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Morphopragmatic View on the Ironic Use of Diminutives in Polish

Abstract

This paper focuses on the use of diminutives in Polish to express irony. The phenomenon is analyzed from the perspective of morphopragmatics (Dressler, Merlini Barbaresi 1994; Merlini Barbaresi 2015; Nagórko 2015) and reports on the results of a small-scale informant-based study, in which twelve respondents described their evaluation of the pragmatic meaning contributed by diminutives in three naturally-occurring spoken sentences. In most cases, there was a negative reaction to the diminutives as it was considered they represent an arrogant type of irony.

Keywords

diminutives, morphopragmatics, irony, evaluation, conversation, perception

Abstrakt

Artykuł koncentruje się na użyciu zdrobnień w języku polskim w celu wyrażenia ironii. Zjawisko to jest omawiane pod kątem morfopragmatycznym (Dressler, Merlini Barbaresi 1994; Merlini Barbaresi 2015; Nagórko 2015), a sama analiza opiera się na wynikach przeprowadzonego na małą skalę badania ankietowego, w którym dwunastu respondentów opisało swoje odczucia w odniesieniu do znaczenia pragmatycznego zdrobnień występujących w trzech wypowiedziach zaczerpniętych ze spontanicznych rozmów użytkowników języka polskiego. W większości przypadków ocena respondentów jest negatywna, a znaczenie pragmatyczne ukazanych zdrobnień reprezentuje arogancki typ ironii.

Słowa kluczowe

zdrobnienia, morfopragmatyka, ironia, ewaluacja, konwersacja, percepcja

1. Introduction

Languages such as Polish frequently involve the production of diminutive forms as the numerous suffixes can express the specific attitude of a speaker towards a particular object. This is why it is necessary to discuss the presence of diminutives in Polish with reference to their morphopragmatic nature. Diminutive forms are often associated with a positive evaluation, nevertheless, when assessed negatively they also play a significant role in interpersonal communication. The aim of this paper is to discuss the morphopragmatic usage of diminutive forms when expressing their most common negative meaning, namely irony, as the basic function of both irony and diminutives is evaluation. Clift (1999: 538) claims that “evaluation, as can be seen, is implicit in the framing that characterizes irony.” Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi (1994: 360) agree with Oomen’s remark that irony is always evaluative (see also Hutcheon 2002: 168), which according to them, “fits in well with the evaluative character of diminutives.” In Polish, ironic statements are often evaluated negatively “as a form of secretive unfair behaviour connected with making fun of the interlocutor” (Biel 2004: 251). The paper analyses examples of non-literary data, that is, spontaneous spoken utterances taken from authentic dialogues which were witnessed in such places as a restaurant, on a bus or in a market. Such statements confirm the above-mentioned attitude of Poles towards irony.

The paper is divided into four sections, each discussing a particular issue: section 2 presents the notion of morphopragmatics, section 3 introduces the nature of irony while section 4 analyses particular ironic statements created through the use of diminutive forms. Section 5 is devoted to the study of the perception of particular statements which express irony by means of diminutives.

2. The scope of morphopragmatic

Morphopragmatics is an integrated discipline which combines pragmatics and morphology as it investigates affixes and other morphological devices whose meaning seems to be primarily located in pragmatics. Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi (1994: 55) define it as “the area of the general pragmatic meanings of morphological rules, that is, of the regular pragmatic effects produced when moving from the input to the output of a morphological rule. (...) A morphological rule is relevant for morphopragmatics if it contains a pragmatic variable which cannot be suppressed in the description of its meaning.” This combination of morphology with pragmatics needs to be

discussed in a systematic way, as, apart from the works of Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi (1994), Nagórko (2007) and Kaproń-Charzyńska (2007), it has not been the subject of a detailed and thorough analysis. It should also be distinguished from other disciplines such as morphosemantics and the lexical pragmatics of morphology.

Morphosemantics, contrary to morphopragmatics, deals with “the semantic meaning of morphological rules, that is the denotational and connotational meaning change between the input and the output of a morphological rule” (Merlini Barbaresi 2015: 1129–1130). Therefore, the semantic meaning of a word-formation rule is that which includes all the pragmatic variables of speech situations, such as participant interrelations, contextual place and time, speech acts, etc. There are, however, certain grey areas, e.g. the interpretation of the connotative meaning of diminutives, as the dissimilarity between the semantic connotation and pragmatic meaning may be very narrow, e.g. *doggy*, which may evoke the semantic connotation of a word spoken by a child and yet, at the same time, the pragmatic meaning of tenderness towards a pet or indeed irony when referring to a huge dog. Therefore, Merlini Barbaresi (2015: 1130) claims that stable connotative features attached to words must be distinguished from pragmatic meanings which are contextually and dynamically created by a morphological operation in the course of a given speech event.

Morphopragmatics should also be differentiated from the lexical semantics of morphology which refers to “the denotational and connotational semantics of a morphologically complex word” (Merlini Barbaresi 2015: 1130). It explores the meanings of morphemes and the way they combine to form the meanings of complex words. The difference in meaning between *employee* and *employer* can be given as an example.

Additionally, morphopragmatics cannot be associated with the lexical pragmatics of morphology as the latter refers to “a theoretical model (...) that deals with the general pragmatic meanings of morphological rules” (Merlini Barbaresi 2015: 1131).

Instead morphopragmatics refers to the “idiosyncratic meaning of [an] individual morphologically complex word” (Merlini Barbaresi 2015: 1130). It describes phenomena within both word-formation and inflection which can contribute autonomous pragmatic meanings to discourse. The pragmatic meaning of a morphological rule modifies one of the individual lexical items employed through the pragmatic operations of e.g. narrowing, loosening and metaphorical extension (Merlini Barbaresi 2015: 1130). Therefore, the pragmatic meaning belongs to the word itself and not to the word-formation operation.

What is more, the morphological operation can be totally responsible for the added meanings of the utterance, with the word base being either

neutral (*pies-ek* ‘dog-DIM.’), or contributory (*kochani-utki* ‘sweet-DIM.’), or even contrary (*ogromni-utki* ‘huge-DIM.’) with regard to the effect pursued.

In other words, morphopragmatics “incorporates language users’ intentions and communication strategies as well as context-dependent social conventions of speaking” (Nagórko 2015: 1546) into the naming of phenomena. It concerns the speaker’s point of view and intention, the “here and now” of the actual context of a given act of speech (Nagórko 2015: 1547). The speaker has word-formation models, affixes and ready derivatives at his/her disposal as these are fully conventional.

The main objects of a morphopragmatic analysis are (Merlini Barbaresi 2015: 1137; Nagórko 2007: 225; Nagórko 2015: 1546):

- evaluative suffixes: diminutives and augmentatives, e.g. *psisko* ‘dog-AUG.’;
- reduplicatives, e.g. *teensy-weensy*;
- elatives, e.g. *cichuško* ‘very quietly’;
- unverbated multi-word structures (combinations of ellipsis and suffixation), e.g. *skarbowka* ‘tax office’ instead of *izba skarbowa* ‘tax office’;
- intermediary structures between compounds proper and (syllable) acronyms with a reduced initial element, e.g. *specsluźby* instead of *sluźby specjalne* ‘special forces’;
- reinterpreted derivatives, e.g. *ciężarówka* (referring to a pregnant woman rather than a type of vehicle) or *komunista* (referring to a child receiving his/her first Holy Communion rather than a communist);
- pragmatic synonyms, e.g. *warszawianin* and *warszawiak* (referring to a citizen of Warszawa) or *szkoła podstawowa* and *podstawówka* (referring to a primary school).

With regard to diminutives, there is a difference between the morphosemantic and the morphopragmatic meanings of diminutive forms. Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi (1994) distinguish the following three features of diminutives:

- morphosemantic (denotation) – [small] – *domek* ‘house-DIM.’;
- morphosemantic (connotation) – [non-important] – *główka {dziecka}* ‘{child’s} head-DIM.’;
- morphopragmatic – [non-serious] – *mamusia* ‘mummy’.

The morphopragmatic feature [non-serious] means that diminutives are used to lower an individual’s responsibility towards the speech act being performed and the commitment to its illocutionary force. This is related to the morphosemantic features through their metaphorical extensions. Laalo (2001: 71) summarizes the morphopragmatic nature of diminutives by stating that “if the abstract feature of non-seriousness is attached to the speech situation, it diminishes its formality, thus reducing psychological distance.

Since reduced psychological distance is a component of sympathy, empathy, familiarity, and intimacy, the latter are thereby linked to the feature [non-serious]; diminutives modify the whole speech act in the given speech situation.”

The metaphoric relation between the semantic feature [small] and the pragmatic speech act feature [non-serious] seems to apply to most languages which have productive rules of diminutive formation. Nevertheless, the pragmatic constraints concerning diminutive use are mainly language- and culture-specific. Despite this, some diminutive uses seem to be of a rather universal nature, e.g. child-centered speech situations (Biały 2017: 72):

(1) - *Na tym obrazku jest dwanaście tulipanków.* ‘There are twelve tulips-DIM. in this picture-DIM.’¹

(2) - *Patrz, jak się pieski bawią.* ‘Just look how the dogs-DIM. are playing.’

Other conditions in which a given diminutive form is employed tend to be more language- and culture-specific, e.g. offering food or drink in Polish when both the choice of landing-sites for applying a diminutive form and the speech situation which requires the use of diminutives are language- and culture-specific (Biały 2017: 55):

(3) - *Może kawki?* ‘Would you like some coffee-DIM.?’

(4) - *Herbatkę podać teraz czy po jedzeniu?* ‘Shall I serve the tea-DIM. now or after you have finished eating?’

What is more, the pragmatic scope of a given diminutive suffix is not connected only with the word or even the sentence, but with the whole speech act being performed.

3. The nature of irony

When discussing irony, it is essential to introduce Grice’s notion of conversational implicature. Grice claims that the content expressed in an utterance constitutes only a part of what may be communicated (Zdunkiewicz 2001: 272–273). The remaining meaning of the utterance consists of implied information, transmitted in either a conventional or a nonconventional way, which is termed by Grice (1975: 45) as conversational implicature. He further explains that conversation is an intentional act of cooperation between the interlocutors. Therefore, he highlights certain principles that are to be

¹ The examples constitute spontaneous spoken utterances taken from authentic dialogues which were witnessed by the author of this paper in places such as a restaurant, on a bus or in a market. Their translational equivalents are provided by the author. The entire text, including the translational equivalents of the Polish examples, has been proofread by a professional English language proofreader under a POB Heritage grant to SPL (2022–2023).

observed in the course of the conversation. The general principle is defined as the cooperative principle and is 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: 45). Along with this principle, Grice (1975: 45–46) proposes four maxims which supplement it:

- maxim of quantity – where an individual tries to be as informative as possible and gives only as much information as is needed;
- maxim of quality – where an individual tries to be truthful and does not give information that is false or that is not supported by evidence;
- maxim of relation – where an individual tries to be relevant and says things that are connected with the discussion;
- maxim of manner – where an individual tries to be as clear and brief as possible in what is said and avoids both obscurity and ambiguity.

Conversational implicature occurs when in an open and ostentatious way the interlocutor violates one of the above-mentioned maxims (Zdunkiewicz 2001: 274). Irony violates Grice’s maxims of quality and manner, therefore, the use of diminutives to express irony is an example of conversational implicature.

Irony is usually understood as “the use of words to convey the opposite of their literal meaning” (Dressler, Merlini Barbaresi 1994: 337), as it arises from a contradiction between what is said and what is intended (see also Haiman 1994; Sperber, Wilson 2002). As Leech (2014: 232) states, irony takes place when “*S* says something that is superficially interpretable as polite but is more indirectly or “deeply” interpreted as face attack – as impolite”. He further provides his extended definition of the Irony Principle:

In order to be ironic, *S* expresses or implies a meaning (let’s call it Meaning I) that associates a favorable value with what pertains to *O* (*O* = other person(s), mainly the addressee) or associates an unfavorable value with what pertains to *S* (*S* = self, speaker). At the same time, by means of Meaning I and the context, *S* more indirectly implies a second, deeper meaning (Meaning II) that cancels out Meaning I by associating an unfavorable value with what pertains to *O*, or associating a favorable meaning with what pertains to *S*. The derivation of Meaning II from Meaning I is by means of two paths of inference: first, Meaning I is infelicitous (i.e., pragmatically untenable in context, often because of violation of the Cooperative Principle) and therefore to be rejected; and second, given that the meaning is infelicitous and in accordance with the PP³, the obvious way to make sense of it is to look for a related interpretation that is felicitous and not in accordance with the PP – which is what the Irony Principle provides (Leech 2014: 233).

² *S* – the speaker.

³ PP – Politeness Principle.

Leech (2014: 236) explains that conversational irony “works in favor of the speaker both offensively and defensively. Offensively, it achieves its impolite goal of a put-down of *O*, in a way that can be interpreted as face-depriving both by *O* and by other people present. Defensively, it means *S* cannot easily be accused of causing offence (because *S* can always claim or imply that the overt, ‘innocent’ interpretation was intended).”

Clift (1999: 533) analyses the notion of irony from a slightly different perspective as she adopts Goffman’s concept of framing to explain its nature:

Adopting Goffman’s metaphor of framing to the characterization of irony makes it possible to capture the simultaneous presence of two dimensions of meaning: what, for want of more elegant terminology, I shall refer to as “inside” and “outside” meanings, the one framing the other, which lies within it. Traditional accounts – adhering to a one-dimensional model that sees irony as the result of the straightforward reversal of an utterance – ignore the fact that two aspects of meaning must be perceived at the same time to make sense as irony. So it is not that one dimension cancels the other, but that it is necessary to make sense of the other.

No matter which perspective is taken into account in order to characterize the notion of irony, it is certain that it has numerous dimensions. As Leech (2014: 235) observes, irony “comes in various degrees of subtlety and seriousness.” This linguistic weapon can be “more or less humorous, and more or less hostile” (Leech 2014: 235). Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi (1994: 358–359) adopt Groeben’s division into four main types of irony:

- protective/defensive irony, which is believed to be the prototypical variety – it is an indirect way of criticizing;
- constructive-critical irony – a kind of friendly irony, which is used by a sympathetic speaker to influence the referent, with the aggressiveness cancelled by jocularity;
- affectionate irony – a kind of friendly irony, which is always jocular and does not criticize but expresses a positive attitude; it aims at humour, creates situational irony, and/or expresses or builds up group solidarity;
- arrogant irony – used for destructive purposes.

The above-mentioned classification of the four main types of irony will be further applied in the analysis of particular utterances in section 5 of this paper.

There is a common belief that sarcasm is similar to irony, only stronger, but it must be underlined that these two terms are not synonyms. The main difference is that sarcasm is always used to hurt the addressee. It also intends to criticize, and resembles cynicism and resignation. Unlike irony, sarcasm always creates distance between the interlocutors, with the diminutives used to express sarcasm considered to be offensive and

intensifying the direct attack on the referent (Dressler, Merlini Barbaresi 1994: 360–365).

Biel (2004: 28–29) discusses irony in terms of the relationship between interlocutors while communicating as she believes that “sometimes references will be made to the distance between the speaker and his/her message if this distance is relevant for the relationship between interlocutors.”

No matter which perspective is taken into account, one conversational aspect concerning irony is worth emphasizing: ironic statements are usually unexpected and indirect and, therefore, as a result more effective (Dressler, Merlini Barbaresi 1994: 358).

4. Irony and diminutives

Diminutive forms belong to the group of linguistic devices which “code the speaker’s attitude towards the interlocutor covertly and indirectly contribute to the overall feeling of communicative distance” (Biel 2004: 226). They “create [a] psychological “conversational atmosphere,” i.e. they emotionally colour conversational space” (Biel 2004: 226). Diminutive forms very often express a negative assessment, with the speaker hiding the actual negative judgment in an ostensibly positive one, which is represented by a diminutive (Sarnowski 1991: 41). According to Biały’s analysis (2017: 178), the most common negative meaning of Polish diminutive forms is irony (together with sarcasm). Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi (1994: 349) quote Haverkate’s observation that irony is the “intentional expression of insincerity,” and conclude based on his discussion that in the case of diminutives “this occurs at the levels of the linguistic structure of the utterance and of the hearer’s interpretation.” Biel (2004: 231) claims the fact that irony in this case stems from “the asymmetry between the root of the word and a diminutive suffix,” a result of diminutives belittling “things which should not be made smaller, e.g. *profesorek* (professor-DIM).”

Irony very often takes the form of praise, however, praise implying reprimand or mockery. This divergence stems from the fact that diminutive forms can only be correctly interpreted in a particular context or situation (Hutcheon 2002: 168–169):

(5) – *No proszę! Znowu nowy kolorek włosów!* ‘Well, well, a new colour-DIM. of hair, again!’

Diminutive forms refer to the smallness of a given object. Usually, being small is treated as a positive feature – [small] means [nice], but in particular situations it is associated with a negative characteristic, when [small] means [unimportant], [insignificant] or [laughable] (Sarnowski 1991: 42–43; Biały 2017: 133):

(6) – *Sąsiadka przyszła, jak zwykle na ploteczki.* ‘The neighbour has come, as usual, for a gossip-DIM.’

Ponsonnet (2018: 27) claims that “the basic negative emotional value of diminutives is disapproval (i.e. pejoration, subjective negative evaluation). The semantic relationship with the core denotational sense [small] is evident: being small, while a cute property of children, can be seen as defective for many other referents”. Biel (2004: 231) mentions that smallness may be associated with a lack of worth – [small] means [cheap] or [unimportant]. This is why diminutive forms applied in ironic contexts denote the speaker’s feelings of not only disapproval, but also of dislike, unfriendliness or even contempt, disdain, a lack of respect, as well as a sense of pity that is directed towards the interlocutor, as, through their use, the speaker humiliates or even disqualifies the addressee, deprecating a given person to a significant extent⁴ (Sarnowski 1991: 46; Biały 2017: 135; Lockyer 2018: 195–196) and demonstrating his/her superiority (Tabakowska 1993: 105):

(7) – *I ta jego, pożał się Boże, żońcia...* ‘And his pitiful wife-DIM. ...’

(8) – *A w tej główce tylko przeciąg...* ‘And there’s only a draught in this head-DIM. ...’

Diminutives may also denote insincere compassion (Sarnowski 1991: 44) or pretended empathy (Dressler, Merlini Barbaresi 1994: 359), as well as the speaker’s emotional condition, including his/her standard of personal culture or intellect (Biały 2017: 133):

(9) – *A widziałeś te jej piersiątko?* ‘Have you seen her breasts-DIM.?’

There are situations when the use of diminutive forms in an ironic context is a direct result of the fact that they are present in an interlocutor’s way of speaking. Sometimes individuals apply diminutives in their conversations in an excessive, unconscious or even established way and, consequently, may be parodied via the use of the same forms as they themselves employ (Sarnowski 1991: 47), since the parody is obtained through an over-use of diminutives (Dressler, Merlini Barbaresi 1994: 2):

(10) – *A pod paszkami się pani depiluje?* ‘Do you shave under your arms-DIM.?’

– *Tak, depiluję się pod paszkami co tydzień.* ‘Yes, I shave under my arms-DIM. every week.’

Diminutives may also be applied in threats, strengthening them, which occasions an expression of the speaker’s satisfaction with the defeat of the interlocutor (Biały 2017: 62):

(11) – *Powiedz swojej przyjaciółeczce, że ją odwiedzę.* ‘Tell your friend-DIM. that I am going to visit her.’

⁴ Ponsonnet (2018: 27) is of the opinion that it can as well be related to low social status.

Last but not least, it needs to be emphasized that diminutive suffixes may be combined with negatively charged words, which results in “a clash in values” (Biel 2004: 250), e.g. *kłamczuszek* ‘liar-DIM’.

Biały (2013: 89) analyses the use of diminutives in ironic contexts from a sociolinguistic perspective as she believes this to be one of the most important social contexts that determine the usage of such forms:

This type of diminutives is most often used in kinship terms (e.g. *siostrzyczka*⁵), and descriptors, such as generic terms (e.g. *wdówka*⁶), terms of endearment (e.g. *kochaś*⁷), functional terms (e.g. *doktorek*⁸) or obscene terms (e.g. *lobuziak*⁹). They are applied in conversations between friends [...], and between members of family (Biały 2017: 133).

She further adds that diminutives expressing contempt or disdain are also used in personal names and in conversations between enemies (Biały 2017: 135).

5. The analysis of chosen ironic statements

In order to illustrate the above-mentioned assumptions and determine if indeed and to what extent the ironic applications of diminutives are perceived by native speakers of Polish, the following research was conducted. A group of twelve respondents¹⁰ aged between 16 and 30 years was asked to comment upon three sentences taken from real-life dialogues. All the utterances contained diminutives used in an ironic context but the contexts were of three different kinds: the first sentence (*Nadal pobożnie chodzisz do kościółka?* ‘Do you still religiously go to church-DIM.?’) is a direct question that was asked during a conversation between two acquaintances. The second (*A oto i ona, nasza córeczka tatusia!* ‘And there she is, our daddy’s daughter-DIM.!’) is an utterance made by a woman when introducing her female friend to a group of people. Therefore, it is not directly addressed to the person who is the object of the irony, even though she overhears it. The last sentence (*Ale się Ewunia dzisiaj odstawiała!* ‘Well, well, but Ewa-DIM. has dressed up today!’) was uttered by a woman to another woman about their female friend who did not hear their conversation. The respondents were asked to describe

⁵ ‘sister-DIM’.

⁶ ‘widow-DIM’.

⁷ ‘lover-DIM’.

⁸ ‘doctor-DIM’.

⁹ ‘rascal-DIM’.

¹⁰ Nine women and three men; four students and eight adults with higher education.

their feelings about the presence of the diminutive forms in these utterances. The aim of the study was to answer the following questions:

1. Was the ironic nature of these sentences perceived by all the respondents?
2. To which type of irony do these sentences refer?
3. Is there any difference in the perception of irony in these sentences taking into consideration the fact that all of these utterances present a different perspective?

5.1. *Nadal pobożnie chodzisz do kościółka?*

The first sentence: *Nadal pobożnie chodzisz do kościółka?* ‘Do you still religiously go to church-DIM.?’ is a direct question in which one man asks his male acquaintance about his religious practices. The addressee is directly attacked as the question aims at criticizing him and, what is even more clear, making fun of him as here [small] means [laughable]. The speaker mocks his interlocutor, demonstrating his insincere interest. The usage of a diminutive form denotes that the speaker looks down on the other person and also that his standard of personal culture is lacking.

In the research, all the respondents perceive this sentence as ironic.¹¹ Nine of the twelve respondents negatively evaluated this utterance, underlying the fact that it aims at ridiculing the interlocutor:

- “mockery of somebody’s faith;”
- “spitefulness;”
- “it’s offensive and loutish;”
- “he is mocking him because he is an atheist himself;”
- “friends keep picking on each other;”
- “pure contempt.”

It can be concluded that for nine respondents this sentence is an example of arrogant irony. On the other hand, some perceived this question as constructive-critical irony as three respondents positively evaluated the utterance, treating it as jocular and humorous:

- “they are just bantering with each other.”

5.2. *A oto i ona, nasza córeczka tatusia!*

The second sentence: *A oto i ona, nasza córeczka tatusia!* ‘And there she is, our daddy’s daughter-DIM.!’) is uttered during a party by a woman who introduces her female friend to a group of people. This statement is not directly addressed to the person who is the object of the irony, even though she

¹¹ The issue whether the respondents are practising Catholics was not taken into account.

overhears it, but instead to those gathered at the reception. The ironic use of the diminutive forms expresses the speaker's pejorative and subjective evaluation, her insincere praise, which in fact implies mockery.

In the results of the research, one person did not observe irony in this sentence, stating that it is "a sweet statement", with another perceiving it as ironic but considering it to be positive:

- "it is a funny joke in a tight bunch of friends, accepted by the woman being introduced."

This respondent considers it to be the affectionate type of irony which expresses a positive attitude, creates situational humour and creates group solidarity. It is viewed as a friendly type of irony whose aim is not to criticise.

On the other hand, ten of the twelve respondents perceived this statement as ironic and evaluated it negatively, emphasising its mocking and contemptuous nature. Their feelings concerning this utterance are very strong:

- "it is a very spiteful introduction of this woman to a group of new people;"
- "she has been ridiculed in front of those people;"
- "it's offensive and shows that this woman is spoiled;"
- "it's unacceptable – I would leave this party;"
- "I would ask why I was introduced in such a way;"
- "the woman who says it must be jealous of something or doesn't like this lady."

Concluding, the statement is viewed as representing the arrogant type of irony which aims at humiliating its object.

5.3. *Ale się Ewunia dzisiaj odstawiała!*

The third sentence: *Ale się Ewunia dzisiaj odstawiała!* 'Well, well, but Ewa-DIM. has dressed up today!' is uttered at the same party but by a different woman and about a different female friend. The woman is talking to another and commenting upon their friend's outfit. The lady who is the object of their conversation does not hear this statement, so she is unaware of the ironic attack of her friend. This comment is depreciative and contemptuous as it expresses strong criticism, insincere praise and a lack of respect towards the woman being talked about. It shows the speaker's lack of personal culture and her tendency to discredit other people.

The results show that all the respondents perceive this statement as ironic but only one person positively evaluates it as an example of the affectionate type of irony, emphasising the presence of strong bonds between the three women:

- "if they all know each other very well and they like each other, then it's ok."

Eleven of the twelve respondents negatively evaluated this comment, treating it as the arrogant type of irony:

- “it’s very offensive;”
- “it shows her jealousy;”
- “she is ridiculing this woman;”
- “she should refrain from such comments as it can be misinterpreted;”
- “she’s smearing this woman;”
- “she’s perfidious;”
- “she pretends to be nice.”

It can be concluded that the respondents’ feelings concerning this statement show various perspectives, nevertheless, all them are a negative assessment of the comment.

5.4. Concluding remarks concerning the analysis

When answering the question concerning the perception of irony by the respondents, it can be concluded that in almost all the cases it was indeed observed. There was only one instance, which related to the second sentence, when the ironic nature of the utterance was not recognised. These results provide support for the above-mentioned assumption concerning the usage of diminutives in Polish for ironic purposes.

The analysis has also shown that in most cases it is the arrogant type of irony that is expressed by means of diminutive forms. This is illustrated by the diagram below (Fig. 1):

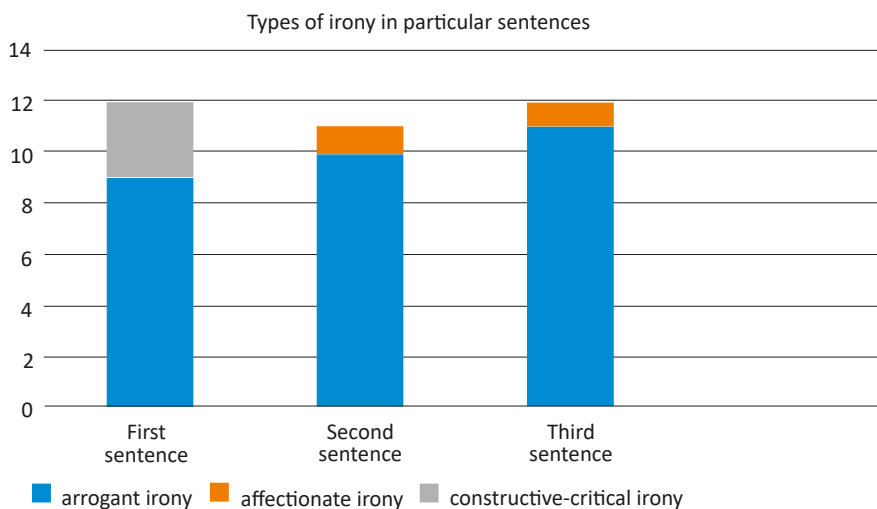


Figure 1. Types of irony in particular sentences

Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that the sentences used in the analysis can also serve as examples of the prototypical type of irony, namely the protective (or defensive), which aims at indirect criticism. This is when a speaker attacks another person while feeling threatened him/herself, which can be clearly observed in the first sentence. The interlocutor may have commented on the speaker's faith, who then responded with the ironic use of a diminutive.

The analysis has also shown that there is no difference in the perception of irony in different sentences, even though the perspectives vary. It does not matter whether the object of irony is attacked directly or indirectly, or is not even aware of this fact – the respondents' perception remains the same and is highly negative in most cases.

6. Conclusions

Morphopragmatics is a relatively new discipline that, nevertheless, deserves academic attention as a field of linguistics in which answers to many questions concerning the possible pragmatic contexts of morphologically complex word usage can be found. A detailed morphopragmatic analysis of synthetic languages (such as Polish) makes a major contribution towards understanding the multidimensional nature of linguistic means such as diminutive forms.

The paper has focused on one particular aspect of morphopragmatic analysis, namely the use of diminutives to express irony. Although the research is based on very limited empirical material as only three sentences are analyzed, with only twelve young, educated, and mainly female, respondents evaluating them, it has been demonstrated that diminutive forms are commonly applied in such contexts and fail to surprise native speakers of Polish. It should be noted, however, that in ironic contexts they are evaluated negatively, which stands in contradiction with their *prototypical* usage, that is to express positive feelings and associations. And it is the contradictory nature of diminutive forms in Polish that makes the analysis of their usage so interesting and worthy of investigation.

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