



Ironical Implicatures among Asian Students and Culture Setting

Widya Caterine Perdhani¹, Florian Buelt² and Dita Grace³

¹ Faculty of Cultural Studies, Universitas Brawijaya, East Java, Indonesia

² International Graduate Program of Education and Human Development, National Sun Yat-sen University, Taiwan

³ Faculty of Letters, Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia
caterine_widya@ub.ac.id

Abstract. This study explores how non-native English speakers from Taiwan and Indonesia, who speak English as their second language (L2), understand and use irony in cross-cultural communication. The discussion contrasts the use of ironic implicatures by these non-native speakers with that of L1 English condition and also highlighting differences in communication patterns. The study focuses on the influence of cultural differences, particularly between High-context and Low-context cultures, in shaping the comprehension of irony. The objectives are (1) to explore whether L2 learners appropriately use ironic implicatures in English, and (2) to analyze how cultural background influences their use of irony in communication. The findings aim to provide insights into how culture affects the interpretation and use of irony by non-native English speakers.

Keywords: cross-cultural communication, irony, implicatures, high-context culture, low-context culture, non-native speakers, English-speaking culture

1. Introduction

Understanding how non-native English speakers interpret ironic language is crucial in cross-cultural communication. This study explores how learners from Taiwan and Indonesia, whose first languages (L1) belong to high-context cultures, comprehend ironic implicatures in English, a language often associated with low-context cultures. According to Grice's Cooperative Principle [1], successful communication depends on adherence to conversational maxims such as truthfulness, relevance, and clarity. However, irony presents a challenge to these maxims because it involves saying something that may not be literally true or straightforward.

In communication, L2 (second language) learners often experience difficulties due to differences in cultural and linguistic contexts [2]. These challenges are particularly evident when using irony, as it requires a deep understanding of both the literal and implied meanings of a conversation. This study investigates whether Taiwanese and Indonesian learners can apply ironic implicatures correctly in English and how their cultural background influences their communication style.

The goal of this research investigates the ironical implicatures through derivation and also the cross culture. First, this research examines among L2 participants on how playing ironical implicatures by using pragmatics derivation. Second, this leads to discussion whether cross-cultural differences in language use and focusing on how non-native English speakers navigate the complexities of irony in English.

2. Review of Literature

Grice's Cooperative Principle [1] is fundamental in understanding how effective communication takes place. According to Grice, communication functions smoothly when interlocutors follow four conversational maxims:

- **Quality:** Be truthful.
- **Quantity:** Provide the right amount of information.
- **Relation:** Be relevant.
- **Manner:** Be clear and orderly.

When speakers follow these maxims, they help ensure that their message is understood as intended. However, Grice [1] also recognized that speakers often flout these maxims to convey meanings beyond the literal interpretation of their words, a phenomenon known as "conversational implicature." For example, irony flouts the maxim of quality by presenting statements that are not literally true, relying on the listener to infer the speaker's true meaning based on context. This concept of conversational implicature is particularly relevant in intercultural communication, where differing cultural norms can affect the interpretation of non-literal language.

Irony is a form of implicature that involves a deliberate violation of Grice's maxims, particularly the maxim of quality. In irony, the speaker says something that is the opposite of their true intention, leaving the listener to interpret the underlying meaning. For example, if someone says, "What a great friend!" when their friend has just betrayed them, the listener must infer that the speaker does not literally mean their words.

Sperber and Wilson [3] expanded Grice's theory, emphasizing that irony involves not just a violation of the maxim of quality but also a complex interaction between the speaker's intention and the listener's interpretation. According to Sperber and Wilson, irony occurs when a speaker says something literally true but intends the listener to understand the opposite. Successful interpretation of irony, therefore, depends on the listener's ability to recognize that the speaker is not being literal. This can be particularly challenging for non-native speakers (L2 learners), who may not have the same cultural or linguistic background as native speakers, making it harder to pick up on the social cues that signal irony.

The understanding and use of irony are heavily influenced by cultural context. High-context cultures, such as those found in many Asian countries, rely on implicit communication, shared knowledge, and indirect speech [4]. In these cultures, speakers often expect their listeners to infer meaning based on contextual cues rather than explicit statements. Low-context cultures, such as those in Western countries,

value direct and explicit communication, where speakers are expected to say exactly what they mean [4].

This cultural divide significantly impacts how irony is used and interpreted. In high-context cultures, where indirectness is common, irony may be more subtle and harder for outsiders to detect. Conversely, in low-context cultures, irony might be more overt but also more dependent on the listener's ability to recognize when a statement is non-literal. For non-native speakers from high-context cultures, interpreting irony in English—a language rooted in a low-context cultural framework—can be particularly difficult.

Grice [1] outlined three conditions under which conversational implicatures arise:

- **Group A:** The speaker adheres to all maxims.
- **Group B:** The speaker violates a maxim but provides sufficient contextual clues for the listener to infer the implicature.
- **Group C:** The speaker flouts a maxim completely, forcing the listener to infer the opposite of the literal statement. Irony typically falls into this third group, where the speaker's words are intended to be understood in a way that is entirely contrary to their literal meaning.

In cross-cultural contexts, non-native speakers (L2 learners) may struggle with Group C implicatures, as they require not only linguistic competence but also an understanding of cultural and social norms. Research shows that speakers from high-context cultures may be less familiar with the overt use of irony, which is more common in low-context cultures [4], [5].

Non-native speakers of English, particularly those from high-context cultures, often face challenges in recognizing and producing irony in communication. This is because irony requires a deep understanding of both the language and the cultural context in which it is used. Grice's maxims, which are culturally bound, may not apply in the same way to non-native speakers, leading to potential miscommunication [1].

Kapogianni [4] investigated how speakers can cancel or reinforce irony in conversation based on social context. She introduced the concept of "cancelability," which refers to a speaker's ability to retract or emphasize irony depending on the listener's response. This flexibility makes irony a sophisticated communicative tool, but it also adds complexity for L2 learners who may not be familiar with the social cues that signal irony. In high-context cultures, where indirectness is valued, irony may be less commonly used or more difficult to detect. This can make it harder for learners from these cultures to interpret ironic statements in English, where irony is often more overt.

Dynel [6] added to this discussion by exploring sub-irony, a type of irony that hides behind the maxim of quality. She argued that irony often involves untruthfulness and evaluative implicatures, where the speaker's intention is to criticize or mock rather than to deceive. For non-native speakers, understanding these subtle forms of irony requires not only language proficiency but also an awareness of

the speaker's social and cultural background. In many cases, non-native speakers may interpret ironic statements literally, leading to misunderstandings.

Several studies have explored how L2 learners acquire the ability to understand and use irony in their second language. Li and Jung [7] found that Cantonese learners of English, who come from a high-context culture, were able to identify ironic implicatures in English after receiving sufficient exposure to the language and its cultural norms. Their research suggests that frequent use of English in daily life can help L2 learners develop the ability to detect irony, particularly in situations where the speaker's intention is clearly signaled by social cues.

Kapogianni's [8] research on spontaneous and scripted utterances further supports the idea that L2 learners benefit from repeated exposure to irony in context. She found that learners who regularly encountered ironic statements in media, such as TV shows or movies, were better able to detect irony in conversation. This highlights the importance of cultural exposure in developing an understanding of conversational implicatures.

While much research has been conducted on irony in communication, there is still a gap in understanding how non-native speakers from high-context cultures, such as Taiwan and Indonesia, interpret irony in English. Most existing studies focus on native speakers or learners from low-context cultures, leaving a gap in the literature regarding how high-context cultures approach irony. This study aims to fill that gap by investigating how L2 learners from Taiwan and Indonesia, who come from high-context cultures, interpret and produce ironic implicatures in English.

By exploring how these learners navigate the complexities of cross-cultural communication, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how cultural context influences language comprehension. The findings will provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by non-native speakers in interpreting irony, as well as the role of cultural background in shaping communication.

3. Method

This research apply pilot experiment as exploratory study, that participants were administered the questionnaire through Google Form. When link Google Form shared, we also declared that this research does not impact to any subject and feel less pressured after submitting their answers. After collecting the participant's answers, the data were analyzed using Google Spreadsheet, and also besides less 20 participants, a set of nonparametric test were carried out.

The participants were from Taiwanese and Indonesian university. There were 7 participants as sample research. Since the participants were Asians, the culture showed High Culture Context (HC). The participants were ENNS (English Non Native Speakers). Besides, they assessed themselves on English proficiency from Good – Average – Bad.

The questionnaires were adapted based on [2], [9]. The questions are set by using multiple choices. There were 8 questions placed that possible answer about pragmatically respond based on situation, felicitous or infelicitous of pragmatical

interpretation and one possible answer based on participants thought that may be different interpretation.

4. Results

4.1. Ironical Implicatures to the Derivation

The data below is representing of the participants in experimental derived pragmatically ironical implicatures (Figure 1).

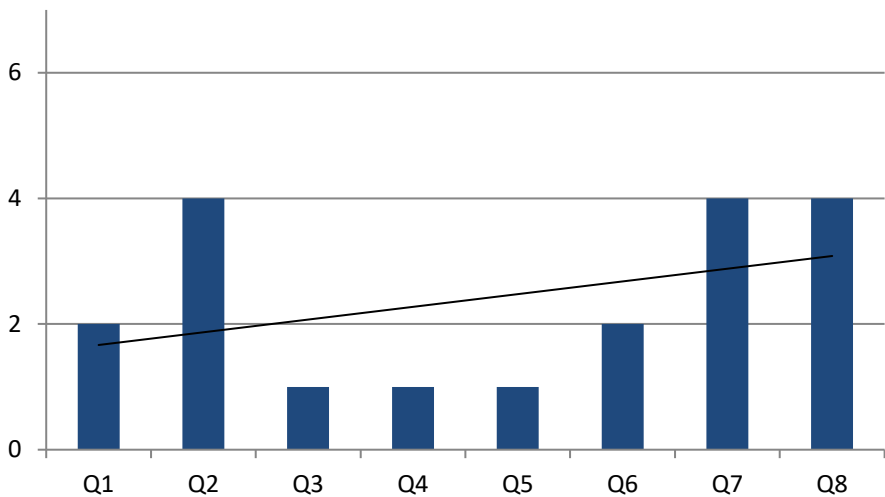


Fig. 1. Pragmatical Ironical Implicatures

The figure has shown that the participants to derive pragmatically on ironical implicatures were mean 2.7 (34%). With small participants as pilot experimental, the derive pragmatically on ironical implicatures was moderate, though on multiple choice questions.

The question on no. 3 was asking about a invited guest who joined party and got trouble with drink all over to someone's brand new jacket, so the respond other invitation asking about victim. The participants were mostly chosen that another guest towards story was not sure whether the victim was angry or not. This case has similar to situation no. 4 and 5 (8.33% for each). Question no. 4 was asking about a neighbor question to girl's father about the daughter choice of university, as resulted that participants chose of daughter's decision instead false alarm decision. In no. 5 , the situation represented a bad attitude customer in asking service to sales person and interacted a whole store. The participants agreed that the customer had little upset rather than chose very furious situation. In opposite sense, the participants which more ironical implicatures in precise were question no. 2,7, and 8 (33.3% for each).

Question no. 2 had a situation that his friend did not tell about friend spouse was cheating. Mostly the participants agreed that the friend has no sense to be a good person. In question 7, the situation was about disagreement one of parents at school meeting towards extracurricular idea of one parent. The participants had seen first parent hated the idea. Question 8 was about a couple made a picnic, but ended as disaster. Most participant agreed to a man's comment that had no raining for worse.

4.1. Culture

This data do not clearly show participants' cultural background has impact on ironical implicatures. However, the participants nearly indicate that L2 culture plays a role in ironical implicatures. This is happened that the participants have been interpreted a pragmatically in several questions, such as question no.2, 7 and 8 (4 participants, 33.3% of the sample) were high interpretation, or that other questions such as no 3,4,5 (1 sample or 8.33% for each question) were less to interpret in ironical implicatures. Based on less interpret, there is certain factor that participants tend to unconscious in interpretations of some questions.

From figure 1, the culture plays a role in interpretations of ironical implicature, but among participants' familiarity are lacked to the L2 culture which actually helps them to derive interpretation or hidden it. As example, questions no. 3, 4, and 5 showed the participants has no option in having precise interpret while they unrecognized the situation very often. In question no. 2 as high interpretation, a participants was wrong recognized the situation and chose the answer "They know each other, so Peter can trust his friend", which this participant would rely on another clue (raising intonation) rather than another closed friend as reminder on this situation which is supposed to be the clue for participants to see the ironical in utterance nature.

5. Discussion

This research investigates on how non – native English speaker (L2 learners) comprehend and use ironic implicatures require a comprehensive approach that integrates linguistic theory, cultural communication frameworks, and practical teaching strategies. With knowing ironical implicatures, the data were gained and showed the sample in moderate tendency in ironical utterances. This is happened because the participants may get facilitate through the multiple choice questions and offer clue to act of possible answer. Besides, the sample from China and Indonesia, which the Higher Culture communication more surfaced, so they still have doubt to respond the interpretations. As [8] stated, High Culture chooses indirectness valued, and also supports on the situation offered is not met for understanding irony in conversation.

From culture sight, the participants would influence of ironical implicature. If this paper considers High Culture as very interdependent among societies [10], the results are bit different, the participants were not recognized the ironical really well in answering the questions. Some questions are not represented interpretations, as

sequence of this High Culture, as effecting on minimize the conflict to utter their willingness on respond.

6. Conclusion and Further Research

This article explores how non-native English speakers, particularly from high-context cultures like Taiwan and Indonesia, navigate the complexities of using and interpreting ironic implicatures in English, a high context culture. Through the lens of Grice's Cooperative Principle and cultural communication frameworks, it becomes clear that irony presents unique challenges for L2 learners, as it often involves violations of conversational maxims and relies heavily on cultural cues that may not be familiar to these learners.

The findings suggest that while L2 learners from high-context cultures may initially struggle with detecting and producing irony in English, their understanding improves significantly with increased exposure to the target language and its cultural context. Media consumption, frequent interaction with native speakers, and explicit instruction in irony comprehension are key factors in bridging the gap between learners' native cultural norms and the expectations of English-language communication.

Moreover, the cultural differences between high-context and low-context communication styles highlight the importance of teaching strategies that focus on both linguistic and cultural competence. By incorporating irony comprehension into language instruction, educators can better prepare learners to navigate non-literal language in real-world situations, thereby enhancing their overall communicative abilities.

In conclusion, this article not only contributes to the understanding of how cultural and linguistic factors influence the comprehension of irony but also provides practical recommendations for improving L2 learners' ability to interpret and use irony effectively. Future research should continue to explore how learners from diverse cultural backgrounds adapt to irony in cross-cultural communication, contributing to a deeper understanding of the role culture plays in language acquisition.

• **Disclosure of Interests.** The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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