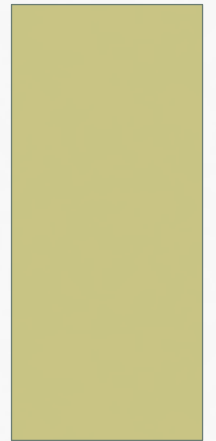# SATIRE AND THE BABYLON BEE

DREW CURLEY (GCURLEY@LEOMAIL.TAMU.EDU)

BACKGROUND

- The [Babylon Bee](#) is a Christian website producing Satire news stories similar to The [Onion](#)
- Conducting a pilot study to see if and how irony and sarcasm is marked
- Irony serves rhetorical and social effects (Attardo, 2000b)
- Irony markers are optional (Attardo, 2000b)
- Analyze the corpus to determine presuppositions driving the worldview promoted by the Babylon Bee

2

METHODOLOGY

- Gathered several corpora
    1. A corpus of headlines from the Babylon Bee
        a) Within this corpus, created a distinct corpus from headlines found containing socially conservative terms
        b) Also within this larger corpus, created a distinct corpus from headlines containing socially progressive terms
    2. A corpus of headlines from Washington Post
- Ran corpora through Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) program
- Analyzed results

BABYLON BEE TITLE CORPUS

- Utilized a Google-based search algorithm to find the titles to articles dealing with various social issues
- This was then divided into two groups; one with socially conservative search terms and one with socially progressive search terms
- Socially conservative search terms: *Pro-life*; *baby*
- Socially progressive search terms: *Pro-choice*; *fetus*; *abortion*; *transgender*; *lgb*; *gay*; *lesbian*

WASHINGTON POST CORPUS

- Gathered corpus of 25 news headlines from the Washington Post on March 12, 2019
- Avoided opinion/editorial articles and analysis pieces

DEFINING SEARCH CATEGORIES

- LIWC's definitions of their search categories
- **Analytical thinking**- this is the degree to which people use words that suggest formal, logical, and hierarchical thinking
- **Clout**- this is the relative social status, confidence, or leadership people display through their writing
- **Authenticity**- this is the degree to which people reveal themselves in an authentic or honest way
- **Emotional Tone**- this is the degree to which someone uses emotional language. This field is sub-divided into the use of terms of positive emotions and negative emotions

RESULTS

	Positive Emotions	Negative Emotions	Clout	Tone
Socially Conservative Corpus	3.58	3.23	92.40	31.90
Socially Progressive Corpus	3.62	3.57	81.48	26.50

	Analytic	Clout	Authentic	Tone	Positive Emotions	Negative Emotions
Babylon Bee Corpus	92.42	83.02	23.08	27.08	3.61	3.54
Washington Post Corpus	98.96	70.60	6.24	5.44	1.27	3.18

CONCLUSION

- Irony and sarcasm cannot be phonologically marked in writing
- Irony appears unmarked in many instances in this written corpus
  - Examples include: "Planned parenthood releases abortion discussion guide," "Exclusive reveal: 7 upcoming progressive Disney princesses," "9 things you should know transgender bathroom debate"
  - Reader needs to be aware of background contextual factors to know headline is irony
- Occasionally, it is marked by a degree of absurdity in the headline
  - Examples include: "Grizzly bear shatters pro wrestling records after identifying as a human," "Cecile Richards jealous that Gosnell got his own movie," "Planned parenthood defends Bill Cosby sexual assault is only 3 of what he does," and "Kim Jong Un criticized for meeting with nation that has killed 60 million babies "
- However, there is drastic difference in the LIWC analysis when comparing the Babylon Bee's headlines to the Washington Post headlines. This could suggest that sarcasm and irony are marked in some yet undetermined way.
  - Perhaps contextual markers drive the identification of written Irony. This would not be surprising as the Babylon Bee does not need to be inferred to be satire as many people are introduced to the the website by others who identify it as satire to them. This would indicated that irony is connected to prosocial behavior and in-group identification.

RESOURCES

- Attardo, Salvatore. (2000a). "Irony as relevant inappropriateness." *Journal of Pragmatics, 32.* 793-826.

- _____. (2000b). "Irony markers and functions: Towards a goal-oreinted theory of irony and its processing." *Rask, 12.* 3-20.

- Cusnir, C. (2017) "Parody and humor challenging the mainstream religion discourse on Facebook." *Jurnalism si communicare, XII*(4). 42-47

- Feltmate, D. (2013). "It's funny because it's true? "The Simpsons", satire, and the significance of religious humor in popular culture. *Journal of the American Academy of Religionm 81*(1). 222-248.

- Hobert, R.L., Hmielowski, J., Jain, P., Lather, J., & Morey, A. (2011). "Adding nuance to the study of humor effects: Experimental research on juvenalisn satire verses horatian satire." *American Behavioral Scientist, 55*(3). 187-211.

- Tang, L. & Bhattacharya, S. (2011). "Power and resistence: A case study of satire on the internet." *Sociological Research Online, 16*(2). 1-9.