

## SARCASM AS A COMMUNICATIVE-PRAGMATIC SUPERSTRATEGY OF MOCK POLITENESS

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**Key words:** *sarcasm, sarcastic utterance, mock politeness, communicative-pragmatic approach, communicative-pragmatic intention, communicative situation, communicative-pragmatic strategies and tactics.*

The article deals with sarcasm as a complex linguistic phenomenon characterized by its complex structure and semantics. The study of sarcasm in modern linguistics has expanded beyond literary works and now encompasses its importance in everyday communication. Special attention is paid to the category of mock politeness and its role in the communicative paradigm, in particular in the context of modern British fiction, where the characters' dialogues are characterized by complexity, allegory and sarcasm. In the article, sarcasm is analysed as a communicative-pragmatic superstrategy of mock politeness in the English language. In particular, various mock politeness strategies and tactics used by characters of modern British fiction to achieve different communicative-pragmatic intentions during communication are considered, as they help illustrate the multifaceted and complex nature of modern communication. Special emphasis is given to the significance of context for comprehending sarcasm. In order to recognize the true intentions of the speaker and correctly understand sarcastic statements, it is necessary to take into account not only linguistic, but also cultural, psychological and philosophical factors. Sarcasm is an important element of modern communication, and understanding its purpose and means of expression has proven critical to successful communication in modern society. Sarcasm is a strategic form of expression used by the speaker to achieve specific communicative-pragmatic intentions. Sarcasm is used in various communicative situations, in particular for expressing criticism, concealing disagreement or irritation, etc. The intention behind every sarcastic utterance is to assert the opposite of what is being stated. It should be mentioned that context is a crucial factor in determining sarcasm, and sarcastic utterances that are taken out of context do not have any impact on the addressee. The study of sarcasm as a communicative-pragmatic superstrategy contributes to a better understanding of speech practice and its impact on communication.

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## САРКАЗМ ЯК КОМУНІКАТИВНО-ПРАГМАТИЧНА СУПЕРСТРАТЕГІЯ ПСЕВДОВВІЧЛИВОСТІ

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**Ключові слова:** сарказм, саркастичне висловлення, псевдоввічливість, комунікативно-прагматичний підхід, комунікативно-прагматична інтенція, комунікативна ситуація, комунікативно-прагматичні стратегії й тактики.

У статті розглянуто сарказм як складне лінгвістичне явище, яке характеризує складною структурою й семантикою. Вивчення сарказму в сучасній лінгвістиці вийшло за межі літературних творів і тепер охоплює його важливість у повсякденному спілкуванні. Особливу увагу приділено категорії псевдоввічливості і її ролі в комунікативній парадигмі, зокрема в контексті сучасної британської художньої літератури, де діалоги героїв вирізняються складністю, алегоричністю й сарказмом. У статті проаналізовано сарказм як комунікативно-прагматичну суперстратегію псевдоввічливості в сучасній англійській мові. Зокрема, розглянуто різні стратегії й тактики псевдоввічливості, які використовують персонажі сучасної британської прози для досягнення різних комунікативно-прагматичних інтенцій під час спілкування, оскільки вони допомагають проілюструвати багатогранність і складність сучасної комунікації. Особливий акцент зроблено на важливості контексту для розуміння сарказму. Щоб розпізнати справжні наміри мовця й правильно зрозуміти саркастичні висловлення, необхідно враховувати не тільки лінгвістичні, а й культурні, психологічні й філософські чинники. Сарказм є важливим елементом сучасної комунікації, і розуміння його призначення й засобів вираження виявилось критичним для успішної комунікації в сучасному суспільстві. Сарказм є стратегічною формою вираження, яку використовує мовець для досягнення конкретних комунікативно-прагматичних інтенцій. Сарказм використовують у різних комунікативних ситуаціях, зокрема для вираження критики, незгоди, роздратування й т. п. Кожне саркастичне висловлення спрямоване на ствердження протилежного тому, що було сказано. Слід також зазначити, що контекст є вирішальним чинником у визначенні сарказму, і саркастичні висловлення, вирвані з контексту, не мають жодного впливу на адресата. Вивчення сарказму як комунікативно-прагматичної суперстратегії сприяє кращому розумінню мовленнєвої практики і її впливу на сучасну комунікацію.

**Introduction.** Linguists have always been interested in sarcasm because of its complex structure and semantics. In modern linguistics, sarcasm goes beyond literary works and has become a key element of communication and interaction in society. At the same time, the category of mock politeness is an integral element of the communicative paradigm, particularly in modern British fiction, where the dialogues of characters are characterized by complexity, allegory, and sarcasm.

Mock politeness strategies and tactics implemented in the dialogues of the characters of modern British fiction are complex psycholinguistic phenomena that require detailed analysis and interpretation. Not only linguistic, but also cultural, psychological, and philosophical approaches are needed for the perception and understanding of these strategies.

The suggested paper analyzes sarcasm as a communicative-pragmatic superstrategy of mock

politeness in modern British fiction. Additionally, it outlines the paradigm for strategies and tactics that are used in the dialogues of characters and their interaction with other mock politeness strategies.

The importance of the study lies in the necessity of a comprehensive analysis of sarcasm in the context of mock politeness strategies and tactics used in the dialogues of characters in postmodern British prose, as it reveals the multifaceted nature of modern communication.

The aim of this article is to reveal the general patterns of using sarcasm as a communicative-pragmatic superstrategy of mock politeness, taking into account the peculiarities of the strategies and tactics of its expression in modern British fiction.

**Methodology.** In the article, theoretical and conceptual analysis is used to critically examine the concepts and definitions available in modern linguistics regarding sarcasm as a communicative-pragmatic

strategy. It helped us analyze different approaches to studying sarcasm and its role in communication, and identify key concepts and ideas, which form the basis for our research. The method of continuous fixation of the dialogues of characters from modern British prose ensured the reliability and validity of the research results. The method of communicative-pragmatic analysis of sarcastic utterances for the presence of mock politeness strategies and tactics helped us understand how communication affects the actions, decisions and interaction of the communicants in a pragmatic context. The method of contextual analysis is based on the assumption that there is a certain context in which we study and analyze the use of mock politeness strategies and tactics, as well as determine the influence of this context on how sarcastic utterances are perceived and interpreted.

**Results and Discussion.** The study of sarcasm in modern linguistics is represented by the works of scientists such as D. W. Ball, A. Bowes, P. Brown, J. Culpeper, E. Filatova, P. H. Grice, M. Haugh, A. Katz, G. Leech, S. Levinson, C. Taylor and others, but no single definition of sarcasm is universally accepted. The diversity of viewpoints and interpretations of this phenomenon among scientists makes sarcasm a multifaceted subject of research, which is distinguished by its complexity and semantic ambiguity. Thus, sarcasm is considered to be a form of verbal irony that aims to express a negative attitude by conveying the pragmatic opposite of what has been said (Hancock, 2004: 453); a verbal irony used to express negative and critical attitudes towards individuals or events (Cheang & Pell, 2008: 366); negative irony that occurs when a positive comment seems positive but actually expresses a negative criticism or judgment towards an individual or situation (Alba-Juez & Salvatore, 2014: 100); a means to convey criticism or increase negativity in general (Colston, 1997; Toplak & Katz, 2000); a type of ironic speech that is often used to express implicit criticism that targets a specific victim (McDonald, 1999: 486-487); a sharply mocking or contemptuous ironic remark that is intended to hurt other individuals (Rockwell, 2000: 485); an act of mock politeness aimed at causing face-threat and social disharmony (Culpeper, 1996); an act of mock politeness that is mostly restricted to snide remarks intended to be hurtful (Leech, 2014: 233).

In our opinion, sarcasm is a communication strategy used by the speaker to obtain the desired reaction from the addressee. The speaker's intentions are not confusing to the listener, on the contrary, they make him aware of them. The communication process can be impacted by discrepancies between what the speaker says and what they mean. However, the communicants' mutual understanding is promoted by their shared awareness. It is the addressee's responsibility

to identify the communicative- pragmatic intention implied by sarcasm.

In our study, we define sarcasm as a communicative-pragmatic superstrategy of mock politeness, which is used to express communicative-pragmatic intentions that differ from the literal or obvious meaning of the utterance. In this perspective, sarcasm is used to accomplish various communication objectives such as expressing criticism, concealing disagreement or irritation, and so on. Within sarcasm as a superstrategy of mock politeness, we distinguish such strategies as: implied criticism, backhanded compliments, insincere thankfulness, backhanded agreement, excessive gratitude, etc. Let's analyze some of them.

*The strategy of implied criticism* involves expressing disapproval, negative sentiments, or critique in a subtle way without explicitly stating them. Implied criticism is used to convey negative evaluation or disagreement by using indirect language, subtle cues, or nuanced implications instead of directly criticizing or condemning someone or something. The speaker uses polite or diplomatic language to conceal criticism, which allows them to navigate social interactions delicately while still expressing their disapproval or dissatisfaction. Implied criticism can be conveyed tactfully without causing conflict or confrontation by using tone, facial expressions, word choice, or contextual clues. For example:

(1) *'I'm reminding you of what family life is really like,' Doyle said. His eyes did not waver from her face.*  
 (2) *'Before you get too sentimental about it. Sunday dinners were hell in my family. My father grilled us about what we had been doing all week. Worked himself into a frenzy and gave himself indigestion. We were dead lucky to get to bed without a belting on a Sunday.'* (3) *'Great,' the Woman said sarcastically. 'I really enjoy your happy childhood memories, Doyle.'* (Cross, 1989).

In the text provided, Doyle and his wife are having a conversation. Utterance (1) is polite on the surface, but it also contains subtle criticism of his wife's perspective on family life. Doyle initiates by sharing personal experience from his childhood, but the tone is tinged with sarcasm and mock politeness (2). The phrase *before you get too sentimental about it* implies that he anticipates his wife's reaction and is preemptively rejecting any potential sentimentality. Furthermore, he describes Sunday dinners as a *hell* and mentions his father's behaviour using phrases such as *worked himself into a frenzy and gave himself indigestion* highlights the negative aspects of his childhood in a somewhat detached manner. Doyle's negative attitude is emphasized by the phrase *We were dead lucky to get to bed without a belting on a Sunday*, which underscores the prevalence of physical abuse in his family. The wife responds in a sarcastic way,

using mock politeness to express her scepticism and disinterest (3). Her use of the phrase *Great* suggests that she doesn't really enjoy Doyle's story, and the phrase *happy childhood memories* implies her dissatisfaction with Doyle for attempting to diminish the negative aspects of his family life.

The analysis of this dialogue justifies the usage of the strategy of implied criticism through the tactics of indirect utterances and contextual references. The characters conceal their true emotions, criticism, and attitude towards the situation by using polite language, showcasing the complexity of interpersonal communication.

*The strategy of backhanded compliments and the strategy of insincere thankfulness.* The strategy of backhanded compliments involves giving a compliment that is ostensibly positive but is actually disguised as criticism or insult. This communication strategy is characterized by the use of a compliment that contains an underlying negative or derogatory implication, often leaving the recipient feeling slighted or offended. Backhanded compliments can be subtle and nuanced, making them particularly effective for those who wish to express criticism or disapproval without appearing overtly confrontational. The strategy of insincere thankfulness involves expressing gratitude in a manner that lacks genuine sincerity or appreciation. This communication strategy is employed when an individual wishes to maintain social decorum or avoid conflict while masking their true feelings of displeasure, frustration, or sarcasm. Insincere thankfulness is often used in situations where one feels obligated to express gratitude but does not genuinely feel appreciative of the gesture or action being acknowledged. For example:

'I wanted to ask you something.' 'Ask away.' (1) 'Your name – Shepherd' 'Well?' 'And the Rams – Jonathan Ram.' 'So?' 'They're similar.' (2) 'What amazing observation!' she said sarcastically, but he thought she seemed uneasy. 'You related?' (3) 'The Rams and the Shepherds? Why should we be? Just because they're names to do with sheep. You barmy or something?' 'No, I don't think so.' (4) 'What a stupid question!' (5) 'Thanks a lot!' said Jack. 'I only wondered, that's all.' (Masters, 1991).

In the text provided, Jack and Tina are having a conversation at school. By replying to Jack's observation (1) with a sarcastic tone *What amazing observation*, Tina is using the strategy of backhanded compliment. Although she appears polite, her tone is sarcastic conveying her disbelief and annoyance with Jack's comment (1). Tina's utterance (3) demonstrates a mix of indirectness and sarcasm. Tina responds indirectly by questioning Jack's sanity *Just because they're names to do with sheep* instead of directly responding to his comment. Tina can express her frustration and annoyance with Jack's comment (1) without directly

confronting him. The conversation continues as Jack responds *Thanks a lot* to Tina's comment (4). In order to downplay any potential conflict and defend his initial question, Jack employs the strategy of insincere thankfulness. By using the phrase *I only wondered* Jack indirectly communicates that his question was not intended to cause harm.

The analysis of this dialogue justifies the usage of the strategy of backhanded compliments and the strategy of insincere thankfulness through the tactics of indirect utterances, subtle criticism, passive aggressiveness, and confrontation avoidance. Despite their politeness, both characters use sarcasm and indirect language to conceal their genuine emotions when challenging each other's comments. This illustrates the intricate nature of communication and how language is used to convey underlying emotions and intentions.

*The strategy of backhanded agreement* involves agreeing with someone's statement or opinion while subtly expressing disagreement or criticism. The speaker appears to agree with the addressee's viewpoint but indirectly inserts a subtle criticism or reservation. Individuals can use this strategy to maintain an appearance of agreement while subtly expressing their disagreement or scepticism. For example:

(1) 'They look like tortoises,' said Klift. 'Giant tortoises.' Rosheen turned from him dismissively. Was he going senile? (2) 'I've never seen that species before,' Sheldukher confessed. More of the confused reptiles emerged from their tanks. (3) 'They're rather sweet, aren't they?' (4) 'Oh yes,' said Rosheen sarcastically. 'We could take them home and sell them as pets. Psychotic tortoises would have gone down well on the North Gate.' (Roberts, 1993).

In the text provided, Klift, Rosheen and Sheldukher are having a conversation about strange creatures that appeared in front of them. Klift's utterance (1) seems to be just a simple observation. However, his use of the phrase *Giant tortoises* adds a level of exaggeration, which can be considered to be a subtle form of sarcasm. Even though he seems polite, Klift's comment may be a mockery of the creatures' appearance. Rosheen's reaction to Klift's comment is dismissive, conveying her dissatisfaction with his observation. She *turned from him dismissively* indicating that she considers his comment unimportant or irrelevant. The act of turning away can be interpreted as a subtle form of mock politeness, as she avoids directly confronting Klift about his comment. Sheldukher's phrase *I've never seen that species before* can be interpreted as a form of mock politeness. Although he acknowledges his lack of knowledge about the creatures, he also expresses scepticism towards the situation. His use of polite language does not always indicate genuine curiosity, but it can also be a means of expressing disbelief or confusion in a subtle manner.

Additionally, Rosheen's sarcastic response *We could take them home and sell them as pets* to Sheldukher's comment (3) can be interpreted as a form of indirect disagreement. Although she seems to agree with Sheldukher's observation, her sarcastic tone and her use of the phrase *Psychotic tortoises* suggest that she holds a different opinion about them, and disagrees with the idea that they are *sweet*.

The analysis of this dialogue justifies the usage of the strategy of backhanded agreement through the tactics of exaggeration, confrontation avoidance, and indirect utterances. The characters use polite language to communicate their underlying criticism, sarcasm, or disdain. Their polite demeanour conceals their true feelings and attitudes toward the situation.

The strategy of excessive gratitude involves expressing gratitude in a way that goes beyond what is considered normal or expected, and is aimed at conveying sarcasm, insincerity, or mockery. It has the potential to be used as a form of passive aggressive behaviour or to undermine the recipient's actions or statements in a subtle manner. For example:

(1) *'I don't need to be Plato to see the obvious,' he said coldly. 'You've had everything and everyone your way from much too young, and it hasn't prepared you for the big, wide world. But you can't spend your life only mixing with people who flatter your ego. Sooner or later you're going to find out that life just doesn't work that way.'* (2) *'Well, thank you so much for that valuable insight,' she said sarcastically. 'Any more profound truths to impart before I go upstairs and have a bath?'* (Williams, 1992).

In the text provided, Piers and Alyssia are having a conversation. Piers initiates the conversation by giving a thorough evaluation of Alyssia's actions and perspective on life. Despite the fact that utterance (1) is not explicitly sarcastic, the tone of the statement, particularly the phrase *I don't need to be Plato to see the obvious*, indicates some degree of contempt. Piers's cold delivery and criticism of the addressee's life choices can be interpreted as a form of impoliteness. Alyssia responds politely, but she is actually dissatisfied with Piers's comment (1). Her use of her phrase *thank you so much for that valuable insight* is accompanied by sarcasm, which suggests that she is not truly grateful. The sarcastic tone of the response is further emphasized by the rhetorical question about the *profound truths* to be imparted before they leave. Although Alyssia appears to be polite, the underlying sarcasm reveals her true feelings of irritation or disdain towards Piers's criticism.

The analysis of this dialogue justifies the usage of the strategy of excessive gratitude through the tactics of exaggeration, rhetorical questions, and emphatic language. The character demonstrates politeness by subtly undermining the speaker's criticism. This strategy enables the character to express their real feelings

of irritation or disdain towards the speaker's criticism in a subtle and indirect manner.

**Conclusions.** In modern communication, sarcasm is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that is used to achieve various communicative-pragmatic intentions. Sarcasm is a communicative-pragmatic superstrategy of mock politeness that is used to conceal genuine intentions behind polite utterances by employing a variety of strategies and tactics: implied criticism, backhanded compliments, insincere thankfulness, backhanded agreement, excessive gratitude, exaggeration, passive aggressiveness, confrontation avoidance etc. These strategies indicate the flexibility and variety of sarcastic expressions, as well as the various communicative-pragmatic intentions that can be achieved through them. It is important to take into account contextual, cultural, psychological, and philosophical aspects when comprehending sarcasm. The purpose of sarcasm is to express a different meaning of the utterance that is not the same as the literal or obvious one. Context is crucial to defining sarcasm, and only the mutual awareness of communicants can contribute to mutual understanding. When separated from their context, sarcastic utterances lose their illocution force and have no impact on the addressee who is unaware of their concealed intentions. Thus, sarcasm is an important element of modern communication, and understanding its purpose, and the peculiarities of various strategies and tactics, is crucial for successful communication in modern society.

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