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2017/2018

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**Analysing sarcasm through the lens of
(Im)Politeness**

Master's Thesis

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Zagreb, 2018

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1. Introduction

Although numerous dictionary definitions of sarcasm give us a solid frame to pinpoint sarcasm as a concept (e.g., the Cambridge Dictionary definition is: “the use of remarks that clearly mean the opposite of what they say, made in order to hurt someone's feelings or to criticize something in a humorous way”), the individual perception gives us a variety of interpretations. Sarcasm is used in everyday communication, influencing the dynamics of almost every conversation. As such, sarcasm provides an opportunity for extensive study in the field of linguistics. This paper will try to provide additional insight by analyzing sarcasm through the lens of (im)politeness.

This thesis is a two-piece puzzle. The first part consists of a survey conducted in order to measure the influence of context in the perception of sarcasm. The results will be presented in partial comparison to the original survey conducted in *Context and Intonation in the Perception of Sarcasm* by Jennifer Woodland and Daniel Voyer, which also focused on the perception of sarcasm, the focal point being the intonation.

The second part will cover the theoretical frame. It will describe the concept of the Cooperative Principle presented by Grice in *Logic and Conversation*, Leech's Irony Principle with regard to the Cooperative and Politeness Principles, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and Culpepper's theory of impoliteness.

The last part of the paper will serve as the space that connects the two pieces of the puzzle. Sarcastic statements from the survey will be interpreted in the light of the theories mentioned above. We will try to argue that sarcasm floats in the space between politeness and impoliteness, as it has the elements of both, depicting its multilayered and ambiguous nature. To do so, we will analyze which politeness strategies are used on a semantic level and which impoliteness strategies and conventionalized impoliteness formulae are deployed on a pragmatic level.

2. The survey

Sarcasm is a complex linguistic phenomenon that can be studied from different perspectives. It can be accompanied by different cues, such as intonation, stress or certain facial expressions, etc. These cues enable sarcasm recognition, but what happens when we omit these cues and present the survey participants with a short text so that they can only rely on context? Is sarcasm really lost in print?

Woodland and Voyer (2011) studied the role of context and tone of voice in sarcasm perception. In their discussion, they suggested that it might be interesting to omit the vocal cues and base the survey on verbal content. We decided to pursue this avenue and used the same examples for two reasons. The first reason was the fact that the examples were already validated, and the second reason was the possibility to compare the results of two surveys conducted under different conditions.

3. The analysis

In the following chapters we will present our survey and, when possible, compare it with the survey that was conducted by Woodland and Voyer (2011).

3.1. Participants

Fifty participants took part in this survey. 28 of them were male and 22 female. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 55 ($M = 23.52$, $SD = 6.09$). While the number of the participants in Woodland and Voyer's (2011: 230) experiment was higher (82), their mean age was fairly similar ($M = 19.44$, $SD = 3.24$). It might be important to mention that the participants of the original study were undergraduate students who got bonus credit for their participation which might have influenced their motivation.

3.2. Materials

Woodland and Voyer (2011) used twelve pre-recorded statements from an article titled *On the perception of sarcasm in dichotic listening* by Voyer, Bowes, and Techentin (2008) and paired them with a positive and a negative context. The contexts for each statement were developed in

such a way that they resemble each other and consist of plausible situations. Woodland and Voyer (2011) were interested in the role of context and intonation in the perception of sarcasm, so they matched the contexts with the pre-recorded statements spoken in both a sarcastic and a sincere tone of voice and produced 48 examples. All the examples were presented twice.

These statements were translated into Croatian due to lack of native speakers of English. The Croatian survey consisted of 12 statements paired with a positive and a negative context each. It was presented in written form and did not include the audio recordings, as this thesis did not focus on the role of intonation in the perception of sarcasm. The original examples and the translated version can be found in the appendix.

The demographic questionnaire that consisted of four questions was also adopted from Woodland and Voyer's (2011) survey. Besides being asked to state their sex and age, the participants had to provide their own definition of sarcasm and rate how frequently they use sarcasm in everyday conversations on a 7-point scale ranging from never (1) to very often (7). Woodland and Voyer (2011: 232) included the latter two questions because: "Specifically, Bryant and Fox Tree (2002) required that participants define sarcasm to determine if they were responding accurately to the questions asked in the experiment . . . Similarly, Ivanko, Pexman, and Olineck (2004), and Kreuz, Dress, and Link (2006) suggested that the frequency of sarcasm usage in speech influences the ability to perceive sarcasm."

3.3. Procedure

In the original survey, the participants first heard the situational context, and after a 400 ms interval, they heard the audio recording of the statement read in a particular tone of voice. After hearing the statement, the participants were supposed to rate whether the tone of voice was sarcastic or sincere on a Likert type scale ranging from very sincere (1) to very sarcastic (7) (Woodland and Voyer 2011: 232).

The present survey was conducted using Google forms. The participants were presented with contexts and statements in written form, and they rated them on the same scale as in Woodland and Voyer (2011) for the purpose of analysis and comparison. The examples were presented in a random order in both surveys.

3.4. Results

3.4.1. Sarcasm usage

The overall mean of the frequency of sarcasm usage was 5.26 ($SD = 1.32$) which is similar to Woodland and Voyer's (2011: 232) results ($M = 5.05$, $SD = 1.17$). Both results show that the participants use sarcasm quite frequently, at least according to their self-report. Woodland and Voyer (2011) also measured the response time and analyzed it, but they did not find any significant correlation between the response time and the usage ratings.

3.4.2. Defining sarcasm

In order to determine if the definitions given by the participants were correct, Woodland and Voyer (2011) compared the answers to the definition given in the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary:

“1: a sharp and often satirical or ironic utterance designed to cut or give pain

2a : a mode of satirical wit depending for its effect on bitter, caustic, and often ironic language that is usually directed against an individual

b : the use or language of sarcasm” (“Sarcasm.”)

They reported that 82.9% participants defined sarcasm correctly. (Woodland and Voyer 2011: 232)

The same analysis was carried out with the answers from the present study. Thirty-two (64%) participants gave a correct definition of sarcasm, seven (14%) did not provide an answer to this question, and eleven (22%) gave a definition that was not in concordance with the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary definition. We have to admit that Woodland and Voyer (2011) did get fairly higher percentage rates, but this difference could be explained through the following facts: the present study was conducted online, the participants were anonymous, and they were not extrinsically motivated. These conditions made it easier for the participants to skip this question or to answer informally. Furthermore, this analysis was conducted in order to compare the results of both surveys, but it has to be emphasized that such an analysis is a bit problematic. Considering the fact that sarcasm is a multilayered phenomenon, we have to conclude that comparing the results to the dictionary definition is not really appropriate, as this definition does not cover all the features of sarcasm.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted by both Woodland and Voyer (2011) and the author of the present report to compare the frequency of sarcasm usage and the ability to define sarcasm correctly. No significant difference in the scores was found ($t(48) = 0.74, p = 0.46$), meaning that the ability to define sarcasm does not influence the frequency of sarcasm usage.

The definitions of sarcasm provided by the participants of the present study were very interesting and provided insight into sarcasm perception. They could be divided into four groups according to the feature of sarcasm that the participants found to be the most important: *contrast*, *intention*, *irony* and *other*. These categories will be further described and analyzed in the following paragraphs.

Contrast seems to be the most prominent feature of sarcasm for the participants of this survey as the highest number of participants (18) focused on the discrepancy between the literal meaning and the message to be read between the lines. Notably, five participants added that sarcasm is accompanied by a different tone of voice, which is indicative of sarcasm. It is also important to mention that two participants defined sarcasm as: “Izgovaranje tvrdnje s kojom se sami ne slažemo u nadi da će sugovornik shvatiti koliko se ne slažete.” and “Suprotno izrečene misli od onoga što stvarno mislimo pritom misleći da sudionici razgovora shvaćaju da ne mislimo ono što točno izrečemo,” thus emphasizing the role of the recipient. In order for sarcasm to be interpreted correctly, the recipient has to conclude that the literal meaning of the utterance should be discounted and find another plausible interpretation.

The participants who focused mainly on the *intention* could be further divided into three subcategories. The participants of the first subcategory defined sarcasm as a form of humor. It is noteworthy to mention that some considered sarcasm to be the lowest and some the highest form of humor. The second subcategory consists of responses that described sarcasm as biting remarks. Self-defense and answering "stupid" questions are in the focus of the third subcategory. Other answers that did not quite fit into the aforementioned subcategories include two participants who noted that sarcasm is both humorous and offensive at the same time and one who stated that the function of sarcasm is, besides humor, to enhance the impression of what is said.

Six participants defined sarcasm as a form of *irony*. Three of them said it was a meaner form of irony; one claimed it was enhanced irony while one participant declared that sarcasm was subtle irony.

Four answers fell into the *Other* category; they included the following responses: laziness, stating the obvious, a necessary tool for everyday conversation; one participant answered sarcastically by saying that sarcasm was a wonderful thing that made people think he was dumber than he appears to be.

Two other answers should also be mentioned. One participant noted that the more you use sarcasm, the more you understand it thus implying that the ability to produce and perceive sarcasm is a skill that requires practice. The other participant defined sarcasm as: “Jedna od viših razina humora namijenjena tome da se iskaže nezadovoljstvo, ali na neizravan i na prvu pristojan način.” This participant was the only one to recognize and mention *mock politeness*.

3.4.3. Sarcasm level ratings

This section deals with the examples that were rated by the participants on a scale ranging from 1 (very sincere) to 7 (very sarcastic). The examples, together with the mean average and the standard deviation of the answers are shown in appendix B. Unfortunately, Woodland and Voyer (2011) did not analyze the answers individually, and therefore the results of the present study cannot be compared to Woodland and Voyer’s (2011) results in detail. Woodland and Voyer (2011: 233) analyzed: “context (positive, negative) and tone of voice (sincere, sarcastic) as within-subject factors, and sex and definition of sarcasm (correct, incorrect) as between-subjects factors,” but found no correlations with either sex or definition. They did find a significant main effect for context and tone of voice. They also established that:

. . . when the statement and the context were congruent, that is in a negative context/sarcastic tone combination and a positive context/sincere tone combination, ratings generally reflected the expected sarcastic and sincere tone, respectively. However, when the context and tone were incongruent (positive context/sarcastic tone, negative context/sincere tone), ratings were toward the middle (neutral) point on the scale. (Woodland and Voyer 2011: 233-234)

Woodland and Voyer (2011) did include mean ratings that can be compared to the results of the present study.

. . . a negative context produced ratings close to the sarcastic end of the scale (i.e., 7 = sarcastic) ($M = 5.20$, $SE = .10$) whereas a positive context produced ratings closer to the sincere end of the scale (i.e., 1 = sincere) ($M = 3.36$, $SE = .10$). A significant main effect was also found for

tone of voice, $F(1, 77) = 157.56$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .65$, indicating that the sarcastic tone of voice produced ratings closer to the sarcastic end of the scale ($M = 5.30$, $SE = 0.10$) whereas a sincere tone of voice produced responses closer to the sincere end of the scale ($M = 3.26$, $SE = .10$). (Woodland and Voyer 2011: 233)

The results of the present study followed the same trend and are fairly similar. The mean average for statements paired with a positive context was 2.08 ($SD = 0.87$) while the mean average for statements paired with a negative context amounted to 5.49 ($SD = 1.21$). Considering the fact that the mean averages in both studies are similar, we could conclude that the absence of vocal cues in the present study did not play a significant role, i.e., the verbal content was sufficient for sarcasm detection in most cases. These results are not to be interpreted as a general rule, as both surveys had a relatively small number of participants and because the type of the text was different, as well as the analysis.

Even though the results show an expected tendency, some scores did not meet the expectations as they were closer to the neutral part of the scale. These results will be further analyzed in the following paragraph. Woodland and Voyer (2011: 236) mention Gerrig and Goldvarg's conclusion that: "high-disparity situations led to a higher sarcasm rating than low-disparity situations" and add that: "the inclusion of a sarcastic tone of voice in addition to a literal statement that contradicts the situation . . . could be seen as exaggerating the situational disparity and this would likely increase the likelihood that the utterance is rated as highly sarcastic." It would be interesting to compare the above-mentioned unexpected results to see if Woodland and Voyer (2011) got more extreme scores due to the inclusion of a sarcastic tone of voice.

As mentioned earlier, we will now take a closer look at the mid-range ratings and attempt to discover what led to the uncertainty of the participants.

1. Otišli ste na obiteljsko okupljanje gdje su se prisjećali starih vremena. Vaš rođak kaže: „Baš je bilo zabavno!“

According to Woodland and Voyer (2011: 231), the expected tone of voice was sarcastic. The participants of the present study apparently did not recognize this, as the mean average was 3.08. Only 7 (14%) of them rated this example with values 6 or 7, whereas 24 (48%) participants rated this example with 1 or 2. Because of the obvious incongruency between the way the statement was supposed to be perceived and the way it was perceived we can conclude that this context was not

a good choice. From the context itself, it is not clear that the family gathering was not fun. Therefore, the participants probably rated this statement according to their individual experience with family gatherings. Such a situation could also be perceived differently across various cultures, but we do not have the data to support this claim. We could presume that the tone of voice could disambiguate this situation, but unfortunately, we cannot confirm that assumption.

2. Dolazite kući i kažete cimerici da ste se sastali s profesorom i da Vam nikako nije htio pomoći. Vaša cimerica kaže: „Pričaj mi!“

The phrase “Tell me about it!” usually implies that the speaker understands the situation and has had a similar experience. Even though it displays a certain contrast – on a semantic level the speaker orders the recipient to give more information but the speaker usually shares his/her experience after this phrase, it was not recognized as very sarcastic by the participants. The mean value for this statement was 3.82; relatively close to the mean value for the positive counterpart (2.28). The scores were scattered all over the scale, with the largest group (30%) evaluating the statement with 5.

The following four examples are in fact positive and negative contexts for two statements and will, therefore, be interpreted in pairs.

3. Prijavili ste se za posao i dobili ste ga. Kažete svom cimeru dobre vijesti. Vaš cimer kaže: „Ti si čudo!“
4. Vi i Vaš cimer ste se prijavili na isti posao i Vi ste dobili posao. Vaš cimer kaže: „Ti si čudo!“

Getting a job, especially under the circumstances from the fourth example could cause envy. Such feelings would be implied through the use of sarcasm. These examples do not provide a lot of data about the relationship between the speaker and the recipient, or about the speaker’s personality, so the participants had to make a decision based on their personal experience. The mean values for the positive (statement 3) and negative statement (statement 4) were 3.86 and 4.54 respectively.

5. Rješavate teški problem u sklopu zadatka s prijateljem i Vi riješite problem. Vaš prijatelj kaže: „Pametno moje!“
6. Rješavate jednostavan problem u sklopu zadatka s prijateljem i Vi riješite problem. Vaš prijatelj kaže: „Pametno moje!“

The difference in the mean value between these two examples is 0.5 (positive context, statement 5, $M = 3.8$; negative context, statement 6, $M = 4.3$). Furthermore, the negative context exhibits the highest standard deviation of all the examples (1.91), but the standard deviation for its positive counterpart is not a lot lower (1.84). These examples were obviously very confusing for the participants, and one could only speculate about the reasons behind it.

Apart from the first example, the scores for the three pairs of statements are relatively close to each other. Therefore, we can conclude that the verbal content did not offer enough clues to detect sarcasm. There are several questions that one could pose: Is it a matter of culture or personal experience? Were the contexts well developed? Was there enough context? Would vocal or other cues for detecting sarcasm change the score? Without further research, these questions will remain unanswered.

4. Theoretical framework

In order to define sarcasm within the frameworks of politeness and impoliteness theory, we first have to introduce some concepts that are crucial for understanding how sarcasm works.

The first concept is Grice's *Cooperative Principle* (further on referred to as CP). In his article *Logic and Conversation* Grice (1975: 45) states the rules for the CP as follows: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged." Grice (1975) also developed and described four categories which are to be followed in order to maintain the CP. The first category, *quantity*, refers to the amount of information the speaker is supposed to make. It includes the following maxims:

"1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).

2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required." (Grice 1975: 45).

The category of *quality* consists of the supermaxim: "Try to make your contribution one that is true" (Grice 1975: 46) and these two maxims:

"1. Do not say what you believe to be false.

2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence." (ibid.)

The category of *relation* consists of only one maxim - "Be relevant." (ibid.), whereas the category of *manner* entails the supermaxim "Be perspicuous." (ibid.) and the following four maxims:

"1. Avoid obscurity of expression.

2. Avoid ambiguity.

3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).

4. Be orderly." (ibid.)

Grice (1975) also introduced a term that is very important for this subject – implicature, i.e., that what is suggested, but not explicitly stated. Grice (1975) differentiates between two kinds of implicatures. Namely, between *conventional* implicatures, i.e., "non-truth-conditional inferences that are not derived from superordinate pragmatic principles like the maxims, but are simply attached by convention to particular lexical items or expressions" (Levinson 1983: 127) and *conversational* implicatures.

We will focus on *conversational* implicatures, as they are more important for the subject of this paper. They arise when the speaker exploits one of the maxims, i.e., “blatantly fail[s] to fulfill it” (Grice 1975: 49). There are of course some conditions that have to be satisfied in order to classify a conversational implicature:

(1) he [the speaker] is to be presumed to be observing the conversational maxims, or at least the cooperative principle; (2) the suppositions that he is aware that, or thinks that, *q* is required in order to make his saying or making as if to say *p* (or doing so in THOSE terms) consistent with this presumption; and (3) the speaker thinks (and would expect the hearer to think that the speaker thinks) that is within the competence of the hearer to work out, or grasp intuitively, that the supposition mentioned in (2) is required. (Grice 1975: 50)

When using sarcasm, the speaker flouts the *maxim of quality* by saying something that is the opposite of what the speaker really means. In order to recognize sarcasm, the recipient has to presume that the speaker is obeying the CP and decode the utterance to find out the true meaning, in this case - the conversational implicature.

As mentioned earlier, this disparity between what is said and what is meant is what most participants of this study focused on in their definitions of sarcasm. If we consider some of the definitions, we will see that some of the participants, who were not linguists, did show an implicit knowledge of the CP and the conversational implicature. As we can see, two participants even used some form of the verb *implicate* - “Govor korišten na *implicitan* način da opovrgne to što se govori,” “*Impliciranje* suprotnog značenja od rečenog uglavnom uz pomoć drugačijeg načina govora.” Furthermore, some definitions mention some of the conditions for conversational implicature (e.g. “Izricanje stvari suprotnih od istine, *za koje se može zaključiti da su neistinite*, s ciljem pojačanja dojma koji izjava ostavlja ili humora,” “Izgovaranje tvrdnje s kojom se sami ne slažemo *u nadi da će sugovornik shvatiti koliko se ne slažete*,” “Suprotno izrečene misli od onoga što stvarno mislimo *pritom misleći da sudionici razgovora shvaćaju da ne mislimo ono što točno izrečemo.*”).

The second concept is Leech's (1983) *Politeness Principle* (further on referred to as PP), which is necessary for the understanding of the *Irony Principle* (hereafter referred to as IP). The PP consists of the following six maxims that go in pairs:

- (I) TACT MAXIM (in impositives and commissives)
 - (a) Minimize cost to *other* [(b) Maximize benefit to *other*]
- (II) GENEROSITY MAXIM (in impositives and commissives)
 - (a) Minimize benefit to *self* [(b) Maximize cost to *self*]
- (III) APPROBATION MAXIM (in expressives and assertives)
 - (a) Minimize dispraise of *other* [(b) Maximize praise of *other*]
- (IV) MODESTY MAXIM (in expressives and assertives)
 - (a) Minimize praise of *self* [(b) Maximize dispraise of *self*]
- (V) AGREEMENT MAXIM (in assertives)
 - (a) Minimize disagreement between *self* and *other* [(b) Maximize agreement between *self* and *other*]
- (VI) SYMPATHY MAXIM (in assertives)
 - (a) Minimize antipathy between *self* and *other* [(b) Maximize sympathy between *self* and *other*] (Leech 1983: 132)

We know that sarcasm involves a certain disparity between what the speaker says and what the speaker means and therefore flouts the *maxim of quality* and consequently breaks the CP. Leech (1983) argues that the IP breaks the CP only on a surface level but ultimately supports it. How this is possible, will be further explained in the following paragraph after we explain the concept of IP.

Leech (1983: 80) admits that “the CP in itself cannot explain . . . why people are often so indirect in conveying what they mean”. He, therefore, presents the PP as a “necessary complement” (ibid.) to the CP and states that “the CP enables one participant in a conversation to communicate on the assumption that the other participant is being cooperative. In this, the CP has the same function of regulating what we say so that it contributes to some assumed illocutionary or discursal goal(s)” (1983: 82). However, Leech (1983) argues that: “the PP has a higher regulative role than this: to maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place” (ibid.). The interaction of the earlier mentioned principles is visible in the IP which Leech (1983: 82) defines in the following way: “If you must cause offense, at least do so in a way which doesn't overtly conflict with the PP, but

allows the hearer to arrive at the offensive point of your remark indirectly, by way of implicature.¹” This definition explains how the CP in sarcastic utterances is breached and supported at the same time, though on different levels. The violation of the CP happens on a semantic level, but abiding to it is achieved via implicatures. Leech (1983: 83) describes this in the following way: “A person who is being ironic appears to be deceiving or misleading *h*, but in fact is indulging in an ‘honest’ form of apparent deception, at the expense of politeness.”

Within the impoliteness theory, sarcasm is equated with the term *mock politeness*. Leech (1983: 144) describes it as “an apparently friendly way of being offensive” and adds that “it combines the art of attack with an apparent innocence which is a form of self-defence” (ibid.).

Although Leech’s work is significant, the greatest contribution to the Politeness theory was made by Brown and Levinson (1978). They base their theory on the notion of face, which they define as “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself” (1978: 311). This notion consists of two components, a *positive face*, i.e., “the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others” (Brown and Levinson 1978: 312) and a *negative face*, i.e., “the want of every ‘competent adult member’ that his actions be unimpeded by others” (ibid.). When it comes to face threatening acts (hereafter referred to as FTAs), Brown and Levinson (1978) distinguish between threats to positive and negative face, as well as between threats to the recipient’s face and the speaker’s face and give a thorough account of all categories (see Brown and Levinson 1978: 313-315 for further details). Moreover, they presume that speakers tend to be polite, i.e., to avoid or at least mitigate the FTA. If the speaker decides to do the FTA, the way in which he/she minimizes the threat of his/her utterance depends on two variables: “the want to be efficient or urgent, and the want to maintain H’s face to any degree” (Brown and Levinson 1978: 316). Besides withholding from doing an FTA, Brown and Levinson (1978) propose four politeness strategies: *bald on record*, *positive politeness*, *negative politeness* and *off record*. *Bald on record* means doing an FTA “in the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way possible” (Brown and Levinson 1978: 316) This strategy could be identified with the CP, as the authors state. *Positive* and *negative politeness* are used to satisfy the recipient’s positive or negative face respectively (Brown and Levinson 1978: 317). The last politeness strategy, *off record*, is the most important for

¹ It is noteworthy to mention that one participant offered a definition, that slightly resembles Leech’s definition - “Jedna od viših razina humora namijenjena tome da se iskaže nezadovoljstvo, ali na neizravan i na prvu pristojan način.”

this paper, as it includes irony. The speaker does the FTA indirectly thus leaving space for “more than one unambiguously attributable intention” (Brown and Levinson 1978: 316) and “so that the meaning is to some degree negotiable” (ibid.).

Whereas Brown and Levinson (1978) focus on politeness and face-saving, Culpepper et al. (2003: 1546) focus “on impoliteness, the use of communicative strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony.” The impoliteness theory was criticized because some researchers thought that the existence of *bald on record* makes the impoliteness theory redundant, but Culpepper et al. (2003: 1547) argue that it is only used in “specific context, namely, one where the face threat is very small and so minimal politeness work is required.” Culpepper et al. (2003) emphasize that they deal with impoliteness that has the “function that the speaker intended and was not [simply] failed politeness” (Beebe, quoted in Culpepper et al., 2003: 1546) and claim that politeness theory is not sufficient for explaining such phenomena. It is important to mention Culpepper’s (1996) superstrategies for impoliteness. They are based on Brown and Levinson’s (1978) politeness strategies but “opposite in terms of orientation to face. Instead of enhancing or supporting face, impoliteness superstrategies are a means of attacking face” (Culpepper 1996: 356). Culpepper’s superstrategies noted in the article *Towards an Anatomy of Impoliteness* (1996) will be described in the next paragraph.

As well as FTAs, one can also withhold politeness (Culpepper 1996: 357). *Bald on record impoliteness* refers to FTAs “performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimised” (Culpepper 1996: 356). This definition differs from Brown and Levinson’s (1978) in the amount of face that is threatened and in the intention of the speaker (Culpepper 1996: 356). As in Brown and Levinson (1978), *positive* and *negative impoliteness* is concerned with the recipient’s positive and negative face wants respectively, but it aims to damage these face wants (Culpepper 1996: 356). Finally, we come to *sarcasm* or *mock politeness*. Culpepper (1996: 356) defines *sarcasm* as performing the FTA “with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain surface realisations.” It is important to note that Culpepper (1996: 356) states that his “understanding of sarcasm is close to Leech’s (1983) conception of irony” but he favors the term sarcasm, “since irony can be used for enjoyment and comedy” (Culpepper 1996: 357). Culpepper’s (1996) view is adopted in this paper. Furthermore, Culpepper (1996: 356) admits that his definition of sarcasm is similar to Brown

and Levinson's (1978) definition of the *off record politeness* but adds that Brown and Levinson's (1978) definition promotes social harmony, while sarcasm promotes social disharmony through, as Leech (1983: 142) describes it, "bypass[ing] politeness, promot[ing] the 'antisocial' use of language" and "scoring off others by politeness that is obviously insincere, as a substitute for impoliteness."

In his article *Conventionalised impoliteness formulae* Culpepper (2010: 3236) advocates the dual view of politeness by stating that: "there is a semantic side and a pragmatic side to impoliteness, both being interdependent opposites on a scale, neither guaranteeing an interpretation that something is impolite in context." This classification is especially fit for sarcasm, as it is semantically polite but pragmatically impolite. It is noteworthy to mention that Culpepper devised a list of conventionalized impoliteness formulae (see Culpepper 2010: 3240-3241 for further detail). He states that these formulae: "can be creatively exploited, either by breaking the formula itself or by deploying a formula so that there is a mismatch between the context it projects and the communicative situation in which it is contextualised, or between the context projected by one formula and that projected by its co-text—cases which give rise to phenomena such as sarcasm or banter" (Culpepper 2010: 3244).

5. Discussion of results within the two frameworks

This section will provide an analysis of the examples used in the survey presented in the first chapter of this paper. Even though sarcasm is, according to Culpepper (1996: 356), an impoliteness strategy, it uses politeness on a semantic level, which is why it should be analyzed within the framework of both politeness and impoliteness theory.

It is important to state that the power and social distance between the speaker and the recipient are minimal in the contexts of the statements that were analyzed in this study. The speakers have the following roles in recipient's life: friend, cousin, classmate, roommate.

We will start off by examining how the examples breach the Cooperative Principle. There is no evidence of flouting the *maxim of quantity* because all the statements are quite brief and appropriately informative. Sarcastic utterances clearly flout the *maxim of quality* in that the speaker says something he/she believes to be false. If the recipient recognizes sarcasm, he/she can perceive

the true meaning of the statement via implicature. As mentioned earlier, a significant number of the participants emphasized precisely this breach in their definitions of sarcasm. Leech (1983: 94) argues that: “an utterance U is relevant to a speech situation if U can be interpreted as contributing to the conversational goal(s) of s or h.” Most of the utterances refer to the context, and it could be said that they are relevant. Only two examples, where the speaker thanks the recipient when the recipient did nothing to help the speaker, could be interpreted as flouting the *maxim of relevance*. Thanking someone implies that the speaker somehow benefited from the recipient, but in these examples, the speaker actually criticizes the recipient for the lack of help and promotes his/her conversational goal. Using sarcasm in order to criticize someone, like in the previous case, can be justified by Leech’s (1983: 144) proposition that sarcasm plays a significant role in reducing the aggression in a conversation due to the fact that it entails politeness which makes it harder to reply impolitely. Lastly, sarcastic statements are ambiguous and therefore also flout the *maxim of manner*.

We will next analyze the examples according to Brown and Levinson’s (1978) politeness theory to conclude which strategies are used on a semantic level. *Bald on record* involves specific situations that are not presented in the survey and *off the record* superstrategy involves the flouting of Grice’s (1975) maxims which was analyzed earlier. Therefore, this analysis will be limited only to the positive and negative superstrategies. There are three examples of *negative politeness*. The first one “Pričaj mi!” follows the strategy of being direct. Even though such directness is more appropriate for *bald on record*, this action does not present a severe face attack and respects the recipient’s freedom. The other two examples consist of giving thanks and can, therefore, be seen as examples of going “on record as incurring a debt” (Brown and Levinson 1978: 322). Examples of *positive politeness* use the following strategies: notice (“Lijepo izgledaš!”), exaggerate (“Ti su čudo!, Baš je draga!, Baš super!, To je stvarno dobro prošlo!, Odlično!, Baš je bilo zabavno!, Kakav divan dan!”) and give gifts to the recipient (“Pametno moje!”).

We now turn to Leech (1983: 83) in order to see how sarcasm “exploits the PP,” or to be more exact, the politeness maxims. “Pričaj mi!” is the only impositive among the examples and can, therefore, be interpreted only through the *maxims of tact* and *generosity*. This request is quite direct, and it scores low on the indirectness scale. Indirectness correlates with optability;

imperatives do not leave the recipient many options, or an easy way out. Therefore, this example scores low on the optionality scale too. Nonetheless, it presents a benefit to the recipient, as the speaker is overtly interested in his/her story. Leech (1983: 110) explains this interesting duality by saying that: “increasing the positive politeness of an offer means anticipating and counteracting the negative politeness of the recipient.” On a semantic level this example follows the *tact maxim*, but on a pragmatic level, it flouts this maxim.

The other eleven utterances are examples of either expressives or assertives and will, therefore, be analyzed according to the *maxims of approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy*. The examples display a variety of positive comments which obey the *approbation maxim* in that they praise the recipient, third party or a situation, but this praise of other is clearly insincere. The examples show no evidence of the *modesty maxim*. Because the recipient’s replies are not included in the examples, it is difficult to see whether or not the speaker abides by the *maxim of agreement*. Based on context, we can only presume that in some examples, such as the one with technical support² or the boring assignment³, the *maxim of agreement* is only superficially violated, because the underlying message does imply that the speaker is not satisfied with the situation, and we can assume that the recipient is not content either. As for the *maxim of sympathy*, there are only two examples that can be connected to it. If we were to take the statement “Ti si čudo!” as a form of congratulation, the utterance could be interpreted as following the *maxim of sympathy* but only on a semantic level. The other example is the one where the speaker responds to the recipient’s loss of job with “Odlično!” On a semantic level it breaches the *maxim of sympathy*, but if we look at it from a pragmatic point of view, we can conclude that “Odlično!” is indeed an attempt at maximizing the sympathy between the speaker and the recipient.

Finally, we will examine the examples based on Culpepper’s (2010) conventionalized impoliteness formulae to see how they are used in sarcasm. Taking into account that Culpepper’s theory deals with impoliteness, we will deal with the pragmatic meaning of the utterances in order to see which formulae fit with the intended meaning of the examples. While the superficial meaning

² Imate problem s računalom i nazovete tehničku podršku. Oni Vam svojim savjetom pogoršaju problem. Vaš prijatelj kaže: „To je stvarno dobro prošlo!“

³ Nalazite se na Vašem najomraženijem predavanju i profesor Vam kaže da napravite vrlo dosadan i zamoran projekt. Vaš kolega kaže: „Baš super!“

of the utterances “Puno hvala!” and “Hvala na pomoći!” implies that the speaker is indebted to the recipient, the pragmatic meaning emphasizes that the recipient is indebted to the speaker. Furthermore, there are four examples of *personalized negative assertions*: “Baš je draga!”, “Lijepo izgledaš!”, “Ti si čudo!” and “Pametno moje!” The latter two could also be understood as *condescending*. The intended meaning of “Lijepo izgledaš!” and “Pametno moje!”, as well as the intended meaning of the examples of expressing gratitude would also “make the other uncomfortable” (Culpepper 1996: 358). The *pointed criticism/complaint* formula was found in the following examples: “To je stvarno dobro prošlo!”, “Kakav divan dan!”, “Baš je bilo zabavno!” and “Baš super!” The pragmatic meaning of “Pričaj mi!” could be interpreted as a *silencer*, and we could say that the speaker uses the following positive impoliteness strategy: “Be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic” (Culpepper 1996: 357). Saying “Odlično!” as a sarcastic reply to finding out that your friend has lost his job could be interpreted as an expression of empathy or as *pointed criticism* of the situation.

6. Conclusion

This thesis deals with various theories and concepts of sarcasm viewed through the lens of the research conducted. As such, it has produced data similar to the findings of previous researches. However, it is important to emphasize that the results are by no means to be taken as generalizations, due to the scope of the work, but they can be seen as examples of a certain trend.

When comparing Woodland and Voyer's (2011) results to the results of the present study, we found a lot of similarities. The ratings for sarcasm usage were very close to each other. In both surveys more than half of the participants were able to define sarcasm correctly, but we have to admit that the percentage of correct answers was bigger in the original study. Participants also rated the examples in a similar way, but in the present study, the scores were lower and higher for positive and negative contexts respectively. Based on the fact that these ratings are fairly similar we can conclude that context was sufficient for sarcasm detection in most cases. It has to be mentioned that some results remained on the neutral part of the scale. The underlying reasons for such scores could be worth exploring.

When it comes to the analysis of sarcasm within the frameworks of politeness and impoliteness theory, we have to distinguish the semantic side from the pragmatic side of sarcasm. On a semantic level sarcasm does violate the CP, but the recipient, if presented with enough clues, is usually able to detect the true meaning, hidden on a pragmatic level, via implicature. Furthermore, sarcasm uses the following politeness strategies in order to seem, at least overtly, polite: be direct, go on record as incurring a debt, notice, exaggerate and give gifts to the hearer. As for Leech's (1983) politeness maxims, we could conclude that the *maxim of approbation* is highly potent, as it is used in all the expressives or assertives from the survey. The *maxims of agreement* and *sympathy* were also found in the examples but in a smaller number. In order to analyze the pragmatic side of sarcasm we examined which conventionalized impoliteness formulae are used in the sarcastic statements from the survey. The results of this analysis show that *pointed criticism* and *personalized negative assertions* are used most often. We also found examples of *stating the hearer's debt to the speaker on record* and one example of a *silencer*. In some statements we also found the following impoliteness strategies on a pragmatic level: *be condescending*, *make the other uncomfortable* and *be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic*.

7. Abstract

This thesis examines whether the perception of sarcasm changes in the absence of intonation. It is based on the examples from Woodland and Voyer's *Context and Intonation in the Perception of Sarcasm (2011)*. We try to answer this question by presenting only written examples and comparing the results to the original study. This study also offers an insight into how sarcasm is defined by non-linguists. Furthermore, this thesis presents the most important concepts (CP, PP, IP) and representatives in both politeness and impoliteness theory (Brown and Levinson, Leech and Culpepper) and focuses on the role of sarcasm within these theories. Finally, it explores which (im)politeness strategies and conventionalized impoliteness formulae were used in the aforementioned examples both on a semantic and a pragmatic level.

Keywords: sarcasm, politeness theory, impoliteness theory, conventionalized impoliteness formulae, mock politeness

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Appendix A

Context	Statement
Rješavate teški problem u sklopu zadatka s prijateljem i Vi riješite problem. Vaš prijatelj kaže. . .	Pametno moje!
Rješavate jednostavan problem u sklopu zadatka s prijateljem i Vi riješite problem. Vaš prijatelj kaže. . .	
Prijavili ste se za posao i dobili ste ga. Kažete svom cimeru dobre vijesti. Vaš cimer kaže. . .	Ti si čudo!
Vi i Vaš cimer ste se prijavili na isti posao i Vi ste dobili posao. Vaš cimer kaže. . .	
Vi i Vaš prijatelj ste u šoping centru. Vidite kolegicu. Ona vam se nasmiješi i kaže bok. Vaš prijatelj kaže. . .	Baš je draga!
Vi i Vaš prijatelj ste u šoping centru. Vidite kolegicu. Ona vam se namršti i ode. Vaš prijatelj kaže. . .	
Nalazite se na Vašem najdražem predavanju i profesor Vam kaže da napravite zabavan projekt. Vaš kolega kaže. . .	Baš super!
Nalazite se na Vašem najomraženijem predavanju i profesor Vam kaže da napravite vrlo dosadan i zamoran projekt. Vaš kolega kaže. . .	
Ulazite u prostoriju u svojoj najljepšoj odjevnoj kombinaciji. Vaš prijatelj kaže. . .	Lijepo izgledaš!
Ulazite u prostoriju u vrlo ružnoj odjevnoj kombinaciji. Vaš prijatelj kaže. . .	
Dolazite kući i kažete cimerici da ste se sastali s profesorom i da je imao dobre vijesti za Vas. Vaša cimerica kaže. . .	Pričaj mi!
Dolazite kući i kažete cimerici da ste se sastali s profesorom i da Vam nikako nije htio pomoći. Vaša cimerica kaže. . .	
Radite na zadatku s prijateljicom i pomognete joj oko jednog pitanja. Vaša prijateljica kaže. . .	Puno hvala!
Radite na zadatku s prijateljicom i ona Vas zamoli za pomoć. Kažete joj neka sama riješi problem. Vaša prijateljica kaže. . .	
Imate problem s računalom i nazovete tehničku podršku. Oni Vam pomognu riješiti problem. Vaš prijatelj kaže. . .	To je stvarno dobro prošlo!
Imate problem s računalom i nazovete tehničku podršku. Oni Vam svojim savjetom pogoršaju problem. Vaš prijatelj kaže. . .	

Dolazite kući i kažete prijatelju da ste dobili povišicu. Vaš prijatelj kaže. . .	Odlično!
Dolazite kući i kažete prijatelju da ste dobili otkaz. Vaš prijatelj kaže. . .	
Napuštate odličnu zabavu s dobrom glazbom. Upoznali ste mnogo zanimljivih ljudi. Vaš prijatelj kaže. . .	Baš je bilo zabavno!
Otišli ste na obiteljsko okupljanje gdje su se prisjećali starih vremena. Vaš rođak kaže. . .	
Izašli ste van. Prekrasan je sunčan i topao dan. Vaš prijatelj kaže. . .	Kakav divan dan!
Izašli ste van. Hladan je oblačan i kišovit dan. Vaš prijatelj kaže. . .	
Pomažete prijatelju pri selidbi u novi stan. Prenijeli ste puno stvari i pomogli ste vašem prijatelju završiti u pola vremena. Vaš prijatelj kaže. . .	Hvala na pomoći!
Pomažete prijatelju pri selidbi u novi stan. Samo se motate po stanu i ne prenosite ništa. Vaš prijatelj kaže. . .	

Appendix B

Statement	Expected tone of voice	Context
Aren't you smart	Sincere	1) You're working on a difficult problem for an assignment with a friend and you solve the problem. Your friend says. . .
	Sarcastic	2) You're working on an easy problem for an assignment with a friend and you solve the problem. Your friend says. . .
Aren't you special	Sincere	1) You apply for a job and get it. You go home and tell your roommate the good news. Your roommate says. . .
	Sarcastic	2) You and your roommate apply for the same job and you get it. Your roommate says. . .
Isn't she friendly	Sincere	1) You and a friend are at the mall. You see a classmate and she smiles and says hello to you. Your friend says. . .
	Sarcastic	2) You and a friend are at the mall. You see a classmate and she frowns at you and walks away. Your friend says. . .
Isn't this exciting	Sincere	1) You're in your favourite class and the professor tells you to do a fun project. Your classmate says. . .
	Sarcastic	2) You're in your least favourite class and you are given a very tedious and boring assignment. Your classmate says. . .
Nice outfit	Sincere	1) You walk into a room with a beautiful outfit on. Your friend says. . .
	Sarcastic	1) You walk into a room with an ugly outfit on. Your friend says. . .
Tell me about it	Sincere	1) You get home and tell your roommate that you went to see a professor and he had good news for you. She says. . .
	Sarcastic	2) You get home and tell your roommate that went to see a professor and he wouldn't do a thing for you. She says. . .

Thanks a lot	Sincere	1) You're doing an assignment with your friend and you help her with a question. Your friend says. . .
	Sarcastic	2) You're doing an assignment with your friend and she asks you for help. You tell her to solve the problem herself. Your friend says. . .
That worked well	Sincere	1) You are having a computer problem and you call Technical Support. They help you fix the problem. Your friend says. . .
	Sarcastic	2) You are having a computer problem and you call Technical 'Support. The advice they gave you made the problem worse. Your friend says. . .
That's just great	Sincere	1) You go home and tell your friend that you got a raise. Your friend says. . .
	Sarcastic	2) You go home and tell your friend that you got laid off from your job. Your friend says. . .
Wasn't that fun	Sincere	1) You're leaving a really great party with good music and you've met a lot of new, interesting people. Your friend says. . .
	Sarcastic	2) You went to a family get-together and they were reminiscing about old times. Your cousin says. . .
What a great day	Sincere	1) You walk outside and it is a warm, beautiful, and sunny day. Your friend says. . .
	Sarcastic	2) You walk outside and it is a cold, dark, and rainy day. Your friend says. . .
You're a big help	Sincere	1) You're helping a friend move into a new apartment. You carried many items and you helped her finish in half the time. Your friend says. . .
	Sarcastic	2) You're helping a friend move into her apartment but you just hang around and you don't carry any items. Your friend says. . .

(Woodland and Voyer 2011: 231)

Appendix C

Statement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Pomažete prijatelju pri selidbi u novi stan. Prenjeli ste puno stvari i pomogli ste Vašem prijatelju završiti u pola vremena. Vaš prijatelj kaže: „Hvala na pomoći!“	1.1	0.3
Napuštate odličnu zabavu s dobrom glazbom. Upoznali ste mnogo zanimljivih ljudi. Vaš prijatelj kaže: „Baš je bilo zabavno!“	1.42	0.88
Radite na zadatku s prijateljicom i pomognete joj oko jednog pitanja. Vaša prijateljica kaže: „Puno hvala!“	1.48	1.09
Dolazite kući i kažete prijatelju da ste dobili povišicu. Vaš prijatelj kaže: „Odlično!“	1.66	1.02
Izašli ste van. Prekrasan je sunčan i topao dan. Vaš prijatelj kaže: „Kakav divan dan!“	1.72	1.43
Nalazite se na Vašem najdražem predavanju i profesor Vam kaže da napravite zabavan projekt. Vaš kolega kaže: „Baš super!“	1.82	1.32
Imate problem s računalom i nazovete tehničku podršku. Oni Vam pomognu riješiti problem. Vaš prijatelj kaže: „To je stvarno dobro prošlo!“	1.84	1.23
Ulazite u prostoriju u svojoj najljepšoj odjevnoj kombinaciji. Vaš prijatelj kaže: „Lijepo izgledaš!“	1.92	0.97
Vi i Vaš prijatelj ste u šoping centru. Vidite kolegicu. Ona vam se nasmiješi i kaže bok. Vaš prijatelj kaže: „Baš je draga!“	2.04	1.41
Dolazite kući i kažete cimerici da ste se sastali s profesorom i da je imao dobre vijesti za Vas. Vaša cimerica kaže: „Pričaj mi!“	2.28	1.51
Otišli ste na obiteljsko okupljanje gdje su se prisjećali starih vremena. Vaš rođak kaže: „Baš je bilo zabavno!“	3.08	1.78
Rješavate teški problem u sklopu zadatka s prijateljem i Vi riješite problem. Vaš prijatelj kaže: „Pametno moje!“	3.8	1.84
Dolazite kući i kažete cimerici da ste se sastali s profesorom i da Vam nikako nije htio pomoći. Vaša cimerica kaže: „Pričaj mi!“	3.82	1.61
Prijavili ste se za posao i dobili ste ga. Kažete svom cimeru dobre vijesti. Vaš cimer kaže: „Ti si čudo!“	3.86	1.84

Rješavate jednostavan problem u sklopu zadatka s prijateljem i Vi riješite problem. Vaš prijatelj kaže: „Pametno moje!“	4.3	1.91
Vi i Vaš cimer ste se prijavili na isti posao i Vi ste dobili posao. Vaš cimer kaže: „Ti si čudo!“	4.54	1.63
Ulazite u prostoriju u vrlo ružnoj odjevnoj kombinaciji. Vaš prijatelj kaže: „Lijepo izgledaš!“	5.76	1.49
Izašli ste van. Hladan je oblačan i kišovit dan. Vaš prijatelj kaže: „Kakav divan dan!“	6.02	1.32
Dolazite kući i kažete prijatelju da ste dobili otkaz. Vaš prijatelj kaže: „Odlično!“	6.18	1.34
Imate problem s računalom i nazovete tehničku podršku. Oni Vam svojim savjetom pogoršaju problem. Vaš prijatelj kaže: „To je stvarno dobro prošlo!“	6.26	1.55
Nalazite se na Vašem najomraženijem predavanju i profesor Vam kaže da napravite vrlo dosadan i zamoran projekt. Vaš kolega kaže: „Baš super!“	6.38	1.12
Radite na zadatku s prijateljicom i ona Vas zamoli za pomoć. Kažete joj neka sama riješi problem. Vaša prijateljica kaže: „Puno hvala!“	6.42	1.28
Vi i Vaš prijatelj ste u šoping centru. Vidite kolegicu. Ona vam se namršti i ode. Vaš prijatelj kaže: „Baš je draga!“	6.5	1.04
Pomažete prijatelju pri selidbi u novi stan. Samo se motate po stanu i ne prenosite ništa. Vaš prijatelj kaže: “Hvala na pomoći!”	6.64	0.75