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The Role of Context in Interpreting English Sarcasm by Non- Native Speakers

The Case of EFL Master Students at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements of the master's degree in linguistics.

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my parents and to my brother Ayoub, also my research colleague

Belhouari, my amazing friends Hocine and Amine whom we shared together endless

memories.

Ayad Anouar

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my parents for their patience and support. This work is also dedicated to my brothers and sister, as they have been helping me finishing my studies. Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to my friends for being there for me whenever I needed validation.

Belhouari Zine Elabiddine

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List of Abbreviation and Acronyms

EFL: English as a foreign language H: Hearer

L2: Second language

etc: End of thinking capacity

LMD: License, Master, Doctorate

MA: Master

S: speaker

u: Utterance

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Abstract

Sarcasm comprehension is an important aspect of pragmatic language skills. The present study aims at exploring the ability of EFL master students at Tiaret Ibn Khaldoun University to grasp and understand written English sarcasm, and how they recognize sarcasm. This study seeks also to measure the extent to which context plays a significant role in enabling EFL master students to better detect sarcastic utterances. Two types of context were examined in this study: the linguistic context and the cultural context. To conduct the research, a questionnaire administered to seventy (70) master students at Ibn Khaldoun University. The participants were first and second year Master students from both linguistics and didactics specialties. The data were subsequently analysed and interpreted quantitatively. Based on the total finding, it seems that EFL master students find difficulties in understanding English sarcasm especially sarcastic utterances with cultural context.

*Keywords***:** Cultural context, figurative language, linguistic context, pragmatics, sarcasm

General Introduction

People frequently use language to convey something other than what the words themselves mean. Very often, in fact, the intended message is far removed from the meaning of the uttered words. One clear example of this is sarcasm, a figure of speech in which there is an incongruity between what is said and what is meant. For instance, when someone walks in the door completely drenched from the rainstorm outside and says, "What lovely weather", he she actually communicates "What terrible weather". Sarcasm comprehension is an important aspect of pragmatic language skills, and one that is acknowledged to be a great challenge for EFL learners, failure in sarcasm understanding can have negative social consequences, including social exclusion and misunderstandings.

Research Motivation

Numerous studies from different fields of linguistics have addressed how English speakers recognize and understand sarcasm but little research has dealt with EFL learners 'ability to grasp sarcasm, and none were conducted in our university. This motivates us to investigate how EFL learners of Ibn Khaldoun University recognize English sarcasm.

Research Aim

The general aim of our study is to examine the ability of EFL students at Tiaret university to grasp and understand written English sarcasm. This study seeks also to measure the extent to which context plays a significant role in enabling EFL master students at Ibn Khaldoun university to better detect sarcastic utterances.

Research Questions

The study at hands intended to address the following questions:

A. Are EFL master students of Ibn Khaldoun University able to identify the

   English written sarcasm?

B. If yes, does the context play a significant role in interpreting the

   meaning of English sarcastic language?

Research Hypotheses

 The following hypotheses are initially assumed:

➢ It may be difficult for EFL master students to pick up on written sarcasm.

➢ EFL master students probably struggle to understand sarcasm with cultural context.

Significance of the Study

There has never been a study assessing the capacity of Ibn Khaldoun EFL master student to understand sarcasm. Therefore, the significance of this research lies in its novelty. Moreover, this research would likely provide useful information for EFL students aiming to improve their sarcasm identification performance, and hopefully, this research inspires other researchers to develop or to conduct other research in the same scope with different subjects.

Research Methodology

To conduct the present research a questionnaire was used with a sample of 70 EFL master students at Ibn Khaldoun university. The participants who were randomly selected are first- and second-year master students from both English specialties (linguistics and didactics).

Research Process

      This dissertation consists of three chapters. The first chapter represents the main theoretical aspects of the phenomenon of sarcasm describing linguistic theories of sarcasm. Chapter two is the empirical phase of this study. This chapter details the process of data collection. Chapter three describes the results obtained and discusses them.

Chapter One

Sarcastic Language and Context

1.1. Introduction

The present chapter is devoted to set the scene and provide a clear understanding of the related concepts to our investigation, we shall be concerned with giving an insight about the phenomenon of sarcasm and outline its aspects, Furthermore, since context is considered as marker of sarcasm perception, we will provide an insight about context and its role in the interpretation of sarcasm.

1.2. Pragmatics

The term "pragmatics" was initially used by Morris in 1938. Pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics that investigates how language is related to the situations in which it is used. It refers to the study of "invisible'' meaning, or how humans understand what is intended even when it is not explicitly expressed or written (Yule, 2010). According to Ibrahim and Abbas (2010), pragmatics describes the encoding of particular communication functions in particular grammatical and lexical components of a given language.

Pragmatics is a contemporary area of linguistic study with roots in philosophy of language. Its philosophical foundations can be found in 1930s philosophy, specifically in the writings of Charles Morris (1938), Rudolf Carnap (1939), and Charles Peirce (1870). According to Huang (2007, p. 2) pragmatics is one of the elements that constitute semiotics. Huang (2007) claimed that semiotics can be broken down into three categories: Syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. The first element (syntax) focuses on the relationship between two signs. The second element (semantics) examines the relationship between signs and their meanings. The third element (pragmatics) deals with the relationship between signals and their users on one hand, and between signals and interpreters on the other hand. This suggests that semantics is a source of information for pragmatics, and syntax is a source of information for semantics. Thus, one can say that semantics is intermediate between pragmatics and syntax in terms of abstractness.

Pragmatics is seen by Levinson (1983) as an inferential process. For him, we can calculate extremely specific conclusions about the types of assumptions participants are making and the purposes for which utterances are being utilized from sequences of utterances combined with underlying assumptions about language usage. Such computations, both in production and interpretation, are a requirement for participation in common language usage. Although it may make reference to common and somewhat abstract principles, this capacity is independent of peculiar beliefs, feelings, and behaviours. Since this skill works for both specific languages and all languages, pragmatics can be used to describe it. (Levinson, 1983, p. 53).

According to Purwo (1990, p 16), pragmatics is the study of speech meaning utilizing context-bound meanings. While addressing language pragmatically entails taking into account its context, specifically how it is used in communication events.

Merriam-Webster defines pragmatics as a branch of semiotics that deals with the relationship between signs or linguistic expressions and their users. In another definition, the dictionary defines pragmatics as a branch of linguistics that examines the relationship between sentences and the context in which they are used. To summarize, the primary goal of pragmatics is the study of the speaker's meaning in a specific situation, rather than what the words imply according to a dictionary.

1.3. Figurative Language

The overarching term figurative language or non-literal language encompasses words or phrases that goes beyond the dictionary definitions. Giroux & Williston (1974, p. 10), stated that "Figurative language is language which departs from the straight-forward use of words. It creates a special effect, clarifies an idea, and making writing more colourful and forceful".

Another definition of figurative language was presented by M. H. Abrams (2004, p 132). For him, "figurative language is a conspicuous departure from what competent users of a language apprehend as the standard meaning of words, or else the standard order of words, in order to achieve some special meaning or effect". According to Abrams, figurative language includes words used in nonliteral ways through different group of linguistic devices called figures of speech, for the purposes of enhancing language and making it livelier. Likewise, Furniss and Bath (2007, p. 146) argued that "a figure of speech is a word or phrase which is not meant to be taken literally in the context in which it is being used".

There are many types of figures of speech that one can come across regularly in his/her daily life. These types are distinguished from each other based on how they function, and they are given names derived from classical Greek rhetorical studies. The main common types are:

a. Metaphor

According to Pardede (2002, p 23), a metaphor is an analogy identifying a single thing comparing one thing with another while giving the first item a higher quality rating. Metaphor might be straightforward, appearing in a single isolated comparison, or it can be complex, serving as the central picture of the entire piece, for example: He is the star of the family.

b. Metonymy

According to Pardede (2008, p. 25), metonymy is the substitution of one term for another that is closely related, for example: if we do not get these reports in today, the suits will be after us.

c. Synecdoche

Synecdoche, according to Pardede (2008, p. 23), is a figure of phrase that in which a part is used to describe a whole, for example: "The captain commands one hundred sails".

d. Idioms

According to Fernando (1996, p 3), idioms are a kind of "conventionalized multiword expressions" that are widely used. For her, the term "idiom" can be broad and embrace all set phrases and rhetorical devices, including similes, proverbs, and sayings, for example: Kill two birds with one stone.

e. Hyperbole

It is a phrase used in harsh language to create intensity (Wyne 1989, p 520), for example: The clouds broke when he sneezed?

f. Irony

When someone says one thing but means another, he/she is using irony, a difference in language and intent. Hutcheon (1995, p. 220) contends that irony encompasses more than just the semantic replacement of a phrase's literal for figurative meaning and that it is possible to identify an utterance as sarcastic by taking into account both meanings.

1.4. Sarcasm

There is no clear and exact definition of the term "sarcasm" in linguistic and pragmatic theories. Katyayan (2019, p. 67) defined sarcasm "as an attempt to make a sharp or bitter comment in order to fulfil any of the three purposes, as wit, as whimper, or as evasion." This means that sarcastic statements generally do not mean themselves literally but convey implicit meaning, often as contrast of their actual meaning. Katyayan declared the negativity and indirectness of sarcasm to serve specific purposes.

According to Shaw (1976), sarcasm is a type of irony, bitter and often harsh derision. Sarcasm, for him, is always personal, always mocking, and always intended to hurt.

Following the same line of thought, Abrams (1981) argued that sarcasm is a type of irony that is sometimes used interchangeably with all other types but differs in that the speakers voice is exaggerated (intonation). According to Abrams' definition, sarcasm also appears to contain intonation as a fundamental characteristic in addition to intention (tone).

Likewise, Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines sarcasm as "the use of words that mean the opposite of what you really want to say especially in order to insult someone, to show irritation, or to be funny". Similarly, Kreuz and Glucksberg (1989) claimed that sarcasm is a type of verbal irony that conveys unfavourable opinions about people or things. For them, sarcasm can express positive feelings while still implying negative ones.

In much more thinking with Kreuz and Glucksberg, cutting (2002) asserted that sarcasm is a less amicable sort of irony that is typically meant to be hurtful. Giora (1995, as cited in Joshi et al., (2017) maintained that irony/sarcasm is a type of negation in which an explicit negation marker is absent. This means that, when sarcasm is expressed, a negative proposition is meant without using clear markers of negation.

Sarcasm, according to Pu La Deshpande (2002), is a conscious attempt to draw attention to critique, or mock attitudes and views by the use of words and acts that differ from their typical connotations. This suggests that sarcasm is a "deliberate" speech act, which is used by speakers on purpose, usually to critique or mock the addressees' attitudes, views, appearance…etc.

McDonald (1999, p. 486) also considered sarcasm as an indirect speech pattern used on purpose to elicit a specific dramatic response from the audience. He adds that sarcasm is a type of sarcastic communication that is frequently employed to express implicit criticism with a specific victim as its focus.

Regarding the extent to which sarcasm is used in daily conversation, Noble (1977) believed that sarcasm is a male-dominated method of communication that is primarily employed among peers. Sarcastic speech acts, according to Caucci and Kreuz (2012) are most of the time used between friends because they are more successful at comprehending their meaning than strangers.

According to Zajdman (1991, p. 30) sarcasm is a term or phrase used for impact that does not have its usual or literal meaning. It occurs when a speaker intends the complete opposite of what they say.

According to Colston and Gibbs (2007, pp. 22–24), "sarcasm is a word that is frequently employed to characterize an expression of verbal irony." From a different angle, Dews et al. (2011, p. 1574) note that sarcasm can assist produce irony when paired with linguistic structures like jocularity, hyperbole, rhetorical inquiries, and understatement. They imply that these characteristics are irony expression techniques.

Given the various perspectives discussed above, it is acceptable to say that sarcasm is an indirect and expressive speech act in a form of verbal irony, or occasionally a behavioural irony, where the speaker sincerely wishes to express his or her (typically) unfavourable opinion toward interlocutors (hurting, criticising, etc...).

1.4.1. Types of Sarcasm

Four diverse varieties of sarcasm all involve a single action of meaning inversion that takes different forms. All four types contradict something the speaker claims to imply (or presupposes someone else to have meant). According to Camp (2012, p.2) there are four types of sarcasm:

1.4.1.1. Illocutionary Sarcasm

The greatest distinguishing feature of illocutionary sarcasm is that it emphasizes a speech act rather than just making an assertion (Camp, 2011, p. 32). This sort of sarcasm is the most common type of sarcasm, and it incorporates extra textual cues that suggest an attitude other than the true interpretation. Non-textual variations (such a change in pitch) come into play in certain situations, for example:

a. "Thanks for holding the door" (camp 2011, p 32).

b. "How old did you say you were?" (Camp, 2011, p. 32).

Example (a) shows how the speaker may appear to thank the hearer while in fact the hearer is not the one holding the door. The speaker says something that they believe is suitable, but the reality is that the hearer does not hold the door open for them. Additionally, the speaker uses the utterance to demonstrate that the hearer's behaviour is impolite.

Example (b) is about to alert the hearer that he or she has displayed an immature attitude or behaviour that is against expectations, the speaker pretends to inquire about the hearer's age.

1.4.1.2. Propositional Sarcasm

According to Camp (2011), propositional sarcasm is the easiest to understand. The most crucial feature of this type is that speakers negate a certain proposition by saying the exact opposite of what they mean. This type may take the form of sentences, phrases, or occasionally only a single adjective. And although such sarcasm looks to be without

emotion, it actually has an underlying sentiment, for example: "He's a fine friend." (Camp 2011, p 18). In this example the speaker makes a claim about his friend while, in fact, he is going to say the exact opposite. The speaker does not consider him to be a fine friend.

1.4.1.3. Like-Prefixed Sarcasm

This form of sarcasm combines a declarative sentence with an entire proposition of the utterance as its target (Camp, 2011, p. 27). If a sarcastic expression is preceded by "like," it means the speaker is trying to deny the statement's assertion. For example:

a. "Like that's a good idea." (Camp 2011, p 14).

b. "Nice cool day today, huh." (Camp 2011, p 31.).

in example (a), the prefix "Like" aids in determining the true meaning, which is that the notion is bad, whereas in example (b), neither "Like" nor "as if" are prefixed to the speech. The fact that it is still said in jest indicates that the temperature is high. In this instance, the word "huh" in the sentence aids in flipping the meaning. It will become "Like it is a nice cool day today" with the same meaning if the prefix "Like" is added.

1.4.1.4. Lexical Sarcasm

Lexical sarcasm "targets terms which imply the extreme end or a conventionally-associated, normatively-loaded scale,"(Camp, 2011, p 25). According to Camp (2011), The use of adjectives like "brilliant" and "genius" enables the sarcastic remark to provide a value at the opposite end of the spectrum. Expressions like "so" or "such a" that are allusive, or comparative are frequently used in lexical sarcasm. The caustic utterance is made more obvious by the allusive terms. This type of sarcasm gives an expression or phrase within the spoken sentence an inverted compositional significance, for example: "Because George has turned out to be such a diplomat, we've decided to transfer him to Payroll, where he'll do less damage" (Camp, 2011, p. 14).

In this example, George is being moved to Payroll since he is underperforming. The speaker conveys this in a natural manner without completely flipping the meaning. However, the speaker's use of the contradictory word "diplomat" made this statement sarcastic.

1.4.2. Causes of Sarcasm

According to Campbell and Katz (2012), sarcasm manifests along a number of dimensions, including failed expectation, pragmatic insincerity, negative tension, and victimization. For Eisterhold et al., (2006) Sarcasm can be understood in terms of the reaction it evokes, they note that possible answers to sarcasm include laughing, giving no response, smiling, exchanging sarcasm (in response), changing the subject (since the listener was not amused by the caustic sarcasm), giving a literal response and showing non-verbal reactions. Wilson (2006) asserts that sarcasm develops when there is a situational discrepancy between the text and the contextual information.

Sarcasm has also been shown to be "morphologically simpler and more versatile to deploy than direct forms" (McDonald, 1999, p.487). It typically works better in expressing emotion or thought. Sarcasm is sometimes seen as a less confrontational way to express one's true feelings towards others. Additionally, using sarcasm allows speakers to be theatrical and employ wordplay that is more engaging than simple statements. Despite the fact that sarcasm is a polite kind of criticism, it is nonetheless a sort of criticism which is usually associated with certain negative attitudes like disapproval, contempt, derision, and ridicule (McDonald, 1999, p.487.).

While others Such as Colston, 1997, 2000; Gibbs, 1986 have shown that ironic criticism can occasionally be employed for the exact opposite reason, namely, to increase condemnation, others such as Dews, Kaplan, & Winner,1995 have suggested that ironic criticism has the effect of diluting condemnation in comparison to the more direct version (Toplak, 2000).

Depending on the speaker's perspective, it can be inferred if someone's intention is to decrease or raise the impact of criticism. After a sarcastic remark has been uttered, the listener must engage in a process of decoding and interpretation in order to comprehend what was said. There are various hypotheses regarding what the hearer feels after hearing a caustic statement.

The conventional Grice model presupposes that the listener hears the statement's literal meaning, learns that it unexpectedly conflicts with previously known facts, and then substitutes a nonliteral meaning based on conversational inference (McDonald, 1999, 488). In essence, the listener is replacing definitions. This model has a drawback in that it ignores the speaker's motivation for using sarcasm. "The speaker is not merely declaring that it is not a great day for a picnic, but may be deriding the listener's judgment, blaming him for ruining the day, indicating they should never have set out, and so on," (McDonald, 1999). The conventional model states that the speaker could be ridiculing the listener and the listener would not even realize it because he/she would be using his/her own substitution to define the comment.

To find out why people use sarcastic statements when criticizing others, Toplak and Katz (2000) conducted a study. Their goal was to determine whether different points of view had distinct motivations for utilizing sarcasm (Toplak, 2000, p.1470). The participants involved in this study were 88 undergraduates from the University of Western Ontario, including 24 men and 64 women. The four points of view that were examined were those of the speaker, listener, incidental overhearing, and a control person who had no perspective. The findings demonstrated that, in comparison to a direct critique, an indirect sarcastic statement is seen as more insulting, verbally aggressive, anger-provoking, and ridiculing than a direct criticism. The sarcastic message is also seen as being somewhat ambiguous, amusing, rude, non- instructive, and lacking in sincerity. The speaker was also perceived as arrogant.

Sarcasm was generally seen negatively and as a kind of verbal assault. However, from the speaker's vantage point, the sarcasm was perceived differently than it was by those with other points of view (p.1474). This is logical. It makes sense that the speaker would consider his remarks to be less critical. He might think that what he is saying is not as offensive as people are making it out to be.

At the end of their study, Toplak and Katz (2000) concluded that point of view is not a factor in the reasoning behind why a person uses sarcasm. All points of view in the studies showed that the fundamental factor of sarcasm is this: "With speaker intent in mind [from all points of view] sarcasm is used as a means of verbal aggression; with victim's reactions in mind, sarcasm is taken as a more severe form of criticism than found when criticism is directly expressed" (Toplak, 2000, p.1482).

1.4.3. Formulating Sarcasm

Ivanko and Pexman (2003) represent sarcasm as a 6-tuple consisting of <S, H, C, u, p, p'> where: S = Speaker, H= Hearer, C= Context, u= Utterance, P= Literal Proposition, P'= Intended Proposition.

Ivnanko And Pexman (2003) interpreted also that the tuple can be read as ‗Speaker S generates an utterance u in Context C meaning proposition p but intending that hearer H understands p.' For example, if a teacher says to a student, "Well, you've done a good job on that assignment, haven't you!" while the student had not completed the assignment, the student will understand the sarcasm. The 6-tuple representation of this statement is:

S: Teacher

 H: Student

C: The student has not completed his/her assignment.

u: "Well, you've done a good job on that assignment, haven't

you!" P: You have done a good job on the assignment.

P': You have done a bad job on the assignment.

1.4.4. Understanding Sarcasm

How sarcasm is understood is discussed by Gibbs and O'Brien (1991). They claim that the key to understanding sarcasm for a listener is the breaking of truthfulness maxims. For instance, it is understood to say, "I adore being ignored." A listener who thinks that being ignored is not a pleasant situation to be in would interpret this as sarcastic "I love your new outfit" though that might be snarky or not. The irony in If any, this line cannot be understood until the listener adopts the opposite meaning from the original meaning after realizing that the literal meaning of the text is untruthful. It would be necessary to be aware of information that would violate the truthfulness principle in order to comprehend the irony, if any, in the phrase above. In case of this new shirt example, if the listener sees that the shirt is stained, the violation of the speaker's truthfulness is likely to convey the sarcasm in the sentence.

Kruez (1996) proposes that sarcasm is easier to be understood between people who share common or similar social grounds. According to Kruez, speakers won't make a caustic remark unless they are certain that it will be understood correctly. This was his "principle of infertility," he said. Therefore, one might infer that sarcasm is more prevalent among friends and family members and less frequent among strangers.

According to Campbell and Katz (2012), sarcasm frequently results from context incongruity, which may surprise readers and require them to re-examine the text. The degree of context incongruity between the remark and the context determines the amount of time needed to comprehend sarcasm. This is known as the Sarcasm Processing Time (Ivanko and Pexman, 2003). That is, the human brain would naturally begin processing the text in a sequential fashion with the intention of understanding the literal meaning in the absence of any information regarding the nature of the upcoming text. The brain may begin a re-analysis to explain an apparent disparity when it detects incongruity (Kutas and Hillyard, 1980).

Inconsistency may alter how the eye moves through the text since information is transmitted to the brain when reading through the eyes. As a result, distinct eye-movement patterns can be seen when sarcasm is successfully processed as opposed to when it is not.

The intricacy of this usage necessitates second-order interpretation of the speaker's or writer's intentions; understanding sarcasm involves the cooperation of various brain regions. Some persons with specific types of brain injury, dementia, and occasionally autism, may not have this advanced comprehension (Aharon-Peretz, J. 2005).

In William Brant's Critique of Sarcastic Reason (2012), it is proposed that adolescents utilize sarcasm as a cognitive and emotional tool to test the limits of decency and truthfulness in discussion. Understanding linguistic structures is necessary for both recognizing and expressing sarcasm, especially when it comes without a cue or indication (e.g., a sarcastic tone or rolling the eyes). Since lying can be conveyed as early as three years old, sarcastic expressions are said to be more sophisticated because they occur far later in the developmental process (Brant, 2012).

According to Brant (2012, 145-6), sarcasm is a type of linguistic expression that frequently involves the assertion of a claim that the expresser does not believe (for example, when the intended meaning is different from the sentence meaning). Around the start of adolescence or later, the ability to recognize irony without the aid of a cue develops.

Sarcasm is the use of an insulting statement that calls for the interpretation to grasp the speaker's negative emotional connotation in light of the current circumstance. Contrarily, irony does not, unless it is caustic irony, entail scorn.

1.4.5. Sarcasm Versus Irony

It can be challenging to distinguish between sarcasm and irony when using these two expressions. Irony, though, is the exact reverse of what you would anticipate. On the other hand, sarcasm has a tone that is meant to humiliate or degrade someone. This suggests that sarcasm is negative (Katz, 2000).

Kreuz and Glucksberg's (1989) distinction between sarcasm and irony has a long tradition. The English words sarcasm and irony both originated as derogatory terms. The word sarcasm can be traced back to the Greek word sarkazein, meaning to speak bitterly as to tear flesh like dogs, and the word irony can be traced back to the Greek word eironeia, a term used to refer to unscrupulous trickery.

Kreuz and Glucksberg (1989) argued that sarcasm and irony are similar in that both are forms of reminder, yet different in that sarcasm conveys ridicule of a specific victim whereas irony does not. Irony and sarcasm are examples of figurative language, Irony lacks the element of scorn that sarcasm possesses (Lee and Katz ,1998). Consequently, the presence of a target separates the two.

Most of the time, the distinction between irony and sarcasm is not made explicitly (for example, in the context of an ironic environment, which holds for sarcasm analogously). Other publications mention the close relationship between sarcasm, satire, and irony. Sarcasm is frequently seen as a particular instance of irony; it is frequently more negative and "biting.'' It is referred to as a synonym for linguistic irony in other definitions (Utsumi,2000).

Wang (2013), who is believed to be the first author to do so, concentrated on the comparison between irony and sarcasm. Her method combines a qualitative sub-corpus analysis with sentiment analysis. She discovers that irony has two meanings: One that is similar to using sarcasm and meant to criticize something or someone, and one that is used to describe an event, which is situational irony. She does not, however, provide an automatic classification of irony and sarcasm or a thorough feature analysis.

According to Katharina Barbe (1995), it might be challenging to discuss sarcasm in the context of irony because many examples can be read as either ironic, sarcastic, or both. The concepts of face-threatening and face-saving acts are employed to differentiate between them. While sarcasm is used to materialize a face-threatening action; irony is thought to be a form of face-saving critique. Speaking in a sarcastic manner has a more intimate quality. All participants in a circumstance are immediately aware of their potential for criticality, therefore shared experience is not an essential factor. A caustic speech does, however, have the power to save face but only for the listener, not the speaker. A hearer can decide to ignore the sarcasm, while speakers compromise themselves, because sarcasm leaves no room for guessing or doubting, which may be found in non-sarcastic instances of irony.

According to Robert L. Brown (1980), irony is a discrete phenomenon that people use to communicate specific messages on the basis of definable knowledge, including knowledge of constitutive rules. Sarcasm, on the other hand, occurs only in language, has a clear function, and is not a discrete logical or linguistic phenomenon. Instead, it is a family of attitudes of scorn, disdain, or derision.

The terms "irony" and "sarcasm" are undergoing a semantic change in some English dialects, according to H.W. Fowler's "A Dictionary of Modern English Usage," which was first published in 1926. As a result of this process, the word "irony" now refers to an unpleasant surprise, whereas the word "sarcasm" now occupies the irony's former semantic area. According to Geoffrey Nunberg (2001), the word "sarcasm" which is derived from the Greek form "rip the flesh" has not retained much of its original meaning. While "ironic" has evolved into a synonym for "coincidental," for many people it now just serves as a blanket phrase for targeted comedy of any kind.

1.5. Context

An important factor in the production and understanding of sarcasm is the context in which the statement may take place. Context has been frequently evoked in the literature, with different meanings and definitions. Different writers and communities use the word "context" to refer to various, though frequently connected, and dependent, conceptions. Language experts frequently refer to the text that is present around a phrase or word as the context. Another common usage of the word "context" refers to a region of reality where certain events or discourse take place. This usage is frequently mixed up and confused with another meaning, which is having knowledge of the same thing, (Christiansen & Dahl, 2005, p. 100).

According to Peccei (1999), context is assessed by the word's meaning, which is influenced by a number of aspects including physical, social, socio-psychological, time, and place. Therefore, context is essential in sarcasm to ascertain the true meaning of what is being said in a more general sense. Merriam-Webster defines context as "the elements of a discourse that surround a word or passage and shed light on it.".

Context is any set of linguistic or non-linguistic resources by which any utterance is produced or interpreted. In other words, context refers to any resources which help a listener/reader to produce or interpret any utterance. Some of these resources include neighbouring words/sentences, manner of speech production, ideas of the past, our values, already acquired knowledge, gestures, facial expressions, physical environment, (Carlo Penco, 1999).

1.5.1. Types of Contexts

There are five types of contexts: Linguistic context, socio-cultural context, physical context, interpersonal context, and institutional context.

1.5.1.1. Linguistic Context

In traditional pragmatics, linguistic context is defined as what has been said previously in the conversation. (Jarmila. P & Jirka. H, 2011). From a language use perspective, context contains linguistic material referred to as linguistic context. The linguistic context is the collection of other words used in the same phrase or sentence (Yule,2010).

Linguistic context, according to Hasan Lubis (1993, as cited in Prillia, 2017), covers speech acts found in sentences, utterances, or specific speech in communication.

1.5.1.2. Socio-Cultural Context

The concept of socio-cultural context refers to the idea that language is inextricably linked to the culture and society in which it is used, rather than existing in isolation, this means that when learning a language, the socio-cultural context in which it is used must also be considered, (Jarmila. P & Jirka. H, 2011).

Socio-cultural Context refers to the culture, customs and background of epoch in language communities in which the speakers participate. Social roles are culturally defined tasks that have been formalized in society and accepted by its citizens. By social status, we refer to the participants' overall social standing. Status will frequently play a significant role in determining who should start the conversation, so it is vital for each participant in the language event to be aware of it or to make assumptions about how they fit into the relationship with the other participants. Age and sex frequently influence or determine social position. When speaking to an elderly person, a person of one sex may use different terms of address than people of the same sex or age could use in otherwise comparable circumstances (Liao Chuanfeng. 2000).

1.5.1.3. Physical Context

Physical context refers to the elements that are physically present what is physically present and surround the interlocutors at the time of dialogue. It is about the place where communication may occur and the things that happen at the same time of interaction, this means that the setting where the speech takes place is known as the physical context, (Jarmila. P & Jirka. H, 2011).

According to Hasan Lubis (1993, as cited in Prillia, 2017), physical context encompasses the location where language is used in communication, the objects presented in communication, and the communicators and communicants' actions.

1.5.1.4. Interpersonal Context

Interpersonal context refers to the sharing of knowledge between two or more individuals, it is a field of study that seeks to understand how people use verbal and nonverbal cues to achieve various relationship and personal goals, (Berger, Charles R. 2008).

Numerous topics are covered in the study of interpersonal context, and both quantitative and qualitative methodologies are used. The study of interpersonal context from a biological and physiological perspective is gaining popularity. Concepts like personality, knowledge structures and social interaction, language, nonverbal cues, emotional experience and expression, supportive communication, social networks and relationship life, influence, conflict, computer-mediated communication, interpersonal skills, interpersonal communication in the workplace, intercultural perspectives on interpersonal communication, and the escalation and de-escalation of romantic or platonic relationships are some of those that are explored (Manning, J. (2014).

1.5.1.5. Institutional Context

Institutional context refers to shared set of beliefs that upholds a predetermined condition is known as an institutional context. Institutional context is defined as a set of rules and practices that influence and frame social processes (Ariztía, T. Kleine, D. Brightwell, 2014). Institutional contexts are the settings where shared and established rules and conditions govern how organizations operate. These contexts define the parameters and conditions under which organizations interact with their surroundings, (McCarthy, J. Partnership, 2007).

As organizations operate in their different social systems, institutional logics are defined as "formal and informal norms of acts, interactions, and interpretations that lead, constrain, and are melded by activity" (Vurro, C.; Dacin, M.T. Perrini, F, 2010, p 53). Institutional voids refer to the absence of functioning institutions that would give

organizations the support they need to operate and interact with other contextual actors, in contrast to institutional thickness, which refers to a strong institutional manifestation with high levels of interactions and shared cultural norms and values among actors (Vurro, C., et al., 2010).

1.5.2. The Role of Context in the Perception of Sarcasm

It has been argued by many researchers that context plays a significant role in the perception of sarcasm, (Kreuzet al., 1989; Gibbs, 1994; Utsumi, 2000; inter alia). Most of sarcastic statements cannot be identified without context since the recipient of sarcasm can deduce whether the uttered statement is to be taken literally or sarcastically. An emerging trend in sarcasm detection is the use of context. The term context here refers to any information beyond the text to be predicted, (Wallace et al, 2014). For example, "the sentence 'I adore tackling math problems all weekend' may not be sarcastic to a student who loves math but may be sarcastic to many others. This example requires context outside of the text to be classified" (Aditya Joshi, Pushpak Bhattacharyya, Mark J. Carman, 2018, p,27).

Yule (1996, p. 3) states that "pragmatics has more to do with the analysis of what people mean by their utterances, rather than the words themselves". Therefore, to know what the speaker's aim in saying those utterances, we need context, as it provides the time and place in which the words are uttered. (Cutting ,2002, p.2).

Additionally, pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning, according to Yule (1996). Furthermore, the simplest approach for the hearer to identify a sarcastic utterance is through comprehending the context, (Tofan Dwi Hardjanto, 2018).

Sarcasm, according to Brant (2012), "involves the expressing of an insulting statement that demands the interpretation to understand the expresser's negative emotional connotation within the context of the present circumstance" (p. 145). When the context is evident, the recipient will notice that there is a disconnect between the speaker's words and the actual circumstances. Because of this, context plays a crucial part in helping others understand whether someone is being sarcastic or not.

1.6. Review of Related Literature

Though, the role context in interpreting indirect speech acts have been widely tackled by a number of researchers, it seems that there is a scarcity of studies conducted to investigate the role of context in detecting sarcastic statements. Jack Dolan (2015), In his study, examines L2 English learners' ability to detect verbal versus sarcastic utterances, as well as their ability to distinguish between sincere and sarcastic utterances, using written context and spoken prosodical cues. This study included 15 L2 English learners and fifteen native English speakers. To acquire the data, Dolan used a survey consisting of ten questions, five written phrases and five audio files. Each written phrase had a preceding scenario to help the reader determine whether the phrase was conveying sincerity or sarcasm. The primary finding of the study revealed that, Native English speakers understand sarcasm and sincerity better than non- native English speakers. Furthermore, factors such as age and time spent formally studying English may influence an L2 English learner's understanding of sarcasm and sincerity.

Jiyun kim (2014) examines how Korean adult learners of English interpret sarcasm in spoken English. Participants were twenty-eight Korean adult employees of a trading company in Korean with advanced level of overall English language proficiency. Research data were collected from a written test and individual interviews. Participants were asked to identify instances of sarcasm in video clips taken from the U.S.TV sitcom friends. And verbally explain what they wrote on their test sheets. The findings of this study demonstrated broad patterns in Korean EFL learners' recognition of English sarcasm, comprehension of speaker Intentions, and incorporation of various contextual sources.

1.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, sarcasm has proven to be a wide term, particularly when considered in the context of the wider scope of verbal irony. Most scholars define sarcasm as a figure of speech in which there is an incongruity between what is said and what is meant, with the purpose of mocking or spreading laughter among listeners, sarcasm is classified into four major types. Understanding sarcasm can be a crucial task to detect in written from and the easiest way that the hearer can do to recognize a sarcastic utterance is understanding the context first.

Chapter Two

Research Methodology

2.1.Introduction

Following the theoretical portion, that enabled us to establish a clear idea about the notion of Sarcasm. This chapter is dedicated to the practical side of the research. It provides a description of the research methodology of the study including the research design, the participants involved in the study, and the research method used to collect the data.

2.2.Research Aim

The main concern of this research work in general is to examine the ability of EFLstudents at Tiaret university to grasp and understand written English sarcasm. This study seeks also to measure the extent to which context plays a significant role in enabling EFL master students at Ibn Khaldun university to better detect sarcastic utterances.

2.3.Research Design

In the field of human sciences, any scientific research can be classified, on the basis of its approach, into two main categories: Quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research is associated with numbers and quantities. Its main purpose is to get a numerical description of the sample population, i.e., information about the kind and the number of people participating in the study. Qualitative approach, on the other hand, is used to describe a set of non-statistical inquiry techniques and processes used to gather data. (Buchanan, D.R. 1992). Qualitative data may take the form of some collection of word, symbols, pictures, or other nonnumeric records, material, or artifacts that are collected by researchers.

To conduct this present study, the two research were used. The quantitative research was used to to quantify the numbers of the EFL master students who were able to interpret sarcastic utterances, and those who failed to detect the meaning of these utterances. The qualitative research is used to describe and analyse the results obtained.

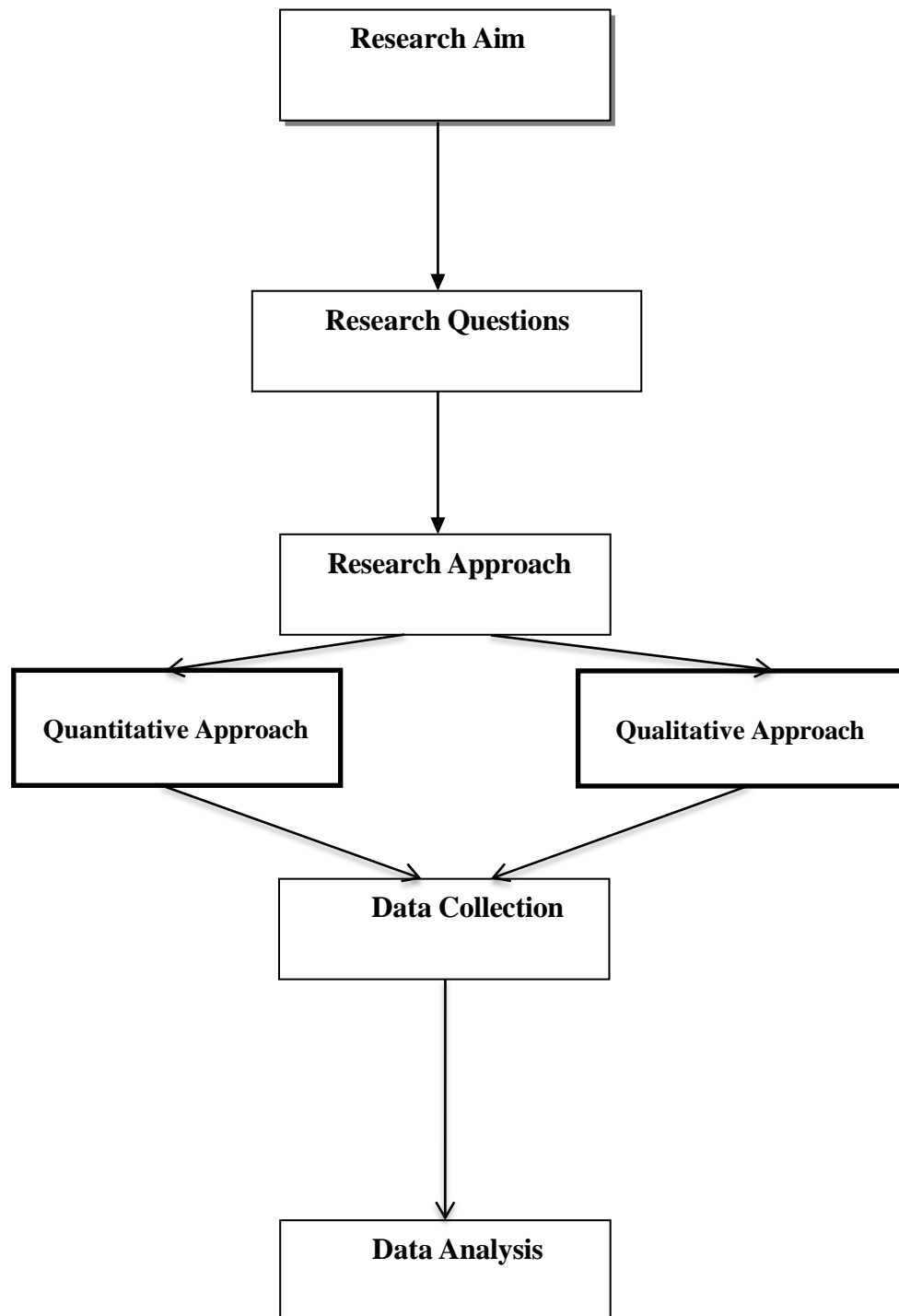Figure (01) below illustrates thoroughly the design of the present study

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                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │    Research Aim      │
                    └─────────────────────┘
                              │
                              ▼
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │ Research Questions   │
                    └─────────────────────┘
                              │
                              ▼
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │  Research Approach   │
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        ┌───────────────────────┐   ┌───────────────────────┐
        │ Quantitative Approach │   │ Qualitative Approach  │
        └───────────────────────┘   └───────────────────────┘
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                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │   Data Collection    │
                    └─────────────────────┘
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                              ▼
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │    Data Analysis     │
                    └─────────────────────┘
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Figure 01: Research Design

2.4.Participants

The participants that took part in the current research are first- and second-year master students at the English department of Ibn Khaldoun universidy. The participants whose total number is seventy are randomly selected. It is worth mentioning that the age and the gender of the participants were not taken into consideration.

2.5.Research Setting

The setting for the investigation is the department of English language at Ibn Khaldun University, Tiaret. The vast majority of students who attend the department are from the same region which is the Wilaya of Tiaret.

2.6.Method of Data Collection

The method used in present research to collect data from EFL master students is 'questionnaire'

2.6.1. Questionnaire

Questionnaires may be used for a variety of purposes, the most common of which is to learn what the public is thinking. These include market research, political polling, customer service feedback, evaluations, opinion polls, and social science research (O'Leary, 2014).

In order to gather more substantial data and lift the veil on some facts and attitudes, a single questionnaire has been carefully chosen for the students, The questionnaire was chosen as the primary instrument in the current study because it is a versatile tool that is simple to administer and can answer certain queries in a short time. In comparison to other research tools, this technique may generate truthful, reliable, and valid information from respondents since it provides a safe path and adequate time for informants to express their opinions.

2.6.1.1. Advantages of Questionnaire

O'Leary (2014) suggests some obvious strength for this research method, as administering a questionnaire allows the researcher to generate data specific to their own research and offers insights that might otherwise be unavailable.

In listing the additional benefits of questionnaires, O'Leary (2014) suggests that they can:

- Reach a large number of respondents

- Represent an even larger population

- Allow for comparisons

- Generate standardized, quantifiable, empirical data

- Generate qualitative data through the use of open-ended questions

- Be confidential and even anonymous

2.6.1.2. Disadvantages of Questionnaire

O'Leary (2014) offers some concerns in using questionnaires as a research tool:

- Is time-consuming,

- Is expensive,

- Sampling is difficult,

- Difficult to get right

- Often do not go as planned

2.6.2. Questionnaire's Design

The questionnaire used in this study includes two sections. Section one is dedicated to personal information. In this section, the students were required to mention their age, gender, and their level of education.

Section two is devoted to examine the extent to which EFL master students are able to detect English sarcastic language. In this section, two types of contexts were used: Linguistic and cultural context.

To investigate the interpretation of English sarcastic language by EFL master students ten short stories were used. The first five stories are examples of linguistic context, while the other five stories are types of cultural context.

Each story had two different versions, but with the same ending statement. In the first version, the story contained information that was discrepant in a way that should have led to an interpretation of sarcasm on the part of the speaker. In the other version, the information provided in the story body was neutral and led to sincere interpretation on the part of the speaker.

At the end of each story, the participants were required to interpret the meaning of the story by choosing whether the story describe "sincere" or "sarcastic" or "lying" or "joking" situation.

The design of the questionnaire can be summarized in figure (02) below

```
                          Context


        Linguistic                        Cultural


  Sarcastic        Sincere          Sarcastic        Sincere


  05 Situations    05 Situations    05 Situations    05 Situations
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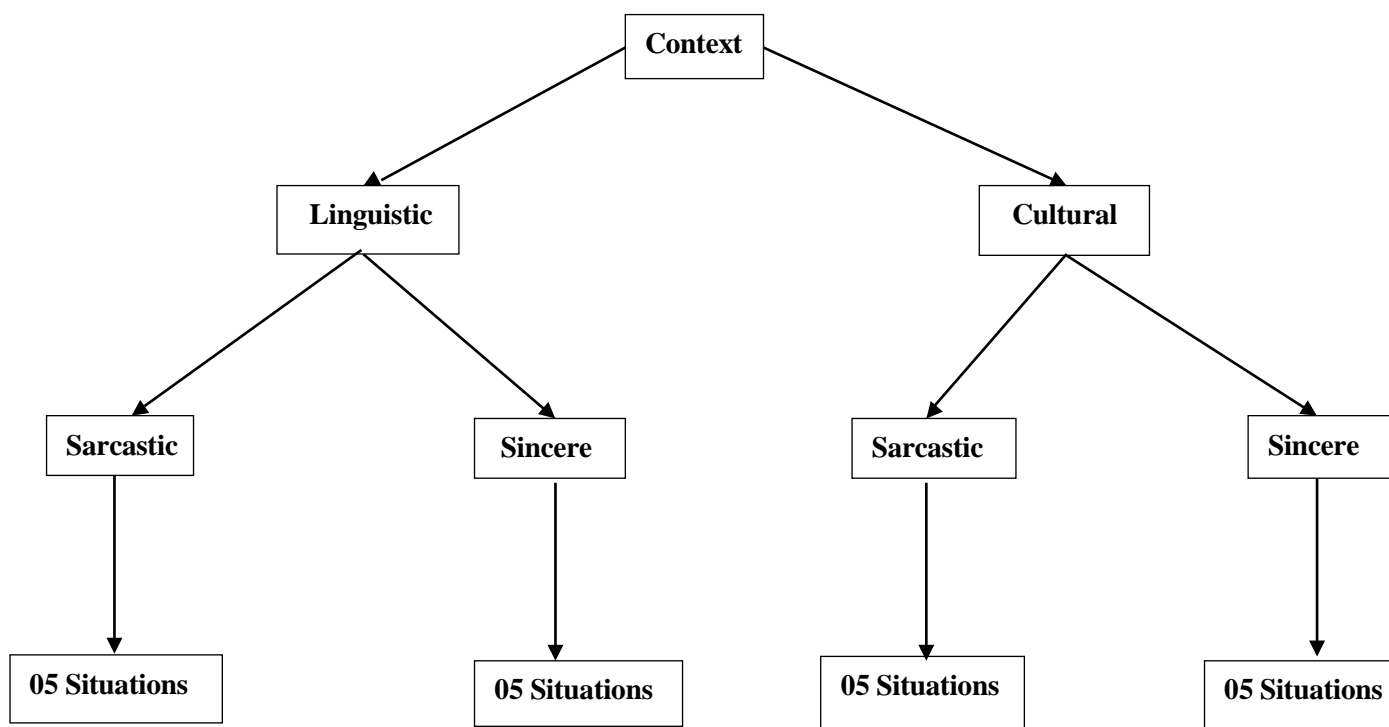
Figure 02: The Design of the Questionnaire.

The utterances used in the short stories are presented in table (01) below

Table 01: Sarcastic and Sincere utterances

Utterance	Type of Context	Situation
1."This is certainly a beautiful weather"	Linguistic Context	Sincere and Sarcastic
2."Your parents should be really proud today "	Linguistic Context	Sincere and Sarcastic
3. "You are a big help"	Linguistic Context	Sincere and Sarcastic
4. "I see you have a healthy concern for your lungs"	Linguistic Context	Sincere and Sarcastic
5. "This route sure saved us a lot of time!"	Linguistic Context	Sincere and Sarcastic

6. "Your promises are worth their weight in gold "	Cultural Context	Sarcastic and Sincere
7. " No kidding, Sherlock "	Cultural context	Sincere and Sarcastic
8. "You are literally the Monday of my life"	Cultural context	Sincere and Sarcastic
9. "I do so love to see the supermarket Christmas ads in November "	Cultural context	Sarcastic and Sincere
10. " Pop-up adverts on the free websites, especially ones with sound, are so convincing "	Cultural context	Sarcastic and Sincere

2.7. Pilot Study

Pilot survey "is in fact the replica and rehearsal of the main survey. Such a survey, being conducted by experts, brings to the light the weaknesses (if any) of the questionnaires and also of the survey techniques. From the experience gained in this way, improvement can be affected" (Kothari 2004, p101).

A pilot study was conducted with five EFL master students at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret to test our reliability and the validity of the questionnaire before using it to collect our data. Another pilot study was conducted with two EFL teachers who work in the same university to make sure that our questionnaire is clear.

2.8. Conclusion

The second chapter describes the research protocol used to conduct the research. It presents the research aim, the research setting, the research approach and the participants. The chapter also details the design of the stories used in the questionnaire to collect the data. Moreover, it briefly describes the pilot study.

Chapter Three

Results and Discussion

3.1. Introduction

After providing an in-depth overview in the first chapter about sarcasm and context and giving a detailed description of the methodology followed in conducting our investigation in the second chapter, the concern of the present chapter is to analyse and interpret the data collected that were elicited from EFL master students and discuss the results obtained from them.

3.2. Data Analysis

After collecting data from the responses provided by Ibn Khaldun EFL students of English department through the questionnaire, we attempt now to analyse those data and discuss them.

1. Participants' Level of Education
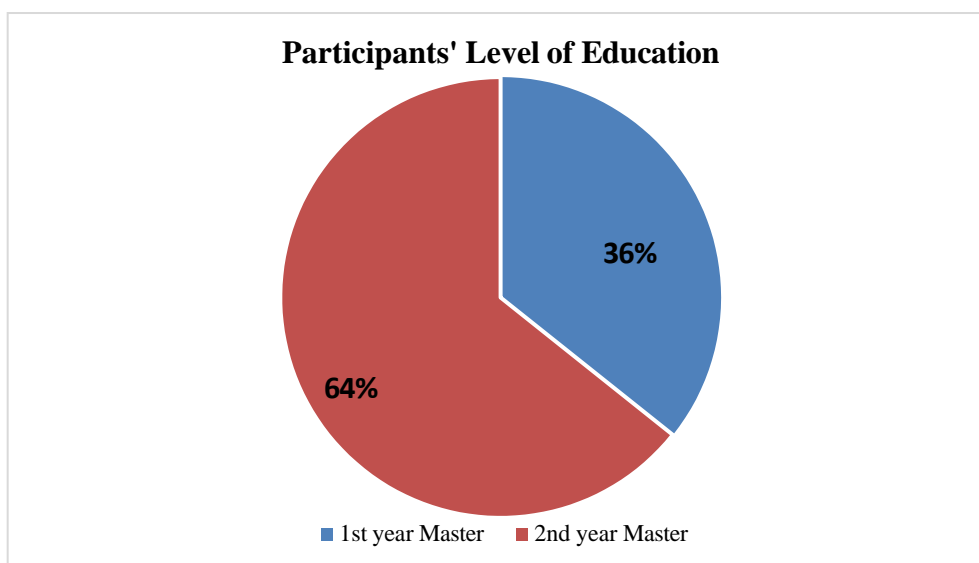
Figure 03: Participants' Level of Education

The participants involved in this study are 70 EFL master students. Figure 03 shows that (36%) of these participants are first year MA students, whereas (64%) of them are second year MA students.

2. Linguistic Context

1. Situation One

➢ **Sarcastic Scenario**

Bilal and his friend Ahmed were planning a trip to the beach. "The weather should be nice tomorrow," said Ahmed, who checked the weather forecast. The next day was a cold and stormy one. As he looked out the window, Bilal said, **"This certainly is beautiful weather".**
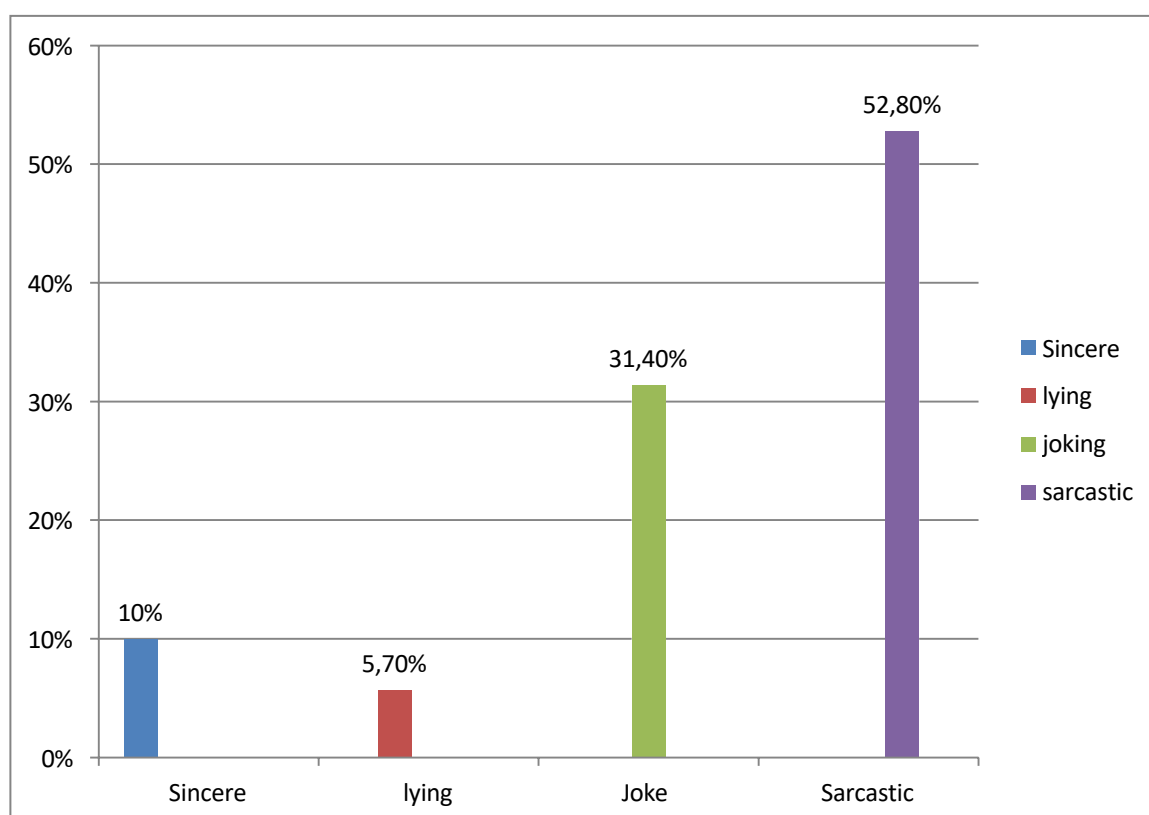

Figure 04: Situation 01-Saracstic Scenario-Linguistic Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify were the utterance "**This certainly is beautiful weather"** was sarcastic or sincere or a lie or a joke. The figure 04 clearly shows that the majority of the participants (52.8%) chose sarcastic utterance and (31.4%) chose that the speaker is joking and (10%) chose that the speaker is sincere and the (5.7%) chose that the speaker is lying.

➢ **Sincere Scenario**

Bilal and his friend Ahmed were planning a trip to the beach. "The weather should be nice tomorrow", said Ahmed, who checked the weather forecast. The next day was a warm and sunny one. As he looked out the window, Bilal said, **"This certainly is beautiful weather"**
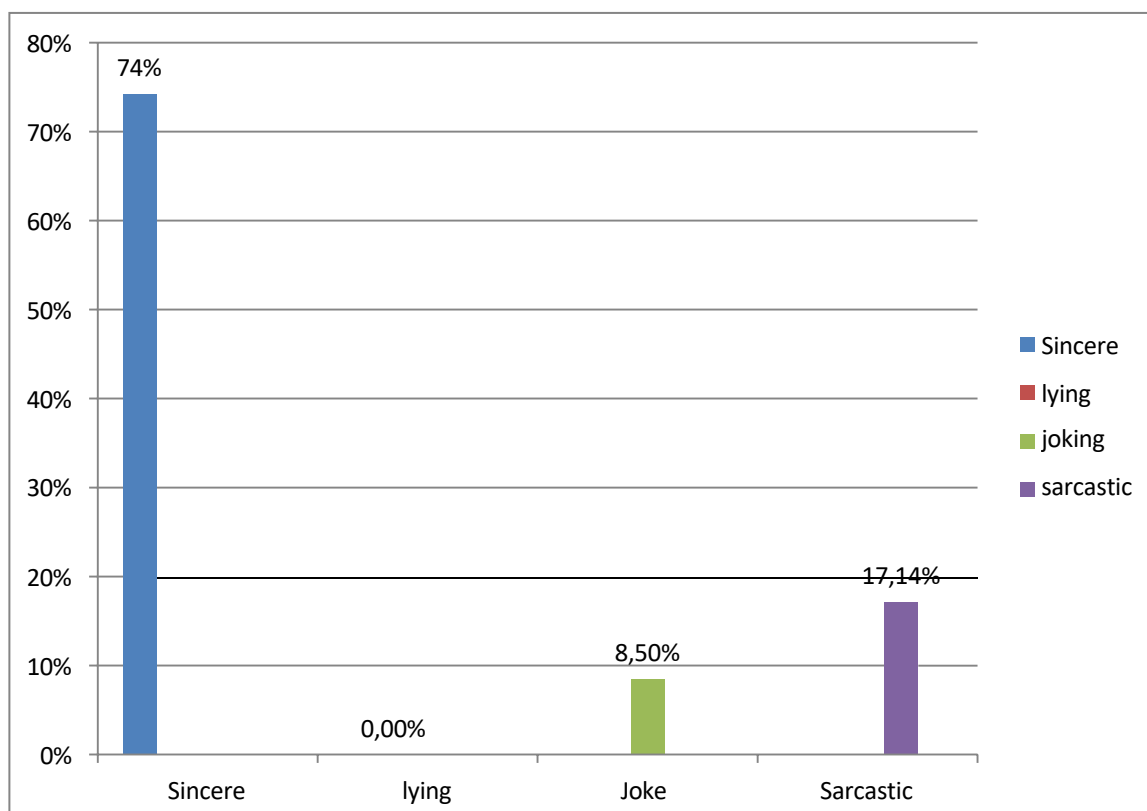

Figure 05: Situation 01- Sincere Scenario-Linguistic Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify whether the utterance "**This certainly is beautiful weather"** was sarcastic or sincere or a lie or a joke. The figure 05 clearly shows that most of the participants (74.2%) chose sincere utterance and (17.14%) chose that the speaker is sarcastic and (8.5%) chose that the speaker is joking, and none chose that the speaker is lying.

2. Situation Two

➤ **Sarcastic Scenario**

During an exam, your teacher catches Bilal, one of your classmates, cheating. The teachers addressed him: **"Your parents would be really proud today".**
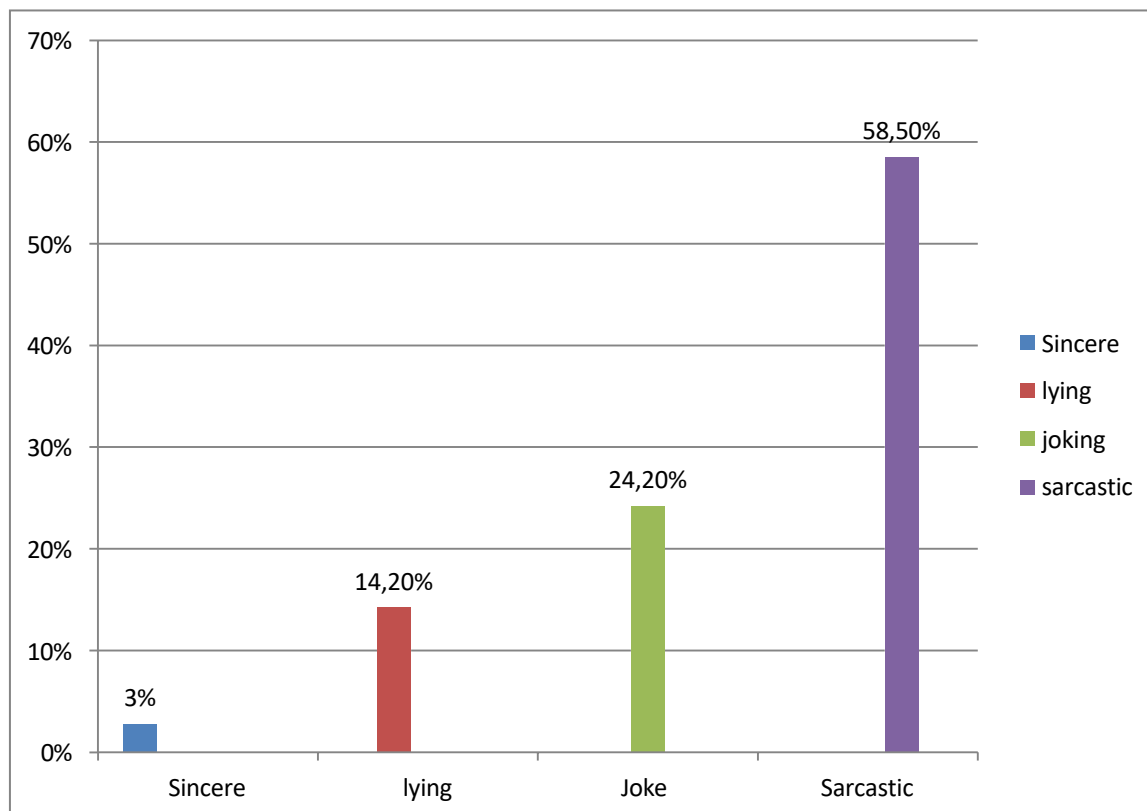

Figure 06: Situation 02- Sarcastic Scenario-Linguistic Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify whether the utterance **"Your parents would be really proud today"** was sarcastic or sincere or a lie or a joke. The figure 06 shows that most of the participants (58.5%) chose sarcastic utterance and (24.2%) chose that the speaker is joking and (14.2%) chose that the speaker is lying and the (2.8%) chose that the speaker is sincere.

➤ **Sincere Scenario**

After the exams, Khaled, one of your classmates, get the highest marks. The

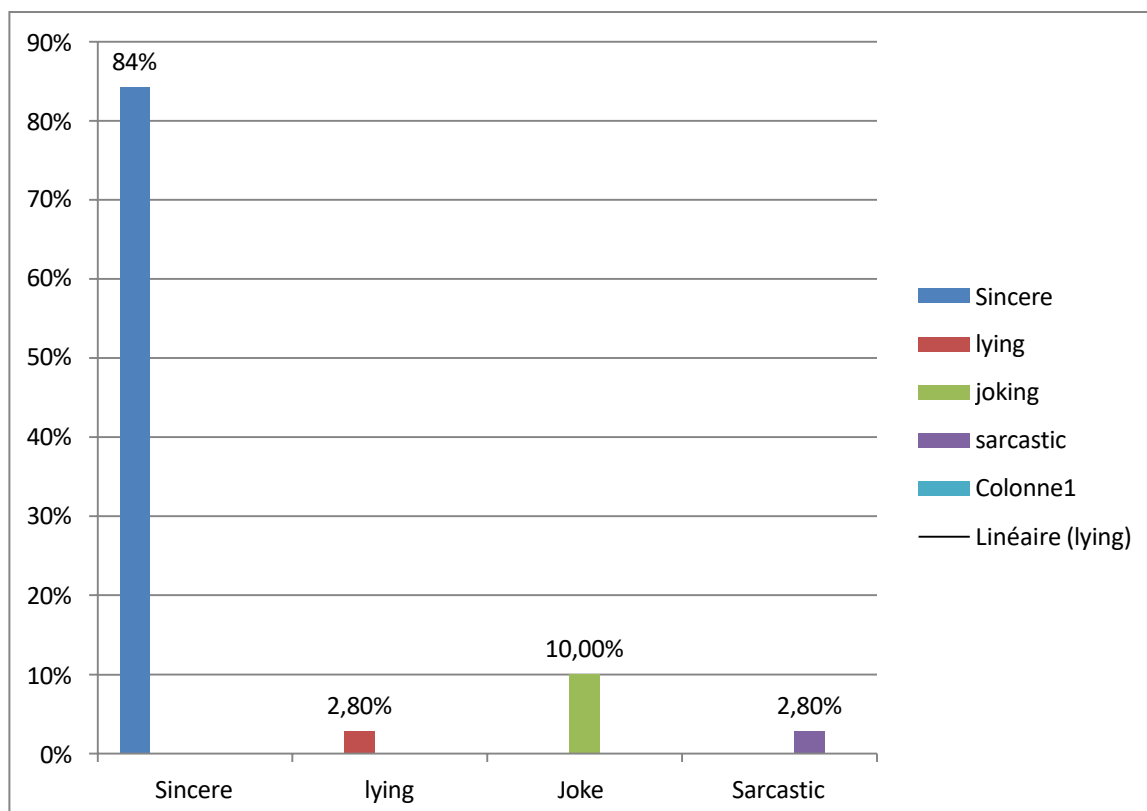teacher addressed him: **"Your parents would be really proud today".**

Figure 07: Situation 02-Sincere Scenario-Linguistic Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify whether the utterance **"Your parents would be really proud today"** was sarcastic or sincere or a lie or a joke. Figure 07 clearly shows that the vast of the participants (84.2%) chose sincere utterance and (10%) chose that the speaker is joking and (2.8%) chose that the speaker is sarcastic and the (2.8%) chose that the speaker is lying.

3. Situation Three

➢ Sarcastic Scenario

Ahmed asks his friend Bilal to help him move into his new apartment. While Ahmed is packing up his things into boxes and lugging the boxes outside and into the moving van, Bilal just hangs around and watch, neglecting to offer any assistance or carry any items.
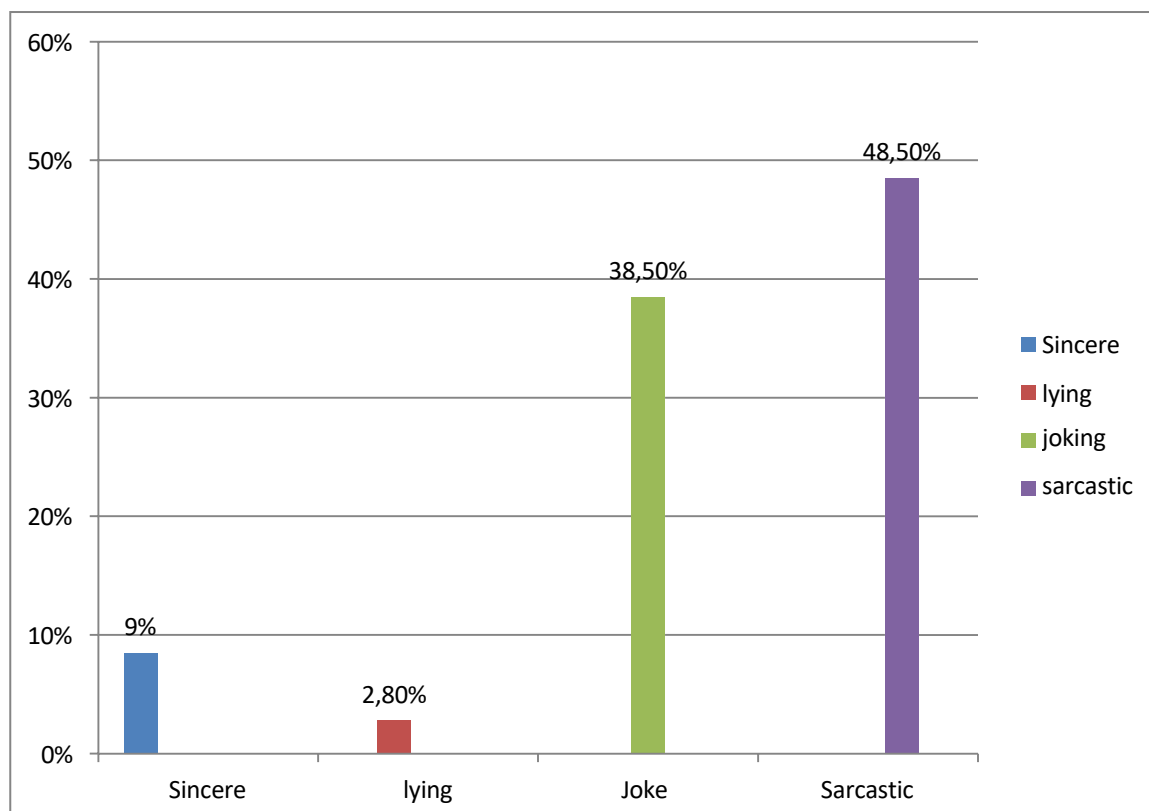
Ahmed then says to him, **"You're a big help".**

Figure 08: Situation 03-Saracstic Scenario-Linguistic Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify whether the utterance **"You're a big help"** was sarcastic or sincere or a lie or a joke. Figure 08 clearly shows that 34 students (48.5%) chose sarcastic utterance and (38.5%) chose that the speaker is joking and (8.5%) chose that the speaker is sincere and the (4.2%) chose that the speaker is lying.

➢ **Sincere Scenario**

Ahmed asks his friend Bilal to help him move into his new apartment. While Ahmed is packing up his things into boxes, Bilal was lugging the boxes outside and into the moving van. Ahmed then says to him, **"you're a big help".**
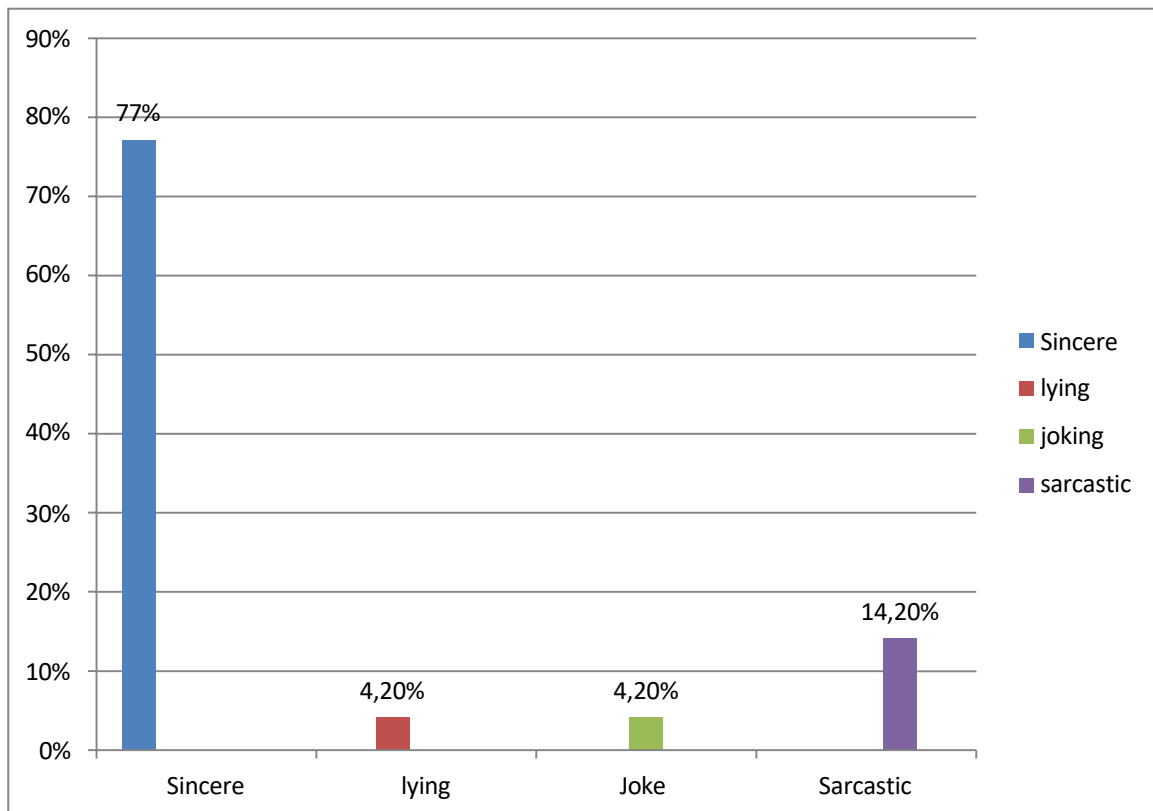
Figure 09: Situation 03- Sincere Scenario-Linguistic Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify whether the utterance **"you're a big help"** was sarcastic or sincere or a lie or a joke. The figure 09 clearly shows that a major part of the participants (77.1%) chose sincere utterance and (14.2%) chose that the speaker is sarcastic and (4.2%) chose that the speaker is joking and the (4.2%) chose that the speaker is lying.

4. Situation Four

> ### Sarcastic Scenario

Bilal is a heavy smoker. He consumes more than two packs a day. While he lights up his fifth cigarette for the day, his friend, Ahmed, addresses him **"I see you have a healthy concern for your lungs".**
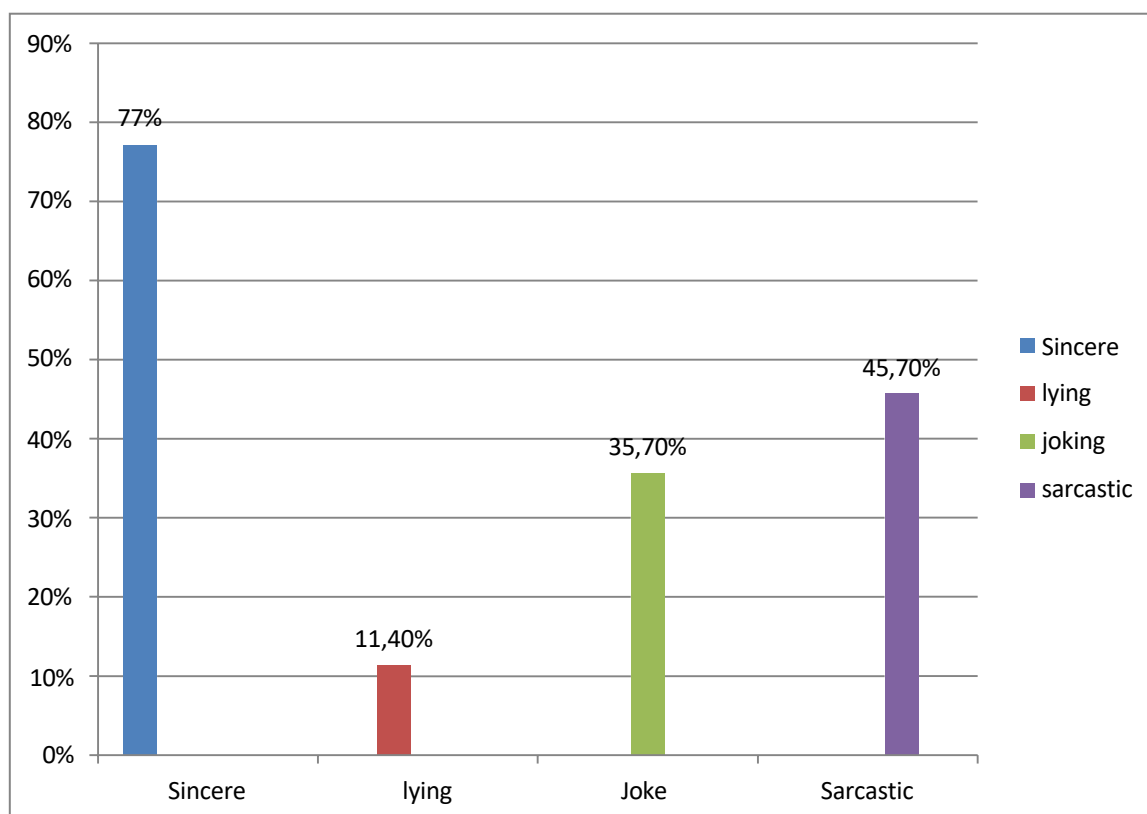
Figure 10: Situation 04- Sarcastic Scenario-Linguistic Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify whether the utterance **"I see you have a healthy concern for your lungs"** was sarcastic or sincere or a lie or a joke. The figure 10 indicates that 32 students (45.7%) selected sarcastic utterance and (35.7%) chose that the speaker is joking and (11.4%) chose that the speaker is lying and the (7.1%) chose that the speaker is sincere.

➤ **Sincere Scenario**

Ahmed is a fitness athlete. He maintains his good shape by keeping a track on his diet and running every morning for 30 minutes. His friend Bilal says to him **"I see you have a healthy concern for your lungs".**
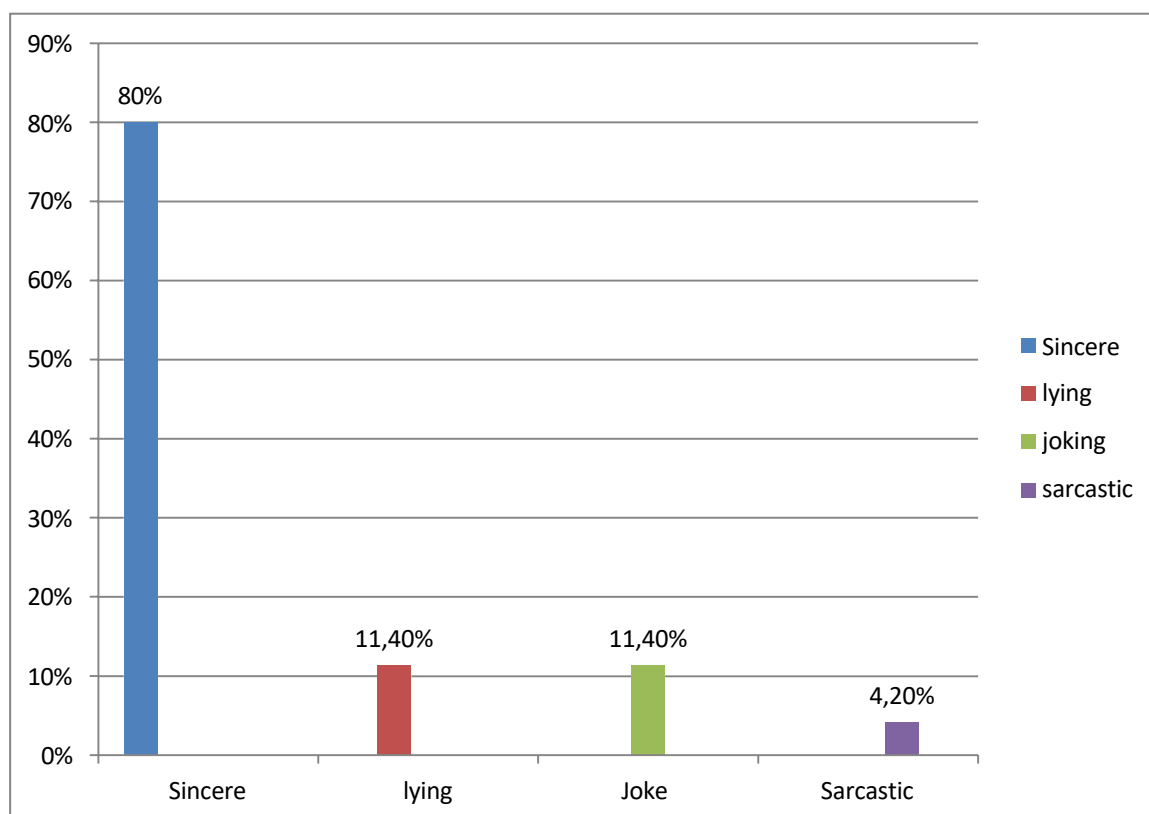
Figure 11: Situation 04- Sincere Scenario-Linguistic Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify whether the utterance **"I see you have a healthy concern for your lungs"** was sarcastic or sincere or a lie or a joke. The figure 11 clearly shows that the greater part of the participants (80%) chose sincere utterance and (11.4%) chose that the speaker is joking and (4.2%) chose that the speaker is sarcastic and the (4.2%) chose that the speaker is lying.

5. Situation Five

> **Sarcastic Scenario**

Ahmed and Bilal were in a hurry to get to work. "We can dodge all the traffic if we continue on this route; I know this area pretty well," said Bilal. A few minutes later, their car got stuck in a massive traffic jam. **"This route sure saved us a lot of time!"**, Ahmed said.
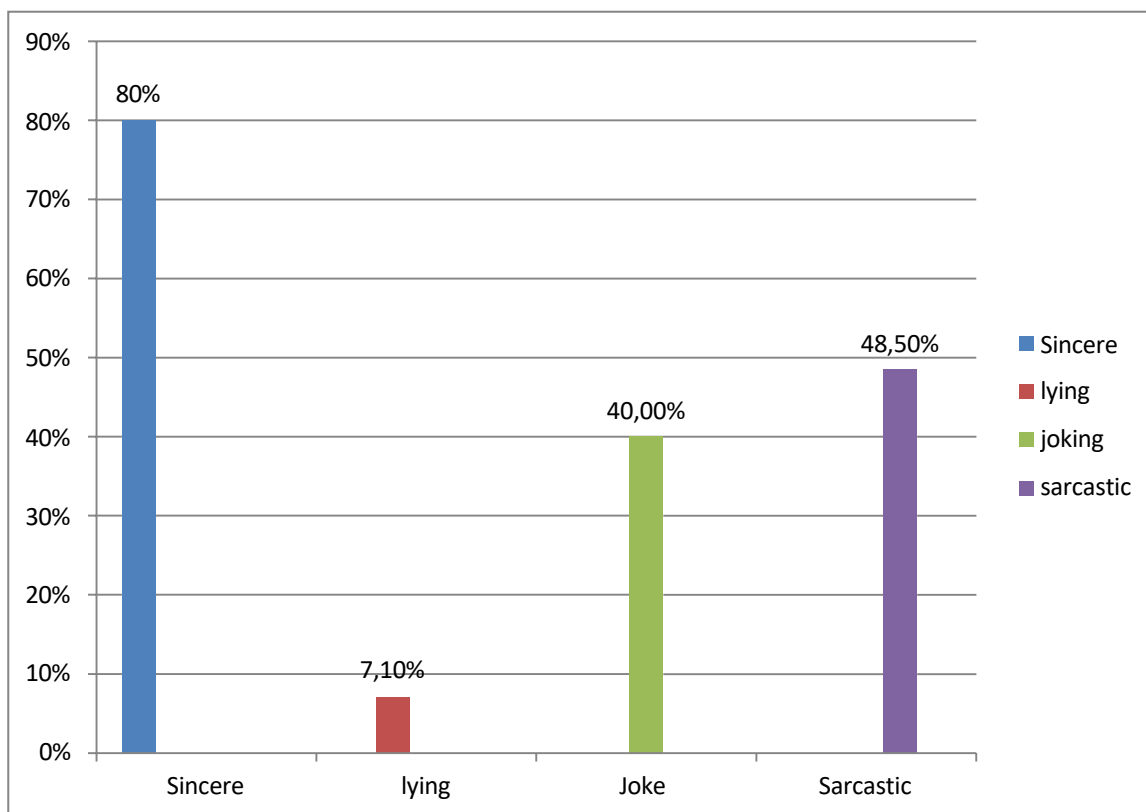
Figure 12: Situation 05- Sarcastic Scenario-Linguistic Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify whether the utterance **"This route sure saved us a lot of time!"** was sarcastic or sincere or a lie or a joke. The figure 12 clearly shows that the majority of the participants (48.5%) chose sarcastic utterance and (40%) chose that the speaker is joking and (7.1%) chose that the speaker is lying and the (4.2%) chose that the speaker is sincere.

➢ **Sincere Scenario**

Ahmed and Bilal were in a hurry to get to work. "We can dodge all the traffic if we continue on this route; I know this area pretty well," said Bilal. The road was not busy, and the traffic was smooth. **"This route sure saved us a lot of time!"**, Ahmed said.
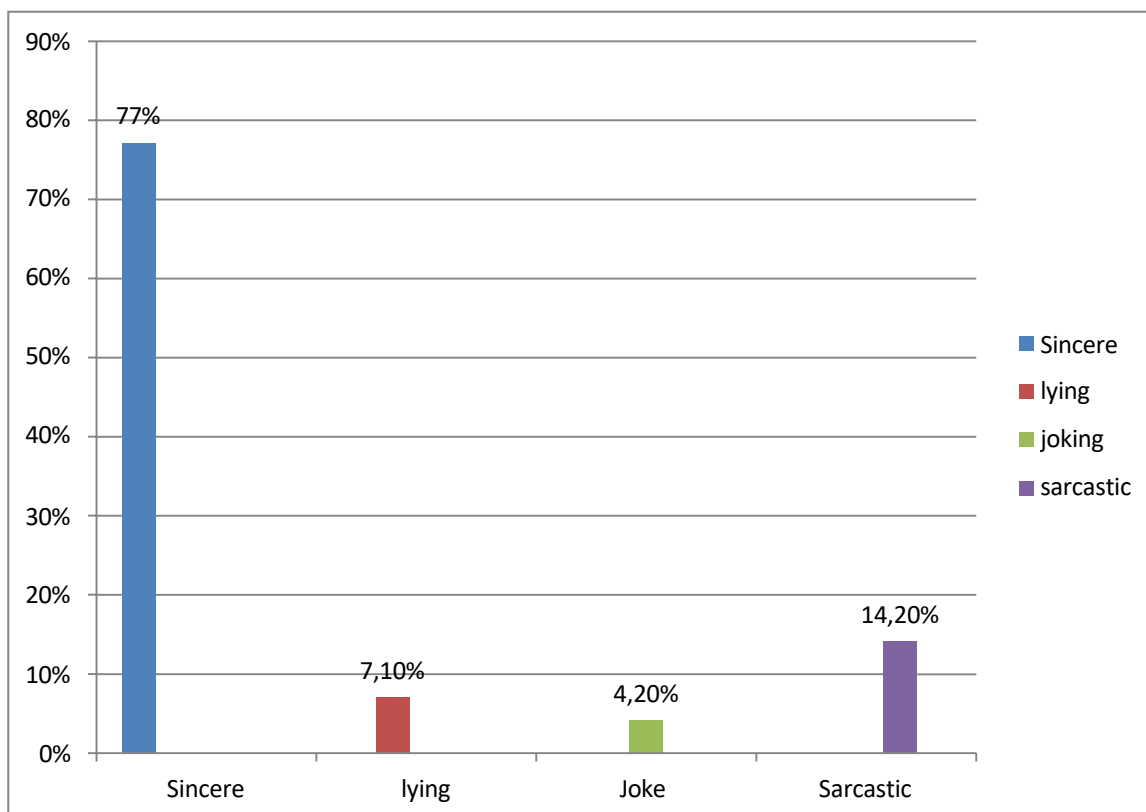
Figure 13: Situation 05- Sincere Scenario-Linguistic Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify whether the utterance **"This route sure saved us a lot of time!"** was sarcastic or sincere or a lie or a joke. The figure 13 clearly shows that the lion's share of the participants (77.1%) chose sincere utterance and (14.2%) chose that the speaker is sarcastic and (4.2%) chose that the speaker is joking and the (4.2%) chose that the speaker is lying.

➢ **Cultural Context**

1. Situation One

➢ **Sarcastic Scenario**

Bilal's mother is sick. She needs her medicine tonight. Bilal has promised to pick up the medicine for her from the pharmacy. Unfortunately, he forgets all about picking up her medicine. Late that night she calls him, and she says: **"Your promises are worth their**
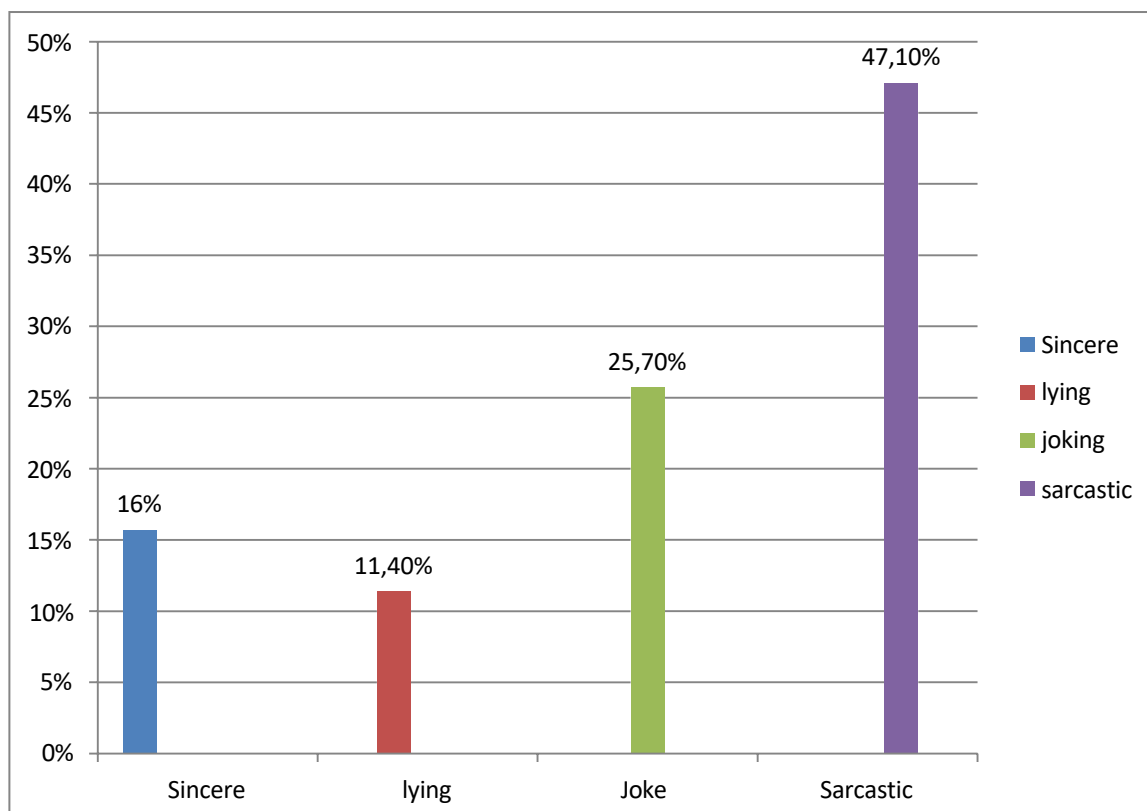
weight in gold!”

Figure 14: Situation 01- Sarcastic Scenario- Cultural Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify whether the utterance **“Your promises are worth their weight in gold!”** was sarcastic, sincere, a lie, or a joke. The figure 14 clearly shows that the majority of the participants (47.1%) chose sarcastic utterance and (25.7%) chose that the speaker is joking and (15.7%) chose that the speaker is sincere and the (11.4%) chose that the speaker is lying.

➢ **Sincere Scenario**

Bilal's mother is sick. She needs her medicine tonight. Bilal has promised to pick up her medicine for her at the pharmacy. He drops everything and rushes to the nearest pharmacy to purchase her medicine. Late that night she calls him, and she says: **“Your promises are worth their weight in gold!”**
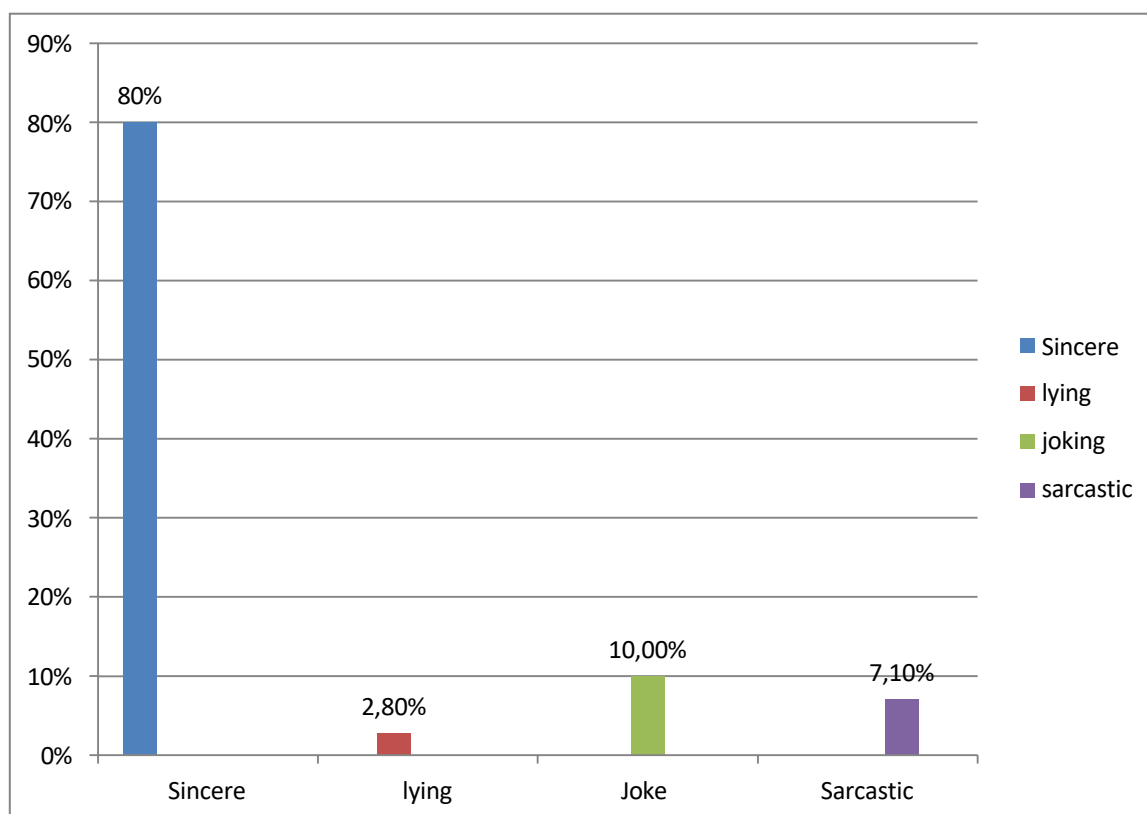
Figure 15: Situation 01- Sincere Scenario-Cultural Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify whether the utterance **"Your promises are worth their weight in gold!"** was sarcastic or sincere or a lie or a joke. The figure 15 clearly shows that the majority of the participants (80%) chose sincere utterance and (10%) chose that the speaker is joking and (7.1%) chose that the speaker is sarcastic and the (2.8%) chose that the speaker is lying.

2. Situation Two

> **Sarcastic Scenario**

Bilal had a quick glance out the window and says: "There is snow outside, it must be cold".

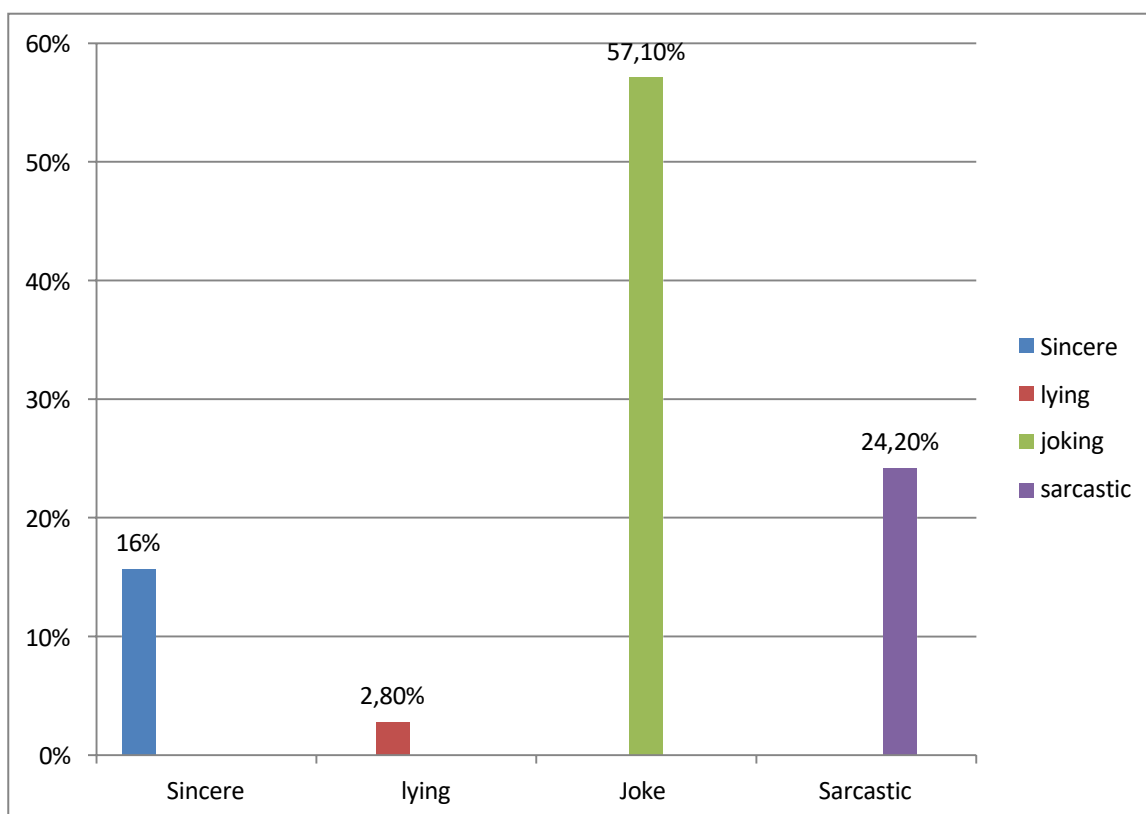**"No kidding, Sherlock"**, his friend, Ahmed, responds.

Figure 16: Situation 02- Sarcastic Scenario-Cultural Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify whether the utterance **"No kidding, Sherlock"** was sarcastic or sincere or a lie or a joke. The figure 16 clearly shows that the majority of the participants (57.1%) chose that the speaker is joking and (24.2%) chose that the speaker is sarcastic and (15.7%) chose that the speaker is sincere and the (2.8%) chose that the speaker is lying.

➢ **Sincere Scenario**

Ahmed manages to solve extremely hard math equation in minutes.

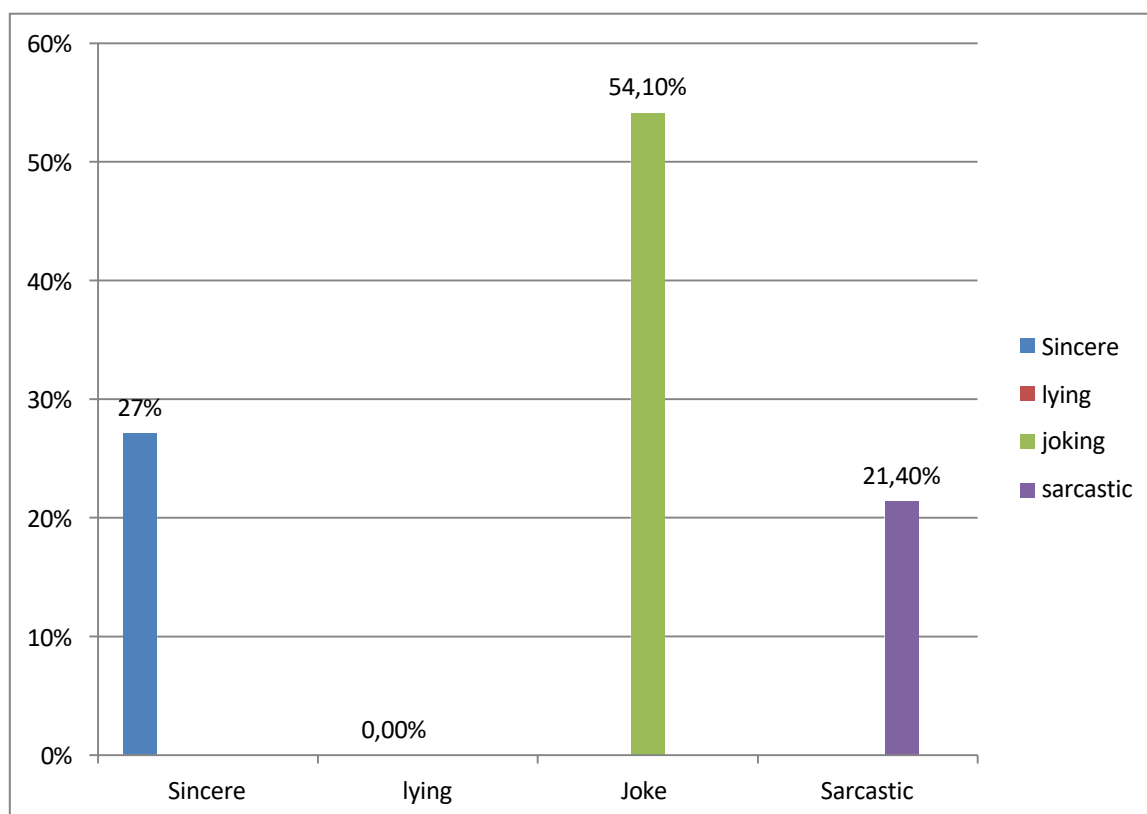**"No kidding, Sherlock!",** his friend Bilal responds

Figure 17: Situation 02- Sincere Scenario-Cultural Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify whether the utterance **"No kidding, Sherlock!"** was sarcastic or sincere or a lie or a joke. The figure 17 shows that the majority of the participants (51.4%) select that the speaker was joking and (27.1%) chose that the speaker is sincere and (21.4%) chose that the speaker is sarcastic, and none chose that the speaker is lying.

3. Situation Three

> **Sarcastic Scenario**

Emma asked her friend Noah: "Do you really hate me?"

Noah answered: **"I'm not saying I hate you. What I'm saying is that you are literally the Monday of my life."**

Figure 18: Situation 03- Sarcastic Scenario-Cultural Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify whether the utterance **"I'm not saying I hate you. What I'm saying is that you are literally the Monday of my life."** was sarcastic or sincere or a lie or a joke. The figure 18 displays that the majority of the participants (55.7%) select that the speaker was joking and (27.1%) chose that the speaker is sarcastic and (20%) chose that the speaker is sincere and the (11.4%) chose that the speaker is lying.

➢ **Sincere Scenario**

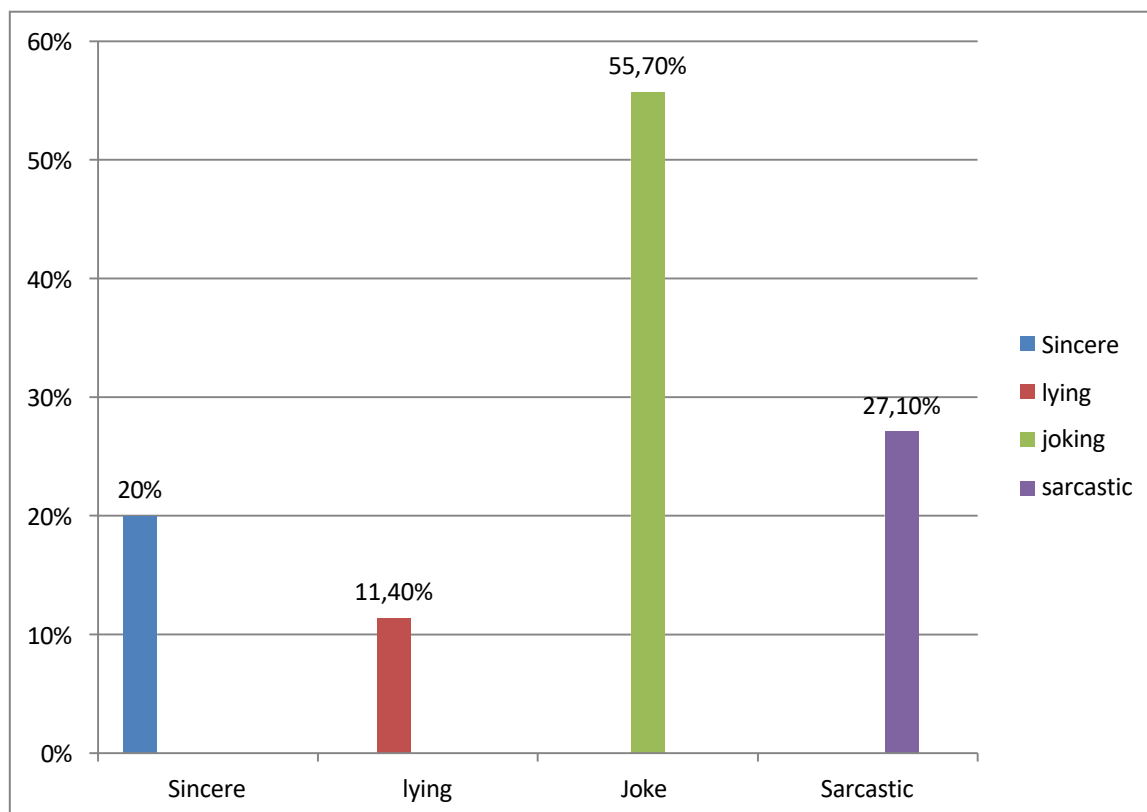Mondays are Noah's days off. Every morning he says to his wife: **"You are literally the Monday of my life."**

Figure 19: Situation 03- Sincere Scenario-Cultural Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify whether the utterance **"You are literally the Monday of my life."** was sarcastic or sincere or a lie or a joke. The figure 19 shows that the majority of the participants (80%) chose sincere utterance and (10%) chose that the speaker is joking and (7.14%) chose that the speaker is sarcastic and the (2.8%) chose that the speaker is lying.

1. Situation Four

➤ Sarcastic Scenario

Emma and Olivia went shopping at the supermarket. They find out that the supermarket has launched the Christmas season because of the decoration and the ads displays. Olivia told her friend **"I do so love to see all the supermarket Christmas ads in November"**.
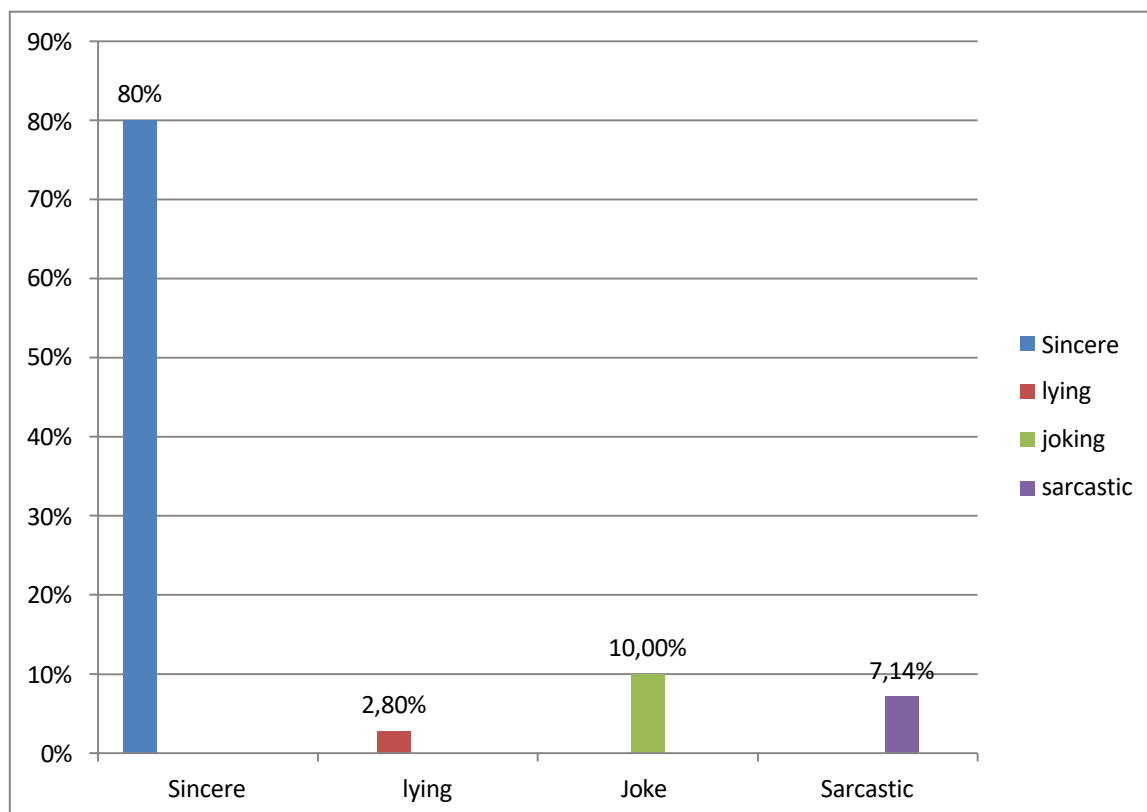
Figure 20: Situation 04- Sarcastic Scenario-Cultural Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify whether the utterance **"I do so love to see all the supermarket Christmas ads in November"** was sarcastic or sincere or a lie or a joke. The figure 20 demonstrates that the majority of the participants (67.1%) chose sincere utterance and (12.8%) chose that the speaker is joking and (12.8%) chose that the speaker is sarcastic and the (5.7%) chose that the speaker is lying.

➢ **Sincere Scenario**

Emma and Olivia went shopping at the supermarket. They are all for celebrating Christmas early. Olivia told her friend **"I do so love to see all the supermarket Christmas ads".**
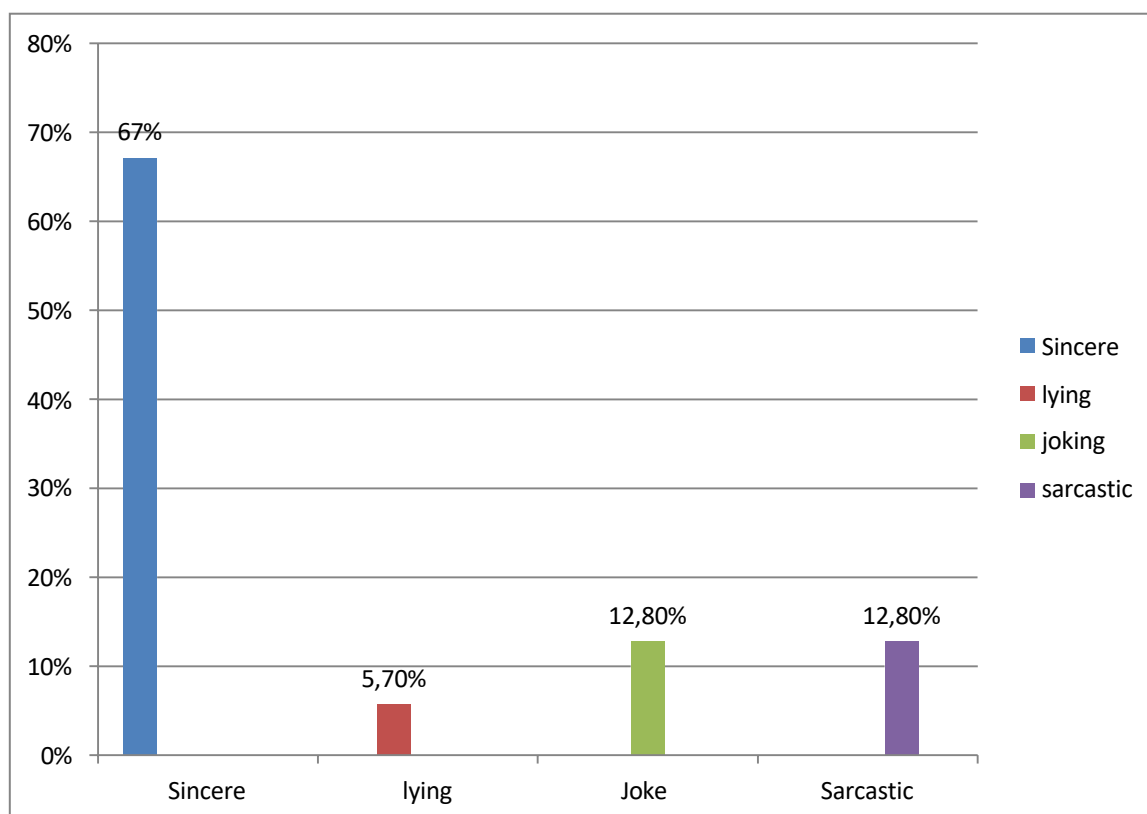
Figure 21: Situation 04- Sincere Scenario-Cultural Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify were the utterance **"I do so love to see the supermarket Christmas ads"** was sarcastic or sincere or a lie or a joke. The figure 21 clearly shows that a larger number of the participants (80%) chose sincere utterance and (10%) chose that the speaker is joking and (7.14%) chose that the speaker is sarcastic and the (2.8%) chose that the speaker is lying.

5. Situation Five

➢ **Sarcastic Scenario**

Ahmed asked his friend Bilal "Why paying a monthly subscription for streaming services in order to watch movies, while there are so many free alternatives? Bilal answered him: **"Pop- up adverts on the free websites, especially ones with sound, are so convincing."**

Figure 22: Situation 05- Sarcastic Scenario-Cultural Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify whether the utterance **"Pop-up adverts on the free websites, especially ones with sound, are so convincing."** was sarcastic or sincere or a lie or a joke. The figure 22 clearly shows that the vast majority of the participants (62.8%) chose sincere utterance and (17.1%) chose that the speaker is joking and (14.2%) chose that the speaker is sarcastic and the (5.7%) chose that the speaker is lying.

> **Sincere Scenario**

Ahmed keeps purchasing products from ads he sees. His friend asked him: "why?"

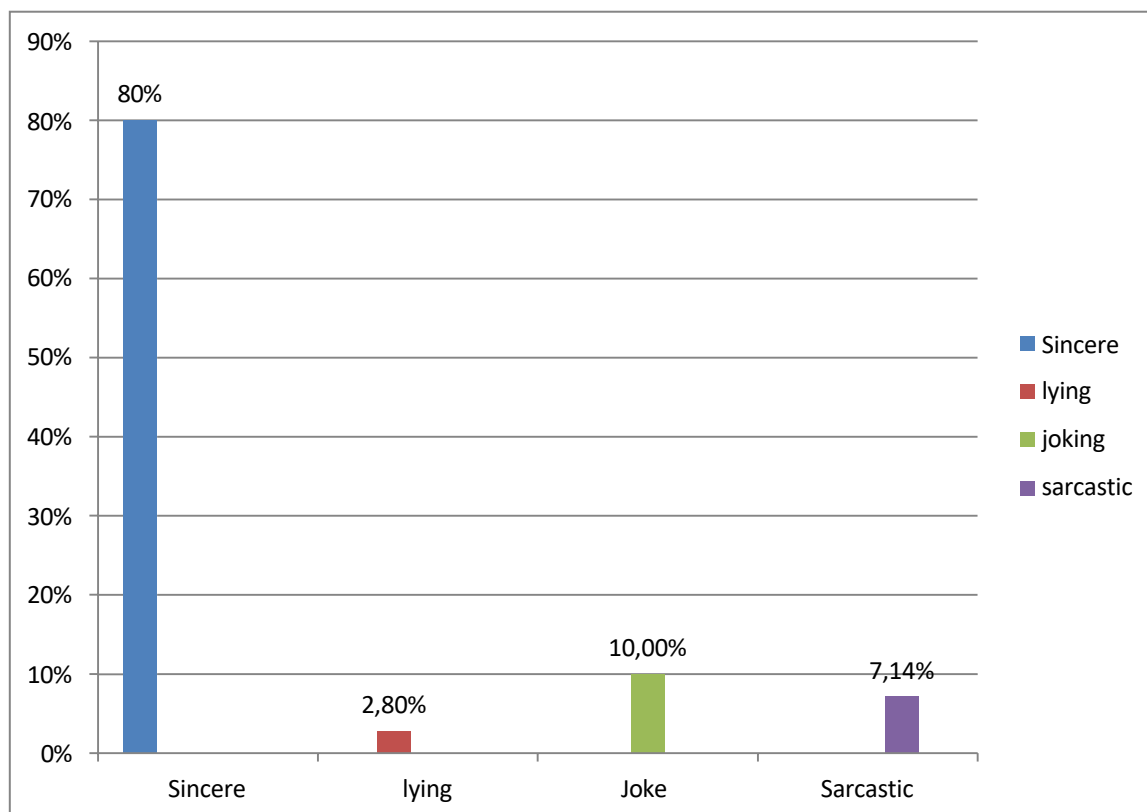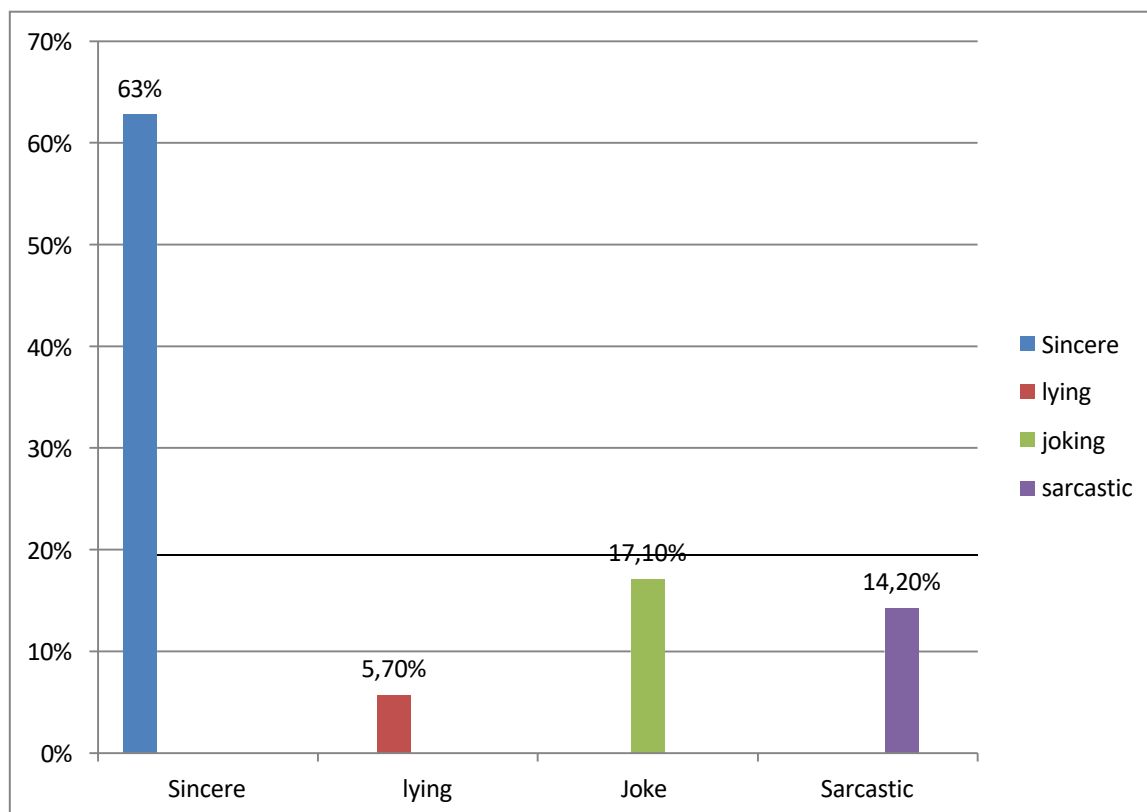Ahmed said to his friend:**" Pop-up adverts are so convincing ".**
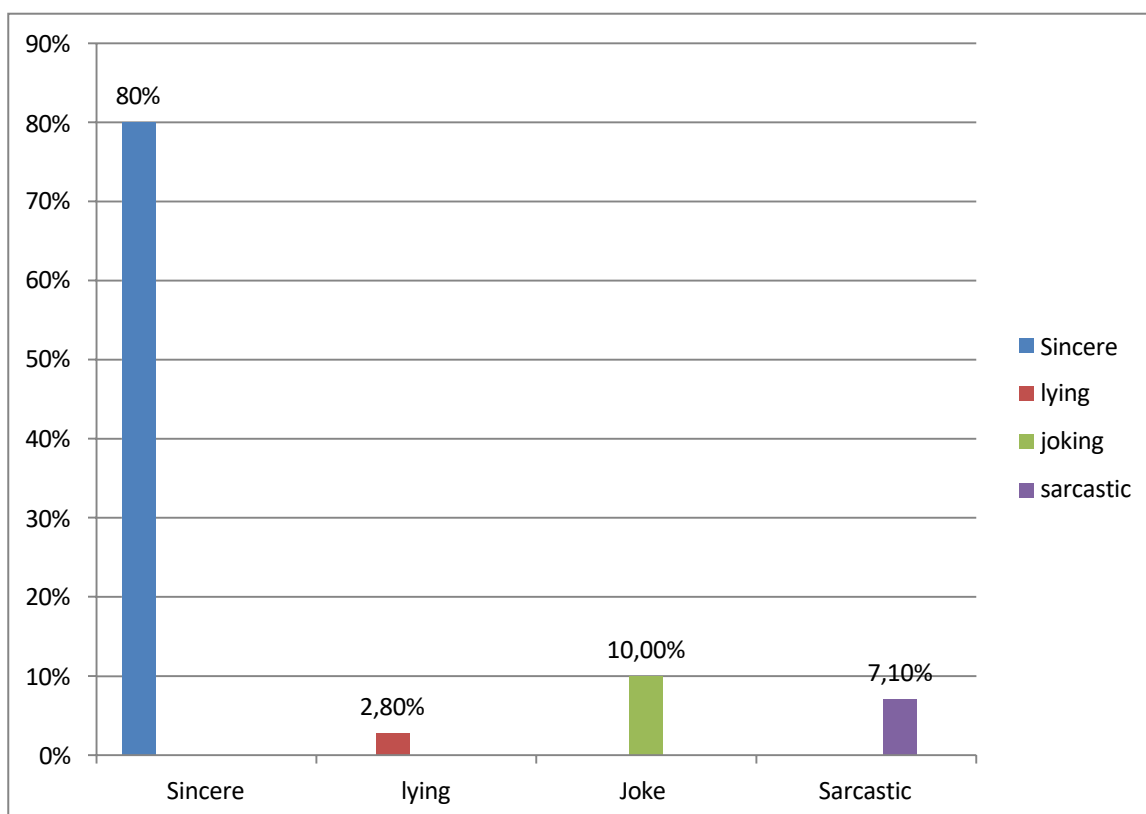
Figure 23: Situation 05- Sincere Scenario-Cultural Context

In this situation, the participants were asked to identify whether the utterance **"Pop- up adverts are so convincing"** was sarcastic or sincere or a lie or a joke. As shown above in figure 23, most of the participants (80%) chose sincere utterance and (10%) chose that the speaker is joking and (7.1%) chose that the speaker is sarcastic and the (2.8%) chose that the speaker is lying.

3.3. Discussion of the Findings

It seems that the results presented and described above validate what have been hypothesized earlier regarding the interpretation of sarcastic language and the role of context in detecting this type of language. The findings reveal that most of the EFL master students fail to detect sarcastic language from non-sarcastic language. This can be seen in situation (3), (4), (5) of the first category. Though these situations provide linguistic clues to help the EFL students to understand the meaning of these situations, the majority of the students

interpret them as describing sincere scenarios or as jokes. Similarly, it seems that the students are not competent in interpreting the meaning of the sarcastic scenarios which reflect the English culture. All the sarcastic stories that have been used in this study were described as sincere stories, jokes, or lies.

Concerning the role of context, it seems that the EFL students struggle to understand cultural sarcasm. The findings show that while the students succeeded to interpret the meaning of some sarcastic situations based on the use of some linguistic cues; they failed to understand the meanings of all the sarcastic stories that reflect the English culture.

3.4. Conclusion

The present chapter is devoted to present, describe, and discuss the findings obtained from the questionnaire. The chapter which provides a detailed analysis of all the sarcastic and non-sarcastic stories shows clearly that the EFL master students at Ibn Khaldoun University find difficulties to interpret the meaning of English sarcastic language, especially sarcasm which reflects the English culture.

General Conclusion

The first purpose of this study was to determine if EFL students at Ibn Khaldoun University can understand English sarcastic language and distinguish between sarcastic and sincere utterances. This study seeks also to investigate the extent to which the EFL students rely on context to interpret the meaning of sarcastic utterances.

To achieve this goal, three chapters have been designed. Chapter one presents the core notions of the subject by making a link between pragmatics, figurative language, sarcasm and context, and other related concepts such as irony. Chapter two describes the research methodology adopted and the sample population which consists of (70) EFL master students, the chapter also details the data collection instrument utilized in our investigation. Chapter three is purely practical. It provides a graphical demonstration of the data gathered from our research instruments, primarily participant's questionnaire.

The results of the study demonstrate that the majority of the participants fail to understand the meaning of some sarcastic utterances that include linguistic cues and find difficulties in interpreting the sarcastic utterances which are related to cultural context. This validates the first hypothesis presented in the general conclusion.

Concerning the role of context, the findings confirm that English sarcastic utterances which reflect the English culture are more difficult to understand by the EFL master students.

Limitations of the Study

The present study is not without limitations. First, the participants were asked to answer the questionnaire on their own personal devices, this was very time consuming. Second. The process of data collection was very difficult. Most of the participants complained about the length of the questionnaire and refused to participate in this research.

Third, because of time constraint, only a single instrument was used to investigate the research, further studies with various types of research instruments such as interview or DCT could provide deeper analysis for this concept.

Recommendations for Further Studies

> ➢ It is highly recommended to examine the factors that might affect EFL students in understanding sarcasm such as intonation patterns and societal factors.

> ➢ Further studies with various types of research instruments such as interview or DCT can be conducted in order to provide deeper analysis for this concept.

> ➢ Further studies can be conducted to examine the reasons that make the EFL master students at Ibn Khaldoun university fail to understand the meaning of English Sarcastic language.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Dear colleagues,

We sincerely invite you to participate in our research which seeks to investigate the ability of EFL learners to interpret English sarcastic language. In the following pages, you will read several short stories/situations. In each story two characters will have a brief interaction. At the end of each story, one of the characters will say something. You will be asked a single question to evaluate this final sentence.

We appreciate your time and cooperation. Your participation will contribute to the success of our research. Thank you.

1. **Personal Information**

What is your age?

[⬍]

What is your sex?

[⬍]

What is your level?

[⬍]

2. **Stories**

Story 01: Bilal and his friend Ahmed were planning a trip to the beach. ―The weather should be nice tomorrow," said Ahmed, who checked the weather forecast. The next day was a cold and stormy one. As he looked out the window, Bilal said, "This certainly is beautiful weather"

Bilal's statement is:

          Sincere

          Lying

          Joking

          Sarcastic

Story 02: Bilal's mother is sick. She needs her medicine tonight. Bilal has promised to pick up her medicine for her at the pharmacy. He drops everything and rushes to the nearest pharmacy to purchase her medicine. Late that night she calls him, and she says: "Your promises are worth their weight in gold!"

The mother's statement is:

          Sincere

          Lying

          Joking

          Sarcastic

Story 03: After the exams, Khaled, one of your classmates, get the highest marks. The teacher addressed him: "Your parents would be really proud today".

The teacher's statement is:

          Sincere

          Lying

          Joking

          Sarcastic

Story 04: Ahmed asks his friend Bilal to help him move into his new apartment. While Ahmed is packing up his things into boxes and lugging the boxes outside and into the moving van, Bilal just hangs around and watch, neglecting to offer any assistance or carry any items. Ahmed then says to him, **"**You're a big help".

Ahmed's statement is:

> **Sincere**
> **Lying**
> **Joking**
> **Sarcastic**

Story 05: Bilal is a heavy smoker. He consumes more than two packs a day. While he lights up his fifth cigarette for the day, his friend, Ahmed, addresses him "**I** see you have a healthy concern for your lungs".

Ahmed's statement is:

> **Sincere**
> **Lying**
> **Joking**
> **Sarcastic**

Story 06: Noah Mondays are his day off. "You are literally the Monday of my life."

Every morning he tells his wife,

Noah's statement is:

> **Sincere**
> **Lying**
> **Joking**
> **Sarcastic**

Story 07: During an exam, your teacher catches Bilal, one of your classmates, cheating. The teachers addressed him: **"**Your parents would be really proud today".

The teacher's statement is:

> **Sincere**
> **Lying**
> **Joking**
> **Sarcastic**

Story 08: Bilal had a quick glance out the window and says: "There is snow outside, it must be cold". **"**No kidding, Sherlock", his friend, Ahmed, responds.

Ahmed's statement is:

> **Sincere**
> **Lying**
> **Joking**
> **Sarcastic**

Story 09: Emma and Olivia went shopping at the supermarket. They are all for celebrating Christmas early. Olivia told her friend "**I** do so love to see all the supermarket Christmas ads in November".

Olivia's statement is:

> **Sincere**
> **Lying**
> **Joking**
> **Sarcastic**

Story 10: Bilal's mother is sick. She needs her medicine tonight. Bilal has promised to pick up the medicine for her from the pharmacy. Unfortunately, he forgets all about picking up her medicine. Late that night she calls him, and she says: "Your promises are worth their weight in gold!".

The mother's statement is:

> **Sincere**
> **Lying**
> **Joking**
> **Sarcastic**

Story 11: Ahmed and Bilal were in a hurry to get to work. "We can dodge all the traffic if we continue on this route; I know this area pretty well," said Bilal. A few minutes later, their car got stuck in a massive traffic jam. "This route sure saved us a lot of time!", Ahmed said

Ahmed's statement is:

> **Sincere**
> **Lying**
> **Joking**
> **Sarcastic**

Story 12: Ahmed keeps purchasing products from ads he sees. His friend asked him: "why?"

Ahmed said to his friend:" Pop-up adverts are so convincing ".

Ahmed's statement is:

> **Sincere**
> **Lying**
> **Joking**
> **Sarcastic**

Story 13: Ahmed asks his friend Bilal to help him move into his new apartment. While Ahmed is packing up his things into boxes, Bilal was lugging the boxes outside and into the moving van. Ahmed then says to him, "you're a big help".

Ahmed's statement is:

> **Sincere**
> **Lying**
> **Joking**
> **Sarcastic**

Story 14: Ahmed asked his friend Bilal "Why paying a monthly subscription for streaming services in order to watch movies, while there are so many free alternatives? Bilal answered him: "Pop-up adverts on the free websites, especially ones with sound, are so convincing."

Bilal's statement is:

> **Sincere**
> **Lying**
> **Joking**
> **Sarcastic**

Story 15: Ahmed and Bilal were in a hurry to get to work. "We can dodge all the traffic if we continue on this route; I know this area pretty well," said Bilal. The road was not busy, and the traffic was smooth. "This route sure saved us a lot of time!", Ahmed said.

Ahmed's statement is:

> **Sincere**
> **Lying**
> **Joking**
> **Sarcastic**

Story 16: Bilal and his friend Ahmed were planning a trip to the beach. "The weather should be nice tomorrow", said Ahmed, who checked the weather forecast. The next day was a warm and sunny one. As he looked out the window, Bilal said, "This certainly is beautiful weather".

Bilal's statement is:

> **Sincere**
> **Lying**
> **Joking**
> **Sarcastic**

Story 17: Ahmed is a fitness athlete. He maintains his good shape by keeping a track on his diet and running every morning for 30 minutes. His friend Bilal says to him "I see you have a healthy concern for your lungs"

Bilal's statement is:

> **Sincere**
> **Lying**
> **Joking**
> **Sarcastic**

Story 18: Emma asked her friend Noah: "Do you really hate me?" Noah answered: "I am not saying I hate you. What I am saying is that you are literally the Monday of my life."

Noah's statement is:

> **Sincere**
> **Lying**
> **Joking**
> **Sarcastic**

Story 19: Emma and Olivia went shopping at the supermarket. They find out that the supermarket has launched the Christmas season because of the decoration and the ads displays. Olivia told her friend "I do so love to see all the supermarket Christmas ads in November".

Olivia's statement is:

> **Sincere**
> **Lying**
> **Joking**
> **Sarcastic**

Story 20: Ahmed manages to solve extremely hard math equation in minutes. " No kidding, Sherlock!" His friend Bilal responds.

Bilal's statement is:

> **Sincere**
> **Lying**
> **Joking**
> **Sarcastic**

Summary

The present study aims at exploring the ability of EFL master students at Tiaret Ibn Khaldoun University to grasp and understand written English sarcasm. This study seeks also to measure the extent to which context plays a significant role in enabling EFL master students to better detect sarcastic utterances. To collect data, a questionnaire was used with a group of 70 EFL master students at Ibn Khaldoun University. The results revealed that EFL master students have troubles understanding English sarcasm especially sarcastic utterances with cultural context.

Résumé

La présente étude vise à explorer la capacité des étudiants en master ALS de l'Université Tiaret Ibn Khaldoun à saisir et à comprendre le sarcasme écrit en anglais. Cette étude vise également à mesurer dans quelle mesure le contexte joue un rôle significatif pour permettre aux étudiants en master ALS de mieux détecter les énoncés, une étude de cas est entreprise avec premier et deuxième année Master étudiants des deux spécialités. Pour collecter des données, un questionnaire a été utilisé avec un groupe de 70 étudiants en master ALS à l'Université Ibn Khaldoun. Les résultats ont révélé que les étudiants en master ALS ont des problèmes pour comprendre le sarcasme anglais, en particulier les énoncés sarcastiques avec
le contexte culturel.

الملخص

تهدف الدراسة الحالية الى استكشاف قدرة طلاب الماسترفي اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة تيارت ابن خلدون على فهم السخرية الإنجليزية المكتوبة كما تسعى إلى قياس المدى الذي يساهم فيه السياق في تمكين طلاب الماستر في اللغة الانجليزية من اكتشاف التصريحات الساخرة بشكل أفضل، لجمع البيانات، تم استخدام استبيان مع مجموعة من 70 طالب ماستر في اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة ابن خلدون، كشفت النتائج أن طلاب ماستر اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية يواجهون مشاكل في فهم السخرية الانجليزية وخاصة الكلام الساخر مع السياق الثقافي.