Irony and Sarcasm in Political Speech: A Pragmatic Perspective

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السخرية و التهكم في الخطاب السياسي : من منظور تداولي

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Abstract

This study investigates the pragmatics of irony and sarcasm in political speech, focusing on how these linguistic phenomena are understood and employed in social interactions. Irony and sarcasm serve as complex communicative tools that convey meanings beyond their literal interpretations, often relying on contextual cues, speaker intent, and listener interpretation. The findings reveal that contextual knowledge, cultural background, and social relationships significantly affect how individuals perceive irony and sarcasm. Additionally, the study highlights the role of non-verbal cues in enhancing understanding and mitigating potential misunderstandings. This research contributes to the broader field of pragmatics by elucidating the nuanced ways in which irony and sarcasm function in political speech, emphasizing theirimportance in expressing humor, criticism, and social commentary. Ultimately, the study aims to enhance awareness of these rhetoricaldevices and their implications for effective communication in various contexts.**Key words:** Pragmatics, Irony, Sarcasm, Social Interaction, Context, Non-verbal Cues.

المستخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في تداولية السخرية والتهكم في الخطاب السياسي، مركّزة على كيفية فهم هذه الظواهر اللغوية وتوظيفها في التفاعلات الاجتماعية. إذ تُعد السخرية والتهكم أدوات تواصلية معقدة تنقل معاني تتجاوز التفسير الحرفي، وغالباً ما تعتمد على الإشارات السياقية، ونية المتحدث، وتفسير المستمع. وتُظهر النتائج أن المعرفة السياقية، والخلفية الثقافية، والعلاقات الاجتماعية تؤثر بدرجة كبيرة في كيفية إدراك الأفراد للسخرية والتهكم. كما تبرز الدراسة دور الإشارات غير اللفظية في تعزيز الفهم والحد من احتمالات سوء التفسير. وتسهم هذه الدراسة في توسيع مجال التداولية من خلال توضيح الأساليب الدقيقة التي تعمل بها السخرية والتهكم في الخطاب السياسي، مؤكدة أهميتهما في التعبير عن الفكاهة والنقد والتعليق الاجتماعي. وفي نهاية المطاف، تهدف الدراسة إلى تعزيز الوعي بهذه الأدوات البلاغية وما تحمله من دلالات بالنسبة للتواصل الفعّال في سياقات متعددة.**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التداولية, السخرية, التهكم, التفاعل الاجتماعي, السياق, الاشارات غير اللفظية.

1. Introduction Linguistic studies often examine the relationship between politeness and impoliteness, their effects on social interactions. Culpeper (1996),influenced by Brown and Levinson's theory, argues that understandingpoliteness is crucial for understanding impoliteness. His model, based on real-life data, explores various discourse types. Impoliteness arises whenthe speaker intentionally undermines the listener's face, or the listener perceives the act as a deliberate attack. This study provides an explanation of Culpeper's 'impoliteness superstrategies,' with a particular focus on the sarcasm strategy, in order to highlight the key elements that characterize a sarcastic context. Sarcasmis an indirect way to hurt the listener. It is mainly expressed positivelyand involves opposition and negativity. Sarcasm is closely connected to

irony; in fact, many linguists see it as a subtype of irony and commonly refer to it as verbal irony, even though it may be expressed nonverbally .According to the Oxford English Dictionary, sarcasm is the use of irony to mock or convey contempt‖. The utterance is bitter innature and is intended to hurt the target (Simédoh 2012). Pragmatically, Leech (1983: 142) defines irony as a pragmatic concept that allows speakers to seem polite while actually being impolite, bybreaking one or more of the maxims of the cooperative principle.According to Webster (1981), irony is the use of language to express something different from, and often the opposite of, the literal meaning of the words. Grice views verbal irony as a rhetorical device that carries meanings beyond what is explicitly stated, emphasizing that this implied meaning should be a clearly related idea, with the most directly related idea being the opposite of what the speaker is claiming (Grice, 1989: 2).**Statement of the Problem**Although irony and sarcasm are common in everyday communication, their pragmatic functions remain complex and often ambiguous. Misunderstandings arise when listeners fail to detect ironic or sarcastic intent, leading to breakdowns in communication. Most existing studies focus on either irony or sarcasm individually, leaving a gap in understanding how these strategies interact and function in political speech.This study seeks to address this gap by exploring two key questions:

1.How do speakers use irony and sarcasm in political speech?
2. What contextual cues help listeners recognize and interpret ironic versus sarcastic utterances?

2.Theoretical Background

2.1 The Concept of Sarcasm

According to Attardo (1994: 11), sarcasm is a form of wordplay that incorporates aggression. This aggression and negativity can be directed at others, whether they are present or not. Sarcasm is seen as a type of impolite speech aimed at offending others, but this offense is conveyed through polite expressions. Therefore, sarcasm is considered a form of 'mock politeness,' where politeness is used to express impoliteness.

McDonald (1999: 486) describes sarcasm as an indirect form of speech used intentionally to create a specific dramatic effect on the listener. It is a deliberate form of verbal aggression and is often viewed as a maledominated form of communication, primarily used among peers. Additionally, sarcasm is frequently employed to deliver implicit criticism or a polite form of criticism aimed at a particular target (McDonald, 1999: 486-7).Toplak (2000: 14) notes that the use and intensity ofsarcasm in daily communication are influenced by various factors, including exaggeration, the nature of the speaker, the relationship between the speaker and the target, the severity of the criticism, and whether the criticism is made privately or publicly. Toplak concludes that sarcasm, with the speaker's intent in mind, serves as a means of verbal aggression, and from the victim's perspective, it is perceived as a more severe form of criticism than direct criticism.To define Sarcasm, a universally accepted definition of sarcasm remains elusive. Traditionally, sarcasm involves presenting an idea in opposition to its original meaning (Kashikar & Ramteke, 2019, p.1). It is typically directed at an individual (Filik et al., 2016, p.1). Barbe (1995, p.29) noted that sarcasm falls under the broader category of irony. Nilsen and Nilsen (2018, p.304) described sarcasm as a form of ridicule or mockery that is often painful, contemptuous, and cruel, characterizing it as destructive. Baragona and Rambo (2018,1-3) outlined four key aspects of sarcasm:
1.The speaker says the opposite of what is meant, conveying a message.
2.The true meaning of the utterance is derisory, used as verbal aggression.
3. There is an incongruity between the words and the intended message.
4. Contextual elements influence the interpretation of sarcastic remarks, reinforcing the perception of sarcasm. Haiman (1998, 9-10) supported the view of opposition, stating that the speaker intends and expresses the reverse of what appears to be said. Camp (2011, 8-19) added that sarcasm involves negative judgment and must be direct and insincere Attardo (2000, 795) defined sarcasm as an overtly aggressive type of irony with clear markers and a specific target. Joshi et al. (2018) identified two key elements of sarcasm: implied negative meaning and the presence of a target.

2.2 Sarcasm vs. Irony

Some scholars, such as Capelli et al. (1990), equate sarcasm with irony.However, others, like Hairman (1998), distinguish between the two by noting that sarcasm must be intentionally communicated by people, whereas irony can pertain to situations and may lack intention. Essentially, sarcasm is deliberate and conscious, while irony can be unintentional and unconscious.

McDonald (1999: 486-7) points out that although both sarcasm and irony involve saying one thing but meaning another, they are not the same. Sarcasm is more intentional in its reversal of meaning, whereas irony can be subtler. Additionally, sarcasm often carries tones of disapproval, contempt, and scorn (Sperber and Wilson,

1981:   297-8).   For   instance:
- Saying "It's such lovely weather outside!" when it's actually raining (Irony).
- Saying "Your intelligence astounds me!" when the opposite is meant (Sarcasm). Therefore, understanding sarcasm requires recognizing the speaker's intentions in specific contexts, which may involve social cognition and theory of mind processes (Winner, 1988: 45).The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms defines sarcasm as a form of expression that highlights a gap between what is said and what is actually meant, often in a blunt or harsh manner (Baldick, 2001: 130). Unlike irony, sarcasm is typically intended to wound or belittle the target. In a similar vein, the Penguin Dictionary of American English Usage and Style notes that sarcasm, like irony, relies on the contrast between literal and intended meaning, but distinguishes itself through explicit ridicule or mockery, making it sharper and more offensive (Lovinger, 2000: 194). Likewise, the Macmillan English Dictionary describes sarcasm as the use of language to hurt or undermine another person's feelings, often conveyed through a tone of voice that signals the opposite of the literal words (Manser, 1996: 372). Toplak and Katz (2000) characterize sarcasm as perceived as insincere,impolite, humorous, mocking, offensive, aggressive, anger-provoking,non-instructional, unclear, and projecting self-indulgence on the speaker's part. Colston (1997) notes that irony enhances condemnation, while Dews and Winner (1995) argue that irony mutes criticism (Drucker et al., 2014: 553). These definitions highlight a key linguistic difference between sarcasm and irony.

   In Culpeper's model of impoliteness (1996), sarcasm is equated with mock politeness when a face-threatening act (FTA) is carried out using obviously insincere politeness strategies. In his revised model (2005),Culpeper replaced the sarcasm super strategy with 'off-record impoliteness.' Sarcasm is recognized for its meta-strategic nature, using politeness for impolite intentions (Taylor, 2015: 59-61) Culpeper (1996, 2005) treats sarcasm as a form of impoliteness and face attack, often using sarcasm in the context of irony. Leech (2014: 233) argues that mock politeness and irony should not be treated as the same thing, since they rely on different ways of interpretation. He explains that irony often goes beyond language, appearing in forms like dramatic irony or the irony of fate.Taylor (2015: 129) points out that Culpeper adapts Leech's view, but tends to associate irony more closely with sarcasm, because irony can be shaped to create humor or amusement. In this sense, banter—seen as playful mock impoliteness that strengthens social bonds—contrasts with sarcasm, which is mock politeness aimed at conflict or disharmony. Over time, the term "sarcasm" has been absorbed into wider categories such as off-record politeness (Culpeper, 2005; Bousfield, 2008) and implicational impoliteness (Culpeper, 2011 Brown (1980: 111-124) distinguishes between irony and sarcasm, noting that a teacher writing "Nice cover-F" on a student's paper without meaning it is being sarcastic, not ironic. Sarcastic utterances differ from
ironic ones in several ways:
1. The sarcastic potential is apparent to participants in a given situation.
2. Sarcastic utterances are more personal.
3. Sarcastic utterances may still serve as face-saving acts for the hearer,
who can choose to disregard the sarcasm (Barbe, 1995: 22).
Sarcasm and irony share similar methods but differ in their ends and
contexts. The line between them can be blurred. Muecke (1969: 54) notes
that irony has diverse forms and functions, often serving as a weapon in
satirical attacks, while sarcasm exists in the impersonal realm.

2.3 Sarcasm as a Form of Mock Politeness
Haugh (2014: 278) describes mock politeness as a seemingly polite stance that, through the use of certain linguistic forms or practices typically associated with politeness, actually masks an impolite attitude conveyed through implicature. Culpeper (1996: 45) categorizes sarcasm as a negative politeness strategy, a type of mock politeness, because it uses politeness to express impoliteness.

2.4 Sarcasm and Social Cognition
Dews and Winner (1999: 1579) explain that sarcasm, when used as implicit criticism, serves various social cognitive functions. These include making the criticism seem more polite, reducing the perceived threat and aggressiveness of the criticism, and creating a humorous atmosphere. They argue that difficulties in understanding sarcastic remarks may indicate an impaired ability to grasp social cues such as intentions,beliefs, and emotions. Therefore, understanding sarcastic comments requires considering the context, recognizing the

speaker's attitude, and acknowledging the shared knowledge between the participants.

2.5 The Role of Pragmatics in Understanding Sarcasm

Pragmatics plays a crucial role in interpreting sarcastic intentions, which involves understanding what speakers mean beyond their literal words. Gibbs and Colston (2007: 188) emphasize the importance of shared pragmatic information between interactants for interpreting sarcastic remarks.

According to Gibbs and Colston (2007: 196), when a speaker sarcastically says to a friend, "You are a big help," it is assumed that the friend shares enough pragmatic knowledge about the context and the speaker's beliefs and attitudes to understand the sarcasm. This shared information helps the friend infer the opposite of the literal meaning to grasp the sarcastic intent.Gibbs and Colston (2007: 196) also note that people use pragmatic information early in the process of understanding sarcasm. While prosody (tone of voice) also plays a role, many sarcastic statements, like "You are the cream in my coffee" (which might imply "You are a burden to me"), rely heavily on pragmatic cues rather than clear literal meanings.

2.6 Functions of Sarcasm

Sarcasm serves five key social functions: social control, declaration of allegiance, establishing social solidarity and distance, venting frustration, and humorous-aggression.

1. Social Control: Sarcasm is used in interactions between people of different social ranks, such as students and teachers or children and parents. It can also be a tool for those with limited power to criticize those in authority.

2. Declaration of Allegiance: Sarcastic remarks can be self-directed, indicating that the speaker supports a particular group and its norms. This involves self-oriented sarcasm, where the speaker is both the sarcast and the target, splitting themselves into a part that adheres to the group's ideals and a part that critiques them.

3. Establishing Social Solidarity and Distance: Sarcasm is often used in ongoing conversations within a group to express connections with or distance from those outside the group or those deemed unworthy of membership.

4. Venting Frustration: Sarcasm can be a reaction to situations or behaviors that violate someone's or a group's norms, serving as an outlet for frustration.

5. Humorous Aggression: Combining humor with criticism, sarcasm can be a witty way to express a critical point. Ducharme refers to this blend as "humorous aggression," "humorous derision," or "jocular aggression" (Ducharme, 1994, 56-57; Dews et al., 1995, 298-299).

2.7 Linguistic Mechanisms of Expressing Sarcasm

Tabacaru (2019, p.126) outlines various linguistic mechanisms used to convey sarcasm. This classification is crucial for understanding sarcasm more deeply and distinguishing it from irony. It highlights the creativity in sarcasm, as these mechanisms utilize diverse language patterns to create an incongruous meaning, often with a playful effect on listeners. Additionally, this classification underscores the importance of shared knowledge between speakers. The linguistic mechanisms include antithesis, repetitive statements, explicitation, metonymy, metaphor, shift of focus, reasoning, and rhetorical-questions.

2.8 Defining Irony

Before diving into an analysis, it makes sense to clarify what irony means. Scholars have varied perspectives on its definition. Fowler (1965:295) describes irony as a form of expression that targets two audiences: one that understands the speaker's true intention and another that interprets the statement literally due to their inexperience. Abrams (1999:134) views irony as the act of concealing the truth, not to deceive, but to create special rhetorical or artistic effects, indicating a literary approach to irony. Similarly, Cuddon (1998:430) defines irony as the recognition of a discrepancy between words and their meanings, actions and their outcomes, or appearance and reality. Simpson (2011:34) simplifies irony as "saying what is

contrary to what is meant," where the speaker's words convey a meaning opposite to their literal interpretation. From these definitions, it is evident that irony involves an element of absurdity and paradox.

2.9 Types of Irony

Irony can be understood from various perspectives, leading to different types. Here are some key types of irony:

1. Situational Irony: According to Cuddon (1998: 430), situational irony occurs in specific situations, such as when someone laughs at another's misfortune, only to experience the same misfortune themselves.

2. Dramatic Irony: Muecke (1970: 64) explains that dramatic irony is not confined to drama. It is a subset of situational irony where the victim's expectations are overturned by unforeseen events.

3. Socratic Irony: Abrams (1999: 136) describes Socratic irony as a technique where a questioner's feigned ignorance leads the respondent to reveal their own lack of knowledge.

4. Irony of Fate (Cosmic Irony): Abrams (1999: 137) defines irony of fate or cosmic irony as situations in literary works where fate or a deity manipulates events to give the protagonist false hopes, only to dash them.

5. Tragic Irony: This type of irony is specific to fictional contexts. It involves characters' words and actions being opposite to the actual situation, with the audience aware of the truth. Tragic irony is often associated with ancient Greek drama, where audiences were familiar with the underlying myths (Cuddon, 1998: 431).

6. Comic Irony: Irony used to create comic effects, often combined with satire. An author might state something as a fact, only to reveal its falsehood through the narrative (Clift, 1999: 524).

7. Verbal Irony: Cuddon (1998: 430) defines verbal irony as a discrepancy between what is said and what is meant. It involves saying something but intending the opposite, making the meaning contrary to the words used.

2.10 Functions of Irony

Speakers use irony for various purposes, as highlighted by several theorists. Attardo (2000: 11-15) identifies the following functions:

1. Group Affiliation: Irony can serve two contrasting purposes: fostering in-group solidarity through shared humor or expressing negative judgments about someone.

2. Retractability: Irony allows speakers to say something and mean the opposite simultaneously, helping them avoid potential repercussions of direct speech and maintain a noncommittal stance.

3. Evaluation: Grice (cited in Attardo, ibid: 13) notes that irony is closely linked to expressing feelings, attitudes, or evaluations.

4. Rhetorical: Carston (cited in Attardo, ibid: 14) suggests that irony is a powerful rhetorical tool because it assumes the truth of the implied proposition is self-evident.

5. Politeness Strategy: Irony can act as a face-saving mechanism. Attardo (ibid: 15) adds that irony is driven by politeness. Gibbs (1994: 372) also highlights other functions of irony, such as being witty, putting someone at ease, or saving face. The primary function of irony, according to Gibbs, is to maintain social relationships among family members, friends, and coworkers.

2.11 Pragmatics and Irony

Lyons (1977:171) defines pragmatics as the study of actual utterances, focusing on use rather than meaning, and on performance rather than competence. While pragmatics has addressed many overlooked aspects of language meaning and use, it still needs to give proper attention to complex phenomena like irony. The pragmatic approach to irony is rooted in Grice's (1975) work. Grice suggests that people understand irony by recognizing that an utterance violates a conversational maxim, leading them to derive an interpretation that aligns with the cooperative principle of conversation. Essentially, in political

speech, the research follows the Cooperative Principle and its maxims, allowing intended messages to be conveyed directly from
speakers to listeners. When these maxims are violated or flouted, a
conversational implicature arises, unless the speakers are being untruthful
or uncooperative (Grice, 1975).

3. Methodology

3.1 Model of Analysis

This analysis uses an eclectic model combining Grice's (1975) "Flouting of the Maxims of the Cooperative Principles" and Culpeper's (1995) "Impoliteness Strategies." It examines how maxims are flouted and identifies the pragmatic strategies involved, along with their frequency of occurrence. Moreover, the model used to Analyze the context is Dell Hymes(1975).

3.2 Data Collection

The data analyzed includes the first and final 2020 U.S. Presidential Election debates between Donald Trump and Joe Biden, held on September 29 and October 15, respectively. These debates, featuring a convener and two debaters, provide valuable material for pragmatic analysis under Grice's maxims. They were chosen for their relevance and novelty, as they have not been extensively studied. The first 2020 U.S. Presidential Debate between Donald Trump and Joe
Biden, watched by 73.1 million people, was marked by chaos, insults, and interruptions. Both candidates struggled to present their ideas effectively, failing to address key issues like the economy, the pandemic, and racial tensions. The debate's tense atmosphere led to calls for canceling future debates, though Biden's campaign insisted on continuing. Trump's COVID-19 diagnosis after the debate raised questions about its timing and potential political impact. Body language played a significant role, with Trump displaying dominance and anger, while Biden maintained calm and restraint. The debate highlighted communication breakdowns, stress, and lack of focus, obstructing meaningful discussion.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Context Analysis

The context analysis of the selected data, based on Dell Hymes' speaking model, provides a structured breakdown of the first 2020 American presidential debate.

1-Setting and Scene: The debate took place in Ohio, USA, during the evening, creating a formal and focused atmosphere.

2-Participants: The key figures were Donald Trump and Joe Biden, with a convener facilitating the discussion.

3-Ends: The purpose was to engage in a political debate as part of the U.S. presidential election process.

4-Act Sequence: The debate followed a structured format where the convener posed questions, and each debater was given equal time to respond.

5-Key: The tone was formal and political, reflecting the seriousness of the event.

6-Instrumentalities: Tools like podiums, microphones, and cameras were used to ensure the debate was accessible to a wide audience.

7-Norms: The interaction was governed by rules, such as time limits for responses and the expectation of respectful discourse.

8-Genre : This was a political debate, a recurring event in the election cycle, aimed at informing voters and influencing their decisions.

4.2 Data Analysis

1- The phrase **"This is so un-Presidential"** illustrates verbal irony, as it conveys criticism indirectly by highlighting a gap between expected presidential behavior and the actual behavior. Pragmatically, it functions as a "bald off-record" strategy: the speaker signals disapproval without explicitly attacking, relying on the listener's shared knowledge of presidential norms to interpret the criticism. This subtle form of mock politeness allows the comment to be biting yet socially acceptable, reflecting the interplay of sarcasm, irony, and face-threatening acts in political discourse.

2- The statement **"47 years, you've done nothing**. They're understand."uses verbal irony to underscore a long period of unfulfilled potential. By contrasting the literal words with the intended criticism, it delivers a subtle rebuke of inaction over decades. Pragmatically, it employs a "bald off-record" strategy, allowing the speaker to convey disapproval indirectly, leaving the audience to infer the critique. This method softens the face-threatening impact while still highlighting failure, demonstrating how irony and sarcasm function together in political speech

3- The statement **" I don't wear a mask like him. Every time you see him, he's got a mask. He could be speaking 200 feet away from him and he shows up with the biggest mask I've ever seen. I will say this.. "** demonstrates verbal irony by exaggerating the other person's mask-wearing habits to ridicule them. Unlike subtle critiques, this uses a "bald on-record" strategy, openly conveying disapproval without any mitigation. The comment's humor and exaggeration amplify the sarcastic effect, making the critique direct, socially provocative, and clearly understood by the audience.

4- The statement **"And Joe does the circles and has three people someplace"**employs verbal irony to subtly mock the small audience, highlighting the disparity between expectation and reality. Pragmatically, it uses a "bald off-record" strategy, allowing the speaker to criticize indirectly without overt confrontation. The humor and understatement engage the audience in interpreting the critique, showing how irony can deliver a sharp comment while maintaining plausible deniability.

5- The statement **"Well, it is what it is because you are who you are."** illustrates sarcasm, directly criticizing the person's character or behavior. It employs a "bald on-record" strategy, delivering the critique bluntly and without subtlety. The remark's sharpness relies on the audience recognizing the contrast between the literal phrasing and the speaker's intended disapproval, making the sarcasm clear and impactful in a political context.

6- The statement **"Will you shut up, man?"** is a clear example of sarcasm used to express direct frustration. It employs a "bald on-record" strategy, leaving no room for subtlety or misinterpretation. The bluntness of the remark conveys strong disapproval, emphasizing the speaker's irritation while maximizing the face-threatening impact in the interaction.

4.3 Data Discussion The statements from the 2020 U.S. Presidential debates show how politicians use irony and sarcasm to criticize, mock, or point out flaws in their opponents. Looking at the data, we can see two main ways these strategies appear: subtle indirect comments (bald off-record) and blunt, direct remarks (bald on-record). When it comes to "irony", speakers often rely on subtlety. For example, phrases like "'This is so un-Presidential'" or "'And Joe does the circles and has three people someplace'" don't attack directly. Instead, they hint at what's wrong and let the audience read between the lines. This approach allows the speaker to deliver criticism without seeming openly hostile, a classic case of "mock politeness" as described by Culpeper (1996). "Sarcasm", on the other hand, is more upfront. Statements such as "'Well, it is what it is because you are who you are'" or "'Will you shut up, man?'" leave no doubt about the speaker's disapproval. The directness hits harder and is meant to provoke a reaction, showing sarcasm's power to confront or even embarrass the target openly.Some remarks, like the mask-wearing comment, mix "irony with exaggeration", creating humor while still criticizing. This shows how politicians rely on shared knowledge and social expectations to make their points—if the audience "gets it," the comment lands perfectly. Overall, these examples illustrate that political figures carefully choose between subtle irony and blunt sarcasm depending on what they want to achieve. Whether it's to gently mock, openly attack, or entertain, both strategies depend heavily on context and the audience's understanding. In the end, irony and sarcasm in political speech are not just about clever words—they're tools for persuasion, humor, and social maneuvering.

Conclusions
Both irony and sarcasm serve various social functions, such as building
group solidarity, expressing evaluations, and serving as rhetorical tools. They can also act as face-saving
strategies, allowing speakers to convey criticism or humor without direct confrontation. Understanding these
functions helps in recognizing the nuanced ways people use language to
navigate social interactions, express attitudes, and manage relationships. The pragmatics of irony and sarcasm
reveal their importance incommunication, highlighting how these tools are used to achieve specific
social and conversational goals. Recognizing and interpreting these forms
of speech require a keen awareness of context, shared knowledge, and thesubtleties of human interaction.   The
analyses of 2020 U.S. Presidential Debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden reveal a consistent use of irony
and sarcasm as rhetoricaltools to critique or mock behaviors, actions, or situations. The choice
between "bald on-record" and "bald off-record" strategies reflects thespeaker's intent to either confront directly

or critique subtly. Together, these statements demonstrate how language can be wielded to expressdisapproval, frustration, or humor, often leaving room for interpretationbased on context and delivery.

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