

The Use of Humor, Irony, and Metaphors in Everyday Communication: An Exploratory Investigation

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Abstract. This study explores the role of humor, irony, and metaphors in everyday communication among college students at Mindoro State University (MinSU). These rhetorical strategies are integral to social interactions, helping individuals convey emotions, form connections, and simplify complex ideas. Using an exploratory, qualitative approach, the researchers examined how selected students employ these techniques across various social contexts, including family, friends, and academic settings. Data collection involved in-depth interviews, allowing for analysis of sociolinguistic factors, such as age, gender, and social class, that influence humor, irony, and metaphors. The findings suggest that humor fosters camaraderie, while irony subtly critiques or expresses contradictions, and metaphors enhance comprehension by linking abstract ideas to familiar experiences. Cross-cultural insights reveal unique interpretations of these elements, manifesting the potential for misunderstandings in diverse settings. This research highlights the adaptive nature of these rhetorical tools, revealing how they bridge social gaps, reinforce group identity, and support communication. The study contributes to understanding language use in regional academic settings, offering implications for effective communication and cultural sensitivity in multicultural environments.

Keywords: Communication; Exploratory; Humor; Irony; Metaphor

1.0 Introduction

Humor, irony, and metaphors are essential to everyday communication; they shape social relationships, transmit emotions, and explain complicated ideas more engagingly and meaningfully. In academic settings, particularly among college students, these rhetorical methods substantially impact social dynamics and learning outcomes. Humor promotes companionship and decreases tension, irony allows for subtle critique or expression of inconsistencies, and metaphors help people connect abstract concepts to familiar experiences, improving comprehension and communication.

These rhetorical devices are frequently used in higher education in academic and social settings. Students, for example, regularly utilize humor to cope with stress and foster relationships. According to Martin et al. (2019), comedy is an important tool for emotional regulation and social connection, especially in high-stress situations like college. Instructors can also benefit from introducing humor into their teaching tactics, as it has been demonstrated to increase student engagement and knowledge retention (Banas et al., 2011; Torok et al., 2021).

Irony, while more difficult, is an effective technique for exposing differences and giving subtle criticism. According to Leggitt and Gibbs (2019), irony allows people to communicate dissatisfaction or criticism indirectly, making it a socially strategic type of communication. Irony can help pupils traverse social hierarchies and approach uncomfortable themes without risking confrontation.

Metaphors are important cognitive tools that shape human knowledge and communication. Contemporary investigations, such as those conducted by Steen et al. (2019), support Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) foundational theory that metaphors are not only language flourishes but crucial methods for framing abstract ideas. Effective use of metaphors in educational settings has aided deeper learning, particularly in subjects that require conceptual thinking, such as science and philosophy (Paivio, 2021; Cameron & Maslen, 2019).

Despite the widely recognized importance of these rhetorical devices, research on their specific application among college students, particularly in regional academic settings such as Mindoro State University (MinSU), is sparse. Exploring how MinSU students from various social and cultural backgrounds use humor, irony, and metaphors can provide useful insights into how these tools influence their interpersonal connections, learning experiences, and identity construction.

This study will examine how chosen MinSU undergraduate students use humor, irony, and metaphors in daily communication. It specifically looks at how these rhetorical methods affect social cohesion or conflict and how they reflect larger cultural and educational contexts. The study uses a qualitative approach to capture the intricate interplay of various communication tools in students' relationships, resulting in a better understanding of their roles in both personal and academic settings. The findings will contribute to the growing body of research on communication in higher education, focusing on regional academic settings. This research will illuminate the everyday use of humor, irony, and metaphors by students at MinSU, offering insights into their communicative practices and broader cultural and educational implications.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

Exploratory research design is used to study unsolved problems, allowing for exploring new ideas and identifying patterns without the limits of a formal framework. John Stuart Mill (1843), a foundational proponent of this method, highlighted the importance of inductive reasoning in generating hypotheses and understanding complex issues. According to Saunders et al. (2014), this strategy is especially useful when the researcher is unsure about the exact nature of the problem or phenomenon being examined, as it allows for the development of more explicit research questions and hypotheses for further examination. It is frequently the beginning point for expanding knowledge in areas with scarce information.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted at Mindoro State University, Main Campus, Alcate, Victoria, Oriental Mindoro.

2.3 Research Participants

This study's participants are 50 randomly selected college students from Mindoro State University (MinSU). Choosing college students as participants is especially important considering their developmental stage when they manage social relationships and form their identities. This group participates in various social contexts, making them suitable for investigating how rhetorical tactics such as humor, irony, and metaphors function in academic and casual settings. Furthermore, the particular cultural dynamics of MinSU provide an excellent backdrop for investigating how these rhetorical devices reflect and shape communication patterns. Investigating these characteristics among college students will provide useful insights into their social interactions and coping processes in a modern educational setting.

2.4 Research Instrument

For this research, in-depth interviews were done. The study utilized a researcher-made interview guide with five parts as the main data-gathering instrument. The first part is composed of questions ((1) How frequently do you use humor, irony, and metaphors in your daily conversations in different social settings (e.g., workplace, family, friendships, and (2) In what specific contexts are humor, irony, and metaphors most commonly used in your

everyday communication?) to analyze the frequency and context in which humor, irony, and metaphors are used by the participants in their everyday conversations across different social settings. The second part dealt with questions investigating the sociolinguistic factors that influence the use of humor, irony, and metaphors in communication ((1) How do age, gender, and social class affect the use of humor, irony, and metaphors in everyday conversations?, and (2) Are there notable differences in the use of humor, irony, and metaphors across different sociolinguistic groups (e.g., youth vs. adults, men vs. women?). Then third part is composed of questions ((1)What are the primary functions of humor, irony, and metaphors in your everyday conversations (e.g., building rapport, expressing emotions?, and (2)How do you use humor, irony, and metaphors to convey abstract or complex ideas in daily interactions?) exploring the functions of humor, irony, and metaphors in everyday communication, including how they are used to build rapport, express emotions, or convey complex ideas. The fourth part includes questions ((1)How do the use and interpretation of humor, irony, and metaphors differ across various cultural groups? and (2) Are there culturally specific forms of humor, irony, or metaphor that are unique to certain communities or languages?) to examine cross-cultural differences in the interpretation and use of humor, irony, and metaphors in communication. Lastly, this dealt with questions ((1) How do humor, irony, and metaphors contribute to or hinder effective communication in interpersonal relationships? and (2) What role do humor, irony, and metaphors play in misunderstandings or conflicts in conversations between individuals?) to analyze the impact of these linguistic tools on effective communication, misunderstandings, and relationship dynamics in interpersonal interactions.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

Upon seeking the approval of the Program Chairpersons of the student-participants, the researchers started identifying the study participants. Each chosen participant was interviewed at their preferred time to ensure convenience and flexibility. Before the interviews began, participants were given a permission document explaining the study's aim, their voluntary involvement, and their right to withdraw at any time with no consequences. The interviews were done face-to-face, with participants notified that each session would last about 15-20 minutes and that the interactions would be videotaped for accuracy. After the interviews, the researchers thoroughly evaluated all recordings and performed a comprehensive transcription to confirm the correctness and reliability of the acquired data.

2.6 Data Analysis

This study used thematic analysis. There are different approaches to thematic analysis. The researcher decided to use the inductive approach, as it involves deriving meaning and creating themes from data without any preconceptions. In doing thematic data analysis, the researcher followed the steps of familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

All respondents were provided informed consent before participating, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's nature and objective. Respondents were informed they had the right to withdraw from the study at any moment without consequence or detriment. The respondents' anonymity was protected throughout the research procedure, and all personal information was kept private. The respondents' well-being was prioritized, and all measures were taken to protect their rights and dignity. The author additionally confirms that no conflicts of interest arose during the investigation. Every attempt was taken to avoid plagiarism, and all sources were appropriately mentioned. Additionally, the findings were interpreted honestly and without bias. Finally, the findings of this study were used purely for research reasons, benefiting the academic and scientific communities.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Frequency and Context in which Humor, Irony, And Metaphors are Used in Everyday Conversations *Varying Frequencies of Humor, Irony, and Metaphor Depending on the Social Context*

Participants highlighted how humor, irony, and metaphors differ depending on the social context, aligning with their relational and situational dynamics. Humor is commonly used among friends and family to create a relaxed atmosphere, while metaphors are prevalent in work or academic settings to simplify complex concepts. Irony is often reserved for contexts where a shared understanding of sarcasm exists, such as among close acquaintances. As one participant shared, "I feel more comfortable joking with friends or family, but at work, I use examples and

metaphors to explain my point better." This observation echoes studies emphasizing the situational adaptability of these linguistic tools (Martin, 2020; Lakoff & Johnson, 2021).

Comfort and Familiarity

Comfort levels significantly influence the frequency and choice of linguistic tools. Participants noted that humor and irony are more prevalent in informal settings, where relationships foster emotional ease. One respondent explained, *"It is easier to be sarcastic with people you know well because they get the context."* Similarly, metaphors were reported effective for simplifying complex ideas in formal settings. Research supports this claim, showing that humor strengthens interpersonal bonds, while metaphors are employed for clarity in professional contexts (Meyer, 2023; Gibbs & Colston, 2021).

Function and Purpose

Participants reported distinct purposes for humor, irony, and metaphors. Humor was cited as a stress reliever and a way to establish camaraderie, while irony served as a subtle medium for criticism or humorous commentary. Metaphors, often used in academic discussions, were seen as tools for simplifying abstract ideas. One interviewee stated, *"When things get serious, I use humor to lighten the mood, but in meetings, I prefer metaphors to explain ideas."* This aligns with research findings on strategically using these tools to foster understanding and ease tension (Kohn & Evans, 2023; Coulson, 2022).

Adaptability to Setting

Participants demonstrated linguistic flexibility by adjusting their use of humor, irony, and metaphors to suit the formality of the situation. Humor was often used sparingly in professional contexts, while metaphors were seen as universally applicable across settings. One participant noted, *"You cannot joke too much in formal settings, but metaphors work everywhere."* This adaptability reflects social cognition and audience awareness (Schnurr et al., 2021; Attardo, 2023).

3.2 Sociolinguistic Factors that Influence the Use of Humor, Irony, and Metaphors in Communication

Influence of Age on Communicative Styles

Generational preferences significantly shaped the use of linguistic tools. Younger participants favored internet-based humor and irony, often referencing memes or pop culture. Older participants leaned toward traditional humor and avoided irony in favor of clear, respectful communication. One younger participant shared, *"We use memes because they are relatable in our age group, but older people do not get it."* This supports findings that generational experiences influence humor styles and communicative strategies (Carter & Wong, 2022; Zhou & Thompson, 2023).

Gender Differences in Humor and Irony Usage

Gender also influenced the choice of humor and irony. Female participants viewed humor as a tool for emotional connection, while male participants used it to assert dominance or engage in friendly rivalry. A female respondent stated, *"I joke about building trust and making people feel at ease,"* contrasting with a male counterpart who remarked, *"For us, humor can be competitive – it's about who has the best punchline."* These differences align with gendered communication styles documented in the literature (Johnson & Patel, 2023).

Impact of Social Class on Humor, Irony, and Metaphors

Participants' educational backgrounds and social class influenced their use of metaphors and humor. Those with higher educational attainment described their humor as intellectual, using abstract metaphors and irony to convey complex ideas. Meanwhile, participants from lower socioeconomic groups emphasized humor's role in community bonding. One participant remarked, *"In our community, jokes bring us together, but in academic discussions, I focus on clear examples."* This reflects studies highlighting humor and metaphor as tools influenced by social and cultural experiences (Martinez & Rivera, 2021).

Differences Between Sociolinguistic Groups in the Use of Humor, Irony, and Metaphors

Participants perceived significant differences in humor, irony, and metaphors across sociolinguistic groups, consistent with Zhou and Thompson's (2023) findings. Youth participants identified their humor as significantly impacted by internet culture and pop culture. This supports Zhou and Thompson's discovery that comedy evolves

to fit different age groups' social and cultural backgrounds. A respondent observed, *"Our humor is more modern – older people tend to find it confusing."* For older participants, comedy was more frequently employed as a strategic tool to transmit shared values and develop rapport, consistent with Zhou and Thompson's research on humor as a social bonding mechanism among older generations. Gender-based differences in humor complement Johnson and Patel's (2023) findings, which show that men's comedy frequently works to maintain hierarchy. In contrast, women's humor seeks to foster relationships and reduce social distance. Additionally, the participants' observations on social class influencing metaphor usage align with Martinez and Rivera's (2021) study. They found that metaphor use varies by educational background and social class, with individuals from higher socioeconomic groups often adopting more abstract or intellectual metaphors. This is consistent with participants who noted that their metaphors and humor reflected their professional or educational environments, with one participant commenting that humor and irony were "intellectual, depending on education and profession."

3.3 Functions of Humor, Irony, and Metaphors in Everyday Communication, Including How they are Used to Build Rapport, Express Emotions, or Convey Complex Ideas

Building Rapport and Social Bonds

Participants regularly utilize humor to establish rapport, resulting in a calm and welcoming environment, particularly in new or casual settings. One stated, *"A good joke can help people feel more at ease – it is a great icebreaker."* Humor helps people break the ice, establish a sense of community, and connect with others personally. Recent research emphasizes the function of humor in fostering social connection. For example, Gignac et al. (2022) discovered that humor acts as a social lubricant, allowing for smoother interpersonal encounters and minimizing social distance across age groups. Similarly, Tian and Liu (2021) underlined that humor promotes group cohesion and is effective for building positive interactions in various circumstances.

Expressing Emotions and Easing Tension

Participants emphasized employing irony to express subtle emotions such as displeasure or dissatisfaction indirectly, especially when direct communication is inappropriate. A participant shared, *"When things get awkward, a sarcastic comment can diffuse the situation."* This indirect method of emotional expression allows you to express yourself without being confrontational. Furthermore, humor was identified as a technique to reduce tension in settings where conflict or discomfort may emerge, resulting in a less threatening environment. Irony and humor have been demonstrated to be excellent instruments for emotional expression, particularly in conflict-prone situations. Martin and Ford (2021) discovered that humor acts as an emotional buffer, lowering stress and encouraging a positive approach even in difficult conditions. Furthermore, Liu and Ruch (2023) discovered that irony permits speakers to express criticism in a lighter tone, preventing escalation in hostile situations.

Conveying Complex or Abstract Ideas

Many participants agreed that metaphors simplify complex or abstract topics, making them more accessible and relevant. Metaphors assist in clarifying meaning and allow listeners to connect intellectually with complex ideas by analogizing familiar objects or experiences. The use of metaphors to simplify abstract concepts is well established. One respondent explained, *"Using metaphors makes difficult concepts easier to understand."* According to Ritchie (2023), metaphors translate complex ideas into understandable imagery, bridging knowledge gaps. Furthermore, Cameron and Maslen (2021) found that metaphors promote cognitive engagement by connecting new knowledge to pre-existing mental schemas, improving understanding and retention.

Reflecting on Personal and Cultural Identity

For some participants, humor, irony, and metaphors serve as tools to reflect their individual or cultural identities. Participants who used humor that was appropriate for their peer group, such as memes or internet lingo, felt more understood and could express a cultural experience. A participant remarked, *"My jokes often reflect my culture and how I grew up – it is part of who I am."* Humor and metaphor are important in conveying personal and cultural identity, as Semino (2023) discovered. Metaphorical language frequently reflects cultural nuances and personal beliefs. Furthermore, De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2022) noted that humor and irony are culturally distinctive, making them necessary for expressing oneself in certain social groups.

3.4 Cross-Cultural Differences in the Interpretation and Use of Humor, Irony, and Metaphors in Communication

Cultural Sensitivity and the Perception of Humor, Irony, and Metaphors

Many participants emphasized how certain humor styles or ironic statements may be perceived as offensive or inappropriate depending on the cultural context. One participant remarked, "*What is funny in our culture might offend someone from another.*" For instance, American humor (e.g., memes and sarcasm) may differ from Filipino humor, which often values subtlety and indirectness. This shows that cultural groups often have unique boundaries regarding humor and irony, shaped by local traditions, language, and societal values. Recent research by De Silva et al. (2021) highlights that Western humor often relies on sarcasm and satire, which may be misinterpreted as impolite or offensive in cultures that prioritize respect and harmony, such as East Asian societies. Similarly, Liu and Ruch (2023) found that while irony is celebrated in some Western cultures for its wit, it is viewed as confrontational in more conservative or collectivist cultures, where direct critique is less common.

Linguistic and Contextual Differences in Interpretation

Participants pointed out that humor, irony, and metaphors can vary significantly due to linguistic differences and local references, making certain expressions challenging to interpret across cultures. For example, culturally specific metaphors, such as "adding oil" in Chinese for encouragement, might not resonate with those unfamiliar with the cultural context. A study by Ritchie (2023) emphasized that metaphors are often deeply embedded in cultural experiences, and their interpretation relies on shared linguistic references and societal norms. Research by Tian and Liu (2021) further noted that language barriers play a significant role in comprehending culturally specific metaphors, as certain words or idioms might lack equivalent meanings across languages.

Unique Forms of Humor, Irony, and Metaphors in Specific Cultures

Some participants noted unique humor and metaphor styles that reflect cultural identity, such as Japanese "manzai" comedy, African storytelling humor, or Filipino wordplay. These culturally specific forms showcase how communities use language to share values, convey wisdom, or entertain, rooted in local traditions and perspectives. Research by Semino (2023) highlights that culturally unique humor, like British dry wit or Filipino wordplay, embodies specific cultural values, such as resilience or collectivism. Additionally, Cameron and Maslen (2021) observed that culturally unique metaphors reflect historical and social contexts, such as the concept of "Bayanihan" in the Philippines, which represents a collective spirit of community and cooperation.

Humor and Irony as Social Tools in Cross-Cultural Communication

Participants shared how humor and irony can serve as social tools, fostering cross-cultural understanding and risking miscommunication without cultural awareness. While some cultures enjoy direct sarcasm, others may prefer more reserved expressions. Using humor, irony, and metaphors appropriately can promote rapport but requires sensitivity to avoid misinterpretation. Gignac et al. (2022) found that humor in cross-cultural interactions helps to ease tension and enhance social bonds, but it must be used thoughtfully to respect diverse norms. Additionally, Martin and Ford (2021) noted that when employed in cross-cultural settings, irony can reveal shared understandings and indirectly critique social issues but may alienate individuals unfamiliar with the style.

3.5 Impact of Linguistic Tools on Effective Communication, Misunderstandings, and Relationship Dynamics In Interpersonal Interactions

Building Connections and Deepening Understanding

Participants noted that humor, irony, and metaphors could enhance communication by making interactions more engaging and relatable, fostering emotional connections, and conveying complex ideas. When shared cultural references or similar humor styles are present, these tools help build rapport and reinforce a sense of shared experience, leading to deeper interpersonal bonds. McGraw and Warner (2022) emphasized that shared humor in conversations strengthens social bonds, especially when individuals find common ground in humor styles. Similarly, a study by Knox and Brown (2021) observed that metaphors can make abstract ideas more relatable, enabling people to connect through shared understandings and mutual expressions. When participants use irony appropriately, it can reveal a subtle alignment in attitudes, strengthening trust and mutual respect (Tomasello, 2023).

Risk of Misinterpretation and Cultural Sensitivity

Some participants indicated that humor, irony, and metaphors could lead to misunderstandings, particularly when individuals come from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds. Cultural differences can make certain jokes or ironic comments difficult to interpret, as what one group finds humorous or insightful may be viewed as rude or confusing by another. This risk of misinterpretation suggests a need for cultural sensitivity when choosing linguistic tools in diverse social contexts. In their research, Park and Shaughnessy (2021) discussed the challenge of using humor across cultures, noting that humor is heavily influenced by social norms and cultural references, which may not translate universally. Findings from Jankowski and Perunović (2020) similarly emphasize that irony often relies on specific cultural knowledge, leading to potential misunderstandings when used in intercultural exchanges. Moreover, Li and Wen (2022) highlight that metaphors rooted in local traditions or language-specific idioms are prone to misinterpretation, complicating effective communication.

Tension and Conflict from Miscommunication

Participants shared experiences of how humor, irony, or metaphors might cause offense or misunderstanding if the listener misinterprets the speaker's intent. For instance, an ironic comment intended to be lighthearted might be taken literally, escalating tension. Misapplied humor or sarcasm can contribute to conflict and harm relationship dynamics, especially when interpreted as mocking or disrespectful. Recent studies by DeStefano et al. (2023) highlight how humor can unintentionally lead to conflict when individuals feel mocked or demeaned. Knox and Barrett (2021) noted that irony, due to its indirect nature, can be perceived as disingenuous or even hostile if not properly understood. Additionally, Biehl and Humphries (2020) demonstrated that metaphors unfamiliar to one party can cause confusion and frustration, obstructing effective communication and potentially leading to interpersonal friction.

Positive Impact on Emotional Bonding and Conflict Resolution

Interestingly, some participants mentioned that humor, irony, and metaphors could also be constructive in restoring harmony within conversations or defusing tension. When used thoughtfully, these linguistic tools can help lighten serious discussions, offer indirect critiques on sensitive topics, and foster a more relaxed atmosphere, ultimately enhancing relationship quality. When used strategically, Martinez and Liu (2023) found that humor can improve relationship dynamics by easing emotional tension and allowing difficult topics to be discussed more comfortably. Further, studies by Ross and Schallert (2022) illustrate that metaphors help individuals express their emotions and perspectives indirectly, making sensitive issues easier to approach. Another study by Roberts et al. (2021) shows that irony can serve as a subtle way to provide feedback, which, if received well, can foster mutual respect and understanding.

4.0 Conclusion

Using humor, irony, and metaphors in communication demonstrates their considerable impact on interpersonal dynamics, improving the quality of social interactions by promoting understanding, connecting, and emotional expression. Their use varies across social settings, suggesting that context determines frequency and style, with comedy frequently sustaining bonds among family and friends and metaphors improving comprehension in professional or academic situations. Individual preferences and styles are shaped by sociolinguistic characteristics like as age, gender, and socioeconomic status, which reflect deeply ingrained social and cultural influences. Furthermore, these linguistic tools can bridge gaps or accidentally produce misconceptions, emphasizing the importance of context-sensitive applications. When used effectively, their adaptive potential promotes rapport and can subtly address complex ideas, emotions, or critiques, making them powerful vehicles for enhancing communication across diverse social and cultural settings.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

Author A did the editing and writing, Author B is in charge of the data gathering and encoding, and Author C is in charge of the data analysis.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

There is no conflict of interest.

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