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# An Analysis of Pragmatic Sarcasm in Political Debate

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## Abstract

This study investigates the pragmatic use of sarcasm in the Brexit discussions of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. The choice of this subject is based on the presumption that sarcasm has become an important component of political discourse. The objectives of the study are to identify the most prevalent pragmatic structures for using sarcasm in political discussions, to ascertain whether or not using sarcasm in political debates constitutes an act of negativity, and to demonstrate whether or not there are distinctive patterns in the formulation of sarcasm. The following is hypothesized in light of the objectives established: Assuming that the speaker adheres to the CP, several speech acts materialize to produce sardonic statements. 2- Some of the recommended pragmatic sarcasm structures are heavily used in Boris' political debates. 3- Sarcasm is constantly used as a cutting verbal weapon in political debates and is always manufactured on purpose. Sarcasm reflects bad impacts. The data was gathered from political debates in which British Prime Minister Boris Johnson participated, and the sarcastic analysis model was based on the speech act model developed by Searle in 1969, the pragmatic structures of sarcasm model developed by Camp in 2012, and the classification of pragmatic functions of sarcasm developed by Attrado in 2001. The study comes to some notable conclusions, such as the fact that sarcasm can convey a variety of signals, including a negative attitude, and that particular sarcasm structures are employed more frequently than others.

**Keywords:** Investigates, Presumption, Sarcasm

## Introduction

Emotions in people have long been a source of pain. Just by reading a sentence that someone else wrote, it can be difficult to understand what they were attempting to say. As styles and eras evolve, humans have created new means of expressing their emotions. Sarcasm is the most often utilised. Nowadays, individuals often use words and sentences in nonliteral ways or with subliminal messages that are meant to be understood by the listener. Researchers have put a lot of effort into making it possible for robots to understand these kinds of words. This chapter serves as an introduction to the concept of sarcasm and methods for identifying it. It gives a detailed description of how sarcasm works and is put together.

In the past, sarcasm has been utilised, especially when used invectively, to cause mental agony and play mental manipulation on the victim. A sarcastic suggestion may also be made by the speaker's caustic tones in their voice. Sarcasm is frequently used for effect rather than true meaning; it has been observed. It often occurs when someone speaks in a way that is contradictory to his intentions. The audience finds this amusing while the speaker finds it exciting. Sarcastic language is used to make fun of, insult, criticise, and ridicule other people.

 

Snarky comments can be made verbally or in writing. This language's extra-linguistic characteristics form and structure it differently than other languages.

The significance of sarcasm stems from two factors: first, language is used to convey ideas subtly; it is worthwhile to look at pragmatic concerns such speech act, directness, conversational maxims, implicative, and presupposition. According to Crystal (2011: 446) and Leech's (1983:2) presentations, the role of utterances in interpersonal communication is addressed.

Second, sarcasm is used for a specific purpose; otherwise, it would not exist. According to expressive, sarcasm is typically employed to highlight a discrepancy between how things are and how they should be, and as a result, it expunges it. Since it identifies English political disputes as necessary reading material that the majority of non-native English readers do not understand, the pragmatic evaluation of the Johnson arguments is particularly noteworthy. The study will be important for anyone who are interested in linguistics, specifically the language used in political discourse.

## Literature Review

### *Sarcasm*

Although "irony" is derived from "iron," a "dissembler," Abrams (2012) pointed out that "sarcasm" is derived from the Greek word "sarkazein," which means "to tear flesh." Exaggerated intonation in the speaker's voice suggests sarcasm (2012, p. 56).

Sarcasm is defined as an attempt to make a caustic or cutting comment for wit, whimper, or avoidance by Katyayan (2019, p. 6-7). Sarcastic remarks don't always have to mean what they say out loud. The negativity and indirectness of sarcasm, according to Katyayan, fulfilled specific purposes.

One of the current most widely used methods of mockery by speakers and authors is sarcasm. Since sarcasm conveys something trivial or silly but mocking, it is simple to identify. Shaw (1976, p. 241) defined sarcasm as a caustic and occasionally harsh form of mocking. Sarcasm, he continues, is typically unpleasant, demeaning, and personal.

### *Irony and Sarcasm*

An ironic statement usually has a discrepancy between what is said and what is intended to be understood. This discrepancy frequently arises from how a speech is pragmatically perceived.

Irony is frequently described as a mismatch between appearance and reality or as a contradiction between actual reality and surface texture. Irony is a notion that is applied in a variety of contexts and situations for diverse purposes. Irony is a term used, for example, in England to switch from praising to criticising or critiquing to blaming. By interconnecting the puzzle across a work, Valstos (1991, p. 21) assumes irony becomes more difficult. Cruse (2006, p. 90) When someone says:

Thanks a lot! Addressing someone who has caused a disaster.

The exact meaning of an ironic remark is to condemn or challenge the claims or presumptions of another. Irony is necessary for sarcastic expression, according to Cruse. For him, sarcasm is irony. Or According to Hutcheon (1995, p. 65), sarcasm is frequently characterised as a pragmatic phenomena that inspires behaviour. An ironic statement conveys the opposite of

 

the original meaning when it detects a breach of specific pragmatic norms, such as cooperative maxims or felicity requirements for a speech act. for example:

*What a tidy room!*

The speaker, a mother, wants to communicate something different than what the words clearly imply (Ibid).

### *Pragmatic Structure of Sarcasm*

Many theorists categorise sarcasm. The four types of sarcasm proposed by Camp (2012) are propositional, lexical, like-prefixed, and illocutionary. Each concept is based on the idea that sarcasm works by subtly or overtly inverting context.

Propositional Sarcasm

Of the four types of sarcasm mentioned, propositional sarcasm is the most blunt (ibid). Yule's (2010:25) presupposition and entailment principle, which defines a presupposition as whatever the speaker believes to be true before making a remark, also uses this type of sarcasm. As a result, propositional sarcasm is founded on factual premise and focuses on communicating the opposite of a true statement (Camp, 2012: 607).

“He's a good friend.”

The speaker should offer some form of confirmation, signaling the opposite of the genuine statement, in order for the listener to understand this sarcastic comment. Therefore, by assuming the reverse, semantic and lexically centered pragmatic processes will read this as sardonic.

### *Lexical Sarcasm*

Word choice changes are generally used to identify sarcastic speech. Although the speaker is using illocutionary power in this instance, the pragmatic processes that are lexically oriented infer the contrary meaning (ibid., p. 611). The frequent usage of particular lexicons like "brilliant," "genius," "magnificent," "thrilled," etc. is another sign of lexical sarcasm. These statements are sarcastic. For instance,

“That's a great idea.”

Sarcasm will imply the other end of the spectrum, i.e., something absolutely awful (ibid., 613). A statement may also have negative connotation even if its outward meaning is positive. As in: You'll get tenure as long as you can come up with one more flimsy, pointless idea.

The term ‘tenure' is used sarcastically as a reward for poor performance.

### *Like-prefixed Sarcasm*

Both declarative and adverbial statements fall under this category. In this category, sarcastic language is frequently employed to emphasise the speaker's disdain of following claims, as in: Like I haven't talked to John in weeks.

She did not speak to John when she made this scathing remark (Camp & Hauthorne, 2008, p. 8).

### *Illocutionary Sarcasm*

Illocutionary sarcasm, according to Camp (2012: 618), is the entire illocutionary behaviour directed by a legitimate utterance of the linked speech. Evaluative feelings like pity, adoration,

 

or astonishment that are included in implicatures are what set illocutionary sarcasm apart from other forms of humour. For instance, the speaker will be shocked and add the following when someone is leaving a place and someone yells the door from behind them:

I appreciate your help.

The sarcasm that contrasts the actual circumstance with the sarcastic statement is the most powerful. Sarcastic use is allowed for any illocutionary discourse, including optatives, inquiries, commands, and expressions:

May I entice you with another piece *of pie? (To a newcomer)* (Camp and Hauthorne, 2008: 13)

### *Pragmatic Functions of Sarcasm*

The listener must understand caustic remarks because of their ambiguity. To demonstrate the capacity to "manipulate" language, it is utilised. A speaker uses one word outright and another implied. Camp (2012) defined sarcasm as an evaluative attitude that can be either positive or negative. All structures are inverted or reversed by sarcasm (p. 588). Camp gave different tasks to the constructions in order to connect them. It is crucial to note that sarcasm is a form of humour with a global audience.Attrado (2001) defined sarcasm as a blend of irony and comedy (p. 172). He asserts that sarcasm has six purposes: sophistication, assessment tool, politeness tool, persuasive aspect, retractability, and tool for group affiliation.

Sophistication: Sarcasm is a linguistic trick that speakers use to show off their knowledge of the English language. The speaker can manage his emotional state by managing his words. 183 in Attardo (2001). Consequently, sarcasm is a skillful and delicate way to communicate oneself, especially in politics, because it fosters a less hostile climate than saying what one wants to say out loud. Before continuing the discourse, the speaker's intended meaning must be understood by the listener. In movies, sarcasm is occasionally employed to achieve humorous effects. In such cases, the speaker says something that isn't meant to be said. Dews et al. (1995, p. 154) claim that the contrast between implicit and explicit meaning in speech may, under certain conditions, also help in the creation of humour.

Additionally, the deletion of some lines leaves a void between the explicit and implicit meanings (Ibid., p. 185). Though it almost always has a humorous effect, there are situations when sarcasm does not come from humour and vice versa.

Evaluation: Depending on the context, sarcasm's evaluative component operates on two scales: negative and positive. There are various levels of evaluation, including self-evaluation, group evaluation, and interlocutor evaluation. According to Grice, sarcasm fosters negative attitudes, feelings, or judgements. Although Dews & Winner (1995: 15) claim that sarcasm is employed to portray a negative attitude, Grice (1978: 124) believes that sarcasm is a form of linguistic irony.

Politeness: Sarcasm can also be used to convey politeness. It is seen as being less hazardous than overt verbal antagonism. Sarcasm lessens the danger of intentional meanings, claim Dews and Winner (1995), p. 13. According to Barbe (1995), using sarcasm can help a speaker avoid causing a schism by not overtly insulting the recipient. The speaker's decorum lessens the impact of unpleasant feelings. Sarcasm is therefore a face-saving tactic (p. 90).

Persuasive aspects: The use of sarcasm in persuasive writing is essential. Researchers contend that irony is a potent tool for persuasion because it can draw attention to the differences between expectation and reality. According to Gibbs, R. W., Jr., and Izett (2005), sarcasm is

 

frequently employed to encourage people to do something. Three characteristics of sarcasm can be used to good effect (2005, p. 135). Sarcasm is a powerful rhetorical device because it clarifies an underlying meaning (Carston, 2002: 30), but in order for it to work, both the speaker and the listener need to be aware of the same information.

Retract ability: Sarcasm is used as a distancing technique to communicate ideas so that the speaker is not held responsible for unacceptable behaviour. A speaker might avoid the consequences of explicitly expressing his opinions, claims Carston (2002). This quality enables the speaker to approach his or her opinion from a novel angle. On the other hand, this use of sarcasm is highly uncommon because it necessitates a very specific context (p. 23–25).

Group Membership: With the use of sarcasm, one can establish insider and outsider status within a group. It demonstrates the loyalty of the organisation. In this situation, sarcasm serves two purposes. To begin with, sarcasm can be used to strengthen intragroup ties. Second, it might be applied to judge someone and keep them out of a group. It therefore reveals a person's adherence to the group's ideals (Myers-Roy, 1981: 412).

### Sarcasm and Speech Act Theory

Speech activities that go beyond the speaker's choice of words or phrases are included in pragmatics. Speech acts are actions that are related to the course of action that has been done by created utterances (Buck, 2002:23). He continues by saying that people have the power to act by making a statement. Speaking can have a variety of purposes, such as making an assertion, bragging, or saying something; expressing one's psychological position, such as graduating; announcing; expressing gratitude; or even assigning blame. Only in situations where commands, instructions, and guiding are given, is another act done by speech. Giving a promise is a necessary act that must be done since it underpins the spoken act of commission and is utilised frequently, especially in urgent situations. Finally, but equally crucially, the declarative speech act shows authority and is utilised only in certain circumstances, according to Searle (1969). You may express bodily activity with only words and phrases. The speech act is the message that was conveyed, according to Yule (2010, p. 126); the words we say have a big influence on the things we do. Identifying the speaker's aim and understanding the context in which the speech is utilised are two considerations that should be made while using sarcasm (Huang, 2007: 1).

## Methods

### Data Collection

Due to the nature of the research, both a qualitative and a quantitative approach will be used, with the researcher serving as the primary data-collection tool.

In order to identify sarcastic expressions, the researcher receives Boris Johnson's Brexit debate, which is read and heard again as part of the research. The implication uncovered is clarified by the researcher's observations of political arguments. To accomplish the goals of the study and verify the accuracy of the proposed hypothesis, the researcher pays close attention to the speech act used in sarcastic utterances as well as the forms and functions of sarcasm as defined by Camp (2011).

In order to comprehend and explain how an utterance function, context is considered a crucial element.

 

## Model of analysis

The Searle (1969) taxonomy of speech actions serves as the foundational framework for analysing the sarcasm in Boris Johnson's Brexit discussions. Along with Attrado's (2001) assessment, sophistication, and persuasion functions of sarcasm as elaborated in figure (1), Elizabeth Camp's (2011) pragmatic classification of sardonic structures, and this model's goal of examining illocutionary acts of disputes.

## Procedures

A theoretical foundation for the key ideas is established, a model for analysis is created, data is chosen, investigated, and analysed using the model suggested, and a conclusion is drawn based on the findings of the analysed data.

Analysis of the Text, Findings, and Discussion The relationship between participant ability to control speech and utterance structure is attempted to be demonstrated in the section that follows. As discussed in the previous three chapters, sarcasm's intention and structure depend on the language context and use of statements that can result in it. To ascertain this, the following excerpts are evaluated.

The information was acquired from previously broadcast debate recordings that were broadcast online. After the researcher had seen the data, the researcher's supervisor saw two sample snippets from a British TV Brexit debate with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

The location, date, and negotiation subject are stated in the following typical extracts. The analysis is broken up into three stages: looking at Sealer's Speech Acts and Gricean Maxims, figuring out which pragmatic structure, according to Camp's 2011 classification, served to proclaim sarcastic utterances, and evaluating the pragmatic purpose of utilising sarcasm in a particular scenario.

The analyzed excerpts (A and B) are taken from a debate held on September the 4$^{th}$ of 2019. In the House of Commons, Conservatives led by Boris Johnson and Labour led by Jeremy Corbyn. The discussion covers social, economic, and political issues, but the excerpt was chosen to focus mainly on the Brexit (British exit out of the European Union) deal, its advantages, and disadvantages. The excerpt is from the political section about Brexit, which conservatives propose and Labor oppose.

## Excerpt Analysis

**Boris (PM):** "If this Bill is approved this afternoon, I do not want an election, and I do not believe that the right honourable Gentleman wants an election, but there is a petition on his own Labour website that 57,000 people have signed calling for an election, including Carol, Nigel, Graham, and Phoebe. Whether or whether there is a Jeremy on the list is unknown to me. There is only one chlorinated chicken in the House, and he is seated on the front bench of the opposition, despite the fact that I am aware that the right hon. Gentleman is concerned about free trade agreements with America.

## Speech act:

Boris makes an untrue assertion using forceful S.A. Although he was aware that Corbyn's name was missing, Boris is claiming ignorance about its absence and expressing his unhappiness because a leader should always be included first in such a significant list. Speaking with force helps the speaker express his opinions on his interlocutor and the opposing side.

 

As in "I know the right hon. Gentleman is concerned about free trade deals with America," which Boris thinks is a great deal, the aggressive speech act may also convey objections about the counterpart policy and attitude.

Last but not least, "but I can only see one chlorinated chicken in the House, and he is on the Opposition Front Bench." Additionally, there are figurative comparisons between his opponent and a poisonous chicken throughout the speech. He alludes to the chlorine chicken agreement that was disapproved by society and labour since there were rumours that American chicken was chemically injected.

### Pragmatic structure of sarcasm:

Propositional sarcasm is consistent with syntactic and pragmatic processes, as in the sentence "I do know that the right hon. Gentleman is worried about free trade deals with America." Say the opposite of what was said instead, for example, "I know the right hon. Gentleman is concerned about free trade deals with America." According to Boris, free trade agreements should be embraced rather than feared.

The final statement employs a metaphor, which Camp interprets as mocking. It states the speaker's feelings towards the receiver, for instance, "I can see only one chlorinated chicken in the House, and he is sitting on the Opposition Front Bench."

### The pragmatic function of sarcasm:

Evaluation: The speaker is criticising the circumstances facing the interlocutor. Corbyn's membership in his party, according to Boris, is unknown: "I don't know whether there is a Jeremy on the list." On the other side, he claims that people are comparing him to "chlorinated chicken," which is actually poultry treated with dangerous chemicals and imported from the United States as part of a trade pact that the Labour Party vigorously opposed. All I see in the House is a chlorinated chicken on the Opposition Front Bench.

Persuasion: Sarcasm is used in this situation to convince the viewers that the transaction Boris is pursuing involves free trade agreements. Contrary to his opponent (Jeremy Corbyn), who is concerned, that is something people should respect and be optimistic about. "I am aware of the right hon. Gentleman's concerns regarding free trade agreements with America."

M.P. (Lab): "Let him put it to the people and ask our people if that is the price they want to pay," said the prime minister, "if he really believes in no deal."

Boris (PM): "This Government will withdraw this country from the European Union on October 31, as the honourable Lady is well aware. The surrender Bill that the Leader of the Opposition is currently putting out is the only thing that stands in our path.

### Speech Act:

Email missive This statement constitutes a S.A. Boris, the speaker, has promised to make a firm decision or to carry out a commitment, such as a successful Brexit deal. On October 31, "This Government will withdraw this nation from the European Union."

The S.A. of assertion is used to convey the speaker's unusual viewpoint or opinion. For instance, he can assert that the Bill presented by the Labour party is "a surrender Bill," stating that it is true even though he is unable to substantiate it and other people might not accept it. The speaker is upset that the Bill is causing a delay in the Brexit agreement.

 

Then, two different types of S.A. are used, with the aggressive S.A. outlining the speaker's perspective through which he makes both claims and complaints. The speaker makes a promise to do something, in this case quitting the European Union, in the second speech act known as the act of commission.

### Pragmatic structure of sarcasm:

The pragmatic structure that emerged from the extract is propositional sarcasm. Speaker invokes a scenario at one extreme of an evaluation scale while seeming to make an assertion, suggesting the opposite or evaluative attitude. He asserts the opposite in this sentence, saying that he "knows very well that this Government will withdraw this country from the European Union on October 31." The truth is that the Lady, who is examining the future of the British people, is unsure whether a deal or no deal exists.

Additionally, he claims that the only thing standing between the U.K. and the deal is her party and her Leader's "bill" given by her party. He is therefore implying a claim that is at odds with what he has just said.

### The pragmatic function of sarcasm:

### Persuasion:

The speaker uses propositional sarcasm to convince the audience and the opposing party to back the Brexit deal and drop their "Bill" The Bill is referred to as a surrender bill by him! It is a metaphor that's employed to signify criticism. As a means of persuasion, he also compels his strategy to treat it as something that actually happens.

### Findings and Discussions:

The selected passages and the other eight excerpts from the same discussion have the same structure, or the propositional structure of sarcasm. This can lead to the discovery of the pragmatic frameworks typically used to produce effective sarcasm in political discourse. Since it entails assuming the opposition and explains the indirect, intended role of sarcasm, propositional sarcasm comes in top (45%). The second often employed structure, illocutionary sarcasm (40), may be seen in eight different contexts and expresses a complete contradiction to the circumstance as a whole, regardless of the words used. The analysis also shows that lexical sarcasm is rarely employed, with only three instances where it is appropriate because it merely changes the meaning of one word, but political arguments need for a deeper understanding in conversations. In contrast, the current discussion never employs like-prefixed sarcasm. The second idea is supported by this discovery.

Regarding the speech act in relation to sarcasm, it is discovered that 13 of the 20 excerpts feature aggressive speech act (61.90%), where a speaker has the power to criticise, dispute, claim, and express what the others believe or state; this is also another reason for inserting sarcastic utterance. There are other speech acts that are less frequent, such as expressive speech act (4 times), directive speech act (3 times), commissive speech act (just once), and declaration speech act (never). The results show that a good sarcastic remark requires the combination of specific sarcastic structures and speech behaviours.

According to the contexts in which sarcasm is used, appraisal is the most common function of sarcasm as examined in this discussion (61.90%). 13 excerpts deal with evaluation, 6 with persuasion, and 1 with sophistication. Additionally, it has been discovered that some sarcastic

 

remarks might simultaneously serve two purposes. The third hypothesis is partially disproved by this finding. We can assume that sarcasm can switch between a positive and a negative function depending on the audience's perception and the position of the addressee. Additionally, it shed light on the notion that context and the addressee's circumstances are necessary to fully comprehend the proposed sarcasm. Sarcasm in this situation supports the political purposes for which it is used.

## Conclusions

The use of sarcasm is governed by particular, practical frameworks, and the meaning is exposed and evaluated in relation to the circumstance and context. The pragmatic techniques for delivering sarcasm that are most frequently used in the arguments under study are the forceful speech act and the pragmatic propositional structure. Illocutionary and propositional sarcasm, which can be applied to any extracts under consideration, are two different types of sarcasm that can be distinguished. Sarcasm is mostly used pragmatically for two goals: persuasion and evaluative intent with a sense of humour. It is employed in ordinary interactional situations in addition to political disputes. In a debate that lasted an hour and a half, sarcasm was used 20 times, which shows how prevalent it is in political discourse today.

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