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# THE ROLE OF IRONY IN EXPRESSING IMPOLITENESS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper studies the ways in which verbal irony can be used as an impoliteness tool. From this aspect verbal irony is investigated as a politeness means or an impoliteness tool depending on the strength of criticism, in this case the main matter is equality and inequality in interlocutors' status. In this case face-saving, face-aggravating strategies happen. The other feature related to verbal irony, its intentionality is studied for intended and unintended irony. Intended and unintended irony is classified as planned and unplanned irony. Irony is analyzed as a linguistics means of impoliteness in the case of over-politeness, for the feature of self-image save and the character of its cancellability. There is little research about irony as an impoliteness tool, or the impolite function of irony, its intentionality, examining the strength of irony depending on the interlocutor's power differences. In this paper, verbal irony will not be discussed with other types of irony, i.e., situational, dramatic.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION.

Politeness has a significant position in recent research. The most researchable area relating to these terms is to study common linguistic means for both impoliteness and politeness. One of them is irony. At the beginning of the article, irony as an impoliteness tool is analyzed through an over-polite situation, the cancellability of irony, and its intentionality as the reason why interlocutors choose irony when they want to make an impolite remark instead of choosing a direct way.

In the section on strength of criticism, it is dealt with how irony is used among people of equal or unequal status. In this section, irony is accepted not only as a face-saving strategy but also as a face-attack strategy. These features (face-saving and face-aggravating strategies) balance to classify irony as a politeness mean and an impoliteness tool.

In linguistic research, politeness and impoliteness have taken on important roles recently as areas to be searched. The problems related to politeness and impoliteness can be connected with searching for the same linguistic meaning. One such linguistic tool is irony. It is based on human cognition, human relationships, and psychology. Analyzing irony from the impoliteness aspect, an effort is made to discern various kinds of irony. These kinds are called subtypes of irony, such as jocular irony, non-sarcastic irony, ironic sarcasm, and sarcasm. They are used to different degrees of offensiveness. The speakers use irony when they intend to make an impolite remark or to criticize instead of saying it in a direct way. In contrast to this approach, irony can be used for humorous purposes or for fun. This case is usually realized during the conversation of friends or people who have close knits with each other [Tselika, 2014: p. 90].

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY OF THIS PAPER.**

Irony is used for various purposes, such as humoristic way, fun and also make criticism resulting in interlocutor's discomfort, insult and other negative states. In this case, irony has double nature, on the one side, it denotes humor such as jocular irony, on the other side, this term expresses insult such as sarcasm. The aim of this research is pointing irony which has dual role, to analyze irony as not only face-saving strategy, but also face-aggravating strategy, to define the relation with sarcasm when irony denotes insult, in face-attack strategy.

The investigation of irony is done theoretically by means of argumentation in previous study and illustrated with examples using the method of linguistic analysis and linguistic description.

### **I. What is irony?**

#### **Irony: A linguistic mean of impoliteness.**

There are several views about irony from different perspectives. As an example, G.Leech's irony principle is based on his theory of politeness (Leech, 1983: p. 83) and the distinction of irony as meaning replacement (Kapogianni, 2013: pp. 48–49). The term irony refers to a meaning that is not opposite of what is said naturally. This approach is considered to be superior. E.Kapogianni's classification is based on this approach, and its types are as follows:

Irony (non-sarcastic), ironic sarcasm, and sarcasm (non-ironic).

Different types of irony carry different degrees of offensiveness, and they balance between politeness and impoliteness. These types are relevant to E.Kapogianni's classification, and they accommodate jocular irony and humor (Kapogianni, 2013: p. 36). Jocular irony is a form of irony that, but it doesn't criticize. Non-sarcastic irony can express not only a positive but also a negative attitude. When it refers to a negative attitude, it doesn't address an insult to any particular person. Ironic sarcasm expresses negative words. These words are considered insults to some extent. According to the author, sarcasm is the highest degree of criticism. Negative irony vs. (vice versa) Positive irony conveys positive evaluations at the sentence level but expresses an unpleasant opinion. For example:

*What a lovely dress! (in the sense of an unlovely dress).*

Positive irony is used less than negative irony. Because, in positive irony, the sentence has negative words; however, these words are used in the meaning of praise and appreciation. To sum up, negative irony expresses criticism and has an impolite effect on the addressee.

In this article, irony is described as a tool because it is considered a critical or offensive way that the interlocutors use it [Leech, 1983: p. 82]. There are different types of irony based on criticism. Various irony types describe different degrees of offensiveness. As an example, jocular irony and non-sarcastic irony don't always express criticism but express a positive attitude. Sarcasm and ironic sarcasm are based on criticism. The borderline between politeness and impoliteness is not obvious, so we have difficulties defining irony as an impolite or polite strategy. So, this feature makes irony a tricky case. To my mind, analyzing irony from the context as an impolite or polite *strategy* is based on the situation. In one situation, the utterance of irony is interpreted as an impoliteness tool; in another situation, the same ironic expression is accepted as a polite mean. In this sense, irony is classified from different sides. They are following sections.

#### **1) The case of over-politeness.**

According to the view-point of linguists, politeness interferes with impoliteness, so it is used as negative irony. L.G. Lachenicht, mentioned that overpoliteness can especially appear in an off-record impoliteness strategy [Lachenicht, 1980: p. 619]. Over-politeness is expressed in different conversations, especially in family talks. For example:

*While Mom was talking to her child, she mentioned to him how dirty the room was:*

*Mom said:*

*"Would you mind very much if I asked you to consider cleaning up your room sometimes this year?" [Colston, 2007: pp. 5–6].*

In this statement, the addressee is criticized by means of over-politeness.

#### **2) Irony as self-containment (self-image save).**

In this case, irony can express the reasons for critical appraisal to the opponent in a certain situation. This type of irony is defined as self-containment. According to S.Dews, controlling our emotions is more acceptable than verbally attacking in a certain situation. This strategy shows emotional control in a dissatisfying situation. The speaker prefers to save his or her image to verbally attack. Therefore, he or she uses this form. For example:

*Two people approach a door. The first person will let the door open for the second person, who is carrying a heavy box. At that time, the first man opens the door, but he doesn't keep the door open. The second person, carrying a heavy box, says:*

*"Don't hold the door open; I'll just say open sesame"* [Kumon-Nakamura, 2007: p. 58-59].

### **3) Irony as cancellability.**

The cancellability of irony gives different interpretations and allows the speaker to avoid using offensive words [Dews, 2007: p. 313]. For example:

*During the lecture, a student said to the professor:*

*"All students aren't pleased with this lesson". As attending this course is compulsory, they have to participate: "Interesting lecture"* [Dews, 2007: p. 313].

This interpretation can be differently analyzed by both the professor and the audience. So, the professor could understand it literally, but the rest of the class interpreted it ironically.

Finally, the cancellability of irony expresses negative irony (i.e., if the meaning is negative, the form is positive). The reason for this type being called the cancellability of irony is to be understood differently by the addressee and the audience (the group). So the first person (the recipient) can interpret clearly, and the rest of the people understand ironically. To my mind, this type relates to implicit and explicit meaning. The explicit meaning is for the recipient, but the implicit meaning is for the audience.

### **4) Irony in the meaning of intention.**

In this section, the linguists find out whether the speaker intends or doesn't intend a negative statement to affect the addressee. In author's works such as S.Attardo [Attardo, 2007: p. 137] and R.W.Gibbs [Gibbs, 2012: pp. 105-7], it is analyzed that irony is based either intentionally or unintentionally. This statement (intentional and unintentional way) is explained more detailed in the experiment that is used in R.W.Gibbs work [Gibbs, 1995: pp. 191-2]. That experiment shows intended and unintended moments of the same statement.

#### **a) Intended irony.**

Intended irony can be called planned irony. The context that is analyzed in R.W.Gibb's Work [Gibbs, 1995: pp. 191-2] is about university study. John and Bill were talking in a statistics class, while they decided to share an answer secretly for a statistics exam. When the exam happened, they kept their decision. So, in that exam, they cheated on each other. After the exam, they behaved as if nobody saw their secret cooperation in the exam. That night, a friend came to ask whether they tried to share their answers or not. In that case, John and Bill looked at each other, and John answered [Gibbs, 1995: p. 191], *"I wouldn't ever be involved in any cheating"*. If we interpret the statement above, we can see some factors. First, the structure or form of the sentence doesn't show any impoliteness, but the explanation of that structure has an impolite effect on the recipient. To my consideration, that example is used in the meaning of "telling a lie". As the word "telling a lie" also expresses impoliteness, the above-mentioned answer is considered impolite.

#### **b) unintended irony.**

In this type of irony, R.W. Gibbs analyzed the same answer in a different situation.

*On the eve of the exam, John and Bill were working for it, but Bill didn't prepare as well as John. So he decided to cheat on John without John being aware. After the exam, a friend approached them and asked about their cheating. John, who doesn't know of Bill cheating on him, answered, "I would never be involved in any cheating"* [Gibbs, 1995: p.191-2].

This example the sentence intensifies the dramatic irony that appears in the speaker's utterance. Dramatic irony is expressed in the utterance without the speaker's awareness, but the audience knows the clear meaning of that sentence [Colston, 2007a: p. 97].

Looking through the types of irony as an impoliteness tool, we can see that all forms of irony as convenient means are based on negative irony.

## **3. DISCUSSIONS.**

### **Strength of criticism.**

The definition of irony is the power differences among interlocutors. This column deals with face-aggravating strategies that increase the strength of criticism. According to some linguists, such as J.Jorgensen, S.Dews, P.Brown and S.C.Lewinson irony is not only a face-saving strategy but also a face-aggravating strategy to criticize the addressee. Face-aggravating strategies usually appear among the interlocutors who have different powers in society. So, power distinctions play a remarkable role in

increasing criticism. From this side, irony is based on equality or inequality (ya inequality) among interlocutors. It has two forms: a) irony among unequals (ya inequals); b) irony among equals.

a) Irony among unequals (ya inequals).

In "politeness theory" by P. Brown and S.C. Lewinson, irony is regarded as a linguistic means of indirect strategy for saving face. In this case, it is used as mock politeness. Some linguists, such as J. Culpeper, G.N. Leech and H.L. Colston, don't consider irony a polite tool because it carries an ironic tone. It is considered that, this approach is necessarily true because an ironic statement has negative traits that can be expressed in its form or meaning. Therefore, irony is used as the linguistic realization of impoliteness.

G.N. Leech analyzes irony within examples in his work.

He claimed that irony is not polite as it expresses an ironic tone. The claim is analyzed in the following example:

*The customs officials who knew the woman's breaking the law said to her:*

*"Haven't you something to declare? [Leech, 1983: p.160].*

This sentence is used in the meaning of "Do you have anything to declare?" Another example is from the linguist Culpeper's work. The speaker tells the addressee that he or she (the addressee) is stunned:

*Do you have sawdust for brains? [Culpeper, 2011: p. 184].*

*(This statement is used in the meaning of "you are stupid.")*

While analyzing these examples, we can realize that irony is more effective in an indirect way than a direct way. When such statements are made by interlocutors who have different or the same power, the negative effect of irony on the hearer (especially the addressee) will be different. The negative effectiveness is based on power differences, so the following example shows the power differences, too. The conversation happens between the interlocutors, who have unequal status.

*Manuel was a capable player on the soccer team, but it was impossible for him to play in the city championship as he was extremely sick. When the team captain knew about it, he said:*

*"We'll win the championship for sure now" [Colston, 2007a: pp. 322-3].*

The criticism in the utterance hurts the hearer's face, and it is more offensive than the literal meaning of the same sentence. In this case, the superior uses an off-record directness strategy in order to cause pain to the hearer. This situation mainly happens among unequals. So, power plays a major role.

b) Irony among equals.

Irony can be used among interlocutors who have the same power. Such a situation helps to increase solidarity; therefore, this kind of irony is called jocular irony [Culpeper, 1996: p. 352]. We consider that, this kind of irony sometimes causes the addressee's face to lose its shape. From this context, it is related to the linguistic meaning of impoliteness. On the first side, ironically, increasing solidarity is based on the addressee's preferring the contextual meaning of the utterance to its literal meaning. So, from a contextual meaning, it expresses mock politeness; from a literal meaning, the irony means impoliteness. The term mock politeness is related to P. Brown and S.C. Lewinson's work [Brown, Lewinson, 1987: p. 265]. When looking through other works related to this issue, we come across that this kind of irony (irony among equals) is considered a mock impoliteness tool. We also consider that if any utterance contains impoliteness in its inner or formal meaning, it can be called impoliteness. For example: The conversation between the interlocutors has the same power.

*"It's always so nice to have you (Sebastian) in class" [Dews, 2007: p. 304].*

In this context, Sebastian seldom participated in the class. When he was at the lesson, he was always disruptive. Once he was present at the class, his classmate said this to him.

While analyzing this example, opposite traits belonging to Sebastian are expressed. By doing it, irony happens. This utterance is not accepted by the addressee in an insulting manner. If its direct meaning is assumed by the opponent, an arguable moment can possibly happen. The first acceptance is assessed as mock impoliteness, and the second assumption is expressed as inherent impoliteness.

Generally, an utterance among people with unequal power is more offensive than a statement made by interlocutors with the same status. However, the linguists classify both kinds of utterances, depending on equality or inequality, as cases of mock politeness. These cases are shown in the works of J. Culpeper [Culpeper, 1996: p. 356, Culpeper, 2003: p. 155, Culpeper, 2005: p.42] and Brown P. and S.C. Lewinson [6, p.265]. In this case, irony is not polite but mock-polite. Mock politeness expresses the FTA by using a politeness strategy called surface politeness. For example: The conversation happens between a soldier of the lowest rank and the company Sergeant Major. One of the major's jobs is to



inspect the barracks. During morning inspection, the major sees the private's not having his hair cut and reprimands that soldier:

*The major: First, go to the barber and say your request sitting in the chair. He (the barber) will cut your hair. Why didn't you do it? Do you have problem in saying your problem? Then why didn't you get it?*

*The soldier: No sir.*

*The major: Explain to me.*

*The soldier: The queue is too long and I ...*

*The major: Oh dear, you had to queue up [Bousfield, 2008a: p. 119].*

In this example, the major's ridiculing the private's not standing in the queue for a haircut shows irony, which contains mock politeness.

Additionally, G.N.Leech defines irony as a friendly way of being offensive [Leech, 1983: p. 144]. In this case, irony expresses criticism without appearing impolite [Colston, 2007a: p. 200]. For example:

When the lieutenant (O. Neill) spoke about the ongoing operation, he disliked his worker's approach even though she was right.

*The superior: The last time I checked, you were an analyst not an operation specialist.*

*(long pause)*

*The lieutenant: Good work lieutenant.*

*The lieutenant: Thank you sir, it was good to get involved and do some good.*

*The superior: Now the problem is intel officers shouldn't get involved, you monitor, analyze. You need to know the fine art of detachment lieutenant.*

It is an extract from the film "J.I. Jane" directed by R. Scott, and in this example, irony is used by Royce (the superior) in order to show his disapproval of his inferior's opinion.

We note that power differences among conversation members (interlocutors) play a necessary role in forming the language that is used. The irony that is used in this case is face-aggravating and related to mock politeness by Brown P. and S.C.Lewinson. This kind of irony has face-threat and it causes face-aggravating. Some linguists (G.Leech, S.Kumar-Nakamura, D.Bousfield and others) classify irony as a face-aggravating strategy, depending on the power differences between the interlocutors. It is truly stated that in the second definition, irony is almost used for criticizing the topical issue or the interlocutors. The irony that is used by equal interlocutors has a face-saving effect and it is also related to mock politeness.

#### **4. CONCLUSION.**

Irony is an expressive means of both politeness and impoliteness, as it contains various forms of offensiveness and different subtypes. When irony is used in the case of over-politeness, in the meaning of self-containment in expressing the speaker's intentionality, in the case of concealing irony, it is analyzed as a linguistic mean of impoliteness. In the case of excessive politeness expresses an ironic tone and is assessed inappropriately by the hearer because it helps the speaker to use an impolite comment. As the second feature of irony, self-containment is the use of criticism by the speaker. Another trait of irony, the cancellability of irony, shows the contradiction between the speaker's expressing the meaning, which is the same as the hearer's assumption, and the addressee's interpretation.

The intentional feature of irony, which forms intended and unintended types, analyzes the speaker's attitude in order to determine whether the speaker is aware of reality or not.

Power relations between the speaker and the hearer (hearers) define irony from a completely different angle. In this case, irony is classified as a means of mock politeness. Whether it is used by interlocutors having both unequal status and equal power, it is considered mock politeness. For this aspect of the research we conclude that, the situation in which face-aggravating happens is impoliteness, the case having face-saving is mock politeness. So irony is analyzed not only mock politeness means, but also impoliteness tool.

To sum up, the areas of irony can define clear borders between politeness and impoliteness with the degree of offense and power relations. We can define this distinctive feature within the situation.

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