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UNIVERSITY OF ABBES LAGHROUR-KHENCHELA  
جامعة عباس لغرور -خنشلة  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
قسم اللغة الانجليزية



**The collective and Individual Reactions to Sarcasm in Lessening Offence in the English Culture**  
**THE CASE OF JOJO MOYES'S ME BEFORE YOU NOVEL AND MOVIE**

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Requirements for the Degree of Master in Language and Culture

Candidates

Supervisor

**BAKKAR Imen**

**Ms. MEKHAZNIA Wafa**

**Board of Examiners**

**President:** Ms. YOUSFI Nabila

University of Khenchela

**Supervisor:** Ms. MEKHAZNIA Wafa

University of Khenchela

**Examiner:** Dr. CHOUANA Khaled

University of Khenchela

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## **DEDICATION**

First I would like to dedicate this to my parents, my mom who is my biggest role model and biggest aspiration and my deceased dad who sadly did not get to see me graduate.

Second I dedicate this to my three siblings my older brother Salah, my younger sister Wafa and my older sister Souha.

I would also like to dedicate this to my friends not just for helping me through everything and supporting me but for being the amazing people they are Aridj, Mira, Sadou, Djihan and Shahinez. I had the most pleasure knowing wonderful people like you in my life and I had the privilege to call you my closest friends.

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## Abstract

This research presents an investigation about the individual and collective reactions to the use of sarcasm in lessening the offensiveness of an utterance in the English culture. The research aims to raise awareness of media elements that have a direct relation with the culture and elements that spread wrong stereotypical images of it. The novel 'Me Before You' is analysed using reader-response theory to highlight the individual reactions of the readers and the movie adaptation of the same novel following Barthes semiotic theory to show the collective reactions. Both reactions are related to the English culture. Finally, the analysis of both the movie and novel are compared to show the difference between the two reactions and justify them.

*Key words:* sarcasm, offensiveness, individual reactions, collective reactions, English culture

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## **General Introduction**

### **1. Background for the Study**

Sarcasm is a prominent feature of language that was used across cultures since ancient times to assert dominance, it is a Trojan horse that shows sophistication and politeness and holds deep hidden criticism in within. Sarcasm is a talent that not everyone can detect, let alone partake in. It presents a 'higher' type of culture (Heiman 12). The use of sarcasm has changed over the years as it has become a tool to escape emotions, it was popularised as a defence mechanism used to cope with trauma and tragedy.

Sarcasm and its use as an escape route from emotions is especially frequent in the English culture, they refuse to face emotions or seriousness which results in shielding behind sarcasm even when a topic is serious or sensitive (Watching the English). This use is seen in real life, on social media platforms, and is portrayed in novels. However, there is no representation of it in main stream media, especially movies.

The use of sarcasm as a defence mechanism is related to offensive topics; those that can result in discomfort, dislike, and embarrassment to others. Making sarcasm the medium that facilitates the mention of such topics and to an extent normalises it which can stir reactions. The attempt to normalise sarcastic offences on mainstream platforms like movies can be seen as a social issue, doing it while targeting small audiences using smaller platforms like novels does not create the same agitation and thus does not receive the same reaction.

This tension between appropriate and inappropriate humour has long been of interest for scholars and media outlets alike. Because humour/comedy often deals with sensitive topics, touching on or transgressing social norms and moral boundaries around sexuality, religion or death, it is not only pleasurable and community-forming but also rife with the potential to hurt, exclude and offend (Greafer and Das, 02).

The clash between the appropriate and offensive humour has been long, the more popular it gets the more power it has, and the bigger the impact will be on the whole societal norms. The possibility of it affecting the shaping and the forming of what is accepted what is not is the reason that makes the reactions so different.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

The use of sarcasm in lessening offence and tackling sensitive topics is widely used especially in England, it is known as dark humour or brutal humour, and it is popular among many societal categories. With the help of globalisation even other cultures are prone to it, yet there is no representation of it in movies. It is shown in almost every other aspect, yet the mainstream media refuses to include it in movies as it could lead to negative collective reactions, meanwhile individuals are exposed to it in any form of direct interaction with the English culture. Such ambivalence can lead foreign language students to get confused between what they see in social media, read in books, and what they watch in movies making them doubt their understanding of the culture. Raising awareness towards such case does not only help reveal the actual elements that are related to the culture and its real features but also highlights the idea of

media manipulations making sense the saying ‘do not believe all you see on TV’, destroying the hoaxes of media, and having an understanding of why the manipulation is important not just for the media outlets but for the society itself.

### **3. Research Questions**

1-What is the collective reaction to sarcasm in lessening offensiveness in the English culture?

2-What is the individual reaction to sarcasm in lessening offensiveness in English culture?

3- What makes the reactions so different from each other?

Based on the previously mentioned questions, this study assumes that the reactions will be different. Thus the elements that govern the difference and justify it will be extracted, explained, and discussed to reveal the reasons behind the use of sarcasm in lessening offence in real life and lack of its presentation in movies and mainstream media and the truth behind false realities created by the media.

### **4. Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to raise awareness to the role of sarcasm in lessening offensiveness in the English culture and the role it plays on an individual scale and on a collective scale. Via analysing an English novel and its movie adaptation, the two will highlight the difference between the individual and collective reaction to such a phenomenon, and the general impact that will affect the society as a result. The aim is to detect the differences in the reactions and compare them to have a conclusion that explains why such difference exists in the first place.

## **5. Significance of the Study**

The significance of study lays in its role to help raise awareness about the different reactions to a social phenomenon like sarcasm in lessening offence in the English culture, and the reasons behind such reactions. The study is made to show EFL learners the elements that have a direct relation to the culture and how different is media from reality.

## **6. Research Methodology**

### **6.1. Research Design**

The research design that the researcher follows is a qualitative approach as it is based on the observation and understanding of a phenomenon that is about human interaction from the researcher's point of view. To analyse the data, this research uses a descriptive method by using semiotics of Roland Barthes for the movie. The descriptive method used by making description of research objects based on explaining the relation between objects that are being observed (Sugiyono qtd in. *Female Masculinity in Movie*). For the novel, reader-response theory will be implemented. It is also a descriptive theory that is based on the feelings and reactions of the reader towards the text in hand making relation between the personality of the reader, the novel, and the reaction resulting from it.

### **6.2. Research Tools**

The data collection tool used in this research is the observation of the signs present in the movie; both verbal and non-verbal signs that convey the desired meaning. The researcher documents the signs via screen shooting the important scenes that hold meaning. For the

book the researcher has read it and observed the important passages that also showed related meaning and copied them. Analysis unit is everything that related with the focus being studied. Basically, in qualitative research to analyse the data use logical thinking, analyse by logic, by induction, deduction, analogy, comparison, and others (Amirinqtd in, Female Masculinity in Movie). In this research it is the scenes and the passage that highlight the use of sarcasm in lessening offensiveness in English Culture.

### **6.3. Sampling Material**

The sampling material of the study is the movie and the novel 'Me Before You', the genre is romantic drama. Both the movie and the novel deal with the use of sarcasm in lessening offensiveness in varying degrees and in similar situations; some scenes in the movie are manipulated and not like in the novel and some other scenes and details from the novel are non-existent in the movie at all. The sampling technique used here is the 'purposeful sampling' based on certain consideration and purpose in choosing the scenes and passages to be analysed. In the movie four scenes that include the main two characters are analysed as well as a background setting of the whole movie. In the novel the total of six passages about different characters were analysed as well as the setting and the use of words. The considered aspects in the sampling are the occurrence of sarcasm regarding a sensitive topic that could cause offence.

## **7. Outline of the Dissertation**

The dissertation includes three chapters; the first two are theoretical explaining the relation between sarcasm and offensiveness as well as the individual and collective reactions towards offensive sarcasm and the difference between a movie and a novel. The third chapter is

practical and it includes the analysis of both elements as well as a comparison between the results of the analysis.

*Chapter One:*

*Sarcasm, Offensiveness and the Reactions Regarding Them*

## **Introduction**

Sarcasm and offensiveness are deeply interrelated in many ways. The relation that is mostly focused on is how sarcasm can cause offensiveness, while an even more important relation is neglected: the one where sarcasm actually lessens offensiveness, and that is due to the fact that it is a rare case.

Sarcasm is mainly linguistic; it has theories explaining how it operates and its linguistic and grammatical use. However, the interpretation of sarcasm is dependent on the culture it is used in as some cultures consider it as a part of daily speech. Meanwhile, other cultures view it as an outrage rebellion and a rude behaviour that is neither unacceptable nor tolerable. While offensiveness is almost the same as it is mostly a personal matter and the interpretation is left to how each individual sees it, some cultures ignore the idea of offensiveness as they give the least importance to personal discomfort and only focus on the collective aspect of it. Other cultures treat personal offences very seriously as they see the offended culture as a way to social justice in the absence of authority figures that provide the supposed protection.

Otherwise stated, it is understandable to say that the two variables are fluid; they have general definitions but those definition are flexible as it depends on the context they are used in, including the culture, the producer of the utterance, the audience receiving it, and the form of the utterance itself. A simple detail can turn the offended into an offender and vice versa. People are careful with both subjects as both are sensitive topics that can create instant controversy and chaos in the society.

Therefore, the first chapter will deal with the definitions of each one as well as the main points that help simplify each concept and show the relation between both, why they are so interrelated, and how this relation can be seen from different point of views.

## **1.1. Conceptualising Sarcasm**

Sarcasm is represented by a witty comment in a TV series, a way of faking politeness, or simply a way to induce laughter in a friend group. However, it is not studied enough as it can be caused by many factors and can have many consequences, and each one of those depend on many factors.

### **1.1.1. Defining Sarcasm**

Sarcasm dates back to approximately the eighth century, the word itself is derived from Greek origins “sarkazein” which back then meant “to tear flesh”. In those times sarcasm did not have a possible humorous side, it was merely used to make fun of, criticize, and mock the addressee. A great example of sarcasm being employed back then and how it was viewed is Homer’s *Odyssey*: one of the greatest and oldest pieces of literature that was composed near the end of the eighth century and had a huge impact on the western cultures especially. Minchin analysed this poem to see how sarcasm was expressed, she explains why some characters did not use sarcasm:

Since Telemachos for much of the period covered by the tale has neither the status nor the seniority to use sarcasm as a discourse option and since Odysseus in that same span of time is not in a sufficiently secure position to put at risk the relationships he is trying to build with those around him (Minchin539)

According to her analysis using sarcasm is a luxury only to those who have power and status. Furthermore, sarcasm was seen as a threat to building relationships due to its negative and critical use. In another passage she analyses the reaction to sarcasm when it comes from an

individual of a low status: “and he is angry because a beggar, his subordinate, has spoken out of turn. It is not for a person of lower status to utter such hostile words to a person of higher status” (Minchin546). Her comment demonstrates how sarcasm is seen as an outrage act as only people with status are allowed to be sarcastic: “Odysseus allows himself—at last—a sarcastic taunt as he claims victory in the contest of the bow” (Minchin550).

The character starts being sarcastic only after he has proved his power and earned a status. There are many other examples in the *Odyssey* about how sarcasm was expressed back then and what it meant, she finishes her analyses by speaking about how sarcasm responds with and reinforces status and rank; only superiors and elders have been allowed to use it with their “juniors”, equals could use it among each other as well. However a junior/subordinate should never use it with an elder/superior.

Knox says that ‘sarcasmos’ has been of a “little importance” before the fifteenth century; it is not due to its little use as it was a part of literature since the ancient times; however, the reason lays in the lack of representation. Sarcasm relies on facial expressions, gestures, and the voice tone. All these elements were not mentioned on old parchment papers which have made sarcasm hard to detect as scholars said “it was too subtle for readers to decipher” (Gordon qtd in. *Words That Tear Flesh*). The lack of nonverbal signs have made it even harder for modern writers to understand old sarcasm and reconstruct the framing context that surrounds it leading to misinterpretations of characters and leaving the reader wondering if they were naïve or extremely sarcastic (ibid).

Etymology dictates that the word sarcasm originates from Greek initially ‘sarkazein’ which translates to “tear flesh”, then it has been of late Latin to finally reach English in the mid-sixteenth century becoming the word we know and use now. Many dictionaries define this word

differently. In Oxford English dictionary, it is a way of using words that are the opposite of what you mean in order to be unpleasant to somebody or to make fun of them, while Cambridge dictionary defines it as the use of remarks that clearly mean the opposite of what they say or did in order to hurt someone's feelings or to criticise something in a humorous way. Google dictionary says it is the use of irony to mock or convey contempt. If you ask a friend to exemplify they will say it is coming to work on the weekend and telling your boss you would not want to be anywhere else. The definitions are different, yet similar; each one has a specific focus; meanwhile the same elements are agreed upon to englobe all three. It is fair to say that sarcasm is an utterance that contains a dishonest humorous statement aimed to ridicule a targeted victim.

Sarcasm can also be defined according to the field of study it is used in; Haiman addressed this in his book. Linguistically and grammatically speaking, it is the execution of two functions simultaneously in which the ostensible message is transmitted, but framed with a meta-message that indicates that the speaker actually means the exact opposite of what has said. This gives sarcasm the appearance of an abstract quintessential linguistic activity: "using language for not talking about the world but about itself" (Haiman 12). Furthermore the availability of other devices that convey denial and verbal aggression suggests that it is a needless second hand way of performing the task.

In linguistics, sarcasm can also be explained as flouting the maxim of quality that was set by Grice where he introduced the cooperative principles explaining that they present rules of common ground for a conversation so that both parties will know what to expect. They simply represent general principles to ensure the conversation is understood. These cooperative principles include four maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner (28).

The first one is about the quantity of the information to be provided as the contribution must be as informative as is required for the purpose of the exchange and to not make it carries more or less information. As for the maxim of quality, it dictates that you try to make your contribution one that is true; you do not say what you believe to be false, and you do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. Relevance is the next maxim, and it is to simply 'be relevant'. Last, the maxim of Manner is about 'being perspicuous', and it includes avoiding obscurity of expression, avoiding ambiguity, being brief, and being orderly (26, 27). Grice then presumes to explain that in some cases the maxim of quality is flouted and gives an example of a conversation when a conversant tells his friend that someone is a fine friend even though that person bad mouthed him. He categorises this as ignoring the maxim of quality because the provided information was wrong and this is the case of irony; he has further explained this by saying that this implicature would not be understood if it was not for the context and the audience knowledge of the whole situation (34).

### **1.1.2. Theory of Sarcasm**

The first approach to the situation and its view is known as the theory of pretence (from the verb pretend). It is based on the belief that in case of irony generally and sarcasm specifically where the intended meaning is the opposite of the literal meaning, the speaker pretends an attitude that he does not truly feel and expects the audience to recognise the act as if it is a theatre play since sarcasm is to some extent a form of mimicry. "To be ironical is, among other things, to pretend, and while one wants the pretence to be recognized as such, to announce it as a pretence would spoil the effect"(Ibid qtd in. *The Pragmatics of Verbal Irony: Echo or Pretence*).

John Haiman explains the second theory of sarcasm, “it involves mention rather than use of words” (Sperber & Wilson qtd in. *Talk is Cheap*). The sarcastic quotes or otherwise repeats other people's words (or possibly just the very words he or she used earlier) and by repetition it is meant to draw attention to their peculiar inappropriateness. One may quote not only another's actual words but also another's diction and syntax. There are many cases where sarcasm is achieved simply by derisory mention that is, repetition or quotation of inappropriate words. There is no real conflict between the ideas of pretence and quotation, which are intimately connected (both formally and semantically), in actual practice the first simply subsumes the second. In its textbook sense, direct quotation, after all, is an act of mimicry above all and thus of self-conscious pretence. Both quotation and other kinds of overt pretence require the audience to understand that the speaker himself or herself is not committed to the words uttered, and that these words originate from some other source. The meta-message in both cases is paraphrasable as "this is not really me: I'm just playing a role, mouthing someone else's words." Even though the two theories complete each other in a sense, it is evident that the first theory is more inclusive, whilst the second is more restrictive (Haiman 25-26):

Unless A's utterance is entirely pointless, A must be trying to get across some other proposition than the one he purports to be putting forward. This must be some obviously related proposition; the most obviously related proposition is the contradictory of the one he purports to be putting forward (Grice qtd in. *Sarcasm, Pretence, and the Semantics/Pragmatics Distinction*).

In this quote Grice is speaking about sarcastic speakers when the implicature is the opposite of what has been said which is widely accepted and viewed as the traditional theory

which is referred to as the meaning inversion model. This model was criticised by “expressionists” who believe that sarcasm is merely the expression of a dissociative attitude towards an evoked thought or perspective instead of it being a type of speaker meaning.

Camp has discussed this stance in her paper as she has not only tried to present a common ground to analyse sarcasm in terms of meaning inversion as the traditional theory does, but also to construe meaning more broadly to include illocutionary force and evaluative attitudes as well as propositional content. She has discussed two views, the first being ‘expressivism’ advocating the radical exclusion of sarcasm or verbal irony, treating irony as a form of meaning substitution. This claim makes it to be a mysteriously inefficient means for communicating content that could more easily be expressed literally (Wilson qtd in. Sarcasm, Pretense, and the Semantics/Pragmatics Distinction).

This general expressivist line has been implemented in two main ways. On the one hand, Sperber and Wilson argue advocate that irony echoes or mentions a proposition in order to present it as an object of ridicule. On the other hand, Clark and Gerrig argue that the ironic speaker pretends to make an assertion or other speech act in order to mock the perspective from which it would be taken seriously. Disregarding the differences, both groups claim that in speaking ironically, a speaker does not undertake any genuine illocutionary act at all, rather, s/he mentions, pretends or ‘makes as if to say’ something for the purpose of directing attention and expressing an attitude. There are two main arguments for expressivism. The first is that not just any sentence can be understood ironically in any context even if it is uttered with a dripping intonation. As Grice himself notes, the speaker must also be interpretable as expressing an evaluative attitude. After expressing their views cant starts to criticise them “expressivists are

right to draw attention to the crucial role that both evaluative attitudes and evoked thoughts play in verbal irony (qtd in Sarcasm, Pretense, and The Semantics/Pragmatics Distinction).

However this does not establish their core negative claim: that irony does not involve the inversion of meaning” she explains that implicature theorists can address this first argument by adding two further clauses to their analysis: a presupposition that someone else has endorsed the content that she makes as if to say, and an implicature that the speaker evaluates this content negatively. So they could still treat the negative evaluation as a conventional implicature, as several theorists have done for slurs. The second argument of expressivism aims to establish the negative claim that irony is not a matter of the speaker’s meaning but the opposite of what they say. The general point is that the target of an ironic attitude—what the irony ‘operates on’—is often something at the level of the overall pragmatic effects that would be generated by a sincere utterance rather than the uttered sentence’s semantic value or its assertoric content (Camp, 8).

Insofar as irony targets something which is itself the result of the full panoply of pragmatic interpretation, the argument goes, it cannot be treated as a case of meaning inversion in any straightforward sense. As she further explains, she notes that this argument is general, and there are specific forms of it further explained. After exemplifying and explaining the views of many theorists and language philosophers she comes to the conclusion that “an exclusive focus on assertive cases of irony also makes it appear natural to treat irony as communicating the contrary of the proposition literally expressed. However, this model breaks down dramatically when applied to irony directed at illocutionary act types other than assertion Most illocutionary acts don’t have plausible ‘opposites’, let alone ones that can be analysed as the same force directed at a logically related proposition. As a result, ironic speech acts other than assertion often cannot be analysed in exclusively propositional terms. Because standard theories of

speaker's meaning focus on propositional meaning ('meaning that p'), it is not at all clear either that the speaker does mean anything in these cases, nor in what sense what is meant could be the "opposite" of what is said" (Camp, 89).

Finishing her arguments on the expressive view Camp carries on and debunks their "arguments" to finally arrive at varieties of sarcasm, and what she has to say first was concerning irony and sarcasm. Traditional theorist is right that sarcasm involves some sort of meaning inversion, while the expressivist is right that irony proper involves drawing attention to a disparity between how things are, and how they should be expressing a "dissociative attitude" towards some aspect of this disparity. Although she agrees that there is a need to distinguish among types of irony and sarcasm, she believes that such a radical bifurcation is at best stipulative and at worst obscurantist.

Sarcasm and verbal irony clearly differ in some respects. Sarcasm is usually thought to be more pointed, blatant, and negative than sophisticated cases of verbal irony. At the same time, there is also a wide agreement that the two phenomena are closely related. Many people use the terms nearly interchangeably. More importantly, expressivists have taken themselves to be showing that traditional theorists like Quintillian and Grice are wrong in their analysis of a relatively unified and encompassing class of utterances. Merely imposing different labels does nothing to elucidate how the various phenomena actually work and threatens to distract from a close examination of their similarities and differences. Although some vague and ragged boundaries should be expected, a fairly systematic and substantive topography of the overall terrain can be developed if characterising the genus of verbal irony begins, and then home in on sarcasm as a potentially more restricted class (17).

Finally, Camp argues that an analysis of sarcasm in terms of meaning inversion can explain all of the examples discussed both by traditional implicature theorists and by expressivists as long as there is a preparation to construe ‘meaning’ more broadly than just the semantic meaning, ‘what is said’, or even propositional speaker’s meaning, and instead as encompassing a speaker’s reflexive intention to be recognised as holding some attitude. For her the major problem with expressivism is just their negative claim that irony does not include “meaning inversion” and says that her model can be exploited in the analysis of sarcasm if the two components were to be modified ‘allusion and pretence’ (1735).

After explaining her point and suggesting the appropriate implementations, she passes to talk about Propositional sarcasm, the most straightforward cases of sarcasm are those in which the sarcasm’s scope is directed toward some proposition to which a sincere utterance would have committed the speaker. The speaker pretends to assert the proposition. This proposition evokes a situation at one extreme of an evaluative scale, typically the positive end by pretending to assert this opposition, the speaker implicates the contrary along with a correlative evaluative attitude. Another type is lexical sarcasm, the speaker undertakes an overall speech act whose illocutionary force is guided by the uttered sentence’s grammatical mood in the usual way, and whose content is a compositional function of the standard meanings of its constituent terms plus local, lexically-focused pragmatic processes. The notable feature, of course, is that the operative ‘local processes’ include inverting the meaning of at least one expression. Finally there is the illocutionary sarcasm in which the sarcasm’s scope encompasses not just some elements within the uttered sentence or some propositions associated with the utterance, but the entire illocutionary act that a sincere utterance of the relevant sentence would have undertaken. Often,

as it has been seen, this targets speech acts with an illocutionary force other than assertion (Camp, 32).

### **1.1.3. Sarcastic Doppelgangers**

Haiman also agrees with Camp when it comes to sarcasm being associated with other forms of speech like irony, so in his book he introduces the neighbours of sarcasm which are some forms of speech that he sees to share similarities with to a certain extent.

The first element is *the put-on* (fake an attitude or a feeling); being ironic or sarcastic with no explicit insincerity, it's also called deadpan act, and it differs from lying because the producer of the speech aims for his message to be understood by members of the audience who know the speaker's real character and opinions. The simplest example of that is a person who hates a show but praises it in a "sincere" manner, most of the audience would believe the statement except the ones who truly know the person (18 19).

Second is *irony*: there is a close connection between these two and sarcasm is often treated as the crudest and least interesting form of irony as they have distinctions; situations cannot be sarcastic but people can be both, irony can be unintentional but sarcasm always has intent. Sarcasm is explicit intentional irony used to commit a form of verbal aggression, but irony can not only be unintentional, but even subconscious at times. A given example of irony is a political play where the actors say something sincerely however the writer and some members of the audience find it ironical even though the characters are oblivious to it. The final difference between the two is that sarcasm is absolute while irony is relative (20 21).

The third neighbour is *lying*; a sarcastic person does not aim to deceive unlike a liar, the thing that tells sarcasm apart from falsehood is the presence of a sincere meta-message. Sarcasm

is close to self-referential paradoxical utterances but differs in the fact that the liar's statement presents the message and the meta-message, on the other hand, the sarcasm makes two separate statements simultaneously: the first and the second one declaring the previous one void (21).

The fourth one is *parody*, sarcasm is a type of humour and incongruity is the bed rock of humour, the humour in sarcasm lays in the sympathetic flattering message and the hostile intention behind it. Its humour is institutionalised in culturally specific and close genres like mockery, mimicry, parody, and satire. The parody however focuses on drawing extra attention to certain characteristics of the ridiculed? highlighting them with no real meta-message just to show how laughable it is (21 22).

The fifth one is Affectionate insults; many words or insults/slurs that are found offensive are commonly used among stigmatised members of groups in a jocular fashion. This phenomenon is similar to sarcasm: the speaker's feelings are the opposite of what they express, the ostensible message denies the literal one, and the intragroup use of this term is 'parodistic'. This draws attention to the semi institutionalisation of the word in Japanese translating to "pretending badness" which is a style adopted by lovers and intimates to avoid the cringe or embarrassment of showing affection. What differentiates this from sarcasm is that in sarcasm the ostensible message is negative that does not mean that sarcasm is not always negative (22 23).

Last but not least is 'the guiltive' which is a related to modality that has no previous adequate theoretical folk vocabulary existing, it was introduced by Haiman. Sarcasm is overly marked by cues of the meta-message like sneering, nasalization, monotone, and the familiar (written, gestured, or pause-marked) quotation marks. All of these signs ironically convey the framing of the meta-message "I don't mean this". The guiltive is totally different as for the speaker to attack the interlocutor; the speaker has to be perfectly sincere and cannot show any

sign of the meta-message “I do not mean that” which has to be implicit. This suggests a kinship between guiltives and put-ons or between guiltives and polite language known for speakers suppressing their emotions and still sounding sincere. The illocutionary force of guiltive utterances is clearly a kind of passive-aggressive one-upmanship whose unambiguous purpose is to make the hearer do some work and then feel like an ingrate or a heel. The meta-message in this case is usually to express the suffering and goodness of the speaker and make the counterpart feel guilty and bad (23 24).

#### **1.1.4. Sarcasm detection**

After knowing other elements that could be mixed up as sarcasm, an important aspect of sarcasm is its markers or the cues that indicate it helping the reader or the listener to understand that the speaker is not serious. Not many linguists addressed this issue. However, the few that did agreed on some points, and they went into different depths about elements or cues that they found to be of significance. The first ones are Caucci and Kreuz, they wrote an article speaking about paralinguistic and social cues of sarcasm. They first mention a few factors that play a major role, they start by tackling the context.

Context in this case is used to refer to the nonverbal aspects of a conversational situation, this includes the relation between interlocutors, their physical locations, and their traits. These aspects are found to help in the communicative comprehension of the utterance, as researchers suggest that verbal information is not enough to get the message across and need nonverbal information to get the whole meaning and understand it fully. There are two important contextual variables that could affect the perception of sarcasm, first is *Regional differences*, this variable can show the humour of the sarcastic utterance as the place in which the conversant can indicate

seriousness or playfulness (work, funeral, party and many others). The regional difference can also mean the country or state the person is in as some regions or cultures frown upon sarcasm or do not use it as often. Second comes the Common ground, the social ties linking the interlocutors are important, hence most people would prefer to be sarcastic towards someone that they have a close relationship with as that would result in understanding the punch line better than a stranger who would look confused as well as the uncomfortable atmosphere that would be created for both parties (Caucci and Kreuz, 2 3 4).

Right after context the two researchers mention the gender as a second factor affecting sarcasm, they talked briefly about it explaining that some researches have claimed that males tend to be more sarcastic than females despite that are other researches that show that there is no difference in the use of sarcasm between the two genders. Then they proceed to make assumptions about why it is used, and they deduce that women use sarcasm as a way of being indirect as that is a backstreet of being nice or polite, while men use it even more often to their status of having more power or control (Caucci and Kreuz, 4).

Passing to cues they elaborated on it, they say that the cues are “moves” by the speaker to increase the likelihood for having the sarcastic speech interpreted correctly. They address two important cues, making experiments to prove their point of views and present accurate data. One is concerning written sarcasm: lexical characteristics and specific pragmatic factors which explain how language forms are used effectively, according to those factors the most lexical items used in sarcasm are interjections (wow, gee, yay...etc.), adverbs (absolutely, totally, definitely...etc.), and exclamation marks (Caucci and Kreuz, 8).

After conducting experiments where literal sentences had some or all of these lexical characteristics, the subjects perceived those statements as sarcastic, and when the lexical

characteristics were absent the likelihood of the statement being sarcastic went down as well. This resulted in the conclusion that that the use of these items can mislead to a sarcastic interpretation of the statement presented in context and intended as literal by the author (Caucci and Kreuz, 9 10).

In regard to paralinguistic cues that are used in spoken or face to face sarcasm they are important as their interpretation can show a lot about the degree of sincerity especially facial expressions. The cues that were analysed exactly are: slow nods, left/right turns, brows up, looking away, looking at the partner, smiling, lip tightening, and laughs. The results showed two main results the first is that sarcasm markers were more used when it was between friends and less between strangers as an unfamiliar figure can have an inhibitory effect on facial expressions. Thereby, people would avoid being sarcastic around strangers to avoid stereotypes, over sharing information, and potential conflicts. The results also showed that people tend to smile way more in sarcastic speech which should not be surprising if this sarcasm is viewed from a humorous perspective (Caucci and Kreuz, 18 19).

Haiman is the second linguist who chose to mention cues of sarcasm, he has dedicated a whole chapter to it in his book entitled *The Meta-Massage "I Don't Mean This"* in which he spoke about some important point or cues in sarcasm detection. He gave all this cues in hopes of making sarcasm 'grammaticalised' and making it into a mood just like the subjunctive. He has spoken about most cues in lengths and in detail, he has even given elaborated examples. All that work is done as an argument supporting his idea of "grammaticalization" (28).

In the first place come (the order does not signify the importance) *sneering and laughter* as a way for the infidelity of the speaker's face to comply with what they said as it shows disgust and distaste. Darwin pointed out that this gesture is universal, and it includes both

the nose and the mouth because when something tastes bad the human will instinctively try to remove it from where they can taste it, and where they can smell it (qtd in. Talk is Cheap). This is the visual sign, while the vocal one is embodied phonologically in heavy overlay of nasality, diphthongisation, and lengthening of stressed vowels or simply the over expiration of air through the mouth. Both the visual and vocal patterns are universal and easily detected even by non-language speaker (Heiman, 30).

Second is *inverse pitch obtrusion*, in brief it is simply highlighting that in case of sarcasm the person is most likely to invert the pitch of the sentence, so if the pitch is supposed to be high and going low it becomes low going high and vice versa. This phenomenon typically occurs in two contexts: when there is a scornful resonance marked by exaggerated amplitude, or when other signs of emphasis are more likely to be taken at face value. Such a method makes sarcasm even more indirect as a variety of inappropriate intonations can form a more indirect signal to indicate the insincerity of the speaker's emotions (Heiman, 31 32).

Next cue is the *international misfits*, a counter example of the Dessausurian belief that the speaker can say one thing at the time (qtd in. Talk is Cheap) as sarcasm is based on a clash between the flattering message, and the critical tune that can be presented in variety of formal notations. Phonologically, the sarcastic detachment (the lexico-syntactic content of the "stage message" and the intonation of the "real world meta-message") is often characterised as an emotively inappropriate intonation to diminish the sincerity of the literal message. As the paralinguistic cue, it resolves any conflict in this matter as intonation is more sincere. The most frequently faced misfits are many (Heiman, 32 33).

First is *exaggeration* that is not necessarily tied to intonation in the case of sarcasm. It is rather a part of mimicry, mockery, and parody, the exaggerated aspect of intonation is the

amplitude variation of the pitch that would only be appropriate if the conveyed message was to be sincere. This exaggeration and prolongation is not only found in English but also in other languages like Japanese and German (Heiman, 33 34 35).

Second is *flattening*, the speaker takes a phrase or a sentence that is supposed to be exciting and says it in a flat lifeless tone to express carelessness and derisiveness, this is also universal and detectable across languages (Heiman, 35). Any person can detect when a conversational partner uses a flat tone to say what is supposed to be exciting like saying "wow I love that" in the most monotonic voice is obviously sarcastic.

Third is the *singsong melody*, the function of this is mostly to signal "an element of predictability or stereotype in the message", it can also signal clichés and is often accompanied by basic normal facial expressions to signal insincerity. This is not as popular as it is in other languages (Heiman 35). The simplest example of this is a kid hitting their sibling and when the mom forces them to apologise they say "soo-ryy" in a sing song melody.

Last is the '*falsetto*' (Heiman have come up with this name) it indicates falseness, the false femininity, delicacy, and attitude used mostly to mock females and gays. It is joined by a heavy nasalisation (38). This can be seen as it used often even in media to indicate the mocking tone as one uses a high pitched voice and over pronounces the words to seem 'girly'.

The next point is the segmental markers of sarcastive modality; the cues for detecting sarcasm do not have to necessarily be of another type other than the message's sign, in some cases the cue is of the same nature so the incongruity between what is literal and what is implied is linear. There are a few examples supporting that:

First is hyper formality, in sarcasm the speaker is in full control of his/her emotions, yet at the same time is distanced from those emotions and does not actually mean them. Control can

be embodied in form politeness and etiquettes that are in opposition with spontaneity that symbolises sincerity making control a sign of artifice. This control can be executed in two ways by using high register or by using the language itself (Heiman, 41).

The formal register manifests control by applying it on grammatical, lexical, and phonological aspects of the high register, this explains the frequent use of hyper formality to test the speaker's commitment to their words and the sincerity of the speech.

*The phonological* control of formal speech is marked by self-conscious and language-conscious subjects that are able to chew each syllable carefully and present the finished word on the tip of the tongue, careful not to mutilate a vowel. Formal registers are distinguished by the lack of optional assimilation, neutralisation processes and the retention of underlying syllable structure where speakers work hard to pronounce clearly, unlike an informal speech that requires a minimal effort. This exaggeration of pronunciation indicates high register and is often regarded as a sign of mockery (Heiman, 42).

*The grammatical* control is embodied in orthographic honorifics. Orthography is used as a sign of respect in English language as the writer will capitalise proper names, religious figures, and personified virtues. In a sarcastic case the writer will capitalise specific words ironically faking an exaggerated courtesy and an insolent respect. As a result the high register is just a means to mock honorifics (Heiman, 42 43).

Finally the lexical control comes as formal use of syntax and diction. Heiman have not explained this with words, he have preferred to illustrate it instead. The examples he have used have all included the use of "fancy" and "formal" words in an ordinary context to accomplish the simple goal of seeming hyper formal and overly exaggerated to be able to create the contrast between the literal message and the meta-meaning conveying derisiveness (Heiman, 43).

Language can be a means to execute control; in language we have expression and description, if something happens to a person, they have the choice to express how it feels in a manner that is obvious and easy to understand universally (ouch and aaaaah for instance) or describe how it feels using a coded message only deciphered by someone who has prior knowledge of the arbitrary codes (that hurts). It can also be seen as the difference between a symptom and a sign: the first is a universal, immediate, and involuntary reaction (laugh, cry, sob...etc.), while the latter is a controlled emotion submitted to the arbitrariness and the formality of social conventions. Voltaire have said that “language was given to us in order to conceal our thoughts”, in that sense language is a practiced type of control of artifice having this much control over codes and words in a sign of insincerity. Therefore sarcasm, as a sincere reaction would be encoded as a laugh at a joke, a cry at a tragedy, or a clap at an admiration. A description of the would-be stimulus like saying “wow, that’s very funny” to an offensive joke is sarcasm manifested in language control.(Heiman, 44 45).

## **1.2. Identifying Offensiveness**

In the recent years offensiveness became a topic of controversy in modern society; some sees it as social justice for the minorities, while others see it as a part of a victim mentality trend. Both views can be right as the context is the lone judge of such problems.

### **1.2.1. What is Offensiveness**

The word offense is defined by the Oxford dictionary as a word derived from the Latin origins “*offensa*”,it can be translated to mean transgression, misdeed, injury, wrong, or affront. The four same usages of the word applied in the fifteenth century are still used currently: the assault or assail, the cause or experience of a negative emotion, the oral or emotional

transgression, or the source of these negative statements. The previous definitions of “offense” explain its diversity and how it can be used depending on different contexts and variables making it an interesting topic for many fields such as philosophy, law, and linguistics even by media, film, and audience studies. However they give an uncomplete explanation and understanding of it due to its cultural entanglement and variation from a social context to another of such “touchy” subjects ( Greafer, 05).

Feinberg defines offence legally as triggering annoyance, disgust, disappointment, or other emotions like fear and anxiety which are seen as causing minor harms and aches with no intention of being harmful in the first place. The word ‘offence’ has a general sense that includes disliked mental states like embarrassment and anxiety as well as a normative sense that is only caused by the wrongful conduct to others like right-violation. Since only the second sense is intended and can be punished, it means that no matter how a person gets offended, it does not justify any interference with personal liberties to just prevent the disliked feelings (02).

Offense" in the sense of the offense principle specifies an objective condition—the unpleasant mental state must be caused by conduct that really is wrongful—"offense" in the strict sense of ordinary language specifies a subjective condition (ibid).

The definition and the quotation both suggest that even though offense can cause unwanted or unpleasant feelings, the degree of those feelings and the degree of harm caused and affected by many variables play a major role in the interpretation and so does the individual’s background especially the cultural one. This includes the intention of the speaker and the interpretation of the audience subjectivity and objectivity and applies to both cases of causing or receiving offense.

The structure of offense is simplified by Graefer in the importance of having two main components: “the giving” and “the taking” of offense knowing that the two components of this equation are not strictly symmetrical. Offense can be taken while it was not intended or meant; in a Pepsi commercial a few years back Kendall Jenner gave a police officer the soda can as a peace offering during a Black Lives Matter protest. However this commercial was viewed as offensive due to many reasons one of which is her being white and privileged, and also seeing how the act of giving a soda can as a peace offering underestimates the cause of such a political problem. This has made her apologize for something she did not mean or have any intention off because her act caused offensiveness to the black community and portrayed her as a racist.

This example shows how offense can be taken where it was not intended. On the other hand there are cases where offense is intended for none to be taken, such cases are rare to be documented but a close alternative is when offense was taken by a proxy (someone to whom the offense was not directed, but chooses to speak up against it). An example of that is the rapper G-Eazy who took offense after the clothing brand H&M showed a black child model in a clothing item that said “the coolest monkey in the jungle” making the white rapper end his partnership with the brand as well as speak upon the subject on social media platforms. These two examples show the complexity and unpredictability of giving and taking offensiveness and the consequences resulting from it (05 06).

### **1.2.2. Triggers of Offensiveness**

After diving into the meaning of offensiveness, it is only fair to discuss the major things that could cause such discomfort and unease to the point of inflecting a degree of pain upon the targeted audience even if it is unintentional such as micro-aggressions, dark humor, and breaking

taboos. The degree of how offensive these elements can be may differ depending on the culture in question but a general overview will give a clear picture that can be slightly modified:

The brief and common-place daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicates hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, and sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group (Schwartz qtd .in *The Rive of Victimhood Culture*).

Simply put microaggressions are small gestures that could be intended or unintended committed against a minority or a specific ethnic, racial, or religious group that are found to be offensive or inappropriate or even derogatory. they can be as simple as asking a person of color to change their seat on a plane or a professor changing the capital letter of a word that the student chose to capitalise for cultural reasons (name of traditional clothing, traditional dish, name of a region, and others.). Such examples do not only show the offensiveness in such acts and definitely do not accuse the speaker of having an ill will but aim to highlight the invisibility of such acts regardless of the strong impact they leave on the receiver who would feel degraded, discriminated, and degraded based on variables like race, religion, or sexuality.

However, this “principle” is criticised for many reasons (Campbell et al, 06 07). First the critic does not wish to be accused of racism or such similar naming due to a spontaneous act with no bad intention, or just because the receiver decided to take it to heart and have got offended. Secondly, psychologists regard it as a personal need to feel special or privileged rather than feeling judged. The critics emphasise that such an incident as micro aggression cannot be enough to determine the individual’s personality traits or political views (sexism, racism, or other). Therefore some acts that can be seen as microaggressions are just acts that are practiced with other people of other backgrounds, and the person in question can be overly sensitive. An

important point in this aspect is that the audience should not put more importance to what they have understood or have chosen to understand over what the speaker intended, as Furedi points out: “neither the content of the words nor the intention behind them is important”, and he urges readers to ignore such complaints: “We all should be free to decide the meanings of our words” (qtd.in *The Rise of Victimhood Culture*). In conclusion micro-aggressions can be a source of offensiveness? but that does not mean it is always to be taken into account as there are two sides to every story, and that subjectivity, emotions, and narcissism can cloud one’s judgments.

Second is dark or ‘black’ humor a term associated and consistently influenced by the literary phenomenon in the 1960’s. There are many definitions of this concept to narrow to a specific one that would explain the exact meaning of its usage in common daily jargon. It is mostly a form of sick humor about death, due to this reason, and since the term “black humor” is used to describe African-American comedy such an offensive type of humor was labeled as “dark humor”. A simple, plain definition of such humor would be:

With the expression dark humor we refer here to the more or less explicit and sacrilegious representation of humor that has as its aim that of making fun of situations usually regarded as tragic, such as death, sickness, disability, and extreme violence, or of the people involved or subject to them (Bucaria, 218 219).

Such humor addresses sensitive topic like death, sickness, and even disabilities. It is not universal and can be specifically prevalent in cultures due to established inclinations which is the case of the Anglo-American culture as it is safe to say that such humor has become a mainstream trend in their movies, series, or media in general (ibid 216). When a culture is okay with and accepts such humor, it is only natural to include it in their daily life including literature, media, and other forms of communication that can be universal. However, such insensitiveness towards

certain topics can be offensive to other cultures that tend tip toe around sensible topics like “Italy, in which contemporary mainstream comedy privileges feel-good/family-oriented entertainment or, alternatively, the erotic comedy genre, and in which the very mention of death might still trigger superstitious reactions.”(ibid) .Therefore, it is fair to say that dark humor is not accidentally or unintentionally offensive; it is as a matter of fact the exact opposite as it is based on offense. So while some argue that there should be a line to avoid offense at all costs, others defend for “the right to offend” as an essential part of humor (Graefer and Das 01).

Finally, breaking taboos, the Oxford English dictionary defines a taboo to be a social or religious custom prohibiting or forbidding a specific practice or the association with a person, place, or thing. In other words taboos are rules that govern the society and protect its members to a certain extent making sure all of them conform to it and never rebel against it. D’Arcy and Arden speak in their article about taboos and explain them as cultural strings that hold individuals down:

Our culture conditions us from birth to accept taboos, not in accordance with common sense, but in order to preserve authority for the military/industrial complex which rules us all. The complex itself is bound up with taboos, to protect itself against any questioning of its logic or its proclaimed purpose "to benefit the human race". Class, race and gender divisions are all used to prop it up (05).

Regardless of how people view taboos they still represent the glue that holds the society together as respecting them is admirable among society members and ignoring or breaking them is enough for the individual to classify the suspect as an outcast. Not due to the deep commitment and support of the taboos but rather to protect the sense of unity and security the community shares in having such spoken and unspoken rules of behaving in a culture. Consequently, the

rebel who decides to break such taboos causes offensiveness to the people surrounding him as they are left in a mental state of embarrassment, anxiety, and discomfort.

Feinberg gave examples in which individuals cause offense in a public setting as he gave an example of a couple being nude and engaging in an erotic act whilst in a bus, and every other passenger is watching in embarrassment, discomfort, and even shame. Feinberg explains this act that is offensive to other passengers is actually a personal choice or a “harmless pleasure”. However, passengers feel offended and shameful towards such an act because of the strict sexual taboos of the culture and the reactions and outrage caused by breaking those taboos (12 17).

Offensiveness can be caused in any context, by anyone, and towards anyone; detecting the cause of why something has been said or done is offensive can be confusing because the main bond that ties all the causes is the cultural relation of the cause making it hard to detect. Whether offensiveness is intended or non-intended, meant to be humorous or harmful, explicit or implicit, both sides of the stories need to be analysed as well as the context before a final judgment is passed.

### **1.2.3. Consequences of Offensiveness**

The aftermath of doing or saying something offensive can vary according to how grave it is in the first place, according to where it was committed, and maybe the intentions as well.

There are many elements that play a role in how the offender is perceived or reacted to.

First is the seriousness of the offence, offences can vary from simple gesture like blowing your nose in public and chewing with your mouth open at the dinner table to serious ones like verbally attacking someone for their sexuality and calling them a homophobic slur. With the degree of seriousness comes a degree of reaction that is equal. The level of offensiveness, how much harm

was done, or the uncomfortableness caused can only be measured by the person it was directed at; therefore, only the victim can decide the punishment of the assailant, and whether they wish to take legal actions against them. However the principle of offensiveness should be taken into account considering that offense can be taken from intentional and unintentional acts, gestures, and even concepts, and it can be taken in different contexts as well (social, religious, and others). Feinberg explains that in some cases offense is taken in a context where the “victim” has no right to be offended. An interracial couple would walk holding hands through the mall and this would earn them nasty glances, snickers, and maybe some remarks if it happened in the deep American south causing the locals to be morally repelled and offended by an innocent activity. Such a groundless “offense” should be stopped and the offence principle should be pursued as such an act is seen as a hate crime and is no longer merely unpleasant or rude. However, legislation cannot stop or prevent all offensive acts as due for an act to be offensive being a two way street. There are two sides to each story, hearing only one side would not be enough to judge who is wrong or right as personal interests and false accusation can be easily thrown into the equation forcing the offense principle to have a scale to be able to determine the level, seriousness, and legitimacy of a complaint based on being offended (25 26).

The first scale to measure offensiveness according to the criminal law is the intensity and the durability of the offense as well as the level of uncomfortableness or disgust. In cases where it is only felt by individuals with higher abnormal susceptibility to be offended, then it would not be seen as serious. As an example, mothers’ breastfeeding in public to which not all would object, but a few might take action against it with the principle of personal liberty.

The second element to be taken into consideration is the easiness in which the person can avoid the offensive situation or display as a person cannot go to a pro-choice protest and

complain about the offensiveness of trying to legalise abortions. Lastly, whether the witness just assumed offense out of pleasure or mere curiosity can be mentioned. An example of that is Caucasians assumed offense from the slogan “Black lives matter” that was created against police brutality against African-Americans. Such factors can weight for or against the allegations of offensiveness as they show the person’s self-importance, consideration of alternatives, and the hidden motives making it possible to embody and scale of justice and use it properly to reveal the real assailant and the real victim (Feinberg, 26).

Although these factors and measures of seriousness are taken from an American based law documentation, and its laws or principles are only applicable on American soils, the concept of offence and its seriousness is universal and such measures can be used to see other culture’s input on offence, what is taken for a culture to consider something offensive and according to such scales and elements what does that show about the culture’s view on self-importance and entitlement? Is it normal or is it frowned upon, or even appreciated? Does the culture prefer taking alternatives and avoiding chaos or is it keen on starting it based on minor emotions of uncomfortableness and disgust? Finally, is the culture neutral and just or is it filled with hypocrisy and victim mentality where it tries to take advantage of social situation for alternative motives.

Campbell and Manning have introduced the concept of ‘modern offensiveness’, they explain such a phenomenon of fake offensiveness or as they named it “competitive victimhood”. Cultures compete as a defence mechanism, in case of disagreement or conflict where a person offends the other and the assailant refuses to deal with the consequences, they are more likely to opt for competitiveness to become the victim and escape the blame. The simplest example of that is that men who are against the idea of radical feminism claim that they are facing “reversed

sexism”. This victim mentality has taken over individuals to the point of being offended by the simplest things? and this phenomenon has grown and spread to the point of affecting cultures as a whole as a simple act can affect a whole culture, race, religion, and even ethnicity. This has made privilege shamed and marginality celebrated and glorified as a result of such a culture based on the rise of victimhood (161 162).

In conclusion offensiveness has been misguided; from an aggression or an attack to a cry for attention and self-importance. It has become a competition bared of the original sense where the victim was sympathised with, and the offender was held accountable for degrading hateful crimes, and where it was a way to make society safe and the individuals united. All to make it into a trend to seem more oppressed and marginalised ignoring the true victims.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter is an attempt to explain the two concepts of sarcasm and offensiveness, show the important aspects of each one and how they are flexible depending on the approach taken to study them. It also hinted to the possibility of the concepts being related to a specific culture and how that relation can change almost everything from the definition, to the use, and to the interpretation, explaining the importance of context and its elements like the time in question, the physical space of the use, and the interlocutors.

***Chapter Two:***

***Situating Sarcasm within the British Culture:***

***Englishness and the Adoption of Sarcasm as a Mechanism to Transcend the  
Absurdities of Life***

## **Introduction**

This chapter aims to relate all the concepts presented in the first chapter to a specific culture; the English one specifically. The English culture and people as well are known for being cold, cynical, and thick skinned. That is due to the kind of humour they use and their unlikelihood to get offended. This tendency and features are not just some stereotypes showed in movies and proven by an English celebrity or two, but they are embedded in their culture and unwritten rules of operating in the society. This includes the bizarre use of sarcasm in contexts that other cultures would not really approve of or accept and the unusual scale of offensiveness that does not match universal scales. This chapter will also deal with the reactions to such concepts, individual, and collective as well as the explanation or at least the most reasonable justification to such reactions in different societies to different situations, and the elements that could play a key role in each reaction and change it completely. Finally the chapter will dive deeper into the reactions by exemplifying them with the simplest yet the most reasonable example of a novel and a movie. The presence of offensive humor in both, the difference in the level of each concept, and the reaction to each concept in the light of novel to movie adaptation; explaining why the same story was changed and reacted to differently and based on what elements exactly. The aim of this chapter is not only to make the concepts of sarcasm and offensiveness clear but also to put them in a specific context to show how different a context can make the definition change as well as the relation governing them. It also designed to show the reactions to these concepts from a general and specific point of view, highlighting the power of media and universal views as well as the individual one.

## 2.1. English Sarcasm

The fact that sarcasm has been around for a long time does not mean it is necessarily used by everyone or by every culture. Haiman says that sarcasm “correlates with sophistication”(12) and that it is far from being universal, according to him if language was to define humanity then irony and sarcasm would be the identification of the higher and more decadent cultures and personalities, or at least a geographically and temporally restricted use of language to perform verbal aggression (12 13).

Most cultures avoid sarcasm as it is seen to be aggressive, critical, and even obnoxious at times. However, England has a different say in that as sarcasm is an integral part of their daily conversation. Fox explains the exact reasons and causes behind this phenomenon in her book. As she explains the rules of English humour and what is important to have it, how it works, and what makes it English.

The first rule that is highlighted and insisted upon is the rule of not being earnest. Knowing the meaning of this word alone and being able to distinguish it from other similar words like serious or solemn is a big step toward Englishness and having a correct behavioural grammar. Once the person knows the correct meaning of the word and can separate it from other “equivalents”, they can simply understand and apply the rule of not being earnest as the rule is simply about “Seriousness is acceptable; solemnity is prohibited. Sincerity is allowed; earnestness is strictly forbidden. Pomposity and self-importance are outlawed. Serious matters can be spoken of seriously, but one must never take *oneself* too seriously.” She explains that in the English culture, they do not appreciate self-praising and the gushing emotions that other cultures exercise so openly, like the Americans and their politicians that the English view as ironic if not cringy (Watching the English).

Earnestness makes the English wince with uncomfortableness whether it is when they see it in politics or in award shows, all those emotional speeches and tears cause them to be grossed out and the greatest example of that is that when a English person gets an award they are most likely to say something sarcastic and self-deprecating while looking awkward and embarrassed, and if they were to break this unspoken rule of Englishness they would have earned themselves a public humiliation and mockery, like what happened to Kate Winslet after she gave an emotional speech and the whole British media took it upon themselves to remind her how shameless she was. Hence any display of emotions is a violation of the rule. In a conducted survey the English were asked if the expression of emotions is healthy and while most said yes only a minority admitted to doing it (ibid).

Another example of this rule and of how the English nation refuses to show emotions and would rather replace them with sarcasm and irony is when a terrorist attack happened in 7/7 the mini version of the American 9/11: while the rest of the world tried to sympathise with London they were busy making sarcastic replies, even when the bombing happened the writer was on the scene and a few seconds after the bombing a passenger said “I didn’t realise the French were such sore losers!”. At the time the host of the Olympics was declared England, even though France was the most expected to win. Another survivor commented through the smoke of the bombing “at least we got the Olympics!” She then proceeded to explain how humour is supposed to be tragedy plus time, but the measurement of time in England is a matter of seconds. These examples show the importance of not being earnest. After explaining other rules of humour, she passes to the rules of irony (ibid).

Irony is a main component of the English humour and is used frequently to the point where foreigners can be unable to distinguish what is serious and what is not. An interesting

aspect of their culture is that irony is in their blood, most of the time they say what they do not mean but not always, as a result if a person asks a simple question like “how are the kids?” an answer like “they are fine” is as expected as “oh well, they are tedious, calm, well behaved, and do not cause any migraines”. It is a fifty-fifty chance to get a serious or a sarcastic answer and they are prepared for both equally.

That being said, the first rule for English irony that is directly related to sarcasm is Self-deprecation; it is based on genuine modesty, the speaker says the opposite of what they mean, or what they intend people to understand. The English have strict unspoken rules about modesty as any form of basting is frowned upon and seen as very negative so individuals tend to avoid that by self-deprecation, criticising themselves in a humorous way. An example of that is the writer’s husband talking about his job (brain surgery) as if it is something simple and just over estimated as he describes it as “it is a bit hit or miss really”, he also said he chose to be a surgeon because after he studied politics, economy, and philosophy at Oxford he found it “rather beyond him” so he went for something “less difficult”.

Among each other the English find no problems understanding this pattern and using it, they get duly impressed by each other’s achievements and reluctance to trumpet them. Yet this game causes a problem when it is played in front of foreigners who do not understand the rules of the culture so they fail to appreciate it and take it literally so they just accept the “low estimate of those achievement” and are unimpressed which leaves the English in a state of confusion cause they are waiting for praise and the other person to be impressed of their achievements, humour, and modesty. Another rule of ironical Englishness is the understatement; the English tend to underestimate almost everything, it is a “cousin” of the not being earnest rule; in order to not show emotions or earnestness, they use understatements to seem dry and unbothered which

makes them describe a chronic painful illness as “a bit of a nuisance”. Fox gave the example of her father as after a friend told him about a horrible restaurant with bad food and rude staff the response was simply “so you wouldn’t recommend it?” Such reactions make the non-English infuriated and bewildered at such an attitude. It makes them wonder if it is supposed to be funny and if it is why is no one laughing.

The English defend themselves by saying that it is humorous but not in a manner that would be rewarded with loud, stomach clenching laughs but just enough to make them smirk amusingly knowing that is mostly done to avoid the taboo of earnestness, also in pride that it is hard to be understood it or replicated (Watching the English).

These rules of English humour are closely related to sarcasm due to the fact that the speaker says an utterance they do not mean, and they have a meta-message they wish to deliver. However, in this type of sarcasm is not exactly aiming to ridicule the other person, but it is rather meant to either for the speaker to criticise themselves, the situation as a whole, or to just hide the embarrassment and avoid the display of emotions.

Fox herself elaborated on the topic and explained in the end of her book why the English “joke” so often, she explained that their culture is condemned to “social dis-ease”, a kind of awkwardness and uncomfortableness in social situations making them feel disabled and not function well and as a reflex to that they developed humour as an antidote but as a result the English culture become oblivious to the concept of having specific time or place to joke as it is always a part of the conversation , a default mode for them, all to avoid falling in the trap of earnestness:

Our humour is cynical, dark, hostile, or even downright cruel. English humour is also often passive-aggressive – a cowardly, calculating, manipulative form of violence. It is

said that the English have satire instead of violent revolutions and uprisings, which makes us sound fairly harmless, until you see just how vicious our satire can be (Watching the English).

Fox admits that their humour can be rather dark and offensive even though most of the times they use it to show affection amongst themselves, it can take a left turn and turn the tables.

## **2.2. English Offensiveness**

Being humorous or sarcastic about sensitive topics in general and religion in specific is a European or Western feature that other cultures do not necessarily embrace due to religious reasons unlike Europe who has declared their war against religious ruling since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. As they declared the rebellion towards the rule of the church and slowly started drifting away from it, the early use of sarcasm against Christianity was during a church play called “The Fall of Angels”, where it was used to criticize another Christian preaching as the commitment to religion fell and crumbled with time, the sarcasm grew and become humorous even which is something that other cultures did not experience while Muslims are slightly more engaged in their religion and still see sarcasm or humor regarding religion very offensive. Some westerns do not understand and accept this concept as they view it as primitive and extremists and most importantly, humorless as they “can’t take a joke”:

[N]ot having a sense of humour is associated with (strict) religiosity. There is a long tradition of animosity between fundamentalist religion and frivolous pastimes: Puritans closed down theatres, Calvinists forbade dancing, the Taliban banned music. In secular Europe, Muslims stand out for their overt religiosity and especially since 9/11, Islam is often conflated with fundamentalism. Hence, the Muslim lack of humour has come to be

seen as a symptom of a more general opposition to fun associated with (fundamentalist) religion. [...] [H]aving a sense of humour is associated with modern personhood and [...] central to western notions of personhood since the 19th century. It is now a desirable social attribute for everyone from potential spouses to political leaders. [...] In today's western societies, not having a sense of humour is not a trivial reproach, but a fundamental personal shortcoming." (Kuipers qtd in. "Towards a contextual approach: Audiences, television and offensive humor.

In an article about translating jokes from a language to another Low, Peter Alan expressed a recurring problem in translating a specific type of jokes or humor; the culturally specific ones exactly not only because some cultural elements are not universal and there would not be an equivalent to them to enable the translator to get the meaning across:

A particular cultural issue that arises with some humour is obscenity. Notions of indecent behaviour and taboo words differ greatly from place to place, because they are culturally constructed. For the same reason, much humour plays with these notions, enjoying the risqué world of vulgarity, and exploiting the argots best understood by speakers of specific times and places. With the colloquial Irish English of Roddy Doyle, for example, it may be difficult to pin down the primary meaning, or to judge the level of offensiveness or even to understand all the jokes (68).

Here, while Peter Alan tries to explain how translating jokes works highlights, an important issue which is the culturally specific jokes or humour which can be offensive to other cultures, and as he mentions in the quote the English humour is a perfect example as most of their humour is based off of sarcasm and dark humour due to their unspoken rule of not being

earnest and refusing to face emotions and claim self-importance as it was mentioned in the first chapter (qtd. in *Watching the English*).

The English society is known for being cynical, dry, and critical in their humour which is the essence of dark offensive humour. In her book about Englishness, Fox gives many examples, as the one mentioned in the first chapter where Londonians made jokes about a terrorist attack milliseconds after it happened, among those where people who were unaffected as well as victims and survivors in the scene. Even though such a case can be criticised as a psychological defence mechanism to cope with the traumatic event, there are other examples showing they are prone to offensiveness and how hard it is to get under their skin.

Fox gave a simple example of a two parents talking. The first mother complemented the academic achievements of her friend's son but as a reply to the complement the mother sneered and started criticising her son; saying he will not go far, mentioning all his flaws and as a response. The first mom starts talking the same thing about her son making the conversation that started by complementing a praising the kids turn into a rant about how awful the kids are. The two mothers, however, had no worry or anxieties indicating the fear of having their sons fail but rather engaged in such criticism as form of British modesty which can be understood by an individual who has enough familiarity with the culture, a stranger or a foreigner on the other hand would find such an act offensive and degrading.

Another slightly more offensive act that the English tend to indulge in is not respecting deaths and funerals of public figures, especially if detested, as other cultures would as the English are eager to crack jokes soon after, following the death of the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher many were unfazed and started, making it a new topic for the dark humor they enjoy, coming up with puns like "rust in peace", handing out free milk to people, and suggesting that

her funeral is held privately. Regardless of the public opinion of the people about her, other cultures would find such an act repulsive and offensive as death is a sensitive topic and so is authority (*Watching the English*).

The English reaction towards universally ‘offensive’ and ‘sensitive’ topics shows that the culture has a fairly thick skin and do not tend to get offended easily as they are more likely to deliver offense than receive it. In spite of the unravel of such facts, the culture might seem to have no concept of offensiveness which is a wrong misconception as the English can also be offended, easily even but it mostly occurs as a consequence to verbal and non-verbal acts that are quiet common and seen as “normal” in other cultures such as money; a topic that is normally and openly discussed in other cultures across the world, that the English see as a taboo that should not be broken (*Watching the English*).

The English have a problem with any interference with “personal, private matters”, and it goes from talking to strangers and invading their space to asking a friend about their marital status, as any sign of being nosey will be regarded as an offence and will be faced with discomfort and to the respect this taboo the English will go as far as ignoring strangers as a form of “politeness”. Another behaviour that is seen as offensive is self-importance and earnestness as it is largely frowned upon, it is one the biggest taboos of Englishness and can be detected and criticised immediately by any native, and the rebel will face consequences such as being publicly criticised for it.

Another ambivalent aspect of Englishness and taboos is that even if they find something offensive they would not address it as a result of the taboo of privacy invasion; they rather replace it with passive disapproval, Fox used herself to exemplify this by conducting a mini

social experiment where she tried to break the smoking in public transportation taboo, she did not use an actual cigarette but rather an electronic one just to stir up reactions:

There are the usual raised eyebrows, frowns, pursed lips, tuts and mutters – and slightly more than the usual number of disapproving coughs, which I suppose is appropriate. But in all the years that I have been using these e-cigarettes on public transport and in restaurants, pubs and other public places where smoking is banned, only one English person has ever actually ‘confronted’ me about it. This was an elderly lady on a train, who approached me very hesitantly, and said, ‘I’m sorry, dear, but, um, you know smoking really isn’t allowed here?’ I explained, very politely, about electronic cigarettes; she apologised for the intrusion... In other countries, by contrast, people regularly come up to me and tell me that smoking is forbidden, that I must put out my cigarette, etc. Some do so politely, others more forcefully (Fox).

During her mini-social experiment, Fox compared breaking taboo in England as in other countries, and even though the English disapproved her rebellion, they were more “polite” about it than other cultures as they used non-verbal gestures to express their offensiveness choosing to be passive unlike other culture who preferred being vocal. This concludes that the English view of offensiveness is very different from other cultures as not only are they more likely to be offended by simple gestures than by actual controversial topics, but also they would rather be passive and avoid commotion.

As seen before the scales of offense or expressing offense are based on self-importance, considering alternative, and ulterior motives and the English despise the attention they would not self-victimise as self-importance and self-entitlement are seen as major taboos, also the English

cherish privacy and would not likely go out of their way to point out something even if they disapprove of making them choose the alternative almost each time and preferring to stay passive. Last but not least, the idea of having an ulterior motive and choosing to assume offence to benefit from, it is unlikely by a culture that refuses to show emotions even in disasters and rather make jokes about it.

The clash between the measures of offensiveness that are almost universal and the English ones are clear as the measures themselves are seen as taboos and offensive making it evident to why the English sense of offensiveness is deviant from the universal sense and showing that the victimhood culture popular around the world has not yet reached the crown holders who would get offended over bragging and would find death jokes funny and light hearted.

### **2.3. Collective vs. Individual Reactions to Offence**

#### **2.3.1. The Determining Elements of the Expected Reaction**

In physics, it is believed that every action has a reaction mirroring it. This is usually means physical and concrete actions, but it also applies to almost every other action that is done publicly, and even private ones if they were to be mentioned. Therefore, it is natural to assume the occurrence of a reaction when saying or doing something that could be seen as controversial (could stir disagreement). The reactions are, however, divided into two types; the collective ones produced from societies, cultures, and big crowds in general, and the individual ones that are formed by a separate, independent entity not a part of a group: "Conflict occurs whenever anyone has a grievance against someone else. It exists whenever someone treats someone else's conduct as wrong—rude, immoral, evil, inappropriate, insane, criminal, negligent, or otherwise

objectionable. Conflict in this sense occurs all the time” (Black.1998 qtd.in Rise of the Victimhood Culture).

However, there are elements that decide and govern the reaction to such conflicts to be either positive or negative, as well as the intensity of the reactions, black called those reactions “Social Control”; reactions that can range from rolling eyes or scoffing to pressing charges or taking matters into hand. Conflict and social control are various as it depends on the culture or society and their approach to the topic in question and most importantly the person or persons involved, the conflict and the reactions might even differ in the social classes, subcultures, and the established relationships of one society.

Henry et al discuss that a big amount of attention is directed to investigate the qualities and traits of the group receiving the offence, mostly to see if the insult directed is about and ascribed or an acquired feature. Ascribed features are natural, born with and just cannot be changed like ethnicity, religion, disability, or sexuality; insulting a person because of such features can be seen as very offensive and hurtful, and will naturally receive more back lash. While an acquired feature will be something that is chosen or that can be changed like obesity, study major, political views, or career choice. Consequently, making fun about such matters is not as offensive or hurtful. Therefore, the level of offence and the reaction resulting from it depends on the thing that was criticised exactly as calling someone fat is not as serious as making fun of a kid with Down syndrome. (186)

I really do not like jokes about disabled people ... to be honest. Because it is not their fault. They are born this way, at least some of them. I always put myself in their shoes; I

wouldn't like to be ridiculed. It's because of this empathy that I would say 'no', jokes about disabled people that is an absolute no-go ... (Greafer and Das, 5)

Even though having a joke come from someone who relates to the jokes or is a target themselves makes it less guilty to laugh at and less offensive to receive, it does not make all the jokes acceptable as there is a board line to not cross. The example of that is the black singer 'Doja Cat' who was recently shamed and called racist for having old social media account resurface showing her saying racist jokes that were deemed by the public as 'too far.

Another trait to be considered by Henry et al about the target group is the social group, for instance if a man talks down to a woman and offends her, it is more likely to have a bigger impact as women are seen of lower social status than man. This also applies to minorities that are most likely to be of a lower status is a non-native country making the offence against them seem greater and graver. An even worse result of such an act towards minorities and lower social classes is the impression left on the audience witnessing such an aggression, as the audience are most likely to degrade or look down upon the victim(s) after witnessing a verbal aggression or a sort of offensiveness causing the victim(s) to have negative associations and even exclusion (186).

Black tackled the same concept but from a different angle as he called it "the social structure" as he brought focus to the social relations and classes in a different light he first talked about the relationship between of the assailant and the victim as if it is intimate the reaction would not be as harsh, the offence itself would not be severe. However, if the assailant and victim are strangers or not on good terms the case changes, and the offence is taken more seriously (qtd in. *The Rise of Victimhood Culture*)

An example for both cases on a collective scale is when non-American celebrities criticise American accents, lifestyle, and traditions on TV shows, but as they seem to be friendly with the host it is seen as non-offensive and even humorous. On the other hand when the Canadian singer Ariana Grande was caught on a CCTV of a coffee shop saying that the Americans are gross for eating donuts, this caused Americans to be offended, and it led to a negative collective reaction of anger. On an individual scale, it is simpler as the example could be spouses conflicting over a concept, but the offense is less likely to be taken to heart. But if it is a stranger making a comment, it could be taken very seriously.

Black then passed to address the issue of status; first, he talked about the hierarchal scale and how the reaction to offence would be different when it comes from the part of an employer or employee, hinting to how being in position of power changes the reaction to offence. A point he passed to highlight next was the cultural background as the occurrence of an offence in a minority group or a smaller society will have a specific reaction that goes with the norms of that society, regardless of the offence being between two individuals or being a public matter. Meanwhile an offence happening in a higher class society, between individuals or the inclusion of the public, would lead to different reactions and outcomes (qtd in. *The Rise of Victimhood Culture*).

Henry et al added to black idea as they emphasised the importance of the group-based status especially when there is a clash between two social groups or classes, on an individual or collective levels. The lower classes are the most likely to receive offence as the lower the class the higher is the chance of facing oppression causing the emotional reaction to be stronger and more serious as the offence is more degrading. This explains the reason why offending lower classes is such a taboo and breaking it comes with dreadful outcomes as in most cases if a lower

social class is being offended by a higher privileged class the reaction tends to include asking help from a third party, if not law authorities due the neglect they face in that aspect then the third party to be asked for help is the public in form of activism and protests (186).

This can be seen in the simplest examples from a kid being harassed by an older student or a teacher making him go to another teacher or the principle for help, to the late incident where Ellen DeGeneres's staff had to speak about the oppression and discrimination they face in the work place on social media platforms because they cannot press charges against her or the controversial case of George Floyd in which the offence was committed by the police that lead to protests across the United States and around 60 countries around the world.

The Final point that Henry et al addressed in relation to the reactions to offence is the context; no word or gesture is innately offensive, the context that it was placed in is what decided if it is offensive, and this context includes the speaker, the audience, and even the physical setting. An important aspect of the context is the relation of the person to the group that is being offended is it an in group or an out group relation "if a disabled person makes fun of his or her disability then this is gallows humour and that is funny, I think. I think that would be okay because this person then chooses to make fun about it and make us laugh."(Greafer and Das 5)

When someone of the in group makes an offensive remark, it is most likely to slide through and to cause less reaction because they meant it to be aggressive they would be attacking themselves so it is socially accepted. On the other hand, an outer group doing it is seen as passing aggression and judgment making the reaction totally different.

Gay and straight participants unanimously felt that Lucas 'got' the experience of being gay, because of his own publicly acknowledged sexuality as a gay man. This, by

extension, gives him an implicit authority to create and portray Daffyd as a visibly ridiculous, attention-craving, overly flamboyant...(Greafer and Das, 5).

The context also includes the temporal and historical frame as some of the words and gestures that are offensive now were not offensive in another or meant with a ill will in previous times as the “f” word that is used as an offensive slur to refer to the homosexuals was actually used by Shakespeare to refer to a bundle of twigs. Therefore, it is irrational for a person to take a word or gestures used in a different time or place and assume offence, it is based on being put in the appropriate context it occurred in originally and only when that condition is fulfilled the victim might claim offence, and the reaction will be equivalent to the damage (Henry et al, 186).

#### **2.4. The causes behind the Personal Acceptance of Humorous Offence**

In some cases individuals are willing to take offence and even embrace it; they have reasons to enjoy a certain type of offence and not stand up against it. But that does not mean they necessarily accept all types of offence on regular basis:

I can say that I think one can make fun about everything, in my opinion, as long as it’s good. If it is in good taste, somehow. For example, I watch this series about gays, and they make a lot of jokes about gays ... and that is sometimes very personal to me, but I find it incredibly funny because it was done in a nice way (Greafer and Das, 8).

The subject of the study who is openly gay expresses that good taste in humor can pardon the offensiveness it holds as he himself admits to enjoying jokes that are meant to degrade his sexuality. A lot of people admit to doing the same thing as they enjoy the dark sense of humor that is personal to them because it is a good sense as they criticize other types of humor that is

plain and 'too simple', some even described such humor to be annoying and anger inducing. They defend their alternative not so popular sense of humor by calling it intelligent while the basic one is classified as an underclass humor. People who enjoy such humor identify as smarter and higher class as they look down upon those who do not and are satisfied with the simple and basic:

Many of the repatriated prisoners of wars refer to themselves and the other RPOWs as "ex-cons," and do so lightheartedly. Even naming the prison the "Hanoi Hilton" and giving other areas Las Vegas hotel names such as "The Stardust" indicate the sarcastic humor the men used. (Henman, 88).

Humor is also acknowledged as a coping mechanism by many amongst which is Freud the psychologist, in many cases people use dark humor and offensive jokes to make the situation lighter whether it is to cope with psychological pain or discomfort or just to create a beacon of light in a gloomy situation, it has been proved that many studies showed its use in the medical department where people have to deal with death or even in wars amongst prisoners including the Holocaust. Thus, it is normal to see why people accept, enjoy, or even produce the offensive humor directed towards themselves as they are using it to cope with reality (death, disability, sexuality, gender, or any other sensitive topic) as these people are using it to escape things they have to face in reality.

Such humor is a form of criticism or self-deprecation as it was directed towards oneself, and it highlighted the importance of not taking oneself too seriously, neglecting self-importance on focusing on the lighthearted criticism and cynicism to get a laugh out of the situation and make it seem bearable:

Self-deprecating and depressing memes or otherwise known as dark memes become the most used memes... These respondents value the humor within the memes as well as the relatability that self-reflective internet memes are able to present. These dark memes connect people who have similar situations while also making fun of the situations.(Kariko and Anasih, 6).

The conclusion about dark memes as a form of humor, and how they connect individuals with the same problems only proves the point further as it shows how such humor is used to ease some situation, but also how it is not part of the mainstream, whether in social life or in media. Such humor is usually shared between close people in specific settings, mostly unpleasant or in social media but not enough to be popular and attract too much attention as it will also attract a collective disapproval, it could be found in books and novels as well since the audience is specific and directed towards individuals.

## **2.5. Causes behind the Public Refusal of Offensive Humour**

“The pen had been mightier than the sword but then the tongue took over.”(Amit Abraham, p..). Regardless of the elements that draw the line between humor and offence in some cases the public reacts hostile towards something that some individuals find totally acceptable while acknowledging the occurrence offence; the public can be mad at what they have seen on TV, even though they read in a novel and laughed

But I am quite strong really, I have a real dark humour, so that for me, you know, that's like a humour, rape, pedophilia humor I actually ... I hate the fact that it's in my head, but my natural reaction to it is to laugh. I don't know if it's one of the things ... because it's such a horrific thing to happen, humor makes it more palatable. (Greafer and Das, 10).

As the British subject gives her testimony, she gives two of the main reasons that make the public reaction to offensive humor so harsh and opposing. First, the subject explained how dark humor makes her perceive ‘horrific’ things as palatable, if things like rape and paedophilia are joked about often then it will be more ‘palatable’ to see in society. It will no longer be taken seriously anymore, and the victims will feel like their struggles are a ‘joke’, if such a thing is to be included in media whether on social media platforms, shows, or movies it would be exposed to a large audience of different ages, personalities, and backgrounds. Some might get the intended harmless humour behind it, and that it is just a joke and does not relate to reality but the frequent use will normalise it as the usage is popularised so is the concept.

The second thing is that the subject also commented that being able to laugh at such jokes without getting offended shows her strength, such a comment implies that those who get offended are weak. The Normalization of the idea of the weak and the strong when it comes to offensiveness feeds into the hierarchal stereotypes of a toxic society, diminishing the already small safe space in society for victims as not only they will be as a joking topic but will also be referred to as ‘weak’ and ‘can’t take a joke’:

It’s the emphasis on being able to take a lot of ridicule, of shit, and not getting upset about it. Most of the interaction we have is verbally abusing each other.... And you aren’t cool unless you can take it without trying to get back. (Lyman1987 qtd in. 'Lads and Laughter' Humour and the production of heterosexual hierarchies).

Allowing such behavior and giving excuses for why it is acceptable in daily life will give birth to an irresponsible, insensitive, cruel, and selfish society in which individuals do not only prey on victims for fun but also encourage normalizing it and not standing up against it: “Media power is generally symbolic and persuasive in the sense that the media primarily have the

potential to control to some extent the minds of readers or viewers, but not directly their actions.”(Van Dijk 10).Realising the power of media, and how it may not affect all but surely will affect most is the reason proving it is not only normal but necessary to see society getting offended and reacting negatively towards dark humor as even if it can be funny and accepted by some individuals the concept itself is wrong and can ruin society. It also has the power to normalize taboos which can be good, but if it is something like rape or pedophilia it is a danger, and it will prevent people from speaking up and claiming their rights creating an unsafe place.

## **2.6. The Difference between Offensive Humor in Movies and Novels**

The first big difference between novels and movies is the audience. Movies are usually directed towards everyone, thanks to globalization, subtitles, and dubbing so it is normal to see a movie that was produced in Korean or China broadcasted halfway across the world in America and vice versa, sometimes translation and dubbing are available the minute the movie drops in such platforms like Netflix. Therefore, the audience of a movie cannot be narrowed down to a specific audience or culture the only thing that can be controlled to a certain extent is the age range of the audience as a warning is added at the beginning of the movie warning for parental advisory about violent or sexual content that could be included. Other than those the movie has to be considerate of the public reaction on a universal scale not just to the native culture.

The first aspect in movies is that they are visual, hence people will not only focus on the script but also on body language, on the clothes, on the settings, and so many other details so the producers and directors should be wary as people can get easily offended. It is really common for people to get offended over visual signs; for example making a black character always wear red lipstick could be seen as a reference to black face. Another thing that could trigger the audience is wardrobe of the characters as for example making a young character wear revealing clothes

could imply that the movie is trying to promote pedophilia, even the smallest even the smallest details are to be taken into consideration as even showing a character with a tan could be perceived as 'black fishing', and finally showing graphic scenes such as brutal murder or rape scene could be really offensive and triggering. All these examples and more are an example of visual offence and how careful movies directors have to be to avoid offence.

Another aspect to be taken into consideration in movies is the background. Movies are played by real people who have real lives that are often open to public display. So, in some cases, people care about the backgrounds of the cast or the actors playing a character; for example a child that is underage should not be allowed to perform any erotic scenes, in some movies the director chooses to portray all the villains of the movie as black or interracial characters making the thieves always Black or the drug dealers always Cuban which is seen as racist and stereotypical same as portraying an Arab as a terrorist. Any stereotypes about any culture or minority should not be in movies as it can be really offensive like making the homosexual character to act girl like and be overly feminine and having the actor for that character be homophobic. The background could also go as far as include religious beliefs; an atheist who always made fun of religion cannot be casted as priest as even if his character is sincere towards religion his background will make the movie look like it was made sarcastically. The director should be aware of his cast and the characters they are assigned to and any controversy that could arise from it.

A final aspect to be considered in movies is the screen time; movies have a limited screen time as between ninety and a hundred and twenty minutes. In such a short time period, the movies should deliver a starting point a plot as well as the big ending focusing on all these aspects as well as making sure everything is entertaining enough for the audience can be hard

and what would be even harder is adding some sort of humor that conveys offensiveness and making sure it will be taken lightheartedly. Therefore, such humor is mostly avoided or at least minimized as in such a short screen time the offence can stay in mind for most of the movie, ruining its review. Taking such a risk is in most cases not worthy:

We had to lose the maze scene, when Louisa recalls a sexual assault when she was younger. It's interesting how people react to that part of the book. Often when you read about rape in fiction, it's the defining event. I knew lots of girls who had similar events happen to them, and they tucked it away and moved on. We almost know before Louisa knows how much that's affecting her. The scene is very opaque in the book, but putting it on film gave it far more weight than it has in the book and it was changing the mood of the story. We tried for six months to make that scene. It was a useful experience to learn you cannot translate some things into film (Moyes qtd in. Book Page).

This is a passage from an interview held by the English writer 'Jojo Moyes' who wrote a bestselling novel called 'Me Before You', and it was later on turned into a movie that she assisted in directing, producing, and writing the script for. She explains how she omitted an important part of the novel that included sexual assault as it would "weight heavy"; she recognizes that in such a short screen time the dark humor of such scene would change the reaction to the movie as in novels she has more freedom.

Novels unlike movies are less popular; not everyone reads novels, and the novel is usually directed to the audience of the same language as translation is not as common and only happens in cases of the novel being popular enough for readers of other languages to request it, making the writer free to relate it to the native culture and also free to express more liberty in the content as they know the audience is one individual at a time, there would be no collective

reaction; some might like it some might not and that depends on the reader themselves, and how they relate to this novel on a personal level above all. It is rare to have a collective reaction towards a novel, it can happen in rare cases of the novel being popular enough to be turned into a movies like what happened with the infamous novel ‘Fifty Shades of Grey’, reactions only started after the movie plan was announced, and people focused on why is it so popular rather than the offensiveness it holds. As novels are more private the reaction towards them is less biased by societal influence as the individual focuses on the personal convictions, and if they do not like it the most expected reaction is to stop reading. “There are things in the book you could never do in a movie.”(Hathaway).

An important difference is that novels are verbal not visual, so they do not relate to senses like audio visuals but more to the mind; novels are based upon words and not acting so they are based on the imagination as well as the mind of the readers, and how far it can go. They can choose to portray the character, they can contextualize a vague phrase that could have more than one explanation, and can create the perfect setting for each event. Unlike movies in which every bat of an eye is controlled and calculated, meanwhile novels are free and not restricted by any real boundaries as every reader will have their own version of the character as the author might give some features like the eye color, the height, some shapes, and faded details, but it will not be specific enough to create a concrete vision. It will be an abstract embodiment of words created in different minds some will project it into someone they know in real life, some will be satisfied with the unclear image, but it is certain that the same version will not be created twice. The imagination will not only allow the emotional attachment but will omit any chance of offensiveness as the context is taken according to the person’s thoughts and assuming offence would be an assumption of self-importance and self-entitlement.

Even though writers are paid less than actors, writers have the luxury of leading a private life and a normal life; people recognize actors, but they do not recognize writers that often as to know how a writer the person needs to do a research which is rare to happen, this gives writers the upper hand when it comes to background as the reader will not know more than the writer lets on. An example of that is the famous writer of the series of 'Harry Potter' book. J.K. Rowling who pretends to be a male when realizing the first book to create the illusion that goes with social norms of a man writing a fiction novel with wizards, her real identity was only revealed after her book became a best seller and most the readers asked to see what goes in the mind of such a genius. Another benefit is that people cannot get offended about some topic as they do not know if it a personal experience or not; Jojo Moyes explained that her book 'Me Before You' was inspired by a real story of an athlete who became quadriplegic and his family allowed her to tell his story in her own way, other sensitive topics like rape were also mentioned but it was also not offensive as people had no clue about her background and what she could have been through. Finally novels are mostly written by one author, so the clash of characters that happens in movies is eliminated as all the ideas, views, and morals mentioned in the novel are the effort of one individual.

Novels can be as short and as long as the author wishes; the author can mention a scene or an encounter short enough to be one paragraph and can also make another long enough to cover pages focusing on the details of how the character was breathing. Having control of length and the freedom to give each part the amount of attention that is seen to be appropriate is underrated as the longer the novels talks about a subject the more understanding it brings to the reader, and this can be seen in many examples in many novels and novel series. In the 'Harry Potter' series it took about seven books to explain that the character that was seen as mean and

malicious ‘Snape’ actually held the best intentions towards the protagonist. The longer space the writer is allowed to fill the more they can express and explain which makes sense why people fall for mean characters in books better than in movies, as the novel shows exactly why is the character that way while the movie will just hint or explain briefly. This is why novels are more authentic and relatable because more personality features are exposed and the focused on instead of simple hint, and a general guess that will be less realistic to express less malice and get the public approval. Novels embrace the reality with its good and bad while the movies give the sugar coated version.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter was an attempt to show how a context changes the point of view of interpreting something that will have a different interpretation and outcome from a general neutral approach. Also how a different view can highlight relation and aspects that were looked over in a general interpretation and finally the reactions, and how media affects how people perceive things on a universal and even control people’s reaction while the individual reaction is solely based on personal opinions and experiences that not everyone can relate to.

***Chapter Three:***

***Analysing the Manifestation of the Collective and Individual Reactions to  
Sarcasm in Lessening Offence in Jojo Moyes's 'Me Before You': Movie  
and Novel.***

## **Introduction**

This chapter is designed to highlight the Individual and collective reaction to sarcasm in lessening the degree of offence in an English setting; the subject of the analysis is an English novel written by an English author and the movie adaptation that was written by the same author and played by an almost fully English cast. This movie and novel present the perfect example as it includes all the key elements of the study: sensitive topics, use of sarcasm to cope, and the cultural background. The movie is to be analysed first, using Barthes's semiotics theory putting focus on many aspects from the background, the facial expressions, the voice tone, to the camera shots. Just too try and capture how sarcasm was used in a movie produced by the 'Warner Bros Picture' studios, a movie that is produced by such a big company is exposed to more audience and hence more criticism from the public forcing producers to try and change things from how they were conveyed in the novel. So they conveyed some messages using symbols to be able to avoid the public judgment and controversy, collective reactions are the key element.

The novel was analysed using Reader response theory, focusing on the point of you of the reader and how they would experience the novel, how they would react to it, and how would it make them feel. The novel is the original story so it was written without the pressure the movie faced as they were waiting for and having certain expectations about it. The novel is the uncensored authentic version. The reaction to it differs depending on the reader and the fact that the writer here unlike in the film did not expect a universal audience. The chapter then deals with the discussion and comparison of the two analyses to shed light on the difference between the Movie and the Novel in including sensitive elements and topic in a sarcastic manner; the effect

of the audience on the content that is to be presented, how different contents have different audiences, as well as the freedom and limitation in each genre.

### **3.1. Collective Reactions to Sarcasm and its role in Lessening Offensiveness in Movies: ‘Me Before You’**

Movies have grown to acquire more power and influence on our society that what we would like to admit, they have the power to build or tear down an opinion or an idea, they have the power to normalise a taboo, to popularise a concept, and communicate an idea without using words. Most importantly it has the power that could make a whole society or even a number of societies revolt if an idea is transmitted in the wrong way or in the wrong context.

Barthes already knew the power that films and movies hold, making him create specific terms that related to the subject; first he introduced the term ‘myth’ which is a accepted associated meaning of a specific sign for each society or in some cases universally. He also introduced ‘naturalization’ which is shaping social reality via the repeated use of signs. Barthes knew the importance that movies held as it did not only deal with verbal signs but also non-verbal ones that triggered the subconscious (Semiotic Analysis for Beginners! / How to Read Signs in Film/ Roland Barthes Media Theory, 00:06:07 - 00:08:20).

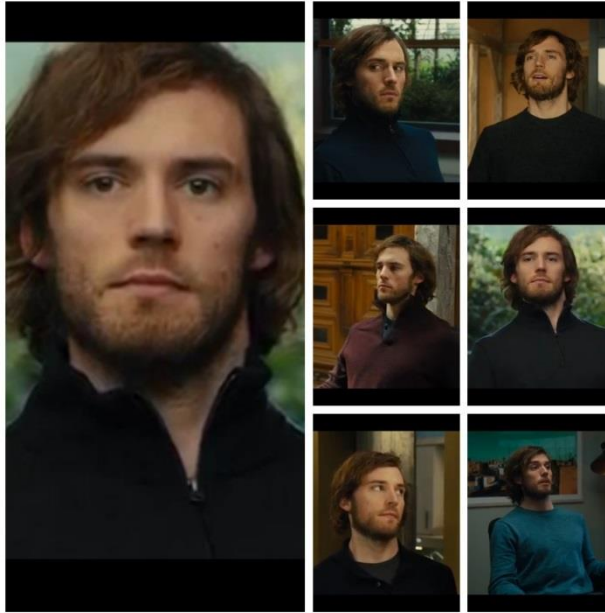
The movie in question: ‘*Me Before You*’ revolves around the English culture as not only is the novel and its author related to the culture, but so is most of the cast. The theme of Englishness is quiet prominent in the movie that is about a disabled man Will Trynor who wants to commit merciful killing and the cheerful care assistant Louisa Clark who ended up with him due to losing her last job. As Louisa tried to stop the suicide the two characters indulge in a sarcastic battle where no topic is off the table, this leads to the discussion and mention of many

sensitive topics that could cause offence, some of the topics are declared simply and others are presented as silent signs.

### 3.1.1. Probing into the Major Scenes within the Movie



*Picture 01: Louisa wearing yellow*



*Picture02: Will wearing black*

- **Table 01: Screenshots of Louisa and Will's Clothes**

Denotative Signifier	Denotative Signified
Screen shots of the colours worn by the main two characters.	Louisa Clark wears bright colours, especially yellow. While Will Trynor wears dark colours
Connotative Signifier	Connotative Signified
Louisa's clothes are dominated by the colour yellow. Will enjoys dark colours.	Louisa is portrayed as an optimist and a happy presence, it can be reflected in the choice of colourful clothes especially the almost permanent yellow that is always seen on her. Will Trynor on the other hand is portrayed as dull and pessimistic as the colour of clothes is shown to be dark and mostly black.

In most the scenes especially at the beginning of the movie Will Trynor is seen wearing dark colours and black specifically; the dark colours are the myth of pessimism and mysteriousness which is Will trying to convey . Louisa Clark is different as she is always wearing bright clothes yellow is almost present in every outfit; a bag, a belt or even a wallet and

since the colour yellow is decoded in psychology as the colour of optimism and reflects her fun, lively character. The colour yellow is also associated with bees as she makes a reference to them verbally and non-verbally; bees are known for the hard work and restlessness which is also a trait of Louisa's as she keeps trying and does not give up unlike Will who is ironically stuck in a wheel chair.

This coding system based on the colour of clothes the characters wore. It was made by the directors of the movie to convey the nonverbal message of each character showing not only their personality features, but also referring to their moods as when Will started to be more social and seemed happier he changed and started to wear lighter colours.

Heiman believes that there is no such thing as a sarcastic situation but there is an ironic one (20) which is the closest and the best way to convey a silent opposition of a situation that is forced to a certain extent as both characters with no proximity, they do not even know each other, but are stuck together against their own preference. Will is stuck because his mother employed Louisa and he cannot fire her or dismiss her because it is not up to him and Louisa is stuck with will because she is jobless and need the money desperately. The irony is presented in a nonverbal manner to appeal to the audience as a sarcastic verbal declaration could be seen as an aggressive cynical, stereotypical assumption that the directors did not want to risk facing so they just used the myth of clothes that was already neutralised by the media.



*Picture 03: Will making sarcastic comment about Louisa's tries to help him.*



*Picture 04 : Louisa suprised expression at his comments.*



*Picture 05: Louisa looking slightly guilty and confused*



*Picture 06: Will looking satisfied that he was able to make Louisa flustered.*

**Table 02: Screenshots of Louisa and Will’s Facial Expression as He was Sarcastic**

Denotative Signifier	Denotative Signified
<p>Screen shots of Louisa’s face after Will was sarcastic towards her</p>	<p>Louisa came to ask Will if he wanted to do anything and his response was sarcastic and rude but her facial expressions showed more confusion than offense.</p> <p><b>Dialogue</b>                      Louisa: I could get you your computer.                      Will: have you found a good quad support group I could join? ‘Quads r us’? The ‘tin wheel’ club?</p>
Connotative Signifier	Connotative Signified
<p>Louisa’s facial expression after Will was sarcastic towards her.</p>	<p>Louisa reacts to Will’s sarcasm by a confused puzzled facial expressions as she looks as if she’s worried that she might have said something wrong, putting her hand on her mouth and knitting her eyebrows together in an attempt to think of what to say to fix the situation instead of getting offended or taking it personally. Also the camera shot angle is showing Louisa as if she is in the background to assert Will’s authority and superiority in such a situation while Louisa is confused and does not know what to say.</p>

Louisa taken on Will’s sarcasm in an unusual way as instead of getting offended by his harsh passive aggressive criticism, she is confused and the coding system shows it (facial expressions) as her face twists in guilt and confusion. She puts her hand on her mouth as if she regretted asking him to help or if she felt like she said the wrong thing that triggered him. She also opens her mouth and closes it several times in an attempt to figure out way to say as her

brows knit together creating a crease in her forehead indicating she is confused and does not know what to say,

These signs feed into the popular myth of confusion and awkwardness as she cannot put her feeling into words to the hierarchy and him being her indirect boss. There is not sign of her being offended or hurt by his words as she tries again and his verbal assaults continue to take place till he dismisses her.

This aspect of interaction shows the cultural aspect of the characters; the movie takes place in England, Pembroke (south Wales). The English woman Louisa taking such passive criticism so well does not imply to her being tough or thick skinned as she is portrayed as a soft character. However, it does show that she is used to sarcasm which plays a big part of the English culture, in previous scenes in the movie she received it and even laughed at it, in other scenes she used it herself at an attempt of being funny. In this scene she did take it well but did not engage enough to use it back or to laugh at it and that is due to the relation between her and Will as he is the son of her employer and she does not know him enough.

The proximity between the two characters shows how unfamiliar with each other as this is only her second day meeting him and he did not open up or act nice enough for her to feel comfortable around his, the level of proximity that is almost non-existent made her more uncomfortable as she could not understand his motives or intentions towards her. The power relation is also shown via camera shots as the camera focuses on Will sitting while Louisa is in the back of the shot looking lost as she fumbles, while he has a half smirk on his face. His

sarcasm showed criticism towards and Louisa felt out of place to laugh or make a witty comment in return.

The audience could have found the witty sarcastic comments of Will funny even though they are dark and that is due to the jokes being related to himself. This makes the offence invalid as it is a person of the in group making a joke about his own disability and of Louisa's 'ignorance' at the same time. The sarcasm used here can be seen as a self-defence mechanism used by Will to cope with his state and also so that he can force a sense of superiority upon others so he will not be a subject of empathy which is shown by the way he half smiles in a sense of victory after she is left speechless, explaining why his sarcasm is venomous and why the target of the sarcasm might not laugh if not acquainted enough with Will's behaviour.



*Picture 07: Louisa faking a smile as she insults Will sarcastically*



*Picture 08: Will looking surprised that Louisa talked back to him*



*Picture 09: Louisa giving Will a challenging look*



*Picture10: Will trying to hide his amused smile from Louisa.*

**Table 03: Screenshots of Louisa and Will’s Facial Expressions as Louisa is Sarcastic**

Denotative Signifier	Denotative Signified
<p>Screen shots of Louisa and Will’s facial expressions as she is being sarcastic back to him for the first time</p>	<p>Louisa speaks back to Will for the first time in a sarcastic tone, a sarcastic smile is plastered on her face while Will looks surprised</p> <p><b>Dialogue</b></p> <p>Louisa: it <u>would</u> be <u>really</u> nice if you didn't <u>TRY</u> and make my life so miserable, as you <u>apparently</u> make <u>everyone</u> else’s.</p> <p>Will: and what if I said I didn't want you here?</p> <p>Louisa I'm not <u>employed</u> by you,</p>

	<p>I'm <u>employed</u> by your mother.</p> <p>So <u>unless</u> she says she doesn't want me here anymore,</p> <p>I'm staying. Not <u>because</u> I care <u>about</u> you, or <u>particularly</u> <u>enjoy</u> your company.</p>
<p>Connotative Signifier</p>	<p>Connotative Signified</p>
<p>Louisa's facial expressions as she talks sarcastically to Will and his facial expressions as he takes in what happened.</p>	<p>Louisa is being sarcastic as Will is again passive aggressive and criticising her efforts to help him. She has a fake smile across her face that indicates how dishonest she is and her tone does not go hand in hand with her insults as she uses a high pitched voice that indicates the fake excitement as she calls out Will for his behaviour and rudeness towards her. Will's expression is quiet surprised as he did not expect her to talk back to him and especially criticise him but he is not offended or hurt by her words just surprised.</p>

In this scene the coding system is facial gestures again; Louisa talks back to Will as sarcastically as he often did to her. Her facial expression show the sarcasm as she is half smirking not as a sign of happiness but as a sign of pretense to match her words as well as the fake high pitch of her voice as she is sarcastically criticizing his behavior towards her, calling him out for the attitude he always has and his horrible company.

She again uses sarcasm not to be necessarily funny but as a part of the English culture as it is more appropriate to use sarcasm to get back at her boss's son than to use direct words which

can be frowned upon in the culture. The sarcasm comes naturally as she did not have to think it before she just blurted it out because of a nasty comment Will made while she was trying to be nice to him, There is also a challenging look on her face when he says he does not want her there but as she makes another witty comment she stands her grounds rebelling against his superiority.

On the other hand, Will who for the other time is at the receiving end of sarcasm did not show any sign of hurt, offensiveness, or discomfort; instead he was looking at her with his mouth a slightly open in surprise at her sudden outburst. After he says he does not want her there and she is still determined his face is in even more surprise: he does not let out many facial expressions but the look on his face and the movements of his eyebrows show the clear surprise since she was the first character to defend herself against his superiority and use of sarcasm as degradation of others where she used his own weapon against him.

As a result he has a surprised look and there was also a hint of a smile that he was trying to hold back as if he was secretly enjoying to have someone finally stand up to him and match his sourness. This code gives into the myth of showing future interest in her character: the smile after a fight is a myth in the media indicating the start of a relation between the two characters.

In this scene Louisa ignored the proximity between them as she no longer cared that Will is her indirect boss, she defended herself in the way she saw fit. She still kept a degree of respect but dared to finally talk back, that could be because of the relation between her and Will as she grew to know him better, they were not close but she was able to observe that he had this attitude towards everyone especially after the friends left. That gave her confidence to talk back and she

got what she wanted as Will ended the scene by asking her to put the frames a way in a softer manner.



*Picture 11: Will making a comment about Louisa's style.*



*Picture 12: Louisa defending herself while smiling at his comment*



*Picture 13: Will smiling as he makes another comment.*



**Picture 14: Louisa smiling back at Will enjoying his sarcasm**

**Table 04: Screenshots of Facial Expressions of Louisa and Will Enjoying Sarcasm**

Denotative Signifier	Denotative Signified
<p>Screen shots of the facial expressions of Louisa and Will as she reacts to Will’s sarcasm.</p>	<p>Will makes a sarcastic comment about Louisa’s choice of clothing in a mocking way but she just enjoys it and laughs with him</p> <p><b>Dialogue</b></p> <p>Will: And what happened to these <u>gorgeous</u> wellies...and the <u>stripy</u> tights?</p> <p>Louisa: ah, I <u>outgrew</u> them. It <u>broke</u> my heart. And they don't make those tights anymore. At <u>least</u> not for grown women anyway.</p> <p>Will: Strange, that?</p>
Connotative Signifier	Connotative Signified
<p>The facial expressions of Louisa and Will as he makes a sarcastic comment about her style in clothes, and both of them finding the humor in it.</p>	<p>As will makes a sarcastic comment he is holding back a smile with his facial expressions relaxed and a eyes soft and Louisa shares the same smile as she is close enough to Will to be able to understand his sarcasm and enjoy the humor behind it and he no longer uses it to assert superiority but more to light the mood and tease Louisa. Both parties enjoy the frequent sarcasm and it is a give and take at this point where they use it to make fun of themselves and each</p>

	other with no hard feelings but a smile instead.
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In this scene the codes are the facial expressions and voice tone: Will is making sarcastic comments about Louisa's clothes as a child that she described, the coding system shows the hint of the smile and the amusement in his face as he taunts her about clothes she wore as a kid. His tone is kind and does not hold any bitterness there is some friendly criticism but no superiority as his relation to Louisa has grown since the interaction where she spoke back to him. This conversation reflects the cultural aspect of the English frequent use of sarcasm as a part of the culture as a part of every conversation and not just as a defense mechanism or as a way to be passive aggressive and criticize people in a somehow polite indirect way.

Louisa is again on the receiving end of Will's sarcasm but she does not seem to mind it at all; as the proximity grew between them; she no longer felt like he hates her and criticize her, she knew he did not exactly like her clothing style but she did not mind him making sarcastic comments about it, she followed her Englishness and pretend to defend herself as her genuine smile was the myth exposing her true feelings of amusement.

Again the cultural background shows there is no offence in receiving sarcasm even about personal matter like clothing style. She also no longer views Will as the mean son of her boss but saw him as a mean yet fun company that was moody and extremely sarcastic but now she understands him more and enjoys the sarcasm and dark humor that is he throws at her. As her facial expressions are relaxed and she smiles brightly at his witty comments

The previous outburst of Louisa caused the proximity between them to be restored to a balanced relation with Will; he no longer acted superior towards her and they started acting like equals, exchanging sarcasm as a way to communicate and criticize each other about various topics including sensitive ones without causing any offence. The camera shots showed that through the balanced shots of Will and Louisa getting equal screen time and both shown from angle that showed intimacy more than anything.

The topic of offence was still general and not sensitive enough to cause public offence to the audience of the movie as he chose to joke about her clothes and not her weight or face which could have been more offensive coming from the other gender (Boeckmann&Liew qtd in. *The influence of target group status on the perception of the offensiveness of group-based slurs*).



*Picture 15: Will making a sarcastic comment about his quadriplegia.*



*Picture 16: Louisa using her teeth to cut the tag from Will's collar.*



*Picture 17: People getting offended by Louisa's action in a public place*



*Picture 18: Will and Louisa smiling after she sarcastically mentions his disability.*

**Table 05: Screenshots of Various Facial Expressions**

Denotative Signifier	Denotative Signified
<p>Screen shots of Will and Louisa’s reactions and facial expressions after he makes a sarcastic comment about his disability.</p>	<p>Will makes a sarcastic comment about his inability and his and Louisa’s facial expression show the slight amusement and enjoyment of a dark humor with no awkwardness.</p> <p><b>Dialogue</b></p> <p>Louisa: have we got any <u>scissors</u> in the bag?</p> <p>Will: I do not know, Clark, believe it or</p>

	not, I rarely pack it myself. Louisa: okay then. Got it! Just be <u>grateful</u> that wasn't in your trousers!
Connotative Signifier	Connotative Signified
Will and Louisa's facial expression as he makes a comment about his disability and they both enjoy the humor in it without awkwardness.	Will makes a sarcastic comment about his disability and not knowing what his bag holds. Louisa does not put much thought into it as she gives a witty comment back and they both smile regardless for the fact that they are in public, the sarcasm lessens the offensiveness of Will comment about his disability and about Louisa's offensive act of using her teeth to cut the tag of Will's collar during a classical music concert. The sarcasm and humor coming from both parts make them laugh and ignore the offensiveness of the previous act that could be seen as offensive but is taken as a joke.

The coding system in this scene includes the facial expressions as well as the background setting. The setting is a Mozart concert; people including Will and Louisa are all dressed in suits or fancy dresses. This falls within the myth of the setting being high class and formal where people should behave a certain ways and etiquettes cannot be overlooked.

The proximity in this scene is on two levels: First between Will and Louisa as she is intimate enough with him that they deal with each other with the intimacy of close friends and to

a point where both of them make jokes about disability, Will starting it. Second the proximity between them and the strangers sitting behind them as the social relation are almost non-existent, it is shown through the judgmental looks that were given to them as Louisa used her teeth to cut the tag.

The myth in this scene lies in Louisa's inappropriate act at such a high end setting; such an act reflects her down to earth personality and her peculiarity from everyone else in that settings. Will's reaction to that falls into the myth of having a rich guy falling for a girl from a lower social class and his discomfort and shock that turned into an enjoyment almost immediately.

The culture is shown again as she does not seem uncomfortable as the topic of the joke is a disability that could be related to the fact that he himself made the joke. But she made a joke back saying he is lucky it was not in his pants, As she makes a joke back they both give a smile and they do not show any uncomfortableness.

Will is not a person who dislikes attention or pity since his accident, yet after Louisa used her teeth to cut the tag from his collar and made a sarcastic comment about his disability he did not feel plastered or annoyed he rather smiled and enjoyed the ability to exchange jokes about his state with no intention other than lightning the mood and making her offensive act seem a bit lighter. Ignoring the looks they got from the rest of the people in the same room, as the discomfort he had on his face while she used her teeth disappeared into a smile right after she made the comment.

As the character got close and closer they found comfort in using sarcasm to make the situations feel less awkward and offensive; Will made a comment about his disability to hide his discomfort about the situation and Louisa made one after she made something that is seen as inappropriate in public. The sarcasm used put a smile on both their faces as the rest of the people around them focused on the offence that took place; The sarcasm between them is acceptable on a collective level as she only made her comment about his disability after he did as if she was the first to mention his disability it could stir the public reaction to such offensiveness which the directors took into consideration before they let Louisa laugh at it and participate in it.

### **3.2. Individual Reactions to Sarcasm's Role in Lessening Offence in Novels: 'Me Before You'**

Technology was able to take over novels and books in general, the effect that novels have on society is undeniable as words are one of the most powerful tools. However, novels are no longer main stream which means that not all people are exposed to them and only those who put an effort in it are the ones able to benefit from them; novels do not have the concept of censorship or offence. In novels it is up to the reader to contextualize the words they chose to commit to, the audience of the novel cannot be predictable as individuals are not predictable; the only situation where an outcome is assumed is when a writer is popular.

In this analysis; the Novel to be analysed is '*ME Before You*', written by the English writer Jojo Moyes. is the story of two people from different worlds: Louisa Clark is a happy bubbly girl who works at a cafe and enjoys wearing colourful clothes as she helps her unemployed parents get by, Will Trynor on the hand is an ex business man who enjoyed

adventures and ended up in a wheelchair due to an accident. Their worlds collide when Louisa lost her job and Will needed a care assistant.

The story deals with many sensitive topics; Will is miserable and in constant pain and disability as needs people to do the most basic tasks for him, he also tried to commit suicide prior to Louisa's arrival and is scheduled to go to 'Dignitas' (euthanasia: mercy killing) after six months. While, Louisa has faced sexual assault and did not tell anyone and she is trying to stop Will's decision to end his life. The characters go through a lot of events a lot of them are dark and in a lot of times they use sarcasm to joke about those topics that Moyes tried to put into context to avoid causing any offence to the readers, she made sure to mentioned the fact that the story was based on real life events in her interview attached to the end of the Novel as well as including other elements in the novel itself.

### **3.3. Novel Analysis**

#### **3.3.1. Jojo Moyes' Implementation of Sarcasm as a Means of Transcending the Absurdities of Life**

"I hung my jacket on the peg...this bloody arm...other side of Stortfold Castle...Are they posh, love...Thomas's nappy on inside out...if you're going to be foul...the English climate was too changeable..."(Me Before You, 07).

"neither of us is the type to bring up subjects that make us feel a bit uncomfortable... not much that can't be fixed by a decent cup of tea"(ibid, 243 27)

The first thing a reader might take notice of is the Englishness presented in the novel and the stress upon it, in the passage above many words limited to the English culture have been used heavily along with the words used there is the descriptions of people and places; first the castle

that was mentioned in many occasions in different parts of the novel. Second is the weather that was mostly mentioned in a form of criticism as the characters in most cases were complaining about it. Then there is the tea that is almost a stereotypical English beverage, it was mentioned a lot and represented as a daily part of each day. Finally the descriptions of characters that were portrayed as cold, cynical, and even indirect like the relation Louisa held with her boyfriend as she explained neither of them “is the type to bring up subjects that made them feel a bit uncomfortable”.

Establishing such grounds for the readers is in a way redeeming for the writer as showing the background makes it more understandable to comprehend and justify particular acts like being sarcastic towards a sensitive matter, being passive aggressive instead of direct about one’s feelings, and hiding emotions as a way of avoiding earnestness. In a lot of cases such acts are the results of unspoken societal rules of specific cultures that the people just cannot get rid of. Providing the reader with such knowledge is helpful not to only understand the character’s mind-set better but to also avoid jumping to conclusion and offences.

Regardless of the background information that the writer provided indirectly, the readers are different individuals, some might understand and focus on the story in their hands, others will not give the novel that benefit as they would judge based on universal scales of morality; since it is a novel the disagreement would mean that the reader will give up on reading the novel or in extreme cases complain about it on social media platforms. However, these topic rarely make it to the mainstream and are popular only among closed small groups of people who share the same opinion. And to avoid the chances of it happening Jojo took it upon herself to add that the story was based on a real life story, also that she has close relatives who relate to the story making her

in a way included enough in such matters to show that she would not want to cause offence on purpose to any of the minorities mentioned in her novel.

- **Louisa's New Job: Meeting with the Trynors**

**Louisa's job interview with Mrs. Trynor**

Do you know what a quadriplegic is?"

I faltered. "When...you're stuck in a wheelchair?"

"I suppose that's one way of putting it. There are varying degrees, but in this case we are talking about complete loss of use of the legs, and very limited use of the hands and arms.

Would that bother you?"

"Well, not as much as it would bother him, obviously." I raised a smile, but Mrs. Traynor's face was expressionless. "Sorry—I didn't mean—" (Me Before You, 24).

- **Louisa's family conversation**

"So how messed up is this man, Lou?"

"Can't be up to much if they're willing to let our daughter loose on him," Dad remarked... "Hope you've practiced your curtsy." Dad grinned... Treena made a face. "I think it would freak me out, if he talked through one of those voice boxes. Can you imagine? 'Get-me-a-drink of-water,'" (ibid, 29 30).

The second passage is about Louisa making sarcastic comments about Will's condition and disability to his own mother as a an attempt lightning the mood on her own job interview to be hired as a caregiver, the mother seems indifferent about the sarcastic comments as she does not laugh but at the same time is not offended to the point of kicking Louisa out or not giving her

a job. This shows the English side of both characters as the first is using sarcasm as a way of not taking herself seriously as an English person would, faced by another English woman's reaction as she did not necessarily feel offended by the sarcasm made about her son disability as much as she felt offended by her chattiness and even then she chose to be passive aggressive and give dirty looks instead of speaking up about it. The offence was ignored as she hired her to take care of her son that she just made sarcastic comments about which if anything, just shows how lightly English people take sarcasm and how little they read into it as a negative thing.

When Louisa went home her and her family made comments about Will's disability once again, even in front of her grandfather who faced disability not too long ago, they even used names and slurs that were seen as offensive towards the quadriplegic community; this act coming from people who had close interact with the cause changes their state from ignorant or inconsiderate to just people who enjoy dark humour, as they do not mean any harm and they do not look down upon people with disabilities they actually care for them but they would rather with the tragedy of disability with making sarcastic comments about it instead of acting gloomy and sad and showing sympathy. This way of dealing with things is deeply related to the English culture as for them humour is tragedy and a time estimated by milliseconds (Fox). Also the fact that they do not have any knowledge of Will makes it easier to be sarcastic as there is no moral responsibility or guilt to feel for a stranger.

The reaction to the two interactions depends on the reader and the reader alone; in the first situation, Louisa's comments were not harsh and they were directed towards the mother of the patient so there is no way that she had an ill intention behind her words, also the other did not seem to be offended which is comforting in some way and gives the reader the unspoken permission to enjoy a laugh or a smile at least as they read the interaction and imagine it.

However, in the second interaction the reaction of the reader cannot be predicted as it depends on their personality, previous life experiences, and beliefs...in such a case even the background priming will not be of much efficiency as some readers will read the passage and open their eyes a bit wider in surprise while other will smirk or snicker. Enjoying such humour would not mean the insensibility or ignorance of the reader as the shock would not mean the fake victimization as each reader will have a personal view to such matters that the author cannot judge or interfere in.

- **Louisa's Defensive reactions**

### **Louisa and her Sister's Conversation**

“Mum told me your disabled bloke came to dinner.”

“He's not my disabled bloke. His name's Will.”

A spinal injury doesn't mean you turn into Quasimodo.

” Please don't say anything about it being a tragic waste, I told her silently. But perhaps my sister was smarter than that.

“Anyway. She was definitely surprised. I think she was prepared for Quasimodo.”(Me Before You, 212 213).

The third passage is also about Treena (Louisa's sister) sarcastic comments towards Will's disability: as the sisters are sitting the younger sister decided to ask about her sister's employer but she makes sarcastic comments about his disability, Louisa defends him against her sister but not in a harsh manner that shows offence. At this point Louisa's character is too invested in Will, she grew to care deeply for him then found out his plans to go to 'Dignitas' to end his life and was trying to convince him to not go through with it. She obviously cared for him much more than she did in the previous passage as he went from the boss's son that is a

stranger to a 'friend' figure and someone she held feelings for as even her sister pointed that out; her care for him was more than just human decency or sympathy which explained her defending him against her own sister.

Even though Louisa seemed to not like her sister calling Will names and being sarcastic about his disability she did stop her but did not show any signs of offence as she did not necessarily laugh at the attempted jokes but did not also scowl or storm out leaving... She just corrected her showing that she did feel uncomfortable with people calling him names, this related to Englishness once again as they do not call people out for making situations 'uncomfortable' but would be passive aggressive about it. A reason that could also explain the fact that Louisa did not get offended is the fact that she knows her sister also cares for Will as she tried to help her with him in many occasions but was just being sarcastic to lighten the mood as her culture dictates best: by making sarcastic comments about the most inappropriate dark topics to make the atmosphere lighter and less serious.

A reader acquiring enough knowledge about the culture and understand Louisa's reaction to her sister's comments and would enjoy them as they hold the book and let out a muffled laugh at her sister's statement visualising the scene where Louisa gives her sister the side eye or rolls her eyes at such use of words as the sister smirks in slight amusement. Another reader would find such vile vocabulary to be too vague as they would argue that the writer could have used some euphemism, and not have the characters be so blunt, rude, and offensive. A different reader would not be offended by the words but by the reaction of Louisa and why was she not furious at her sister, saying that enjoying such jokes and letting them slide is as bad as or even worse than making them. The perspective of the reader and how they decide to approach the incident tells about how their reaction is going to be as in such context it aims to highlight Englishness and

give a closer look to what the actual situation must have been like not only for the characters but for the real life people who went through such a thing.

- **Louisa and Will's Bonding**

### **Louisa and Will Getting Tattoos**

Best before: 19 March 2007

I stared at it. I half laughed, and then my eyes filled with tears. "Is that the—"

"Date of my accident. Yes." He raised his eyes to the heavens. "Oh, for Christ's sake, don't get maudlin, Clark. It was meant to be funny."

"It is funny. In a crappy sort of way."

"Nathan will enjoy it. Oh, come on, don't look like that. It's not as if I'm ruining my perfect body, is it?"...

I pulled out a piece of paper and sat back. It was a folded ten-pound note.

"There you go. The emergency tenner."

"So?"

"It's yours."

"For what?"

"That tattoo." He grinned at me. "Right up until you were in that chair, I didn't think for a minute you were going to actually do it."(Me Before You, 239 240).

In this passage Will was able to convince Louisa to stop at the tattoo shop they saw on their way home from what she would call a successful wine tasting as Will seemed to be enjoying himself as he made friends with the owner and Louisa was just happy he was smiling

and being sarcastic as she saw that as a good sign. After they went to the tattoo shop they both got tattoos while she got a bumble bee he decided to get one that referred to his accident; he meant for the tattoo to be sarcastic and funny in a dark way as it included the date of his accident. Louisa laughed at first but then she started crying, not because she felt offended but because she felt sorry for her friend, knowing his plans to try and go for Dignitas made her very sympathetic and the fact that she took it upon herself to stop him made it worse.

The initial reaction of Louisa was to laugh, which can be seen as the natural or spontaneous reaction as she found the idea of the tattoo funny to a certain extent. If Will was not planning on killing himself she probably would not of had cried right after, as in this case her feeling of empathy and guilt being confused by what this meant for Will and if it going to change anything. However as two English people they both agreed that it is funny as she admitted to the humour behind it. Will saw the tears in Louisa's eyes and went on making more sarcastic comments to lighten the mood and to make sure she did not feel sad, even in this case he knew she was not offended by his action cause they have established a close relationship that guaranteed that sarcasm was included in every conversation about every topic without either of them holding bad feelings about it or thinking too much into it; they both used to as a way of cracking a laugh.

When a reader is faced with such situation this far in this book they are ought to feel sympathetic for Will; his life prior to the accident was so different he used to travel, to practice sports, to have a great job, and most importantly he was independent. To make it worse he was not only a quadriplegic who needed 24/7 care but was also in pain most of the times, Will was also changing as he became nicer to people thanks to Louisa which changed his character from a hated character to one the readers could not help but love and feel sorry for.

This would mean that the reader would either be sorry for Will for getting such a tattoo the same as Louisa did or they would laugh at his dark sense of humour. In this situation the reader does not have the luxury of being offended as Will's life was presented in a light that explains every aspect of his personality. Furthermore, Will made other sarcastic comments about Louisa that did not hold any offence behind them which had to make any reader smile at least no matter how sorry or sad they felt for Will.

- **The Shattered Family**

### **Steven and his Lover**

If the girl failed with her ranches and her bungee jumping and hot tubs and what have you, she would paradoxically be setting me free. Because the only way I would ever be able to leave my family was if Will decided, after all, that he was still determined to go to this infernal place in Switzerland. I knew it, and Camilla knew it. Even if neither of us would admit it to ourselves. Only on my son's death would I be free to live the life of my choosing.

"Don't," she said, catching my expression.

Dear Della. She could tell what I was thinking, even when I didn't know myself. "It's good news, Steven. Really. You never know, this might be the start of a whole new independent life for Will."

I placed my hand over hers. A braver man might have told her what I really thought. A braver man would have let her go long ago—her, and maybe even my wife too.

“You’re right,” I said, forcing a smile. “Let’s hope he comes back full of tales of bungee ropes or whatever horror it is the young people like to inflict upon each other.”

She nudged me. “He might make you put one up in the castle.”

“White-water rafting in the moat?” I said. “I shall file it away as a possible attraction for next summer’s season.” (Me Before You, 326 327).

The last passage above is about Will’s father Steven, as Steven secretly met with his lover he had thoughts of how easier his life would be if his son did end his life; Steven stayed with his wife out of pity because of their son’s condition as he wanted to leave her and go live another life with his lover, a ‘braver’ life but he could not do that While Will was still alive. He wondered that if Louisa would fail her mission so he could be set ‘free’, as he tried to put his thoughts into words his lover read his mind due to her good knowledge of him and stopped him from uttering such words as she then resorted to sarcasm. She used sarcasm to take the edge off of the situation and Steven decided to join her and be sarcastic himself as he knew her intentions.

The trip inside Steven’s mind showed the dark thoughts he kept to himself. Even though, he did love his son as he was the first to encourage Louisa’s ideas and support her in her tries to make Will change his mind, he was unfaithful to his wife and still could not help it as his mind went through the possibilities and what they could lead to. The novel has been realistic a part of that was showing the raw emotions of the characters with no filter whatsoever, when Steven’s ideas were stripped they showed his pessimism and selfishness, the situation got sad and depressing so his lover decided to use sarcasm to not criticise or make fun of the situation but just to change the topic and not let his mind go to such places.

It is possible for readers to get offended by the act of him thinking such thoughts alone, a person who gets offended by such thought is however delusional as in reality it is possible for

people to love their child and care for them but that will not stop them for wanting a better life for themselves, it is normal for human mind to think of dark selfish ideas as it is a part of human nature. Some other reader could be offended by the fact that he was being sarcastic about building his son, that he was just debating the benefits of his death, a water slide. This side can be related to Englishness once again as they best way they know how to deal with tragedy and dark thought is through an even darker humour.

The reader's reaction to the thoughts that clouded Steven's mind and to his sarcastic comments that followed are related to life experiences that the reader has faces, a reader that did not have to take care of a sick person before or had someone dependant on them for even the simplest tasks might not understand the selfishness behind Steven's thoughts causing offence and hatred towards the character. On the other hand a reader who had to face such a challenge head on knowing the troubles coming with would understand where Steven is coming from as they would not necessarily agree with his stance but would show enough understanding of it.

- **Nathan's Perception of Will**

### **Nathan's Conversation with Will**

He told me Louisa had been so drunk he hadn't wanted to risk letting her loose on his equipment. "God knows where she might have stuck the ruddy tubes." He half laughed as he said it. It had taken Louisa almost half an hour just to get him out of his chair and into bed, he said. They had both ended up on the floor twice. "Luckily we were both so drunk by then I don't think either of us felt a thing." She had had the presence of mind to call down to reception, and they had asked a porter to help lift him. "Nice chap". I have a vague memory of insisting Louisa give him a fifty-pound tip. I knew she was properly

drunk because she agreed to it. "Will had been afraid when he finally left his room that she wouldn't actually make it to hers. He'd had visions of her curled up in a little red ball on the stairs.

My own view of Louisa Clark was a little less generous just at that moment"(Me Before You, 300)

In this passage it is the point of view of Nathan (the medical assistant), after he expressed his observation of how Will tried to hide his pain until his mom and Louisa were gone. He tried to give him the needed medical care and while Nathan is mad at Louisa for not taking care of Will's tubes, Will was busy making sarcastic jokes about how drunk she was trying to make Nathan laugh as he tried to stop him from being mad at Louisa that Will felt protective of at this point in their relationship. Nathan was too worried to share the sarcasm back.

As Nathan was from New Zealand, that mean that he did not share the same sense of humor and did not cope with tragedy and uncomfortableness the same was the English did. He was more serious even though his character was the most laid back, calm, unproblematic character. He still drew a line between humor and seriousness especially when Will's health was at jeopardy.

His view of Will was different from the view of other characters as he was the only character to support Will's decision and really understand his pain, even Will has a degree of respect for him and what he provides him with. Nathan did get offended by Louisa's carelessness or neglection but Will used sarcasm to make it less offensive and to guarantee a lighter situation with less intensity not just for himself and Nathan's but for Louisa's sake.

The context of the offence was to an extent personal as it is mainly between Nathan and Louisa and her not being responsible or performing her duties as she should. This left no room

for the reader to be offended as no specific sensitive topic was brought up but this conversation does show Nathan's perception of Will and how he views him. Nathan is possibly the only character who can look through Will and understand him fully as he is constantly supporting him.

The fact that Nathan supports Will's decision to end his life can be seen as offensive to some readers. However a reader that pays attention will notice how the writer used many point of views but did not use Will's, even though he is a main character in her story, that is due to her trying to present his story from different angles. Nathan's angle seems to be the closest to Will's reality as it does not include expectations, it does not force norms, and knows exactly what happens within his mind.

- **Will Confirming Louisa's Offensiveness**

#### **Will and Louisa's Conversation**

"You know," I said, finally, "I could have been horrible to you back there. I could have pointed out that you do nothing either." "I'm not sure Nathan would have offered particularly good odds on me going out dancing," Will said (Me Before You, 226).

"This is your way of telling me I should be doing something far more worthwhile than peeling your potatoes."

"I'm telling you there's a whole world out there. But that I'd be very grateful if you'd do me some potatoes first." He smiled at me, and I couldn't help but smile back.(ibid, 228)

In this passage Louisa was offended as Will and Nathan made a bet about how boring her life choices were, as Will came to apologize it came out more like a 'wake-up call' then it was an apology as he kept making sarcastic comments and explain why he did what he chose to do on purpose, ignoring her hurt feeling and proving his point with more sarcastic comments.

This passage can be seen as highlight of Will's entitlement and insensitivity towards Louisa's feeling as he started a bet about how boring her life, and when she did feel offended he just carried on his verbal assaults at her life choices and what she was doing with her life.

The relation to the culture is quite evident as she is offended she just overlooks it. She only makes one comment about it that Will replies to sarcastically, as if he did not care about her opinion. Regardless of that, she just sat and listened to him refusing to let a sense of self-importance or earnestness to take over her emotions making her end the conversation with a laugh at Will's comments non English people would find such an interaction to be illogical but it governed the relation of Will and Louisa as they were from the same culture and they were close enough to know each other's true intentions.

The reader could view Will's act as impulsive and aggressive, it could be seen as a way of showing his superiority as he got her offended and just kept going to make even more damage that ended up making Louisa laugh, This showed the aspect of Will that only Louisa got to experience as he pushes her to be better and he is sarcastic to make her less sensitive which can be understood as bossy or pushy. Will's intentions were good but his method of conveying them was a bit controversial, but not too controversial for an English person to understand and enjoy.

The humor that Will implied took the seriousness out of the situation; it allowed him and Louisa to relax and take such a serious topic with such a light heart and sarcastic jokes. Not all

readers could comprehend that but Louisa's reaction and thoughts showed that she did and she appreciated it.

### **3.4. Discussion**

The analysis of the movies showed the use of sarcasm in lessening offence on a specific normative scale; the movie did contain some scenes that conveyed that but it was all based on societal rules and the unwritten rules of humanity and politeness. Regardless of the movie's attempt to convey the English culture and portray it through the movie, it still had social limitation and could not be inclusive of all aspects.

The movie relied heavily on signs from background settings like clothing to obvious ones like the fake smile used when being heavily sarcastic. However, all these signs fell into social myths and relied on an already set, agreed upon association of symbols that are universal and unproblematic. There was almost no use of any symbols that could raise any controversy; the directors were so careful as if they were scared of a public rejection.

All the sensitive topics were not included, and if some were included the actors were playing safe going by what is socially accepted so if a Louisa's character is to make a sarcastic comment about Will's disability, she will only do so after Will starts himself as she is not allowed to take the initiative but due to the closeness she can join him in his self-deprecating journey.

Another point is that the directors beard in mind to cast all the actors as English people to match the English characters and avoid any sense of ironic or sarcastic connotation that could be

unintentionally implied. Such care for the cast was not enough apparently as many activist spoke about how the actor who played Will's role should have been disabled in real life.

To see how much details were put into the production of the movie and still receive lash back shows how limited the big screen is and how many challenged the directors had to face to produce a piece that when people watched they focused on the story and not the assumed associative meaning.

The analysis of the novel showed different results as the author had no problem using sarcasm in speaking about a variety of topics, most of which are seen as taboos and sensitive topics that should not be discussed yet alone joked about.

The novel showed the realistic side of events as it did include very dark thoughts and jokes, but they were all based on realities that could not be denied nor ignored so they were stripped and presented to the reader.

Englishness was presented adequately as the author did not have to hold back, she transferred her Englishness through the characters: their costumes and habits, way of speaking, and way of interacting. Jojo Was able to portray her culture in way she desired as she had full control of each and every character.

Novels have no limitation about what can and cannot be included which widened the horizon of the novel and allowed it to include almost every topic and even talk in detail about it freely. Her excuse was that the events based on real life events allowing her to go loose on the limits of what is included or joked about.

The thing that the novel could also do is show one character in different lights to help the reader visualize the vents in a real life context, giving such context was enough justification for some behaviors of characters, as the contextualization gave more sense to the dark and socially unacceptable behavior that is viewed differently on an individual scale.

Finally it is clear the movie was taking some scenes from the novel, decontextualize them from all the socially unacceptable realities and recontextualize them in accordance to the pop culture and what is appropriate explaining why so many scenes from the novel were not included in the movie adaptation. If anything this shows that collective reactions are more critical and public content is more regulated while individual reactions are more understanding and raw.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter dealt with: the analysis of the movie using semiotics and the novel using reader response theory. The goal was to show the difference between the individual and collective reactions to sarcasm as a method of lessening offensiveness in the English culture. It highlighted the limitations and freedoms of the content based on the audience that it is meant for.

It also showed the difference there is between a novel and a movie adaptation even when written by the same person. If anything, this shows the power that the audiences have as they could like a book and not like the adaptation of the same movie. This highlights the difference between the two reactions and shows the limitation that come with following a movie due to its popularization, and the liberties enjoyed by a novel with less social attention.

Collective reactions show that mainstream media outlets like movies have a higher price to pay for its popularity. It includes the twisted half realities, the public judgment, and censorship leaving directors with not much of a choice than to use symbols and silent signs. Individual reactions however, show the privilege of liberty, uncensorship, and individual understanding which gave writer a space safe enough for them to indulge in personal topics and social taboos.

## General Conclusion

The present research has investigated the difference between the collective and individual reactions to sarcasm as a tool of lessening the offensiveness of an utterance in the English cultural specifically. It has highlighted the liberties and limitation that come with the mainstream and the less popularised elements of media. This research was conducted on the assumptions that popular media did not portray real societal features of the English culture and thus mislead EFL learners. In hopes of finding the reasons behind that a research was conducted to answer these questions:

- 1- What are the expected reactions from individuals as sarcasm is implemented to minimise the level of offensiveness?
- 2- What are the reactions expected from society as sarcasm is used to minimise the level of offensiveness?
- 3- What are the elements that create a difference between the two reactions?

To answer these questions a theoretical frame work has taken place focusing on a few aspects mainly the relation between sarcasm and offensiveness, how that is related to English culture, and finally how the individual and social contexts change the outcome of the interaction.

The first part of literature review has dealt with the definitions of sarcasm, its detection, the reasons behind its usage during different periods of time, and how it has become to what it is today. It has also tackled offensiveness, its triggers, consequences, and how serious or silly it can be. This part has also included hints to the relation between the two variables and how interrelated they are.

The second part of the theoretical framework has placed the variables presented in the first part into a context; it has related them to the English culture. After narrowing the scope to one culture, the reasons that have led individuals to accept sarcasm and the masses to refuse it have been explained and discussed. This part has ended by a comparison between movies and novels, and the ability to include offensiveness within each element.

In an attempt to find the satisfactory answers to the questions of the current research, the researcher has analysed the English novel 'Me Before You' using reader-response theory. It aims at getting an understanding of the individual reactions and what readers feel after interacting with a novel full of offensive sarcasm that feeds on sensitive topics and social taboos. To decipher the collective reactions to the same sensitive matters the researcher has also analysed the movie adaptation of the book following Barthes semiotic media theory, breaking down the symbols and signs used to convey a silent message that hinted to the role of sarcasm in minimising offensiveness even in less controversial topics at hand.

The results of the novel analysis showed a vile use of sarcasm regarding many topics such as disability. This showed that the reader's response is based on their previous life experiences as well as their personality traits and knowledge of other cultures. There was no censorship in any form or way in the book as the writer had the freedom to express her thoughts and ideas and use the dark type of sarcasm that the characters used as a self-coping mechanism to deal with trauma and to escape the confrontation of real feelings, highlighting the cultural background. The results of the movie analysis showed a light use of dark humour as sarcasm was implied but lightly and only in acceptable societal norms like just joining in instead of initiating. The movie was exposed to more criticism and was more under the public eye making the

directors use silent signs to convey the irony of the situation as sarcasm would be too harsh, the censorship on the movie was severe as even the light slips would result in judgments and disagreement regardless of the cultural background.

Based on the finding of this study, EFL learners are encouraged to seek less popular media elements to be able to grasp the cultural aspect of a language as movie are not authentic and true to the origins not necessarily because movies spread wrong images of cultures but because movies are censored based on universal scales. This leads to showing only the ‘acceptable’ part of the culture and not the whole culture.

In conclusion, this research was able to shed light on the difference between the individual and collective reactions to sarcasm in minimising offence in the English society. This brought attention to the cultural elements that are not portrayed in popular media outlets just to avoid controversy, public disagreement, and the liberties that smaller media outlets have.

### **Limitations**

The limitation that the researcher has faced in conducting this investigation is the lack of time as well as the forced quarantine due to the Covid-19. It has been scheduled to conduct interviews to support the validity of the research, but due to the circumstances it was not possible to achieve this.

### **Suggestions**

A suggested idea for further research based on the present one is testing EFL learners’ knowledge about cultural features that are not shown in the mainstream media based on the media elements they consume most.



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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Screenshots of the Main Scenes in the Movie 'Me Before You'**

# Appendix

## Appendix A

### Screenshots of the Main Scenes in the Movie 'Me Before You'







## Résumé

Cette recherche représente une étude sur la réaction individuelle et collective envers l'utilisation du sarcasme pour diminuer l'offense d'une expression dans la culture anglaise. La recherche a comme but la sensibilisation du lien direct entre les éléments de media et la culture. Le roman 'Me Before You' est analysé par la théorie de la réception et de la lecture, et l'adaptation du livre en film est analysée par la théorie sémiotique de Barthes pour enfin comparer les résultats des deux. Pour conclure, la différence entre les réactions individuelles et collectives envers l'offense du sarcasme est expliquée et ensuite justifiée.

*Mots clés:* sarcasme, offense, réaction individuelle, réaction collective, culture anglaise

## ملخص

يدرس هذا البحث رد الفعل المنفرد و الجماعي لاستعمال السخرية بهدف تخفيف طابع الإهانة في الثقافة الإنجليزية. الهدف من الدراسة هو التوعية بخصوص عناصر وسائل الاعلام التي فعلا لها علاقة بالثقافة عن طريق تحليل الرواية "انا قبلك" و ذلك باستعمال نظرية رد فعل القارئ و كذلك الفيلم المقتبس من نفس الرواية باستعمال النظرية السميائية لبارثر ثم مقارنة نتائج التحليل من اجل الوصول لخاتمة تفسر الفرق بين رد الفعل الفردي و رد الفعل الجماعي نحو السخرية المهينة مع تبريرها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السخرية, الإهانة, رد الفعل الفردي, رد الفعل الجماعي, الثقافة الانجليزية



