An Exploration of Post-Postmodern Political Irony in Contemporary American Late-Night Television Shows

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ABSTRACT

Philosopher and writer David Foster Wallace introduced the world to the post-postmodernist literature movement, a movement centered around the assertion that political satire, following the beginnings of the 21st century, shifted towards the utilization of more "authentic" tactics to satirically undermine authority. Following the movement's introduction, numerous scholars have followed suit, conducting similar studies consistent with Wallace's initial findings. However, as further noted throughout this paper, these scholars utilize a relatively "unmodernized" definition of irony. By employing a more "complex" interpretation of irony, I seek to measure the accuracy of the current conclusions surrounding 21st-century political satire, specifically through the medium of late-night television. I examined multiple late-night television shows prior to and during the 21st century to determine if this medium of political satire has truly shifted towards the utilization of more "sincere" tactics to undermine authority. This paper was written with the initial assumption that the current conclusions surrounding political satire would fall short with the integration of this more complex outlook of irony, and through the research process, this phenomenon was proven to be accurate. The study concludes that the medium of political satire utilizes more complex ironic devices that were not initially identified in current research surrounding post-post-postmodernism. This research indicates that late-night television satire possesses the ability to heavily muddle the audiences' interpretation of satirical statements. Therefore, the analysis and conclusions provided by this paper can be used to introduce audiences to these emerging forms of irony and illustrate the frequency of such rhetorical strategies.

Introduction

Approaching the dawn of the 21st century and the expansion of digitalization, mediums for political satire shifted towards catering to the two-way information communication structure of the digital era (Moling, 2016). Specifically, this shift brought the rise of late-night television and social media as forms of political satire. This shift additionally influenced a major characteristic of political satire, the notion of irony. From the end of World War II to the arrival of the 21st century, political satire within the media featured heavy amounts of "government paranoia, disruption of language and narration, and a distrust of authority" (Leal, 2017). In this era, widely recognized as the "post-modern era," irony, originally simply defined as an in-congruency between the speaker's underlying and surface message, was widely utilized as a method of satirically undermining authority (Wilde, 1980). However, by the late 20th century "this tactic was overused and no longer effective" (Leal, 2017). Postmodernism's "depiction of the sharp polarization of the globe, fears of looming nuclear apocalypse, and a newfound distrust of [the] government…represent the concerns of an earlier generation" (Adams, 2007). As a result, philosophers, and writers such as David Foster Wallace and Robert L. McLaughlin introduced the term for what they believed to be a new emerging literature movement: "post-postmodernism."

Post-postmodernism, spanning the arrival of the 21st century to the modern-day, challenged humanity's current perceptions of irony, irony became viewed as a spectrum from satirical sincerity to satirical irony (Miller, 2009). Specifically, philosophers view post-postmodernism as an abandonment of irony and a return to sincerity and authenticity found in the "modernist" movement. Post-modernism "seeks not to reify cynicism, the disconnect, the atomized

privacy of our society nor to escape or mask it…but…to make us newly aware of the reality that has been made for [humanity]" (McLaughlin, 2013). However, this proposed literature movement is not as widely accepted and recognized as movements such as the "postmodern" movement. As of now, it remains purely an accumulation of observations made by philosophers and political scientists. Therefore, it is in our best interest to provide a deeper investigation of if these observed characteristics of post-postmodernist irony are truly apparent in modern political satire, specifically in the rising medium of late-night television shows.

Literature Review

In order to understand the rationale for analyzing the existence of post-postmodernist irony as rhetoric for satirically undermining authority within late-night television shows, it is crucial to contextualize this study within the existing body of research. Current studies surrounding the characteristics of post-postmodern irony have been largely focused on its existence within the wider scope of literature and the media. Few studies analyze the existence of post-postmodern irony in a specific form of medium, however, the studies that have explored the shifting use of irony as rhetoric from a general perspective of the media have suggested that post-postmodernist irony places a greater focus on the idea of utilizing authenticity and sincerity as a vehicle for political statements and the undermining of authority (Wallace, 1993; Leal, 2017). These studies generally view irony as a spectrum from satirical authenticity to satirical irony, meaning the utilization of sincerity to satirically undermine authority is still considered to be irony (Miller, 2009). As first observed by Wallace, irony as a device for satirically undermining authority shifted throughout the 1990s, and through further analysis of the irony portrayed in literature and the media, he concluded that the due to the "damaging nature of irony within culture", irony, as a vehicle for political satire, has resultantly shifted towards "authenticity" and "sincerity", with humorists and authors taking increasingly more direct approaches to undermine authority. Decades later, Leal conducted an analytical study confirming the existence of post-postmodern irony within current-day literature and media, and further expanded on Wallace's observation by exploring the specific techniques used by modern authors to "reinsert authenticity" back into the media. He concluded that "the continued use of humor in [literature] helps maintain [its] appeal to audiences brought up with postmodern irony, making the authenticity and sincerity easier to stomach." In essence, both these studies confirm the notion that the literature and media, following the dawn of the 21st century, abandon satirical irony as rhetoric for undermining authority, and integrate heavier amounts of satirical authenticity within the wider scope of political satire. These studies, however, are limited as they generalize these observations across multiple forms of literature and media, and more crucially assume irony only exists as a spectrum from satirical authenticity to satirical irony, while further research proves that the notion of irony is much more complex.

Unlike the studies conducted by Wallace and Leal, research examining irony from an alternatively more complex perspective does exist. These studies introduce the notion of "post-irony" and "meta-irony," which challenge the notion of a two-dimensional spectrum of irony found in current studies surrounding post-postmodernism (Pallawarukka, 2022; Bourne, 2020). Through a surface analysis of popular modern popular memes, Bourne concludes in his study that post-irony, which consists of expressing an authentic and sincere message through the use of an ironic tone, oftentimes appears on the surface to replicate authenticity, but in reality, takes the audience through an additional layer of irony before returning back to authenticity (Bourne, 2020). Similarly, Pallwarukka, through a case study of specific internet memes, asserts that the emergence of surrealism and absurdism within modern humor creates scenarios in which the audience is left "confused" about the "commentary the meme" is providing (Pallawarukka, 2022). A meta-analysis provided by professor Dulk further expands on this study by placing a name towards this occurrence: meta-irony, which is defined as a message appearing to make an authentic statement on the surface, but truly has no underlying message (Dulk, 2012). In essence, both these studies prove the existence and emergence of "complex ironies" in modern media and confirm that oftentimes audiences and researchers "incorrectly" identify and interpret occurrences of "post-irony" and "meta-irony" as pure satirical authenticity. This could potentially be the case with current post-postmodernist researchers such as Wallace, and Leal, who have concluded that the utilization of irony in

modern media has shifted towards "authenticity." These studies are limited, however, as they are purely theoretical and do not explore if these forms of "irony" are widely utilized within modern media. Additionally, the studies also fail to connect the developments and shifts in literary movements, as found in studies conducted by Wallace and Leal, to these newly emerging forms of irony.

Therefore, while some studies analyze the existence of post-postmodernist irony within the growing media and literature, few studies explore its existence within a specific form of media and furthermore utilize an overly simplified definition of irony. Moreover, given the limitations of previous studies, any research analyzing the existence of post-postmodernist irony must focus on a specific form of media. Furthermore, seeing as these studies assume irony only exists on a two-dimensional spectrum between satirical authenticity and satirical irony, and do not take into consideration the research surrounding the emergence of new theoretical forms of irony, future research analyzing irony in modern media and literature should be centered around an exploration of whether or not the characteristics of post-postmodernist irony truly exist within modern media using a modernized definition of irony. This study will attempt to bridge the gap in the current research by asking the question: to what extent are the surface characteristics of "post-postmodernist irony" apparent in contemporary American late-night television shows as a rhetorical device for satirically undermining authority? Through this, I aim to synthesize the methodologies and observations made by researchers such as Wallace and Leal with the theoretical explorations of researchers such as Paulawarukka, Bourne and Dulk.

My research will therefore be unique as it will examine if the current research surrounding post-postmodernist irony and the conclusions made surrounding the emergence of authenticity and sincerity within political satire are accurate and apparent within the medium of late-night television shows (Parkin, 2010). As stated earlier, I will utilize a more complex definition of irony influenced by current theoretical research surrounding the emergence of new forms of irony such as "post- irony" and" meta-irony" Additionally, because previous studies have not been centered around a specific form of media, and even fewer studies have analyzed the existence of satirical irony within late-night television shows, this study will fill the gap in knowledge on the subject. Furthermore, the study will gather qualitative data through a set of late-night television show clips, and utilize researched models to produce processed quantitative data. Specifically, it will obtain data from the five most popular late-night television shows, and utilize more advanced methods of analyzing irony to provide data for the research.

This study's contributions to research on the topic will be significant as it will measure the accuracy of post-postmodernist researchers with their conclusions surrounding irony and humor. It will analyze the satirical irony utilized in an advancing medium for political satire and cross-reference the characteristics of post-postmodernist irony proposed by the current research in the field. This knowledge provides the general audience with a greater understanding of the rhetorical techniques utilized by humorists and comedians in the late-night show industry. This could potentially aid in yielding more clarity of messages, as incorrectly identifying the specific type of irony utilized by speakers may encourage larger amounts of misinformation within the media. Specifically, the ability to discern between the use of "authenticity" and "post-irony" could aid in avoiding the initial layer of irony brought by the employment of the "post-irony" device. Altogether, the results of the study can contribute to providing greater clarity to the wider scope of literature and media in an age of misinformation and post-truth.

Hypothesis

I initially hypothesized that the conclusions of current post-postmodernist researchers and philosophers such as Wallace and Leal would fall short following the integration of a more sophisticated outlook of irony. In other words, the characteristics of post-postmodern irony, specifically the rise of satirical "authenticity" would be apparent within late-night television shows to an incredibly small extent. This hypothesis stems from the conclusions of studies examining emerging "complex ironies." These studies show that new emerging forms of "post-irony" and "meta-irony" on the surface appear to simply be "authenticity" and "sincerity," but are in fact much more complex. I believe that adopting

an analytical method aware of these specific forms of irony would arrive at the conclusion that the utilizations of "post-irony" and "meta-irony" rather than authenticity have in fact increased in usage.

Method

In order to test this hypothesis, a mixed-method case study method containing satirical detection, ironic analysis, and comparisons to previous research was employed. Case studies provide intensive examinations of groups or phenomena, where the "scholar's aim is to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena" (Gerring, 2004). This research focused on a case study of the five most popular American late-night television shows, based on the average yearly views, across a five-year time span. The mixed-case study method was utilized to better analyze the irony employed in these late-night television shows as a vehicle for undermining authority. The fundamental purpose of this study is to verify the current conclusions surrounding post-postmodern irony research, and analyzing the phenomenon through a close examination provided by a case study would produce the most in-depth results. Furthermore, the case study method offers heavier clarity to the three-step process of collecting scenarios, providing ironic analysis, and cross- referencing assertions within the post-postmodernist movement. Essentially, this case study process utilized an initial qualitative analysis of the late-night television shows to produce a processed quantitative result. This specific mixed method was utilized to integrate the reflective abilities of a qualitative study, whilst uncovering concrete evidence for more effective conclusions.

Satirical Detection

In order to collect data to determine the accuracy of the current assertions within the post- postmodernist movement, I utilized satirical detection to pinpoint scenarios within late-night show episodes using humor and "irony" to undermine authority. For reference, satirical detection refers to the use of qualitative behavioral scanning as a method of recognizing situations in which satire is used as a method of undermining authority. The satirical detection I conducted takes inspiration from a model proposed by Professor LeBoeuf in his analysis of satirical comedy within Ancient Greece and *The Colbert Report*. Primarily, the model consists of an initial examination of the audience's reaction to the speaker. In cases of satire, the audience initiates a verbal reaction in the form of "laugh[s] and cheer[s]" indicating a segment of satire (LeBoeuf, 2007). Following the initial environmental scanning of the audience, a qualitative analysis of the segment beforehand causing the verbal reaction will determine if the specific section falls under the category of "satire." In the case of my study, this specific segment must be an evaluative statement criticizing a policy, figure, or action within the United States government before further analysis of the scenario is provided.

Before utilizing this model, however, it is necessary to first select the specific episodes of late-night television shows to be later analyzed. As stated earlier, the five most popular American late-night television shows, based on the average yearly views since 2016, will be examined for the study; specifically, I will be investigating: *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* (NBC), *Jimmy Kimmel Live* (ABC), *The Late-Night Show with Stephen Colbert* (CBS), *The Late Late Show with James Corden* (CBS), and *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* (Comedy Central). Furthermore, I will be analyzing each case across a five-year time period from 2016 to 2021, through the selection of five specific episodes per year. Additionally, since my research is centered around examining the use of irony as a rhetorical device for undermining authority, my selection process of the five episodes was influenced by periods of the year in which relatively drastic authority shifts occur. Episodes were therefore chosen from early November (Presidential, House, and Senate Elections), late January (Inauguration Day), late September (Initial Presidential Debates), mid-October (Major Presidential and Vice-Presidential Debates), late August (Democratic and Republican Social Conventions). A large part of these selections caters toward the presidential elections, which occur twice (2016 and 2020) within my chosen time period. This selection process was designed to maximize the amount of available content, and as stated previously, after choosing the episodes, a satirical detection process will be utilized to find specific data for

later analysis. In total, I will be examining twenty-five episodes across five years, selecting the first episode from each respective late-night television in the month of November, the last episode in January, September and August, and the midpoint episode in the month of October.

Ironic Analysis

Once specific scenarios of political satire within the selected episodes are collected - the research moves on to the second step of the case study - ironic analysis. Ironic analysis is a method of determining the type of irony utilized by comparing the results of an ironic tone detection model and a qualitative analysis of the speaker's underlying message (Lestari, 2018). Furthermore, an ironic analysis will be performed on each specific scenario collected, which often comes in the form of singular sentences and phrases. For the purposes of this study, the "types of irony" were condensed into four major categories based on the research surrounding the development of complex ironies in modern internet memes, providing a more complex yet concise "definition" of irony. This specifically addresses the major limitation within current post-postmodernist researchers by specifically integrating the research surrounding more "complex" forms of irony into the methodology, which aids in bridging the gap in the research. The four types of ironies considered in the study include pre-irony (authenticity), irony (verbal irony), post-irony, and meta-irony. As examined previously, the inclusion of ironies such as "post-irony" and "meta-irony" provides a more in-depth perspective of irony and helps synthesize the current research surrounding these theoretical devices and research involving the characteristics of post-postmodernist irony.

To reiterate, the ironic analysis model consists of two segments, the ironic tone detection model, and the qualitative analysis of the speaker's underlying message. The ironic tone detection model refers to a qualitative evaluation procedure adopted by Professor Frenda, involving linguistic and behavioral analysis to determine the level of authenticity within a satirist's tone. Specifically, the model consists of an analysis of the following five categories: *Disjunctive Conjunctions, Positive Interjections, Regional Expressions, Onomatopoeic Expressions,* and *Ironic Expressions* (Frenda, 2016). Within a given scenario provided by the satirical detection model explored previously, each of these five categories is measured and examined to produce a respective binary conclusion. For instance, a specific scenario undergoing this evaluation would either include or omit the usage *Disjunctive Conjunctions*. A specific segment is determined to incorporate an "ironic" tone if at least a singular category is included.

The second segment of the ironic analysis consists of a qualitative analysis of the speaker's underlying message. The qualitative analysis I conducted adopts a procedure schematic developed by Radboud University Psychology Professor, Margot Van Mulken, which asks a set of central questions to determine the congruency between the speaker's surface verbal expressions and underlying message (Mulken, 2011). Originally, Professor Mulken concluded that the model could be utilized to determine an ironic utterance from a non-ironic statement; however, this is under the assumption that irony only exists on a two-dimensional spectrum from ironic to authentic. Since this study contains complex ironies that do not "fit" on this spectrum, the model will only be utilized to determine the congruency between the speaker's surface message and the underlying message. The congruency analysis, similar to the ironic tone detection examination, produces a binary result. This "congruency determination" model is represented in Figure 1.
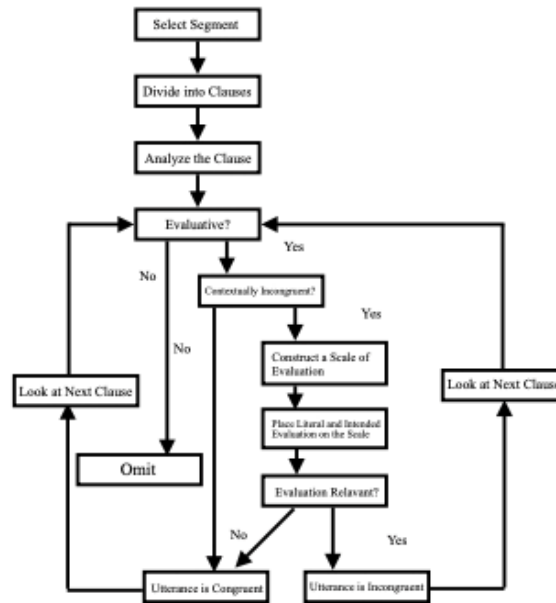
Figure 1. Qualitative Analysis Procedure Schematic

The combined results of the qualitative congruency analysis and the ironic tone detection examination further determine the specific type of irony utilized by the given speaker. Pre-Irony simply refers to the notion of authenticity, meaning a speaker utilizing "pre-irony" would produce an "authentic" result on the ironic tone detection examination and a "congruent" result on the qualitative congruency analysis. Irony, specifically verbal irony, or sarcasm, would furthermore produce an "ironic" and "incongruent" result on the relative examinations. As explored previously, post-irony can be viewed as a "second layer" of irony, meaning the speaker takes the audience through a layer of irony only to result back at authenticity. This means that while the underlying and surface message of the speaker is congruent, the speaker attempts to "confuse" the audience through the utilization of an "ironic" tone. In contrast, meta-irony has no underlying message yet on the surface appears to be an authentic evaluation of a specific subject. Agents of meta-irony oftentimes utilize meta-irony as a tactic of gauging the reactions of the audience, rather than attempting to make a politically-charged statement themselves. Therefore, the underlying message of a meta- ironic utterance is incongruent with the apparent surface message while the tone utilized stays authentic. Table 1 illustrates the relationship between the two binary factors of congruency and tone authenticity.

Table 1. Irony Determination Based off Double-Segment Ironic Analysis

Message			
		Congruent	Incongruent
Tone	Authentic	Pre-Ironic	Meta-Ironic
	Ironic	Post-Ironic	Ironic

Control Group

Before an analysis of the data, a control group consisting of late-night political satire scenarios from the years 1970 to 1980 will be examined. The selected scenarios consist of episodes from the following popular 70s late-night television shows: *Saturday Night Live, The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson,* and *The Dick Cavett Show*. The selection process for both the episodes within these late-night shows and the specific late-night shows themselves were far more lenient compared to the selection process for the "experimental" group. The major driving force behind this

decision stems from the lack of possible situations and scenarios of political satire to analyze. Therefore, nine random episodes (3 from each) from the selected late-night shows within the given time period will be analyzed, utilizing the same process of satirical detection and ironic analysis as a method of determining the overall "types" of irony utilized within these shows. The data collected from this control group provides a baseline metric to determine if political satire has increased the use of "authenticity," as concluded by post-postmodern researchers, from a comparison of the "experimental" group and the control group. In addition, this specific time period was selected due to the 70s being a central period in the postmodern era, which as mentioned previously is the literature movement proceeding assertions of a "post-postmodernist" movement.

Literature Comparison

Since a substantial portion of my inquiry is focused on measuring the accuracy of the current research surrounding the existence of post-postmodernist irony within the modern media, following the determination of the "types of irony" found in the specific episodes of late-night television shows, the overall frequencies found in this study will be compared with the conclusions of current post-postmodernist research. To determine the overall frequencies of irony found within the study's experimental and control sample size, a frequency table involving the occurrences of each "type of irony" will be provided. Through an examination and comparison of the irony occurrences within the experimental and control groups, the overall "trends" of irony across the "post-modern" and "post-postmodern" eras will be established. Moreover, a noticed decrease in the specific use of "pre-irony" or "authenticity" and an increase in the use of "post-irony" and "meta- irony" within the given sample size would resultantly challenge the conclusions of current post- postmodernist researchers.

Findings

As stated previously, the implemented methodology involves a general qualitative analysis of the selected late-night television shows to produce binary and quantitative results. Through the processing of these binary results, the occurrences for total cases of satire, humor, and each type of irony were compiled into a graphical and tabular format. Table 2 illustrates the occurrences of such categories mentioned previously across the five "experimental" late-night shows.

Table 2. Findings for Experimental Group

25 Episodes	Humor Cases	Satire Cases	Pre-Irony	Irony	Post-Irony	Meta-Irony
Jimmy Fallon	401	288	50	101	83	54
Jimmy Kimmel	415	276	63	52	86	75
Steven Colbert	398	263	51	99	53	60
James Corden	387	205	70	82	12	41
Trevor Noah	422	304	55	83	105	61
Total	2,023	1,336	289	417	339	291

Prior to the analysis and discussion of these results, the occurrences of the specified ironies for the "control" group, late-night shows from the 1970s, were gathered and processed in order to uncover specific "trends" across the post-postmodernist movement. As examined previously, this is a crucial step to effectively measure the accuracy of current post-postmodernist researchers. Table 3 illustrates the occurrences of each irony category across the three chosen "control" late-night television shows.

Table 3. Findings for Control Group

3 Episodes	Humor Cases	Satire Cases	Pre-Irony	Irony	Post-Irony	Meta-Irony
Saturday Night Live	52	28	7	16	2	0
Johnny Carson	39	17	9	8	0	0
Dick Cavett	41	22	10	12	0	1
Total	142	67	26	36	2	1

From the synthesis of the processed "experimental" and "control" group results, a graphical representation (as shown in Figure 2), comparing the irony occurrences of the two tables relative to total cases of satire, represented in percent, was produced to uncover trends more effectively across the "types of irony" utilized across the post-post-modernist movement.
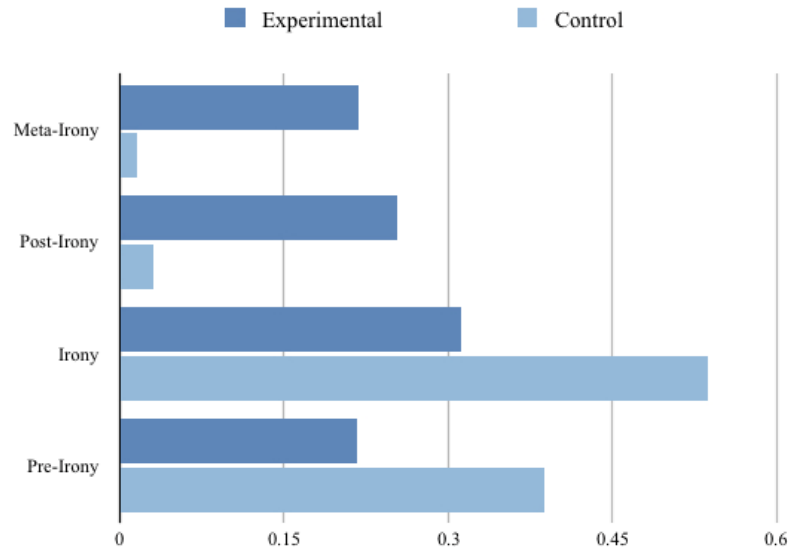

Figure 2. Percent Occurrences of Ironies Throughout Postmodernist and Post-postmodernist Movement

As stated before, a total of five episodes from the five most popular late-night television shows were analyzed across the years 2016-2018. The occurrences of humor, satire, and complex types of irony within each specific episode have not been included in the general tables above in order to maintain a simplified analysis and examination process. In essence, the tables explored previously condense the occurrences of each specific type of complex irony found in each specific episode, while the graphical representation examined above utilizes these irony "occurrences" from both tables to aid in the comparison of the specific literature periods: postmodernism (1970-1980) and post-postmodernism (21st Century). Through this graph, it is possible to identify the general trends of these ironic occurrences throughout the post- postmodernist movement, such as whether "authenticity" or "pre-irony" has truly increased in rhetorical usage across the 21st century.

Results

This section will discuss the results of the implemented ironic analysis model as well as the conclusions the resultant data suggests. As previously mentioned, the ironic analysis process split "irony" into four major categories: pre-irony, irony, post-irony, and meta-irony, in order to provide a more "complex" definition and perspective of irony within the study. Prior to analyzing the implications of my results, it is crucial to analyze the specific occurrences of each of the four categories of irony analyzed within my study.

Pre-Irony

Through the implementation of my methodology examined above, pre-irony was identified as having a congruent tone with an authentic message, meaning the qualitative congruency model would produce the binary result of "congruent" whilst the ironic tone detection model would produce an authentic binary result. Within my "experimental" group which analyzed contemporary late-night political satire, this rhetorical device for undermining authority occurred 289 times out of 1,336 cases of total cases of satire or "irony", consisting of 22% of total "irony" usage within the examined sample size. In contrast, the total occurrences of pre-irony within the "control" group which analyzed late-night television shows from the height of the "postmodernist" era, spanning from 1970 to 1980, pre-irony occurred 26 times out of the 67 total cases of satire, consisting of 38% of total irony usage. This indicates a significant decrease in the employment of pre-irony, or "authenticity" as a rhetorical strategy for undermining authority with the rise of the "post-postmodernist" movement.

Irony

Conversely, irony was identified as having an in-congruent message with an ironic tone. Within the experimental group, the rhetorical device of "irony" occurred 417 times out of 1,336 total cases of satire, consisting of 31% of total irony usage within the experimental sample size. Furthermore, within the control group, irony occurred 36 times out of 67 total cases of satire, consisting of 54% of total irony usage. This statistic is consistent with the characteristics of the postmodernist movement which include heavy utilization of sarcastic and ironic techniques to undermine authority. Moreover, these statistics further represent a notable decrease in the usage of "irony" as a rhetorical strategy for undermining authority.

Post-Irony/Meta-Irony

Post irony, defined as the employment of a congruent message with an ironic tone occurred 339 times out of 1,336 cases of total satire, 25% of total irony usage. In contrast, within the control group, the same rhetorical strategy only occurred 2 times out of 67 total cases of satire, consisting of 2% of total irony employment. This represents a significant increase in the employment of this rhetorical device for undermining authority. Likewise, meta-irony, the utilization of an incongruent message with an authentic tone, occurred 291 times out of 1,336 cases of total satire, consisting of 21% of total irony usage. In comparison to the 1% occurrence of meta-irony within the control group satirical cases, the employment of this rhetorical device similarity increased by a significant margin.

Limitations

Before moving on to discuss the results of the study, it is crucial to identify potential limitations which could have hindered the effectiveness of the data. The first of which is the relatively small sample size, especially with the control

group. Only three episodes from three late-night television shows were analyzed to represent the entirety of the "post-modern" era. As discussed previously, since I had limited access to episodes from the 70s, this limitation makes sense. Nonetheless, having more episodes from more late-night television shows would have made the findings more robust, and perhaps produced a more accurate conclusion. Another limitation within this study was the use of a "non-universal" method of determining the four categories of irony analyzed in my study. Throughout my research process, I found no studies including models to determine and identify pre-irony, irony, post-irony, and meta-irony. As a result, to determine and provide a dissection between the ironies analyzed in my study, I separated the definitions of these ironies into two categories: congruency and tone. Through my research, I was able to find existing models measuring the congruency and "level of ironic tone" within a given excerpt, and as a result, combined these two models to accurately provide a model of determination for the four categories of irony analyzed within my study. However, since this specific method of determining and providing an "objective" distinction between the two ironies is not "universally" utilized, conclusions drawn from this study are technically only accurate under the assumption this model is successful and accurate in determining specific types of complex ironies.

Discussion of Results

Therefore, the results of this study suggest that the initial hypothesis was accurate: the characteristics of post-post-modern irony, specifically the rise of "authenticity" are apparent within late-night television shows to an incredibly small extent. This can be exemplified with an overall decrease in the utilization of pre-irony or "authenticity." Proving that conclusions of current post- postmodernist researchers and philosophers such as Wallace and Leal fall short with the integration of a more sophisticated outlook of irony. This means that assertions of a "post-postmodernist" movement are questionable within the political satire medium of late-night television.

However, this does not necessarily prove that the medium of late-night television has stayed stagnant with characteristics of the "postmodernist" movement. As exemplified by a similar decrease in the usage of "irony" and "sarcastic" tactics to undermine authority, the characteristics of "postmodernism" are similarly not apparent within this digital medium of political satire. As demonstrated by a significant increase in rhetorical usage of post-irony and meta-irony, there is in fact a shift within the rhetorical strategies employed by late-night television satirists. Instead of a "post-postmodernist" shift, it is a shift to the utilization of more complex and emerging ironies to undermine authority. As mentioned previously in my hypothesis, it is likely previous post- postmodernist researchers observed this shift in usage, but with the utilization of an unmodernized methodology of determining irony, they identified cases of post-irony and meta-irony, which on the surface share similar qualities to "pre-irony," as "authenticity." My mythology utilizes this more "modernized" definition of irony, likely contributing towards the disparity between my conclusions and previous post-postmodernist researchers.

This conclusion has multiple implications towards the societal influence of late-night television political satire. This shift to more "complex" forms of irony utilized as rhetorical strategies within late-night political satire, that even post-postmodernist researchers themselves unsuccessfully identified, could potentially result in the misrepresentation of ideas and messages among audience members, as irony is often associated with the in-congruency of surface expression and underlying message. It is likely that certain statements employing the technique of post-irony or meta-irony may similarly be interpreted by the audience as "authenticity" or pre-irony, which could result in the misunderstanding of the speakers underlying message. Therefore, the results and analysis provided by this study could aid in the introduction of new emerging forms of complex ironic devices and illustrate the frequency of each device within late-night television satire. As examined previously, this study further brings significant implications towards the current literature analyzing post-postmodernist satire, as this study proves the that the surface characteristics of this literature movement are not apparent within late-night political satire. Further research could potentially adopt a similar "modernized" metrology of determining irony and analyze whether the conclusions made by this study can be applicable to other mediums of political satire - potentially proposing a new literature movement following the influences of postmodernism.

Acknowledgements

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