

Analysis of Irony in the View of Speech Acts

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Language in general, and irony in particular, is an instrument or a medium between humans that reveals their cognitive and emotional states to each other. To understand irony the hearer, as well as the speaker requires some specific contextual knowledge to choose a particular structure in a particular situation. Because any communication is dual, it consists of coding and decoding processes of the utterance. So, to communicate irony means to achieve a correct understanding of the utterance by intentional mutual exchange of information using verbal and non verbal elements such as gestures, mimics, intonation. As Muecke claims irony plays an important role in mockery, sarcasm, tragedy and comedy, criticism, and is always associated with ambiguity, paradox, contradiction, unexpectedness, some ideals. [Muecke, 1982]. This view on irony once more proves that it has gained a new form and dimension of its analysis based on the speaker's background, his specific perception of the world and general way of thinking. To identify what irony is we must bear in mind that Irony has as many definitions as there are scholars investigating it. We need to set some criteria to find the correct definition of irony among numerous linguistic approaches to this pragmatic phenomenon. For example, Wilson and Sperber in their works "Relevance" (1986) and "Irony and Relevance" (1998) see irony as use and mention, i.e. using an utterance and echoing it. They claim that in certain circumstances any object can represent or cite any other object. The most relevant that we must always remember is that this citation should always be relevant to the hearer for him to adequately interpret the ironic utterance. Attardo [Attardo, 2000] believes that there are three main conditions of irony: ambiguity that helps the hearer to easily catch the meaning of the ironic utterance; inappropriateness of the utterance meaning to the context it is used; the speaker's intention. One more researcher of irony, Giora, claims that irony is indirect negation. Later Giora and Fein [Giora..., 1999] insist on a salient meaning which always comes first in decoding process, when the hearer activates the salient meaning of the utterance. Brown and Levinson [Brown..., 1987:61] give their considerations on irony and politeness, developing Leech's view on irony. This ability of both, the speaker and the hearer, to utter the message and to interpret it in a given context with the appropriate analysis of propositional component creates the condition of face losing when the speaker using irony can be critical and not aggressive one at the same time. Our definition of irony is the following: we think that irony is a systematic trope which, as all tropes, can be characterised by two levels: explicit and implicit, shallow and deep, and which coding and decoding can be achieved by contextual analysing and interpreting of these two levels. [Kenkadze, 2012:267] That's why currently there is a great interest in irony not only as a semantic and stylistic but also as a pragmatic category with the main aim to describe and understand its types, pragmatival and contextual

functions, and mechanisms that have become very actual and important with speaker's intention and proposition and illocutionary force of specific speech situations. All this, according to the concepts of pragmatics, makes us investigate irony in the light of speech acts theory. Pragmatical interpretation of irony begins in D. Sperber and D. Wilson [Sperber ...,1978] and R. Brown [Brown,1980] works who claim that nature of irony can be explained only from the pragmatic position as irony itself is a speech act and not a language phenomenon. In order to see irony as a speech act we need to say a few words about speech acts in general. There are two scholars, Austin [Austin,1962] and Searle [Searle, 1969], who represent the traditional school of speech acts theory introducing a speech act as a human interaction of social character acted through words in a form of a request, an offer, a refuse, a compliment, a greeting, a thanking. Searle in "A classification of illocutionary acts" extended Austin's division of speech acts adding felicity conditions to them claiming that any language is inevitable part of action. The main objective of any linguistic speech act, and irony in particular, is its successful performance when the speaker and the hearer participate in a complex process of communication which covers the form, the meaning and the context of an utterance, achieving the hearer's adequate understanding and reaction to the utterance, i.e. a competent decoding of a complicated proposition and ironic illocution. The difficulty in the process of interpretation of irony lies in the speaker's and the hearer's communicative competence. To decode irony and to understand what the utterance really means in the given context is to adequately "read between the lines". [Colebrook, 2004]. Generally, a successful speech act can be defined in different ways depending on the situation it is used and contextual appropriateness. So any speech act is closely connected to sociocultural factors and is based on the speaker's intention and psychological state of mind, i.e. relation between the words and the world. Searle makes a classification of language use into 5 main categories: 1. assertives in which the meaning of the utterance is true and the speaker believes in this truth; 2. directives when the speaker tries to make the hearer commit further action in future that can exist in the form of a request, advice, permission or warning, demand, instruction, command; 3. expressives when the speaker demonstrates his attitude to the prior action or his psychological state of mind, for example thanking , expressing gratitude, complaint, expressing negative feelings, apology – expressing regret, congratulation, excuses, welcoming, swears; 4. commissives in which the speaker obligates himself to act in future, that can be an offer, a promise, an oath, a threat, abet, a guarantee and 5. declarations, which proposition consists of claiming a person being guilty, announcing a couple being husband and wife or baptising a child. [Trosborg, 1994] According to our research, in cases of irony the speaker's actions result in effects on the hearer with a certain intention or purpose that is reflected in perlocutionary acts, such as alarming, persuading, convincing, misleading, surprise, shock. So the speaker makes the hearer recognize his opinion, emotion, thought using a certain speech act to achieve a certain ironic meaning in a certain context so

that the hearer correctly interprets the utterance containing a wish, an idea or a feeling. "People adjust their language to their addressees and the situation in order to achieve interpersonal effects". [Locher..., 2010:2] According to pragmatics, the main thing to bear in mind when decoding irony is to go further than what is meant in the utterance to what remains beyond it; it means that, to our mind, ironic meaning has pragmatic grounds as it is based on the relations between the speaker and the hearer because in the cases of irony the speaker "masks" his utterance and reveals a certain meaning which is mostly negative or forbidden to make public and the hearer decodes this meaning as ironic. Why does the speaker use irony in his speech? The answer to this rhetoric question from our point of view is the following. The first reason may be the fact that every society has its norms and traditions that regulate any kind of communicative behaviour that bans some kind of verbal actions, and the second one consists of the inner intention of the speaker to create a specific comic effect which can help then to influence the hearer and to make the hearer change his view of a certain situation. Each example of irony shows specific features of speaker's communicative intention to impress, criticise, protest, forbid, deny, ask, accuse, blame, reprimand, disapprove and the meaning he discloses. It should be mentioned that almost each case of irony utterance is accompanied by the speaker's different emotional state, such as being not only annoyed, furious, angry, irritated, insulted, dissatisfied, but also sympathy. According to our research, irony can be of positive connotation. Mizzau, Brown, Attardo, Booth claim that there are some examples when irony is positive: the speaker expresses positive meaning through negative form meaning something positive by saying something negative. In such cases there is a great possibility for the speaker to be misunderstood as, if the hearer does not catch the irony in the utterance, he will decode it as a kind of criticism. This, of course, can lead to negative emotions. That's why positive irony happens very seldom. In our research we came across the following examples of positive irony. The reason of this is the speaker's fear to be misunderstood. One of the examples is from everyday life and the other is from Hemingway's novel "A Farewell to Arms". (a) You're really a bad boy. (b) You are such a silly boy. She kissed me. [Hemingway, 1977:76]. In example (a) a wife is intentionally expressing her satisfaction and positive feelings in negative form by saying he was a bad boy to praise her husband for the expensive gift he gave her. In example (b) Katherine was speaking to Henry kissing him when he was in hospital after the operation on his leg. These two examples have one thing in common: both can be adequately possessed only in case if the hearer has an appropriate ability to make out the difference between implied and directly said meanings. Irony will be successful if the hearer is successful in decoding the intended meaning of the speaker's utterance to cuddle him. Such utterances are always vague and ambiguous and there is always the possibility for the hearer to interpret them in two different or opposite ways. The investigation of the paper is based on examples of verbal irony, as the object of research, from English and American literature, scientific literature (see references). The choice of the irony examples

was not restricted by any parameters that gave us opportunity to distinguish and illustrate different kinds of utterances of ironic meaning. We explored two aspects of irony interpretation: what is the condition of successful irony, and the second point we are interested in is key concept of irony pragmatical interpretation in the light of speech acts theory and outlined a further way of our studying interpretation of ironic utterance in a specific context. We can claim that ironical speech act consists of the speaker, the hearer, the utterance itself, its ironical meaning, context, interlocutors' shared knowledge and intention to express the speaker's attitude towards the expressed meaning and his psychological state. We should always remember that the main part of any person's life is a successful communication and its result to correctly understand and to be correctly understood. That's why a successful pragmatical decoding of the ironic utterance of any speech act example is the main goal of the speaker. In the following example we can see that, according to Wilson and Sperber's mention theory, Andrew echoes Christine words in ironic utterance (c) revealing its propositional negation and his intention to imply the opposite meaning to the words "nice time". This utterance represents an assertive speech act. (c) Christine remarked happily: "We did have a nice time, didn't we, love?" "Oh, a very nice time!" Andrew said bitterly. [Cronin, 1993:41]. Another example of assertive ironic utterance we would like to present is taken from Mark Twain's "The Prince and the Pauper": "The Master of Ceremonies was not present; there was no one who felt safe to venture upon this uncharted sea, or risk the attempt to solve this solemn problem. " (d) Alas! There was no Hereditary Scratcher. [Twain, 2011: 36]. In this utterance we deal with situational irony that bears not opposite but different interpretation to what is delivered by words when the intention being explicit shows that in those times the king had Masters of Ceremonies, The Taster to his Highness, the Lord Head Cook, in other words, Masters of Everything, who could assist the king in any situation. But when Tom (being in the place of the king) wanted to scratch his nose and he did not know what to do, there was no Hereditary Scratcher who could help the king to advise how to behave in such a situation according to a tradition or a custom. Tom's expectations are violated, he criticises the system of "Maters-Helpers" and this is a necessary condition for irony to exist and for the hearer to comprehend it. In example (e) we deal with indirect speech act of commissives which contains information in the form of a question as the explicit act and a promise and threat "to be nasty "as the implicit one. (e) "He can't go. How am I supposed to be nasty to him if he isn't here?" [De Bernieres, 2001:28]. For this ironic utterance to be a success, the speaker (the Doctor) reveals his psychological state of "sincerity", a state of not liking the person who invaded his country and was going to stay at his place for some time. The doctor is sincere in his request to make the captain not leave and stay at his house and insincere in his question as he knows the answer. This becomes a rhetoric question containing a discrepancy between the form and the function. One more example of commissives is the following. Two men speaking on the train: Are you going to Milbery's lecture today? Take my advice, and don't. I heard that he

is a very bad speaker. (f) I must go, I'm Milbery. [Hewitt, 1987:7]. Ironically, the second person intends to go to the lecture as he himself is the man who delivers the lecture expressing his commitment to do this in any case as he himself must perform an action. Analysing the above we came to the conclusion that irony processing cannot be possible without the speech acts theory, as there are no examples of irony connotation outside the speech act. The utterance becomes ironic only in the context that helps to detect its proposition which, in its turn, assists the hearer to determine the discrepancy between the speaker's intention and literal meaning of the words he uses and to understand the utterance with regard to the proposition given in a specific context. Austin makes it clear that "words need to be "explained" by the context in which they are used." [Austin, 1962: 100] To prove this we would like to give an example taken from Walter LaFeber, "The American age": (g) (1) I love Germany so. [LaFeber, 1994: 491] This sentence taken separately, without the context can't be analysed from the point of view of speech acts theory, as we don't know whether it is an oath or a promise or a remark or a suggestion or a thanking until we know the context it is used in. What these speech acts have in common is their propositional content, what they differ in is their illocutionary force. [Bierwisch, 1980]. As soon as we add the context, the hearer understands the utterance as ironic: (g) (2) "I love Germany so", a Frenchman wrote sarcastically. "Every day I thank God that there are two of them". [LaFeber, 1994: 491]. This is a good example of expressives where the Frenchman speaks about Germany as an occupant country during World War II and shows his dislike that there are two Germanys. The hearer who does not have a specific knowledge on historical context, will not be able to interpret irony in this utterance adequately. (h) Such is his popularity that the locals (people in Chukotka) refer to BA and AA: before Abramovich and After Abramovich. [Soars..., 2005:75] People who live in a remote territory, Chukotka, are very grateful to their governor as he spent an estimated \$300 million on this frozen province. That's why they refer to him in this way to express their psychological state of politeness, worship and praise looking for the ways of how to say something that he is wants to say meaning something different and not opposite. As we can notice from the example (h), irony appears in speaker's words "BA" and "AA" referring to the periods of their life as analogical to Before Christ and Anno Domini. For the hearer it is not necessary in such cases to have extralinguistic knowledge to decode this ironical intention. If we look at the directives in the light of speech act theory we can see that the speaker forces the hearer to perform the action in the form of a command, request, advice, warning, demand, instruction which is specified by the intentional state of proposition of the utterance said by the speaker when he makes the hearer to conduct for his own favour. (i) Please don't kill me, I am innocent. [De Bernieres, 2001:27]. This is a request not to be killed which is pronounced by the invader, Captain Corelli, who entered the house he lived in and saw a young woman with a large cooking knife who was preparing dinner in the kitchen. The way he uttered these words using articulation and intonation is also worth

mentioning "The captain fell to his knees before her and exclaimed dramatically" [De Bernieres, 2001:27]. Another example of a directive speech act was taken from "The Complete Illustrated Stories, Plays and Poems by Oscar Wilde. The below words belong to the Infanta whose only wish was to be amused and who liked the dance that the Dwarf performed for her on her birthday party. But poor heart-broken Dwarf died on the scene he was dancing on. On the Infanta's question why the Dwarf does not dance for her any more the Chamberlain answered that his heart was broken and the Infanta said: (j) For the future let those who come to play with me have no hearts. [Wilde, 1991:284]. In her command the Infanta violates the maxim of politeness as her psychological state of mind and communicative intention of the utterance are not friendly but rude. So, we can conclude that every ironic speech act has its specific communicative goal or intention, emotional expressiveness and the context it is used in and the question is what lies in between saying something true or false and meaning something different. Through all these we again come to the notion of pragmatics, as pragmatics studies speech acts and the context these speech acts are used in. In conclusion, the questions that arose during our investigations deal mainly with relevance theory of irony, use and mention theory, theory of inappropriateness and communicative intention revealing if there is a logical relation between two meanings – expressed and implicated – that deals with negation character of irony.

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