

The Role of Sarcasm in Class Management of Female vs. Male Iranian EFL Teachers

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Abstract

The development of teacher training courses provides opportunities to solve the limitations of the traditional ways of teaching. This study aimed at describing the role of using sarcasm in the class management of Iranian EFL teachers, exploring the differences between male and female teachers in using sarcasm and, finding the attitudes of the participants. A group of 52 male and female Iranian EFL teachers were selected from different English language institutes, and divided into two groups in Isfahan, Iran. Teachers in Group A received the instruction, but Group B did not receive any instruction. This study employed a triangulated descriptive research approach involving questionnaires, observation, and interview. The results showed that most of the teachers had positive attitudes towards the appropriate use of sarcasm. Moreover, there was not a significant difference between male and female participants. The result of this study could be beneficial for teachers who want to find an effective strategy to control the students' misbehavior or the disorganized class.

Keywords: attitude, class management, EFL teachers, sarcasm, strategy

INTRODUCTION

Establishing the appropriate situations and conditions for learning is one of the most challenging aspects of teaching, and one of the most difficult skills to master. For those new to the profession, failure to set the right tone will greatly hinder their effectiveness as an English teacher. Indeed, even experienced faculty may sometimes feel frustrated by classroom management issues in Iranian context. In English classes there are usually the same problems even more than the Persian ordinary classes, because of the lack of English dominance and mutual understanding between the teachers and their students. Therefore, the EFL students cannot make the close relationship with the teachers, so the students cooperate less in English classes. Consequently, these problems were the intention of this study to describe the role of using sarcasm in class management of female vs. male EFL teachers with this hope that the English teachers can get help of

appropriate use of sarcasm in class management to create a better and closer relationship with students.

With regard to the problems related to the traditional learning and teaching activities, inflexible student-teacher relationship, and not enough cooperation of students. Therefore, this study aimed at describing the role of using sarcasm in the class management of Iranian EFL teachers. And also, exploring the differences between male and female Iranian EFL teachers in using sarcasm as a strategy in class management; was another purpose. Moreover, the next objective was finding the attitudes of the EFL male and female teachers toward using sarcasm in order to manage the English classes. Another purpose of this study was finding an effective strategy in class management for EFL teachers in relation to sarcasm from the teachers' point of view.

Little research has directly addressed gender differences in sarcasm. Given the inconsistent pattern of gender differences in effective evaluations of outcomes, it is difficult to predict whether gender differences will be observed in men and women's behavior and how it can effect on class management skill. However, if the men and women do differ in their using sarcasm, there are important implications for social and educational institutions. Only few studied were conducted about the relationship between teacher's characteristics and class management more especially in Iran. Furthermore, to the best knowledge of the researcher there were very little works in the world about the role of using sarcasm by EFL teachers in class management which was a great desire for the researcher to choose this topic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English has been undoubtedly established its status as an international language, regardless of people's likes or dislikes. Smith (2007) even stated that with English gaining status as the primary global language in almost every trade and profession, literacy now often includes and assumes the need for competence in English.

We often think of sarcasm as a way to be mean—and it usually is. For instance, sarcasm has been shown to be victimizing, offensive, and anger-provoking to its targets (Toplak & Katz, 2000). However, the emotional value of sarcasm improves dramatically when two members of a conversation share some common ground (knowledge, perceptions & experiences), understandable, and memorable (Pexman & Zvaigzne, 2004). Ducharme (1994) noted this statement as:

Sarcasm was recognized by the intonation of voice as well as by the physical gestures of the sarcaster.... In a sarcastic statement, a speaker utters words which are directly opposite to his/her intended meaning, but a vocal emphasis on these words (often accompanied by facial gestures such as a smirk, shaking of the head, or rolling of the eyes) indicates that they are not to be interpreted literally. (p. 51)

Roger (2005) concluded that sarcasm which was employed by the teachers could be the most destructive of strategies to adopt when dealing with pupils. Also, he found that, sarcasm not only striped away respect and dignity, it also introduced other elements as

well, like belittling, mocking and showing a person up in front of her/his peers. It is a cold and deliberate form of talking, and pupils will see it as such and will quickly come to dislike you. The students did not respect them, because the teachers did not treat them with respect. However, some other researcher devoted their studies on positive effect of using sarcasm such as Sternberg and O'Hara (1999) mentioned, general forms of sarcasm may stimulate creativity, the generation of ideas, insights, or problem solutions that are novel. Kayıkçı's (2009) investigated the impact of teachers' skills on the discipline behavior of students. The outcomes of the study yielded that a positive teacher-student relation and communication, recognition of student characteristics and needs, motivation of students, setting up definite class rules, and arrangement of classroom environment would diminish students' misbehavior.

Huang, Gino, and Galinsky (2015) established sarcasm as a double-edged sword. In other words based on the research they did, it was proved some benefits of sarcasm. First, it helps people think creatively even as they seethe in conflict. Second, abstract thinking is the driving force that connects sarcasm to creativity. Third, sarcastic exchanges in trusting relationships boost creativity without incurring conflict. Student-teacher relationships are a highly influential aspect of a child's school experience: impacting development across social, emotional, behavioral and academic domains (Farmer, McAuliffe Lines, & Hamm, 2011).

Aliakbari and Sadeghi (2014) investigated Iranian teachers' perceptions of teacher leadership practices in schools. Their findings maintained teachers' age, gender, and years of teaching experience did not appear as significant factors in teachers' perception of teacher leadership practices. Nejati, Hassani, and Sahrapour (2014) investigated the relationship between gender and subscales of self-efficacy of Iranian EFL teachers. The outcomes showed that males and females do not differ as far as classroom management was considered. However, they differed in terms of student engagement and instructional strategies they employ; male teachers were better at student engagement, while female teachers were better at instructional strategies.

Drucker (2011) examined the effect of gender inequalities in the politics of humor; exist in his society, in comparing with the seventies. He concluded that the gender, both of the speakers and addressees and of the participants, play a role in affecting the degree of enjoyment. More clearly, women changed their attitudes both towards men and women, in that they no longer enjoyed deriding women, but did enjoyed deriding men.

This study was an attempt to address the following research questions:

1. What is the role of using sarcasm in class management in Iranian EFL classes?
2. Do Iranian male and female EFL teachers differ in using sarcasm to manage the class?
3. What are Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes toward using sarcasm for the purpose of classroom management?

4. What is the effective strategy in relation to using sarcasm in order to overcome class management problems from teachers' attitude?

METHOD

Participants

To conduct the current study, 52 male and female English teachers were selected to participate. They were employed in different English language institutes in Isfahan, Iran. All the participants were selected through non-probability, convenient sampling. They were divided into two groups, A and B. Group A involved 26 male and female EFL teachers, they all required to the instructions. Group B included 26 male and female EFL teachers; they did not use any instruction. The instructions consisted of the gist of Roger's (2009) strategies which were delivered to the teachers in Group A before the study. The teachers aged between 25 and 35. The participants' native language was Persian. All of the teachers studied English as their foreign language. The subjects studied English major with MA and BA degree. All of the participants had more than five years teaching experience and the levels of their classes were intermediate and upper intermediate.

Instruments

Observation

The direct class observation was made to be sure of the internal validity of the study which were gathered in questionnaire and to know how effectively teachers will use sarcasm strategies in their class to improve the level of class management and also, to check the students' feedback. The observations were carried out while the subjects of the study were teaching in their classes. It was made by the researcher, MA English teacher, during the spring semester 2016. The observer took part in 7 classes in group A and the same number of classes in group B. The effect of using sarcasm, its positive and negative points, and the students' feedback in the process of learning were more focused.

Interview

The interview was made to achieve reliable and valid results in order to have triangulation. More clearly, the interview based on Huang's (2015) framework. To the best knowledge of researcher, because this study was almost a new one, there was not found any authentic paper based on this framework on the net. It was found that lots of public posts about it on social networks. The purpose of the semi-interview was to explore, describe, and evaluate the attitudes of teachers towards the use sarcasm for the purpose of managing the class. The semi-structured interview was conducted among 50 EFL teachers. Semi-structured interview with teachers consists of some questions about Huang's framework and the teachers' suggestions about using sarcasm. Each interview took fifteen minutes and the voices were recorded.

Questionnaire

In this study, the questionnaire design was close-ended questions to have more reliability. The questionnaire which was used in this study was researcher made and five point Likert Scale was used. The questionnaire includes 20 statements in 5 domains about using sarcasm in teachers' behavior and its relation to class management, in order to elicit teachers' attitudes towards using sarcasm. Fifteen male and female EFL teachers were participated in the pilot study in two English institutes, in order to find reliability of the researcher-made questionnaire. The main reason for conducting the pilot study was to see whether the items on the questionnaires were understood or not so that if there were any ambiguous parts reported by the teachers, they would be revised or omitted for the main study.

The Cronbach's Alpha for the questionnaire which involved 20 items was calculated by SPSS 23, mean, variance, corrected item-total correlation, and Cronbach's alpha for deletion of each item were calculated. Finally, the Cronbach's Alpha of the questionnaire was 0.703. Therefore, the level of reliability was moderate and the validity of questionnaire was examined by university professors.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure was carried out in descriptive design the data were collected through questionnaire, semi-structure interview and observation. The length of the study is four weeks. The classes met three days a week one hour and half per day.

The instruction involved two parts. First part was some warnings for the teachers which was selected of Roger's (2005) book about the negative use of sarcasm in order to managing the class or learners' behavior such as belittlement, mocking, making ashamed, causing revenge and other similar feelings in students plus some explanations which can destroy the student-teacher relationship. The second part of instruction included some research conclusions, which were the result of many studies in the world, about using sarcasm in human relationship. These papers were given to the participants in group A at the beginning of the study. They studied them and examined the statements of the instruction during the semester at the end the participants filled out the questionnaire. The teachers of group B did the same but without any instruction or explanation paper. The aim of the study was to determine whether the EFL teachers in group A can manage the class a higher level of performance through the application of the sarcasm, compare to the ones who is managed the class without it.

At first a pilot questionnaire were filled out by EFL teachers who used the instruction in advance in order to estimate the reliability and validity of a researcher-made questionnaire. In this study, 52 male and female English teachers were assigned to two groups with equal participation which were called A and B. At the end of the course the participants filled out the questionnaire. Teachers in group A received the instruction and filled out the questionnaire. The other group did not receive the instruction and filled out the questionnaire. The EFL teachers in the group A were given the

questionnaire and then the semi-structured interview was made, based on Huang's framework. Furthermore, in order to find more reliable and valid data, observation were made during the semester and interview were conducted at the end of the course to gain insights from teachers' attitudes towards the use of sarcasm in different stages of class management process.

Data Analysis Procedure

To carry out the statistical analyses, in each stage after the require data were collected and the appropriate statistical methods were used through SPSS 23. In order to find the reliability of the researcher-made questionnaire Cronbach's alpha formula was performed in pilot study. In order to answer the first research question the frequency, percentage, mean, variance and independent-sample *t* test was estimated to test the score of questionnaire items and see whether is there any significance different between group A and B or not. The frequency and percentage were calculated to compare the result of the study and the independent samples *t*-test compare the means of two independent groups in order to determine whether there is statistical evidence that the associated population means are significantly different or not.

Moreover, to answer the second research question, mean and independent-sample *t* test were estimated to see whether there is significant difference between the male and female EFL teachers toward using sarcasm to manage their class. The analysis of the teacher observations and the interview were performed explanatory and also some different charts were prepared to answer third and fourth research questions.

RESULTS

This study aimed to explore whether using sarcasm had any significant role in class management of female vs. male Iranian EFL teachers. Data collected from 52 teachers made the analyses possible. They were assigned to two groups. To compare the participants in two groups with respect to the use of sarcasm, the independent-samples *t* test was carried out at the end of the study after the practical use of the instruction. The mean score of the first group members (3.66) was more than the mean score of the teachers in the second group (3.00). Based on the information in Table 1, there was a statistically significant difference in questionnaire scores for the teachers between the two groups in using sarcasm in order to manage their class. In other words, group A outperformed group B.

Table 1. Results of the Independent-Samples t-test for Comparing Groups A and B

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F.	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal Variances Assumed	.983	.000	- 4.73	50	.000	-.65	.13	-.93	-.37
Equal Variances not Assumed			- 4.73	44.2	.000	-.65	.13	-.93	-.37

The results of the comparison between 26 male and 26 female teachers for using sarcasm in questionnaire showed that the mean score of males (3.33) was greater than the mean score females (3.32). Nevertheless, to understand whether this difference between the mean scores was statistically significant or not, the value of *p* under the *Sig.* (2-tailed) column was checked and presented in Table 2. As the table shows that there was not a statistically significant difference in questionnaire scores for males and females. This indicates that male and female EFL teachers did not have any significant difference in using sarcasm in order to manage the class.

Table 2. Results of the Independent Samples t-test for Comparing Males and Females

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F.	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal Variances Assumed	.13	.71	.03	50	.97	.005	.16	-.32	-.34
Equal Variances not Assumed			.03	49.9	.97	.005	.16	-.32	-.34

Because each choice in this Likert-scale questionnaire carried a point, the mean score of each questionnaire item was compared against the average score of the choices (that is 3). This would mean that if the mean score of a questionnaire item was less than 3, there was a tendency among the participants to disagree with the statement. The results obtained from each of the five domains of the questionnaire.

In the first domain (changing class atmosphere) the mean score for the second questionnaire item in group A was 3.42, indicating that most of the teachers found

sarcasm as a way to organize the disordered classes; however, the teachers in group B disagreed with the same item because the mean score was less than 3. The mean scores of the sixth item in both groups were greater than the average of the five choices. It paved the way for making a conclusion implying that most of the teachers in two groups were of the opinion that using sarcasm is a way to have humor in the class. The mean score of the responses to item 8 in group A was greater than the average points for the alternatives. This showed that the teachers tended to agree with this item, which stated that sarcastic remarks make the class atmosphere pleasant. Although, most of the teachers in the second group disagreed with this item. The participants agreed with item 20 in the first group, which mentioned that they have more student-center class through sarcasm and give the students more chance to show their abilities. But almost most of the teachers in group B disagreed with the same role of sarcasm because the mean score was less than 3. Casting a look at the mean scores of all the items in group A related to first domain, which were all above 3, one can understand that the most teachers agreed with sarcasm had a role to changing the class atmosphere.

Results of teachers' attitudes in second domain (effecting on managing the students' reaction) indicates that out of the three items related to this domain, the most teachers in group A agreed with all items. These items (1, 3, & 12) stated that using sarcasm indirectly to have more obedience of students, using sarcasm is helpful and efficient in class management. Also, speaking sarcastically can control the students' behavior. Although, most of the teachers in the second group did not believe in the same way, for the reason that all the mean scores in group B were less than 3.

Results of teachers' attitudes in the third domain (improving student-teacher relationship) reveals that out of four items in this section ,item 4, 18, and 19 received mean scores above 3 in two groups. It deemed that most of the teachers in both groups agreed with using sarcasm leads to decrease students' interest and motivation to the class and teacher, sarcastic remarks affect and stick more in students' mind. Moreover, they concurred with using sarcasm instead of direct criticism, leads to the students understand that their mistakes were noticed by the teacher and also, the students have one more chance and the teacher care about their self-confidence. However in item 17 the mean score was above 3 in group A , which stated that the participants speak sarcastically, in order to have more close and sincere relationship with their students, but in second group the teachers did not because the mean score was less than 3. It should be added that item 18 and 19 in the first group had the higher mean score than other items, which declared the positive teachers' attitude toward sarcasm in improving S-T relationships. In all items the mean scores of group A were more than second group except in Item 4 which stated the instruction improved the negative teachers' attitudes about sarcasm.

Result of teachers' attitude in domain 4 (effectiveness of indirect speech) shows that the mean score of the responses in the first group to item 13 and 14 were greater than the average points for the alternatives. Therefore, the teachers tended to agree with these items, which implied that the attempt to use sarcastic remarks for all students

instead of direct criticism for one student and use it with humor instead of complaining about the class. Similarly, the mean scores were above 3 in the second group, which stated that the teachers agreed with the same items (13 & 14). In addition, the participants in group A concurred with explaining expectations through sarcasm, lead to creative thinking among the students. Also, they agreed with declaring the solutions and suggestions indirectly through sarcasm lead to emotional relationship with students and improved learning. However, in the second group, the mean score in item 15 and 16 were all under 3, which stated that the participant disagreed with the same items. It should be noted that the in group A item 13 had the highest mean score among the others, which implied that the teachers showed a great tendency to use sarcasm indirectly to the whole class not individually.

Result of teachers' attitude in domain 5 (Negative Effect of Sarcasm) indicates that the most teachers in the first group and also second group tended to agree with showing revengeful reaction from students against sarcastic behavior of teachers because the mean scores of item 7 were greater than 3. The same result obtained for item 9, which stated using sarcasm repeatedly cause the same reaction from students. The most teachers in group A and the other group agreed with this statement because the mean scores were above 3. Item 10 had the similar process; more clearly, the mean scores in the first group and the other one were above the average. Therefore, the most participants in both groups had the tendency to consider sarcasm as a reason for hurt feelings among students. Based on the responses to the items 5 and 11 in group A, which referred to answering students' disobedience and impudence through sarcasm and also, inability in managing the class can lead to speaking sarcastically, were agreed by the teachers. On the contrary, the mean scores in group B for the fifth item and eleventh item were less than 3; they indicated that the most teachers disagreed with the same items.

The results of semi-structured interview with the teachers correlated with the results of teachers' questionnaire. At first, the teachers were asked about Huang's (2015) framework and explained why they agreed or disagreed with them. In relation to the first benefits of using sarcasm, many teachers disagreed with it. They stated that in T-S (teacher-student) relationships, it hardly ever occurs in conflicts that people think about something new, answering differently, and creativity at all. They used to answer routinely like others. Few teachers agreed with sarcasm leads to creativity even in conflict. About 12 out of 15 teachers agreed with the second benefit of sarcasm, they indicated the prior stage of sarcasm is abstract thinking because when a person speak sarcastically he or she thinks about the different aspect of that phenomena in the mind. However, 3 out of 15 teachers did not concur with the second benefit, they believed that students, in reaction to sarcasm, become upset, say nothing or they just think about answering even impolitely not creativity at all! Almost 9 out 15 teachers agreed the third benefit of sarcasm; they mentioned that in S-S or T-T conversations the individuals feel safer, cause of the trusting relationship, to speak sarcastically without any conflict. Furthermore, they can think more about new answers, solutions, and reactions. But 6 out of 15 teachers disagreed; they stated that, because of trusting relationship, people

have more chance to speak freely without any obstacles. So, the probability of occurring conflict increases.

According to the results of interview with teachers about their attitudes and suggestions toward using sarcasm, most of the teachers had positive attitude about using sarcasm after reading instruction, they affected more by the positive sides of using sarcasm. Only the few numbers of teachers had negative attitude about using sarcasm after reading instruction. Less than half of the teachers had positive attitude about using sarcasm before reading instruction, based on their characteristics or experiences, they used sarcasm in the appropriate way. All of the teachers pointed out to satisfactory results with necessary policies in teachers' behavior about using sarcasm. Many teachers suggested to using sarcasm with humor, in order to prevent a boring and lifeless class. Some of the interviewees recommended using sarcasm instead of direct criticism; they preferred to criticize the students indirectly through sarcasm for all instead of one student in order to avoid negative side effects of direct criticism. Some interviewees mentioned that sarcasm should not use for sensitive students, they added these students are in more risk of negative effects of sarcasm, so they must not be the direct interlocutor for the direct individual sarcasm. Most of the teachers suggested that using sarcasm politely and caring about students' feelings can be one of the best ways of using sarcastic remarks with fewest numbers of risks.

During the repeated class observations, it was found that in group A, the teachers' progress in class management after reading the instruction was improved more over the passage of time. In group B only few teachers used sarcastic remarks and the other participants did not prefer to use sarcasm in order to control and manage the class better because they were not familiar with positive effect of using sarcasm in student-teacher relationships. However, in the group A the participants preferred to use sarcasm in the appropriate way as one of their method for managing the class and students' behavior effectively. They specifically used sarcasm in order to have sense of humor, better student- teacher relationship, indirect criticism, better understanding.

DISCUSSION

By comparing the scores of teachers' in the two groups, it was found that there was a significant difference between the teachers' with sarcasm instruction and traditional methods. In other words, using sarcasm, significantly affected the class management in EFL classes in this research. The results might support the study of Kayıkçı (2009) which investigated the impact of teachers' skills on the discipline behavior of students and a positive T-S relation and communication. However, the results are different from Roger's (2005) work who concluded that, sarcasm which was employed by the teachers could be the most destructive strategy to adopt when dealing with pupils.

By comparing the performance of male and female teachers on questionnaires, it was found that there was no significant difference between male and female and, the instruction did not affect the class management of the males and females differently. These findings are in line with that of Nejati, Hassani, and Sahrapour (2014) who

explored the difference between male and female teachers in terms of sub scales of self-efficacy, and the outcomes showed that males and females do not differ as far as classroom management was considered. However, the findings are different from the study of Drucker (2011) who examined whether gender inequalities in the politics of humor; exist in his society, in comparing with the seventies. He concluded that the gender, play a role in affecting the degree of enjoyment.

The descriptive statistics showed that most of the teachers had positive attitudes towards using sarcasm in enhancing their class management skill. Based on these findings, through using sarcastic remarks, the Iranian EFL teachers could improve their abilities in S-T relationship, managing the class and students' behavior in a better way. The findings are in agreement with Huang, Gino, and Galinsky (2015) who established sarcasm as a double-edged sword. In other words based on the research they did, it was proved some benefits of sarcasm such as increasing creative thinking. However, the results of this study are different from the findings of Toplak and Katz (2000) who concluded that relative to a direct criticism, the person who uttered an indirect, sarcastic statement was perceived as intending to be more offensive, verbally aggressive, anger-provoking, and mocking.

Based on the results of interview in order to use sarcasm as an effective strategy to solve class management problems and disorders with the fewest destructive effects, the teacher should speak sarcastically in certain situations and conditions with necessary policies in his or her behavior. To the best knowledge of the researcher, there was not any available previous study about the relationship between sarcasm and class management and therefore, it was not possible for the researcher to mention any consistent work of others.

CONCLUSION

This study showed that there was a significant difference between the method which was sarcasm included and the traditional (sarcasm excluded). There was no significant difference between male and female teachers regarding their use of sarcasm in class management.

The result the current study showed that most of the teachers had positive attitudes towards using sarcasm in enhancing their class management skill especially after reading the instruction and becoming aware of positive and negative effects of using sarcasm in human relationship. Based on these findings, through using sarcastic remarks, EFL teachers could improve their abilities in S-T relationship, managing the class, and students' behavior in a better way. Based on this study, in order to use sarcasm as an effective strategy to solve class management problems and disorders with the fewest destructive effects, the teacher should speak sarcastically in a certain situation and condition with necessary policies in his or her behavior such as using sarcasm with humor, caring about students' feelings in a polite way. Moreover, it's better to use sarcasm instead of direct criticism and for all of the students instead of one student.

The findings can be beneficial for teachers, language institutes, schools material designers and policy makers in ministry of education to consider the positive role of sarcasm in the teacher guide books and all the books which are related to class management or S-T relationship. Moreover, all the TTC instructors might use the findings of this research and all the authors who are interested in managing the students' behavior or class management totally.

A further study can be organized with a larger sample of participants. In this study, using sarcasm to manage the class was under investigating, so it is recommended to examine the role of others teachers effective characters and also, use the different classes in different cities of Iran in order to examine the social and cultural aspects of using sarcasm among the participants. Attitude of the learners towards using sarcasm in teachers' behavior could be another topic for further research. It is hoped that this study could pave the ways for presenting information regarding the improved strategies about the class management in general and the role of sarcasm in specific for teaching.

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