

# Examining Rhetorical Strategies in Humorous Discourses: A Systematic Review

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## Abstract

The purpose of this systematic review is to review the relevant studies on rhetorical strategies in humorous discourse and text to gain a comprehensive understanding of the role of rhetorical strategies in humorous discourse and to explore future research trends. A systematic literature review following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses was conducted in the present study. After data selection and screening followed the protocol criteria, 20 articles were included in this study. The results reveal that most of the prior researchers investigated one specific rhetorical strategy in an article, such as irony, metaphor, satire, insults, and metonymy, while some of them examined different rhetorical strategies simultaneously. Besides, all the included articles adopted a qualitative research method, and the theories they applied are diverse. Moreover, the functions of rhetorical strategies in different humorous discourses are summarized. The results show that the functions of rhetorical strategies differ in different types of humorous contexts, which depend on the speaker's communication purpose in certain situations.

**Keywords:** rhetorical strategies, humorous discourse, systematic review, functions of rhetorical strategies

## 1. Introduction

Humor is a unique feature of human beings, and it is ubiquitous and closely related to our lives. Humor plays different roles in different situations to achieve various communicative purposes. Rochmawati (2017) pointed out that humor serves many purposes, as it is an important tool for achieving specific goals and is frequently used as a discourse strategy. For instance, stand-up comedies and talk show hosts produce humorous discourse to elicit laughter from the audience and to realize the program's effect. When people are in some embarrassing situation, they might turn to telling a joke to ease the atmosphere. What is more, Waisanen (2015) argued that a socially and emotionally engaged form of humor with a persuasion goal and a public function exists. This view is consistent with Weitz's (2009) definition of humor, which is a social transaction involving at least two people in which one party seeks to elicit amusement or laughter from the other. According to Attardo (2020, p.25), linguistic humor is a subclass of semiotic humor, which refers to expressing humor through language, spoken, and written, and it is also called "verbally expressed humor." Human beings produce linguistic humor through language, so how language is arranged in a speaker's discourses or written works is very crucial for a speaker to achieve the language effects and his/her communicative purpose.

Linguistic humor has an intimate relationship with rhetoric. In other words, rhetoric is a kind of complex language play. In Plato's time, the lectures who adopted "rhetoric" to present a speech were described as "sophists" (Wardy, 2005). In the view of Plato, rhetoric is used by "naturally clever" people to adulate their innocent audiences into agreeing with them and to do their bidding (Herrick, 2018). While Aristotle views rhetoric as a process rather than a product, and in the beginning, he defines rhetoric as "rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic," later arguing that "rhetoric is the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion," which is also one of his most famous and influential definitions of rhetoric (Aristotle & Roberts, 2007, p.1-3). Richard McKeon (1989, p.108) regarded rhetoric as "a universal and architectonic art", which means rhetoric organizes and lends structures to other arts and disciplines. Then, Herrick (2018) further argued that rhetoric is the study of how we organize and employ language effectively, and thus it develops into the study of how we organize our thoughts on a wide range of subjects.

A broader definition of rhetoric is given by scholars, as classicist George Kennedy (1994) defines rhetoric more broadly, believing that rhetoric is the energy contained in emotion and thought that is transmitted to others via a system of signs, including language, in order to influence their decisions or actions. Kennedy's definition indicates that rhetoric exists in every human being. Whenever we express emotions and thoughts to others with the goal of persuasion, we are using rhetoric to influence others. Then the modern definition of rhetoric is to persuade others to understand and accept our arguments; to evaluate the legitimacy of others' arguments when trying to persuade us (Wink, 2015). However, according to Hauser (2002), rhetorical situations are not only complex but also dynamic. Their emergent and relative meaning, which is the basis for how we respond, develops out of the interplay between context, message, messenger, and audience. Because of this, in a rhetorical analysis, Richardson (2006) employs Aristotle's rhetorical triangle to demonstrate the significance of identifying the arguer, argument, and audience, and the context of a speech and its potential effects are explained for each part of the triangle.

Humorous discourse encompasses many linguistic humor phenomena. Are there rhetorical strategies in humorous speech? Conversely, how do rhetorical strategies contribute to the creation of humorous language? Is there a connection between the two? Linguistics and rhetorical scholars have not neglected the possibility of examining rhetorical strategies in humorous discourse. With the aid of certain rhetorical techniques, speakers or writers try to use humor to make their audiences laugh and accept their ideas. Then, Weaver (2012) proposed that humor can have a variety of ideological or discursive impacts through using rhetoric, while the dynamics of the rhetorical triangle will influence the meanings generated by a joke in humor. Therefore, examining the rhetorical strategies in humorous discourse is very necessary for us to better understand humor and use humor for successful communication. In the same year, Weaver studied the rhetorical discourse in online anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic jokes. He applied Berger's (1976) list of rhetorical devices to identify the metaphor or rhetoric of humor. His findings suggest that through rhetoric, people can produce specific jokes that have the power to influence racial truth conceptualizations. This type of rhetoric is possible because jokes are created using linguistic mechanisms that are similar to rhetorical devices or metaphors. He further analyzed the rhetoric of disparagement humor in anti-Semitic joking online in 2015. He assessed the strengths and weaknesses of rhetorical approaches to humor analysis. Furthermore, rhetorical strategies were examined by Rochmawati (2017) in written jokes. She argued that there has recently been a shift in the field of humor studies, emphasizing linguistic humor and involving the field of rhetoric, which provided a study trend for the following scholars. Then, in 2019, Yahiaoui et al. investigated the irony in the translated humor of the film to identify if the irony humor was lost or not in the target translation language. Their findings suggested that the success or failure of irony humor conveyed was closely related to the translating ability of the translator and affected the film's effect. Additionally, metaphor as a rhetorical strategy was examined in media texts by Elena Stoyanova (2021). Stoyanova argued that metaphor, as an integral part of media discourse, can create comic or humorous effects in parts or whole media texts based on single or more metaphor models. Some linguistic scholars pay attention to rhetoric in different kinds of humorous contexts and discourses. Currently, some humorous discourses in a variety of contexts have been investigated: jokes (Weaver, 2012, 2015; Rochamawati, 2017), stand-up comedies (Heidari-Shahreza, 2017), literature works (Bednarz, 2013; Waisanen, 2015; Aitbaeva et al., 2018), conversations in a specific situation (Ortega, 2013), and so on and so forth.

Previous studies have expanded our knowledge of this linguistic phenomenon of humor and given us a deeper understanding of that rhetorical strategy in humorous discourses. Nevertheless, few articles have provided us with an overview of the rhetorical strategies in humorous discourses. For instance, what kinds of rhetorical strategies have been investigated? What theories and methods have been applied in this research field? Furthermore, because rhetorical situations are complex and dynamic, we must consider rhetoric carefully in different humorous contexts, and how rhetorical strategies are used by humorists and their function in different humorous discourses should be generalized. Besides, as Attardo (2017) mentioned, the field of linguistics of humor is still in its infancy. Hence, we consider that a comprehensive understanding of rhetorical strategies in humorous discourses is necessary.

The present systematic review intends to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current state of the research on rhetorical strategies in humorous discourses and to explore its future research trends. The authors aim to 1) examine the types of rhetorical strategies studied by researchers; 2) explore research methods and theories applied in previous studies on rhetorical strategies in humorous discourses; and 3) examine the function of rhetorical strategies in humorous discourses, through which we can better understand the role of rhetoric in humor.

## 2. Methods

A systematic literature review conducted by this study followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (Page et al., 2021).

### 2.1 Data Eligibility Criteria

A protocol, developed in advance, supported the inclusion and exclusion criteria that would be followed in the data selection and screening process. This study focuses on reviewing the final journals or articles published in journals from 2012 to 2021. So, the previous review articles, book chapters, books, and conference papers were excluded. The research belongs to the field of social science or arts and humanities, specifically to language and linguistics. Therefore, literature from fields like psychology, business, computer science, and others was excluded. The included journals or articles should also be written in English. The articles not written in English were eliminated. During the process of record screening, if the titles, abstracts, and keywords did not include "rhetoric" or rhetorical devices, and "humor" or "humorous," they were eliminated, as they did not relate to the research. If the full articles only related to rhetorical strategies or humor analysis or did not involve the two combined aspects, they were excluded. Lastly, all the duplicated records were removed from every screening stage.

### 2.2 Data Sources

This study retrieved data from Scopus as their main data resource to provide a comprehensive review of applying rhetorical strategies in humorous discourse. Science Direct, Sage Journals, and *European Journal of Humour Research* are the supplementary data resources because Scopus covers a large portion of social science journals compared to other data resources (Wijesinghe et al. 2017). Science Direct and Sage Journals are also the most popular and multidisciplinary online databases for scientific study (Denizci Guillet & Mohammed, 2015; Cheng, 2016), while the EJHR publishes a wide spectrum of research on all elements of the humor phenomenon.

### 2.3 Searching Strategies

In the first step of record searching, the authors used an advanced document search of TITLE-ABS-KEY to conduct the search in Scopus in the form of ((rhetoric\*) AND ((humor\* OR joke OR fun OR laugh\* OR comedy))), which was intended to select the most relevant articles. A further reason for using other keywords rather than "humor or humorous" is that researchers present humor in multiple expressions. Following the protocol, after the search results came in, a priority screen was conducted by the researchers in the database system. The remaining results were saved as CSV Excel, including the citation information, affiliations, abstract, and keywords. The second stage of research was carried out in Science Direct and Sage journals. Even though their searching system is different from Scopus, they still need to stick to the eligibility criteria, so after the research results came out, they were exported as RIS files for later screening. Before the second step of searching, a pilot search was conducted in each database system of Science Direct and Sage Journals. The researchers found the fewer combined keywords searched, the more irrelevant the results, so we narrowed the keywords to the most relevant ones, "rhetorical strategies and humorous discourse," and the results came out to be more focused. The third step of searching was conducted on the EJHR by reviewing recent years' archives on its official website, and the topic relevant records would be retrieved for later screening. The last date of the final search round was May 30th, 2021.

### 2.4 Data Screening and Collection

The procedures and screening of data processing followed the flow of PRISMA 2020 (Page et al. 2021) (see Fig. 1). Since this study only acquires the studies via databases and registers, the previous review studies and the new studies-in-progress are not considered. In the screening process, all the records went through manual screening without using an automatic screening machine or software in case of some unexpected error. In the first step, all the retrieved records in Excel and RIS files were manually screened by two independent researchers based on the records' titles, keywords, and abstracts. The records that were deemed ineligible would be marked. After they finished screening, they discussed their reasons for marking them and reached a consensus on the results. If they disagreed, a third researcher would make the final decision. In the second step, they sought the remaining records and downloaded the full reports. The researchers used the subscribed database to retrieve the entire text of the data. Google Scholar and Research Gate also helped in finding full articles. Besides, we emailed the authors of some full articles, which were not retrieved, and they were excluded if they were still not accessible. The screening of the full reports also needs to follow the screening rules in step one. The last step was to extract the useful data from the included reports to respond to the research objectives. To minimize the bias risks of the present study, one researcher extracted the data first, and then the data was checked by another researcher. The disagreement was resolved by the discussion at the committee meeting of all researchers.

### 2.5 Data Collection Results

Figure 1 reports the data screening process and the result of the data collection. The authors retrieved a total of 1012

records from Scopus (n = 223), Science Direct (n = 180), Sage Journals (n = 585), and the *European Journal of Humour Research* (n = 24). After the duplicate screening, 113 records are removed, and there are 899 records left for screening. Then 837 records were excluded because their titles, keywords, and abstracts did not meet the eligibility criteria, leaving 62 records to be retrieved. The authors retrieved 59 full articles to assess for eligibility, while 3 records were unretrievable. As a result, 39 articles were excluded for reasons of unrelated content, commentary review articles, and other reasons. Finally, a total of 20 articles were included in this study. A content analysis was conducted carefully to analyze all the (20) full papers to address the objectives of this study. Then the results of the study are analyzed and discussed in depth.

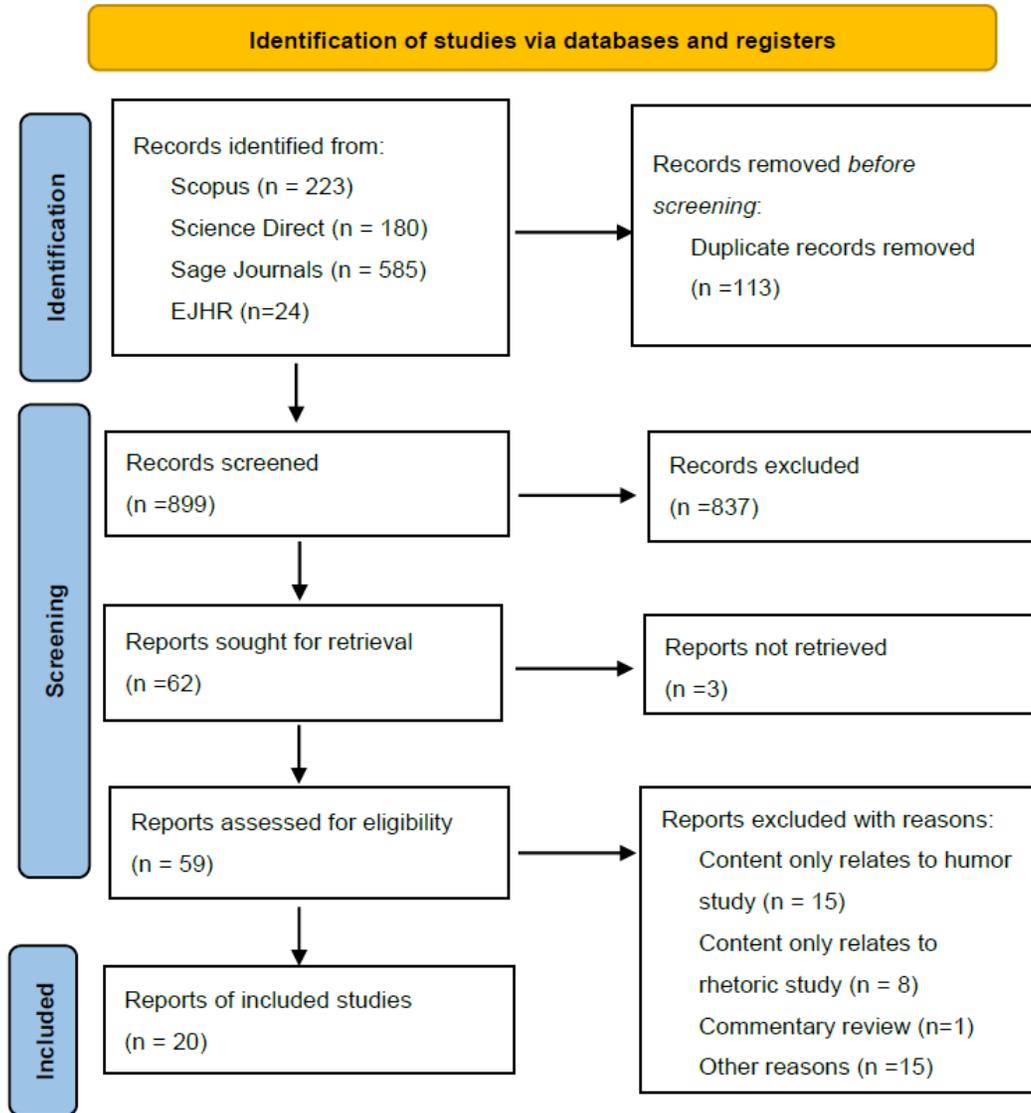


Figure 1. PRISMA flow of data identification, screening, and included reports results

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Types of Rhetorical Strategies and Relevant Article Numbers

The analysis of the 20 full articles in this study shows that the usual prior researchers investigated one specific rhetorical strategy in an article, like irony, metaphor, satire, insults, and metonymy, while some examined various rhetorical strategies simultaneously. Figure 2 shows the types of rhetorical strategies and the number of relevant articles. Six articles examined "irony," accounting for 30% of the included reports, and three articles examined "metaphor," accounting for 15% of the total. 2 articles focused on "satire" studies, 1 article on "insults," and 1 article on "metonymy." However, the majority is accounted for by the variety of rhetorical strategies examined in one relevant article, accounting for 35%, which includes seven articles.

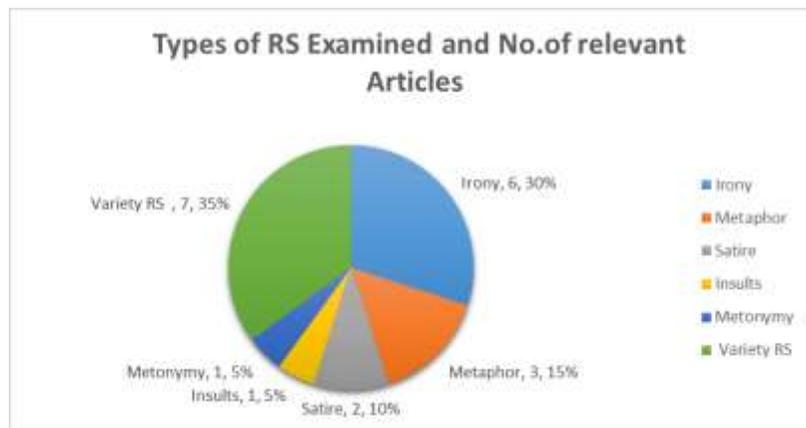


Figure 2. Types of rhetorical strategies and number of relevant articles

### 3.2 Research Methods and Framework Theories

Table 1 shows the research methods and framework theories in the included studies. When extracting data, the authors are keen on the research methods of such articles. They want to know whether this research uses qualitative research, quantitative corpus research, or other research methods. The authors found that all the papers used qualitative research methods by a screening of the research methods. More specifically, they used methods like content analysis, discourse analysis, discourse-historical approach, discursive and lingua-cultural analysis, and complex linguistic-pragmatic approach for data analysis.

Table 1. Profile of research methods and framework theories

<b>Research Methods</b>	<b>20</b>
A qualitative research method (content analysis (n = 3), discourse analysis (n = 14), discourse-historical approach (n = 1), discursive and lingua-cultural analysis (n = 1), complex linguistic-pragmatic approach (n = 1))	
<b>Framework of Theories</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Humor and Humor linguistic theories</b>	
Superiority theories of humor (La Fave et al., 1976)	1
General Theory of Verbal Humor (Attardo & Raskin, 1991)	1
<b>Rhetorical theories</b>	
Berger's rhetorical techniques (1993)	1
Muecke's (1978) classification of irony markers	1
A modified version of rhetorical typology (Heidari-Shahreza, 2017)	1
Humoristic Metaphors in Satirical News (HMSN) typology (Droog, et al., 2020)	1
<b>Other theories</b>	
Wieviorka's (1995, 1997) dual logic of racism	1
Clark's (1996) layering model	1
<b>Mixed using various theories</b>	
Mixed using theories of Jerry Palmer (1987), Arthur Asa Berger (1995), Kenneth Burke (1969, 1984 [1937]), Michael Billig (2001, 2002, 2005), Simon Weaver (2012).	1
Mixed using theories of Theory of conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnsen 2003; Baranov & Karaulov 1991, etc.) A contextual theory of metaphor or theory of metaphor in LCS (Stoyanova, 2013), Discourse theories (Fairclough, 1995).	1
Integrate theories of discursive appropriation with scholarship on copyright rhetoric (High, 2015)	1
<b>Not mentioned</b>	<b>9</b>

According to the framework of theories in this study (see Table 1), the included reports used humorous, linguistic, rhetorical, and some other theories. Some of them also used various theories in their studies. After careful screening, we found two articles used the theories of humor and humor linguistics, four articles used rhetoric-related theories, three articles used mixed theories, and two of them used other theories. The articles, using blending theory, analyze the research data from various theoretical perspectives by mixing humor theory with rhetoric theory or other theories. However, there are nine articles that do not state what theories are used for their research.

### 3.3 Functions of Rhetorical Strategies in Different Humorous Discourses

In this section, the authors presented the functions of rhetorical strategies in different humorous contexts to find out what role rhetoric plays in humorous discourses. From the data we finally collected in the literature, a total of 20 relevant papers are available. This study categorized them into four main clusters: (1) Rhetorical strategies in literary discourses (n=3); (2) Rhetorical strategies in political or social movement discourses (n=5); (3) Rhetorical strategies

in TV media and communication discourses (n=6); and (4) Rhetorical strategies in jokes and comedy discourses (n=4), as well as some others (a film subtitle translation (n=1) and a conversation analysis (n=1)).

### 3.3.1 Functions of Rhetorical Strategies in Literature Works

Rhetorical strategies are rarely examined in literary humor. Only three articles investigated the rhetorical strategies in literary works. So, what role does rhetorical strategy play in literary humor? In 2013, Teresa Bednarz investigated the Demetrian-like humor rhetoric in the stinging criticism and the diverse dicta found in Luke 16:14–18. Bednarz looked at how Luke combines a variety of different dicta to construct prophetic barbs and Demetrian-like punches via the prism of humor rhetoric. The article describes a frightening reversal of the story when the status of Jesus is questioned, and the Jesus of Luke gains credibility with a rhetorical punch through some humor, wordplay, and sarcasm. Jesus' humorous rhetoric reflects Jesus' wit and enriches his characterization. Then, in 2015, Don Waisanen discussed the relationship between humor and decorum in Book 6, Chapter 3 of the *Institutio Oratoria*, and he mainly focused on the part of rhetorical humor in Quintilian's Reflections. From his point of view, even though humor is debated by many scholars and some people fear using it, Quintilian offered a method of making a balance between humor and decorum: if comedy can get to the level of socially and emotionally involved instrumental rhetoric, it's probably worth deploying; if it can't, people could be wary. While comedy production in satiric short stories was examined by Aitbaeva et al. (2018), they proposed that humor is one of the methods for gaining an aesthetic understanding of reality. Humor, irony, and satire are used to bring the humorous aspect of any situation to life. The use of language and extralinguistic tools is used to create comedy (Bramlett, 2012). They pointed out that satire is a type of humor in which scathing criticism and ridicule take precedence over malice, and it cannot exist without a funny episode, as the latter is not only a vehicle for satire, but also its purpose. Then they concluded that Kazakh satirists use words with contrary meanings and polysemantic wordplay to portray irony and humor.

To sum up, the included articles examined the rhetorical strategies in the literary works; the characters in the works use them to persuade their listeners to achieve their goals. However, according to Quintilian's Reflections discussed by Waisanen (2015), people should pay attention to the specific situation of comedy when they want to employ rhetorical humor in decorum. For Aitbaeva et al. (2018), some rhetorical strategies in short satiric stories are regarded as humor; they coexist in the humorous language to achieve humor as well as communicative purposes.

### 3.3.2 Functions of Rhetorical Strategies in Political or Social Movement Humorous Discourses

Five articles have conducted humorous rhetorical studies in political or social movement discourses, which is the second largest group of rhetorical research in the collected data. High (2015) investigated the dialogue comedy of the pirate movement, which is the free speech of the movement's participants, such as the words, slogans, and even the names of pro-copyright groups. He regarded dialogic comedy, as a rhetorical approach, as opposing dominant discourse, promoting social learning, and initiating debate and dialogue. Besides, insult tactics, such as labeling or ridiculing, are considered an integral part of the language of protest by scholars in the field of social movement rhetoric (Orkibi, 2016). What's more, Don L. F. Nilsen (1990) claims that humor is a "strong weapon" in political communication. In Orkibi's (2016) article, he examined the rhetorical humor in the French "Anti-Sarko" Movement (2007–2012), and he pointed out that the act of rhetorical humor in this movement is to use insults to mock the leader of the republic and against political hegemony, which has the potential to challenge the target's reputation, credibility, authority, and dignity, or even damage it. Orkibi (2016) summarized: insulting flag individuals through ridicule or vilification is a rhetorical strategy that allows protesters to frame injustice, collective action, and concrete goals rather than being a spontaneous kind of verbal abuse.

However, Anna Piata (2016) treats metaphor as a powerful tool in political election ads, so she chose three of them for campaign advertising in Greece in 2015 and tries to provide us with a novel understanding of the fuzzy relationship between humor and metaphor in achieving political goals. Her paper demonstrates how, through the new genres they enact, such as internet memes, social media recontextualizes metaphors and purposefully renders them humorous. The findings indicate that metaphor and humor serve the rhetorical purposes of election campaign advertising and political satire, respectively, through the evaluative frames they generate and comedy's targets and role as a vehicle of criticism.

Furthermore, comments on a politician's Facebook were also investigated by scholars. Galia Hirsch (2020) analyzed humor and irony in the direct and indirect comments on a post by the controversial Israeli politician Miri Regev on Facebook, and she carefully compared these two kinds of comments. She found that indirect comments used more ironic language to criticize and damage the politician's face. What's more, irony shows more threat to face than humor, which means humor is still useless in saving face. Her finding helps to disprove the notion that humor is friendlier. Then, she proposed that irony and humor were nearly always met with a succession of indirect responses

by observing the comments. Galina N. Ryabova contends that by 2021, humor and satire had flourished in Soviet society of the 1920s, whether at the official or unofficial level, each with its own set of forms. After examining humor and satire in their magazines, caricatures, etc., Ryabova concluded that humor and satire were "an integral part of political propaganda" and they appeared in our lives in a variety of forms (Ryabova, 2021). Concludingly, rhetorical humor could be a "strong weapon" in political discourse to shape the audience's perception and reframe the policies to achieve political purpose.

### 3.3.3 Functions of Rhetorical Strategies in TV, Media, and Communication Discourses

In 2013, Orla Vigsø argued humor and irony have positive effects in crisis communication cases, and then he did a case study to analyze the function of humor irony videos in facing the crisis case which happened in 2011 of the main Swedish rail company SJ. According to his findings, irony and comedy may be appropriate in a crisis communication situation when the crisis does not include major bodily harm or loss of life, but rather concerns a company's reputation (Vigsø, 2013). However, the decision to utilize such an approach should be founded on a comprehensive examination of the communication context, often known as the rhetorical scenario (Bitzer, 1968).

Then, Droog et al. (2020) identified it as a difficulty for communication scientists to figure out the hybrid genres in satirical news. He and his research members proposed a humoristic metaphor in the satirical news (HMSN) typology to help communication scientists recognize and switch between four different discursive modes (interrogation, celebration, confrontation, and conversation) that are "communicative orientations toward particular genre elements." Furthermore, they argued this mode has more than one rhetorical function in satirical news and the HMSN typology could be adopted to achieve these functions (Droog et al., 2020), which means that metaphorical humor plays an important role in deepening our understanding of satirical news.

The role of ironical humor in communication was further investigated by Kwon et al. (2020) in the firm meeting situation. They discussed using "ironic personae" as a pragmatic tool to facilitate the discussion of complex and controversial topics within a multinational company. According to their given definition, "ironic personae" is "a pragmatic vehicle that facilitates the use of humorous verbal irony and aggressive conversational humor." Then they debated that the previous studies failed to convey the dynamic of how irony and comedy were realized and constructed in these executive team meetings. Hence, the focus of their research is on how participants co-create and deploy ironic personae as well as the roles they play in assisting people in making sense of complex problems. Their findings indicate that both individuals and organizations benefit from irony and humor since they help to collision and contrast ideas as well as moderate and reduce criticism. In addition, the advantages of ironical humor are also demonstrated by Tatyana Chernyshova (2021), who studied ironic media texts' comic effects and proposed that irony is an essential tool in producing humor and that it is the semantic foundation of text in current Russian media texts, through which the media text author can express their social position, speak out against their differences, and hide their true feelings. Their true intention, however, is always hidden behind their text and related to the subtext of their text (Chernyshova, 2021). Stoyanova (2021), on the other hand, extracts corpus from modern Bulgarian media to analyze metaphor's role in creating a humorous effect. Stoyanova argued that "metaphor is not only a device of poetic imagination and a characteristic of language; it is a necessary instrument of thinking and action." Without a doubt, the recipient's linguistic and cultural competence influences metaphor comprehension (successful communication). Therefore, her study tried to clarify the background study of the relationship between language, thinking, and culture, identifying the most distinctive metaphoric operating processes in the Bulgarian contemporary linguistic and cultural situation. The findings of her study suggest that metaphor is frequently used in modern Bulgarian media texts to create a humorous effect as a linguistic method and a cognitive mechanism. She discovered four groups of metaphors that aid in the creation of humor in Bulgarian media texts, and she went on to say that single metaphors and script metaphors are used as humor makers in text fragments or the entire text. Also, she argued, because of the metaphor's implicit functions, they fit within the functional and pragmatic parameters of media discourse, making it an essential component of it. Finally, the author concluded that metaphors assist in the execution of the primary pragmatic tasks and attitudes of media discourse and may have an effect on the audience's or addressee's consciousness. The use of metaphor as a construct-scenario in a Bulgarian media text increases its expressiveness and directs its addressees to the intended interpretation of the information delivered.

Moreover, metonymy in humor was examined by Tabacaru and Feyaerts (2016). They look at the structural role of metonymy in comedic interactional sequences like those in *House M.D.* and *The Big Bang Theory* on American television by employing Clark's (1996) layering model to explain the hilarious uses of metonymies and show that metonymic linkages are central to pragmatic inference. Their study shows how a metonymic relationship can be used to establish a humorous meaning by extending across distinct layers of meaning—the "serious" discourse base space

and a "non-serious" pretend area—based on the common ground between the speakers and the audience (Tabacaru & Feyaerts, 2016). Metonymic reasoning appears to be a key driving factor for creating humor from a conceptual standpoint, as it can stretch and change any continuous relationship between the source and target concepts or across distinct meaning layers. Their study provides us with a cognitive-linguistic perspective to understand the role of rhetoric in humor. We could gain a deeper understanding of the internal mechanism of metonymy. After analyzing the rhetorical strategies in the above articles, we found that rhetorical humor also has a close relationship with TV programs and media communications. Rhetoric can not only facilitate producing humor in a media context but can also moderate social relationships for communication purposes.

### 3.3.4 Functions of Rhetorical Strategies In-Jokes and Comedy Discourses

In early 2012, Simon Weaver conducted an analysis of rhetorical discourses in the context of online anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic jokes. He claimed that humor has the inherent ability to support racism in multiple readings since it is constructed with linguistic methods that resemble metaphor and other rhetorical devices. Weaver, according to the collected data of 272 anti-Semitic jokes and 101 anti-Muslim jokes, clearly explains how rhetorical humor works in racism jokes, and he found social inclusion and exclusion are two logics of racism humor expression. Weaver believes that rhetorical humor does help with racism. In 2015, Weaver further examined the rhetoric of disagreement humor. For Weaver's rhetoric is defined as "convincing communication," and he argued the resemblance between hilarious incongruity and metaphor, which is one of the most important rhetorical communication tools. In Weaver's (2015) article, he has presented and synthesized numerous approaches to the rhetorical study of humor, joking, comedy, and laughing. Thus, rhetorical humor analysis as a form of critical humor theory, which is particularly valuable for the analysis of disparagement humor, has been strengthened. As a result, the jokes and disagreement humor, according to Weaver, imply racism through rhetoric.

In addition, Rochamawati (2017) combines pragmatic theories of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principles, Austin's (1975) Speech Act Theory, and Berger's (1993) rhetorical techniques to interpret the humor of some written jokes from Reader's Digest and two online sources. She intended to figure out how pragmatic strategies and rhetorical devices worked in the jokes and to help produce humor. Her findings revealed that the rhetorical and pragmatic perspectives of jokes written in English might aid readers in comprehending the funny meanings. Both tactics are mutually beneficial (Larrazabal & Korta, 2002). The rhetorical viewpoints aid in comprehending the structure of the joke, while the pragmatic aspect might assist readers in revealing the hilarious objectives. In the same year, Mohammad Ali Heidari-Shahreza (2017) did a rhetorical analysis of humor styles and techniques, and he claimed his study was the first ever to examine rhetoric in the context of Persian stand-up comedy. Based on Berger's (1976) humor typology and Juckel et al.'s (2016) theory of humor techniques, he proposed a modified version for stand-up comedy humor research. As mentioned previously, Weaver considered rhetoric to be a form of "convincing communication." Furthermore, Heidari-Shahreza proposed the idea of "convincing humor." As he argued, a successful style of persuasion requires three elements: ethos, pathos, and logos, or the logical mechanism used by the comic to create humor and persuade the audience of the humor in his or her act. However, in Heidari-Shahreza's research, he categorized the rhetorical humor in stand-up comedy not only as language rhetoric, but also as logic, identity, and action rhetoric as well (Heidari-Shahreza, 2017). In conclusion, rhetorical strategies could help us to produce humor in jokes and comedy, while rhetorical humor not only has positive effects, but also some negative effects that depend on the purpose of use in the context, especially in some racist jokes.

Even though some previous traditional beliefs proposed that humor is a kind of aggression, in 2013, Ortega tried to prove the positive existence of humor as a strategy in utterance. What's more, Ortega pointed out that "humor and irony very often appear together in utterances." Then he explains how ironic-humorous utterances emerge from violations and inversions of conversational principles with the theory of the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), which is followed by a succession of generalizable inferences and knowledge sources that the listener must interpret. Ortega concluded that humor still has positive value in conversation, including irony and politeness, which have become narrative and social tactics.

One more interesting study on rhetorical analysis in humor is to investigate if the target translation work has completely expressed the ironic humor of *Monsters Inc* or not. (An animated feature film) (Yahiaoui et al., 2019). Yahiaoui and his research teams investigated the tactics, forms, and categories of irony as comedy in translations, as well as the accuracy with which those translations convey the funny meaning. According to the findings, the translators had adopted the strategies of explication, substitution, omission, or addition, in translating irony as humor, and more importantly, the success or failure of dubbing sarcasm as humor is mostly determined by the translators' creativity, or lack thereof, and the language variant employed.

#### 4. Discussion

The present study is interested in the types of rhetorical strategies examined in the past decades, so data was collected in figure 2. Considering Fig. 2, five types of rhetorical strategies in humorous discourse have been examined by prior researchers. They are: "irony," "metaphor," "satire," "insults," and "metonymy." As seen from Fig. 2, several rhetorical strategies are examined in an article, which accounts for the largest proportion (35%). Six papers investigated irony in humorous discourses (Vigsø 2013; Ortega, 2013; Hirsch, 2020; Chernyshova, 2021; Yahiaoui et al., 2019), which is the most examined single rhetorical strategy by scholars. They explored irony in a variety of humor discourses or its role in humor, such as in film translation discourses (Yahiaoui et al., 2019), in media text (Chernyshova, 2021), and so on and so forth. Some researchers argue that irony is a difficult topic to grasp since it is intertwined with other forms of humor, such as satire and sarcasm (Yahiaoui et al., 2019). Therefore, we still have articles such as Aitbaeva et al. (2018) that examine satire and irony together in short stories by Kazakh satirists. However, papers do not discuss how to differentiate these similar rhetorical terms. It is the second-most discussed rhetorical strategy, and three papers have studied the relationship between metaphor and humorous utterances in detail. The included articles discussed metaphor in the discourse of media text (Droog, 2020; Stoyanova, 2021) and political ads (Piata, 2016). Satire was studied in two articles: one of which we have mentioned, written by Aitbaeva et al. (2018), examined satire in Kazakh satirists' short stories; the other one is Ryabova's (2021) paper about investigating humor and satire in Soviet society. The minority papers of the included articles are the rhetoric of insults (Orkibi, 2016) and metonymy (Tabacaru & Feyaerts, 2016). Although most of the included papers emphasized the crucial role of rhetoric in many aspects of humor discourses, they examined different types of rhetorical strategies in different contexts. This implies that certain rhetorical techniques are dominant in certain humorous discourses, which supports Berger's (1976) argument that humor is always composed of several humorous techniques, while one of them is in a dominant position and the others are in a secondary position.

Then, the authors aimed to investigate the study approaches and theories conducted in the previous studies. It is apparent from Table 1 that all the included reports in this systematic review adopted qualitative research methods. However, they have minimum differences in specific analysis approaches. Most of them used content analysis and discourse analysis approaches ( $n = 17$ ), while some of them used a discourse-historical approach (Kwon et al., 2020), discursive and linguo-cultural analysis (Stoyanova, 2021), and a complex linguistic-pragmatic approach (Chernyshova, 2021). A qualitative study is to understand what happened in some specific context (Crocker, 2009); it emphasizes the process of the study. Therefore, examining the rhetorical strategies in humorous discourse is a kind of qualitative discourse analysis, and qualitative research seems suitable for this kind of study. The theoretical framework applied in the prior studies is numerous, including humor and humor linguistic theories, a variety of rhetorical theories, and some other theories. One characteristic of the articles is that most of them use one theory in their articles, but some of them use several theories to address different examining factors. Another characteristic of the theories adopted in studies is that some researchers modify original theories to put forward the most suitable theory to meet the requirements of their study, for instance, Heidari-Shahreza (2017). These theories found in the included articles can provide a theoretical reference for further research, but which theory is the most suitable one still needs researchers to choose according to their specific research objectives, corpus, research methods, and other requirements of their studies. Furthermore, this study investigates the functions of rhetorical strategies in humorous discourses. The findings show that rhetorical strategies play a crucial role in a variety of humorous contexts, including literacy works, political discourses, media and communication discourses, jokes, comedies, and other kinds of humorous texts. The function of rhetorical strategies in humorous discourse has some characteristics as follows.

Firstly, although the main purpose of rhetorical strategies in different humorous discourses is to create humor and persuade the audience, there are differences in their roles in specific contexts. The rhetorical strategies of humorous discourse in literature are mainly intended to reflect the style of the literary work (Aitbaeva et al., 2018), reflect the personality charm of the characters in the works (Bednarz, 2013), or examine the scholars' insights on rhetoric and humor in the works (Waisanen, 2015). The function of rhetorical humor in political and social movement discourse is primarily to attempt discursive humor through rhetoric, appealing to the masses' participation and thus gaining their support for the purpose of social movements or politics. Rhetorical humor in political discourse is often called a powerful weapon by scholars. Rhetorical humor in political discourse usually uses the rhetorical strategies of insult, irony, satire, and metaphor to achieve rhetorical humor. Through this indirect way, one can ridicule or oppose political hegemony and social injustice, attract the attention of the government, and achieve policy reform and political purpose. Rhetorical, humorous discourse also has a different role in television media and in everyday communication. In television programs, rhetorical strategies are mainly used to achieve humor in discourse and to enhance the effectiveness of the program (Tabacaru & Feyaerts, 2015). In news media reports, media writers can

express their ideas and positions indirectly through rhetorical humor, hiding their real intentions (Chernyshova, 2021). At the same time, metaphors are considered an important means of creating humor in media discourse, which can help not only to produce humorous discourse but also to understand satirical news reports (Stoyanova, 2021; Droog et al., 2020). However, in everyday communication, rhetorical humor plays a role in regulating interpersonal relationships, resolving communicative crises, and promoting communicative efficiency (Vigsø 2013; Kwon et al., 2020). Rhetorical strategies have a more singular role in jokes and comedy than in the previous types of humorous discourse, and their main purpose is to help create humor and make the audience laugh, but Weaver (2012, 2015) argues that rhetorical strategies are present in some racist jokes and disagreement humor. In addition to the four categories of humorous contexts above, rhetorical strategies have been examined in conversation and translation. The role of rhetorical strategies in conversational humor is that, as a social strategy, rhetorical humor is closely related to social politeness, making the conversation funny while achieving the purpose of social communication (Ortega, 2013). Moreover, in translation, researchers have examined whether the translated target language reaches an accurate expression of rhetorical humor because rhetorical humor affects the accuracy and humorous effect of the target language translation. In conclusion, the role of rhetorical strategies is not the same in different humorous contexts and vice versa. The same rhetorical strategies can present different language effects in different humorous contexts, which depends on the communicative purpose of the language users, and speakers must choose different rhetorical strategies to achieve different communicative purposes according to the situation.

Additionally, some researchers claim that some rhetorical strategies have similar characteristics to humor, and they even try to propose an analytical model to analyze the rhetorical strategies in humorous discourse. For instance, Heidari-Shahreza (2017) discussed the advantages and disadvantages of previous rhetorical humor analysis methods and proposed a modified rhetorical humor identification typology for stand-up comedy. Droog and his team members proposed the "humoristic metaphors in satirical news (HMSN) typology" to demonstrate how satirists might use metaphors to materialize and transition between four different discourse modes. Also, Stoyanova (2021) argued the nature of metaphors and humor have a lot in common, and the contrast of the contradictory and the combination of the disproportionate exemplifies the relationship between metaphor and humor. She also argued that language is the result of thinking while being influenced by socio-cultural and other factors, so she adopted a series of metaphor-related analysis theories to interpret the humorous discourse of Bulgarian media text, which she calls the "Metaphorical model (M-model)." These models provide us with a good reference for analyzing the rhetorical strategies of certain humorous discourses, but we cannot contend that these analytical models are perfect because they correspond to a limited analysis of humorous contexts separately. In particular, a relatively universally applicable model for the analysis of rhetorical functions in humorous discourse has not been proposed, which needs to be further explored in future studies.

Finally, in terms of the number of relevant articles collected, the literature related to the examination of rhetorical strategies in humorous discourse is still relatively small, with only 20 articles that best meet the literature screening criteria. This indicates that the examination of rhetorical strategies in humorous discourse has not yet attracted enough interest from scholars. Although these articles emphasize the importance of rhetoric in humorous discourse, they always focus on the analysis of one rhetorical strategy (irony, metaphor, satire, etc.) in certain humorous contexts, and many of them are still in the stage of exploration and discovery. It has yet to be discussed how the role of rhetorical strategies changes with the humor situation and the affect factors of rhetorical choice. Therefore, the study of rhetorical strategies in humorous discourse is still virgin territory to be explored, and the factors affecting rhetorical choice in humorous discourse need to be further investigated.

## **5. Limitation and Implication**

However, the limitations of this study should also be addressed. Although the authors have tried their best to collect all relevant articles for review, some papers might have been missed. And this systematic review only included journals and articles from databases and registers. Books and other sources are excluded in the current review. Besides, only articles written in English are examined, and other language sources are excluded. Consequently, this study still has limitations in these aspects. To address these limitations, future studies should include reports from a broader range of data resources and languages.

The present study contributes to the study of rhetorical strategies in humorous discourses by shedding light on employing rhetorical strategies in humorous discourses. Also, this study presented a reference for future researchers who are interested in humor linguistic studies, and here are some suggestions for future researchers. Currently, there are still few studies on rhetorical strategies and humorous discourses, and many of these strategies have not been explored in humorous discourses. Linguists could examine more kinds of rhetorical strategies' roles in humorous

discourses, such as puns, exaggerations, etc. Furthermore, scholars could also try to conduct a comparative study on the rhetorical strategies used in different humorous discourses.

## 6. Conclusion

Through a systematic literature review of the previous studies on rhetorical strategies in humorous discourses, the authors have carefully examined rhetorical strategy types, research methods, applied theory frameworks, and the functions of rhetorical strategies in humorous discourses. The findings suggest several rhetorical strategies have been examined in different humorous texts, and some of them investigate one type of rhetorical device, while some of them study various rhetorical strategies in an article. Besides, the study approaches they used were qualitative research methods with diverse theoretical frameworks, mainly from the theories of humorous linguistics and rhetoric. However, some researchers modify theories according to the requirements of their study, which indicates the flexibility in the use of theories in such cross-disciplinary studies. Finally, this study spent more effort exploring the functions of rhetorical strategies in humorous texts. We found the role of rhetorical strategies is not the same in different humorous contexts and vice versa. The same rhetorical strategies can produce different language effects in different humorous contexts, which depend on the communicative purpose of the language user. The results of the present study also suggest that rhetoric can be found everywhere among human beings and their humorous discourses. It is worth investigating how rhetorical strategies affect humor production to help us gain a better understanding of the humor around us.

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