method allows the researcher to explore the types of sarcasm within each genre. By focusing on the character's dialogue, the researcher can examine the differences and similarities in how sarcasm contributes to the tone and character development in both genres.

The data source was obtained from the Netflix application and the full transcript of the movie from <http://surl.li/pimnzk> for "Ready Or Not" and <http://surl.li/bgsjv> for "Knives Out." The researcher applied Elizabeth Camp's theory (2006) to analyze the data. The types of sarcasm are divided into four types: propositional sarcasm, lexical sarcasm, like-prefixed sarcasm, and illocutionary sarcasm. Data were gathered by (1) watching the selected films, (2) analyzing their scripts, and (3) Identifying sarcastic utterances. The data were analyzed by (1) categorizing each utterance into the four types and (2) calculating their distribution within the genres.

FINDINGS

The findings confirm the theory proposed by Elizabeth Camp related to sarcasm. All the identified types of sarcasm are found in both genres, including propositional sarcasm, lexical sarcasm, like-prefixed sarcasm, and illocutionary sarcasm. A total of 66 sarcastic utterances were found in the horror genre, and 61 in the comedy genre, making a combined total of 127 sarcasm utterances across both genres.

Table 1. Types of Sarcasm In Horror And Comedy

No	Types	Horror Genre		Comedy Genre	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Propositional Sarcasm	17	25.76%	23	37.70%
2.	Lexical Sarcasm	13	19.70%	17	27.87%
3.	Like-Prefixed Sarcasm	3	4.55%	2	3.28%
4.	Illocutionary Sarcasm	33	50.00%	19	31.15%
Total		66	100%	61	100%

Table 1 showed that the dominant type of sarcasm in the horror genre is **illocutionary sarcasm** with 33 utterances at 50.00%, where characters use sarcasm to perform actions or convey deeper intentions indirectly. It is followed by propositional sarcasm with 17 utterances at 25.76%, lexical sarcasm with 13 utterances at 19.70%, and like-prefixed sarcasm with 3 utterances at 4.55% for the types that least appear in the movie. This aligns with the genre's dramatic and intense atmosphere. In contrast, the comedy genre prominently features **propositional sarcasm** with 23 utterances with 37.70%, which uses irony to create humor or highlight contradictions in dialogue. It is followed by illocutionary sarcasm with 19 utterances at 31.15%, lexical sarcasm with 17 utterances at 27.87%, and the same as horror movies like-prefixed sarcasm with 2 utterances at 3.28% as the types that least appear.

DISCUSSION

This study provides an initial exploration of how sarcasm types in horror and comedy films, showing how this form of communication varies significantly between the two genres. However, there are still areas in this research that could be expanded upon. For instance, a deeper investigation into how cultural and social factors shape the use and perception of sarcasm across different media platforms would offer a more comprehensive understanding. This research also emphasizes the crucial role films play in shaping audience perceptions of sarcasm and how it influences the narrative.

The results of this research show that sarcasm is a form of communication that is widely used, often used to express humor, criticism, or stress about something by saying the opposite of what it means. This finding is in line with research (Pasaribu, 2023; Elawati, 2023; Melawati, 2022; Bachtiar, 2018), which shows that sarcasm influences the audience's attitude in conveying humor and burdening something with the opposite meaning. The similarity of these results strengthens the argument that sarcasm has a meaning that is inversely proportional to its original meaning.

Further studies could explore the impact of sarcasm in other types of media, such as television shows, literature, and even social media, to understand how these mediums help to build awareness of communication styles and influence societal attitudes toward humor and irony.

In the educational context, this research highlights the importance of introducing various communication styles, including sarcasm, to students. By teaching students about sarcasm and its role in different genres, we can encourage critical thinking and a deeper understanding of language and cultural expression. This can promote a more nuanced approach to communication in both media and real-life interactions. The following is an example of the data.

1. Propositional Sarcasm

a). Horror Genre:

Extract 1: “And even though your family is richer than God and intimidates the hell out of me, and I’m pretty sure your mom hates me, and your alcoholic brother keeps hitting on me, I honestly can’t wait to be part of your **moderately fucked up** family.”(Movie: Ready Or Not, Scene 2).

Analysis: The data above is categorized as Propositional sarcasm because it happens when a statement is made that literally contradicts the context. In this case, Grace states, “I honestly can’t wait to be part of your **moderately fucked-up** family.” The phrase "**moderately fucked-up**" is sarcastic because it implies that Alex's family has something bad like an issue, but she said it in a way that sounds almost enthusiastic. The exaggeration highlights her discomfort about joining such a horrible family, making it clear that she does not genuinely feel excited about it.

b). Comedy Genre:

Extract 2: "It's **funny**, Ransom, you skipped the funeral but you're **early for the will reading**."

(Movie: Knives Out, Scene 6)

Analysis: The data above is categorized as Propositional sarcasm because it happens when a statement is made that contradicts the context. In this case, Walt says, “**Funny**” he’s not amused. Instead, he’s pointing out Ransom’s behavior in a way that’s meant to be critical. The comment about “**early for the will reading**” implies that Ransom seems more interested in inheriting money than in paying respects to his Grandfather.

2. Lexical Sarcasm

a). Horror Genre:

Extract 3: “She’s **pretty enough** in a ‘**last call at the dive bar**’ kind of way.(Movie: Ready Or Not, Scene 6).

Analysis: The data above is categorized as lexical sarcasm because it focuses on specific word choices that imply the opposite meaning. Charity uses the word “**pretty enough**” meant to be sarcastic not a genuine compliment aligning it with lexical sarcasm. And the word “**last call at the dive bar**” is meant to be like she’s the last option from a lot of girls who can be picked.

b). Comedy Genre:

Extract 4: "**The party? Pre my dad's death? It was great.**"(Movie: Knives Out, Scene 6)

Analysis: The data above is categorized as lexical sarcasm because is created by using a word or phrase that seems to convey a positive or straightforward message. In this line, Linda’s statement seems to be a casual remark about a party, but the sarcasm lies in how she drags the words “**great**” and “**pre my dad’s death**”. The use of “**great**” in the context of something as serious and emotional as death is intentionally inappropriate or out of place. She emphasizes how everything seemed perfect

before the tragedy, but her choice of the word “**great**” is sarcastic because, in reality, the event is likely not something to be celebrated.

3. Like-Prefixed Sarcasm

a). Horror Genre:

Extract 5: “Your parents **look like they’re at a funeral**. They **hate me**.”(Movie: Ready Or Not, Scene 2).

Analysis: The data above is categorized as lexical sarcasm because the Use of “**like**” at the beginning of the comparison is a key indicator of like-prefixed sarcasm. Grace is comprising the appearances of the parents to people at a funeral using “like” to imply that there is cold, or unhappy.

b). Comedy Genre:

Extract 6: **You look like you’re gonna pass out**. Have you eaten all day? Eat. (Movie: Knives Out, Scene 6)

Analysis: The data above is categorized as lexical sarcasm because the word “**like**” supports mocking Marta who looks unenergetic.

4. Illocutionary Sarcasm

a). Horror Genre:

Extract 7: “I told you, dear, that’s only **with you**.”.(Movie: Ready Or Not, Scene 6).

Analysis: Illocutionary sarcasm involves intonation and the speech act itself to convey an opposing meaning. In this text, Daniel’s words could appear neutral, but when said he uses a sarcastic tone to mock his wife that he doesn’t have passion for his wife.

b). Comedy Genre:

Extract 8: "Alright! **Enough**. Jacob, we **get where this is going**."(Movie: Knives Out, Scene 8).

Analysis: Illocutionary sarcasm relies on tone and intent beyond the literal meaning of words to convey sarcasm. In this case, Linda stopped Jacob from continuing because she already understood what he was saying or where he was heading. Linda uses a tone of sarcastic implying that Jacob is being repetitive or dragging things out unnecessarily.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that sarcasm plays different roles depending on the film genre. In comedies, sarcasm acts as a key humor element that draws the audience in, while in horror, it tends to create tension and influence how the narrative is interpreted. What makes this research unique is its comparative approach across genres, something that hasn’t been widely explored in previous studies. By addressing this gap, the findings offer fresh insights into how sarcasm works in different contexts and its connection to the way characters communicate within a story.

The analysis focused on only two genres, horror, and comedy, so the results might not apply to other genres. Additionally, the dataset was relatively small, meaning some patterns in the use of sarcasm may not have been fully captured. Future studies could build on this by examining more genres and using larger datasets. Doing so could help develop a more detailed and complete understanding of sarcasm's role in film.

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