A Pragmatic Analysis of Contextual and Co-textual Cues in Sarcastic Comments on Reddit

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A Pragmatic Analysis of Contextual and Co-textual Cues in Sarcastic Comments on Reddit

Graduation thesis

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Contents:

Abstract:

This graduation thesis deals with the comparison between sarcastic cues in spoken and everyday written online communication. It explains lexical and pragmatic cues for verbal sarcasm, correlates them with the written environment and eventually categorizes written cues based on the data collected on the platform Reddit. The research showed that context and content play a crucial role in both modes of communication and accurately predetermine the conditions under which sarcasm would and would not appear. Lexical cues and punctuation marks are pronounced in written communication as a replacement for prosody and facial expressions. On the other hand, multimodal tools, which are literally a replacement for facial expressions, are neglected in favour of deadpan delivery. All these factors are important for successful delivery and reception of sarcastic meaning.

Key words: sarcasm, pragmatic and lexical cues, face-to-face communication, online communication, deadpan delivery

1. Introduction

This thesis deals with a pragmatic analysis of sarcastic comments on Reddit, with the emphasis on contexts in which they appear and sarcasm cues by which they are indicated and interpreted by participants of the discussion. Reddit is an online network of communities within which users communicate based on their common interests. It was chosen for this analysis because of the sense of users sharing common interests and attitudes within online communities. "If a speaker shares common ground with his listener, then he can infer that the listener can correctly detect ironic intent." (Kreuz, 1996) For the purposes of this thesis, Reddit was searched for posts which elicited sarcastic comments and appropriate answers to them in the comment section, within the same feed.

The majority of research regarding implicit content is focused on spoken language because prosody and facial expression play a crucial part in successfully communicating such a message. "Speakers convey implicit information to listeners by manipulating language and prosody (i.e., intonation and stress patterns), among other features, to express a particular message." (Cheang and Pell, 2008: 366) However, it is important to direct attention to everyday on-line communication because not only does it dominate in today's world, but it also parallels a face-to-face conversation in many aspects. Therefore, the primary goal of the thesis is to define and systematize a specific set of cues which indicate a sarcastic remark in everyday on-line communication, taking into consideration only those sarcastic comments answered by users in such a way which indicates user-recognition of sarcastic intent.

The thesis first defines basic principles of online communication on Reddit and provides three hypotheses that it tries to prove, together with a reason as to why it is possible to draw parallels between online and face-to-face communication. In the next two chapters, it moves to defining implicit language, as well as indicators of sarcasm in spoken and written communication found in previous research on sarcasm. In the fifth chapter, the thesis lays out relevant sarcasm cues found by empirical research conducted on Reddit, together with the examples. More specifically, it explains the method of analysis, as well as categorizes and discusses concrete patterns which have emerged in the research. In the end, it evaluates the three hypotheses combining previous knowledge and current research in order to draw a conclusion.

2. Online vs. face-to-face communication

With the immense popularity of the Internet and emergence of a large number of social networking sites, online communication has become an everyday phenomenon in people's lives. Reddit is one such network which enables people from all around the world to join various *online communities* organized around different interests and participate in discussions about relevant topics. The term *online community* refers to a group of people coming together on an online platform based on their shared interests to exchange information and communicate following certain conventions. In other words, members of online communities share *common ground* which can, under those circumstances, be understood in terms of "a shared context of social conventions, language, and protocols." (Preece and Maloney-Krichmar, 2003:2)

In that respect, Reddit provides a suitable ground for exploring sarcasm as a phenomenon in an everyday written communication. Namely, it is possible to find contexts in which sarcastic comments emerge and the responses to it within the community of people sharing not only interests, but also sense of humor and critical attitudes, which are driving forces behind sarcasm as a concept. By establishing the fact that Reddit online communities provide more than enough context (background knowledge, shared interests, etc.) to ensure correct sarcasm detection and responses to it, it is possible to draw parallels between online and face-to-face communication when it comes to sarcasm. In that respect, there are three hypotheses that this thesis will attempt to prove:

1. There is a set of <u>written</u>[1] cues on which users rely to a greater extent in written communication as a replacement for pragmatic cues of prosody.
2. Context (and co-text) as the only pragmatic cues in written language predetermine the use of sarcastic comments.
3. Users use different kinds of multimodal content in the attempt to mimic non-linguistic cues present in face-to-face conversation.

It is clear that online and face-to-face conversation represent two different modes of communication. "Interlocutors in face-to-face conversations can rely upon both verbal and nonverbal cues to signal ironic intent (e.g. rolling of the eyes, heavy stress, or slow speaking rate)." (Kreuz and Caucci, 2007:2) However, even though participants in online written

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[1] In this thesis, the underlined term <u>written</u> will be used as an umbrella term which refers to lexical sarcastic cues found in online comments, as well as punctuation, style and multimodal tools in order to differentiate this set of cues from context and content of posts in which they appear.

communication cannot rely on that, they can successfully adapt those cues in the written medium under the right set of circumstances, that is, in the proper context.

3. Defining implicit language and sarcasm

Pragmatic research regarding implicit meaning in general has extensively been conducted on spoken language (Kreuz and Link, 2002; Kreuz, 1996; Camp, 2011; Matsui et. al., 2016). Implicit content includes any type of utterance which is intended to be understood differently in a particular context than the literal meaning of the words combined suggests. Context of use, social knowledge and paralinguistic cues are crucial for implicit content to be successfully interpreted, which is the domain of pragmatics. Moreover, Carston (1998) also maintains that Paul Grice and his maxims are important in detecting implicit meaning:

> "Grice (1975) argues that conversations proceed according to a Cooperative Principle (CP). In following the CP, conversationalists mutually assume their utterances to be truthful (maxim of quality), relevant (maxim of relation), adequately informative (maxim of quantity) and clear (maxim of manner). Should an utterance violate the CP, this is a signal to the listener that a non-literal meaning is being conveyed." (Carston 1998:14)

Implicit language is generally used when a person wants to express her or his attitude or opinion indirectly, thus leaving open the possibility to later deny those claims and save face if they do not produce a desired effect with the recipient. Camp (2011) points that out:

> "...one important motivation for avoiding an explicit commitment is the desire to preserve deniability. Thus, such speakers can legitimately object to later reports of them as having asserted or claimed *Q*—although it might be fair to report them in more general terms as having "indicated" their belief in *Q*." (23)

Sarcasm or verbal irony is a type of implicit language traditionally defined as "expressions in which the intended meaning of the words is different from or the direct opposite of their usual sense." (Cheang and Pell, 2008:366) It is usually used by speakers as a means of expressing implicit criticism in a form of a humorous remark directed towards a particular person by not being direct and obvious in their intent. Sarcasm in particular has negative connotations, that is, it conveys insults or disagreement but in a polite way and with a more mocking effect than a direct insult would have. (Pexman, 2002) According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary,*

sarcasm is a mode of satirical wit depending for its effect on bitter, caustic, and often ironic language that is usually directed against an individual. In addition to that, by conveying an insult indirectly, the speaker has a chance to deny it if it produces an unwanted response from the recipient:

> "A communicative act that is done off the record is one that has more than one defensible interpretation, and as such leaves the speaker free from responsibility by leaving it up to the recipient to decide how to interpret it. By encoding an insult indirectly as a compliment, the speaker may deny the offensive intent of the remark and thus guard against the escalation of hostilities that would arise from directly insulting the recipient."
> (Slugoski and Turnbull, 1988: 105)

However, in most cases speakers direct sarcasm towards the recipients with whom they share some kind of *common ground* (Kreuz, 1996) because they want to be properly understood and avoid any possibility of their recipients taking an utterance literally and offensively, but ensure they interpret it correctly and appreciate the humor. Under those circumstances sarcasm gets its true meaning as a primarily humorous criticism or attitude towards a person or an event which should be understood in terms of wit, and not a straightforward insult.

3.1. Sarcastic utterances

As stated above, sarcasm (verbal irony) is an example of implicit language in which, according to Grice (1975), a speaker purposely wants to get across a proposition contradictory to the one he appears to be putting forward. By doing so, he or she deliberately flouts Grice's first maxim of Quality and implicates "meaning inversion" of some kind. (Camp 2011: 2) Sarcastic meaning is generally opposite to the literal one but it is manifested in different ways based on the scope of sarcasm and lexical factors which indicate sarcastic meaning.

The most prototypical sarcastic utterance in face-to-face communication is lexically no different than any other explicit utterance, therefore it can easily be misinterpreted as straightforward and sincere (e.g. You're a really good friend). In order to be recognized as sarcasm, this utterance needs a combination of pragmatic cues (context, prosody and non-verbal cues) to be understood properly. Spoken sarcasm can sometimes be lexically overt and explicitly indicated based on the choice of words. Camp (2011) mentions lexical sarcasm and like-prefixed sarcasm in that respect. In the case of lexical sarcasm, there are some typical expressions which occur in those

utterances to indicate sarcasm: 1. extreme expressions such as *brilliant, genius, thrilled*; and 2. comparative expressions *so*, *such a*, *like that*. When it comes to like-prefixed sarcasm, it is a very common subcategory of an explicitly sarcastic utterance which "prefixes the relevant sentence with 'like' or 'as if' and employs a sneering tone." (Camp 2011:14) It expresses a strong denial of something previously stated or done (e.g. Like you would know.).

3.1.1. Pragmatic cues for spoken sarcasm

Lexical and like-prefixed sarcastic utterances can unmistakably be identified by lexical markers. However, in most cases of spoken sarcasm, purely linguistic factors are insufficient to discern sincere intention from inversion of meaning which sarcasm expresses. It is because speakers and listeners mostly rely on a number of pragmatic factors to properly produce and identify sarcasm. In the broadest sense there are three pragmatic factors that indicate sarcasm: context, prosody and non-verbal cues.

1) Overall conversational **context** plays a crucial role in understanding sarcasm because it provides the listener with a set of real-life circumstances which indicate that the speaker's utterance is contradictory to the situation and thus, he or she, must be expressing his or her attitude or opinion sarcastically. According to Matsui et al. (2016), "once the hearer has recognized the incongruity between what he had expected to hear from the speaker, given a certain conversational context, and what he actually heard (i.e. what is described in the utterance)..." (75) can sarcasm comprehension begin. If contextual information is insufficient, the listener can always rely on the speaker's prosody and non-verbal cues.

2) **Prosody** of sarcastic utterances is so distinctive from sincere statements that many researchers agree it alone is enough for the listener to recognize sarcasm. Matsui et al. (2016) mentioned the term "affective prosody" which refers to a specific tone of voice, intonation or enunciation expressing emotion or attitude. There is a specific affective prosody used in sarcastic utterances which listeners perceive as a "natural cue regarding the negative affect or critical or contemptuous attitude that the speaker intends to communicate" (Matsui et al, 2016: 75)

3) **Non-verbal cues** refer to facial expressions which indicate sarcastic intent. Attardo et al. (2003) defined some non-verbal indicators of sarcasm: smirking or so called "ironic smile", tongue-in-cheek gesture, raising of eyebrows or an overall blank face expression.

The latter indicator is commonly present in a "deadpan" delivery, an emotionless way of conveying sarcasm or humor "without any overt marker of ironical, sarcastic, or humorous intent." (Attardo et al., 2003:244) Such delivery is an immensely popular way of conveying sarcasm for comedic purposes due to the obvious disparity between the intended humor and serious facial expression. Even though excessively stiff facial expression and corresponding flat tone of voice could indicate this type of sarcastic delivery, without proper contextual cues it can easily be misinterpreted as serious and sincere. In other cases, prosody and non-verbal cues are more than enough to indicate sarcasm:

> "While sarcasm can be conveyed solely through contextual cues such as counterfactual or echoic statements, and thus may be recognized in text communications, face-to-face sarcastic speech may be characterized by a specific paralinguistic profile that alerts the listener not to interpret the utterance sincerely, even in the absence of contextual information." (Rankin et al, 2009:2006)

4. Context and cues in written sarcasm

As already stated, spoken and written communication represent two completely different modes of communication. Based on points about sarcastic utterances made in the previous chapter, it can be claimed that written sarcasm is much harder to recognize because there are no facial expressions and prosody to rely on, but one must heavily rely on context and typical cues for written sarcasm. Therefore, it is presupposed by this thesis that people in everyday online communication of sarcastic meaning rely mostly on lexical cues (common set of words, interjections) or punctuation as a replacement for prosody, multimodal tools for different facial expressions and narrow contexts in which sarcasm would and would not appear. Contextual factors are a set of circumstances which predetermine interaction, and in such type of written communication they include content of posts, communities in which they are posted and user history. When it comes to everyday online communication and posting a sarcastic comment, users have to take into consideration that they had no previous contact with the people reading the comment, except for the assumption of sharing common interests, so they have to decide based on the contextual factors above if sarcasm is appropriate or not. Once users decide to use sarcasm, they have to formulate their comment using certain written cues. Ishihara and Cohen (2010) maintain that readers have to comprehend the linguistic structure of the message, but also

pay attention to "subtle indicators of tone or attitude in the communication" (4), from humorous or sarcastic to angry or threatening. Writers, on the other hand, have to pay attention to the intelligibility of their message and levels of "politeness, directness, and formality" (4) directed by context. In that respect, besides reacting sarcastically in specific contexts, writers of sarcastic comments also need to transfer the *sound* of sarcasm. In order to do that, it is supposed they would rely on a set of conventionalized tools intertwined with contextual factors to express all the necessary subtle signals so that their statement would have full effect in written form.

5. Analysis of sarcastic comments on Reddit

5.1 Method

The research of sarcastic comments on Reddit for the purposes of this thesis was conducted empirically by searching through various posts across online communities to find which of them triggered sarcastic comments. First, Reddit was searched randomly post by post (paying special attention to their content) until noticing relevant comments. This was, together with the definition of sarcasm and its usage, the basis of choosing relevant online communities to join and search. The definitions of sarcasm in Chapter 3 as a humorous remark or witty criticism, provided the way of limiting a countless number of online communities to those which mostly posted the content that would intuitively elicit sarcasm. In the following step, potentially sarcastic comments in those contexts were taken into consideration and evaluated only if they had humorous or sarcastic responses to them within the same thread, proving that other users understood sarcastic intent, which was a way of confirming that the comment is in fact relevant for this research. Eventually, it was possible to discern two relevant groups of posts which elicited sarcastic comments: humorous and controversial posts. Other types of posts, such as serious news, surveys, posts involving a beloved famous person or a picture of a cute animal, were excluded from the research because it was not expected that users would react to them sarcastically due to their content not opening the opportunity for wit or humor. Humorous posts and controversial news provide contextual cues for sarcastic comments, giving users the opportunity to make a witty remark or criticize something sarcastically triggering responses from other users who understood the comment and felt the need to add something to it. Finally, after determining sarcastic intent, comments were analyzed in terms of their common <u>written</u>

characteristics with the ultimate goal of defining and systematizing a specific set of cues for sarcastic remarks in everyday on-line communication.

5.2 Results and discussion

It was already stated that participants of online communication on Reddit share common ground in the sense of interests because they follow the same people or sites. It means that Reddit provides general context for people to feel safe to use sarcasm based on the principle of common ground and the presupposition that the audience (readers) have similar interests as a part of the same online community. Only posts and comments which fulfill the criteria listed above were analyzed for this research and served as data for drawing conclusions. Based on this, the analysis has confirmed that the content of posts is a reliable factor in detecting sarcastic comments, thus providing a more specific context in which they can be found. That is, sarcastic comments appear immediately in top threads in some groups of posts with a specific subject matter. Namely, it was noticed that there are two groups which elicited plenty of sarcastic comments and responses: **humorous** and **controversial posts**, which contain in themselves two main reasons for sarcasm in general - humor and criticism.
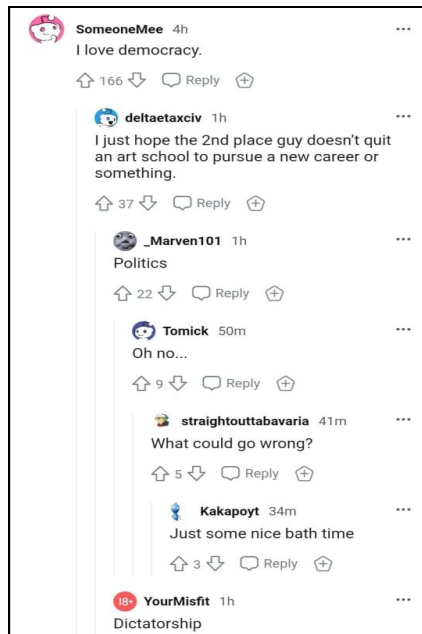
1) Communities such as *r/funny, f/gifs, r/memes, r/Jokes* or individual users who post **humorous posts**, such as funny or sarcastic texts, memes or photos, a joke at someone's expense or a witty wordplay, elicit either sarcastic comments or straightforward reactions such as laughter or a constatation that something is funny as a response to them. As in everyday life and communication, sarcasm elicits sarcasm. This context is unmistakably a safe ground for sarcasm because such posts themselves are humorous in nature and it has already been stated that sarcasm is first and foremost intended to convey humor. (1a)[2]

2) The other group of posts which have proved relevant in this research are **controversial posts** in various communities, mostly connected to politics and current events (r/unpopularopinion, r/politics, r/PoliticalHumor). They bring out the critical side of sarcasm. It is a context which would also elicit sarcasm in face-to-face communication when a speaker conveys an insult indirectly and implicitly with the intent of preserving deniability. (Slugoski and
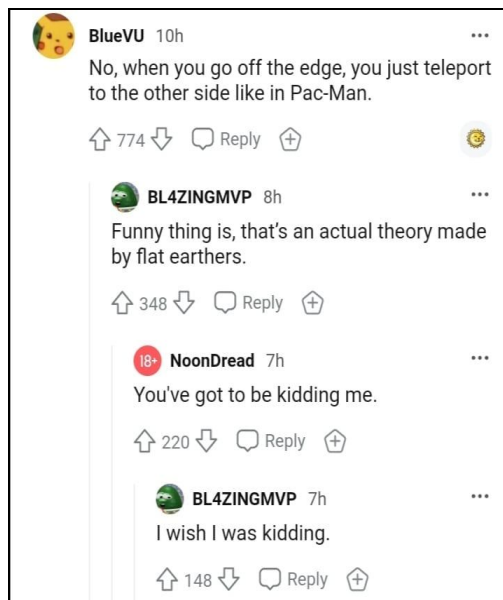
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[2] There will be only one in-text example of each category. Some additional examples can be found in the Appendix.

Turnbull, 1988) On Reddit particularly, those are posts connected to any kind of concept that some people may consider serious, but it contains an element which the majority will recognize as inconsistent. Users tend to identify the incongruity and react to it sarcastically, using mockery to express their protest and criticism. Those posts are usually connected to disliked politicians or public figures and relevant news. (1b)

1a)

1b)

The content of posts, as well as user history and the online community itself provide a contextual environment for sarcastic comments to appear. Previous research on written sarcasm (Burges et al., 2012; Kreuz and Caucci, 2007) lists some indicators which characterize sarcasm in written communication. Sarcastic intent can be recognized because of a characteristic "set of sarcasm indicators that explicitly signal if an utterance is sarcastic." (Burges et al., 2012) There are several types of <u>written</u> cues in online sarcasm detected by analyzing Reddit posts and comment threads gathered in the research:

1) The most obvious cue is the use of common **lexical expressions**. They are lexical features which indicate sarcasm and are used extensively in written language as an overt means of expressing sarcastic meaning. Lexical expressions such as *so*, *right, not sure if, cause*, etc. (2a) are some prototypical indicators of sarcasm. Based on previous research of sarcasm (Burges et al., 2012; Kreuz and Caucci, 2007), they are more common in written sarcasm, as opposed to a propositional sarcastic utterance that prevails in spoken sarcasm. In that way, writers of sarcastic comments can transfer pragmatic cues of prosody and facial expression in written language through linguistic means. Based on the data gathered, it was noticed that common lexical expressions do appear in some sarcastic comments both for pure comedic purposes or when pointing out the obvious inconsistency in controversial posts. Such comments are definitely lexically overt and the choice of words explicitly indicates sarcastic intent. However, although they are easy to spot and interpret correctly, they do not dominate in the communication on Reddit based on the data analyzed, suggesting that users in most cases rely on other <u>written</u> cues. Nevertheless, interjenctions such as *yeah, ah, oh no*, etc. have to be mentioned as the only consistently appearing type of parts of speech (2b). Kreuz and Caucci (2007) emphasized the importance of interjections in written sarcasm as "the expression of emotion" (2) which can be seen in the examples.

2a)

Nick Manes
@nickrmanes

TIL today: a contingent of those protesting @GovWhitmer's (and Michigan State Spartan alum) stay-at-home orders have taken to calling her the "Wolverine Queen."

11:38 PM · Apr 22, 2020 · Twitter Web App

24 Retweets   212 Likes

Gtghawaii 🔊 @gtghawaii · 6h
Replying to @nickrmanes and @GovWhitmer
That's a great name. Why would they consider it derogatory?

2   63

1_TRU_ME @1TRUME1 · 29m
Replying to @nickrmanes and @GovWhitmer
So the people protesting her gave her the most badass nickname imaginable.

It's almost as if they don't understand how things work. 🤔

1

Sarah @Sarah91560157 · 2h
Replying to @nickrmanes and @GovWhitmer
Not sure they thought this through.

GIF   VERY MUCH LIKE YOU.

2b)

Girlfriend made me a motherboard birthday cake

Hardware

18,6k   430   Share

Tiishen · GTX 1660Ti | Ryzen 7 2700 | 16GB DDR4... · 6h
Ah yes the Chocolate-core i8 processor and KitKat DDR5 16 Giga*Bite* RAM. Great build

Reply   1,3k

Under_Enrage · 5h
1 Award
What a sweet spec

448

Jack_BE · Threadripper 2950X / 32GB ECC ... · 4h
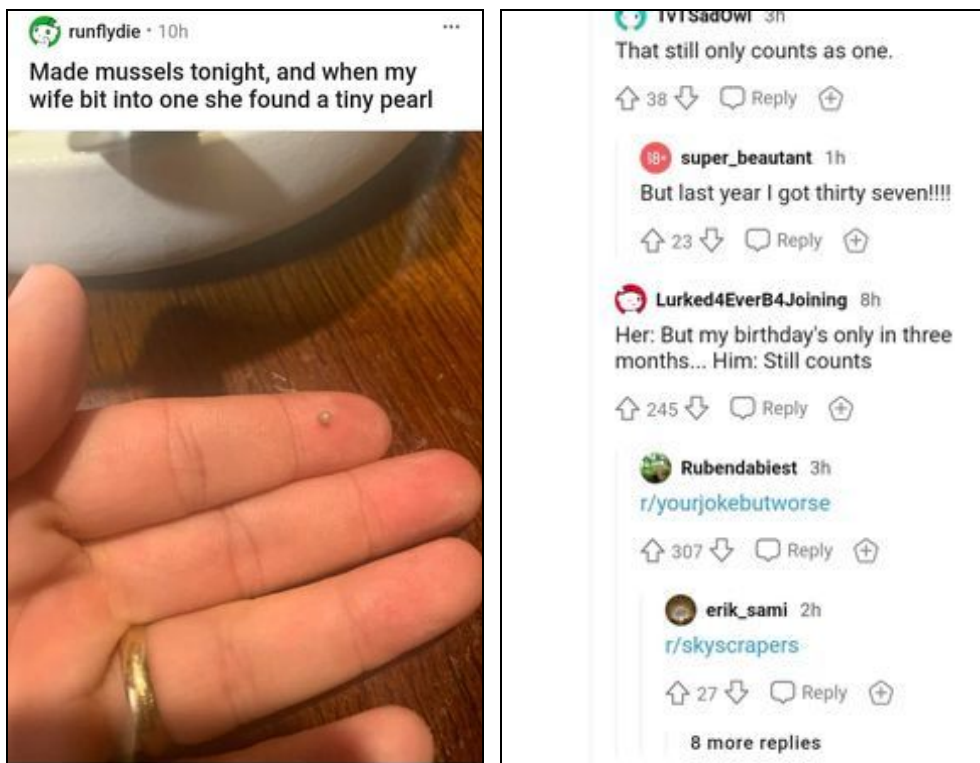the power draw could literally melt the Nougat Regulator Module though

155

Alarid · 2h
Melted chocolate bars? But that would look like... Oh no.

41

ankitjungbahadur · 2h

Add a comment

13

2) The next indicators of sarcastic intent are **punctuation marks**. Even though the majority of sarcastic comments are in fact written without any punctuation marks, there are some examples in which they themselves give additional meaning or dictate the way in which a comment is meant to be read. Question mark (or more of them), often combined with a typical lexical expression, is used in those comments which are intended to be a type of a rhetorical question in which a user clearly expresses his or her disagreement in the context of a controversial post. For example, the question mark can in those cases be combined with the lexical expression *right*, which further emphasises sarcastic meaning (3a). Exclamation marks are usually used for emphasizing a statement: "Exclamation points indicate emphasis, which may be a sign of non literal intent." (Kreuz and Caucci, 2007:3) Therefore, the main reason for using them would simply be expressing some kind of accent and stressing a comment (3a). However, they are not as common on Reddit as a full stop, which appears in many comments. Full stop is common in both contexts and it either serves the purpose of breaking a comment in parts and ensuring that it is read with pauses in intended places (3b) or it appears at the end of a sarcastic comment written in a proper and overcorrect manner. (3c)
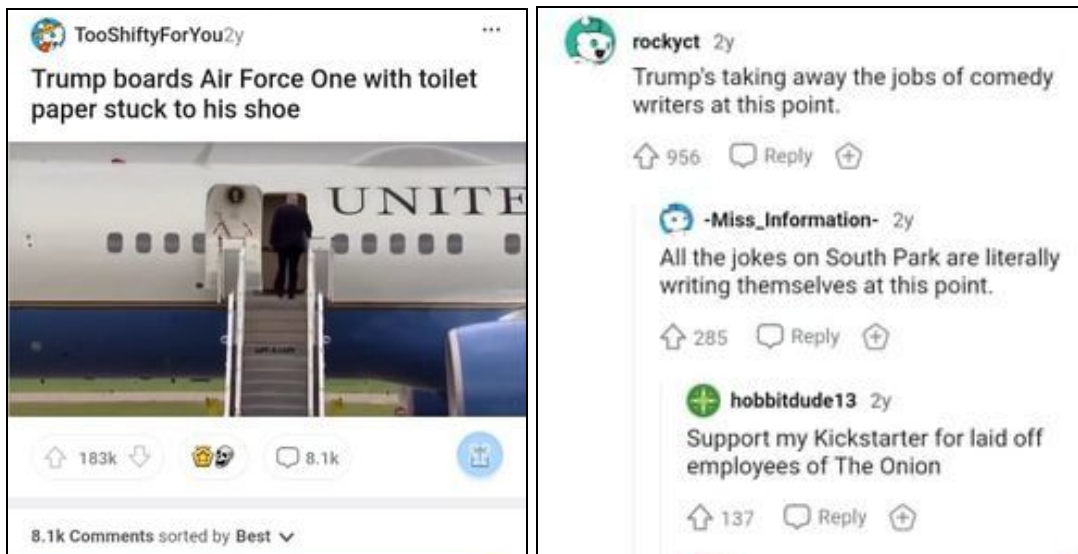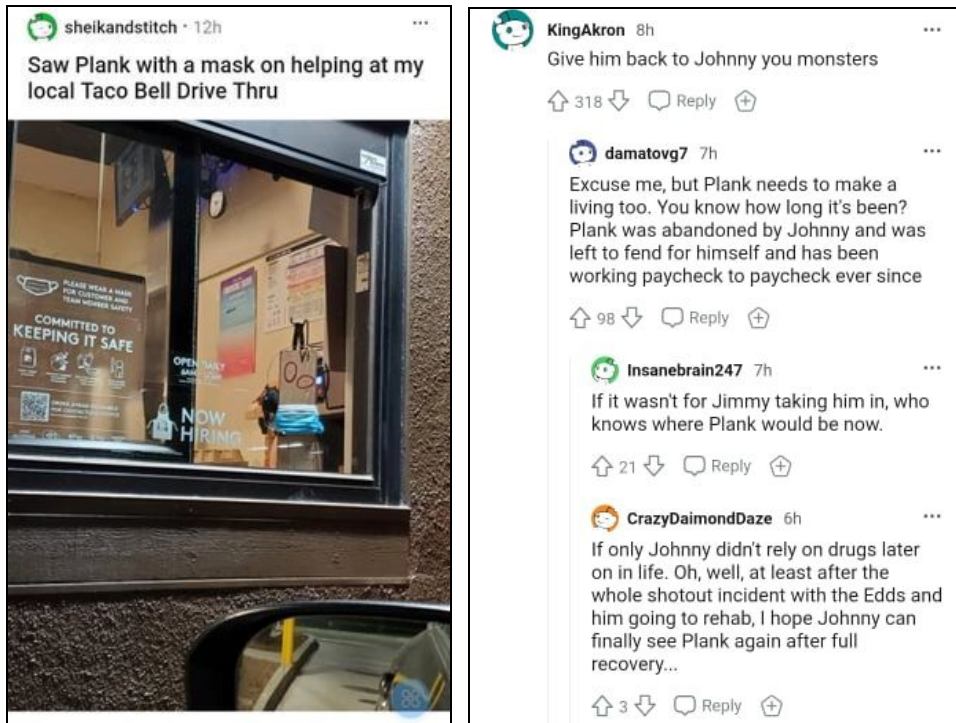
3a)

3b)

3c)

    3) **Formality of style** is another sarcastic cue noticed in the context of both humorous and controversial posts. This term refers to those comments which are either written following the rules of the standard language or use certain expressions which contribute to their formality. Those expressions are not traditional lexical cues mentioned in previous research, but different "posh" expressions that change the overall style of the comment, such as *shall, thus*, *if only* etc. Such expressions are usually combined with several key features: capitalizing the first letter,

ending a sentence with a punctuation mark, using commas and formal expressions. They are in stark contrast with the overall context of the comment and thus only intensify sarcasm: This feature of sarcastic comments is very frequent among the data collected. It combines certain formal lexical expressions and punctuation marks and produces a stylistically specific sarcastic comment which is very similar to propositional sarcastic utterance, without classic lexical cues. Besides obvious disparity between a grammatically correct, an almost formal comment and its sarcastic meaning in the context in which it appears, there are no other overt indicators of sarcasm. (4a)

4a)

4)   Finally, Reddit, as well as every other social media platform, offers a wide range of **multimodal tools** for users to include in their posts and comments. Those tools are emojis, gifs or stickers and the option of including various links from external sites into their comments. Although it was initially expected that users would extensively use multimodal tools, very rarely appear with sarcastic comments. The previously listed written cues prevail and seem to be enough to signal sarcastic intent, while the use of emojis or gifs is minimal. They are the tools

which offer the possibility of including facial expressions into the written communication, which is a very important pragmatic cue people rely on in face-to-face communication. Gifs are mostly used in order to do that and they can either be pre-made or made by users specifically for that purpose and linked in the thread. Emojis, as literal manifestations of facial expression, also almost never appear. The lack of multimodal tools can simply be explained by the fact that other written cues are sufficient for sarcasm comprehension and they can be used only if a user wants to put extra effort. On the other hand, it is possible that deadpan delivery is also popular in written communication, as well as in face-to-face communication. As stated before, deadpan delivery is a specific way of conveying sarcasm whose humor lies in the disparity between serious facial expression and comic intentions. The *sound* of this particular delivery is translated into written communication by omitting any kind of tool which would indicate unnecessary facial expressions, thus giving the reason for the lack of multimodal tools.

5.3 Intensifying sarcasm

When analyzing the data collected, one specific feature of sarcastic comments was noticed. Users who respond to a sarcastic comment tend to intensify its original meaning by further developing the topic of the comment. This phenomenon was noticed in any type of humorous context especially in comments referencing pop-culture. The pattern which occurs is the following: a user comments on a post and other users tend to build on the original comment with their replies by piling sarcasm on sarcasm or reference on reference, making each other comment top the previous one in the process. In such instances, users who react to comments in that way, not only show comprehension and acceptance, but also make the comment even stronger and funnier. It ends up being a competition on who can make a wittier reference or reply in a funnier way. This gradation in intensity is even evident on the surface. If the first comment is, as in the example (5a), formal in style, the next one will use the same cue and only be even more formal, or if the first comment refers to a pop culture reference, the next one will build on that (5b).

5a)

I'm never wearing this again

Linsey Davis ✔
@LinseyDavis

Welp I'm never wearing this top again

STIMULUS STALEMATE
DEMS BLOCK GOP RELIEF BILL OVER CORPORATE "SLUSH FUND"

Pablo Escobarner (blue check)
@PabloEscobarner

It makes you look like Helena Bonham Carter as the Queen of Hearts lol

⬆ 10,0k ⬇   💬 73   ➦ Share   ✩

sMarvOnReddit • 1h

top comment stating the obvious
just like this one :))

⁝   ✩   ↩   ⬆ 15 ⬇

PWNQ • 14m

Which, if my math is correct, means there are two comments stating the obvious.

⁝   ✩   ↩   ⬆ 1 ⬇

wonkey_monkey • 9m

Ah, but now you've stumbled upon the "obvious comment" paradox because by saying that, you've increased it to three. And now *I've* increased it to four, or possibly five if this is two different statements. Wait, six!

⁝   ✩   ↩   ⬆ 1 ⬇

5b)

She's used to wedding plans

Jennifer Lopez Says Coronavirus Quarantine Has Affected Her Wedding Plans (via @Fox411)

.... r
@nozaroccc

she's had 7 weddings i'm sure she'll be okay

Definitlyhuman • 4h

She's had so many weddings that she got the lead in a movie called "The wedding planner".

⁝   ✩   ↩ Reply   ⬆ 1,1k ⬇

donvito39 • 1h

Written, produced and directed by Larry King

⁝   ✩   ↩   ⬆ 177 ⬇

BobsNephew • 1h

Elizabeth Taylor - Executive Producer

⁝   ✩   ↩   ⬆ 65 ⬇

Following the three initial hypotheses, as well as taking into consideration the patterns that emerged in the examples, the research has revealed the following patterns to emerge in sarcastic comments on Reddit:

1) Users on Reddit do rely on a wide variety of <u>written</u> cues to express nonliteral intent, more specifically to signal humor, express emotions, emphasize their criticism of

something or even to indicate where to pause when reading the comment. Those cues can be considered as a replacement for pragmatic cues which are important in spoken communication and referred to in research on spoken sarcasm (Matsui et.al., 2016; Attardo et.al., 2003). More specifically, tone of voice and the overall manner of conveying sarcastic utterances in spoken communication are transferred into the written medium by means of <u>written</u> cues. They enable readers to "hear" the comment as it would have sounded in a face-to-face communication. However, it is important to emphasize that traditional lexical expressions which indicate written sarcasm (Burges et al., 2012; Kreuz and Caucci, 2007) and punctuation are not the only ones predominantly used on Reddit. There is a new cue of formality of style which emerged during this research and it includes a combination of "posh" lexical expressions and punctuation in such a manner that in the end, the wit of sarcastic intent lies particularly in the disparity between the context and linguistic form. Formality of style can be researched further by looking into possible combinations of lexical expressions and punctuation or analyzing it comparatively on different platforms, since it has proven to be an emerging cue of conveying sarcasm in online everyday communication.

2) Context does predetermine the use of sarcastic comments. More specifically, the content of posts, together with online communities which post them, provides context in which sarcastic comments regularly appear in more than one thread. These contexts are humorous posts and controversial posts. A parallel can be drawn between these contexts and specific situations in which sarcasm emerges in face-to-face communication. More specifically, sarcasm in spoken communication emerges when a person wants to express implicit criticism with a mocking and humorous effect (Pexman, 2002), provided that he or she shares summon ground with his or her collocutor. Along these lines, sarcasm in online everyday communication emerges in humorous and controversial posts which provide suitable communicative situations for mockery and criticism, whereas an online community provides common ground. Moreover, in the context of humorous posts, especially those referring to pop culture, it was noticed that replies to comments tend to intensify the meaning of the original comment, the so-called sarcasm on sarcasm. Further research can be done if intensifying sarcasm appears in face-to-face communication or is it only reserved for online communication.

3) The research has shown that users tend to convey sarcasm relying on <u>written</u> cues much more than multimodal tools such as emojis or gifs. That disproves the initial hypothesis of using different kinds of multimodal content which online platforms like Reddit have to offer for mimicking non-linguistic cues present in face-to-face conversation. It was logical to expect that users would take advantage of the tools which literally represent facial expressions so important for recognising sarcasm in face-to-face communication (Attardo et.al., 2003), but that was not the case. That can be explained by the fact that lexical cues, punctuation and style, together with context, are sufficient enough for sarcasm to be indicated and comprehended or that many users frequently opt for deadpan delivery not only in spoken (Attardo et.al., 2003), but in written form as well. Further research can be done on reasons for the lack of multimodal tools in online written communication.

6. Conclusion

This graduation thesis analyzed sarcastic comments on Reddit with the purpose of establishing concrete contextual factors which elicit sarcastic comments, as well as defining a set of <u>written</u> cues which sarcastic utterances share in the online environment and comparing them to those in face-to-face communication. For the purposes of this research, Reddit was searched, taking into consideration previous findings and conclusions on sarcasm. It was confirmed that context is a reliable factor which predetermines sarcastic comments and that they appear in humorous and controversial posts in top threads. Moreover, searching through the data collected, it was discovered that there are common <u>written</u> cues which indicate sarcasm, and they are classic lexical expressions, punctuation and formal style, which combines the previous two in a new way. Multimodal tools, which replace facial expressions, are used very rarely, suggesting first and foremost that <u>written</u> cues and contextual factors are sufficient for sarcasm delivery and comprehension.

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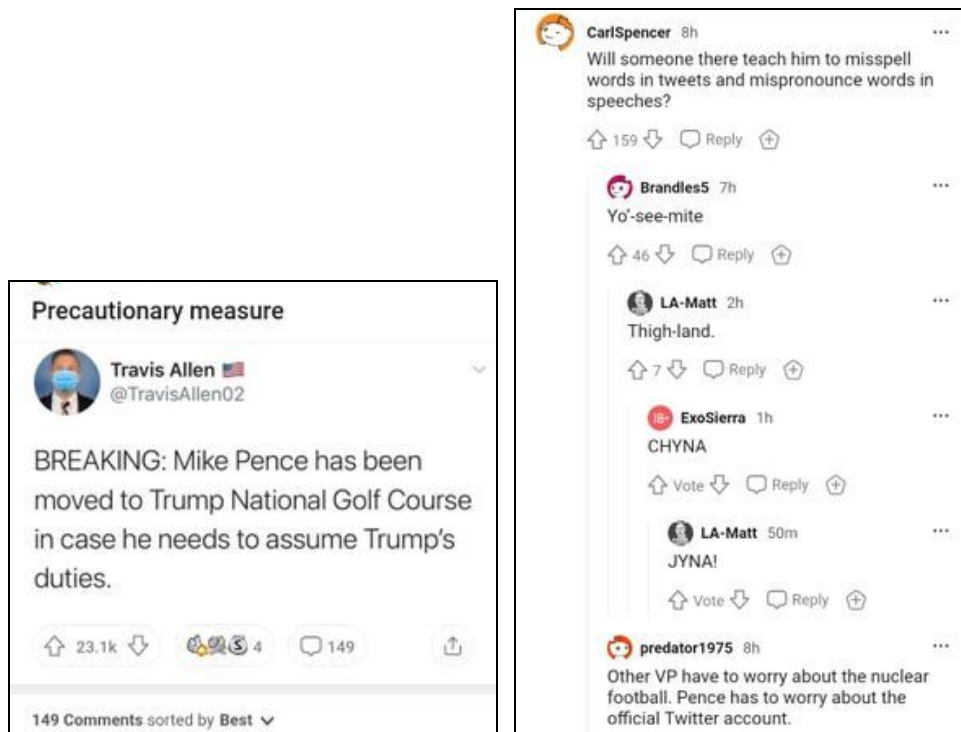
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8. Appendix

This appendix contains the list of examples taken from Reddit. Date of access: June 2020 - October 2020.

1)

2)

We live in strange times

When you use Twitter to announce that you have a deadly virus and it becomes one of the most liked tweets of all time

Wasn't expecting that reaction, but OK

⬆ 70.5k ⬇   🏆🐱 12   💬 825   ⬆️

never_given_a_name61 6h   ⋯

Lmao also Biden's tweet saying he is the worst president ever got a similar amount

⬆ 54 ⬇   💬 Reply   ⊕

DODO_CODE_ME 5h   ⋯

Hope he remains positive during this trying time

⬆ 47 ⬇   💬 Reply   ⊕

noyga 2h   ⋯

I see what you did there

⬆ 5 ⬇   💬 Reply   ⊕

3)

That's what the spider wants you to think

⬆ 330 ⬇   💬 Reply   ⊕

ChadOfDoom 5h   ⋯

Sounds like something a super tarantula would say

⬆ 93 ⬇   💬 Reply   ⊕

Rc202402 3h   ⋯

That's what an impostor would say
ᑦ ᓀ ᴗ ᓂ ᑐ

⬆ 9 ⬇   💬 Reply   ⊕

RainBroDash42 1h   ⋯

I swear!! I was spinning web in electric

⬆ 2 ⬇   💬 Reply   ⊕

dontstalkredditorsTM 2h   ⋯

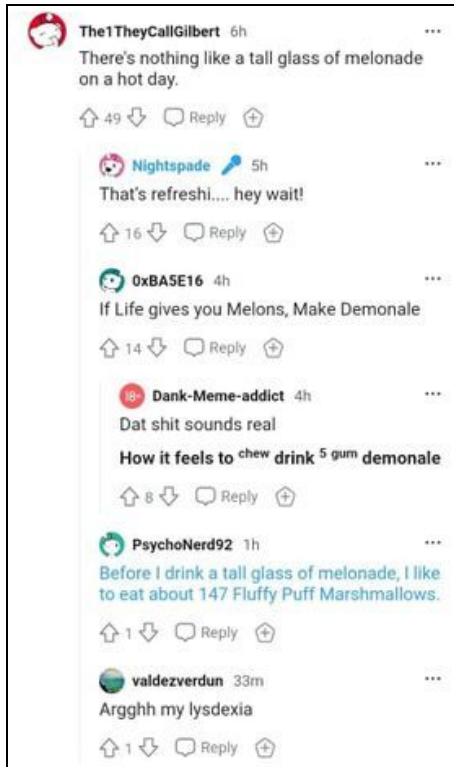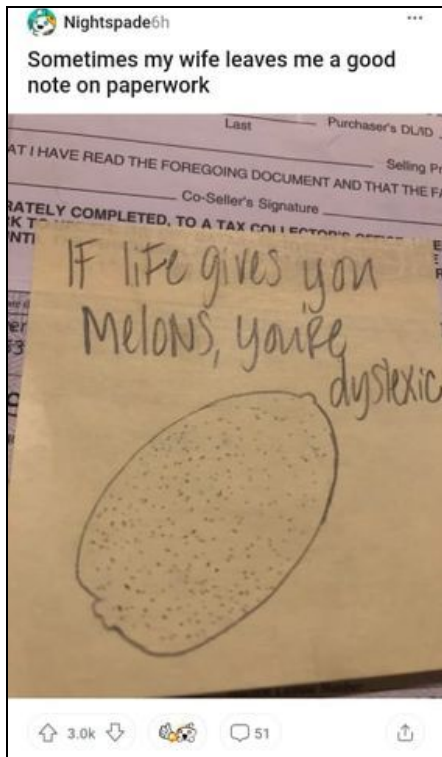That was a good one
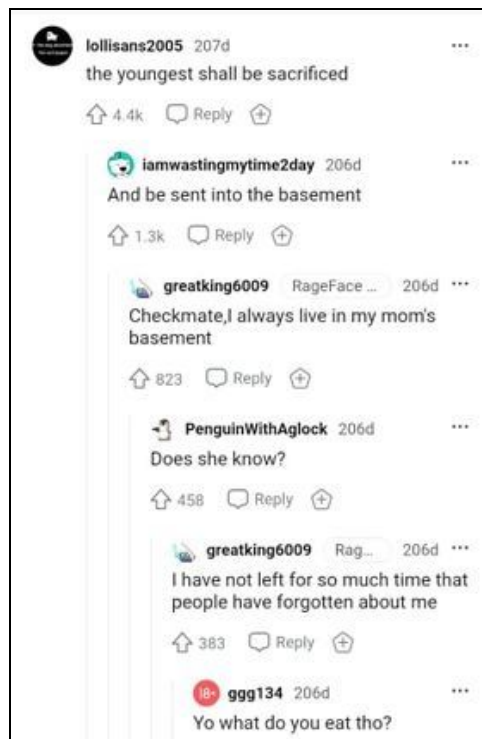
⬆ 1 ⬇   💬 Reply   ⊕

A_Math_Dealer 5h   ⋯

Oh great, the super tarantulas also have mind influencing abilities.

⬆ 16 ⬇   💬 Reply   ⊕

New character unlocked

For a split second I thought this branch was a legit super tarantula, but like, since it's 2020, I wasn't startled, I just thought, "wow, I guess super tarantulas are in play now"
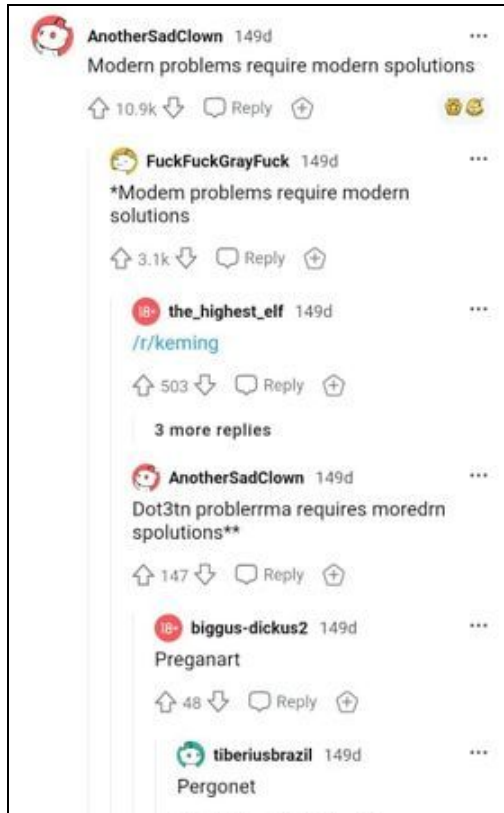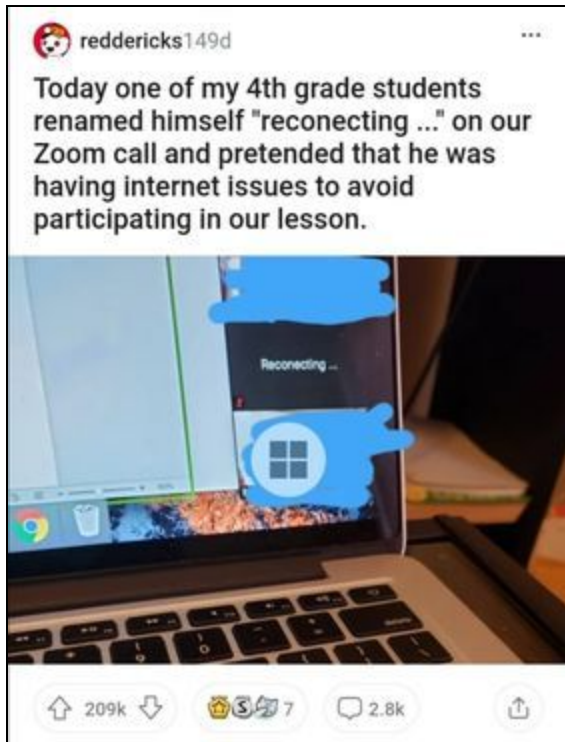
⬆ 105k ⬇   🐱🐱 8   💬 762   ⬆️
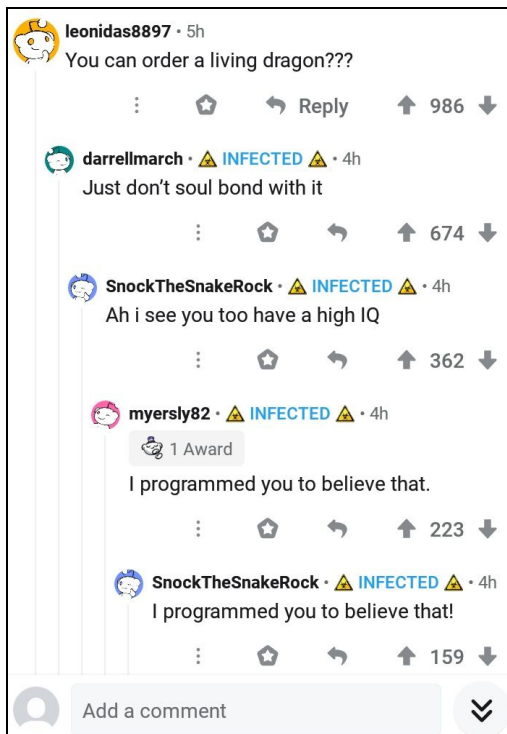
4)

5)

6)

7)

8)

Bakery mocked for Frozen Elsa cake which 'looks like baboon wearing makeup'

FROZEN 3

97 Comments sorted by Best ▾

Leave a comment

NovaAge iwrestledabeartwice 3h ···
they are the same picture

⬆ 186 ⬇ 💬 Reply ⊕

   mohaee 3h ···
   corporate needs to find the difference between these pictures

   ⬆ 71 ⬇ 💬 Reply ⊕

      HELICOPTERRRRR69 1h ···
      I don't see any difference either

      ⬆ 22 ⬇ 💬 Reply ⊕

      HELICOPTERRRRR69 12m ···
      Wait a minute I can make a spot the difference

      ⬆ 2 ⬇ 💬 Reply ⊕

      MaxLou420 2h -177 votes