The Pragmatics of Irony in Interpersonal Exchanges: The Case of Igbo Women and their Maids

Rosarii C. Mbisike, PhD
Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Lagos State University, Lagos, Nigeria

This research examines some ironic texts of the interpersonal exchanges between some Igbo women and their maids in order to show how some pragmatic principles operate in the encoding and decoding of ironic remarks. Moreover, it identifies the ironic tactics employed in the issuance of such remarks as well as some factors that engender the use of irony.

0. Introduction:
Irony is described in Encyclopedia Britannica (Micropedia) as:

… either speech (verbal irony) in which the real meaning is concealed or contradicted by the literal meaning of the words, or a situation (dramatic irony) in which there is an incongruity between what is expected and what occurs.

This study is, however, limited to verbal irony. It is simply put, as follows in Encyclopedia Americana:

Verbal irony occurs when the actual intent of the speaker or writer as expressed in words that carry the opposite meaning.

The ironic force of a remark is often marked off by “exaggeration” or “understatement” and these contribute in deceiving the hearer if he interprets the ironic remark at its face value.

Irony could be comic or sarcastic in force. An example of comic irony is:

A: (introducing a short friend) Here comes the tallest man in Nigeria.

An example of irony that has sarcastic force is:

A: (already eating the cake)
B: Tasty bite? Go on.

Deirdre Wilson (Lecture Notes) clearly points out that “irony is ridicule not of linguistic form but of the content of an utterance or an opinion”.

Irony, however, helps one avoid being aggressive in speech because it prevents direct criticism, accusation, insults, etc, which could lead to conflicts. An
addressee can easily retort to an insult and this could spark off a hot exchange of words, but it is less easy to angrily respond to an ironic remark. Leech (1983) says irony “combines the art of attack with an apparent innocence which is a form of self-defence”.

Muecke (1969:67-68) lists some rhetorical uses of irony as follows: praising in order to blame, blaming in order to praise, pretended agreement with the victim, pretended advice or encouragement to the victim, rhetorical questions, pretended doubt, pretended error or ignorance, innuendo or insinuation, irony by analogy, deliberate ambiguity, pretended omission of censure, pretended attack upon the victim’s opponent, pretended defence of the victim, misrepresentation or false statement, intended contradiction, fallacious reasoning, stylishly signaled irony, understatement, overstatement, and the display of incompatibles. In referring to Muecke’s collection of rhetorical uses of irony, Kaufer (1981:503) points out that the collection delineates ironic tactics.

Since ironic statements are opposites of what the speakers mean, then the interpretation of ironic statements go beyond the truth definition for that language. It therefore calls for a pragmatic theory.

1. Theoretical Orientation

Pragmatics is a theory of communication. Stalnaker (1972) defines pragmatics as “the study of linguistic acts and the contexts in which they are performed”. Kempson (1975) says “pragmatics refers to the study of sentences in use.” Levinson (1983:9) considers pragmatics as being “the study of those relations between language and context that are grammaticalized, or encoded in the structure of a language.” Mey (2001:6) states thus: “Pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society”.

Kempson (1975:138) states that “a pragmatic theory is a theory which has to explain how a language is used to enable any speaker to communicate with any hearer”. Sperber and Wilson (1981:281) see pragmatics as “the theory of utterance – interpretation.” They point out that “the main aim of pragmatic theory is to provide an explicit account of how human beings interpret utterances. To do this, one would have to say how disambiguation is achieved; how reference is assigned; how sentence fragments are interpreted; how ungrammatical utterances are dealt with; what role presuppositional phenomena play; how implicatures (intended inferences) are worked out; how contextual and encyclopaedic knowledge is brought to bear; and so on. Any organized set of answers to these and similar questions would constitute a pragmatic theory on some level of adequacy.”

Kempson (1977:68-69) explicitly describes the aim of pragmatics as “the explanation of how it is that speakers of any language can use the sentences of that language to convey messages which do not bear any necessary relation to the linguistic content of the sentence used”. So a pragmatic theory concerns itself with both encoding and decoding of utterances within a particular context. Such a
theory is put forward by H.P. Grice (1975) in what he called the Cooperative Principle (CP).

a. **The Cooperative Principle (CP)**
The Cooperative Principle provides us with a framework within which we derive an explanation of how speakers succeed in using sentence(s) of language to communicate information which is unspecified by the literal meaning of the sentence(s) in question.

The cooperative principle subsumes a set of maxims which specify the conventions that should govern participants in a conversation. The maxims represent an attempt to account for how conversations are construed by participants in different speech situations. The maxims are as follows:

**Quantity:**

i. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange).

ii. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

**Quality:**

i. Do not say what you believe to be false.

ii. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

**Relevance:**

Be relevant.

**Manner:** “Be perspicuous”

i. Avoid obscurity

ii. Avoid ambiguity

iii. Be brief

iv. Be orderly.

These maxims show that the cooperative principle suggests that communication is essentially a cooperative endeavour governed by specifiable conventions. However, unlike linguistic rules, these maxims are often broken. For instance, many people tell lies and some people make irrelevant statements. Nevertheless, speakers sometimes break these rules (maxims) deliberately and flagrantly in order to convey some extra information which is in accordance with the cooperative principle and which he assumes that the hearer can work out. This extra information is what Grice calls an implicature.
b. **Conversational Implicature**

Kempson (1977:143) defines conversational implicature as:

> ... assumptions over and above the meaning of the sentence used which the speaker knows and intends that the hearer will make in the face of an apparently open violation of the Cooperative Principle in order to interpret the speaker’s sentence in accordance with the Cooperative Principle.

Implicatures are non-trivial inferences that prevent breakdown in communication. Let us examine the following example:

James is a tiger.

The above example flouts the maxim of quality. It is a metaphorical expression and it involves a non-linguistic knowledge of the world for the hearer to interpret it. Grice’s implicatures provide us with a natural explanation of the interpretation of metaphors. In order to interpret this utterance in accordance with the Cooperative Principle, the hearer must assume that the speaker is conveying an extra information other than the literal meaning of the sentence. Since ‘tiger’ is a large, fierce animal of the cat family, the speaker is then saying that James is aggressive.

Deidre Wilson (personal communication) states that

> ... conversational implicature is part of the speaker’s intended message, but an implicit rather than an explicit part. It is a proposition the hearer has to take the speaker to believe, in order to preserve the assumption that the speaker, in producing his utterance, was obeying Grice’s maxims.

The notion of conversational implicature provides us with an explanation of utterance interpretation.

c. **Limitations of the Cooperative Principle**

There have been some criticisms of Grice’s Cooperative Principle on the grounds that it does not adequately capture real language use. Larkin and O’Malley (1973) have argued that the conversational constraints of the cooperative principle do not work because most declarative sentences are not “information-bearing” in function. Moreover, Keenan (1976) pointed out that some maxims of the cooperative principle do not apply to some linguistic communities, and thus argued that the maxims of the Cooperative Principle (CP) are not language universal.

Nevertheless, I agree with Leech (1983) in arguing that:
To reject the CP on purely quantitative grounds would be to mistake maxims for statistical norms – which they are not. And no claim has been made that the Cooperative Principle (CP) applies in an identical manner in all societies.

The Cooperative Principle (CP) has greatly provided us with insight to utterance interpretation. However, there are some language instances which cannot be satisfactorily explained by the Cooperative Principle. These put the Cooperative Principle in a weak position. An example of such a case is the following:

(i) A: We’ll all visit Akin and Ojo, won’t we?
    B: Well, we’ll all visit Ojo.

In this example, B flouted the Maxim of Quantity in his confirmation of A’s opinion because he partially confirmed it by only saying: “Well, we’ll all visit Ojo” without including visiting Akin, thereby supplying less information than is required. An implicature is derived from this: “B is of the opinion that we will not all visit Akin”. However, this implicature is not arrived at solely on the basis of the Cooperative Principle because B could have added “… but not Akin” which will provide us with enough information; rather the implicature was also arrived at on the knowledge that B withheld saying: “but not Akin” in order not to be impolite to a third party.

Also, let us examine the following example:

(ii) X: Somebody ate my biscuits.
    Y: It wasn’t me.

In the foregoing, Y’s reply breaks the maxim of relation: Y reacted as if X directly accused him of eating his biscuits. However, Y’s apparent breach of the Maxim of Relation could be explained thus: suppose X is not sure who ate his biscuit, but suspects that it is Y; then X politely suppresses a direct accusation by substituting an impersonal pronoun someone for the second-person pronoun you. X’s remark is interpreted as an indirect accusation. Y’s response to this indirect assertion implicates that Y may have eaten the biscuit because Y denied an offence of which he has not been directly accused. This explanation suggests that Y’s irrelevant reply was caused by an implicature of X’s indirect utterance which was motivated by politeness.

The above examples show that the Cooperative Principle cannot explain the relation between sense and force of non-declarative sentences and also it cannot explain people’s motivation for indirect illocution. In these cases, the Politeness Principle is involved at a deeper level of interpretation. Thus, the Politeness Principle (PP) complements the Cooperative Principle (CP).
d. **The Politeness Principle (PP)**

Superficially, politeness is a matter of “being civil”, but apart from this superficial function, “politeness is an important missing link between the CP and the problem of how to relate sense to force” (Leech 1983:104).

Politeness concerns a relationship between two participants in a conversation. The two participants may be called ‘self’ and ‘other’. The speaker (s) is normally referred to as ‘self’ while the hearer (h) is referred to as ‘other’. Sometimes politeness is shown to a third party who may or may not be present during the conversation, and the third party is also referred to as ‘other’. Politeness varies in kind and degree in different situations.

Leech (1983) formulates the Politeness Principle (PP) in its negative form: “Minimize (other things being equal) the expression of impolite beliefs”, and a corresponding positive version: Maximize (other things being equal) the expression of polite beliefs”. Leech (1983) derived the ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ aspects of politeness from Brown and Levinson’s (1978:64) distinction between positive and negative face, and their consequent distinction between positive and negative politeness.

In examples (i) and (ii) above, the following expressions: ‘We won’t visit Akin’ and ‘You have eaten my biscuit’ are the suppressed impolite beliefs. Polite beliefs are “favourable” to the hearer while impolite beliefs are “unfavourable”.

Both the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle perform the function of regulating language users, but while the Cooperative Principle enables one participant in a conversation to communicate on the assumption that the other participant is being cooperative, thereby, “regulating what we say so that it contributes to some assumed illocutionary or discoursal goal(s)”, the Politeness Principle (on the other hand, “maintain(s) the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place (Leech 1983:82). The Politeness Principle prevents breakdown in communication to the extent that it sometimes overrules the Cooperative Principle at the expense of the maxims of the Cooperative Principle. For instance, people sometimes break the Maxim of Quality by telling ‘white lies’ in order to be polite. For example, a student who does not feel like attending her association’s dinner party may feel that the only way to politely decline her president’s invitation is to pretend that she has a headache. This is outrightly a ‘white lie’ and it could be illustrated in a figure:

![Fig. 1: Telling ‘white lies’ (taken from Leech 1983:83).](image-link)
However, such ‘white lies’ are meant to deceive the hearer and they should be distinguished from apparent breach of the Maxim of Quality.

Still on the Politeness Principle (PP), the PP enhances communication, so it is not surprising that it is greatly utilized in making ironical remarks. This is to say that the Politeness Principle is important for explicating both the Cooperative Principle and the Irony Principle (IP).

e. The Irony Principle (IP):
Irony is overtly too polite for the situation. This takes place if the speaker overvalues the Politeness Principle by deliberately breaking a maxim of the Cooperative Principle so as to uphold the Politeness Principle. Leech (1983:82) states the Irony Principle (IP) as follows: “If you must cause offence, 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”.

Let us examine the following example:

(iii)  
A: Susan will be visiting us this weekend.  
B: O! I LOVE the idea!

There is an obvious breach of the Maxim of Quality in this example. The irony in B’s statement is made clear by B’s contradictory tone of the utterance which is indicated by capitalizing LOVE. What B means is: O! I hate the idea! However, the implicature derived from the Irony Principle in this case is roughly: ‘What B says is polite to Susan and is clearly not true. Therefore, what B really means is impolite to Susan and true’. This example shows that the Politeness Principle is greatly exploited in being ironic in order to uphold the Cooperative Principle at ‘a remoter level’. The person who is being ironic apparently deceives the hearer at the expense of politeness. Ironic ‘truthfulness’ can be illustrated thus:

Fig. 2: Ironic truthfulness (taken from Leech 1983:83).

However, unlike the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle which directly promote effective interpersonal communication, the Irony Principle’s
function depends on the Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle for explanation. Leech (1983:142) says:

The IP is a ‘second-order principle’ which enables a speaker to be impolite while seeming to be polite; it does so by superficially breaking the CP, but ultimately upholding it. Apparently then, the IP is dysfunctional, if the PP promotes a bias towards comity rather than conflict in social relations, the IP, by enabling us to bypass politeness, promotes the ‘antisocial’ use of language. We are ironic at someone’s expense, scoring off others by politeness that is obviously insincere, as a substitute for impoliteness.

In using ironic remarks in “scoring off others” by insincere politeness, we go a long way to preventing conflicts which could have been sparked off by direct insults, criticism, etc. This is clearly pointed out in Leech (1983:144), as follows:

The function of irony may thus be tentatively explained as follows. If the PP breaks down, it is liable to breakdown on both sides: direct accusation leads to counter-accusation, threat to counter-threat, and so on. But because irony pays lip-service to the PP, it is less easy to break the PP in one’s response to it. Hence the IP keeps aggression away from the brink of conflict.

The Irony Principle is the major pragmatic principle that will be used for analyzing the data in this study. Since the Irony Principle is explained in terms of the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle, these other principles will also be incorporated in the data analysis.

2. Data Collection and Selection:
The study samples are a collection of ironic interpersonal exchanges between some Igbo women and their maids, whom the researcher visited. The sampling technique used in selecting the study samples is ballot-system random sampling technique. The women selected are those that belong to the middle-class. The middle-class women were selected because most lower-class women rarely keep homehelps since they cannot maintain them and most upper-class women are distanced from their homehelps to the extent that they hardly interact with them.

The data was collected using three instruments: (a) Observation Schedule for the women, (b) Observation Schedule for the maids, (c) Interview for the women. These three instruments were used to find answers to the following Research Questions:

1) How do pragmatic principles operate in the encoding of ironic statements by the madams?
2) What are the factors that motivate madams to use ironic statements?
3) How accurately do the maids interpret the ironic statements in relation to the context of utterance?
4) What are the implications of the maids’ interpretation of the ironic statements?

3. Encoding Pragmatic Principles in Ironic Remarks:
The pragmatic principles speakers resort to in encoding ironic remarks are Cooperative Principle, Politeness Principle, and Irony Principle.

a. The Cooperative Principle (CP) in the Ironic Remarks:

Text 1
Madam: (about to leave the house, and there is very little water in the house)
   E ku kwa na miri tata. I nu go?
   (‘Don’t fetch water today. Okay?’)
Maid:        Yes ma. (Maid ended up not fetching water)

In this Text 1, the madam broke the Cooperative Principle’s Maxim of Quality deliberately with the assumption that the maid will work out the meaning of the ironic remark. In saying “E ku kwa na miri tata. I nu go?” (i.e. ‘Don’t fetch water today. Okay?’) in a situation where there is very little water in the house, the madam truly meant that the maid should fetch water.

Text 2
Maid:        Mama, biko a kuwara m ofu afele.
            ‘Mama, please I broke a plate’.
Madam:      Ji si ike.
            ‘Well done’.
            (Maid sorrowfully walks away).

In Text 2, the maid’s personal (illocutionary) goal is to inform her madam that she broke a plate. However, the madam’s reply is an ironic remark which breaks both the Maxim of Relation and the Maxim of Quality, thereby not being very cooperative because her response (“Ji si ike.” → ‘Well done.’) does not advance the maid’s desire/intention to explain how the plate got broken. People are normally told ‘Ji si ike’ when they do or when they are doing something good, but breaking a plate is not a good thing, so “Ji si ike” is both irrelevant and a contradiction in that situation.
Text 3
Maid: (dozing while washing clothes)

Madam: I na asa.
     ‘You are really washing’.
     (Maid wakes up and gets busy).

There is a violation of the Maxim of Quality in madam’s ironic phatic communication to the maid in Text 3. The ironic force of the madam’s statement is signalled by exaggeration because in saying “I na asa” → ‘You are really washing’ to the maid who was dozing while washing clothes, the madam was stretching her greeting beyond the truth. The irony is sarcastic in this case.

The flouting of the Cooperative Principle’s maxims of quality and relation, respectively, in encoding the ironic remarks was successfully achieved by the help of the Politeness Principle.

b. Politeness and Ironic Tactics in the Ironic Remarks:
In Text 1 above, the madam’s ironic statement is an indirect instruction to the maid which was politely ended with the following expression: “I nu go?” → ‘Okay?’ The politeness in that expression apparently deceived the maid at face value. The ironic tactic employed by the madam in her statement is Intended Contradiction: ‘E ku kwana miri tata’ (‘Don’t fetch water today’) while she meant that the maid should fetch water.

The madam’s response in Text 2 (“Ji si ike” → ‘Well done’) is a clear deception at the expense of politeness. People are told “Ji si ike” when they do or are doing something really good but breaking a plate is not something good, so in saying ‘Ji si ike’, the madam is politely scolding the maid indirectly. The ironic tactic employed by the madam in her remark is Pretended Encouragement to the Victim.

The ironic force in the madam’s greeting to the maid in Text 3 is heightened by the politeness in the madam’s statement: “I na asa”. (‘You are really washing’). The madam’s remark ridicules the maid’s action without directly criticizing her. The ironic tactic employed by the madam in her remark is Praising in Order to Rebuke.

From the above analysis, it could be seen that the Irony Principle is explained in terms of the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle because the maxims of the Cooperative Principle are deliberately flouted to uphold the indirectness of the Irony Principle and the apparent deception of the Irony Principle is achieved at the expense of the Politeness Principle.

4. Decoding Pragmatic Principles in Ironic Remarks:
Creativity is one of the basic characteristics of human language, so language users use language in various ways to communicate. However, some sentence forms
occur frequently in language that they have become conventional and are unmarked but the sentence forms which do not occur frequently are marked and they attract more attention and are more context dependent for their interpretation. Figurative expressions such as metaphoric expressions, proverbs, ironic remarks, etc, belong to this latter form and they are used to create various ironic effects which may not be successfully achieved with sentences of the unmarked form.

a. The Concept of Interpretation in Communication:
Communication is a cooperative endeavor and when there is a breakdown, communication fails. For communication to be successful, the speaker has to be intelligible in order that the hearer can interpret what is said.

Grice’s Cooperative Principle, as we have discussed earlier, subsumes a number of maxims that should govern any conversation to avoid communication breakdown. When the speaker deliberately flouts these maxims with the assumption of still communicating in accordance with the Cooperative Principle, the hearer is expected to work out the implicature of such sentences. So the task of interpretation is that of the hearer in all cases of language use. Ernst von Glasersfeld (1983:207) says: “...the activity of interpreting involves experience, the coordination of conceptual structures, and symbolic representation; that is to say, it involves the very activities of cognition and thus, inevitably, a theory of knowledge”.

This suggests that the hearer should work out the presupposition of the sentence in order to correctly interpret the sentence in question.

b. Presupposition in the Ironic Remarks:
Presupposition has been a very controversial notion in both linguistic and philosophy circles. This study, however, is concerned with two types of presupposition: semantic and pragmatic.

Semantic presupposition deals with the logical relation that holds between the sentence and the world. Such notion of presupposition is context independent. For example, in the sentence below, A presupposes B:

A. Mary ate the piece of cake in the fridge.
B. There was a piece of cake in the fridge.

The presupposition of a sentence refers to the necessary conditions for determining the truth value of the statement. One thing with presupposition is that it is the same for both the positive and the negative forms of any sentence, thus C still presupposes B in the following example:

C. Mary did not eat the piece of cake in the fridge.
B. There was a piece of cake in the fridge.
Semantic presupposition is a distinct part of the sentence meaning that is different from what is said.

Pragmatic presupposition, on the other hand, considers the context of utterance which should also be appropriate. They are shared assumptions about the context of utterance as well as shared information.

A combination of the semantic and the pragmatic notions of presupposition will go a long way in helping the hearer interpret the speaker’s utterances. However, interpretation of ironic remarks depends greatly on the pragmatic notion of presupposition because it is context dependent. Let us treat the presupposition in the ironic remarks contained in the three texts given above.

In Text 1, the madam’s ironic statement (‘E ku kwa na miri tata. I nu go?’) presupposes that there is enough quantity of water at home, so the maid should not bother with fetching water.

In text 2, the madam’s ironic remark (‘Ji si ike.’) presupposes that the maid did or is doing something that is very good.

In Text 3, the presupposition in the madam’s ironic remark (‘I na asa.’) is that the maid is really working hard on washing the clothes.

The working out of the presuppositions in relation to the context of utterance will help the maids know that their madam’s statements are ironic, then they will try to work out the implicature of such statements in order to interpret the ironic remarks accurately. So the knowledge of the presupposition of the sentence contributes a lot to the successful working out of the implicature of the sentence in question.

c. **Implicature in the Ironic Remarks:**
The Irony Principle exploits both the maxims of the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle. Ironic remark entails the flouting of one or more of the Cooperative Principle maxims at the expense of politeness. The speaker assumes that the hearer should be able to work out the implicature of such ironic remarks. For the hearer to work out such implicature, he must assume that the speaker is observing the Cooperative Principle though he (the speaker) overvalued the Politeness Principle. It is only when the hearer makes these assumptions can he accurately interpret ironic remarks. In other words, it is only then can the ironic force make sense to the hearer. Let us go back to our sample texts (1-3) to explain how the homehelps work out the implicature of their madam’s ironic remarks.

In Text 1, the maid unfortunately did not understand that her madam meant that she should fetch water for the house. She interpreted the madam’s ironic statement at its face value without relating the madam’s utterance with the context in which it was said. (However, in that situation, the maid was relatively new to that family, so she was not yet used to the madam). In order to successfully work out the implicature of the ironic remark in this text, the maid should know, from the quantity of water in the house, that the madam deliberately broke the Maxim of Quality with the hope that the maid will work out the real meaning of her
utterance instead of relying on the literal meaning of her utterance. If the maid realized the madam’s assumptions, she would have understood that the real intention of the madam’s utterance was to instruct her to fetch water though this instruction was indirectly and politely conveyed.

In Text 2, the maid’s reaction to her madam’s ironic remark shows that she was able to work out the implicature of the madam’s ironic reply to her illocutionary goal. She understood that the madam’s response was sarcastic and should not be simply interpreted as irrelevant. She understood the madam’s remark as an indirect scolding carried out in a polite manner.

Also in Text 3, the maid successfully worked out the implicature of the ironic compliment in the madam’s greeting because she quickly realized that the madam was ridiculing her for dozing while washing clothes, so she became more alert and got busy with washing the clothes. The maid was able to work out this implicature by realizing that the madam was communicating in accordance with the Cooperative Principle and that she deliberately broke the Maxim of Quality with the assumption that the maid will be able to work out the implicature of her utterance. This the maid successfully did because she worked out that such compliments are not paid to people who doze off while on duty.

The above analysis shows that successful communication depends on accurately working out the implicature or accurately interpreting the utterance(s) of the speaker.

5. Observation
From the data, it was discovered that only the madams used ironic remarks during the exchange they had with their maids; no ironic remark was found in the expressions of the maids in relating with their madams. This I believe is due to the class distinction between the madams and their maids. It will not be appropriate for maids to use ironic statements in addressing their madams because it will be seen as disrespectful, at least, in the Igbo culture. The madams tactfully exploited the Politeness Principle in making their ironic remarks and they succeeded in getting their maids do what they intended.

On the part of the maids, it was observed that in most cases they were able to work out the implicature of their madam’s ironic remarks. They hardly interpreted the ironic remarks at their face value. They were able to arrive at the accurate interpretation through detecting the contradiction between their madam’s statements and the context of utterance. However, that one maid (out of the three samples presented above) misunderstood the ironic statement shows that some variables intervene in the interpretation of ironic remarks. These intervening variables could be discovered through the maid’s demographic data. The variables that could be considered are: age, sex, I.Q, educational background, social background, etc. This, as it were, is not the concern of this research. Nevertheless, to the extent that ironic remarks could sometimes be misunderstood, the present writer proposes a revision of the Ironic Principle thus:
Use ironic remarks only if the hearer is in a position to work it out, and do so in a way which doesn’t overtly conflict with the Politeness Principle, but allows the hearer to arrive at the offensive point of your remark indirectly, by way of implicature.

Note: The addition to the Ironic Principle is in italics.

6. Motivation for the Use of Ironic Remarks:
Some of the madams were interviewed to find out what factors motivate their use of ironic remarks instead of direct honest remarks. Below are some of the motivating factors:

i. To be sarcastic through indirectness.
ii. To avoid outright abuse or insult.
iii. To strengthen the reasoning faculty of the maids.
iv. To cut down on scolding.

7. Conclusion
It has been shown in this study that the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle operate simultaneously, the latter complementing the former, in explaining the Irony Principle. This was proved by analyzing some ironic remarks in the interpersonal exchanges between some Igbo women and their maids.

The present study, therefore, provides us with a basis for research in sociopragmatics. Moreover, it encourages further studies on micro-pragmatics.
References


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