CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Fresh Off the Boat (2015), directed by Nahnatchka Khan, is an American television sitcom that adapted the autobiography of a Taiwan-American chef, Eddie Huang. Although the Huang is ethnically Chinese and sometimes identified themselves as Chinese within the series, canonically speaking they are Taiwanese American. The show mainly follows the story of Eddie Huang in his childhood, after his family moved from Washington DC, to Orlando to open a cowboy-themed steakhouse. The story of the show revolves around the struggles of each member of the Huang family in their everyday lives, often showcasing humorous situations that arise from the cultural differences between the Huang and their neighbors. As a sitcom, the story focuses on the comedic aspect that is depicted through the interaction of various characters within the show. One way the writer of the series showcases the humor in the show is through the use of sarcasm between the characters, especially the family member.

One of the primary sources of humor in sitcoms is sarcasm. Sarcasm is often used by the characters within the show to express criticism, disagreement on certain situation, and expressing humor indirectly. Besides its main function as a humor and comedy, sarcasm may also reflect cultural values and communication patterns. Since the interpretation and use of sarcasm are highly dependent on social and

cultural contexts, examining sarcastic expressions can provide insight into how a particular culture is represented through language.

Studies regarding *Fresh Off the Boat* that has been done before mainly focuses on the cultural aspect of the series. This fact proves that the series is interesting from cultural standpoint because of its Taiwanese American characters representation. However, from a linguistic perspective, the series remains relatively underexplored. In particular, the use of sarcasm arising from the characters' comedic interactions has not received significant attention. The combination of frequent sarcastic expressions and strong Taiwanese American cultural representation makes the series an intriguing subject for examining the relationship between culture and language use.

Fresh Off the Boat season 1, is an ideal object for this research due to its Taiwanese American story background and the involvement of Eddie Huang (the writer of the original memoir) in its production in season 1 as a producer and narrator. Since the study mainly revolves around the Taiwanese American representation from sarcasm usage perspective, a more accurate representation through season 1 of the show is considered to be more suitable for the study. This study provides a detailed explanation of certain cultural tendencies that appear when Taiwanese American characters use a sarcastic expression, aiming to analyze the connection between sarcasm usage and the Taiwanese American culture depicted throughout the show.

1.2 Research Question:

From the background study explanation three questions can be formulated, those are:

1. What are the types of sarcasm appearing in the *Fresh Off the Boat* season 1?

2. What are the purposes of the usage of sarcasm in the *Fresh off the Boat* season 1?

3. How does the Taiwanese American culture influence the usage of sarcastic utterances in the *Fresh Off the Boat* Season 1?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to answer the research question that already been formulated before, which are:

1. To describe the types of sarcasm used in the *Fresh Off the Boat* season 1.

2. To explain the reasons of the usage of sarcasm in the movie *Fresh Off the Boat* season 1.

3. To explain how Taiwanese American culture influences the production of sarcastic utterances in the show.

1.4 Previous Studies

Fresh Off the Boat has been an object for research for some of the previously done studies. From a cultural perspective, this series has been the main object of some researchers. For example, Chen (2023) analysed the series from Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions; the study explains how the Huang, although still sticking to their Chinese roots, can still adapt to the American custom. Consistent with the previous research, Ernawati *et al*. (2025) analysed the series using Fiske's three-level

semiotic framework and found that Chinese culture and stereotypes are depicted through Jessica Huang using a range of visual, verbal, and behavioral signs such as parenting style, household tradition, and attachment to traditions and beliefs.

In contrast with the previously mentioned studies, these studies look the series in a more critical lens. For example, Hang and Thanh (2018), in their study of model minority stereotypes in *Fresh Off the Boat*, argue that the show does depict such stereotypes through its portrayal of Asian characters. However, they note that the series also adds a realistic and humane dimension to these stereotyped figures, allowing audiences to relate to and accept the representation. Nguyen (2019), in her undergraduate thesis study that focuses on genre and humor in *Fresh Off the Boat*, suggests that despite having mostly Asian leads and being written by an Asian writer, the representation often feels shallow. She argues that in an effort to attract a wider audience, the show oversimplifies many Asian American narratives, making them more 'palatable' for mainstream viewers.

These previous studies reveal that there are multiple perspectives regarding the portrayal of Asian American characters within the show. While some researchers view F*resh Off the Boat* as a positive representation of Taiwanese American culture, others argue that the series relies on simplified portrayals and stereotypes to appeal to a broader audience. Despite the differences in perspectives and opinions regarding the series, the studies generally agree that it is an important piece of media for discussing Asian-American culture and identity.

There are various studies that have been conducted using Camp (2012) and Attardo (2002) theory of sarcasm. First, Ramadhan & Setiasari (2023) study how

the character utilizes sarcasm through the utterance produced by the cast or character in *the Friends* TV series; this study found that propositional sarcasm is the most frequently used type of sarcasm, and sophistication is the most frequent used purpose. This finding suggests that the character in *Friends* TV series mainly used sarcasm to play with language in order to create humor. Shelldyriani & Munandar (2021) focuses on the sarcastic expression and its relation with power and social distance. The study found that in a close relationship, such as among friends, Propositional Sarcasm and Illocutionary Sarcasm are commonly used. The study also found that individuals with a higher power hierarchy tend to use the more direct types of sarcasm such as illocutionary and propositional.

A study by Bachtiar & Hardjanto (2018) examines sarcastic utterances found in the films Fantastic Four and Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer. The study reveals that the most frequently used type of sarcasm in these films is illocutionary sarcasm, which indicates that speakers tend to express an attitude opposite to that of a sincere utterance. The findings also suggest that, in terms of politeness, sarcasm can mitigate the impact of a literal expression. Furthermore, the study notes that, compared to previous research, British speakers tend to use sarcasm more frequently than American speakers, suggesting that Americans are generally more direct in their communication style. Lastly, a study conducted by Cahyani (2017), which analyzes sarcasm in the American sitcom The Big Bang Theory, finds that the most frequently used purpose of sarcasm is sophistication, indicating that the characters mainly employ sarcasm to create a humorous effect in their utterances.

Some research that has been conducted before shows that there are other factors that affect sarcasm. For example, Szymaniak & Kałowski (2020) stated that there is a positive connection between trait anger and the use of self-reported sarcasm; additionally, the study also found that sarcasm does not require an apparent emotional reaction, which makes a high-trait anger individual often describe themselves as more sarcastic because it gives them the feeling of control.

Studies regarding the effect of sociocultural variables on sarcasm communication online by Oprea & Magdy (2020) suggest that sociocultural variables of interest significantly increased the effectiveness of sarcastic communication; this study also stated that age was the most influential factor, followed by English language nativeness and gender. Lastly, the study conducted by Zhu & Filik (2024) found that different cultures and social statuses impact the audience's feelings towards sarcasm, and the results show that with the same social status, a different culture perceives sarcasm quite differently.

Sarcasm behaves differently in different contexts, a study done by Riandika *et al*. (2025) found that sarcasm functions differently in different movie genres, specifically horror and comedy. In comedy, sarcasm functions as an important humorous element which draws the audience's attention. In the horror genre, sarcasm tends to create tension and influence the overall perception of the narrative. Though limited by only two genres, this study shows that in a different circumstance, sarcasm perceived and acted differently.

From the various previous studies that have been shown in this section, it can be seen that *Fresh Off the Boat* has been previously researched by other

scholars. The studies on these objects, however, are more focused on cultural representation portrayed through cinema and not from the linguistic viewpoint. In particular, the use of sarcasm remains underexplored, despite the fact that the series is a comedy that frequently employs sarcastic language as part of its humor. From other studies it can also be seen that sarcasm can interact with and be affected by various variables such as genre, emotion, gender, age, and culture. These studies prove that *Fresh Off the Boat* is an underexplored object in linguistic field. Moreover, as a comedy series, sarcasm is frequently used by the characters as a communicative strategy. This research fills the gap of those said studies by investigating how culture, especially Taiwanese American culture that is portrayed through cinematic representation, can affect language used in sarcastic utterances.

1.5 Scope of The Study

This study analyses the connection between the usage of sarcasm and the communication strategy utilized by Taiwanese American characters, aiming to provide a comprehensive explanation of the sarcasm phenomenon that occurs in *Fresh Off the Boat* Season 1. This study exclusively analyses the sarcastic verbal expression of the Taiwanese American characters that are present throughout the show and ignores nonverbal sarcasm and sarcasm that is made by non-Taiwanese American characters.

The study classifies the types of sarcasm using Camp's theory of sarcasm and Attardo's purpose of sarcasm theory. The theory is used for grouping the larger data in order to find the tendencies and strategies that Taiwanese American characters might have within the show.

In addition, this study examines sarcasm within the context Taiwanese American strategies that is represented in the series. It does not attempt to generalize findings to all Taiwanese American cultures or real-life communication practices. While the Taiwanese American communication tendencies are supported by previous research, the conclusions of this study remain limited to the series' representation