

Investigating Iraqi EFL University Students' Comprehension of Irony in Novella

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Abstract

This study aims at investigating Iraqi EFL University students' comprehension in novella. The sample of this study consists of the fourth year students/ Department of English/ College of Education at University of Samarra. The total number of those students is forty.

To achieve the aim of this study the following procedures are adopted:

1. A diagnostic test has been constructed.
2. The test is exposed to a number of specialized jurors who agree on its content validity and face validity.
3. A pilot study is administrated by giving a test to twenty EFL students chosen randomly from the selected sample to determine a number of factors including reliability of the test item, the difficulty level of the items and their discrimination power.

Reliability is ensured by using Cronbach's Alpha formula and interscore reliability method. The coefficient reliability is found to be 0.81 and 0.94.

Results obtained by statistical treatment of data have shown that fourth year EFL students in the college of Education at University of Samarra are below the average level in their efficiency in comprehending irony.

The study ends up with recommendations which are based on the obtained results.

Keywords: Irony, Verbal Irony, Dramatic Irony, Serendipitous goal, Self-Treason Irony.

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1.1 The Problem and its significance

Irony is not as independent and autonomous phenomenon. It is an expression used by historians and critics to illustrate or realize a broad domain of various phenomena. Irony is a distinct element of literature which has different types that are used in different ways with various purposes. Each of them evokes different type of fun and sense of enjoyment.

According to Brabe (1995: 118) irony can be used to include or exclude people and to divide the audience, thus, some of them realize irony and some do not, since the recognition of irony is based on sharing information.

Irony depends on the readers' skillfulness in recognizing the implicit meaning beyond the factual words used. Accordingly and in order to demonstrate and improve officious comprehension of the students, the researcher has identified the deficiency or problems of her students concerning their capability to comprehend irony in a selecting textbook.

1.2 Aim of the study

This study aims at measuring the Iraqi EFL University students' comprehension of the irony in selected novella.

1.3 Hypothesis

The above stated aims is supposed to be achieved through verifying the following null hypothesis:

EFL College students are at the average level in their efficiency in comprehending the different types of irony in novella.

1.4 Limits of the study

The study is limited to:

1. Iraqi EFL Fourth students in the Department of English at the College of Education at University of Samarra.
2. The academic year 2017-2018.
3. The prescribed textbook "The Animal Farm" a novella by George Orwell.

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1.5 Value of the study

The present study is intended to be valuable to:

1. The researchers and experts in ELT since it is an attempt to shed light on the different types, which are used in literary text.
2. Instructors and EFL University students since it shed light on their comprehension of the irony in a selected textbook.

1.6 Procedures of the study

The procedures adopted in this study are as follows:

1. Constructing a diagnostic test which includes 3 questions concerning the irony in the selected novella.
2. Exposing the test to a number of specialized jurors to agree on its content and face validity.
3. Administering a pilot study by giving a test to twenty EFL students chosen randomly from the selected sample to determine reliability of the test, the difficulty level of the items and their discrimination power.
4. Applying the final form of the test on the fourth years students to measure their comprehension of the irony in novella.
5. Summing up the major findings of the study.

2.1 The Concept of Irony

Irony is a manner of arranging a work in order to give complete expression to conflicting or integral propulsion and attitude, particularly as a means elucidating separation from a subject, theme or affection. The fundamental characteristic of irony is the indirect submitting of discrepancy between an action or expression and the context in which it takes place (Singh, 2012: 55).

Irony is not a separate and autonomous phenomenon. It is an expression used by historians and critics to illustrate or to specify a wide range of various phenomena. Irony is a distinguished quality of the literary discourse since the 18th century and becomes practically omniscient element in the 20th century literature (Skorov, 2009: 88).

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The concept of irony appears it is named. Muecke (1970: 14) states that the first record, in Plato's Republic and applied to Socrates by one of his victims, *eironeia* sound to mean something comparable to "a smooth, law – down way of taking people in", However, the meaning of *eironeia* is inconsistent, even among the ancient Greeks.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the expression 'irony' begins to adopt various meanings, that range from recently developed distinctions of irony such as philosophical irony, world irony, tragic irony and cosmic irony (Li, 2008: 3).

According to Muecke (1982: 16) the word 'irony' never appears in English till 1502 and does not come into general literary use till the 18th

century like in the rest of Europe, the concept of irony improve so slowly in England. Irony is clarified as saying reverse of what someone means as

saying something to mean another, as blaming so as to praise and praising to blame.

As a rhetorical device, irony becomes furthermore tricky when its riddle is interrelated throughout a text. Probably an adequate example of this riddling irony can be found in Socrates rhetoric. Three characters namely, Socrates, the interlocutor and the reader are accured within a Socratic dialogue. Socrates grasps something despite the fact that he grasp nothing. The interlocutor grasps nothing, but is device for Socrates to take part the subject. The reader is predicted to explicate the negative space of the dialogue. Thus, the negative space among Socrates, interlocutor and the reader is exactly the irony that permits a convenient approach to a complicated subject (Valstos, 1991: 21).

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2.2 Types of Irony

2.2.1 Situational Irony

In a work of literature, situational irony is presented to reflect the author's conception of the world. In perception of the world, human and their lives, the ironic author apprehends the inconsistency inherent to them and show this inconsistency in his work. Sometimes, situational irony ranges from vaudevillian reversal to tragic irony of fate (Skorov, 2009: 94).

Singh (2012: 67) points out that situational irony is the most common in literature. It is the variance between what happens and what is anticipated or what would appear suitable. It is often more accurate and efficient than dramatic and verbal irony since it arises from the event and circumstances of a story.

To delimit their duty they enclosed their experiments on three ideal episode for ironical situations (Littmann & Mey, 1991: 137):

□ Intentional goal / plan irony

It emerges when an actor perform a logical plan to fulfill a goal, but endures when the plan achieved. The irony demands a specific relationship between goal, plan and the actors awareness about the probable success of the plan (ibid: 137).

□ Serendipitous goal/ plan irony

Unlike the previous situation, in this type the actor gives up the goal of getting over his problem. Therefore, his execution is incidental and leads to alteration of the situation.

□ Competence irony

A few characteristics that seem to be prevalent for all competence irony situations: One of the actors suppose to have competence that is culturally appreciated and illustrate the major focus of the situation. As the lack of the success, the actor fails in his trial to use that competence and endures unpleasant consequences. The more terrible failure, the more ironic is the situation.

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To elaborate a system of classifying ironical situations Mucke (1980: 100) distinguishes five different ironic situations:

1. Irony of Simple Incongruity: this kind is also known as minimal irony since there is incongruity in all situations.
2. Irony of Self-Treason: when someone discloses his own ignorance, enervation, errors or brutishness fortuitously not by what happens to him, but by what he says or does.
3. Irony of Events: there is an ironic disharmony between what is expected and the event.
4. Dramatic Irony: unlike the previous form, dramatic irony is directly ironic and does not depend on any subsidiary reading of the results.
5. Irony of Quandary: in this form of irony the victim suffers from a dilemma or other unattainable situation or impossible position in various ways.

2.2.2 Verbal Irony

Verbal irony is a variance of expression and determination when someone says something but means another e.g. "All generalizations are false" (Cuddon, 1998: 427).

In his view, Grice (1975: 46) states that all cases of verbal irony comprise an opposition between what is literally said and what is meant.

Grice (1978: 124) adds the necessity that irony includes a term of attitude, feeling or evaluation. He declines the requirement of an ironic tone of voice as an exigency for the expression of irony.

With regard to verbal conversation, the first reference that one's word should not be taken literally seems in the speaker's body language. The facial expression of the speaker reveals that the audience are dealing with verbal irony when they make a funny or a fortuitous grimace while seemingly appearing serious purposely sway their eyes, or slowly wag their heads (Krevz, 1996: 25).

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Irony takes place when things goes against the constant convention. And this demonstrates the puzzle of producing and realizing verbal irony as there are various norms in different communities and therefore, irony could not always be successful. In other word the hearer might not realize that the speaker tries to be ironic (Colebrook, 2004: 41).

It is supposed that the use of verbal irony leads to nonchalance or separation towards something and has just one goal of showing the ironists negative attitude towards a specific situation, instead psychological research indicates as with other language devices, verbal irony is used to attain other social goals (Gibbs and Izett, 2005: 137).

Sometimes verbal irony is used to convey humour, since using nonliteral language can be more effectual and the discrepancy between the utterance and the reality can result in a funnier result in the end. Using literal language can take away the elements of unexpected and surprise and nonliteral language sometimes convey some dexterous differences that are hard to attain with literal language only e.g. "Heath is only the slowest possible rate at which one can die" (Dews et al., 2007: 298).

2.2.3 Dramatic Irony

Dramatic irony is the disparity between what the character think be actual and what the readers realize to be true. Sometimes the readers are placed in the position of knowing more than what a character knows. Since the reader knows something that the character does not, we read to detect how the character will react when he grasp the truth of the situation (Singh, 2012: 67).

Pfister (1988: 56) points out that dramatic irony indicates the ironic discrepancy which is made where internal and external communication system clash with each other. Dramatic irony is also defined as a type of irony in which the characters are unaware of significant conditions about which audience is completely formed. Dramatic irony appears when the

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audience feels that there a struggle between appearance and reality in events or language (Sackton: 1948: 45-6).

According to Rozik (2011: 48) dramatic irony is not the basis of laughter on itself, but allows discernment depending on humorous, serious or any other model handling of a narrative. Dramatic irony is one of the exigencies for offering a character as *ridiculus*, i.e. essential status for laughter.

Mackey and Cooper (2000: 90-1) affirms that dramatic irony makes use of the audience where the audience grasp something one or more of the characters are indiscernible. Which means that we are in participation with the dramatist. Dramatic irony emerges when the audience comprehends more than the protagonist himself. So, according to the authors, a number of purposes for dramatic irony is found. First, it adds to the dramatic stress of the play to attract the audience's attention. The second purpose is that dramatic irony represents a specific situation in the character's life where they have a little control over their fates or actions. This type exemplifies knowledge in life. The third one is that dramatic irony is used specially to impact in comedy. The audience may know a truth of a situation and watches double – faced or deceiver becomes involved in a falsity.

Dramatic irony is when there is a double meaning on the character's words that is comprehended differently depending on the attitude of the hearer (Beckson and Ganz, 1989: 133-134). What modern reviewers sight dramatic irony is almost fixed interpreted by indication to Greek tragedy. This makes good concept, as Greek tragedy often deals with contrast between celestial and human points of view (Holland, 2000: 34).

3.1 Population and Sample Selection

The total population of the study consist of 40 fourth year college student of the Department of English/ College of Education at University of Samarra for the academic year 2017-2018. They are selected randomly to present the sample of this study.

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3.2 Construction and Description of the Diagnostics Test

Test construction refers to the process of producing a test. It includes planning for the test, preparing its items and instructions putting them together and reproducing the test. The test includes subjective and objective question (see Appendix one). It consists of three questions and as the following:

- Question one includes 2 items of a subjective type.
- Question two includes 5 items of completion type with 5 blanks, where each blank is considered an item.
- Question three includes 1 item of subjective type.

The whole mark given to the diagnostic test is 20 distributed among the three questions.

3.3 Validity of the test

One of the qualities to be considered when selecting or constructing a research instrument is validity. Validity is a reflection of how well an instrument measures what is designed to measure (Bergman, 1981: 150).

The test has been exposed to a jury of specialists in the field of literature applied linguistics and methods of teaching English to ensure its face validity

Percentage formula has been used to measure the agreement of the specialists to the test items. The jurors agree on the test and the scoring scheme as being appropriate for measuring the written performance of student.

3.4 Pilot Study

The pilot administration of the diagnostic text has been carried out on the 7th May, 2018 and after ensuring its validity A sample of twenty EFL fourth year students in the College of Education is chosen randomly from the population if this study. This administration has been conducted in order to:

1. Check the clarity of the best instructions.
2. Compute the test reliability.
3. Estimate the time allotted for responding to the test items and

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4. Determine the effectiveness of the test items in their difficulty level and discrimination power in the light of the testees's responses.

Consequently, no serious ambiguity is found concerning the test items. Concerning the time allotted for answering the test, it has been found that EFL college students need 60 minutes to answer the test.

3.5 Item Analysis

Item analysis is the process of evaluating the test items in respect to certain characteristics. It usually involves determining the difficulty level and the discrimination power.

3.5.1 Difficulty Level

Test items should be neither so easy nor very difficult for the testers. The item whose difficult level range from 20% to 80% seems to be accepted (Bloom, 1971: 66).

To show the level of difficulty of each item of the test, the same sample of the pilot test has been used to find out the difficulty level. Thus, the researcher has separated two subgroups of test papers. The total scores of the students who answer the test items correctly at both the upper and the lower groups are divided by the total number of the students of both groups. The results have indicated that all the items are of acceptable level of difficulty since the level of difficulty ranges between 0.30 to 0.75 which are considered suitable.

3.5.2 Discrimination Power

Granland (1976: 268) points out that the discrimination power of the test refers to the degree to which the item discriminate between learners with high and low achievement.

Brown (1981: 109) states that the test item is good if it has a discrimination power of 0.20 or more. In calculating the discrimination 10 over of the test items, it is ranged between 0.29 and 0.85 which is regarded as an adequate power of discrimination.

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3.6 Reliability of the Test

A test is reliable if its results stay comparatively constant in various administrations under the same conditions. The more the test scores are consistent on different positions, the more the test is reliable (Madson, 1983: 179). Employing the Alpha Cronbach method, reliability coefficient is found to be 0.81. more than that, inters-corer reliability method is also used and the reliability correlation between the two scorers is found to be 0.94.

3.7 Final Administration of the Diagnostic Test

After ensuring the validity, reliability, difficulty level and discrimination power of the test, it has been applied on 20 EFL College students.

They have been motivated not to hesitate and asked to responed seriously to the given questions and items within the time-limit one hour of the test. Then, the written responses have been considered for the purpose of identifying student's comprehension of irony in novella.

4.1 Analysis of the Collected Data and Results

In order to achieve the aim of this study, namely measuring the Iraqi EFL University students' comprehension of the irony in novella and after applying the T-test on the sample of the study and analyzing their responses, the test formula for one independent sample is used.

The mean score of the students' response on the whole question of the test has been calculated. The obtained mean score is 23.45 with a standard deviation of 4.22 and the calculated t-test value is 42.75 at 0.05 level of significance, whereas the tabulated t-test value is 2.00.

The results indicate that EFL college students face difficultied in comprehending irony. Therefore the null hypothesis which states that EFL college student are at the average level in their efficiency in comprehending the different type of irony in novella is rejected.

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4.2 Conclusion

The current study comprises some results according to which the following conclusions are presented:

1. Irony concentrates on contradictions between what is said or seen and what is really meant which need a quick witted person to identify.
2. The EFL college students lack the ability to distinguish between different kinds of figurative speech such as irony, sarcasm, satire and metaphor.
3. The EFL college students are unaware of how to make a distinction between the different types of irony used in literary texts.
4. Fourth year EFL students at college of Education at the university of Samarra are not efficient in one of the figurative language, i.e. irony and their level in comprehending irony in novella is below the average level.

4.3 Recommendations

Based on the conclusions obtained in this study, the following recommendation are made:

1. The EFL college instructors ought to pay more attention to the differences between what has been said and what meant.
2. Students should be aware of using irony in their conversations.
3. Instructors ought to teach their students how to recognize the different types of figurative language in literature.

The EFL college instructors should attempt to encourage students to practice the different types of irony as a role play inside the classroom.

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Appendix 1

The Version of the Diagnostic Test Given to the Students

Q.1 justify the following statement: (10 Marks)

- a. It is ironic that the animals are congratulated at the Battle of Windmill.
- b. "All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others" This is an example of verbal irony.

Q.2 Based on your information, complete the following statements with the suitable types of irony (5 Marks)

1. The fundamental characteristics of irony that places it apart from the other different types of irony is that it is used by the speaker purposely.
2. An example of irony in Animal Farm is when Napoleon gets drunk.
3. irony takes place when the audience is acquainted with something that the audience in the story are not aware of.
4. _____ irony is often formed by squaler, who purposely makes pseudo or overstated statements.
5. _____ irony involves an inconsistency between what is prospective to happen and what truly happen.

Q.3 Evaluate the significance of irony in the overall effect of Animal Farm. How does Orwell use irony to reinforce the novella's emotional and intellectual impact on the readers? (5 Marks)

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التحري عن استيعاب طلبة الجامعة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية لغة اجنبية للتعبير
الساخر في الاقصوصة

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المخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحري استيعاب طلبة الجامعة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية لغة اجنبية للتعبير الساخر في الاقصوصة وإن عينة الدراسة تتكون من أربعين طالباً من طلبة المرحلة الرابعة في قسم اللغة الإنكليزية/ كلية التربية في جامعة سامراء ولتحقيق هدف الدراسة هذه تم تبني الإجراءات التالية:

1. بناء اختبار تشخيصي.
 2. عرض الاختبار على لجنة محكمين لإيجاد الصدق الظاهري وصدق المحتوى للاختبار وقد تمت الموافقة بالاجماع على صدق الاختبار.
 3. اختيار عينة استطلاعية للدراسة مكونة من عشرون طالباً وطالبة من طلبة المرحلة الرابعة في قسم اللغة الإنكليزية وبشكل عشوائي يعطي لها الاختبار وذلك لتعزيز عدة حقائق منها ايجار ثبات الاختبار ومستوى درجة الصعوبات والتميز لفقرات الاختبار.
- تم تحقيق هدف الاختبار باستخدام معادلة كرونباخ ألفا وبدرجة 0.81 وطريقة الثقة المتبادلة بين المصححين وبدرجة 0.95 مما يعد درجات عالية للثبات وبعد تحليل البيانات احصائياً تم التوصل إلى أن مستوى استيعاب طلبة المرحلة الرابعة قسم اللغة الإنكليزية في كلية التربية جامعة سامراء للأسلوب الساخر في الاقصوصة هو دون المستوى.
- وقد خلصت الدراسة إلى مجموعة توصيات مبنية على النتائج المتحققة.