

A Contrastive Study of Ironic Expressions in English and Arabic

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Abstract:

The present study deals with ironic expressions in English and Arabic. Irony is a communicative behaviour in which the speaker says something and means the opposite. Though irony is a universal phenomenon, people misunderstand it and take it literally. The study aims at distinguishing between literal and ironic expressions and showing the similarities and differences between ironic expressions in both English and Arabic. It is hypothesized that irony is a universal phenomenon in all cultures and yet, there are many differences and similarities in the making of ironic expressions in English and Arabic. The analysis of the data is based on an eclectic linguistic model comprising Giora et al.'s (1998) and Gibbs and Colston's (2007) models of irony.

The application of this model to the selected data has yielded some findings and conclusions, the most salient of which are the following:

1. Irony is a universal phenomenon since it has been examined in English and Arabic as an example for its universality.
2. In most cases ironic expressions are similar to each other in both languages, except for some situations. The differences fall in the usage of some utterances that are exclusively related to a certain culture whether Arabic or English.
3. Ironic expressions in Arabic are more figurative than those in English.
4. Opposition, humour and exaggeration are the most common devices to form ironic expressions in both languages.

دراسة مقارنة لتعابير السخرية في الانكليزية والعربية

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ملخص البحث:

تتناول الدراسة الحالية تعابير السخرية في اللغتين الانكليزية والعربية. والسخرية سلوك تواصل ي قول المتكلم فيه شيئاً ويعني عكس ذلك. ورغم ان السخرية ظاهرة عامة فان الناس يسيؤون فهمها وياخذونها بشكل حرفي. وتهدف الدراسة الى تمييز التعابير الحرفية عن تعابير السخرية واظهار حالات التشابه والاختلاف في تعابير السخرية في اللغتين الانكليزية والعربية. وتقتض الدراسة ان السخرية ظاهرة عامة في كل الثقافات ومع ذلك فان هناك الكثير من حالات التشابه والاختلاف في صياغة تعابير السخرية في اللغتين. ويعتمد تحليل العينة على نموذج لغوي انتقائي يدمج نموذج غيورا واخرين (1998) ونموذج جيبس وكولستن (2007) للسخرية. ونتيجة لتطبيق نموذج البحث على المادة المختارة تم التوصل الى بعض النتائج والاستنتاجات من اهمها الاتي:

- 1- السخرية ظاهرة عامة اذ تمت دراستها في اللغتين الانكليزية والعربية كمثال على عموميتها.
- 2- في معظم الحالات تتشابه تعابير السخرية مع بعضها البعض في اللغتين باستثناء بعض المواقف. اذ يكمن الاختلاف في استخدام بعض الالفاظ التي تكون مرتبطة كلية بثقافة معينة كليا سواء اكانت الثقافة الانكليزية ام العربية.
- 3- تعابير السخرية في العربية اكثر مجازية من مثيلاتها في الانكليزية.
- 4- التقابل والفكاهة والمبالغة هي اكثر الوسائل شيوعا في تكوين تعابير السخرية في اللغتين.

1. Introduction

Though there are many approaches and theories concerning irony, most of them are controversial. Irony is a common concept in most cultures and yet 80% of the people misunderstand it and take it literally.

The current study aims at distinguishing between ironic and literal expressions in language in general and showing the similarities and differences in the ironic expressions in both English and Arabic.

It is hypothesized that irony is a universal phenomenon in all cultures. Still, there are many differences and similarities in the making of ironic expressions in English and Arabic.

The data of this study are taken from books, articles, the internet and everyday situations.

In order to achieve the aims of the study, the following procedures have been conducted:

1. Making a literature review of the theories and approaches to irony.
 2. Adopting a model for the analysis of ironic expressions that tackles as many as possible of the important features that must exist in any ironic situation.
 3. Applying the model to the ironic examples in both English and Arabic.
- The study is limited to a number of ironical expressions in everyday speech. Most generally it is about ironic expressions but it includes some other terms related to irony.

2. Definitions of Irony

The term **Irony** (from the Ancient Greek εἰρωνεία *eirōneia*, meaning dissimulation or feigned ignorance) is a literary device, a rhetoric technique, or a situation in which there is a sharp incongruity or discordance that goes beyond the simple and evident intention of words or actions (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irony>).

From a historical point of view, different scholars and linguists define and view irony differently. Some of them agree with each other's opinion, while others add more to this concept. Fowler(1965:306-306), for example, defines irony as "a form of utterance that postulates a double audience, consisting of one party that hearing shall hear, and shall not understand, and another party that, when more is meant than meets the ear, is aware both of that more and the outsider's incomprehension."

Amante (1981:77) defines irony as a "pragmatic phenomenon where a *gap* exists between what is said and what is meant by the speaker". On his part, Verschueren (1999:34-35) argues that irony means that the implicated meaning is the opposite of what is literally said.

Irony is also defined by Webster's College Dictionary(2001:657). as "the use of words to convey a meaning that is opposite to its literal meaning."

According to Kreuz& Caucci(2007:1), "an ironic message is a blatantly false message containing some counter attitudinal information with the intent of being actively detected by the receiver as being false".

In this study the following workable definition is adopted: Irony is a semantic- pragmatic phenomenon which involves a contradiction between what is said and what is intended.

3. Approaches and Theories of Irony

From the previous studies dealing with irony, it is evident that all of them agree that irony is a universal phenomenon in all languages. Many linguistic approaches have been presented to examine irony from different perspectives such as semantic, stylistic and pragmatic. Such approaches are helpful to show and specify the attitude of the speaker's intention.

3.1 The Gricean Approach

Grice (1975) tries to clarify the traditional definition of irony, namely, saying something but the intention is something else. For him, ironical utterances would “conversationally implicate, rather figuratively mean the opposite of what they literally say” (Alexandris, 2010:17).

In Grice's view, irony is a case of conversational implicatures. He (1975) suggests a number of maxims to distinguish between different implicatures during a conversation. For their part, Brown and Levinson (1987) view irony as a form of off-record politeness strategies, an indirect face-threatening act, along with joking and humour. They try to show the difference between these maxims and ironic expressions. The first one of these maxims is the quantity maxim. This maxim says: “(a) Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange). (b) Do not make your contributions more informative than is required” (Grice, 1975:45). Brown and Levinson give an example of “understatement” violating the Quantity Maxim which seems to be also perfect as an example of an ironic utterance. This is the case of “a teenage girl that might say: ‘He's all right’ as an understated criticism implicating ‘I think he is awful’ or as an understated compliment implicating ‘I think he's fabulous’”.

The second maxim is that of quality. Brown and Levinson (ibid) believe that by being ironic, a speaker violates the quality maxim. This maxim says: “try to make your contribution one that is true”. It includes two other maxims: “(1) do not say what you believe to be false, (2) do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence” (Grice, 1975:46).

Ironic utterances are totally opposite to the mentioned maxim, since the speaker intends something else of what he already said. For example, if someone says: “What a sunny day!” during a storm it shows that he says something which he knows is false. This example falls under the traditional definition of irony and contradicts with the Gricean maxim of quality above. It is worth mentioning that Ironic utterances violate the other two Gricean maxims, namely, the maxims of relevance and manner, but the most important ones are the maxims of quantity and quality. This clarification shows that Grice's rules cannot be applied to ironic expressions because the most common and well known definition of irony is opposite to his maxims (Alba Juez, 1995:26-28).

3.2 Irony and the Speech Act Theory

According to Yule (1996:46), “in an attempt to express themselves, people do not only produce utterances containing grammatical structures and words, they perform actions via those utterances.”

Yule refers to the speech act devices which a speaker uses to convey different actions like request, offering, invitation, etc. speech acts which are of two kinds: direct and indirect. Many scholars agree on the idea that irony is a kind of speech acts. The question is that whether it is direct or indirect.

According to Searle(1979:113), in an indirect speech act “the speaker means what he says. However, in addition, he means something more”.

It seems that Searle does not suggest that irony is an indirect speech act because it contradicts his definition. Since an ironic utterance carries an opposite meaning to what is said, irony violates Searl's conditions of speech acts. He rates irony as being insincere.

For Amante (1981:77), “ironical speech acts are not performatives, they are necessarily indirect speech acts, and must be insincere.”

Kaufer (1981 cited in Ramos,1997:394) highlights the direct relationship between irony and speech acts. He avers that if speech acts describe irony as a mere utterance of proposition, then it "hardly conveys that one disavows it." He adds that the speech act description of irony involves both asserting and denying the proposition, so that it is hard to accept because it is difficult to see how ironic utterance should convey any implication at all.

3.3 Giora et al.'s (1998)Theory

3.3.1 Graded Salience Hypothesis

The Graded Salience Hypothesis(henceforth GSH) carries the idea that highly salient meanings should be processed initially before less salient meanings are activated(Giora et al., 1998:84). This happens according to a pragmatic point of view such as the background knowledge between the participants or familiarity. A meaning of a word or an expression is considered salient if it can be retrieved directly from the lexicon. An example of this is “the word 'bat', which is a homonym of two different meanings. The first meaning is 'the flying creature' and the second is ' that used in sport” (Yule, 2006:107).

So, according to the GSH, the first one is more salient than the other, since not all people are familiar with sports and the flying creature is the first thing that comes to their minds. Now how can we apply this hypothesis to irony? Giora et al.'s treatment of irony is as follows: “the graded salience hypothesis predicts that ironies should take no longer to read than their literal counterparts. The assumption is that ironic interpretations are less salient than their literal meanings; hence, they should be derived after the literal meaning has been activated (and probably rejected as the intended meaning” (Giora et al., 1998:84).

3.3.2 Indirect Negation

Indirect negation view is another attempt by Giora et al. to investigate the understanding of irony. According to this view, “the literal meaning of an ironic utterance is functional in irony comprehension, because it helps the comprehender to compute the difference between the literal meaning(usually pertaining to a desirable state of affairs) and the ironized situation(less

desirable) ”. He adds that "the indirect negation view predicts that the activated literal meaning of an ironic utterance should be retained rather than suppressed. In this respect, the indirect negation view differs from the traditional account of irony(Grice,1975, Searle, 1979) which assumes that the literal meaning should not be retained, but should be rejected and suppressed” (Giora et al., 1998:85).

Giora et al. test a group of people to find out the time needed for participants to comprehend utterances with literal and ironic meanings through these two examples:

(1a) Anna is a great student, but she is very absent- minded. One day when I was well through my lecture, she suddenly showed up in classroom. I said to her: “you are just in time”.

(1b) Anna is a great student and very responsible. One day she called to tell me that she did not know when she would be able to show up for my lecture. However, Just as I was starting, she entered the classroom. I said to her: “you are just in time”(Giora et al,1998:86).

The above examples show different situations about Anna. If one reads them, one will find out that the first one is ironic, whereas the second one is literal. The question is, how can one recognize that? Literal utterances do not take extra time to understand for many reasons like familiarity or simply one is adapted to such situations, while ironic utterances need more time since they are somehow ambiguous to the addressee. S/he has to understand the literal meaning first then according to the specific situation and comprehends the utterance otherwise as an irony.

4. Types of Irony

Ironic expressions fall into two main types: verbal and situational. With verbal irony there is a speaker and a listener, while in situational irony the audience judge whether the situation is ironic or not. According to Gibbs (1994: 363), “[b]oth verbal and situational irony involve a confrontation or juxtaposition of incompatibles”. Moreover, they also employ incongruity in order to distinguish between facts and expectations (saying one thing and meaning another) while keeping in mind the audience’s (reader’s) awareness of both.

4. 1 Verbal Irony

According to Ajtony(2010:247), “verbal irony is a linguistic phenomenon exploiting the incongruity between reality and expectation and consequently, unveiling an attitude towards such an incongruity. ”

Verbal irony is the most attainable. It is the most frequent form of irony as sarcasm and humour, simply because it requires only the two participants speaking to each other. The main concern of verbal irony is the factor of timing. If someone utters the ironic statement very early or late in a

conversation, or if someone does not use the required tone or in an incorrect situation, the addressee may take it as an offence and it will cause confusion. That is why, basically, verbal irony needs the correct understanding of the situation, feeling, and the most important thing which is timing. <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/verbal-irony-examples.html>).

In verbal irony, an individual presents or evokes a confrontation by his/her utterances. Furthermore, the speaker creates a juxtaposition of incompatible actions or words with a view to convey an attitude (Gibbs, 1994: 363).

In some writings, verbal irony is used because readers get attracted to it. The review of the writer becomes funny because he tries not to exaggerate and to make their statements as soft as possible. It also shows politeness in order to avoid breaking relations (Jonsson, 2010:6).

However, sometimes verbal irony violates the traditional definition of irony (the meaning is opposite to the utterance). In other words, it is not restricted to the idea of saying something while the meaning is opposite. The literal utterance is what the speaker intends to say but at the same time the statement is ironic. This fact is confirmed by Martin (1992 cited in Jeoung, 2006:4) who states that “there are cases where the speaker vouches for the truth and the relevance of his utterance: it is ironical despite the fact that it describes an actual state of affairs and it is not itself mentioned”.

4.2 Situational Irony

According to Gibbs(1994: 363), situational irony is something that just happens to be noticed as ironic. It foregrounds events which appear as ironic regardless of the speaker’s intention.

This type of irony is defined as a situation in which the real result is far from what is expected. When the reader reads a story (situation) he starts to predict the end, but when he finishes reading it, he gets to the result; he is surprised that the end is not what he expects to be like.

<http://www.buzzle.com/articles/verbal-irony-examples.html>)

In order to understand this form better, there is a significant example of this kind of irony in religion. The Pharaoh ordered to kill all the new born baby boys of Israel children, because of the prophecy saying that one of them will be the reason behind the downfall of the Pharaoh. Moses' mother tried to hide him and ultimately he was adopted by the royal family. The irony lies in that the Moses was that baby boy who was the cause behind the downfall of the Pharaoh (Khan, 2010:1).

Concerning situational irony, Lucariello(1994 cited in Shelly,2001:777) adopts the theory of schema-recognition system. This shows how people understand incidents by relating them to a given rule. Some of these rules stand for the people's predictions of the normal unfold of events. On the other hand, other rules show the opposite, which means how the events happen

ironically. The ironic rules are active when these four features are in a situation: unexpectedness, human frailty, outcome and opposition.

Yet, this theory fails in differentiating between ironic and non-ironic situations. Also, in some ironic situations the four features above are not combined together (Shelly, 2001:777).

According to this theory, situational irony starts with a surprise. It co-occurs with some emotions. These emotions tend to progress at a certain time. Lucariello (1994 cited in Shelly, 2001:808) shows that *unexpectedness* is the most common feature that associates with situational irony. Usually irony continues from surprise to sadness, a state of emotions that are associated with special adjectives like *sad*, *tragic*. Complicated feelings like pity and misery are for those people who face such pitiful situations. Other kinds of ironies are disagreeable, that start from surprise to disgust. These are categorized as *bitter* ironies. Emotions such as hatred and contempt that are related to disgust are by those people towards a thing or condition from which he wants to be far away from (ibid).

5. Functions of Irony

Irony serves two ends: positive and negative. This depends on the opinion of the interpreter. To some people irony has a positive function. It is used for the sake of **emphasis**, or sometimes for the accuracy of communication of an attitude. There are some speech communities where irony has an important role to prove its communicative competence, among friends, professionals, or even in universities (Hutcheon, 1992:222).

The negative side of this function is that it is only **decorative** and not necessary, since it leads to ambiguity and thus the result is confusion and misunderstanding in communication (Ibid).

The other positive function of irony is the **playful** function. It is related to humour and wit. This is a good feature in the use of language, but according to some linguists this shows the superiority of the speaker only. On their part, Long and Graesser (1998 cited in Gibbs and Colston, 2007:297) state that irony may be funnier than the literal speech because of the surprise produced by the detachment between what is said and what is meant. Another function of irony can be that of **status elevation**. When criticizing, the speaker either tries to praise or puts down the status of the person being criticized. In irony the speaker might over elevate than the literal one, because he tries to show how the addressee must have acted in contrast to what he has done. In other words, irony can be less status elevating because it could be considered a joke. Ironic praise makes the compliment vague by referring to it in negative terms. This makes the addressee to get confused, and think whether the speaker's intention is to praise or to underestimate (Ibid).

Aggression is another function of irony. It is presumed that irony is an unpleasant form of criticism. It is worse than the direct negative expression. It

is a way of making fun and humiliating the addressee. It is severer than the literal one because of the contrast between what is said and what is meant (Ibid).

A very important function of irony is **Emotional Control**. The speaker shows some measure of self control by claiming of making a joke (Ibid, 300).

The last function of irony is the **social function**. Dewes et al.(1995 cited in Gibbs and Colston,2007:297) are of the opinion that the social functions of irony are related to verbal form. As explained previously, each function has its special purpose. Ironic compliment is more offensive than literal compliment, but ironic criticism is less offensive than literal ones. Ironic comments seem to be more interesting than literals. Now, it is more objective to show the reaction of the addressee towards these ironic statements. When the speaker directs irony to the addressee's ill performance, he simply tries to protect the latter's face by making the criticism softer. The speaker uses irony when the addressee misbehaves or offends him in order to appear as less annoyed.

6. The Model

The model adopted in this study is an eclectic one comprising Giora et al.'s (1998) and Gibbs and Colston's (2007). This model tries to show the stylistic reasons of ironic expressions and their functions in language. It helps to figure out the main principles and strategies related to irony. Giora et al. (1998) attempts to differentiate between the literal meaning and the ironic one. On the other hand, Gibbs and Colston (2007) present the reasons and functions of irony. This makes the reader see how the ironist plays with language in different situations.

The examples taken are in English and the study examines them according to certain criteria in the two models. Giora et al.'s(1998) model examines the examples from a pragmatic point of view since it attempts to differentiate between the literal meaning and the ironic one. The difference is according to the familiarity, priority and frequency of the expression. On the other hand, by the adoption of Gibbs and Colston 's(2007) model, the analysis of the ironic expressions takes these points into account:

- The kind of irony whether it is verbal or situational.
- The reasons behind its usage whether it is for humour, politeness, etc..
- The function of the expression.

7. English Data Analysis

The analysis of the examples involves three points. The first point is that it focuses on irony as an opposition. The second one deals with the term as a humorous form, while the last point shows irony as an exaggerative technique.

7.1 Opposition

According to the traditional definition of irony, the speaker says something but has an opposite intention. This opposition is not always clear. It can be vague and difficult to judge (Komlosi, 2010:3). The examples below clarify this point:

1. *What a wonderful party!*

Context: A teenager attends a party then figures out that most of the guests are old people (Gibbs & Colston, 2007:38).

Here, the teenager uses verbal irony. The kind of language she uses suits her age, since teenagers do not like to attend such parties and communicate with old people. The opposition is clear and there is nothing vague about it unlike examples [1] and [2]. The word *wonderful* is more common and familiar in this situation according to Giora et al.'s GSH (1998).

2. *What beautiful flowers you have brought to me!*

Context: In Valentine's Day, your boyfriend comes to see you empty handed (Komlosi, 2010:4).

The idea of opposition goes beyond the limitations of the definition (saying something but meaning something else). The girlfriend uses verbal irony by being sarcastic. She says that out of disappointment. The words "beautiful flowers" do not mean that they are ugly but the fact that he has not brought any. The situation itself is opposite to her expectations.

3. *What a lovely day for a picnic!*

Context: Said in a rainy day.

It is all clear that the speaker uses verbal irony. From the context one can figure out the definite opposition between "lovely picnic" / "rainy day". Irony's comprehension is difficult because the hearer takes the familiar and prior meaning of the word "lovely" (he understands it literally). It has a positive meaning and shows that the speaker had a good time at the picnic. The listener must be aware of the situation first and then he can interpret the meaning of "lovely" as negative in this situation and consider it ironic (Giora, 1998: 2).

7.2 Humour

According to Attardo (2001: 166), "those involved in the academic study of humour have decided to adopt the generic term *humour* as an umbrella term encompassing pragmatically all the semantic field of humor and humorous forms". Some put irony as a pragmatic technique of achieving humor. In some situations the ironist knows that the person being criticized

feels uncomfortable, and thus the first tries to save his attitude by showing that it was no more than a joke.

4. Trust the Weather Bureau! See what lovely weather it is: rain, rain, rain.(Gibbs& Colston,2007:26).

This utterance does not need a context because the ironist reveals the opposite of her speech i.e. the listener does not take the literal meaning of the utterance. The opposition between the words shows the ironic expression and yet it is not uttered to humiliate or criticize any one. It refers to the bad luck in a humorous way.

5.A: Harry to Tom: Tedious lecture, wasn't it?

B: Harry to Anne: Tedious lecture, wasn't it?

Context: Harry and Tom attended a lecture that was fabulously presented. They agreed that it was fascinating. Anne came out of the lecture and Harry said these two utterances. (Gibbs& Colston, 2007:30).

“Speakers are not just ironic: They are ironic only to certain listeners” (Ibid). In the first utterance, Harry is ironic to Tom because they have the same background knowledge. Tom knows Harry’s real intention. He simply says something but means something else and he takes it as a joke. Now [5B] confuses Anne. She does not know anything about Harry’s feelings towards the lecture. In this case she comprehends the literal meaning of his speech. Harry intentionally says this to her. He uses the style of sophistication to make the listener think of what he has said.

6. A:Wow. That was fast.

B: Smiles.

Context: A and B are women in their early 30s. They are graduate students attending a weekly seminar. B has borrowed some videotapes from A and has taken several months to return them. B returns the videotapes to A (Attardo et.al, 2004:1247).

In this example, A uses verbal irony to refer to the long time she waited to return the videotapes. “fast” is the opposite of “several months”. The listener understands the ironic joke but through her reaction to the utterance, it seems she is not that happy with what the ironist says.

7.3 Exaggeration

Sometimes when it comes to ironic utterances, the ironist exaggerates in the terms of the opposition he or she uses. The listener’s response is different. Most of the time he is defensive towards the utterance. In this case, it is difficult for the speaker to withdraw his irony and consider it a joke.

7. *That guy is brilliant in answering questions.*

Context: Said to about an unintelligent person (Gibbs&Colston, 2007:10).

If one compares the situation to the utterance, the difference between them is explicit. An unintelligent person does not give brilliant answers. It is clear from the utterance itself that it is his habit. In this case the context must be about an intelligent man in order to be logical. The exaggerative verbal irony is as clear as day light. Those who follow Giora et al.'s (1998) theory of comprehending irony find no difficulty in understanding the ironic utterance.

8. *"She's mentioned in the Old Testament"* (ibid).

Context: A student speaks about his teacher's age.

The exaggerated expression is explicit since it is obvious that the teacher is not mentioned in Old Testament. He only wants to say that his teacher is so old. The irony here is also explicit and it violates the formal definition of irony. The ironist says something and means it but still it is irony. The context of situation decides that it is an ironic expression in the form of exaggeration.

9. *The test was very easy, by the time I finished it I was 100 years old.*

Context: The student utters this after getting out from the exam. (<http://www.worsleyschool.net/socialarts/hyperbole/hyperbole2.html>)

The irony in this example is obvious since there are two contradicted ideas. "very easy" and "100 years when finished it". First of all, the intention of the student is not that he may fail. He tries to show how much he got tired because it takes too long to answer those questions. What makes the listener indicate to the irony is the exaggerative style. For sure no one takes this long in an exam. Students are mostly ironic during their exams. They take it as a humorous way to express their attitude.

7.4 Examples of Situational Irony

Examples of this type of irony do not need a deep analysis. The only thing needed is the situation itself, then the reader or the audience judges whether it is ironic or not. Situational irony is more objective because it does not need an ironist.

10. The American troops are playing "Risk" the purpose behind the game is to control the world. The irony here is that without playing this game they are really controlling the whole world. They start in Afghanistan then move to Iraq. May be this game decides what their next step is.



IRONY
Playing "Risk" in Afghanistan.

<http://www.blog37.net/blog/tag/irony/>

11. The picture is of a very poor area in Africa. Generally speaking, it is the country of poor people. The irony lies on the big poster. It is about the luxury and the enjoyment of life. The poster does not suit the way of living in this place. Those who live here are poor and cannot afford it.



AFRICA
The home of irony

<http://www.phombo.com/funny-pictures/jacana-demotivational-posters/820875/>

12. The situation is clear from the picture. What makes it ironic is that the sign is there as a note for drivers to drive carefully and what makes it worse is that the driver does not only drive carelessly but also damages the safety note as well.



IRONY
Someone genuinely believed that distracting drivers with this pointless sign would create safer roads

<http://auto-fail.com/irony/>

13. The next situation is significant. Those who always ask for peace, their behaviour as well should be according to their principles. A peaceful protest turns into a violent act. People start quarrelling and beating one another.



<http://www.uniquescoop.com/2009/10/25-most-ironic-photos-on-internet.html>

14. This is a fitness center and people come here to do sport in order to lose weight. The irony here is that the members of the center use the electric stairs to go in.



http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_7xGESFZ0NC8/StcqYwQ3INI/AAAAAAAAAU-8/eBtKEp6hZdk/s1600-h/exercise_irony_20091014_2089544428.jpg

8. Arabic Data Analysis

The Arabic structure of irony does not differ a lot from that of the English one, though it has its own way in conveying the utterance towards the listener. Definite opposition, humor and exaggeration will be discussed in the Arabic structure as well to show the similarities and differences of irony in both languages. When the situation is the same in both languages, the ironic utterance sometimes is totally different from that in the Arabic structure and sometimes it is the same.

8.1 Opposition

Opposition deals with the traditional definition of irony when the speaker says something and means exactly the opposite. This opposition falls into levels because sometimes though in these expressions the contradiction is not definite but still it is under the umbrella of opposition. The examples below illustrate this point.

15. يا له من فستان ناصع البياض الذي ترتديه العروس!

Lit. (What dress pure whiteness that wears the bride).

Func. (What a snow white dress the bride is wearing!).

Context: she is wearing a red dress.

Traditionally speaking, in most parts of the world brides wear white dresses for their weddings. The kind of irony here is verbal. The ironist here seems to be surprised by the color of what the bride is wearing. He is unaware of their culture. The opposition is through using the collocation (ناصع البياض) which means something extremely white. It is not necessary for the speaker to say “what a black dress” to show opposition, because anyone who sees that dress can figure out the contradiction between red and white.

16. لقد احترق لساني .

Lit. (Burned my tongue).

Func. (Wow, that was very hot).

Context: the waiter brings an already cold tea for him.

After examining the context, the reader or the listener may understand that the ironist is criticizing the service of that place which makes it a verbal irony. If we put the feelings of the waiter, we can see that he is humiliated and the ironic expression is somehow harsh. In the Arabic statement there is no indication that the ironist is drinking tea, but through the whole situation one judges that it is the reason behind that. (احترق لساني) is different from “ what a hot tea” and yet it is ironical because he says something and means the opposite. The word “احترق” itself indicates the hotness of something which is explicitly the opposite of coldness.

17. أنت حقا شخص مفعم بالنشاط.

Lit. (You really person full of activity).

Func. (You are really an active person).

Context: after so many attempts to make his friend go out with him the latter keeps making excuses.

It seems that the speaker is fed up with the excuse made by the listener in order not to go out that is why he is being ironical. (مفعم بالنشاط) is for a person who likes to have fun and hang out with friend all the times. The contradiction here is that the listener refuses to go out. A justification behind this is that the ironist uses verbal irony to show how lazy the listener is. The intention of the word (مفعم بالنشاط) means very lazy and boring person.

8.2 Humour

In all cultures people use a humorous language to communicate with one another. This is conveyed through jokes, satire and many other techniques. Irony also whether verbal or situational has a humorous perspective. Sometimes only this kind of irony suits the purpose of the utterance. The Arabic structure is not that different from the English one because its communication is limited to certain people. Either among friends or members of the family.

18. احمد يكلم محمد: كنت على وشك النوم في المحاضرة

احمد يكلم منى : كنت على وشك النوم في المحاضرة

Lit. (Was on about the sleep in the lecture).

Func. (I was about to sleep during the lecture).

Context: Ahmed and Mohammad attended a lecture that was well presented, they enjoyed every single moment of it. When Mona came out of the class Ahmed uttered those two expressions.

In the first example, no doubt that the kind of irony is humorous because both participants know the real meaning behind that utterance. The second one is also verbal irony for humorous reasons as well, but Mona does not understand it because she does not share the same knowledge. The denotative meaning of (كنت على وشك النوم) is (كانت المحاضرة شديدة الملل), that is to say “it was a boring lecture”. The context indicates that the students enjoyed the lecture. Now the contradiction is between “enjoyed” and “boring”. The reason behind the second utterance is that Ahmed tries to be sophisticated. He wants to see Mona’s reaction and her opinion about the lecture.

19.

- استمتعت بمشاهدة كل دقيقة من الفلم.

- نعم, كان رائعا.

- من الان فصاعدا, انا ساختار الافلام.

Lit.

- Enjoyed I with watching every minute of the movie.

- Yes, was wonderful.

- From now on, I will choose the movies.

Func.

- I enjoyed watching every moment of the movie.

- Yes, it was wonderful.

- From now on, I’ll choose the movies.

Context: two persons watched a very bad movie, they even did not finish it.

Without reading the context, one cannot understand the situation. It is clear that both participants are using verbal irony. The opposition is between (استمتعت) and (كان رائعا) from one side and the fact that it was a bad movie. Both share the same background knowledge and try to make some fun out of their experience. The last utterance provides the humorous side to the whole situation.

8.3 Exaggeration

One of the common ways of using irony is through exaggeration. It is an extended form of humor. The listener gets the purpose behind the utterance if he feels that there is a huge difference between what is said and what is meant. That is why it is somehow difficult for the ironist to turn it as a joke.

20.

الاستاذ: هذا الطالب حقا نابغة

الطالب: اليس أفضل من لاشيء؟

Lit. (This student really genius).

Func. (This student is a real genius).

Context: Said about an unintelligent student when he answered a question that was not that good.

Absolutely the professor uses verbal irony, because this description does not suit the person involved. The exaggeration is clear because students are not praised like this when they give such answers. What is significant here is the reaction of the student. He understands the exaggerated form of the utterance and defends himself. The reason why the student reacts like this is because of the word (نابغة) which means a genius person. What makes it more exaggerated is (حقا) which means that the professor insists on his ironic utterance.

21. انا مشغول جدا بالعمل حاليا, ليس لدي الوقت كي احك رأسي.

Lit. (I am busy very with work now, not have I time to itch head I).

Func. (I am so busy working right now, I have no time even to scratch my head).

Context: The speaker is a graduate student and is jobless.

First of all the utterance is verbal irony because there is an explicit contradiction between what is said and the context. The first clause (مشغول جدا بالعمل) is enough to indicate the ironic expression. Since it is a definite opposition, busy working opposes having no job in meaning. The other clause is an extension to the previous clause. (احك رأسي) is a very simple and easy thing to do and it takes a very short time, but the ironist tries to show how much idle he is. The exaggerative clause which is also an ironic one supports the definite opposition to create a powerful ironic utterance.

22. عليك بالذهاب لمركز الرشاقة كي تخسري بعض الوزن.

Lit. (Must you going to center the slenderness to lose you some the weight).

Func. (You must go to the fitness center in order to lose some weight).

Context: He tells his cousin who is a skinny girl.

Without reading the context, this utterance is logical because the gym is the place where people lose weight through sports. The problem is with the context, the girl is already skinny and she does not need to lose weight. This shows that the speaker is ridiculing her skinny body. The verbal irony shows two contradictory ideas at the same time. There are two indications of this difference: (مركز الرشاقة) and (تخسري بعض الوزن) both oppose (skinny) which makes it ironic. The feelings of the listener is important. Usually ladies get uncomfortable when someone speaks about their weight whether overweight or so skinny, especially if that person is a man. This lady may feel humiliated because the speaker exaggerates in his speech.

8.4 Situational Irony in Arabic

As it has been mentioned before, situational irony does not need participants. It depends on the audience to rate the irony in that situation. In Arabic, this kind of irony is mostly expressed by caricatures. The skillfulness of those who make these caricatures is manifested through the feelings that come to the audience when they see them. The examples below illustrate the point:

23. This is a man watching TV in Ramadan. The huge number of remote controls in front of him indicate that a holy month for people is only a matter of watching TV series and programs. The irony is that man is supposed to pray to Allah as much as he can not to watch TV as much as he can.



<http://aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/C9831693-F749-49E3-B223AD68A759524C.htm?WBCMODE=authoring preview>

24. This is the previous president Hosni Mubarak, he is in the middle of other Arab presidents. After losing his post, some of them are making fun of him, others are shocked for his dictatorial policy, while others cannot stand the situation and are running away. The big irony is that all of those presidents are like or even worse than Mubarak. They show themselves as honest and patriotic.



http://manaralive1.blogspot.com/2011/02/blog-post_6952.html

25. This one really affects one's feelings. The picture is the reality of Gaza's situation. We feel sorry and sometimes cry for what is happening out there. The irony is that we are the reason behind that, the silence and the weakness of the Arab countries is a great aid to the Israeli troops in Palestine.



<http://gazatalknet.wordpress.com/>

26. The picture speaks about the relations between the Arab countries from a political point of view. They are always proud of their history and glorifies it. They act as brothers but the reality is something else. The irony in the picture shows two Arab presidents welcoming each other warmly and at the same time they are stabbing each other in the back.



<http://arabe.maktoobblog.com/category/>

27. Friday is a spiritual day for the Muslims. It is supposed to be calm and peaceful. As it is clear from the picture, all the other days are quiet and unidentifiable but when it comes to Friday, the situation is different. Nowadays, in the Middle East Friday is a revolutionary day, full of violence and bloodshed. Ironically, the best day to dethrone a president is Friday. It seems that governments must cancel Fridays from the week, or else they are in jeopardy.



<http://mushahed.mr/vb/showthread.php?t=24970>

9. Conclusions

The study has come up with the following finding and conclusions:

1. Irony is a communicative message in which there is a gap between what the speaker says and means.
2. Grice's maxims cannot be applied to Irony utterances since they violate the two main ones: the quantity and quality maxims.
3. There is no clear-cut evidence of irony as speech acts, whether they are direct or indirect.
4. Irony utterances take more time to be comprehended than the literal meanings.
5. With verbal irony, one must be careful with the matter of timing. The speaker must choose a suitable time for the ironic utterance.
6. Situational irony does not need participants or utterances. It depends on the judgment of the audience.
7. Situational irony begins with surprise then develops to different kinds of emotions such as sadness, disgust or anger.
8. There are two main functions of irony: positive and negative. The former is related to wit and humour, while the latter refers to the unpleasant criticism and the humiliation of the addressee.
9. One cannot understand ironic expressions without being aware of the context.
10. The study verifies the hypothesis that irony is a universal phenomenon since it has been examined in English and Arabic as an example for its universality.
11. In most cases ironic expressions are similar to each other in both languages, except for some situations. The differences fall in the usage of some utterances that are exclusively related to a certain culture whether English or Arabic.
12. Irony expressions in Arabic are more figurative than those in English.
13. Opposition, humour and exaggeration are the most common devices to form ironic expressions in both languages.

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