Testing Responses to Sarcasm Reviewed from Gender and Social Relationship Aspects Using Discourse Completion Task

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Abstract

In Indonesia, use of language for sarcasm has recently increased. It exists in both men and women, and in all social interaction or relationships. This study conducted a survey with 270 respondents using a Discourse Completion Task or DCT. The purpose of this study was to investigate their responses to sarcasm reviewed from the aspect of gender and social relationship. The SPSS 24 was used to analyze the data through parametric test using one sample t-test. The results proved that responses to sarcasm varied significantly both from the aspect of gender and social relationship. From the aspect of gender, women who received sarcasm from the opposite sex or the same sex reacted more strongly (angrier or more opposing) than men. From the aspect of social relationship, someone who received sarcasm from a stranger reacted more strongly (angrier or more opposing) than other forms of social relationship. The implication of the study is that sarcasm is unhealthy and a threat to social communication. It is recommended to avoid sarcasm in interaction as much as possible with any reasons and situations because it can cause a gap or even a social conflict.

1. Introduction

Language is an entity inseparable from humans, because it becomes a tool of human thought in expressing their ideas and feelings. (Williams, 2018) stated that in social reality, language is used as suggestion and is required to express thoughts and feelings about something to a speech partner in a certain situation. When it is viewed as a tool to express thoughts and feelings, the value and the meaning of language are closely related to mental and emotional situation of the speaker. For example, when a speaker is angry, disappointed, or feels hurt, the situation can be recognized from language used in the speech delivered. One of the most concrete forms of language that show the emotional situation of the speaker is sarcasm. Sarcasm is a speech variant that generally contains bad words or humiliate others. Wijana et al. (2006) classify sarcasm in Bahasa Indonesia into some forms, namely word, phrase, and clause. Furthermore, the forms of sarcasm are also classified by Wijana and Rohmadi into various references, such as situations, animals,

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objects, body parts, relatives, ghosts, activities, jobs (professions), and exclamations.

Knowledge about sarcasm related to science of meaning is hard to separate from the issue of taboo developing in the society. The meaning of taboo is actually very broad, but commonly it is defined as "something prohibited" (Wijana et al., 2006). When reviewed using psychological motivation theory, the background of emergence of taboo expressions is more or less caused by the events, namely: 1) being in a state of fear (taboo of fear); 2) being in unpleasant feeling situation (taboo of delicacy); and 3) existence of something considered impolite or inappropriate (taboo of propriety). Sarcasm is categorized as the third type of taboo expression (Wijana et al., 2006).

For a language speaker who feels intimidated in a certain situation, the use of sarcasm is a part of self-defense. Otherwise, for a language speaker who feels free or not intimidated, sarcasm is used to intimidate others. In the second scenario, some researchers suggest that sarcasm should be avoided as much as possible because it can result in a social gap between the speaker and his/her speech partner (Lunando et al., 2013). However, Kreuz et al. (2007); Green (2012); and Eden and Hasund (in (Tannen, 2002) stated the opposite. They found that sarcasm was used to create an intimate and harmonious situation, even sarcasm was able to create closeness and friendship. In addition, Drucker et al. (2014) found an interesting fact that responses to sarcasm are highly influenced by gender. Therefore, no matter how the reality is, sarcasm plays an important role as a center in verbal communication as a medium that has benefits for emotions in connection to linguistics. Hence, the synthesis that can be formulated from the concept is that sarcasm and gender are two variables that have contributed or played a role in responses to sarcasm expressions.

When reviewed based on response theory, language in communication process is manifested in two forms, namely stimulus and effect. Stimulus is related to the message received by a speech partner from a speaker, while effect is the response given by the speech partner after receiving the message Embretson et al. (2013) Hambleton et al. (2013). Therefore, both speaker and speech partner have control on their own selves. A speaker can choose and use a language to get an expected response, otherwise a speech partner can process (choose and implement) a response to be shown. If the concept is implemented in sarcasm, the form of sarcasm used by a speaker is "stimulus", while the reaction from speech partner after receiving sarcasm is "effect". The formulation can then be used as a reference to conduct a test on responses to sarcasm.

Testing response to sarcasm belongs to pragmatic review, namely speech act. Manifestation of the action with language is the definition of speech act. Speech act according to Austin is classified into three forms, namely locution, illocution, and perlocution (Baktir, 2013; Oishi, 2006). Response to sarcasm is the third form of speech act, which is perlocution. Testing response to sarcasm can be used as a technique called Discourse Completion Task or DCT.

Discourse Completion Task is a pragmatic research technique in the form of a survey used to collect speech act data (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). While Nurani explains that Discourse Completion Task is a written questionnaire containing brief description about certain communication situation aimed to express the pattern of speech act studied (Sudirman, 2018). DCT has some goals, namely: 1) to obtain data more quickly and abundantly; 2) to create situations in the form of delivery the way they are; 3) to review specific forms of speech commonly used in the society naturally; 4) to gain knowledge related to cultural and psychological condition that possibly influences speech; 5) to legitimate with wide variety of forms and variations of speech as a result of certain speech response in the speaker's mind (Kasper et al., 1991). Based on the opinions, it can be concluded that Discourse Completion Task is a written questionnaire containing brief description about certain communication situation aimed to express the pattern of speech act studied.

The excellence of DCT according to Wouk (2006) is that the research is controlled; the cross-situation and cross-language comparison is high; the possibility to collect and process data quickly; and the number of respondents surveyed is easier. The instrument was initially prepared by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), and many used it at that time to collect information about forms of speech act or language or the two of them or even culture. One of information collected using the instrument currently is the data of Al-Marani and Sazalle (Dewi et al., 2016).

Discourse Completion Task has been used by previous researchers, such as Aufa (2011) Lahodová Vališová (2019), and many more. It is not surprising that Discourse Completion Task is popular among pragmatic researchers and its goals and benefits in speech act research include: 1) to obtain data more quickly and abundantly; 2) to create situations in forms of delivery the way

they are; 3) to review specific forms of speech commonly used in the society naturally; 4) to gain knowledge related to cultural and psychological condition that possibly influences speech; 5) to legitimate with wide variety of forms and variations of speech as a result of certain speech response in the speaker's mind, and so on (Kasper et al., 1991).

In Indonesia, Discourse Completion Task has not been conducted to test responses to sarcasm empirically. Most pragmatic researches reviewing sarcasm are only limited to textual analysis to find data in the manner of forms and meanings. The steps implemented in data collection are also dominantly in the manner of documentation or observation. However, in Indonesia, the phenomenon of sarcastic speech has become a trend in the past years. It is proved by the existence of its use that can be found in all social interaction lines, either social interaction in real life or in cyberspace. Moreover, from year to year, legal cases related to sarcasm have increased rapidly. Therefore, it has become essential to carry out studies on responses to sarcasm and let people know that sarcasm is a reality of language that needs to be understood well so as to avoid various problems caused by it when it is used without with insufficient and inappropriate knowledge.

This premise is closely consistent with a study by (Drucker et al., 2014) entitled "On Sarcasm, Social Awareness, and Gender," which studied the responses of Israelis to sarcasm based on social situation setting reviewed from the aspect of social awareness and gender. The research problems narrated in this study were: "Does social awareness influence reaction or response to speech act? Are there any differences of response to sarcasm between men and women?" With the help of these two problems, Drucker et al. (2014) proved that the social awareness of Israelis influenced their response to sarcasm. The higher social awareness someone has, the weaker (more controlled) are reaction to sarcasm. Otherwise, the lower social awareness someone has, the stronger (more uncontrolled, emotional) is the reaction to sarcasm. Additionally, a few differences of reaction to sarcasm were also found between men and women.

The study conducted by Drucker et al. (2014) provided an opportunity to conduct a further study with location setting in Indonesia, with a new and a developed variable. The new variable in the current study was social relationship, while the developed variable was gender. The settings of social relationship variable were classified into four situations namely: 1) relationship between older people and younger people; 2) relationship between superior and subordinate; 3) relationship between lecturer and student; 4) relationship between strangers; and 5) and relationship between friends. For gender variable, it is said to be developed because Drucker et al. (2014) implemented the setting in only two kinds of situation, while in the current study, the settings of gender variable were classified into four categories, namely: 1) men to women; 2) women to men; 3) men to men; and 4) women to women. An illustration of situation setting of each variable tested using DCT is presented in Table 10.

Table 1. DCT Situation Setting

Sarcasm Speaker	Interaction Pattern	Respondent
Man	Two-way illustration	Woman
Woman	Two-way illustration	Man
Man	Two-way illustration	Man
Woman	Two-way illustration	Woman
Older person	Two-way illustration	Younger person
Superior	Two-way illustration	Subordinate
Lecturer	Two-way illustration	Student
Stranger	Two-way illustration	Respondent
Friend	Two-way illustration	Friend

The current research aimed to conduct a study different from that of Drucker et al. (2014). The current study premised that research findings can never be the same if it is conducted in a different location, with a different subject or data source, or a different framework of thinking. The current researcher practiced this premise aptly in this study and chose a different location, culture, language, and social knowledge of subject as well as the data source. Therefore, there was a great potential to obtain new finding, which were expected to synergize with previous studies and give better contribution to the development of science and technology as well as human civilization in future, especially in Indonesia.

Based on these concepts, as well as research gaps, and the availability of potential data in the

field, this research was conducted on various types of responses to sarcasm based on gender and social relationships using Discourse Completion Task (DCT). The following research problems were framed for the study: 1) What are the differences between responses to sarcasm reviewed from the aspect of social relationship? 2) What are the differences between responses to sarcasm reviewed from the aspect of gender?

2. Method

2.1 Research design

The study applied the quantitative research method to collect and analyze the data. The data was collected in the form of numbers and analyzed statistically to observe the gradation of responses to sarcasm from the aspect of gender and social relation in each situation setting. The quantitative research design enabled to calculate and differentiate the extent to which each of these variables predicted sarcasm.

2.2 Sample

The respondents of the study were classified into two groups, based on the variables of the study, the gender and the social relationship. The number of respondents based on the gender aspect were 120 while the number of respondents for social relationship aspect were 150. Table 2 and Table 3 presents the demographic characteristics of each of these aspects:

Table 2. Characteristics of Respondents of Gender Variable

Age Range	Gender Variable								
	Sex		Education			Profession			
	M	F	SHS	S1	S2	School Student	University Student	Teacher/ Lecturer	Public
0-25	35	37	28	35	9	20	42	5	5
26-45	15	18	5	17	11	0	0	15	18
46-65	10	5	7	8	0	0	0	0	0
66-85	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
86-100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**120**		**120**			**120**			

Table 3. Characteristics of Respondents of Social Relation Variable

Age Range	Gender Variable								
	Sex		Education			Profession			
	M	F	SHS	S1	S2	School Student	University Student	Teacher/ Lecturer	Public
0-25	48	32	4	27	9	23	54	2	4
26-45	19	41	18	25	19	0	12	22	34
46-65	8	2	1	35	12	0	0	0	10
66-85	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
86-100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**150**		**150**			**150**			

The sample size belonging to both the aspects was therefore 270 respondents. The respondents in the study were selected using purposive non-probability sampling technique. A care was taken to maintain the heterogeneity and geographical widespread of respondents. In making the selection of respondents, two thigs were taken care of: first, there should be a willingness to participate in the research study; second, their appropriateness to be a respondent (in terms of age and communication skills). When the two things were met, the potential respondent was selected as a participant.

2.3 Instrument and procedure

A questionnaire was used to collect data, which contained a brief description of situations of communication aimed to express the pattern of speech acts and study them. Such types of questionnaires are called Discourse Completion Tasks or DCT. The DCT instrument pertaining

to the current study was developed by referring to the characteristics of situation settings of each variable studied. After the DCT instrument was given to the respondents, they were explained in the first instance the objectives of the study and the procedure of instrument filling. They were asked to read and understand the situation settings shown in the form of illustration of an event. After that, the respondents were given the DCT instrument and asked to give responses to situations. The responses were manifested on a 1-5 scale (from indifferent reaction to sarcasm (1) to angry reaction or strong opposition against sarcasm (5)). The time given to each respondent to fill the instrument was two days. On the second day, the researcher coordinated with the respondents and collected the filled out DCT instruments. After the responses were collected, they were tabulated for the next stage of data analysis.

2.4   Data Analysis

The data analysis of the study involved parametric test design, which meant that the data obtained were tested for appropriateness before moving to the real analysis stage. The normality test was sued to test the data appropriateness. The analysis technique used in the study was one sample t-test using the SPSS-24 for Windows. The test was done to observe average comparison among responses to sarcasm reviewed from the aspect of gender and social relationship.

3.   Results

This section contains two parts. The first part presents the results showing the gradation of responses to sarcasm reviewed from the aspect of gender. The second part shows the gradation of responses to sarcasm reviewed from the aspect of social relationship.

3.1   Part One: Responses to sarcasm reviewed from the gender aspect

The settings for gender variable were classified into four categories, 1) men to women; 2) women to men; 3) men to men; and 4) women to women. Table 4 presents the results of t-test analysis for the gender aspect.

Table 4. Results of One Sample T-Test for Gender Aspect

	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
			One-Sided p	Two-Sided p		Lower	Upper
Man to woman	25.987	29	<.001	<.001	2.8667	2.641	3.092
Woman to man	25.493	29	<.001	<.001	2.2067	2.030	2.384
Woman to woman	34.235	29	<.001	<.001	2.4600	2.313	2.607
Man to man	27.873	29	<.001	<.001	1.7800	1.649	1.911

The significance level (one-sided p/two-sided p) shows that each communication situation setting of gender variable was the same, <0.001, smaller than 0.05 (0.001<0.05). In addition, when the value of $t_{calculate}$ was compared to the value of table (1.661) for all settings, the results showed that the value of $t_{calculate}$ was greater than the value of table. It meant that there was a significant (real) difference in each setting. Furthermore, the column of mean difference shows the gradation of significance of response given in each setting. The value of mean difference of women receiving sarcasm from men (man to woman) was 2.8667, men receiving sarcasm from women (woman to man) was 2.2067, women receiving sarcasm from women (woman to woman) was 2.4600, and men receiving sarcasm from men (man to man) was 1.7800.

3.2   Part two: Response to sarcasm reviewed from the aspect of social relationship

The settings of social relationship variable were classified into five categories, namely: 1) relationship between older people and younger people; 2) relationship between superior and subordinate; 3) relationship between lecturer and student; 4) relationship between strangers; and 5) and relationship between friends. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Results of One Sample T-Test for Social Relationship Aspect

	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
			One-Sided p	Two-Sided p		Lower	Upper
Lecturer to student	45.160	29	<.001	<.001	2.5133	2.400	2.627
Superior to subordinate	21.334	29	<.001	<.001	2.2733	2.055	2.491
Strangers	87.598	29	<.001	<.001	4.2000	4.102	4.298
Older person to younger person	25.667	29	<.001	<.001	2.1867	2.012	2.361
Friend to friend	27.477	29	<.001	<.001	1.2800	1.185	1.375

The significance level (one-sided p/two-sided p) in the table shows that each communication situation setting of social relationship variable was the same, namely <0.001. This value was smaller than 0.05 (0.001<0.05). In addition, when the value of $t_{calculate}$ was compared to the value of table (1.665) for all settings, the results showed that the value of $t_{calculate}$ was greater than the value of table. It meant that there was a significant (real) difference in each setting. Furthermore, the column of mean difference shows the gradation of significance of response given in each setting. The value of mean difference of students receiving sarcasm from lecturers (lecturer to student) was 2.5133; subordinates receiving sarcasm from superiors (superior to subordinate) was 2.2733; respondents receiving sarcasm from strangers (strangers) was 4.2000; younger people receiving sarcasm from older people (older person to younger person) was 2.1867' and friends receiving sarcasm from friends (friend to friend) was 1.2800.

4. Discussion

4.1 Response to Sarcasm Reviewed from the Aspect of Gender

This study proved that gender has a strong influence on language dynamics (Coates, 2015; Coates et al., 2011; Eckert et al., 2013; Goddard et al., 2000; Kurniasih, 2006; Talbot, 2019; Yonata et al., 2017), particularly when used for sarcasm (Drucker et al., 2014). The gender determines the kind of response to sarcasm (Bharti et al., 2016; Heintz et al., 2019; Lunando et al., 2013). This was proved by finding the mean difference of each communication situation setting. The findings revealed that when receiving sarcasm from opposite sex, women reacted more strongly (angrier, more rejecting, or more opposing) than men's reaction. When receiving sarcasm from the same sex, women reacted more strongly too (angrier, more rejecting, or more opposing) than men's reaction. These findings are in line with that of Drucker et al. (2014) who also found that women gave stronger reactions to sarcasm than men. Drucker et al. (2014) explained that men used sarcasm more commonly than women; so women's responses were stronger than men's responses. Additionally, Drucker et al. (2014) also explained that the reason for weakness of men's responses to sarcasm under gender characteristic suggested that men used logic and argument more than feelings and emotions. On the contrary, women preferred to use their emotions and feelings rather than logic or argument (Duncombe et al., 1993; Jaggar, 1989; Sarason et al., 1986). Therefore, women tend to give stronger responses to sarcasm than men.

These findings also suggested that the reason for women's stronger reaction than men's was due the social stigma that women are weak, and destined to be protected and loved, and not to be treated harshly. People understand such conditions as natural. Therefore, the stigma created various situations called as taboo or prohibited actions against women, one which could be sarcasm. The study also suggested that communication situation settings based on gender variable created a gap in social relationship between the speaker and the speech partner. It is therefore suggested to avoid using sarcasm as much as possible in interactions, based on any reasons and situation. In such situations, self-control and self-defense skills become important for every individual.

4.2   Response to Sarcasm Reviewed from the Aspect of Social Relationship

Humans are social creatures and they strive that their relationship with other humans should never be broken. Language is the main tool used by humans to manifest their position as social creatures and maintain their human relationship (Agha, 2006; Cook et al., 2005; Hymes, 2005; Spencer-Oatey, 1993). Hence, language dynamics certainly contributes to social relationship among humans. This study has proved that social relationship influenced responses to sarcasm. There are evidences seen that the response of someone receiving sarcasm from a stranger was stronger (angrier, more rejecting, more opposing) than the response in other forms of social relationship, such as lecturer to student, superior to subordinate, older person to younger person, and friend to friend.

Furthermore, the response of students receiving sarcasm from lecturers was stronger (angrier, more rejecting, more opposing) than the response in other forms of social relationship, such as superior to subordinate, older person to younger person, and friend to friend. The response of subordinates receiving sarcasm from superiors was stronger (angrier, more rejecting, more opposing) than the response in other forms of social relationship, such as older person to younger person, and friend to friend. The response of younger people receiving sarcasm from older people was stronger (angrier, more rejecting, more opposing) than the response in another form of social relationship, namely friend to friend. It means that the response of friends receiving sarcasm from friends was the weakest among the forms of social relationships.

5.   Conclusion

Based on the findings, the researcher suggests that sarcasm should be avoided as much as possible because it has effect of creating a gap in social relationship between the speaker and the speech partner (Lunando et al., 2013), especially for those who are about to start a social relationship with a stranger. It is also proved that a strong reaction is given when receiving sarcasm from a stranger. Similarly, in other forms of social relationship, when a lecturer, a superior, an older person, or a friend speaks sarcastically to a student, a subordinate, a younger person, or a friend, it can create a social gap. Humans prefer praise, support, and other forms of appreciation to something that hurts their feelings such as scorn, cursing, blasphemy, insult, and others, in addition to sarcasm (Fiske, 2018).

These findings are not in line with Kreuz et al. (2007); Green (2012); and Eden & Hasund (in (Tannen, 2002)), who stated the opposite. They found a fact that sarcasm was used to create an intimate and harmonious situation, even sarcasm was able to create closeness and friendship. It was the reason why the reaction to sarcasm in friendship relationship was the weakest. The implication of the study is that people are expected to be wiser in using language, especially in facing sarcasm. Considering that the dynamics of sarcasm in Indonesia has developed massively in all human social interaction lines, it is crucial to have self-control and self-defense to avoid undesirable situations.

6.   Declarations

- **AT** was entrusted the tasked with assisting the main author in developing instruments, collecting data, validating data, and processing data
- All authors read and approved the final manuscript

- *Authors' information*

- **RJ** is a lecturer as well as a senior researcher at the University of Cokroaminoto Palopo who works in the field of applied linguistics. Currently RJ holds the position of associate professor.
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