

A Phonopragmatic Study of Irony in Amber Heard and Johnny Depp Trial

دراسة صوتية تداولية للسخرية في محاكمة امبير هيرد و جوني ديب



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Abstract

This study is a phono-pragmatic analysis of irony within the context of the trial involving Johnny Depp and Amber Heard. The primary objectives are to explore the phonological expressions of irony present in the analyzed data, identify the pragmatic strategies employed to convey irony, and determine the main functions that emerge from a phono-pragmatic examination of irony. The study seeks to categorize the types and functions of ironic expressions while investigating irony through a phono-pragmatic lens. To fulfill these objectives, an eclectic model was developed, utilizing a mixed-method research design. Following the analysis of various extracts, several conclusions were drawn, most notably that verbal irony is the predominant form utilized by characters in the selected data, while the reinforcing function is the most frequently identified among those analyzed.

Key words: Phono_pragmatic, irony, phonological expressions, and pragmatic strategies.

المستخلص

تُعد هذه الدراسة تحليلًا صوتية تداولية للسخرية في سياق المحاكمة التي تتعلق بجوني ديب وآمبر هيرد. الأهداف الرئيسية هي استكشاف التعبيرات الصوتية للسخرية الموجودة في البيانات التي تم تحليلها، وتحديد الاستراتيجيات التداولية المستخدمة لنقل السخرية، وتحديد الوظائف الرئيسية التي تظهر من خلال الفحص الصوتي-التداولي للسخرية. تسعى الدراسة إلى تصنيف أنواع ووظائف التعبيرات الساخرة بينما يتم التحقيق في السخرية من خلال اجراء تحليل صوتي-تداولي. لتحقيق هذه الأهداف، تم تطوير نموذج انتقائي، باستخدام تصميم بحث مختلط. بعد تحليل مقاطع مختلفة، تم التوصل إلى عدة استنتاجات، أبرزها أن السخرية اللفظية هي الشكل السائد المستخدم من قبل الشخصيات في البيانات المختارة، بينما كانت الوظيفة التعزيزية هي الأكثر تكرارًا بين تلك التي تم تحليلها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الفونو-براغماتية، السخرية، التعبيرات الصوتية، والاستراتيجيات البراغماتية.



1. Introduction

The sensational aspects of the trial between Johnny Depp and Amber Heard have garnered a lot of public attention, but it also presents an excellent chance to examine the complex dynamics of language, particularly through irony. According to some researches, irony can be difficult to understand, especially for second-language learners who might have trouble recognizing the contextual clues required to decipher ironic statements (Yang, 2022). Both parties' purposeful use of irony in the Heard-Depp trial not only demonstrates their command of language but also shapes public perception and the stories that surround the accusations. Moreover, Irony can convey complex emotions and attitudes in the face of serious charges, making the courtroom setting a unique setting for examining language use in high-stakes situations.

This study will examine how irony from phono-pragmatic perspective appears in the trial's discourse, paying particular attention to its phonological features and pragmatic roles. By investigating specific examples of ironic expressions, this research seeks to deepen our understanding of how language influences interactions and reflects the complexities of human communication in conflict situations.

2. Literature review

Irony is defined as a speaker's use of language to convey meanings that contradict the literal interpretation of their words (Simpson, 2011). This often leads to confusion among listeners, exemplified when a mother remarks, "This room is very clean," while referring to a messy space (Khazali-Al, 2019). From a pragmatic-phono viewpoint, irony can be operationally defined as any utterance that signifies the opposite of what is literally stated. This definition encompasses both pragmatic and phonological dimensions, analyzing how irony communicates new information through features like intonation and stress patterns (Grice, 1975; Poggi, 2007). The pragmatic aspect also examines how irony interacts with Grice's maxims of relation, quantity, quality, and manner.

Verbal irony occurs when a speaker uses words to convey a meaning that is opposite to their intended message. Muecke describes it as a "double-layered or two-storey phenomenon," where the lower level reflects the situation perceived by the victim of irony or as deceptively presented by the ironist (Butler, 2015, p. 55). Dracopoulos adds that



verbal irony arises from a tension between a specific group of words and another meaning, which may be inherent in the words or derived from their context (Dracopoulos, 2006). Abrams (in Al-Ali, 2015) further explains that this type of irony involves a statement where the implied meaning sharply contrasts with the overtly expressed meaning, indicating through context that the speaker intends a different, often opposing, attitude (Al-Ali, 2015). Furthermore, Kreuz and Glucksberg (in Gibbs & Colston, 2007) characterize verbal irony as a way for speakers to express attitudes toward an object, event, or person by stating something that is not literally true. An example of verbal irony is the statement, "I am absolutely happy to lose my money."

Situational irony refers to an ironic condition recognized by an observer. Muecke defines it as the situation as it appears to the observer or ironist, which may not need to be presented by the ironist but should be evoked in the observer's mind (Muecke, in Butler, 2015). Added to that, Gibbs (in Li, 2008) explains that situational irony arises from a contrast between expectations and reality, creating an incongruity that often carries a sense of misfortune for those involved. This incongruity is typically unintentional and beyond the control of those who may be victims of the irony.

According to Hutcheon, irony serves multiple functions, as for Reinforcing is a primary function of irony, described by Hutcheon (in Al-Ali, 2005) as the intentional use of irony to emphasize a point in conversation. This function enhances communication by providing greater precision and clarity, especially when expressing attitudes, and can involve emotional engagement (Al-Ali, 2015). An example is the statement, "I am absolutely happy being slapped for no reason," which underscores a sentiment while conveying the opposite meaning.

Complicating introduces complexity and controlled ambiguity, enriching interpretation but potentially leading to confusion or miscommunication. Irony can create unnecessary ambiguity that obscures clarity in dialogue (Al-Ali, 2015). For instance, saying "There are plenty of other fish in the sea," followed by "Oh well, I cannot even handle one fish," reflects the tension between expectation and reality.

The ludic function of irony involves playful teasing and humor, conveying with similar to puns or metaphors. Peter McGraw notes that humor arises when something seems wrong yet simultaneously



acceptable or safe. However, irony can also be perceived negatively as trivializing (Al-Ali, 2015). An example might be: “Although he is a grammarian, too bad he has no comma sense at all.”

Irony also serves a distancing or self-protective function. This aspect allows the speaker to maintain a non-committal stance and avoid explicit judgments that may be inappropriate. Irony acts as a defense mechanism that enables speakers to evade potential repercussions (Al-Ali, 2015). For instance: “The medical term for the inability to pronounce the sound 'r' is called rhotacism. Whoever coined this term is absolutely smart,” illustrates how irony can distance the speaker from direct criticism.

The assailing function of irony is often viewed as contentious; it can criticize or reprimand an issue while also highlighting values that need addressing (Al-Ali, 2015). An illustrative example would be: “What an honorable way to betray his master. People should not be so ungrateful.”

In conclusion, Hutcheon’s framework provides a nuanced understanding of how irony operates in communication. Each function—whether reinforcing an idea, complicating meaning, introducing humor, creating distance, or critiquing behavior—indicates the multifaceted nature of irony in human interaction.

3. Phonopragmatics

The concept of phono-pragmatics, which explores the intersection of pragmatics and phonology, has been extensively investigated by various scholars. Initially introduced by Levinson in 1983, this approach delves into the cultural cross-processes involving auditory and prosodic explorations of both illocutionary and perlocutionary intentions in communication (Levinson, 1983). The pragmatic-phono approach applies to communication settings where extralinguistic influences and spontaneous oral interactions are paramount. It addresses how speakers use sociocultural schemata and intercultural variations in speech acts, along with suprasegmental features like intonation, timing, intensity, and realization (Zhang, 2009; Hill, 1986).

Scholars have indicated the significance of prosodic features in phono-pragmatics analysis. Caballero emphasized the importance of intonation within phrases, recognizing that acoustic parameters such as



pitch, timing, and vowel intensity play crucial roles in perceptive perception and production (Caballero, 2001, p. 48). Mixdorff further discussed the need to integrate phonology and pragmatics for a deeper understanding of speech patterns, including silences, pauses, and contours (Mixdorff, 2002). More recent studies by Raheem and Kadhim (2020), Hammood and Aadili-Al (2022), and Zokirova and Hammood (2022) continue to elaborate on the relationship between pragmatics and phonology, underscoring the vital role of prosody in conveying speakers' intentions during conversational interactions (Raheem & Kadhim, 2020; Hammood & Aadili-Al, 2022; Zokirova & Hammood, 2022).

To sum up, the phono-pragmatics approach seeks to merge the disciplines of pragmatics and phonology to better understand how speakers convey messages through both linguistic and paralinguistic means, thereby enhancing our comprehension of interactive communication processes.

4. Methodology

The current study employs an eclectic model for analyzing irony, integrating various analytical frameworks to fit the selected data. This eclectic approach aims to identify different types of irony, whether situational or verbal, by utilizing both pragmatic and phonological levels. The analytical framework designed for this study will focus on prosodic characteristics, such as sentence stress and intonation, to analyze the functions of irony. Additionally, it will consider the flouting of maxims as part of the pragmatic strategies involved in ironic communication.

4.1 Data Analysis and Result

This section provides a phonopragmatic analysis of irony in the context of the trial of Johnny Depp and Amber Heard. Through the analysis of particular extracts of ironic discourse, researcher's aim is to reveal how both parties strategically employ irony in their interactions and testimonies. The use of irony as a rhetorical device to express nuanced feelings, refute narratives, and affect public opinion will be examined in this analysis.

Extracts 1:

In the trial, Johnny Depp stated, "I'm not going to strike a woman



who makes fun of my tattoo. That's like going into someone's journal and making fun of it. It's a personal thing. I would never resort to violence over something so trivial."

Context of Extracts 1

Depp made this statement in an effort to refute Amber Heard, his ex-wife, who accused him of domestic abuse. Depp played the victim of Heard's accusations and repeatedly denied physically abusing her during the trial. Moreover, his attempt to minimize the importance of Heard's criticisms and to make it clear that he would not react violently to perceived insults—because such issues are private and not worth using violence for—is evident in his statement.

1. Types of Irony

In his testimony during the trial, Johnny Depp utilizes verbal irony to address the serious allegations of domestic violence leveled against him. For instance, he states, "That's like going into someone's journal and making fun of it," employing a metaphorical comparison that trivializes the gravity of violence. By suggesting that mocking a tattoo is akin to a personal violation, Depp ironically diminishes the seriousness of physical abuse against a partner, as the intended meaning sharply contrasts with the literal interpretation.

Additionally, when he claims, "I would never resort to violence over something so trivial," he asserts that he would not engage in violence for insignificant reasons; however, this assertion is ironic given the context of the accusations against him. The irony lies in the contradiction between his statement and the serious nature of domestic violence, indicating his attempt to distance himself from the allegations while simultaneously framing them as unimportant.

2. The Phonological Analysis of Irony



In the analysis of phonological elements related to verbal irony in Johnny Depp's testimony, we utilize Praat software to examine prosodic features such as intonation and stress. Stress refers to the emphasis placed on specific syllables within words, which are pronounced with greater energy than unstressed syllables, making them more prominent in speech. Conversely, pitch pertains to the tone of voice, denoting whether a sound is higher or lower. In this context, verbal irony is manifested in Johnny's speech through these prosodic features—particularly pitches and stress.

For instance, in the statement "That's like going into someone's journal and making fun of it," the word "journal" (/dʒɜː'nəl/) has its second syllable stressed, underscoring its significance within the statement. Similarly, in "I would never resort to violence over something so trivial," the word "resort" (/rɪ'zɔːt/) carries stress on the second syllable, while "violence" (/ˈvaɪləns/) is stressed on the first syllable. This strategic emphasis enables Depp to convey verbal irony and clarify his viewpoint to the audience.

Pitch involves adjusting the vocal cords to modify the speed of vibration, which affects how speakers are perceived. Typically, women's voices have a higher pitch than men's due to differences in vocal cord structure and vibration frequency. In the sentence "I'm not going to strike a woman..." Depp's pitch is noticeably higher than other words in that sentence, reflecting his feelings and emotions regarding irony towards Amber.

Through this examination of intonation and stress patterns, it becomes evident how Depp employs verbal irony in his testimony, utilizing prosodic features to enhance his rhetorical effect and effectively engage his audience.

3. The pragmatics analysis



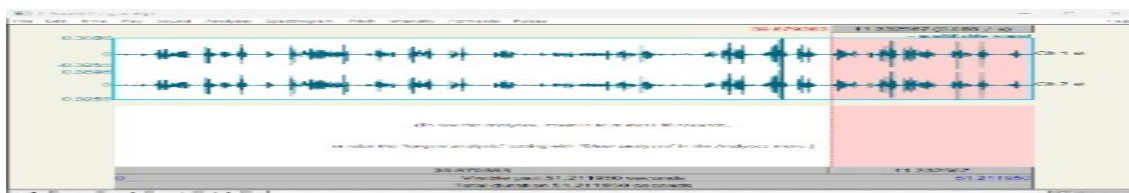
In Johnny Depp's extract, two particularly ironic statements emerge: "That's like going into someone's journal and making fun of it" and "I would never resort to violence over something so trivial."

In the first statement, Depp flouts the Maxim of Quantity by employing an analogy that oversimplifies the complexities surrounding violence. He implies that only significant issues warrant violent reactions, which misrepresents the gravity of his situation with Amber Heard and misleads the audience regarding the nature of violence in interpersonal conflicts.

The second statement flouts the Maxim of Quality as Depp claims he would never engage in violence for trivial matters. The irony is pronounced given the serious allegations against him; evidence suggests otherwise. By asserting that he has never harmed a woman and trivializing the situation, he presents himself as truthful, despite contradicting the evidence presented during the trial. This insistence on his non-violent nature starkly contrasts with Heard's serious accusations, creating a dissonance that undermines his credibility.

4. The Function of irony

Statements	Function
"That's like going into someone's journal and making fun of it"	Reinforcing: This emphasizes Depp's view of his situation as insignificant; implying that he believes ridicule should not lead to violent reactions.
"I would never resort to violence over something so trivial."	Complicating: This adds complexity to the narrative by claiming that he would never turn to violence over trivial matters, which is ironic in light of the serious allegations he faces. This discrepancy creates a tension between his assertions and the evidence brought forth in court, making it more challenging for the audience to grasp his true character.



<p>“That's like going into someone's journal and making fun of it” and “I would never resort to violence over something so trivial.”</p>	<p>Ludic: The incorporation of humor in these statements introduces a playful element, as Depp attempts to diminish the seriousness of the situation through analogy and trivialization. This approach can create a disconnect between the gravity of domestic violence and his depiction of it as something amusing or insignificant.</p>
<p>“That's like going into someone's journal and making fun of it” and “I would never resort to violence over something so trivial.”</p>	<p>Self-Protective: Both sentences function to protect Depp by allowing him to distance himself from the allegations of violence. By portraying his actions as responses to trivial issues, he seeks to safeguard his public image and maintain a narrative in which he is not depicted as the aggressor.</p>

Extract 2:

"I receive hundreds of death threats regularly, if not daily. Thousands since this trial has started. People mocking... my testimony about being assaulted. It's been agonizing. Agonizing, painful, and the most humiliating thing I've ever had to go through"

Context of Extracts 2

The extracts capture Amber Heard's poignant testimony during the defamation trial against Johnny Depp, emphasizing the profound effects the trial has had on her mental well-being and public image. Heard revealed that she has received hundreds of death threats, potentially thousands, since the trial commenced, describing this relentless harassment as "agonizing," "painful," and "the most humiliating experience" of her life. She articulated how these threats, coupled with the mockery of her testimony, have intensified her trauma, stating that she is forced to relive her past experiences daily and grapples with anxiety and fear.

Heard's remarks highlight a significant disparity between her actual experiences and her perceived public image, particularly on social media. She pointed out that many individuals ridicule her testimony, trivializing her experiences of abuse and fostering an environment in which she feels unsafe. This scenario underscores the wider



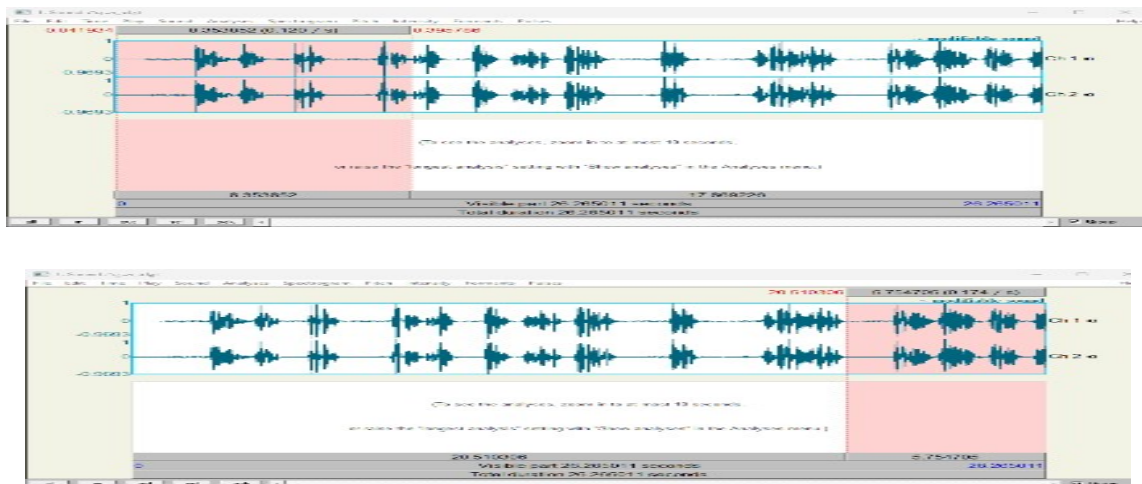
implications of the trial, affecting not only those directly involved but also influencing societal attitudes toward domestic violence and victimhood.

1. Types of Irony

Verbal irony occurs when a speaker expresses something that starkly contrasts with their intended meaning. In Amber Heard's testimony, her descriptions of her experiences as "agonizing," "painful," and "the most humiliating thing I've ever had to go through," along with her mention of receiving "hundreds of death threats regularly," indicate the profound emotional distress she faces. There is a significant contrast between her serious claims and the public perception that often trivializes her experiences, which is where the irony emerges.

While she aims to evoke empathy through such powerful language, the intensity of her expressions may lead some listeners to question the authenticity of her claims. This creates a disconnect between her lived reality and how she is perceived by others, illustrating the complexities of her situation and the challenges victims face in being believed.

2. The Phonological Analysis of Irony



In Amber Heard's testimony, she emphasizes certain words through stress and intonation, particularly "threats" /θrets/, "agonizing" /'ægənaɪzɪŋ/, "painful" /'peɪnfəl/, and "humiliating" /hju:'mɪlietɪŋ/. This stress serves multiple purposes: it draws attention to the severity of her claimed experiences, evokes empathy from the audience, and



reinforces the authenticity of her statements. Additionally, Heard's pitch is generally higher than Johnny Depp's, which is typical due to physiological differences, but her use of pitch variations likely serves specific communicative functions. Higher pitch and a wider pitch range can convey emotional intensity, highlight some points in her testimony, and make her speech more engaging and persuasive. While these prosodic features can influence audience perception, they do not inherently indicate deception; rather, they reflect natural emotional expression. The irony in her delivery may lie in the contrast between the gravity of her situation and the skepticism she faces from the public.

To sum up, Heard's use of stress, intonation, and pitch variations appears to be a blend of genuine emotional expression and deliberate rhetorical techniques aimed at emphasizing her points and connecting with the audience.

3. The pragmatics analysis

Amber Heard provides extensive accounts of the death threats she has received, stating, "I receive hundreds of death threats regularly, if not daily. Thousands since this trial has started." This underscores the gravity of her situation and the emotional toll it has taken on her. By offering more detail than necessary, she flouts the Maxim of Quantity, which suggests that speakers should be as informative as needed without overwhelming their audience. When she characterizes her experiences as "agonizing," "painful," and "the most humiliating thing I've ever had to go through," she implicitly challenges how listeners perceive her emotional state. While these descriptions likely reflect her genuine feelings, they also aim to elicit a strong emotional response from the audience, potentially leading them to question the authenticity of such intense claims in light of the public scrutiny she faces. This can be seen as flouting the Maxim of Quality, which advises against stating what one believes to be false or lacks sufficient evidence for.

4. The Function of irony

Statements	Function
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“hundreds of death threats regularly, if not daily”	Reinforcing: The irony stems from the disparity between the seriousness of her experiences and the public ridicule she encounters, highlighting how her trauma is frequently minimized.
“agonizing,” “painful,” and “the most humiliating thing I’ve ever had to go through,”	Complicating: This adds complexity to the narrative surrounding her testimony. Although these descriptions are likely sincere, they may also elicit skepticism from certain audience members who doubt the authenticity of such extreme claims in the context of public scrutiny.
“hundreds of death threats regularly, if not daily” & “agonizing,” “painful,” and “the most humiliating thing I’ve ever had to go through,”	Assailing: By expressing the pain inflicted by these actions, she underscores the cruelty of such behavior and urges the audience to acknowledge the consequences of their words and actions.

4.2 Results and Discussion

The data analyzed indicates that verbal irony is a significant element in the testimonies of Amber Heard and Johnny Depp. This irony enables them to tackle complex issues, rendering their experiences more relatable and comprehensible to the audience. An ironic statement can effectively convey the seriousness of their circumstances, revealing the gaps between their actual experiences and public perceptions.

The stress patterns employed by both speakers dominate their narratives, allowing them to highlight critical or sarcastic commentary. By placing emphasis on specific words or phrases, they establish a central contrast or incongruity that strengthens their arguments and captivates the audience's attention.

Both Heard and Depp frequently violate the maxims of Quality and Quantity in their testimonies. By offering either excessive details or making claims that may lack complete truthfulness, they create a gap between intended meanings and literal interpretations. This deliberate use of irony helps to bolster their positions while complicating how their messages are perceived by the public.



Conclusion

The irony presented in the testimonies of Amber Heard and Johnny Depp serves as a powerful rhetorical device that highlights the discrepancies between their narratives and societal expectations. The commentary surrounding their testimonies often emphasizes the contrast between the events they describe and the preconceived notions held by the audience. By stressing particular words or phrases, both speakers create a critical or sarcastic tone that reinforces their arguments. Additionally, they frequently flout the conversational maxims of Quality and Quantity, providing either excessive information or making claims that may not be entirely truthful, which can undermine their credibility. The role of irony in their testimonies not only strengthens their respective positions but also illuminates the complexities of public perception regarding domestic violence, societal expectations, and personal trauma. Through their frequent use of irony, Heard and Depp effectively draw attention to significant issues while navigating a highly publicized trial context, ultimately influencing audience perceptions in nuanced ways.

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