

Hamze, D., assistant in the
University
University of Plovdiv
"Paisii Chilendarski",
Bulgaria

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IRONY IN ITS PRAGMATIC ASPECT

The article examines the range of communicative irony as a compendium of hierarchical speech acts within both, the illocutionary scope of the utterer and the perlocutionary scope of the addressee. The diversity of speech acts is summed up and "labelled" by the synthetic predicative to ironize.

Keywords: irony, comemes, modality, speech act, illocution, perlocution

With a view of assembling the illocutionary spectrum of irony, we deem appropriate to put forth the implicature we identified, which distinctly demonstrates the primary, fundamental and taxonomic character of irony, as the semantic prototype (skeleton) of parody and of grotesque. These three explicatures are axial constructs focussing on the basic and on the complementary illocutionary intentions within the flow of communication. Similar paradigmatic schemes constitute a very efficient exploration model both facilitating and exemplifying our surveys in the sense of reconstructing the illocutionary potential of the comemes¹, within the scope of which the hierarchy of the communicative axes takes shape (for more detailed information concerning the categories of the comic within the perspective of irony in its cognitive and pragmatic aspect Cf. Hamze 2012). The superficial apology of the ironic statement disguises, but also signals, through intonation or contextual indication the *negative assertion* of the deeper level.

Implicature of irony

X ironizes Y

I say: you are some thing good. (I do not think what I say).

I think: You are not some thing good. (You are not what I say).

I want: you to understand what I think, you to know, that you may be what I say, you to become, what I say that you are.

The three constituents come gradually and are consolidated (united) within the synthetic predicative *To ironize*. In terms of a speech act this predicative represents an implicit

combination of a *verdictive*² („verdict”, related to the expression of a view, of an opinion) and of an *exercitive* (related to the expression of power, of influence with, at the same time - execution of an intent) – „I ironize you”, and if the addressee recognizes it, his/her possible reactions may be the following : „I will not allow you to expose and humiliate me”, „Me too, I may ironize you and my attitude would be right and fully justified” or on the contrary: „You teach me a good lesson. I am grateful to you. I will remember the morale. I will try to change”. There is the exception of the irony addressing phenomena from the reality, which are not subject to the will of the subject: „Wonderful weather!” (while there is a heavy storm outside), while the communicating is in the role of an adherent and associate of the utterer in his ironic statement. Then the third constituent „I want” solely includes the first stage „you to understand what I think and that you support me”. The main conclusion that can be drawn is that irony appears like an illocutionary „compendium” or a mixture, within whose scope there is distribution and graduation of illocutionary intentions. The generative body of the syncretic predicative *I ironize* is obviously a derivation of the constituent *I deny* (what I say) at the deep level i.e. the assertive-negative modality plays a domineering and decisive role in the genesis of irony. For understandable reasons we cannot dwell in length here on the issues of modality, related to the categories of the comic, for

their serious study would result in a lengthy work. We would just note, that modality in our view, is a psychological adjustment of consciousness, having a reflection on the utterance in a definite speculative or emotional way. On one hand, the illocutionary strategy is a direct derivation of modality that it generates and from the other hand the modality attributes to the uttered speech act a specific, as if complementary intentional and emotive hue.

1. 1. Let us try to recreate the illocutionary ironic model having fed a whole ensemble of speech acts on the ground of a specific example: „you are the cherry on the cake in my life” the wife says to her husband in reproach that he has ruined her life. The presupposition here is: „I can't abide you. I cannot stand you any more”. The deictic marker (the second person of the pronoun) increases the hyperbolic and ironical impact of the metaphor. The superficial *assertion* (establishing the truth about a definite state of things) may denote a suggestion or an assurance – „I instil in you (I assure you), that you are wonderful and I cannot live without you”, but presumptively: „I instil in you (I assure you), that practically things are exactly the opposite – I hardly abide you. Therefore, I react mockingly”. In the second instance („I assure you, I am sure”) as if the assertion withholds and makes way at the deep level to the *hypothetical declaration* with a great degree of conviction – with a negative sign (with its negative equivalent). The explicit assertion is backed by

1 Comeme – a terminological suggestion for the name of a category, related to the three embodiments of the comic that we express (irony, parody, grotesque) as based on the common intellectual genealogy, on the structural and functional similitude and on ethical and aesthetic objectives and at the same time – on the grounds of their relatively autonomous expression and functioning. In our view, they are the most representative textual and artistic expressions of the comic.

2 The terminological array sticks to the terminology suggested by St. Dimitrova in her book Linguistic pragmatics.

the *expressive*, revealing the ecstatic character of the feelings („*I feel an emotion*”). It becomes obvious that the given utterance (as most of the communicative situations), is not the representation of a sole act of speech but represents an illocutionary mix, „led” and to a certain degree „requalified” by the performative *I ironize*. The illocutionary „cocktail” of jointly acting acts of speech is relevant (essential) to a degree, at which, in its ensemble and coagulation (interference) they obey to a main objective, namely they serve one leading objective – the ironizing of the utterance. It becomes clear from the above example that for the assertion identifying the irony generating content is of the greatest significance (the reason for the irony concerned operation) for the addressee of the communication and this justifies the strategy itself. In this context the acclamation (the pathetic outburst) plays the role of an irony mark, forbearing to a significant degree the perlocutionary effects. The condensed deictics in the poem by Pushkine : „*I have loved you... I pray God grant another love you so.*” , in the instance of an ironic reading, such as carried by R. Jakobson, („*Without divine interference, you would not meet any such love*”) is being identified as an assertion, accompanied by an *optional volitive* within the framework of the *religious behabitive*.

1. 2. In the next example, the *expressive and tender directive*, as strengthened additionally by the hypocoristic qualifier, emanates a stack of illocutionary axes, embodied in the different speech acts at the intentional level under the „command” of irony: „*Give your wife a kiss*”, says the wife to her husband. The irony addressing the marital partner gets mixed with *self-irony*: 1. The wife ironizes her husband – she is reproachful for his indifference, his apathy, lack of fantasy and invention. She is angry that he does not spare enough time for her and does not notice her assets; 2. The lady speaks with self irony and the following signs exist: self perception from a distance i.e. objectivating the proper „I” (a glance to one self from outside), when the observer is at the

same time also a conceptor and the object of her own conceptualization, grammatized from the third person singular (rather than from the first person singular.), and with the aim to distinctly carry a self definition; except that, through the self-diminutive she is tenderly coquettish. The self-ironizing strategy here is deprived of self-destructive functions, to the contrary – there is a confirmation of the tendency towards „magical defiance” and of the hypothetical, dreamed of qualities (assets) of the wife. Being aware of her own imperfections, she would wish her husband sees her as a charmer and admires her. The presumption appears here as an *expressive optative* „*I wish I could be like that!*”, followed by a *weakened directive* as a kind of incitation, which in the instance of a right interpretation in the field of the addressee would entail a new illocutionary act, again in the field of the ironic utterer: *existential persuasive* (act of the convincing): „*Imagine that I am like this and apprehend me as such (a charmer). If you do that, then it means that I am like that*”.

1. 3. We can infer from the above that the synthetic component *I ironize* is the result of *I evaluate*, subject to division into the following pre-supposing acts: disapproval, dissatisfaction, disdain, criticism, reprimand, reproach, accusation, condemnation. Quite obviously the assessment has an emotional origin. The axiological (evaluating) predicates (which semantically coordinate with the scales „good – bad”, „nice – ugly”, „intelligent – stupid”, „useful – harmful”, „rapid – slow”), get consolidated within the general evaluating synthetic predicate and reveal the evaluation as the sheer representative of the pragmatic semantic of the ironic utterance. The expanded model of irony that we suggest might illustrate these observations:

Expanded implicature of irony

X ironizes Y

I say: You are good > You are wonderful, incredible great! (I do *not think* what I say).

I think: You are *not* good > You are horrible, impossible, unbearable! (You are *not* what I say).

I want: you to understand, what I

think (Will you be able to see through my intent?; try to understand me, to guess what is my intention and to draw your conclusions).

you to know, that you may become what I say (How will you react? Will you be offended or will you realize what your mistakes and faults, are and will you recognize that I am right; Correct your self, try to change, do not get offended and do not offend any one, improve yourself!).

you to become what I say that you are (Would you wish this change to happen?; Will you take my implicit advice for your and for other peoples’ good?; I would wish and I would like to see you changed (different)).

1. 4. In the context of the Wendler terminology, irony could be also qualified as *quasiexpositive*: „I speak some thing different from what I should be in fact be saying to you, but I do not say it: 1. in order not to hurt you directly; 2. out of courtesy; we could add here that adherence to the speech etiquette taboos the direct challenge, while the ironic signal partly denies the pre-supposition; 3. to preserve my identity, my dignity and my own “integrity”. It is exactly the observance of the principles of ethics that protects the ironist. from accusations of „quasi-expositiveness”, generally defined as a communicative mishap (Zeno Wendler calls it an illocutionary suicide) (Wendler 1976). The explicitation of irony (i.e. its liquidation) by its utterer would constitute a similar “failure” in terms of communication like: „*I flatter you but in fact I am mocking you*”.

1. 5. If we have to attribute irony (as well as the other two comemes) to one of the two speech acts, which are roughly positioned along the *directness – indirectness* axis, we would undoubtedly associate it to the second type, i.e. the indirect acts of speech, representing a standardized mode of expression of a definite aim without naming it. As a *text having a projective nature* (related to formations standing on a vast pre-suppositional basis), irony is an appropriate illustration of speech acts whose illocutionary strategy is not directly reflected into the linguistic structure of the produced utterance. Within the *illocutionary field* of the

utterer, the following speech acts are carried (some at the deep, others – at the superficial level):

– *assertion*, as expressed by the declarative component **I say**, and quite often complemented by an *expressive assertion* – „You look great!” (pre-supposition: „You look ugly”) or an *expressive behabitive* (addressative in the form of habitual greeting) – „Good afternoon, old fool!” (pre-supposition: „I am seemingly quarrelsome and defy you, but in fact I love you and feel you close”), or an *interrogative* – „How are we today?” (pre-supposition: „I am not one of the ill”);

– *negative statement* (again a type of assertion), expressed through the declarative component **I think**, completed by a *verdictive* („I accuse”, „I reprimand”) and an *exercitive* („I provoke you for dispute”, „ I throw you the gauntlet”);

– *obligative directive* („I insist that you recognize my ironic intention and to rightfully decipher my explicit assertion”), expressed through the directive component **I want**, but which constitutes an illocutionary synthesis of several possible speech acts: a/ *deontive* („You have to correct yourself”); b/ *warning* („If you do not correct yourself, things will get worse”); c/ *optative* („I

hope you will improve yourself”; d/ declarative hypothesis with a high degree of conviction („I believe that you will correct yourself”).

Within the *perlocutionary field* of the addressee the following speech acts are carried: a/ *disagreement*, offence, will for revenge and threat, because of a sense of pride hurt, because of a feeling of humiliation and underestimation; b/ *verbal revenge*, counterattack, turning back the ironic „provocation”; c/ *gratitude* concerning the precious observations and assertions, even if negative; d/ *approval* of the strategy and *assurance* as to the personal ambition and mobilization for a change (for personal improvement); e/ *agreement, solidarity* with the utterer.

Based on the above outline we come to the following conclusions:

1. The irony is a synthetic speech act, which unites and is ahead of a varying multitude of hierarchical speech acts.

2. The indirect illocutionary reserve makes irony an idiomatic category.

3. The perlocutionary polyphony, as anticipated (foreseen) by the ironic utterer, practically excludes reactions by the addressee that are unforeseen.

4. Irony as a number of speech acts unveils the truth, that the success of the

communicative act is not measured by its temporal limitation to the moment of speech, but has rather a perspective and result oriented dimension.

5. Irony gives a new impetus to pragmatics for a partial solution of one of its most important and complex problems - the relationship between the form and the function of the speech acts;

6. Without the semantic universalia, which are an integral part of the implicature of irony, we could not recognize it, while without the individual conceptual and aesthetic creativity of the utterer, we could not attack inertia, the uniformness and uniformity of communication...

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