
The Use of Indirect Strategies Among University Students in Ghana: A Case Study of University of Cape Coast

Lawrencia Nyamekye Adjei, Lawrence Bosiwah

Dept of Ghanaian Languages & Linguistics, College of Humanities & Legal Studies, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast

Email address:

akosua.adjei@yahoo.com (L. N. Adjei), lbosiwah@ucc.edu.gh (L. Bosiwah)

To cite this article:

Lawrencia Nyamekye Adjei, Lawrence Bosiwah. The Use of Indirect Strategies Among University Students in Ghana: A Case Study of University of Cape Coast. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*. Vol. 3, No. 2, 2015, pp. 90-101.

doi: 10.11648/j.ijll.20150302.17

Abstract: This study aimed at finding out why and how students employ the use of sarcasm. The students of University of Cape Coast served as a case study. It also discussed how the social variables - gender and age influence the employment of sarcasm. The sampled size was eighty undergraduate students representing forty males and forty females with ten males and ten females in level hundred, two hundred, three hundred and four hundred respectively. The study used questionnaires. The study revealed that the aim of using sarcastic comments is to correct and tease. The study also revealed that gender has an influence on the issuing of such indirect strategies. In terms of age, it was revealed that students barely pass sarcastic comments towards people older than them. This shows their respect for the elderly as the culture demands in Ghana.

Keywords: Indirect Strategies, Sarcasm, Face, Discourse

1. Introduction

In the process of people communicating their ideas, they tend to use certain ways and means to present their utterances in the most desired way. In a speaker's attempt to communicate with a hearer, he uses all forms of utterances. Some of these utterances can be direct or indirect. Example, *you are standing on my foot*. The speaker is giving information to the listener that he is standing on his foot. However, the speaker is also telling the listener to step off his foot. Yankah (1995: 45) defines indirection as one frequently used mode of controlling the potency of spoken word. Obeng (1994:42) also defines indirection as a communicative strategy in which interlocutors use to abstain from being communicative in order to obviate crisis or in order to communicate difficulty and make their utterance consistent with face saving and politeness. It can be realized that when speakers make use of indirection, they do so to avoid straight forward embarrassing situations of offending the addressee. The speakers also make sure to present themselves as being polite. Indirection as a form of language use can be grouped into types. Schottman (1993) distinguishes four main types of indirection. They are that which is formulated indirectly, that which is addressed indirectly, that which has an indirect author and that which is indirect because of its key. In the

Akan society of Ghana, the use of indirection can be used to show how a person is matured and well trained in the act of speaking. Indeed, the use of indirection as employed in language can sometimes be confusing. It can be done through many strategies such as innuendo, irony, sarcasm and euphemism. This write up focuses basically on sarcasm.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The concept of indirection forms an integral part of every language system. It plays a very pivotal role as far as communication between and among two or more individuals is concerned. Generally, studies do indicate that indirection is mostly used to achieve certain ends, to save face and even to dodge legal consequences. Notable among these studies include Searle (1975) Yankah (1995), Tannen (1986) and Hope (2010). It is the view of the present researchers, however, that the majority of these studies examined indirection socio – cultural and non-academic settings. In an attempt to fill this gap, the present study investigates the strategies of indirectness in a discourse community under-researched, in the literature of the University of Cape Coast.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to find out why and how the uses of indirect strategies are employed among students. In

so doing, the use of indirect strategies will be critically examined to find out why people especially university students do not just say what they mean. It would analyze how social variables such as gender and age influence the use of indirection among students.

1.3. Research Questions

In order to maintain a high level of consistency and to make sure that this research is devoid of inconsistencies the following questions will guide the research:

1. What could cause university students to use sarcasm as indirect strategy in their speech?
2. What are the consequences of using sarcasm in speech?
3. How could social variables such as gender and age influence the use of sarcasm as an indirect strategy?

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study throws more light on why individuals prefer the use of indirection during communication. The study also shows how and why students use indirection and also look at how social variables influence the use of indirection.

Again, this research can add to the already existing literature on indirection. It can also be used as reference material for students who will pursue studies similar to this topic.

1.5. Delimitations of the Study

The research is limited to University students. Specifically students in the Department of Ghanaian Languages and Linguistics of the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. We chose this particular site because of proximity. As we are all in the Dept. of Ghanaian Languages and Linguistics, University of Cape Coast, and getting access to information from the students was anticipated to be easier.

The research is also limited to the use of sarcasm as an indirect strategy by students.

2. Literature Review

This section discusses the speech act, indirect speech act, face, indirection strategies and sarcasm.

2.1. Speech Acts

In communication, people make use of verbal and non-verbal. Verbal communication has a relationship with speech act. Austin (1962) defines speech acts as words that can be used to perform some functions. This definition was further explained by Searle (1969). According to him, speech act is an act that a speaker performs when making an utterance. Therefore, during communication, whatever goes into the interaction, forms part of speech act. Grammatical competence, linguistics competence and performance of the speaker form an integral part of speech act. Speech act as an utterance that serves a function of a request may not express a desire but the ability of the listener to take certain initiatives. For instance, *Can you please pass the sheet?*

Though the example is a request, it seeks that the listener takes an action by passing the sheet. Austin analyzed speech acts at three levels. They are the locutionary act (the basic act of speaking), illocutionary act (the meaning the speaker wants to put across) and perlocutionary act (by-product of speaking).

He, therefore, propounded two main types of utterances – performatives and constatives. Performatives are utterances that have actions embedded in them. That is, once the utterance is made, the action is performed. For example, the expression *“I hereby pronounce you husband and wife”* constitutes the act of marriage. Constatives on the other hand are used to make statements. As a result, the truths and falsehood of the utterances can be judged. For the purpose of this work indirect speech act will be discussed next.

2.2. Indirect Speech Acts

Searle (1969) defines indirect speech act as an utterance in which one speech act is performed indirectly by performing another. Brown (1980) also defines indirect speech acts as utterances in which one speech act form is used to realize another speech act. This implies for instance that a particular speech act performing the function of a request can also be a directive. As a result, for communication to take place, Searle and Brown suggests that we must be able to derive meaning out of indirect speech acts by means of co-operative processes out of which we are able to get different illocutions. Understanding the motives behind utterances is very crucial to a successful communication.

2.3. Face

The concept of face has been dealt with by many scholars. For the purpose of this study however, Goffman's analysis of face would be critically analyzed.

Goffman (1955:213) defines face as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume. Face is an image of self-delineated in terms of approved social attributes. Agyekum (2004) further explains this kind of face as a universal one but employed in cultural specific terms. As a result, during communication among people they must try to maintain a level of prestige as they find very appropriate means of conveying their messages in a very wise way or in a manner that will seem less harsh.

Traditionally, the concept of face is considered by Brown and Levinson (1987) as the pride of self-image inherent in every adult and people either perceive this pride of self-image. According to Brown and Levinson (1987) face is of two types, namely: Positive Face and Negative Face. Positive Face refers to the desire to be liked, appreciated, approved of, or the need to have a positive image accepted by others. However, negative face refers to the desire to be unimpeded, imposed upon and intruded or the need to be free from obligation in one's actions.

Generally, one's face can be either threatened or preserved. Face preserving acts are the utterances that tend to maintain, develop and promote a person's self-image. Examples are

understanding and affection. There are certain behaviors that undermine the face of an interlocutor because they run contrary to wishes of the hearer. They include disagreements, threats, insults and refusals. These are what Brown and Levinson call Face threatening Acts. According to Mutanda (2006) in social interactions, whatever an interlocutor says is potentially a face threatening act therefore, it can cause the addressee to lose his or her negative or positive face. As a result participants adopt strategies of politeness in order to avoid face threatening acts.

2.4. Indirection

Indirection can simply be defined as lack of straightforwardness and openness according to Shapiro (2012). Indirection is a form of language in which speakers avoid speaking directly about things or going straight to the point but rather move around the main purpose of the interactions: still with the intention of putting the message across. Generally, people use indirection to prevent them from any kind of crises. As a person who has being arrested by the police on the road will feel safe saying can we find a nicer way of solving this problem than just handing money over to the policeman? It would be easier to obviate crises by just asking how nice you could solve the problem. Using indirection helps both the listener and the speaker to know that they are all aware of what they are talking about or at least they care enough to break down what the speaker is saying.

Therefore, people use indirection to obviate crises, to know whether other people care enough for them and to ask for favour. It is worth to know that for whatever reason that causes people to use indirection whether in traditional setting or in our everyday life, the use of indirection is perfect for obviating crises and to save speakers from some kind of embarrassing situations if what speakers want the listener to do cannot be done. From what has being discussed we define indirection as a means of carrying information across by meaning what he or she says but saying it in different way in order not to be seen as mean and to prevent any troubles.

Indirection unarguably forms part of everyday conversation. Doing some empirical review, Gauthier (2004) examined the use of indirection in televised political debates. The data of the study was collected during the 2000 presidential debate between George Bush and Al Gore for the 2000 presidential race. The data was analyzed according to the eight steps propounded on indirection by Searle (1969). Gauthier found out that the indirection used most often saw the speaker promising to perform an action by expressing his intention to do so. It was concluded that the use of indirection has a persuasive effect in political communication.

Hope (2010) also discussed the meaning of indirection and its importance in the Akan society of Ghana. He critically analyzed indirection in the Akan community. His study revealed that indirection is used when someone is unable to pay a debtor in due time or during an argument between an old woman and a small girl. It can be deciphered from Hope's (2010) study that indeed indirection can be used to obviate crisis and also to save face. Hope's study and the

present study do share a similarity in that, like Hope's study, the present study also focuses on the various forms of indirection and why student in the University of Cape Coast employ indirection as part of their conversations and interactions. The present study, however, differs from Hope's because unlike Hope's work which was situated in an ethnolinguistics community the present study is situated in an academic community.

2.5. Sarcasm as an Indirect Strategy

The issue of sarcasm has been discussed by a number of scholars. Tannen (1992) defines sarcasm as a common means of criticism either in public or in private. It is a favourite form of criticism precisely because they are indirect. Indeed Tannen (1992) did point that some sort of indirectness is employed when sarcasm is used.

McDonald (1999) also defines sarcasm as an indirect form of speech intentionally used to produce particular dramatic effect on the listener. This definition just like Tannen (1992) brings out the fact that the use of sarcasm involves an indirect use of language. However, it also points out that sarcasm is used to get a dramatic effect on the listener. This effect can either be anger provoking or used as a perfect sense of humor depending on the common grounds shared by the speaker and the listener.

Agyekum (2007) also explains sarcasm as a form of verbal irony in which the speaker who seems to be very praising rather hides behind the screen and sends bitter expressions of strong and personal disapproval to the addressee. He points to the employment of sarcasm through an indirect means. He again points to the fact that the end result of sarcasm is to send bitter expressions. This explanation, however limits the fact that sarcasm is employed to usually send a bad vibe. Mounts (2012) also sees sarcasm as a specific form of irony meant to be sharp biting and pain inflicting. Therefore, sarcasm as a use of language can be said to be victimizing, offensive and anger provoking. So that when a speaker utters a sarcastic comment like *that was beautiful* and the listener gets the sarcasm in what the speaker says because the listener knows that what she/he is wearing is not beautiful, it can be victimizing and even threaten the face of the listener. He makes it clear that sarcasm is an irony that is sharp. That is, some form of irony can be seen as sharp when the extent of ridicule or thought provoking is very high. Therefore, from all these definitions and explanations, we conclude that sarcasm is an indirect use of words with the purpose of being mean to the listener. So sarcasm uses indirect means to achieve its purpose which are usually to be mean to someone.

Dauphin (n.d) investigated how sarcasm affect inter and cross gender relationships. The study was conducted in the University of Pennsylvania. The participants used for the study were fifteen males and fifteen females making a total of thirty students in all. The study was divided into two sections: the first consisted of ten questions on sarcasm and gender experience and the second part consisted of a role play with two characters. The results of the study showed that males view sarcasm as a lighthearted humor as fourteen

of them saw it as such. But the females were divided on the issue, as seven of them viewed sarcasm as a lighthearted humor, six were of the view that sarcasm is a humorous aggression and four viewed it as a means of venting anger. At the end most male agreed that indeed males are sarcastic most of the time but the females agree that they are rarely sarcastic. Again, for the role play section the females said they will feel sad and offended if they are at the receiving end of a sarcastic remark from their close friends. However, the males were not bothered at all when they were at the receiving end of a sarcastic remark. These findings aided in the saying that sarcasm is a male dominated use of language. This study is related to the present study with regards to the use of sarcasm among students. This present study also looks at why students in the University of Cape Coast employ the use of sarcasm.

Mount (2012) also examined the effects of balanced use of sarcasm in relationships. The research aimed at discovering if the valence of the sarcastic speaker's mood and intentions improves within a balanced sarcastic relationship. In view of this, data for the study was collected from fifty undergraduate students from introductory psychology class which included thirty one females and nineteen males. The study employed the use of vignette to collect the data. The vignette was made up of dialogues and it is appropriate to check the mood of the participants. A sum of sixteen vignettes was used. Analysis and discussion of the results revealed that participants rated the speaker in part one of the dialogue very sarcastic than participants in the control condition. The study also revealed that no matter how long sarcasm is being used in a particular relationship it does not bring down its negative effect. So the use of sarcasm is often viewed as aggressive and critical with speakers who display negative effect like annoyances or anger. Mount (2012) concludes that the use of sarcasm is more appropriate among friends but it does not smoothen the rough edges that one gets as a victim of a sarcastic remark. This study is related to the present research as common grounds are seen as a means to make some sarcastic remarks appropriate and understandable. This is because the present study also seeks to find out why students use sarcasm.

Tepperman, et al (2006) examined the sarcasm recognition for spoken dialogue systems. The objective of the study was to bring to the fore the characteristics that are very indicative of a sarcastic remark to formulate sarcasm and to find out how sarcasm functions as a speech act and finally how a dialogue manager must respond to sarcasm. These were done through the use of prosodic, spectral and contextual cues. Data for the study was collected in a spontaneous two party telephone conversation with the expression 'yeah right'. A sum of one hundred and thirty one of the recordings with yeah right was used. The findings of the study showed that to identify sarcastic remark the prosodic features should not be the only feature used. This is because using only the prosodic yielded the worst accuracy. However, adding both the context and spectral features to prosodic really improved. Again, it was realized that leaving the prosodic feature out and using spectral and or context was best. Laughter and alteration of

voice were realized to be the most important contributor to the contextual and prosodic features respectively. This study cannot be a full representation of the means of identifying sarcasm since the employment of sarcasm in conversation entails more than just 'yeah right'. This study is related to the present study in terms of finding out how sarcasm is employed.

Strom (2010) investigated further on the use of sarcasm during oncology interviews. The aim of the study was to gain more understanding in the use of sarcasm in the medical setting and also to find out how doctors use sarcasm in their conversation with patients. Data for the study was collected from the San Diego Conversation Library. Basically ten separate doctor-patient interviews were examined using the conversation analysis. The analysis of the interviews between the doctor-patient conversations was grouped under three themes. Thus, sarcasm initiated by patient, doctor and patient playing at sarcasm and doctor initiated sarcasm. In the first theme it was realized that patients often alter their voices whenever they wanted to make a sarcastic remark. The patient often spoke louder, under tone, faster or slowly. With the second theme it was realized that it could be shared where both doctor and patient could use sarcasm. Finally, with the third theme it was realized that doctors often use non literal statements as their sarcastic remark. It was also realized that patients did not take the sarcastic remark very lightly. All in all one basic procedure that was realized is that in all the recorded interviews used, sarcastic remarks were often made by the alteration of voice. This study has been able to bring to the fore some basic features which is indicative of sarcastic remarks. This study differs from the present study in terms of the research site and population sample, while this study chose a medical setting and doctor-patient conversation, this present study looks at students and how they interact with each other.

3. Methodology

We employed mixed method approach comprising both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative methodology helped us to have better understanding and analysis of data. The qualitative approach aided us to represent the frequency with which students use sarcasm. This is the reason for blending the two approaches. We used questionnaire in gathering the data. We presented the same questions to all the respondents However, the questionnaires were highly structured because the questions asked are open ended and close ended. Therefore, there were some questions respondents ticked their answers and there were some questions that respondents had to share their views by means of writing. The questionnaire used had two sections. The first section asked questions with respect to the background of the respondents. The second section asked questions on the use of sarcasm.

The used University of Cape Coast, which is one of the six government universities in Ghana. The school was established in 1962 originally to train graduate professional

teachers for second cycle institutions as well as the Ministry of Education (University of Cape Coast Admission brochure, 2013). Due to the vast nature of the school, the study was narrowed to the Faculty of Arts, specifically, the Department of Ghanaian Languages and Linguistics.

We adopted the use of quota sampling. Quota sampling is a type of non-probability sampling technique. According to Kothari (2004), quota sampling is when the researcher sets quotas of respondents to be chosen from a specific population groups by defining the basic choice, examples being gender, level and age. In the quest for us to find out how students employ sarcasm, it was appropriate for us to choose non probability quota sampling. This is because we sampled the population that was going to be relevant to the study. A disadvantage for using this procedure is that we could be bias and some people from a particular character could be over represented. However, we tried to avoid bias. We used eighty regular undergraduate students. This number cuts across gender (forty males and forty females), Level 100 (20) Level 200 (20), Level 300 (20) and Level 400 (20) between the ages of (18-35) years.

We distributed questionnaires to the students after their lectures for them to respond. We then collected them back after the respondents had finished answering them. The secondary source of the data was from books, articles and journals.

During the collection of the data, the rights and freedom of the respondents were taken into ample consideration. As a result, we briefed the respondents to bring them up to speed with what the study was all about. None of the respondents was forced to answer the questions. Once again, none of them was put at risk. The respondents' privacy and confidentiality was properly sealed by avoiding questions where the respondents had to give personal information like their names and address. In the end the information gathered were diligently used for the academic purpose for which it was collected. The collection and analysis of the data were done in line with ethical consideration.

4. Analysis and Discussion

In all, a total of eighty questionnaires was sent out and collected. Forty males and forty females representing twenty students in each level being ten males and ten females from levels hundred through to level four hundred. The analysis of the data was based on the research questions stated in the introduction. In view of that, questions used for the questionnaire were divided into three main groups in accordance with the research questions. In discussing the research questions the first matter we looked at were the causes of the use of indirect strategies, objectives of the use of the indirect strategies and the consequences of the use of indirect strategies

4.1. What could cause University Students to use Sarcasm as an Indirect Strategy

Sarcasm is one of the indirect strategies that are employed

by students in their various discourses with their colleagues and other people as well. This section of the study discusses what could cause a student in the University of Cape Coast to use sarcasm as an indirect strategy. From the data collected, various reasons were given as to what exactly students employ sarcasm on. Some of the reasons given include physical appearance, intelligence, religion, death and sexual intercourse.

4.1.1. Physical Appearance

A critical observation from the data gathered made it possible for us to conclude that physical appearance of an addressee can cause others to use sarcastic comments when the addressee is being addressed. According to Wikipedia, physical appearance refers to the outward phenotype or look of human beings. The observable features of a person counts as physical appearance. These appearances could be inherited or an individual basically chooses his/ her outlook. The parts that are inherited are transferred genetically from parents to children and they include height, skin color and nose. The physical appearance such as how a person dresses is purely a part that an individual does for himself/herself. People are sometimes really affected by the comments they receive concerning their physical appearance. It is important to state that from the data collected, the students characterized the physical appearance in terms of how people dressed. This aspect of the physical appearance is not inherited but an individual chooses how to dress each day for every event. This makes it possible for others to pass sarcastic comments about it so that if possible the person can change. As a result, as much as 49 students representing the 61.2% pass sarcastic comments about a person's physical appearance in terms of how the person dresses. See Table 1 figure 1 for details.

Some illustrations are drawn from the data.

An illustration:

"Sometimes the color combination is too outrageous as if they are masquerades" (a male 21-24 years level 400 student).

"It is an indirect way of saying a friend's dressing is too much" (a female 21-24 years level 400 student)

The responses represent the views of a male and female in level four hundred students. These comments are given about a friend's dressing usually when the person is all dressed up and ready to go out. The person dresses so much by combining a lot of colors and this makes the addressee look like a masquerade. Then again, a friend can be dressed too over the top for a casual event and as such the use of sarcasm is employed. The use of the words outrageous, masquerades and too much for an event shows the addressers disagreement with whatever the addressee has on. Also it invokes some form of mockery with the addressee being the victim. The quest of the addressee not to threaten the face of the addresser resorts to the use of the indirect strategy as a form of mockery and correction. This observation is in line with Agyekum (2007) as he posits that sarcasm is used to send a

bitter expression of strong disapproval to the addressee.

Another illustration:

“It sounds very bad to talk directly about a person’s physical appearance” (a male 21-24 years level 300 student).

“At times people need to be directed because they might not know what is wrong with their dressing” (a female 25 years and above level 300 student).

These responses are from a male and a female level three hundred students. They are very careful about comments they pass on people’s dressing. This is because it is very bad to talk about it directly. Therefore in order to save their faces sarcasm is the refuge they can cling under to make them talk about their dressing not being very bad. This observation supports the assertion by Mutanda (2006) that in social interaction, whatever an interlocutor says is potentially a face threatening act. As a result of this, respondent adopts some strategies to avoid any face threatening act. It is clear that these respondents do not only use sarcasm for mockery alone but as a form of correction.

4.1.2. Intelligence

The intelligence of an individual is an issue when it is talked about publicly. It can potentially face threatening act. To the respondents, sarcastically commenting about a person’s intelligence makes them aware of themselves and also to correct them. This makes the addressee’s feel comfortable in their company. Illustrations are discussed using sarcasm. From the data collected it was observed that quite a number of students thus 26 of them pass sarcastic comments about a person’s intelligence because this can be an area of sensitive nature. This brings to the fore that students of the University of Cape Coast indeed employ the use of indirect strategies in their discourses. However, they do so in a sarcastic manner. See Table 1 figure 1 for more detailed illustrations.

The following illustrations indicate the reasons why sarcastic comments are employed in terms of intelligence.

Another illustration:

“I want them to know that I accept them for who they are instead of saying it directly. (a male 25 years and above in level 100)

“I use sarcasm in order to praise, mock or correct them”. (a female, 25 years and above level 400 student)

In the illustration above, the respondents are a male and a female level four hundred and 100 students respectively. For the sake of acceptance, people resort to the use of sarcasm. This according to the respondents save their face and as a result bring unity. Again, sarcasm about intelligence are employed to praise and correct but most importantly to mock them not in an angry means but a friend zone means. This observation sides with Mount (2012) as he concludes that the use of sarcasm is more appropriate among friends but does

not smoothen the rough edges that one gets as a victim of a sarcastic comment.

Another illustration:

“Because it sounds very bad to talk about it directly to that person” (a male 21-24 years level 300 student)

“I use sarcasm because intelligence of someone is very emotional to talk about it raw (a female, 21-24 years level 300 student)

These responses are from a male and a female level three hundred students. Basically, people use sarcasm intelligently to prevent any face threatening act. The addressee employs the use of sarcasm, because it is very bad to talk about the intelligence level of a person directly especially when the person is not performing well academically. Also, it is very emotional to talk about it in its raw state. The use of sarcasm inflicts pain and victimizes the addressee but that allows for the people to laugh about such issues. In the end sarcasm is employed so that the speaker will not offend or threaten the face of their addressee’s.

Another illustration:

“I feel comfortable speaking directly about education” (a male. 25 years and above level 200 student)

“So that I do not discourage their abilities” (a female, 21-24 years level 200 student)

In this illustration, the respondents are male and female level two hundred students. In order for the speaker to save his face, he would rather use sarcasm. This is because of the comfort that comes with speaking indirectly about such issues without directly affecting the interlocutors. Again, for the purpose of encouragement sarcasm is used so that people are not discouraged.

Another illustration:

“To force them to learn hard” (a male, 21-24 years level 200 student)

“I do not want to be rude”. (a female 21-24 years level 100 student)

The respondents for this illustration are a male and female level two hundred and level one hundred students respectively. From their point of view, it is in the best interest of the addressee and the addresser to use sarcasm. This is because their faces, especially, that of the addressers are preserved. In such an indirect way the addressers make fun of the of the addressees situation and mostly to edge them to do the right thing. So even in correcting a person, sarcasm is used.

4.1.3. Religion

Issues concerning religion are not at all discussed without being conscious and knowing exactly how to talk about it. This is because people are very superstitious and use mysterious stories behind their God or gods, and their form

of worship. Therefore, passing sarcastic comment about religion does not only affect the individual but it affects that religion as a whole.

Issues concerning religion are very dicey. This is because they have been a lot uprising and misunderstanding in a lot of countries about some forms of religion. Even in Ghana part of a child's socialization is being taught not to say anything awful about any god. This is because of all the stories and superstitions behind the gods and their respective religions. On that basis just 5 students will pass sarcastic comment on a particular issue relating to religion. See Table 1 figure 1 for more detailed illustrations.

Below are some illustrations to indicate why people pass sarcastic comment on religion.

An illustration:

"I scarcely use it because, sarcasm about religion and intelligence can invoke mixed reaction. (a male 21-24 years level 200 student)

"Because some friends do not want the truth, they always want you to side with them even if what they are wearing is bad." (a female 21-24 years level 200 student)

These responses represent the view of a male and female in level two hundred. To them, the use of sarcasm is safe. This is because some friends do not want the hard truth but the truth mixed in a different way is convenient for both interlocutors and their faces are perfectly saved.

Table 1 Figure 1 below illustrate why students use sarcastic comments. It is observed that 49 of the respondents pass sarcastic comments about a person's physical appearance representing a percentage of 61.2 while 5 out of the respondents representing a percentage of 6.2 pass sarcastic comments about a person's religion and the remaining 26 respondents representing a percentage of 32.5 pass sarcastic comments on a person's intelligence.

Table 1. Showing some things that could cause university students to pass sarcastic comments.

	Frequency	Percent
Physical appearance	49	61.2
Intelligence	26	32.5
Religion	5	6.2
Total	80	100

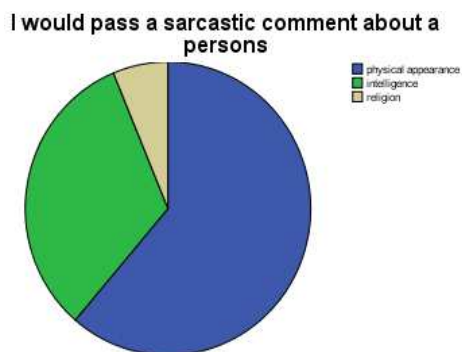


Figure 1. Pie chart showing the percentage of students passing sarcastic comments on physical appearance, intelligence and religion

4.2. The Consequences of Using Sarcasm as an Indirect Strategy

In the use of sarcasm, the consequence can be to build or break up relationships. Various reasons were given as to why sarcasm builds or breaks relationship. Coincidentally, half of the respondents believe that sarcasm can break relations and the other half think that sarcasm build relationship. Illustrations are drawn from the data collected.

An illustration:

"You meet someone with the same attitude you feel you have a friend" (a male 21-24 years level 100 students)

"It helps the individual to know how to talk to a fellow" (a female 21-24 years level 100 student)

These are the views of a level hundred male and female students. To them sarcasm builds relationships. It helps people to know how to talk to friends and help in the binding process of making friends. Therefore, among a group of friends if sarcasm is normal for language use then it is considered as fun. This is because it will be a continuous thing for these interlocutors.

Another illustration:

"When sarcastic comments prevail in a relationship it strengthens the tolerance level" (a male 16-20 years level 200 student)

"It makes people dull and unwanted" (a female 21-24 years level 200 student)

These illustrations are the views of a male and female in level two hundred. They happen to share different views on the consequence of sarcasm. While the male thinks it improves tolerance level which fosters the relationship, the female believes it makes people dull and unwanted. In this sense, sarcasm in a relationship can either break or build the relationships. This will mean the interlocutors should know their limits about what they can pass sarcastic comments about and what they can pass sarcastic comments at.

Another illustration:

"I have witnessed before; it breaks relationship and I have also been a victim". (a male 21-24 years level 300 student)

"Sarcasm breaks relationship because individuals do not have the attitude of being addressed as such. Since they see it more insulting especially inability to decode such statements it's not good." (a female 20-24 years level 300 student)

These are the views of a level three male and female students. To them and others too, sarcasm breaks relationship because people do not just decode the sarcastic aspects of an utterance and just laugh about it. The addressee can add other interpretations of their own. This can lead the addressee's face to be threatened and as such will not approve of what the addressee said so far as their faces are concerned. Also, the

male believes it breaks relationship because he has witnessed the use of sarcastic comments resulted in breaking of his relationship. Again, he has been a victim therefore, he has learnt from experience not to employ sarcasm in a relationship.

Another illustration:

“I won’t use sarcastic comments since one thinks he is being mocked” (a male 25 years and above level 400 student)

“Sarcastic comments help friends and families know what to expect of you during a conversation. It also helps include fun and jokes into everyday conversation. (a female 21-24 years level 400)

These illustrations represent the views of level four hundred male and female. The addressee’s face is threatened because the sarcastic comment is used to mock him. However, it is the wish for every individual to keep up a positive face. The use of sarcasm however builds relationship by bringing some sort of fun. Again, it helps in the bonding process among friends.

It can be observed from the analysis and the information gathered that, indeed, sarcasm can result in breaking or building relationships. However, a number of males agree that sarcasm builds relationships while a number of female believe it builds relationship. The males mostly regard sarcasm as a lighthearted humor but most of the females regard it as a face threatening act. This observation is in line with Dauphin’s (n.d) finding that sarcasm is usually used by males most of the time. These males are usually not bothered at all especially when they are at the receiving end.

Table 2 and figure 2 below illustrate the views of the respondents on the consequence of sarcasm on relationship. Generally, 40 respondents believe sarcasm build relationships representing a percentage of 50 while 40 of the remaining respondents believe sarcasm break relationships representing a percentage of 50. In terms of gender 27 males and 13 females representing percentages of 67.5% and 32.5% respectively, believe sarcasm builds relationships while 27 females and 13 males representing a percentage of 67.5% and 32.5% respectively believe sarcasm break relationships.



Figure 2. Pie chart showing how sarcasm helps to build or break relationships

Table 2. Showing the consequences of sarcasm on relationship

Sarcasm helps to	Gender of respondent				Total	%
	Male	%	Female	%		
Build relationship	27	67.5	13	32.5	40	50
Break relationship	13	32.5	27	67.5	40	50

4.3. How Social Variables such as Gender and Age Influence the Use of Sarcasm

The third research question focused on how social variables such as gender and age influence the use of sarcasm as an indirect strategy.

4.3.1. Gender

Gender can be contrasted from sex as the biological feature that depicts if one is a male or a female. Therefore, we analyzed how the use of sarcasm is prevalent in their utterances.

Table 3 and figure 3 show a representation of the number of respondents used for the study. They are presented and discussed with the help of tables and graphs. 80 respondents took part in this study. It can be observed that 50% of the respondents are males and 50% are females.

Table 3. Showing distribution of Gender

Gender	Number	Percentage (%)
Male	40	50
Female	40	50
Total	80	100

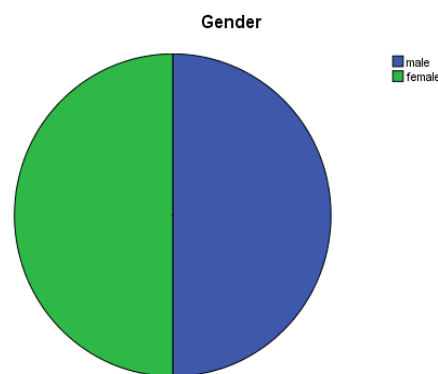


Figure 3. Showing male and female respondents in percentages.

Many scholars have investigated into the language use among the two genders. These scholars include Lakoff (1975), Labov (1966) and Trudgill (1972). Their investigations have proven that usually females use less provocative and hurting words as compared to males. Tannen (1990) states that women speak and hear a language of connection and intimacy, while men speak and hear a language of status and independence. These reasons assert that there is a difference between the uses of language by male and female respectively.

In table 2 and figure 2, it was observed that the students of University of Cape Coast employ the use of sarcasm and euphemism when talking to their colleagues. This could be from male to male, male to female, female to female and female to male. Therefore, 27 out of the forty females agree

that sarcasm breaks relationship with the other 13 males who believe that sarcasm breaks relationship. However, twenty seven males believe sarcasm builds relationship while thirteen females believe it breaks relationships. This observation is in line with what Noble (1977) states that sarcasm is a male dominated speech form. The table 2 and figure 2 above give a representation that clearly shows the rate at which females and males use sarcasm.

When female students were asked about how often they use sarcastic comments when talking to their opposite sex or same sex, they expressed their mixed feelings.

Table 4 below illustrates the frequency at which sarcastic comments are passed from female to male and from female to female. 7 females representing 17.5% use sarcastic comments very often with the opposite sex, 23 females representing 57.5% use sarcastic comments sometimes with the opposite sex and ten females representing 25% do not use sarcastic comments at all with the opposite sex.

8 females representing 20% use sarcastic comments very often with other females, 26 females representing 65% use sarcastic comments sometimes with other females and 6 females representing 15% do not use sarcastic comments at all with other females.

Table 4. Showing the use of sarcastic comments among females in all levels

How often do you use sarcastic comments when talking to members	Very often		Sometimes		Not at all	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Opposite sex	7	17.5	23	57.5	10	25
Same sex	8	20	26	65	6	15

When male students were also asked about how often they use sarcastic comments when talking to their female counterpart sex or same sex, they expressed their views in different ways.

Table 5 illustrates the frequency at which sarcastic comments is employed from male to female and from male to male. 3 males representing 7.5% use sarcastic comments very often with the opposite sex. 29 males representing 72.5% use sarcastic comments sometimes with the opposite sex and 8 males representing 20% do not use sarcastic comments at all with the opposite sex.

16 males representing 40% use sarcastic comments very often with other females, 19 males representing 47.5% use sarcastic comments sometimes with other males and 5 males representing 12.5% do not use sarcastic comments at all with other males.

Table 5. Showing the use of sarcastic comments among males in all levels

How often do you use sarcastic comments when talking to members	Very often		Sometimes		Not at all	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Opposite sex	3	7.5	29	72.5	8	20
Same sex	16	40.0	19	47.5	5	12.5

4.3.2. Age

Age is the representation of how many years a person has attained. Merriam-Webster defines age as the amount of time during which a person or animal existed. Although, age may be considered by some people as just a number, it is a very important social variable. However, age cannot be necessarily associated with maturity.

Table 6 and figure 4 below show the distribution of age groups in the data collected. 11 students representing 13.8% are within the ages of 16-20, 58 representing 72.5 are within the ages of 21-24 and 11 students representing 13.8% are within the ages of 25 and above.

Table 6. Showing the distribution of age group

Age Group (in years)	Number	Percentage (%)
16 – 20	11	13.8
21 – 24	58	72.5
25 and above	11	13.8
Total	80	100

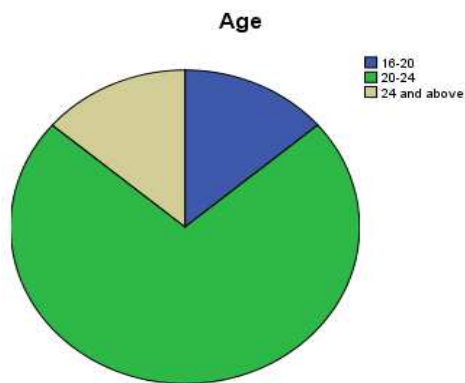


Figure 4. Pie chart showing distribution of age group

In the analysis of the data, age plays a vital role in the employment of sarcasm. This assertion can be linked to societal norms which demand respect towards elderly when talking. The respondents face is very important to them so they preserve the face of their addressees so that their face is also preserved. It is not surprising that students barely pass sarcastic comments at people older than them. Tables 7 - 9 below give a representation of the frequencies at which students between 16-20, 21-24 and 25 and above pass sarcastic comments. This analysis is done in terms of their age mates, people older than them and people they are older than.

Finding out from the students aging between 16 and 20 years from the university about the frequency at which they pass sarcastic comments with their age mates, people they are older or younger than, it showed clearly that they do not pass any sarcastic comments to people that are older than them. See table 7 below for the details. This depicts the culture of Ghanaians where an elderly is respected. The results also show again that age mates do not meet without sarcastic

comments being passed.

Table 7 illustrates the frequency at which sarcastic comments are passed with respect to age range of (16-20). 2 students representing 18.2% use sarcastic comments very often with their age mates. 9 students representing 82.8% use sarcastic comments sometimes with their age mates and 0 student representing 0% do not use sarcastic comments at all with their age mates.

0 students representing 0% use sarcastic comments very

often with people they are older than, 2 students representing 18.2% use sarcastic comments sometimes with people older than them and 9 students representing 82.8% do not use euphemistic comments at all with people older than them.

1 students representing 9.1% use sarcastic comments very often with people they are older than, 7 students representing 63.6% use sarcastic comments sometimes with people they are older than and 3 students representing 27.3% do not use sarcastic comments at all with people they are older than.

Table 7. Showing the use of sarcastic comments among the ages of (16-20)

How often do you use sarcastic comments when talking to members	Very often		Sometimes		Not at all	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Age mates	2	18.2	9	82.8	0	0
People older than you	0	0	2	18.2	9	82.8
People you are older than	1	9.1	7	63.6	3	27.3

Table 8 illustrates the frequency at which sarcastic comments are passed with respect to age range of (21-24). 25 students representing a 43.0% use sarcastic comments very often with their age mates, 26 students representing 45.0% use sarcastic comments sometimes with their age mates and 7 students representing 12.0% do not use sarcastic comments at all with their age mates.

1 student representing 1.7% use sarcastic comments very often with people they are older than, 16 students representing 28.3% use sarcastic comments sometimes with

people older than them and 41 students representing 70.0% do not use sarcastic comments at all with people older than them.

9 students representing 15.5% use sarcastic comments very often with people they are older than, 29 students representing 50.0% use sarcastic comments sometimes with people who are older than and 20 students representing 34.5% do not use sarcastic comments at all with people they are older than.

Table 8. Showing the use of sarcastic comments among the ages of (21-24)

How often do you use sarcastic comments when talking to members	Very often		Sometimes		Not at all	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Age mates	25	43.0	26	45.0	7	12.0
People older than you	1	1.7	16	28.3	41	70.0
People you are older than	9	15.5	29	50.0	20	34.5

Table 9 below illustrates the frequency at which sarcastic comments are passed with respect to age (25 and above). 4 students representing a 36.4% use sarcastic comments very often with their age mates, 6 students representing 54.5% use sarcastic comments sometimes with their age mates and 1 student representing 9.1% do not use sarcastic comments at all with their age mates.

0 students representing 0 % use sarcastic comments very often with people older than them, 2 students representing 18.2% use sarcastic comments sometimes with people older

them. 9 students representing 81.8% do not use sarcastic comments at all with people older than them.

2 students representing 18.2% use sarcastic comments very often with people they are older than, 7 students representing 63.6% use sarcastic comments sometimes with people they are older than and 2 students representing 18.2% do not use sarcastic comments at all with people they are older than.

The study shows again that people do not often pass sarcastic comments at people older than them. Still emphasizing respect for the elderly.

Table 9. Showing the use of sarcastic comments among the ages of (25 and above)

How often do you use sarcastic comments when talking to members	Very often		Sometimes		Not at all	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Age mates	4	36.4	6	54.5	1	9.1
People older than you	0	0	2	18.2	9	81.8
People you are older than	2	18.2	7	63.6	2	18.2

5. Conclusion

The objective of the study was to find out why and how students in the University of Cape Coast use indirect strategies. While taking into consideration social variable like age differences and gender.

The study observed that, physical appearance, intelligence, religion are the reasons that cause the students to use sarcasm. Specifically, issues concerning physical appearance, intelligence and religion will cause a student to pass a sarcastic comment.

The present study revealed that, the aim of using sarcasm is to correct and most especially to tease the addressee. Also,

sarcasm as an indirect form of language use is adopted so that the addresser does not hurt the addressee directly.

Again, the study revealed that, when the use of sarcasm is employed about physical appearance it includes the dressing of the addressee. At this stage it is done to specifically tease the addressee and caution them to dress more properly and decently. It was also revealed that when sarcastic comments are employed about the intelligence of someone, it is used to edge the students to study hard. However, the effects will not be complete without the sharp biting and pain inflicting aspect of sarcasm. In view of that, it was revealed that 26 students representing 32.5% will pass a sarcastic comment about the intelligence of someone. It was revealed that rarely would a person pass a sarcastic comment about religion. As such, a total of 5 students representing 6.2% of the total population employ sarcasm when talking about religion.

For the consequences of using sarcasm, it was revealed generally that it can break or build relationships. This is because; forty students representing 50% of the entire population believe it breaks while another forty representing 50% of total population believes it builds relationships.

It was also revealed in terms of gender that, a greater number of males believe sarcasm builds relationships while a greater number of females believe sarcasm breaks relationship. Twenty seven females and thirteen males believe that sarcasm breaks relationship while twenty seven males and thirteen females believe that sarcasm builds relationships.

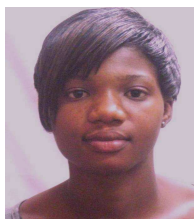
In terms of age, it was revealed that students barely pass sarcastic comment with people older than them but the recipients of most of their sarcastic comments are targeted to their age mates and people the students are older than. Therefore, the faces of the interlocutors, especially elderly ones are usually safe from sarcasm.

References

- [1] Agyekum, K. (2004). The Concept of Face in Akan Communication. *Journal of Pragmatics and Cognition*.
- [2] Agyekum, K. (2007). *Introduction to Literature*. 2nd edition. Accra Legon Media Design.
- [3] Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do Things with Word*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [4] Brown, P. G. (1980). *Action Description in Indirect Speech Acts cognition and Brain Theory*.
- [5] Brown, P. and Levinson (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language usage*. New York, Cambridge University Press.
- [6] Dauphin, V. P (n.d) *Sarcasm in Relationships*. Retrieved from <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/plc/communication/valerie.htm>
- [7] Gauthier (2004) *The use of indirection in Television Political Debate*. *Journal of Political Marketing*.
- [8] Goffman, E. (1955) *On face-work: an analysis of ritual elements in social interaction*. *Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Processes*.
- [9] Goffman E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, New York Double day
- [10] Kothari (2004), *Research Methodology Methods a Technique*. New Age International (P) Ltd., Publishers
- [11] Labov, W. (1966) *The Social Stratification of English in New York*. Centre for Applied Linguistics: Washington DC
- [12] Lakoff, R. (1975) *Language and Women's place*. New York, Harper and Row.
- [13] McDonald, R. (1999) *Exploring the Process of Inference Generation in Sarcasm: A Review of Normal and Clinical Studies*
- [14] Mounts, J. (2012). *A History of Sarcasm: Effects of Balanced Use of Sarcasm in a Relationship*. Undergraduate Research and Creative Practice. Retrieved from <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1161&context=honorsprojects> Saturday, February 01, 2014, 8:10:01 PM
- [15] Mutunda, S. (2006). *A Sociolinguistics Study of Politeness Strategies in the Lunda Culture*. *Journal of Language, Society and Culture*.17-2006
- [16] Noble, C. (1977) "Weak Speak": An Investigation of Sarcastic Slang. *The Nottingham Linguistic Circular*.
- [17] Obeng, G. S. (1994) *Verbal Indirection in Akan Informal Discourse*. *Journal of Pragmatics*
- [18] Schottman, W. (1993) *Proverbial dog names of the Baatombu: A strategic alternative to silence*. *Language in society*, - Cambridge Univ Press 22: 539-554
- [19] Searle, J. L. (1969). *Speech Acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [20] Searle, J. L. (1969). *Speech Acts. An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [21] Searle, J. (1975) *Indirect Speech Acts "In Syntax and Semantics*. New York Academics Press
- [22] Strom M. A. (2010). *Cancer May Cause Sarcasm: The Use of Sarcasm During Oncology Interviews*. Retrieved from http://sdsudspace.calstate.edu/bitstream/handle/10211.10/610/Strom_Alyssa.pdf?sequence=Tuesday, March 11, 2014, 7:22:34 PM.
- [23] Tannen (1990) *Don't Understand. Women and Men in Conversation*. Virago Press.
- [24] Tannen, D. (1992). *That's Not What I Meant*. Great Britain Clays Ltd, St plc.
- [25] Tepperman, J Traum, D and Narayanan, S. (2006). "Yeah Right": Sarcasm Recognition For Spoken Dialogue Systems. *Interspeech 2006 - ICSLP*. Retrieved from <http://www.cs.columbia.edu/~julia/papers/teppermanetal06.pdf> Tuesday, March 11, 2014, 7:08:50 PM
- [26] Trudgill, P. (1972). *Sex, covert prestige and linguistic change in the urban British English of Norwich*. *Language in Society*. Cambridge University Press
- [27] University of Cape Coast Admission brochure (2013) www.ucc.edu.gh

- [29] Yankah, K. (1995). *Speaking for the Chief: Okyeame and the Politics of Akan Royal Oratory*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Biography



Ms. Lawrencia Nyamekye Adjei is a young graduate from the Department of Ghanaian Languages & Linguistics whose research interest is Sociolinguistics. At the moment, she is a Teaching Assistant in the Department.



Mr. Lawrence Bosiwah is a lecturer in the Department of Ghanaian Languages and Linguistics, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana. He holds M. Phil in Applied Linguistics, Currently; he is pursuing his PhD degree in Applied Linguistics at the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana.

His research interests cuts across Akan Linguistics, Applied Linguistics and linguistics of Education.