



THE PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF IRONY AND SARCASM IN ENGLISH HUMOROUS DISCOURSE

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Abstract. Irony and sarcasm are prominent pragmatic devices in English humorous discourse through which speakers express attitudes, evaluations, criticism, and interpersonal meanings indirectly. Although the two phenomena are closely related, they differ in communicative orientation and pragmatic intensity. Irony commonly involves an apparent discrepancy between the expressed proposition and the intended interpretation, whereas sarcasm tends to carry a sharper evaluative or critical force. This article examines the pragmatic functions of irony and sarcasm in English humorous discourse, focusing on contextual interpretation, speaker attitude, implicit evaluation, interpersonal communication, and humorous effect.

Keywords: irony, sarcasm, pragmatics, humorous discourse, implicit meaning, context, evaluation, communication.

Humorous communication frequently allows speakers to express meanings that would sound too direct, serious, or confrontational if communicated explicitly. Among the linguistic resources used for this purpose, irony and sarcasm occupy a particularly important position. They enable speakers to construct an utterance whose surface interpretation does not fully correspond to the attitude being communicated. As a result, the hearer must interpret the utterance in relation to the surrounding situation, the relationship between participants, and the speaker's communicative purpose.

Irony has traditionally been associated with the expression of an intended meaning that differs from the apparent meaning of an utterance. In humorous discourse, this difference may generate surprise and amusement. Sarcasm is often considered a more pointed form of indirect evaluation, frequently associated with ridicule, criticism, or negative interpersonal positioning. Although the boundaries between irony and sarcasm are not always absolute, their pragmatic effects can be distinguished according to the degree of criticism, emotional involvement, and interpersonal force they convey (Dynel, 2013).

Methodology. The study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to examine representative examples of irony and sarcasm in English humorous discourse. The examples are analyzed according to their linguistic form, contextual conditions, implied interpretation, and communicative function.



Irony as a Source of Humorous Contrast. One of the most important functions of irony is the creation of contrast between an expressed evaluation and the actual circumstances. Consider the following example: *“What a beautiful day!”* If the speakers are standing outside during heavy rain and strong wind, the statement may clearly be interpreted ironically. The speaker does not simply describe the weather. Instead, the positive expression highlights the unpleasantness of the actual situation.

The humorous effect is created because the hearer recognizes that the literal interpretation is inconsistent with contextual evidence. The positive wording consequently acquires a negative or humorous interpretation. This demonstrates that irony often depends on the hearer's ability to compare the utterance with the situation rather than interpret the words independently.

Sarcasm as Indirect Criticism. Sarcasm differs from less confrontational forms of irony because it commonly contains a stronger critical or mocking component. For example: *“Brilliant! You forgot your presentation again.”* The adjective *brilliant* normally expresses positive evaluation. However, the second part of the utterance makes clear that the speaker does not genuinely praise the addressee. Instead, the apparently positive expression communicates criticism.

The sarcastic effect becomes stronger because the speaker refers to a repeated failure. The utterance therefore performs an interpersonal function in addition to creating humor. It evaluates the addressee's behavior while avoiding a completely direct statement such as “You are very careless.”

Sarcasm can consequently function as a socially recognizable form of criticism. Its interpretation depends on prosody in spoken discourse, contextual knowledge, previous interaction, and the relationship between participants. Without these elements, a sarcastic statement may be misunderstood as sincere praise.

Sarcasm and Interpersonal Relations. Sarcasm may also serve to regulate interpersonal relationships. Its effect depends considerably on the degree of familiarity between participants. Among close friends, sarcastic remarks may function as playful teasing and contribute to solidarity. Between unfamiliar individuals, however, the same expression may be perceived as hostile or offensive.

Consider: *“Of course you remembered my birthday. I can see the card right here.”*

If there is no card and the addressee has forgotten the birthday, the statement is sarcastic. Among close friends, it may be interpreted humorously. In a more formal relationship, however, it may be understood primarily as criticism. This example illustrates that the pragmatic interpretation of sarcasm is not determined solely by linguistic form. Social relationships and contextual expectations contribute substantially to the final interpretation. Sarcasm can therefore simultaneously create humor and negotiate interpersonal distance.

Conclusion Irony and sarcasm represent significant pragmatic resources in English humorous discourse. Their effectiveness results from the relationship between apparent linguistic meaning and the interpretation constructed by the hearer. Irony commonly produces





humor through contextual contrast, while sarcasm often adds a stronger evaluative, critical, or mocking dimension. The analysis shows that both devices perform several communicative functions. They can create humorous effects, express implicit evaluations, communicate speaker attitudes, soften or intensify criticism, and influence interpersonal relationships. Context is particularly important because identical expressions may function as sincere statements, irony, or sarcasm depending on the communicative situation.

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