



Humor about Life of Immigrants in the U.S. in a Stand-Up Comedy Show *Ronny Chieng: Love to Hate It (2024)*

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze how the stand-up comedy show *Ronny Chieng: Love to Hate It (2024)* represents the life of immigrants in the U.S. Using Berger’s theory of humorous devices, the analysis identifies strategies such as exaggeration, redefinition, irony, ridicule, analogy, repetition, literalness, bombast, and self-deprecation. These devices enable Chieng to transform everyday immigrant struggles into comedic narratives that simultaneously entertaining and criticizing. Beyond technique, the study highlights the recurring themes in Chieng’s humorous material: stereotypical representations, experiences of discrimination, and challenges of cultural adaptation. The research reveals how Chieng satirizes racial misidentification, undermines xenophobic claims, and dramatizes generational and cultural misalignments. The analysis demonstrates that immigrant comedy functions as a mode of cultural negotiation, balancing insider critique with self-deprecating vulnerability. Ultimately, Chieng’s stand-up affirms the role of humor as both coping mechanism and cultural critique for immigrants navigating life in the U.S.

Keywords: Humorous Discourse; Stand-Up Comedy; U.S. immigrant; Ronny Chieng

INTRODUCTION

Stand-up comedy is an increasingly popular form of entertainment worldwide. Starting in the 1970s, stand-up comedy experienced a significant increase in popularity with the emergence of numerous comedy clubs. The increasing number of comedy clubs allowed more comedians, known as comics, to perform and hone their skills. In each performance, a comedian conveys material based on personal experiences, social phenomena, issues relevant to everyday life, and cultural reflections in a humorous and entertaining style [1]. This humor is also often used to reflect on experiences of discrimination, cultural adaptation, and the challenges of daily life [2]. Social issues, such as those experienced by immigrants in multicultural regions such as the U.S., have become interesting topics raised in stand-up comedy material.

Comedians of immigrant descent often use their cultural backgrounds as material, creating humorous discourse that is not only entertaining but also touches on deeper social issues [3]. Humorous discourse in stand-up comedy plays a crucial role in shaping and reflecting societal views on certain social issues, including the lives of immigrants in the U.S. Historically, narratives about immigrants have often been filled with stereotypes and inaccurate representations. Through stand-up comedy, comedians can deconstruct these narratives and present a more authentic perspective based on their personal experiences [4]. Similarly, Kuipers and Meyer argue that stand-up comedy serves not only as entertainment but also as a tool for communicating and negotiating social identities, as well as a means of criticizing social inequalities in a non-confrontational manner [5,6].

Among well-known comedians, Ronny Chieng is an Asian-American who explicitly address social issues through specific linguistic strategies and distinctive comedic styles. In his stand-up comedy performances, he often highlights the experiences of living as descendants of immigrants in the U.S. with a humorous approach that still touches on complex aspects of reality [7]. The humorous discourse he presents not only functions as entertainment, but also as a form of expression of cultural identity and critique of the social dynamics he experiences [8]. In linguistic studies, stand-up comedy humor can be analyzed

through the linguistic representations used, including word choice, discourse strategies, and the construction of gender identity in communicating humor.

Chieng in his show *Ronny Chieng: Asian Comedian Destroys America!* (2019) uses humor to discuss gender representation and cultural stereotypes between Asian and Western societies, particularly in how men and women are perceived in various aspects of life. According to Lee, Chieng uses linguistic strategies that reflect the experiences of Asian men amidst the dominance of Western masculinity culture, by critiquing gender expectations and biases often attached to men of Asian descent [9]. Chieng pokes fun at American society's perception of Asians, including the expectation that Asian men are often considered less masculine than white men. He also highlights how Asian and Western cultures have different views on success, hard work, and romance.

This study aims to analyze how Chieng's latest stand-up comedy show *Ronny Chieng: Love to Hate It* (2024) represent the lives of immigrants in the U.S. Chieng uses various discourse strategies in constructing humor, as Attardo stated, humor has certain mechanisms such as incongruity, superiority, and relief [10]. Based on the background above, the research problem can be formulated as how Chieng constructs humorous discourse representing the life of immigrant in the U.S. Using a discourse analysis approach, this study examines how the humor delivered by this comedian reflects the immigrant experience, constructs cultural identity, and critiques existing social dynamics. The results of this study are expected to provide deeper insight into the role of humor as an effective communication tool in discussing complex social issues.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method [11] to describe a phenomenon and its causes with a critical discourse analysis method [12] to examine the use of humor in a stand-up comedy performance as a medium for social criticism of the lives of immigrants in the U.S. The researcher uses documentation techniques in collecting data from stand-up comedy performance *Ronny Chieng: Love to Hate It* (2024) from the Netflix channel [13]. The application of documentation techniques requires an analytical approach in the form of content analysis. Data for content analysis can consist of words, phrases, clauses and sentences in the form of verbal utterances uttered by Chieng. The data is then interpreted using secondary data sourced from books, academic journals, magazine articles and research articles as well as interviews with Chieng obtained from various reference sources.

The research data was analyzed using qualitative methods, which describe the data in a comprehensive descriptive manner throughout the analysis process. There were several steps in data analysis. The first step was to transcribe utterances by watching videos with official subtitles into Microsoft Word. The second step was to sort the data by underlining important data relevant to the research topic. This step involved searching for contextual information online and understanding the discourse and propositions of utterances containing humor and social criticism. The data were analyzed using a critical discourse analysis approach with three main stages: description (identifying linguistic and rhetorical structures in humor); interpretation (analyzing how humor is constructed and understood by audiences); and explanation (examining the relationship between humor and the social structures being criticized).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a combined analysis of findings and discussion, thematically organized to explore Chieng's humorous material by: 1) examining linguistic elements Chieng's humorous material according to the theory of humorous devices by Berger [14], 2) examining the social context behind Chieng's humorous materials and connecting them to the social realities of immigrants in the U.S. including stereotypical representations, discrimination, and the challenges of cultural adaptation.

1. BERGER'S HUMOROUS DEVICES IN RONNY CHIENG: LOVE TO HATE IT (2024)

The stand-up comedy show *Ronny Chieng: Love to Hate It* (2024) is rich with Berger's humor devices, which he uses to turn personal experiences, cultural stereotypes, and immigrant realities into comedic narratives. By employing exaggeration, irony, ridicule, analogy, and other strategies, Chieng not only entertains but also reveals tensions at the heart of immigrant life in the U.S.

- a. **Exaggeration/Hyperbole:** amplifying a premise until the absurdity is evident, creating incongruity between scale and reality. In the fertility-treatment story, Chieng says, *"It's a meth lab in my kitchen as I'm mixing... sweating the whole time 'cause I'm scared I'll fuck up the measurements and kill my wife with these powerful pharmaceuticals"*. Here, he inflates his incompetence into a life-or-death scenario, creating incongruity between the task of mixing powder into liquid and the apocalyptic consequences he imagines. This hyperbole reflects immigrant anxieties about responsibility and failure, especially in high-stakes environments like healthcare in a foreign system, while making the tension laughable.
- b. **Definition/Redefinition:** reinterpreting a familiar term through his own criteria, producing a humorous reframing. Chieng redefines 'love America' as 'give America money' as he says, *"When you love something, you give it money... So when you go, 'Love America, USA, USA,' but 'Fuck U.S. tax'... you love America so much you want it to be poor?"*. This redefinition exposes the hypocrisy of nationalist rhetoric 'Love America, but fuck U.S. tax' that rejects taxation while professing devotion to the country. By redefining patriotism as financial responsibility, Chieng mocks the contradiction, showing how immigrant comedians often "translate" cultural discourse into logic to reveal its flaws.
- c. **Sarcasm/Irony:** stating the opposite of his intended meaning, relying on tone and context for the audience to catch the reversal. Chieng suggests *"But anyway, respect your elders"* immediately after a sarcastic roast of Chinese baby boomers' tendency to be easily persuaded that something is real or true in online media. This sarcastic reversal creates humor by contradiction. For immigrant audiences, this irony resonates with cultural ambivalence: torn between filial piety and exasperation at parental behaviors in modern contexts.
- d. **Ridicule/Put-down:** targeting groups, trends, or systems, often softened by self-inclusion or cultural insider status. On Chinese baby boomers, Chieng roasts Chinese baby boomers by saying *"Least fun of all the Asians. RoboCop programmed not to get scammed"*. The ridicule works because Chieng invokes his own Chinese identity, claiming insider license to critique. For immigrants, such ridicule reflects real generational frustrations while keeping the critique playful.
- e. **Analogy/Comparison:** linking unlike domains to expose absurdity or reframe the premise. Chieng frames baby boomer internet use as he says *"Watching baby boomers online is like watching babies wander into the kitchen, pulling down knives on themselves"*. The domestic imagery reframes digital incompetence as physical danger, making the generational gap concrete. Such analogy allows immigrant comedians to translate complex experiences (tech illiteracy, online scams) into universally relatable humor.
- f. **Repetition/Parallelism:** using recurring phrasing or syntactic patterns to build rhythm and anticipation before the punch. In his rant against MAGA (Make America Great Again) tax contradictions, Chieng repeats slogans *"Love America, USA! USA! Fuck U.S. tax"*. The patterned structure emphasizes the contradiction between professed patriotism and anti-tax sentiment. The rhythm mirrors political chant structures (*"USA! USA!"*), turning the rhetoric back on itself. For immigrant comedians, repetition often mimics dominant discourses to destabilize them from within.
- g. **Literalness/Misinterpretation:** taking figurative or oversimplified statements at face value to expose flawed logic. Literalness arises when Chieng takes figurative speech at face value. At a MAGA barbecue, he recalls, *"They're like, 'Touch my gun.' And I'm like, 'I don't have time to attend depositions'"*. Here, he interprets "touch my gun" not as camaraderie but as a legal liability. The humor comes from a clash between social intention and immigrant hyper-caution, reflecting how cultural outsiders may misread idioms and rituals.
- h. **Bombast:** overblown, theatrical language that elevates minor grievances into epic declarations. When mocking anti-tax sentiment, Chieng declares *"You want your country to be a street beggar on the street!"*. The redundancy of "street beggar on the street" intensifies the insult, turning tax avoidance into an epic betrayal. Bombast, in this sense, dramatizes immigrant critique of American contradictions with overblown rhetoric, making them both comic and cutting.
- i. **Teasing/Self-deprecation:** shifting the joke target onto himself to soften earlier aggression and build audience rapport. In a parenting bit, Chieng imagines berating a hypothetical child for wanting to do stand-up: *"Do you think there's any chance you'll be funnier than me?!... Go to law school! ... Is what my father said to me"*. The punchline shifts the ridicule from the imagined child to his own past,

reframing it as intergenerational repetition. This self-deprecation humanizes him, balancing critique with vulnerability, and illustrating the immigrant cycle of parental pressure and disappointment.

Each device from Berger's framework is vividly embodied in his stand-up comedy show *Ronny Chieng: Love to Hate It* (2024). Chieng uses them not merely for laughs, but to articulate immigrant anxieties, critique American contradictions, and bridge the cultural gap between immigrant parents, second-generation children, and mainstream U.S. audiences.

2. **RONNY CHIENG: LOVE TO HATE IT (2024) AND IMMIGRANT LIFE IN THE U.S.**

Ronny Chieng's stand-up explores immigrant life in America by addressing how Asian immigrants are represented, treated, and expected to adapt within a society that both welcomes and marginalizes them. Chieng moves between sharing his real opinions, performing as his stage character, and delivering prepared jokes. This approach keeps his criticism light and allows him to both poke fun at and relate to his subjects, which is important when talking about sensitive issues like race, taxes, and safety. His humor highlights three recurring themes: stereotypical representations, discrimination, and the challenges of cultural adaptation.

Asian immigrants in the U.S. are often viewed through monolithic or reductive stereotypes, collapsing diverse nationalities and identities into a single 'Chinese' label. Chieng mocks this when MAGA supporters blame him for China's actions: "*Why are you yelling at me about China? I'm from Malaysia. We are the ones who lost the plane*". This joke illustrates how immigrants are forced into national identities they do not claim, reducing them to misrepresentation. By exaggerating Malaysia's association with MH370, Chieng uses self-deprecating identity play to critique the absurdity of such misidentification. Another example comes from his Hollywood encounters: "*Someone's like, 'Yo, were you that guy in Shang-Chi?' And I'm like, 'Yes... but not the main guy'*". Here, the stereotype shifts to media representation, where Asian actors are being misidentified with one another. Chieng's humor exposes the limited cultural visibility of Asians in America, seeing representation without an appreciation of an individual.

Chieng also addresses the discrimination immigrants face, both subtle and overt. Reflecting his mother's priorities, he jokes: "*She's not even scared of Asian hate. She's more scared of inflation*". The line brings the two immigrant anxieties: the external threat of racial violence and the internalized threat of financial instability. While Asian hate crimes surged in recent years, Chieng highlights how immigrant parents often normalize discrimination, focusing instead on survival. This reflects that humor provides a buffer, allowing immigrants to address painful realities indirectly. Chieng also mocks the contradictions in anti-immigrant rhetoric: "*My dad was a good immigrant. He came to America to study... and then he left. He didn't take anyone's job*". This ironic statement satirizes xenophobic claims that immigrants "steal jobs." By portraying his father as the 'ideal immigrant' who contributes nothing lasting to America, Chieng exposes the absurdity of discriminatory narratives. Through irony, he undermines exclusionary rhetoric while reframing immigrant presence as neutral or beneficial.

Cultural adaptation is a recurring struggle for immigrants, often dramatized in everyday experiences. Chieng depicts generational adaptation gaps when describing Chinese baby boomers' paranoia about scams: "*Chinese baby boomers tense up when they leave the house... until their body curls into a C for Chinese*". The image humorously dramatizes how immigrants remain guarded in public, shaped by scarcity and mistrust. For their American-born children, however, such behaviors can be embarrassing or alienating. The joke illustrates how adaptation is uneven across generations, producing both laughter and tension. Another example involves his discomfort at American gun culture: "*They're like, 'Touch my gun.' And I'm like, 'I don't have time to attend depositions'*". By interpreting the invitation literally as legal liability, Chieng reveals the challenges immigrants face in decoding social rituals. What Americans see as friendship, he sees as potential danger, underscoring cultural misalignment. Even in his professional life, cultural adaptation is framed economically: "*I do this in America—'Fuck the president'—money comes in. I do this in Malaysia—jail*". Here, adaptation is not only about fitting in socially but also about navigating freedoms and risks. America provides opportunities for speech and profit, but only by adapting to its cultural norms of commodified dissent.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of *Ronny Chieng: Love to Hate It* (2024) reveals how Berger's humorous devices—exaggeration, redefinition, irony, ridicule, analogy, repetition, literalness, bombast, and self-deprecation—

structure Chieng's comedic style. These strategies transform everyday immigrant experiences into exaggerated narratives that are both absurd and insightful. By inflating small tasks into life-or-death operations, redefining patriotism through financial responsibility, or ridiculing generational quirks, Chieng highlights the incongruities of immigrant life while sustaining audience laughter. His careful use of sarcasm and self-deprecation also ensures that critique is balanced with vulnerability, making his humor both biting and relatable.

At the same time, the themes of immigrant life in the U.S., stereotypical representations, discrimination, and cultural adaptation, run through his material. Chieng's jokes about being mistaken for other Asians, or being blamed for China's actions, expose the persistence of reductive stereotypes. His ironic portrayal of his father as the "ideal immigrant who left" critiques xenophobic narratives of job theft, while his accounts of parental paranoia, economic anxieties, and generational clashes show the difficulties of cultural adaptation. By dramatizing these struggles in comedic form, Chieng articulates the paradox of immigrant life: the need to survive within structures of exclusion while finding pride and resilience in difference.

Together, these findings suggest that humor operates for Chieng as more than comic entertainment, it is a mode of cultural negotiation. His stand-up transforms stereotypes into identity play, reframes discrimination into ironic critique, and softens cultural misalignments with laughter. In doing so, *Ronny Chieng: Love to Hate It* (2024) affirms the role of immigrant comedy as both social commentary and coping mechanism, enabling immigrants and wider audiences alike to reflect on the contradictions of American life through humor.

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