A Pragmatic Analysis of the Expression and Interpretation of Sarcasm in Chats on Facebook Messenger

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Master's thesis / Diplomski rad

2021

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **University of Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Filozofski fakultet**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:131:381237

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-03-29**

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University of Zagreb
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
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Academic year: 2020/2021

Pragmatic Analysis of the Expression and Interpretation of Sarcasm in Chats on Facebook Messenger

Master's Thesis

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Zagreb, 2021

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Abstract

Sarcasm is most typically defined as a type of speech that draws attention to discrepancies between an utterance and its intended meaning, or the current and counterfactual situation, often as a way of dampening critical remarks or being humorous. Sarcastic intent can be signaled with the use of a variety of multimodal cues in face-to-face communication, mainly verbal cues, gestures, facial expressions, and prosody. Computer-mediated communication has for a long time constrained our ability to express sarcasm multimodally, but the computer-mediated environment has undergone significant developments since the dawn of the Internet, producing replacements for multimodal cues. This thesis analyzes the translation of potential sarcastic cues from face-to-face to computer-mediated communication on a sample of conversations in Facebook Messenger. Among the most common cues are punctuation, GIFs, code-switching, and emoji, though some other innovative cues have also been found: the alternating caps technique and use of hashtags. GIFs and code-switching are especially prevalent in the collected samples, illustrating the value of quotation, dramatization, and exaggeration in communicating sarcasm. Previous research and the presented analysis also highlight the significance of context in the correct interpretation of sarcasm. Results indicate the need for further research concerning sarcastic communication, the occurrence of code-switching in computer-mediated communication, and the significance of GIFs in communicating sarcasm in this environment.

Key words: sarcasm, computer-mediated communication, multimodality, GIF, code-switching, context

1. Introduction

For several decades computer-mediated communication was constrained to a limited number of modalities, making it more difficult for users to communicate and interpret more complex messages such as sarcasm. Without cues provided by gestures, facial expressions, and paralinguistic cues, messages often appear ambiguous. In recent years the quality of computer-mediated communication has vastly improved, with social media platforms providing their users with an increasing number of features to help enrich their online communicative experiences and communicate complex ideas.

In the simplest of terms, communication is the exchange of meaning. Traditional, face-to-face (FtF) communication allows us to use diverse tools for communicating different meanings. These tools include words, bodily movements, gestures, and facial expressions. The different ways we can communicate a message are also called modalities, so human communication may be described as multimodal – messages are typically packaged into combinations of modalities with each contributing something to the whole meaning (DeVito 1993: 12; Thurlow et al. 2004: 18; Jewitt et al. 2016: 2). Communicative signals can be verbal and nonverbal, though verbal messages are also accompanied by paralinguistic cues such as intonation (DeVito 1993: 9, 115). Modalities within a single utterance typically work together to reinforce the meaning of the message, but can also contradict one another, either intentionally or unintentionally (12). Messages are transmitted via several channels: our senses, and our sociocultural background play a part in interpreting them (DeVito 1993: 9; Thurlow et al. 2004: 19).

Visual behavior, which includes bodily movements, is critical for processing language in communication (Silva et al. 2019: 3). The computer-mediated[1] environment has to a certain extent limited our ability for sending visual and other signals, potentially causing difficulties in message transmission. However, communication technologies have undergone significant changes and improvements since the Internet first emerged. Now this environment, sometimes also called *cyberspace*, supplies us with resources that help improve the quality of our social lives (Thurlow et al. 2004: 28-29). Different social media platforms and messaging applications are available for use worldwide, and they are regularly upgraded to suit our social needs, allowing us to create and interpret messages in unique ways (Jewitt et al. 2016: 3, 25).

[1] In the context of this thesis, *computer-mediated* will refer to any use of electronic devices such as personal computers, (smart)phones, tablets, and any other device which supports electronic communication and use of the Internet (calling, video-calling, e-mail, instant-messaging, social media platforms).

Facebook Messenger (also known simply as Messenger) is one such application that allows its users to conduct computer-mediated conversations. It supports both synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous communication and provides multimodal features for enhancing user interactions. The most prominent features include emoji, stickers, audio- and video-messaging, sharing still or animated images, and videos. There are different ways users can substitute FtF cues with features supported by electronic communicative devices: by utilizing the keyboard, adapting their use of language, and "going multimodal" with the use of emoji or animated images (Thurlow et al. 2004: 52-53). The focus of this thesis will be the pragmatic analysis of potentially sarcastic cues within conversations conducted on Messenger. This application has been selected for its multimodality and the variety of features users can utilize to convey meaning. The focus is on the instant-messaging functions only, therefore audio- and video-messaging will not be considered. The analysis will attempt to answer the following questions:

1) How are potentially sarcastic cues translated from face-to-face communication into computer-mediated communication?
2) Which tools offered by Facebook Messenger are utilized the most in the role of potentially sarcastic cues?
3) Can any innovative techniques for communicating sarcasm be identified in the computer-mediated environment?

2. Sarcasm

2.1. Defining sarcasm

Sarcasm lacks a definitive definition but has been noted to bear a close connection with the concept of irony (Haiman 1998; Camp 2012; Gibbs 1986; Sykora et al. 2020). Gibbs (1986), Hancock (2004), Camp (2012), Haiman (1998), and Rankin et al. (2009) define sarcasm as a type of irony. For instance, Haiman (1998) observes that sarcasm is "overt irony *intentionally used by the speaker as a form of verbal aggression*," noting that while sarcasm requires intention, irony can be both unintentional and unconscious (19-20, emphasis theirs). Camp (2012) considers sarcasm "more pointed, blatant and negative" but defines it as a "more restricted class of verbal irony" (603-604). Schifanella et al. (2016) define sarcasm as speech intended to "insult someone, to show irritation, or to be funny" (1136). Hancock (2004) includes sarcasm as one of the four types of irony in his work, one that is especially used to express a negative attitude (453). Rankin et al. (2009) define sarcasm as "a type of ironic speech" used to express criticism via the use of different cues (2005). Sykora et al. (2020) have

also observed the close relation of these two concepts, possibly because of their shared characteristics, but they note that sarcasm is a "more aggressive form" of humor (2, 4). These definitions especially highlight the use of sarcasm for expressing criticism or expressing an otherwise negative attitude, but also its humorous aspects. Haiman (1998) for example relates it to genres like mockery, parody, and satire, which are also used as humorous forms that highlight the contrast between the ostensible, positive or sympathetic message and the "hostile intentions" of the speaker (21). Attardo et al. (2003) use the terms irony and sarcasm interchangeably in their research, noting that there is no way to "differentiate reliably" between them (243). This paper will consider sarcasm as a form of verbal irony; thus the terms will be used interchangeably.

The two are certainly related in that both target expectations or attitudes, or rather attempt to draw the listener's attention to a discrepancy between the current situation and what is expected. Gibbs (1986) specifically refers to the *Echoic Mention Theory* (Sperber and Wilson 1981; Jorgensen et al. 1984, both cited in Gibbs 1986: 4). This theory suggests the listener understands irony when the speaker's utterance *echoes* a familiar proposition and thus reminds or informs the listener of the speaker's attitude toward the proposition. Gibbs also notes that these echoic mentions can have more *or* less traceable origins, and can come from actual utterances, and even thoughts or opinions (4). His experiments revealed that people understand sarcasm more easily when a "putative belief or opinion" is echoed in the context (8). He also extends on the theory, suggesting the *Social Norm Model* which holds that it is possible to echo beliefs about certain social norms within a sarcastic utterance, thus making the intent more easily understood. His study as well as several others have especially noted the "asymmetric nature" of sarcasm – sarcastic utterances more frequently express negative attitudes with a positive (sarcastic) comment rather than positive attitudes with a negative comment ("You're a *fine* friend" vs. "You're a *terrible* friend") (Wallace et al. 2014; Kreuz and Link 2002; Pexman and Olineck 2002). Gibbs suggests this may be because positive comments are expected in social situations, even if just as a matter of politeness, and as such present a social norm (8). Another one of his experiments supported this claim, finding that people more easily understood sarcasm in contexts with explicit mentions of a social norm (8-9). These results shed light on one important factor in successfully interpreting sarcasm - *context.*

Hancock (2004) divides sarcastic cues in three different categories: contextual, verbal, and paralinguistic cues (448-449). Verbal cues refer to any use of words to mark sarcastic intent, and paralinguistic cues refer to nonverbal signs such as prosody, and facial and bodily movements. Contextual cues refer to discrepancies between an utterance and the context in

which it is uttered. This type of cue again highlights the impact of the discrepancy factor in interpreting irony and sarcasm. Other studies also emphasize the significance of context (Schifanella et al. 2016; Rankin et al. 2009; Wallace et al 2014; Kreuz and Link 2002; Pexman and Olineck 2002). Kreuz and Link (2002) focus on assessing four specific variables and their potential impact on the interpretation of verbal irony. These variables are: *expectations* of events, the *outcome* of events, the *evaluation* of the outcome, and the *shared common ground* (127). They also highlight the importance of the discrepancy between the expectations or assumptions about a given situation and its current state (128).

One of Camp's (2012) main arguments is that sarcasm always involves a kind of evaluative scale, which relates to the *Echoic Mention Theory,* as well as to Kreuz and Link's claim that *evaluation* of the outcome significantly affects the perception of ironic statements. This will be elaborated upon in the analysis section. Kreuz and Link (2002) also list *shared common ground* as a key variable. They conclude their study with the claim that the "accumulation of common ground requires a long-term representation of shared knowledge and experiences," and this becomes especially evident in the study of verbal irony and similar "complex pragmatic phenomena" (142). Haiman (1998) tries to show that the semantic message in sarcasm only serves as a "vehicle" for delivering the "pragmatically essential metamessage," and points out the role of the "in-group who shares [the speaker's] values" (19). Gibbs (1986) suggests sarcasm comprehension may also involve the "pragmatic information" shared between interlocutors, because this information and shared ground ultimately makes sarcasm between them possible and comprehensible (14). Schifanella et al.'s (2016) study suggests knowledge about an author of a particular post on social media platforms may be crucial in deciphering their sarcastic intent (1137). The word *author* can also be applied to the sarcastic speaker within a personal conversation, as in instant-messaging applications, where knowledge about the speaker may prove significant in deciphering their sarcastic intent. The study also indicates the significance of shared knowledge between the speaker and their audience, i.e. that comprehension of sarcasm may depend on what one knows about the speaker (1137). Pexman and Olineck (2002) specifically propose that listeners' beliefs about a speaker may affect their interpretation (245). Wallace et al. (2014) also show that people cannot always decipher irony and sarcasm from verbal and grammatical cues, in which case they require more contextual information (514). These studies strongly suggest that social expectations, context, and especially shared common knowledge or experience between the sarcastic speaker and their audience greatly affect the interpretation of sarcastic utterances.

Traditionally, sarcasm has been defined as speech by which the speaker implies a meaning opposite of the one explicitly spoken (Camp 2012: 587; Gibbs 1986: 4; Haiman 1998: 9-10). However, Gibbs (1998) challenges the *Standard Pragmatic Model* which proposes that sarcasm is understood first by analyzing the literal (context-independent) meaning of the sarcastic message before deciphering the nonliteral (intended, context-dependent) meaning (4). He notes that people do not always refer to the literal meaning when deriving the intended one. Camp (2012) explains the traditional view of sarcasm as "the speaker's meaning coming apart from sentence meaning" (587). The traditional view treats the two types of meaning of sarcastic utterances, semantic and pragmatic, as opposites of one another. Carston (2008) places the general distinction between semantics and pragmatics between the linguistically-encoded meaning (context-independent) at the semantic level and speaker meaning (context-dependent) at the pragmatic level. Pragmatics is concerned with "recovering the content of a speaker's communicative intention," (322). Gibbs (1986: 4) challenges exactly *what* the opposite of the semantic content in a sarcastic utterance entails, while Camp (2012) provides examples of utterances where such a definition falls apart, such as,

> A: I'm sorry Aunt Louisa is such a bother.
> B: Oh, she never stays for more than a month at a time, and she always confines her three cats to the upper two floors of our house. (596)

Speaker B in the above utterance "genuinely assert[s] the utterance's semantic content" – the visits are represented as they are, but the attitude towards them is ironic. Clearly, the pragmatic meaning of sarcastic utterances is not always completely contrary to their semantic meaning. Gibbs (1986) observes that many cases of sarcasm lack "well-defined" literal meanings, and that the literal meaning often has nothing to do with the intention (14), as in the example provided by Camp. He suggests both kinds of meaning are to some extent context-dependent because literal meaning is also derived from the interpretive process (14). In cases where sarcasm comprehension does involve understanding the literal meaning, the literal meaning again needs to be defined within the framework of pragmatic information shared by the speakers (14). Camp (2012) also notes sarcastic expression is highly dependent on the sociocultural context (626). Taking the above into account, clearly the discrepancy between the utterance and its intended meaning is not always as clear as the traditional stance would have it. She argues that sarcasm involves some kind of "meaning inversion," but the process

requires a broader understanding of meaning, so that it includes illocutionary force, evaluative attitudes, and propositional content (587).

Haiman (1998) describes sarcasm as "characterized by the *intentional production*" of a separate metamessage which lets on that the speaker is not being sincere but rather makes fun of another speaker or a different target (such as an attitude) (25, emphasis theirs). He attempts to show that sarcasm is "overtly marked" by a variety of cues (24). Moreover, Wallace et al. (2014), Shifanella et al. (2016), and Hancock (2004) are specifically concerned with the investigation of production and interpretation of irony and sarcasm in computer-mediated communication. Both Camp (2012) and Haiman (1998) discuss in detail the aspects of sarcasm they are interested in, and their work will be especially useful in analyzing and discussing the collected computer-mediated conversations. Camp argues that sarcastic utterances always involve pretense and the presupposition of a normative scale (605), and identifies four different subtypes of sarcasm: propositional, lexical, *like*-prefixed, and illocutionary sarcasm (606-607). Haiman claims that the sarcastic speaker *wants* the sarcastic message to be understood (18), thus he concerns himself with explicit markers of sarcastic intention. This thesis aims to explore how different markers which are employed in face-to-face sarcastic communication have been translated into computer-mediated communication.

2.2. Method

For the purposes of this thesis, a sample of conversational segments[2] has been collected from students at the University of Zagreb. Students were asked to provide screenshots of conversations where sarcasm was communicated in different ways – textually and visually, and to comment on the provided content, focusing on whether and why they thought the sarcastic message was communicated well or not. Visual communication in the context of this research implies the use of content such as emoji, stickers, still and animated images. A total of 23 segments has been collected, with most consisting of bilingual exchanges (in English and Croatian). Permission has been granted for the use of these segments by their providers, and personal information has been anonymized.

[2] The collected examples will also be referred to as conversational segments as they are only smaller parts of larger conversations. However, they represent unique meaningful units containing sarcastic utterances and other, surrounding utterances deemed essential for better understanding of the sarcastic utterance and the context in which it occurs.

2.3. Analysis and Discussion

An analysis of nine examples will be presented below for the purposes of this thesis. The conversations have been numbered and titled based on an identified key content feature, with each contribution in a conversation separately numbered. For example, if one speaker has sent two separate texts immediately one after the other, they are listed separately one below the other. The analysis has been divided into three subchapters, with each focusing on a specific set of cues that have been identified, though some cues are bound to appear in other sections as well as the analysis progresses. Haiman's (1998) work provides a detailed account of many cues that have been discussed in the literature, therefore his discussion will serve as the basis for the analysis of the collected conversations.

2.3.1. Flattening, exaggeration, and the use of GIFs

In his research Hancock (2004) highlights some of the similarities and differences his study has revealed between the production and interpretation of verbal irony in face-to-face and computer-mediated conversations. The study revealed that frequently employed signals in FtF communication include: amplifiers, prosody, laughter, kinetic signals (which include facial expressions and gestures) (455). Signals found in CMC include amplifiers, ellipsis, punctuation, emoticons, and adapted vocalizations (455). This study was published in 2004; since then computer-mediated communication has undergone great changes, and instant-messaging applications have enabled the use of a variety of new formats which help in enriching the communicative experience, even though some limitations of CMC remain to this day. Our ability to discern one's intonation and other prosodic qualities of speech that are available to us in multimodal FtF interactions remains limited in textual communication. Still, users have found other ways to indicate their intended intonation in the production of sarcastic utterances, as will be demonstrated by the examples that follow.

The first example is also the simplest in that it consists of textual utterances in English only. Speaker A is using short, single-word responses to reply to speaker B's questions (which are not shown).

(01) Short replies

1. A: Yes
2. A: Idk
3. A: Idk
4. B: Aww i just love how much u care

While B's replies to A's questions are sincere, they are communicated in a way which also signifies lack of commitment on A's side, to which B reacts with what looks like an emphatic expression of affection, marked by the interjection *aww* and the use of verbs *love* and *care*, indicating positive emotion. However, B does not use any other markers to emphasize this affection, but rather seems to be imitating A's detached style – using abbreviated forms (*u* instead of *you*) and avoiding any punctuation or visual markers such as emoji. The rest of the utterance is in contrast with the initial interjection *aww*. In relation to intonation, Haiman (1998) introduces the term *intonational misfit*, a phenomenon defined by displaying emotional incongruity between the semantic content of a message and the speaker's intonation (33). Here the distinction between semantics and pragmatics also comes into play – at the semantic level, B's message seems to communicate a positive sentiment, but the message is intended to acknowledge and comment on speaker A's detached replies, by expressing a negative attitude toward them – speaker B does not appreciate such replies. This way B is employing *sarcastic detachment*, "expressed by means of an emotively inappropriate intonation" (Haiman 1998: 33). Haiman also calls this technique of communicating sarcastic intention *flattening*, as the "melody" of the message seems to be flat compared to the semantic content (35). In Hancock's (2004) study, participants mostly used punctuation to signal ironic intent, thus Hancock describes punctuation as the "prosody of text" (460).

Furthermore, Haiman also briefly discusses the significance of punctuation in text, especially in the context of "flattening of affect," which is exemplified here. He notes that in the "orthographic representation of frigid flatness" even a period or no punctuation in place of the expected exclamation mark can be "deadly" (40). In fact, this utterance may even be related to what Attardo et al. (2003) describe as *deadpan delivery,* where the presence of ironic or sarcastic intent is not signaled overtly by the speaker (256). Rather than describing it as an utterance without any overt cues, Haiman (1998) considers the "deadpan monotone" a cue of its own (24).

There are two instances of sarcasm within this one utterance which can be analyzed in terms of Camp's (2012) four varieties of sarcasm. As has been noted above, she distinguishes between propositional, lexical, *like*-prefixed, and illocutionary sarcasm – they vary in "operative targets, rhetorical force, and their semantic status" (589). I will attempt to show that the utterance above contains an instance of propositional sarcasm embedded within an illocutionary sarcastic utterance. Propositional sarcasm targets the proposition "to which a sincere utterance would have committed the speaker" (607). The proposition in line 4 is that speaker A cares (a lot). Furthermore, Camp argues each type of sarcasm involves pretense and

an evoked evaluative scale (605). In this case speaker B "pretends to assert the proposition *P*" (607, emphasis theirs), which evokes an evaluative scale of commitment (to speaker B). Semantically, the manner of speaker A's replies is placed at the positive end of the scale, as indicative of great commitment. However, by looking at A's replies it does not look as though A is *that* committed to speaker B, so we can conclude B means the opposite – that A does *not* care, or at least that they do not care *that* much, which places them lower at the evaluative scale, closer to the negative end.

Moreover, this part of the utterance can also be analyzed in terms of Camp's lexical sarcasm since it contains the word *much*, which places the proposition closer to the extreme positive end of this evoked scale. According to Camp, lexical sarcasm targets a single expression or phrase within the utterance (588) and makes use of comparative expressions (611), which arguably may include the word *much*. She also suggests lexical sarcasm may allude to a "previous, genuine evaluation of the same subject" which contrasts with the one expressed in the current situation (611). In this case we might assume that, since A and B are friends, B may be alluding to their relationship, where presumably A has already adequately expressed commitment. In the current situation B is simply alluding to or *echoing* this prior expressed commitment. Speaker B also seemingly expresses a positive sentiment towards this asserted proposition, by saying they *love* how much A cares. Camp's illocutionary sarcasm "encompasses the entire illocutionary act" which would have been appropriate in a situation that contrasts with the current situation, i.e. A's display of lack of commitment. The evoked scale contrasts the current and counterfactual situations, placing each at opposite ends of the scale: the current situation in this case falls toward the negative end, and the counterfactual situation, in which speaker A adequately shows commitment to B, toward the positive end. In the counterfactual situation speaker B's utterance would have been sincere and expressed a positive attitude towards A's actions.

Camp's evaluative scales certainly relate to the *Echoic Mention Theory* whose claim is that people recognize sarcasm by being echoically reminded of a familiar proposition (Gibbs 186: 4). These echoes refer to certain sociocultural norms and expectations being targeted with sarcastic utterances. The evaluative scales are based on such expectations: we cannot know where the proposition of an utterance belongs on a scale without at least some contextual knowledge of these norms and expectations. In this case speaker B is echoing an expectation based on their relationship with speaker A: assuming they are friends, they expect speaker A to show more commitment – their current behavior is represented as high on the scale but belongs somewhere lower.

The next conversation demonstrates another type of intonational misfit which Haiman (1998) describes as *heavy sarcasm* – "a combination of *heavy exaggerated stress and relatively monotonous intonation*" (39, emphasis mine). The textual exchanges are in Croatian, though one utterance consists wholly of an animated image superimposed with English text.

(02) <u>You don't say</u>

5. A: Di ima duhanske tekucine s kokosom
6. B: Pufkalica
7. A: De je to
8. B: U vzu
9. A:



Speaker A wants to know where one can purchase a specific kind of e-liquid and is looking for a more specific piece of information than the one speaker B provides. Since B provides information A already knows, A reacts with an animated image of a person with a heavily exaggerated facial expression and a caption that reads, "YOU DON'T SAY?". The expression *you don't say* is used on two occasions: when expressing genuine surprise and when expressing insincere, sarcastic surprise. In this case the expression is used insincerely, which makes this utterance an example of Camp's (2012) illocutionary sarcasm. The use of the expression evokes a scale of expectation, or different levels of surprise. A sincere utterance would have been appropriate in a counterfactual situation where speaker B produces a truly unexpected, surprising response to speaker A's question. Such a situation contrasts with the current one, where B has only managed to produce an unsatisfactory, predictable response echoing what speaker A already knows. By being sarcastic in this way, A is echoing what is presumably a shared fact between the two – that A already knows the mentioned store is in Varaždin *and* B *knows* this. At least speaker A is *assuming* that this is true – since the two do not live in the same town, B may have assumed A needed more general information.

Sarcastic intent in this conversation is not communicated only textually. The animated image in question also needs to be considered. The person's face is unnaturally exaggerated,

and the person seems to be sneering. A sneer is an expression associated with disgust, contempt, or scorn. Haiman (1998) claims this "facial expression of distaste" explicitly displays the speaker's "emphatic lack of commitment to the literal meaning of his or her words" (30). Moreover, the superimposed expression is written in uppercase, and as such may be perceived as exaggeratingly loud, further strengthening the heavy exaggeration in this whole utterance. Rankin et al. (2009) have observed that widened eyes and increased grimacing are some of the non-acoustic paralinguistic features associated with sarcastic speech (2005). These features and the text together lead to the conclusion that the utterance in this situation is meant sarcastically, even if one is unfamiliar with the source of this animated image. The image has been taken from the film *Vampire's Kiss* (1988) in which the character from the image (played by Nicolas Cage) regularly displays *heavy sarcasm*. It is probably because of this that Cage's face has been turned into the popular internet meme[3] called *you don't say* – both Cage's face and this expression have since become associated with sarcasm. [4]

Schifanella et al.'s (2016) study specifically focuses on "the interplay between textual and visual content in sarcastic multimodal posts" on modern social media (1137). They conclude that visual elements such as images can help in the correct interpretation of sarcastic posts and suggest that images may serve as a possible contextual clue (1144). More conversations which utilize animated images will be analyzed below, which warrants a brief introduction into a phenomenon called the *graphics interchange format* or simply GIF. This format was first published as an open format, which immediately allowed it to spread more quickly and easily on the Internet (Eppink 2014a: 299, 301). GIF-hosting websites emerged in the late 90s and early 2000s, but social media platforms were ultimately responsible for the giant leap in the GIF's evolution (302-303). Most GIFs today have been taken from popular sources such as film and television, so users have begun using them to "playfully express common ideas and emotions," and employing them as "gestures, performed reactions," labeling them as *reaction GIFs* (303). It is no surprise then that they are also being employed as sarcastic markers. They are surely one of the most expressive communicative tools to have been introduced in CMC in the last decade.

Tolins and Samermit (2016) investigated the specific functions of GIFs in text-messaging. Two main functions were identified in their research: as representations of embodied or affective responses, or as co-speech gestures (78). The second function was

[3] Internet memes will be addressed in the general discussion chapter.
[4] *You don't say,* Know Your Meme: https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/you-dont-say--3 [July 20, 2021]

further divided into displays of emotional content of the preceding text, and enactments of events mentioned in the preceding text. For example, the GIF used in the exchange above functions as an affective response; it demonstrates speaker A's reaction to speaker B's predictable response. Tolins and Samermit highlight the important role of this format in the context of computer-mediated communication where our resources for displaying vocal prosody, facial expressions, and gestures are limited or unavailable – in this environment GIFs allow us to represent others' facial and bodily movements as our own (83).

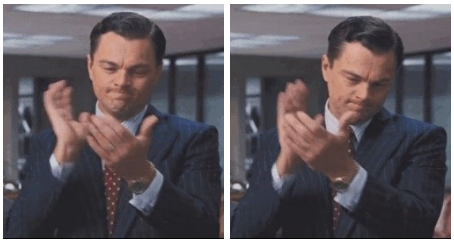
In relation to *heavy sarcasm* Haiman (1998) also describes an analogous gesture – the "heavy monotonous, thoroughly controlled repetition of the clapping gesture" (39) whose characteristic "slowing and heavy emphasis" is used in the expression of "ridiculed enthusiasm" (41). The following conversation includes this type of sarcastic gesture along with another instance of sarcasm, both displayed with GIFs.

(03) Got a pen?

10. A: Imas kemijsku?
11. B: Imam nekim cudom
12. B: Kaj ti nemas?
13. A: Zaboravil sam
14. B: Ko da sam znala
15. B:



16. A:



The textual exchanges are wholly in Croatian, but the final two utterances are GIFs with no superimposed text. Speaker A asks speaker B if they have taken a pen for a pub quiz the two

are going to together, from which B infers A has forgotten to take theirs. Speaker B uses a GIF of a person knowingly tapping their head, to which A responds with a GIF of another person clapping. Speaker B's having remembered to take a pen in this context seems to be cause for celebration if these GIFs are taken as sincere utterances.

The first GIF illustrates using a GIF as a co-speech demonstration because it provides a "visual elaboration" of speaker B's previous utterance (line 14) (Tolins and Samermit 2016: 83). It is also another example of an internet meme, called *Roll Safe*, which is typically used with images "mocking poor decision making and failures in critical thinking," according to *Know Your Meme.* [5] We can assume then that speaker B is using this GIF without any captions to mock speaker A for displaying a failure in critical thinking by having forgotten a pen, a crucial part of their pub quiz experience. This interpretation would then, in Camp's (2012) terms, evoke an evaluative scale of success or intelligence, with two possible propositions displayed with the use of this GIF. Speaker B's proposition could be "I'm (very) smart because I remembered to take a pen" or "You're not (very) smart because you forgot to take a pen." These propositions would place speaker B at the positive end of the scale and speaker A at the negative. Taken as such, the GIF as an utterance represents an instance of Camp's propositional sarcasm. The pretense is in that speaker B treats their remembering as a sign of great intelligence or success in critical thinking (and the opposite in speaker A's case) whereas the act actually falls somewhere in the middle of the scale, i.e. neither is speaker A any less successful nor speaker B any more so for their respective actions. Speaker A uses the clapping GIF as an embodied/affective response to B's prior utterances (lines 14-15) (Tolins and Samermit 2016: 78). This GIF can be observed as having two functions: speaker A may be displaying genuine satisfaction with the circumstances because speaker B has remembered to take a pen. However, it may also represent an insincere gesture of congratulations toward speaker B's small success. In that case, it evokes another scale of success, though it represents an instance of illocutionary sarcasm, because the clapping gesture, when used sincerely, is used to congratulate, or celebrate success. Of course, more possible propositions and interpretations of the given GIFs can be derived, since they do not have captions, i.e. they lack any verbal semantic content. This relates to Carston's (2008) claim that semantics limits interpretation at the pragmatic level (339). Captions would provide a kind of framework which would limit the number of possible propositions and interpretations.

[5] *Roll Safe*, Know Your Meme: https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/roll-safe [July 15, 2021]

2.3.2. Repetition, quotation, and *alternating caps*

Conversations 01 and 02 show two extremes of demonstrating affect by means of intonation – the first example utilizes the lack of punctuation and any visual signals (such as emoji) as a demonstration of flattening affect while the second utilizes uppercase letters and facial expression to exaggerate affect. Hancock (2004) has found that exaggeration can be expressed verbally as well, by using hyperbole or intensifying adverbs and adjectives in both face-to-face and computer-mediated communication (448-449, 455). The following example will demonstrate exaggeration in a different way, by means of repetition.

(04) Good music

17. A: daj preslusaj svestere
18. A: uskrsnja je pjesma
19. B: WHY
20. B: Whats in it for me
21. B: HAHAHAHAH
22. B: Zicer
23. A: visokokvalitetna glazba
24. B:



In the above conversation speaker A is trying to make speaker B listen to a song by an artist speaker B does not like. A provides two *pros* to this argument: the song is Easter-themed and high-quality music can be expected. Speaker B expresses doubt with the word *zicer*[6] [sure][7], and then with a GIF of a person saying, "Oh sure, of course, absolutely" (indicated by the superimposed caption). Speaker B is using essentially synonymous expressions to signal doubt. The type of repetition that is demonstrated here is what Haiman (1998) calls *reduplication* –

[6] *Zicer* and *ziher* are two commonly used lexical borrowings of German words. Each has a distinct meaning, though they may sometimes be used interchangeably, as in this case, where *zicer* is used instead of *ziher* [sure].
[7] Utterances originally produced in Croatian will be translated into English where necessary for the purposes of this analysis, by the author.

these synonymous expressions are spoken one after another. If these were spoken sincerely, they would have the "iconic function of signaling plurality or intensification" (57). However, the expressions above are signs of assent, of agreement or approval, about which Haiman has noted that their use in this way has become associated with sarcastic intent. Speaker B is using these words to seemingly signify approval of speaker A's argument, but is instead strengthening their doubt. Furthermore, the GIF used is of a person wearing an expressionless, emotionless facial expression, referred to by Attardo et al. (2003) as *blank face* (254). They elaborate that this facial expression is signaled by lack of movement, especially in the eyebrow and mouth area (apart from movement when speaking) (254). This face combined with a flat, expressionless intonation results in a "deadpan delivery" where irony is not signaled at all, but rather has to be inferred by the interlocutor (256). For Haiman (1998), a deadpan delivery is another cue signaling the presence of sarcasm (24), especially in cases that feature this kind of repetition of signs of assent (57).

The use of these expressions can also be analyzed in terms of Camp's (2012) propositional sarcasm. She notes that propositional sarcasm can also target the epistemic probability of a given proposition, in utterances involving expressions such as *sure*, *surely* or *oh yeah* (629). Speaker B's *zicer* [sure] targets the epistemic probability of the song in question being Easter-themed or the probability that speaker B might *believe* this to be true or possible. The propositions in this utterance may then be "Sure, I'll believe that [it's an Easter-themed song]" or "Sure, it's an Easter-themed song." These propositions evoke the scale of epistemic probability for each. The use of *sure* places them at the positive end of the scale (probable), but the utterance is communicating that they actually fall at the negative end (improbable). Similarly, the expressions in the GIF target the probability of the proposition "You can expect high-quality music." Camp notes that by targeting the epistemic probability of a given proposition in this way, the speaker is expressing scorn toward the assumption that anyone would even *consider* assigning a higher probability to the situation (616), in which case it illustrates the use of sarcasm as an expression of a negative attitude.

Another interesting aspect of this conversation is that speaker B is demonstrating a high degree of control in the production of their utterances, illustrated in two ways: by switching between using uppercase and proper case between utterances, and by employing code-switching (between English and Croatian). In line 19, speaker B writes *WHY*, wholly in uppercase, but then switches to proper case in the following line. They again switch to uppercase letters in the next line, typing the orthographic representation of laughter, seemingly to intensify the affect demonstrated by the laughter (that speaker B is amused). Haiman (1998)

notes that such differences in "melodies" (the differently stylized utterances imply differences in intonation) let on that the speaker is in "complete control" of the pretended emotions and that this control "signals artifice" (41). He observes that the general ability to use a language is indicative of a high degree of control *or* artifice in communication (44). Control is signaled by artificial politeness, frequently assumed in sarcastic utterances (41), and this in turn again echoes the *Echoic Mention Theory* and Gibbs's (1986) *Social Norm Model* – polite agreement is assumed in the conversation so as to conform to social norms. The use of code-switching in CMC will be discussed in the general discussion chapter.

The following conversation illustrates another type of repetition – quotation used as "contemptuous repetition of 'fresh talk'" (Haiman 1998: 53). Its target is explicitly mentioned earlier in the conversation, so the intent is easier is interpret. Gibbs (1986) also found sarcastic utterances are better understood when the echoes are made explicit in the conversation, rather than when they are not (7). The correct interpretation is also supported with the use of an explicit insult before the sarcastic expression, in the same utterance.

(05) Normal girls

25. A: *sends a screenshot of a *Facebook* comment* [*Kada ovo čitam, čini mi se da nema normalnih cura. Mislim mene baš i ne doživljavaju jer nisam zanimljiv ali mi se i čini da ih nema baš*.]
26. A: Kakav retard ovaj lik, pise jedna zena i tri lika u clanku ali nEmA nOrMaLnIh CuRa
27. A: Likovi su svi normalni
28. B: Komedija hahahahahahaha

Speaker A shares a screenshot of a comment found under an article about a recently committed murder. Following the screenshot, A also expresses their opinion about the comment and its author, directly quoting part of the comment in a specific format, by alternating uppercase and lowercase letters. This format is an important development in sarcastic expression in CMC. Its use is demonstrated in discussion threads on different social media platforms and is referred to as *alternating caps* by users on *Urban Dictionary*, who have described it simply as "[t]he texting way of being sarcastic."[8] By quoting the commenter's words in this way, speaker A is expressing their disapproval of the comment and pointing out the inappropriateness of his

[8] "aLtErNaTiNg CaPs", *Urban Dictionary:* https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=aLtErNaTiNg%20CaPs [June 12, 2021]

concern with a petty matter compared to the topic of the article. They elaborate with a monotonously delivered sarcastic message that all guys are normal, indicating the insincerity of the utterance with the lack of punctuation.

In Camp's (2012) terms, these utterances can be analyzed as propositional sarcasm. They are targeting two different propositions: the first is targeting the proposition that there are *no* normal girls, and the other is targeting the proposition that *all* guys are normal. More specifically, what is being targeted is the epistemic probability of these propositions, which may be made clearer if we add *sure* or *oh yeah* before them: "Sure, there are no normal girls" or "Sure, all guys are normal." They can also be formulated as *like*-prefixed sarcastic utterances if we simply add *like*, "Like there are no normal girls" or "Like all guys are normal." Semantically these utterances place the epistemic probability of these propositions at the extreme positive end of the evoked evaluative scale, but speaker A is communicating that they belong somewhere significantly lower.

Another device which is sometimes used to mark a sarcastic attitude toward a text or attitude are quotation marks (Haiman 1998: 53). In the above example *alternating caps* are being employed as a sarcastic quotative device, so we may assume that, even in the absence of explicit quotable content, alternating caps can be used to signal sarcasm, as in the exchange below.

(06) Precious

29. A: a da, sad vidim da bi sutra trebalo cijeli dan padat hahah nece ti on [their dog] htjet ic nikam ak bude padalo
30. B: Precious
31. B: Maybe Friday
32. A: yes so precious when he doesn't wanna go out and then pOoPs iN thE aParTmEnt

Speaker A is explaining to speaker B that A's dog will not want to go out if it rains (in Croatian), to which B replies, "Precious," then suggests another time for their walk. In the final utterance, A switches to English, possibly because speaker B uses it. Speaker A seems to be agreeing, beginning the utterance with, "Yes so precious," but in repeating B's comment, A is signaling the inappropriateness of this comment and their disagreement with it. This message is strengthened by the lack of punctuation. What follows as elaboration to this insincere agreement are two propositions, "The dog not wanting to go out is precious" and "The dog pooping in the apartment (because it does not want to go out) is precious." Both propositions

can be represented on a scale of *precious* things. While semantically they are represented as being on the positive end of the scale, they fall somewhere on the negative end. This whole utterance is an example of illocutionary sarcasm – A's agreement can be appropriate in a counterfactual situation where something commonly (or at least between the two speakers) considered precious is being discussed. The utterance may also be analyzed as propositional sarcasm targeting the epistemic probability of the expressed propositions, which may be made clearer if *sure* is added at the beginning of the utterance, in which case speaker A is expressing scorn toward B's evaluation of the situation as *precious*. Speaker A's attitude is signaled especially strongly with the use of alternating caps in the second part of their utterance.

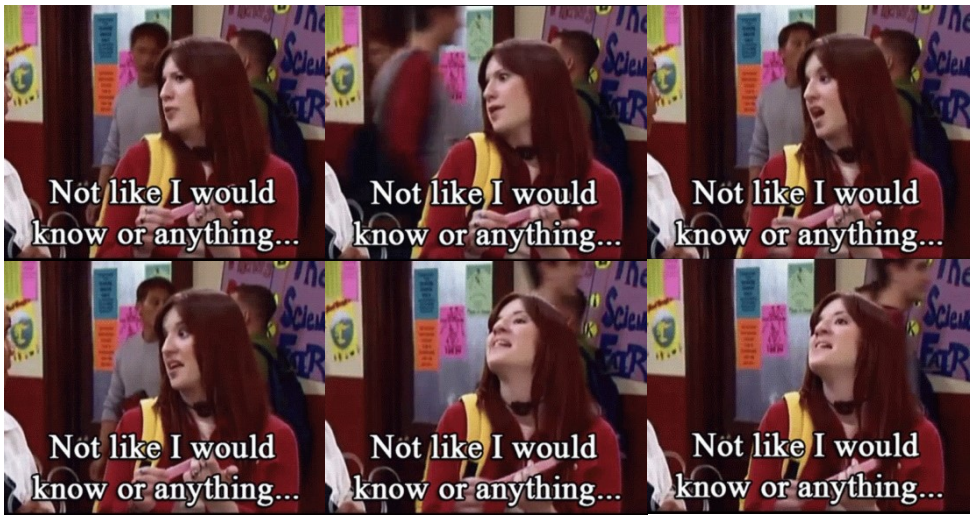
2.3.3 Lexical markers and hashtags

Furthermore, Haiman also introduces some more explicit indices of sarcasm. Two of these are used within a single utterance in the next conversation: *like*, which is also discussed in Camp's (2012) work, and *not that...or anything*. The latter is a kind of exaggerating device whereby the speaker, by emphasizing one proposition, suggests something else might be true (Haiman 1998: 55).

(07) Anger management

33. A: Zdravo je rasrdit se tu i tam znas

34. A:



35. B: I think you would

Haiman (1998) notes that syntactic structures such as "not that... or anything" are another form of exaggeration or emphasis, whereby the speaker syntactically emphasizes what he or she does not actually mean at the pragmatic level (53, 55). The above conversation actually illustrates both the use of this structure as well as the use of *like* (or *as if*) as an *overt* marker or sarcasm (53). This exchange also involves another instance of code-switching – speaker A begins this conversation in Croatian, but switches to English with the GIF, and B follows the GIF with another, related utterance in English. Speaker A claims that it is healthy to get angry from time to time, and elaborates on this with a GIF of a person saying "Not like I would know or anything..." B follows with the sentence, "I think you would", not necessarily exhibiting negative feedback about their misinterpretation of ironic intent in A's utterance, bur rather mocking speaker A by reinforcing their (A's) actual claim, which is contrary to the one semantically expressed (speaker A definitely *would* know).

What is interesting about this person is that their facial expression changes drastically throughout the GIF – first they begin the utterance with a serious face within normal contour, but it quickly changes into an exaggerated expression with widened eyes and furrowed eyebrows. In the final moments of the utterance the person raises their chin up and gives the interlocutor what appears to be a sarcastic smile, almost meant to conceal the intent behind the words of the utterance, but it makes the intent more obvious. This smile may be what Attardo et al. (2003) call an "ironic smile," one of their suggested *metacommunicative* alerts which signal to the hearer possible ironic intent in the speaker's utterance (257). This type of alert can be produced verbally as well as in another modality. Another type of alert they introduce is the *paracommunicative* alert, which is produced *alongside* the utterance and thus includes intonational cues (257). It is meant to contrast with the speaker's statement. In this case, the syntactic structure of this utterance and the facial expression of the person in the GIF act as metacommunicative alerts indicating ironic intent.

Camp (2012) discusses *like*-prefixed sarcasm as one of the four subspecies of sarcasm which, similar to propositional sarcasm, also targets an entire proposition, but it is not as flexible in that it combines only with declarative sentences (613). The proposition is expressed in the "focal content" of the utterance, i.e. the content following *like*. She notes that this variety of sarcasm "actively commits" to denying the expressed content, disabling the speaker from preserving deniability, unlike propositional sarcasm (614).[9] *Like* and *as if* can thus be analyzed

[9] Preserving deniability in the context of propositional sarcasm is discussed under conversation (08) *Roommate problems*.

as forms of sentential negation, as ellipticals for *it's not like/as if* (614). This type of sarcasm also less obviously demonstrates the two essential features of sarcasm as argued by Camp: the presupposition of a normative scale and the pretense of commitment (615). This pretense in the case of *like*-prefixed sarcasm is in that the speaker "merely denies, rather than actively asserts" the negation of the targeted content (615). Furthermore, the expressed content is denied very strongly, with the implied evaluation being that it falls at the very low end of the scale of epistemic probability (616). If we apply this to the utterance above, it seems to be denying the possibility of speaker A knowing *anything* about the subject at hand, but A is communicating the contrary – they *would* and *do* know. This knowledge is precisely what gives them the authority to make a statement such as the one given in line 33.

In the following segment two sarcastic utterances are followed by an explicit marker of insincerity in the form of a GIF, after one speaker displays negative feedback, i.e. misinterpretation of sarcastic interpretation.

(08) Roommate problems

36. A: Jos je [roommate] problem
37. B: Ma dobro more i on s nama gledat
38. B: *beer emoji*
39. A: Ne znam bas dal bi bil odusevljen
40. B: Zato bi bilo bas zabavno *LOL emoji* *LOL emoji*
41. B:



Speaker A is trying to get rid of their roommate before speaker B shows up for a movie date. Speaker B suggests the roommate can join them, following this utterance with a beer emoji, possibly as a sign of invitation which may have confused speaker A into thinking B is serious. Speaker A then expresses doubt about this idea, "I'm not sure if [roommate] would be thrilled by that," to which B responds, "That is exactly why it would be so fun." This utterance ends

with two LOL emoji, which indicate that speaker B finds this idea humorous but also that they may not be serious about their idea after all. Speaker B's acknowledgement of the possibility suggested by speaker A – that the roommate might not be thrilled by the idea – also serves as a cue to their sarcastic intent. At this point speaker A could have been realizing B may not have meant their suggestion seriously, but B still decides to reveal their intent with a GIF of a person shaking their head and waving their hand saying, "I'm just kidding," The final utterance finally (hopefully) rids A of any doubts.

The utterance in line 36 can be classified as an act of illocutionary sarcasm – speaker B is inviting speaker A's roommate to join them, or rather directing speaker B to invite the roommate. The beer emoji possibly strengthens this invitation because the three are friends who sometimes go out for beer together. However, since these speakers are trying to organize a movie date (at speaker A's flat), the evoked scale may be of (in)appropriate activities to do on a date. The proposition of this utterance, having A's roommate join the date, appears to rate high on the scale, but falls rather low at the negative end. The idea echoes a "norm" or conventional attitude/belief that a date should be between two people, which should make it clear to A that B is being insincere. Speaker A even echoes this themselves in their response in line 39 but does not let on that they have interpreted B's sarcastic intention correctly. It might be useful to note that this conversation happened at the very beginning of these speakers' relationship. Neither speaker wants to directly say they do not want the roommate there, echoing another "norm" – they resort for indirect suggestions instead of directly refusing to have the roommate there, perhaps to avoid any confrontation.

Hancock (2004) discusses the influence of addressee feedback in the communication of verbal irony, arguing that positive feedback should encourage the sarcastic speaker to use such utterances freely because there is less risk of miscommunication, while negative feedback should have the opposite effect (449). Positive feedback can be expressed by smiling or laughing, or by extending the irony. Still, in the conversation above A's feedback appears to be negative, but B is not discouraged, perhaps because they are *assuming* both speakers are against this idea and so are not concerned with any possibility of confusion. B extends the irony themselves in line 39 but decides it may be better to drop the act while waiting for A's response. The sarcastic utterances expressed in lines 37 and 40 represent a kind of "communicative bluff", in Camp's (2012) words, in that speaker B is communicating their sarcastic intention to speaker B in a way that "avoids explicit commitment", i.e. helps in "preserving deniability" (609). For instance, speaker A could have agreed to B's first suggestion, that A's roommate join their movie date. In this case speaker B would have had to either go with this suggestion

or explicitly admit they are only joking. This may be another reason why B chooses to "come clean" with the GIF, to avoid the possible consequences of miscommunication. In his study Hancock (2004) observed that people were less ironic or sarcastic in face-to-face interactions, possibly because they wanted to appear more polite or "protect" themselves while more irony was produced in the computer-mediated environment, possibly owing to relative anonymity compared to face-to-face interactions (457-459). The speakers in this conversation, however, already know each other and are trying to establish a different kind of relationship. Another solution proposed by Hancock's study was that this frequent use of irony served to "communicate relational [social] information" which may be communicated more slowly in text (459). This solution rests on the idea that the goal of discourse is to establish a common ground which would enable the communicators to avoid miscommunication (450, 459).

As has already been said, speaker B in this situation is likely assuming the two share a common ground of experience, which encourages them to use verbal irony with no fear of miscommunication. They also use two LOL emoji in their second utterance, to better signify their humorous intent. These pictographs are used in computer-mediated conversations to enrich utterances and make up for the lack of visual cues found in face-to-face interactions. Having first appeared in Japan, they became available for global use once they were converted to Unicode.[10]

Realizing that the common ground may not be as wide as originally assumed, however, B resorts to finally admitting their communicative intent. Even the words "I'm just kidding" themselves could have communicated this message, but the facial expression and gestures of the person in the GIF reinforce B's attitude toward their previous suggestions and the possibility that A may have taken them seriously. This person also appears to be wearing a kind of sneering expression and is gesturing with their head and hands that they disagree with whatever has been suggested. The function of this GIF in the conversation above is synonymous with another explicit marker discussed by Haiman (1998), in addition to *like* and *not that...or anything* – the "utterance deflater" *not*. This marker indicates that the prior utterance is meant as a joke (53). While the example above does not feature this exact word as a marker, the GIF functions as a deflater in its stead: it explicitly signals that speaker B is not seriously suggesting speaker A's roommate join them but that they are only joking.

[10] Unicode Technical Standard #51: Unicode Emoji. Unicode, https://www.unicode.org/reports/tr51/index.html#Emoticons [July 19, 2021]

The final example that will be analyzed features a novel development in sarcastic communication in computer-mediated communication, the hashtag, and some of the previously discussed markers. Schifanella et al. (2016) have noted that hashtags and emoji are popular sarcastic cues on modern social media platforms (1136). Sykora et al. (2020) analyzed a sample of *Twitter* posts tagged with hashtags they have found are commonly associated with sarcastic and ironic expression (1). It has also been observed that in some contexts, such as on *Twitter*, hashtags may be the only apparent indicator of sarcastic intent and its target (3). In the example below, the used hashtags are not associated with sarcastic expression, i.e. they do not include the words *sarcasm, irony*, *not* or *joke*, but the intent is clearly discernible from the context, from which they have been derived.

(09) Late swimmer

42. A: I've been really enjoying swimming
43. A: so hopefully that goes somewhere
44. B: oh yees? I'm really glad!!
45. A: yeah, it's nice
46. B: yaaay #merman #swimswam
47. A: refreshing
48. A: hahahaha
49. A: don't do that

Speaker A in the segment above is telling speaker B about their experience learning how to swim in their twenties. Even in speaker B's first response there are some indices of exaggerated enthusiasm in *yees* and the use of two exclamation points. Speaker B does not truly consider this a great deed as they have known how to swim for most of their life; however, they may be exaggerating their enthusiasm to echo the sociocultural norms associated with celebrating others' successes but also to avoid offending their friend. Speaker A takes this enthusiasm as sincere, providing elaboration about their experience. B's sarcastic enthusiasm is made even plainer in line 45 where B exaggerates the length in *yaaay* and uses two hashtags of words associated with swimming. These two words evoke a scale of swimming skill and can be placed at the positive end, which implies great swimming skill: a *merman* would probably be considered an extremely good swimmer, and the two forms of the verb *swim* likely imply (vast) swimming experience, whereas speaker A's actual experience falls lower on the scale, since they are a beginner. By using these expressions speaker B is being intentionally ironic,

pointing out the contrast between speaker A's experience as a beginner and these expressions which belong at the positive end of the scale. While A fails to understand this after B's first message, the hashtags help to get the point across. Speaker A then makes their understanding clear by joining in on the humor with the orthographic representation of laughter and a request that speaker B not do that. Speaker B has observed they frequently use hashtags when being sarcastic. Since these speakers are friends, speaker A may be familiar with speaker B's custom of using hashtags in this way, which may be why they helped them correctly interpret B's messages in the end. While hashtags are typically used as part of users' posts on various social media platforms such as *Twitter* (Schifanella et al. 2016; Sykora et al 2020), *Instagram* (Schifanella et al. 2016), *Tumblr* (Schifanella et al. 2016), and even *Facebook,* it is possible some users have simply taken this trend and made it part of their personal communicative practices, as in this type of instant-messaging applications.

3. General discussion

The analysis of the collected conversations shows that text remains the dominant modality utilized in computer-mediated communication, perhaps because it is the one convention that all users are familiar with. Moreover, even just text can be modified for specific purposes, i.e. for expressing paralinguistic cues otherwise unavailable in CMC. For example, users have found ways to indicate flatness of intonation by omitting punctuation, and to indicate exaggeration by typing in uppercase, employing excessive punctuation (especially where exclamation marks are concerned, and lengthening syllables. Orthographic vocalizations have also been found, of laughter as well as the interjection *aw*. Two important novel developments in CMC, especially where sarcasm and irony are concerned, are the alternating caps typing format and the hashtag, both commonly utilized on different social media platforms as representations of insincerity or sarcastic intent.

Even so, the modern social media platforms have allowed users to express themselves in modalities other than text. The most powerful of these seem to be GIFs and emoji, not just in sarcastic expression, but in general use as visual depictions of responses and elaborations to users' own talk. Between the two, GIFs are certainly the more powerful expressive tool, because they are usually taken from sources such as television and film, which are arguably very close to social media users. Attardo et al.'s (2003) study specifically focuses on the study of multimodal sarcastic expression in American sitcoms. They note that while the scenes they chose for their study may be exaggerating ironic markers, this might be a "good thing" for their untrained participants who are asked to identify these markers (246-247). Using such GIFs in

conversations such as the ones analyzed can help users identify and interpret sarcastic utterances correctly. GIFs cannot display pitch but surely are a powerful tool for depicting various facial expressions. It may be a good thing that some of them are exaggerated because as such they help get the intended message across in a communicative environment where interlocutors cannot see or hear each other physically. Tolins and Samermit (2016) stress the significance of physical modalities such as bodily movements, gestures, and facial expressions in speech production and coordination (75), for which GIFs provide adequate replacements in CMC, allowing users to control their "displays of paralinguistic information" (77). They have also noted the value of emoticons (i.e. emoji) in making up for "socioemotional" cues (77). While emoji certainly enable strengthening or weakening emotional content, GIFs also help "reproduce actions" which would not require demonstration in face-to-face interaction (77).

The GIFs employed in lines 9 and 15 respectively point to another development relevant to the study of modern social media. These GIFs have been created from scenes that have served as templates for two different internet memes – *you don't say*, which has become associated with sarcasm, and *Roll Safe*, associated with criticizing bad decisions. *Memes* were first introduced by Richard Dawkins (1976) as a cultural analogue of genes. They were proposed as replicating units giving rise to a "kind of cultural evolution," (189) whereby aspects such as human language, traditions, songs, and knowledge spread from person to person via imitation (192). A separate field studying this concept emerged as a result, called *memetics* (Cannizzaro 2016: 562).

Even if these GIFs were not employed in the "role" of internet memes within these utterances (addressed later), they still represent an important development in the context of CMC. There is no universal definition of the concept, though the academic community seems to agree about two aspects regarding the use of internet memes: they can come in different formats, and they encourage participation. For example, Huntington (2013) defines them as "remixed images and videos circulated online, inviting participation through creation of derivatives" and potentially as a "form of subversive communication" (1). Cannizzaro (2016) has observed they can come in the form of still *and* animated images, and other audiovisual formats (563). In her view, internet memes spread through *translation*, whereby each user who contributes their own derivative of a meme essentially assigns new meaning(s) to it (574-575). Milner (2013) defines them in the context of a "logic of lulz," a way of expressing "distanced" irony and criticism in text and image, especially on social media such as *4chan* and *reddit*, where users frequently discuss sociopolitical topics such as gender and race stereotypes (62, 64-65).

Davison (2012) and Shifman (2013) each offer their own framework for defining internet memes or rather the aspects of each separate meme that can be remixed or replicated. Shifman, for instance, analyzes Chris Crocker's *Leave Britney Alone* video in terms of three dimensions: content (content of a specific text, ideas and ideologies it expresses), form (physical incarnation, perceived through senses), and stance (information conveyed about a contributor's own communication) (367-371). He has observed that imitations of Crocker's video "draw attention to [its] communicative codes and strategies" by exaggerating Crocker's shouting, dramatizations, and repetitions as a way of expressing scorn toward them (371). These strategies again bring us to sarcastic communication as each represents a potential sarcastic cue, highlighting the use of sarcasm as a mocking device. Davison (2012) offers a similar framework, separating memes into manifestations (the observable, external objects), behavior (actions taken to spread the meme), and the ideal (concept or idea conveyed) (123). He analyzes two separate memetic phenomena in terms of this framework: emoticons and *Advice Dog*. The ideal behind emoticon use is having a "recognizable glyph" for displaying emotion or intent, which in turn dictates the behavior in the form of constructing emoticons for specific uses, and their manifestations in the end are the different combinations of typed characters used as "pseudopictograms" reminiscent of human facial expressions (124). The other internet meme, *Advice Dog*, is manifested in various individual images with content organized in a specific way (first line of advice, image of dog in center with rainbow background, second line of advice/punchline) (127, 130). Users view these images and create their own derivatives by contributing different text or reposting them as they are, but the meaning conveyed by each can vary – some are ironic, others aggressive or offensive (130).

Wiggins and Bowers (2014) offer yet another definition of the internet meme – it describes a *genre* of communication because it represents messages which are transmitted by "consumers-producers of discursive [...] purposes" (1890, 1892). Considering this definition as well as the ones referred to above, I disagree with Davison's notion that emoticons (i.e. emoji) constitute internet memes, primarily because they are fairly restricted, compared to a phenomenon such as *Advice Dog*. Davison himself divides the Internet into restricted and unrestricted web, arguing the unrestricted web is the "native habitat" of internet memes because their creators do not necessarily conform to universally accepted social norms (120). Emoji on the other hand are formally moderated and coded by the Unicode Consortium, which by this division would belong to the restricted web – special requests need to be filed to the Consortium with emoji suggestions, and there is no guarantee they will be accepted. Memes such as *Advice Dog* and Crocker's *Leave Britney Alone* video can be manipulated by users in countless

different ways, and these derivative forms are very easily spread in the computer-mediated environment. This also brings us back to the meme templates utilized as GIFs in the analyzed conversations. Sources such as *Know Your Meme* track the sources of these memes to specific objects of popular culture. Even if sources such as *Know Your Meme* and *Urban Dictionary* are not formally or academically managed, they provide significant insight into how these objects as well as other phenomena encountered in the computer-mediated environment are used. *Know Your Meme* suggests distinct uses on social media for each of these memes – for *you don't say* and *Roll Safe*. In a way, these memes along with *Advice Dog* each represent a separate genre for communicating specific kinds of messages about sociocultural topics.

Even so, the GIFs in the analyzed conversations do not constitute different iterations of the above discussed memes. They do not carry any context-specific messages or meanings by themselves, but rather their meaning is derived *from* the context in which they are used, the conversations. In this sense they become *signs* with the potential of being *codified* into internet language, or "digital slang, a visual vocabulary" (Eppink 2014a: 301). In addition to discussing sarcasm, Haiman (1998) also provides a discussion on linguistic ritualization, of which codification is an important part. In his words, codification constitutes "such fundamental transformations as the bifurcation of objects into signs" (152). Objects are "*emancipated* from their conditioning environments" and codified (152, emphasis theirs). A GIF taken from a particular film can simply be viewed as a small part of a larger whole, considered in the context of its source, or as a piece of media found on the internet, in which case it simply remains an object. Today GIFs are not *just* viewed, however; they are also "created, used, posted, collected, copied, modified, *performed*" (Eppink 2014a: 298, emphasis mine) and *recontextualized* (Tolins and Samermit 2016: 88). These activities constitute a successful GIF in the contemporary media environment. Once it is used in an exchange (such as a conversation) beyond its source context, as a means of starting or continuing a conversation, we assign a new role to it, a new meaning, a new context. This way the GIF becomes *emancipated* from its "conditioning environment" where it was originally produced. Within the resulting "digital slang," *media artifacts* (such as GIFs) are "elaborated upon as *language more than art product*" (Eppink 2014a: 301, emphasis mine). Their meaning is highly dependent on the context of specific interactions where they are used – they become meaningful signs when employed as parts of conversations.

Speakers also assign connotations to signs – some GIFs become associated with particular contexts once they are emancipated from their source. Connotations depend on how we use and interpret them. Regular association with the connotative meaning results in

denotation. As Haiman (1998) puts it, "*[D]enotation is emancipated connotation*" (153, emphasis theirs). The expression *you don't say* in its association with the Nicolas Cage GIF seems to have become a sign of sarcastic intent, even though his character in *Vampire's Kiss* never uses it. GIFs exhibit a lot of potential as expressive tools in multimodal CMC, some of which has been explored in Tolins and Samermit (2016). This thesis demonstrates their potential as sarcastic markers. In 2014 *Reddit* users participated in identifying and assigning interpretations to commonly used reaction GIFs, which were then selected for an exhibition at the Museum of the Moving Image, titled *The Reaction GIF: Moving Image as Gesture*.[11] Extending on this, perhaps a similar project may be organized to identify and define GIFs which are most frequently employed as sarcastic markers in computer-mediated communication. Similar to the Nicolas Cage GIF and *you don't say*, the alternating caps typing format has also undergone emancipation in a way – now it is a stylized format used for denoting sarcastic remarks, mockery, and imitation, as has been demonstrated in conversations 05 and 06. Further research is needed to reveal specific functions this technique serves in CMC.

Another feature that seems to be as prominent as GIFs in the analyzed exchanges is *code-switching*, a common sociolinguistic phenomenon observed among speakers of two or more languages. Out of the nine analyzed samples, seven contain utterances in English, with two being wholly in English, the speakers' second language. Code-switching is commonly defined as the speaker's ability to switch between two or more languages in communicative contexts (Bullock and Toribio 2009; Cárdenas-Claros and Isharyanti 2009). Most common distinctions are inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching, and transactional and metaphorical. The first distinction distinguishes between switching at or above the level of clause boundaries and switching within clause boundaries (Romaine 2000; Bullock and Toribio 2009). The second distinguishes between switching motivated by conversational circumstances (topic, participants) and the communicative effects associated with the languages used (Romaine 2000; Holmes 2013). The analyzed examples illustrate the use of inter-sentential code-switching, since all switching is done above clause level, between separate utterances and sentences. Speakers' roles remain constant throughout the exchanges, as do the topics of their discussion – code-switching is used for more effective expression of intended meaning, thus illustrating metaphorical switching.

[11] Jason Eppink (2014). The Reaction GIF: Moving Image as Gesture. *Jason Eppink's Catalogue of Creative Triumphs*. URL: https://jasoneppink.com/the-reaction-gif-moving-image-as-gesture/. [August 30, 2021]

Most earlier studies of code-switching focus on studying its occurrence in face-to-face interactions, in spoken language (Barasa 2016: 49; Halim and Maros 2014: 126). In the last two decades, however, there have been attempts to investigate code-switching in the computer-mediated environment (Barasa 2016; Halim and Maros 2014; Cárdenas-Claros and Isharyanti 2009; Dorleijn and Nortier 2009). Dorleijn and Nortier (2009) introduce the notion of *written speech* to refer to CMC language, because it is comparable to both spoken and written language (128) – it is similar to informal spoken language because it employs colloquialisms and abbreviations, but a certain level of consciousness and control is assumed because CMC is a "written medium" (127; also in Barasa 2016: 67). Some studies have noted that instant-messaging or chatting, the type of CMC supported by Messenger, is most comparable to spoken language (Dorleijn and Nortier 2009: 130-131; Barasa 2016: 53). Code-switching in the computer-mediated environment has been observed to serve several functions, mainly: as a source of humor (Holmes 2013; Dorleijn and Nortier 2009), demonstrating otherwise absent conversational cues in CMC (i.e. gestures, prosody, intonation) (Barasa 2016), better expression of thoughts and emotions (Halim and Maros 2014; Cárdenas-Claros and Isharyanti 2009), as a quotative device (Halim and Maros 2014; Holmes 2013), and interjection (Halim and Maros 2014).

Metaphorical switching specifically is employed to convey various communicative effects and social meanings (Romaine 2000: 59; Holmes 2013: 42). As such, it is especially convenient for sarcastic communication, as has been demonstrated in the analyzed samples. In example 04: *Good music* speaker B, in their initial response to speaker A's messages, switches to English for dramatic effect, employing both uppercase and lack of punctuation, then expresses doubt with *zicer*, and finally emphasizes their sarcastic intent by using a GIF with an English caption, "Oh sure, of course, absolutely." In fact, only two of all the GIFs discussed in the analysis are not captioned, and the others are captioned with English utterances, which are either taken from the original sources or in some other way associated with the visual content of the GIF. By utilizing GIFs with these captions, speakers are quoting not only the bodily movements of the characters but also quoting their words, illustrating the quotative function of code-switching and its utilization as a communicative effect, especially of sarcastic intent. In other cases, such as in examples 01: *Short replies* and 09: *Late swimmer* English is the only language used, possibly because one speaker continued or started the conversation in it, and the other speaker simply followed through with this suggestion. This can also be applied to conversation 06: *Precious*, where speaker A's first shown utterance is in Croatian, to which speaker B responds with two utterances in English. Speaker A then continues in English as

well. They seem to quote speaker B's use of *precious* and then continue in English for dramatic effect and further increasing dramatic effect by employing alternating caps. Barasa notes that use of code-switching also depends on the "media affordance and the characteristics of the specific CMC genre," (68). Not all types of CMC offer the same multimodal features as Messenger. However, as has been demonstrated in the analyzed examples, code-switching shows great potential in marking sarcastic intent in combination with multimodal tools such as GIFs and other identified techniques. Future research needs to address and further investigate how these phenomena work together to ease the communication of more complex messages such as sarcasm and irony.

4. Conclusion

For the purposes of this thesis, nine examples of conversations with sarcastic utterances, conducted in Facebook Messenger, have been analyzed and discussed in turn. The analysis provides insight into the translation of potential sarcastic cues from face-to-face to computer-mediated communication. Several practices have been revealed as regularly utilized in the expression of sarcastic messages, either to exaggerate or to flatten affect – (lack of) punctuation, spelling (including abbreviated forms as well as lengthening of syllables), alternating caps, hashtags, emoji, GIFs, and code-switching. The results of this analysis reveal that these techniques are used to add a sort of dramatic effect, or to quote both known and unknown sources, again with the purpose of adding dramatic and humorous effect to sarcastic utterances, and thus make them more easily interpretable.

Though this thesis simply demonstrates the translation of sarcastic cues from face-to-face interactions to screen interactions on a small number of samples, it provides significant insights not only into which cues are deployed and how, but also into how bilingual users choose to express themselves, and how people communicate in the computer-mediated communicative environment in general. These observations highlight the need for further research into each of the modalities employed and how they can be utilized together in expressing complex messages such as sarcasm. Sarcasm, after all, demands to be understood, and multimodality allows us to convey it *explicitly*. It may be that these new communicative practices are not really *new*, but rather, as Shifman (2013) puts it, "old ideas or communicative practices in new textual gowns" (373), which users have simply adapted to a new environment.

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7. Appendix

The following is a list of all 23 examples collected for the purposes of this thesis. Examples have been divided into those where sarcasm is expressed with textual symbols, and those where it is expressed with both text and image (which includes still and animated images). Emoji can be found in both categories. Conversations which have been analyzed in the analysis chapter are listed in bold.

7.1. Text

(01) Short replies

1. **A: Yes**
2. **A: Idk**
3. **A: Idk**
4. **B: Aww i just love how much u care**

(02) Girlfriends

5. A: *sends a personal interest-related meme to a person who does not share the interest*
6. B: Steta kaj nemas frendice kojima bi mogel sve te slike slati
7. A: Steta

(03) Optimistic

8. A: Nisam siguran kaj da mislim o coveru haha
9. B: Ovaj narancasti jako
10. B: Optimisticno
11. A: Zakaj optimisticno
12. B: Pa NIJE
13. B: Zgleda ko da je sve zgorelo
14. A: Aha
15. A: Haha

(04) Disregard

16. A: *sends several messages while B is offline*
17. B: *sends a video that in no way acknowledges A's messages*
18. A: YES disregard all of my previous messages *sigh of relief emoji*

(05) Maybe

19. A: ahh
20. A: I shall skip this one
21. A: and then myb some day
22. A: i will not have been sick the week before *upside-down smiley emoji*
23. B: I hope so heheh
24. B: Future perfect use
25. B: Like a boss
26. B: +99 xp

(06) Normal girls

27. **A: *sends a screenshot of a *Facebook* comment* [*Kada ovo čitam, čini mi se da nema normalnih cura. Mislim mene baš i ne doživljavaju jer nisam zanimljiv ali mi se i čini da ih nema baš.*]**
28. **A: Kakav retard ovaj lik, pise jedna zena i tri lika u clanku ali nEmA nOrMaLnIh CuRa**
29. **A: Likovi su svi normalni**
30. **B: Komedija hahahahahahaha**

(07) Precious

31. **A: a da, sad vidim da bi sutra trebalo cijeli dan padat hahah nece ti on [their dog] htjet ic nikam ak bude padalo**
32. **B: Precious**
33. **B: Maybe Friday**
34. **A: yes so precious when he doesn't wanna go out and then pOoPs iN thE aParTmEnt**

(08) Late swimmer

35. **A: I've been really enjoying swimming**
36. **A: so hopefully that goes somewhere**
37. **B: oh yees? I'm really glad!!**
38. **A: yeah, it's nice**
39. **B: yaaay #merman #swimswam**
40. **A: refreshing**
41. **A: hahahaha**
42. **A: don't do that**

7.2. Text and image

(09) <u>You don't say</u>

43. **A: Di ima duhanske tekucine s kokosom**
44. **B: Pufkalica**
45. **A: De je to**
46. **B: U vzu**
47. **A:**



(10) <u>Lunch</u>

48. A: *sends a photograph of their lunch*
49. B: Ja nem poslikal jer je sc u pitanju
50. A:



(11) <u>Stay healthy</u>

51. A: Jela sam pohanu svinjetinu u menzi *grin emoji* *grin emoji* *grin emoji*
52. B:

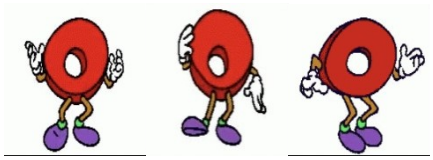


(12) Creative spelling

53. A:



54. A:



55. B:



56. A:



(13) Roommate problems: Subtle

57. A: Budem mu rekel
58. B: Kaj bus mu rekel?
59. B: *LOL emoji*
60. A: Da ode van
61. B:

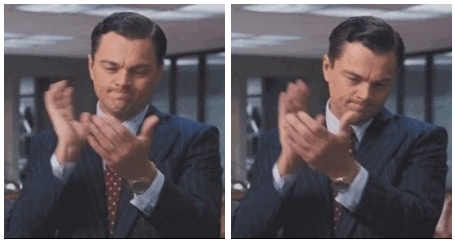


(14) <u>Got a pen?</u>

62. **A: Imas kemijsku?**
63. **B: Imam nekim cudom**
64. **B: Kaj ti nemas?**
65. **A: Zaboravil sam**
66. **B: Ko da sam znala**
67. **B:**



68. **A:**



(15) <u>Rehab</u>

69. A: Kak napreduje tvoje odvikavanje enivej
70. B: Okej mi ide
71. A: Si zdrzal
72. B: Je
73. B: Ne pijem vec kolko
74. B: 3 dana
75. A:



76. B:



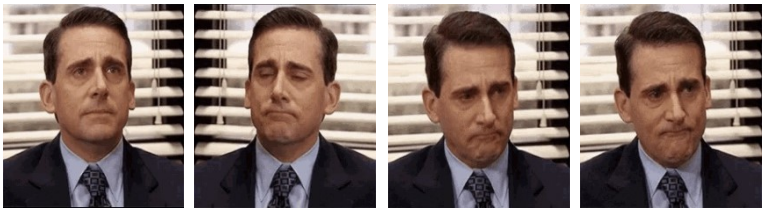
(16) Seen

77. A:



78. A: Seenas

79. A:



80. B: Sad kad sam videl pesa mi je zal

81. A: Aha sad kad si videl pesa

(17) Good music

82. **A: daj preslusaj svestere**

83. **A: uskrsnja je pjesma**

84. **B: WHY**

85. **B: Whats in it for me**

86. **B: HAHAHAHAH**

87. **B: Zicer**

88. **A: visokokvalitetna glazba**

89. **B:**



(18) Fist bump

90. A: Dobila sam sakicu jucer

91. A:



92. B:



(19) Fun things

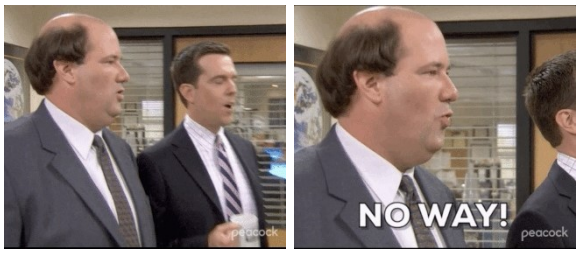
93. A: Meni se opcenito nist neda delat

94. A: Kj se tice skole

95. B: Yea i understand

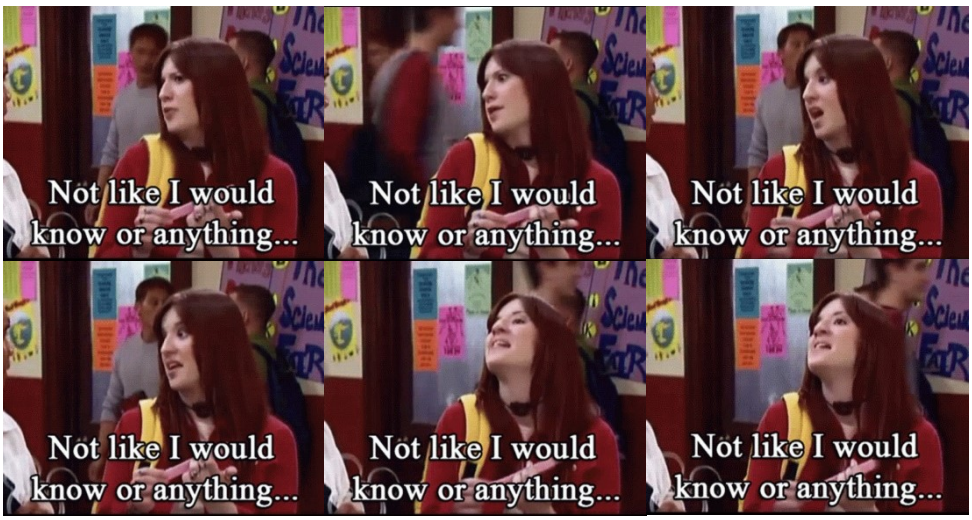
96. B: Its almost as if… things arent as fun when ure forced to do them

97. B:



(20) <u>Anger management</u>

98. **A: Zdravo je rasrdit se tu i tam znas**
99. **A:**



100. **B: I think you would**

(21) <u>Roommate problems</u>

101. **A: Jos je [roommate] problem**
102. **B: Ma dobro more i on s nama gledat**
103. **B: *beer emoji***
104. **A: Ne znam bas dal bi bil odusevljen**
105. **B: Zato bi bilo bas zabavno *LOL emoji* *LOL emoji***
106. **B:**



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107. A: tko nam je danas favorit
108. B: Srbi
109. B:



110. A: već sam se splašila

(23) Sarcasm

111. A: *sends a photograph of beer on a table in a cafe*
112. B: Vec sedis tam?
113. A: Ne, skinula sam tu sliku s necijeg instagrama *grin emoji*
114. A:

