

„BABEŞ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY
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DOCTORATE THESIS

*IRONY – LINGUISTICAL CONSTRUCT WITH PRAGMATIC,
STYLISTIC AND POETIC FUNCTIONALITY*

- SUMMARY -

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First of all, we will underline one of the majore purposes of our thesis, namely to pursue the evolution of the concept of „irony” from its early appariton until today. We also tried to observe the different meanings that the word accuired over time, and to analyse the diversity of definitions that the concept received, mostly from a rhetoric or stylistic point of view.

The main objective of our thesis was, from the begining, to analize some other analises of irony, specially the recent pragmatic theories, so we admit that our thesis is, also, a metaresearch work, which brings on Romanian linguistic field some of the most relevant theories of irony from the recent past. Our research work may be considered fastidious and lacking in orginallity, but we think otherwise. We think that it is important to analize and interpret some of the most appreciated theories that describe irony and to explain, in the same time, those theories in a way that future researchers in the field of irony to have some useful benchmarks in the ironiology domain.

Also, explaining the theories that describe irony, we have presented few of the major pragmatic theories, such as the theory of conversational maxims and the theory of implicatures proposed by Paul Grice, the theory of indirect speech acts of John Searle, the relevance theory proposed by Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson, the theory of the salience meaning propose by Rachel Giora and others. Besides theories, we have mentioned and explained a number of pragmatic concepts such as *implicature, indirect speech act, conversational maxim, salience meaning, mention, echo meaning, metarepresentation, pragmatic relevance, derogatory attitude* etc.

An aspect of our thesis which we consider important, also, is the translation of some important pragmatic concepts from English to Romanian for the first time, as we know, such as **salience meaning** (in rom. „semnificație proeminentă”), and the translation of many representative fragments from the studies we used in our research.

Also, another aspect which our thesis propose is a name for the field of irony researches. In our opinion, **ironiology** is the term adequate for the field that includes a huge amount of irony studies from the last two or three decades, studies who came mostly from the direction of philosophy of language, stylistics, linguistic pragmatics, sociolinguistics,

neurolinguistics etc. This field of research tends to grow and, obvious, became a commonplace in the domain of pragmatics in the last years.

As we underlined in our thesis, studying irony means study many aspects of the language use, aspects that in pragmatics are traditional subjects, such as the concept of semnification; the dichotomy literal meaning vs nonliteral meaning or one more specific: proposition meaning vs speaker meaning; the role of metarepresentations in human communication; the capacity of attributing mental states to other humans in human linguistic interaction; the attitudes that are communicated along with language performance; the ability of human beings to understand nonexplicit communication etc.

So you cannot study irony without studying other language issues. We knew from the begining that our research will trespass the irony subject and that we will have to discuss the act of irony producing in relation with the language producing in general or with language producing in a given situation. And we did so.

In conclusion to what have been said so far, we say that our thesis is first of all a thesis that describes some language mechanisms from a pragmatic point of view, and when we say pragmatic we think at language use in normal, common situations, by regular individuals.

Obviously, our research focused on studying the producing of irony, the transmtion of irony and the receving of irony with all that is implicated in those liguistic and mental activities. We gave attention also at the attitudinal aspect of irony producing, because we consider that irony presupose always the communication of some attitude by the speaker. We noticed that the attitudes that are indirectly and nonexplicitly conveyed through irony are diverse and we tried to explain when occurs each of them.

Referring to the structure of our research, we consider that our thesis has three main parts (even that chapters are more than three): a first part in which we describe irony from a rhetoric and stylistic point of view, a middle part (the most substantial one), in which we analyse some linguistic theories that describe irony and in which we propose some personal considerations about irony use and the last part, in which we try to analyse some literary texts from the point of irony usage. The literary texts that we choose for analyze are written by three major Romanian writers, I.L.Caragiale, Ion Creangă and Marin Preda.

Next, we will try to present each of the three parts we mentioned before. The first part, presents the birth of irony, its first sense in Greek antic world and its relation with Socrates. We observe also the evolution of the concept from an pejorative state, in Greek world, to an elevated one, in Latin world. We payed attention also to the many definitions given to irony in rheoric papers, majority of them following the definition that Marcus Fabius Quintilianus

gave to the concept. It is a fact that irony was, along history, a cinderella among tropes and figures, being marginalised in respect of other figures such as metaphor, hyperbole, simile, epithet etc. Maybe this happened because irony was for a long time associated with mockery, with unsincerity, being considered a frivolous way of speaking.

In the middle part of our thesis we presented as detailed as we could some major theories of irony usage, namely the theory of implicatures of Paul Grice, the indirect speech act theory of John Searle, the relevance theory of Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson, the theory indirect negation theory of Rachel Giora and other few theories, the majority of them pragmatic theories. We have tried to show the strong parts of each theory and the weak parts. We made an comparative analysis of theories indicating which are the inovative ideas of each and which are the similarities between them. Obviously, there are points of interference among irony theories, but, in the same time there are particularities which almost every theory has. For example, Paul Grice describes irony as a type of conversational implicature that can be recognised by the apparently infringing of some conversational maxim. For John Searle, irony is an indirect speech act, which can be interpreted through an interpretative procedure consisting in ten inferential steps. Rachel Giora sees irony as a form of indirect negation, whose interpretation depends on the type on irony – the usual ironies, performed constantly in every day speech, are, in Rachel Giora's opinion interpreted faster and effortless but the unusual ironies, the genuine ones, demand an inferential procedure, which consists in at least three steps. For Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson, irony is a type of mention, an echo utterance which quotes implicitly and indirect an utterance, a proposition, a thought, expressed or just attributed to someone else.

Other theories that we have analysed claime that irony is a form of pretence, in which the speaker pretends to be someone else in the moment of speaking and, for the irony to be effective, needs two kinds of audience – a part, who notices the insincerity of the speaker and share with him the delight of cheating the other part, the naive one, who doesn't recognize the insincerity of the speaker.

For Luigi Anolli, Rita Ciceri and Maria Giaele Infantino irony is like a fancing game, a method of dissimulation who permites to the speaker to disguise his emotions or thoughts which he don't want to be obvious to the others participants to conversation, without blocking the verbal exchange.

Joan Lucariello considers verbal irony as the result of an ironic environment. He classifies the ironic situations, finding seven typical situations (**Unbalances, Looses, Wins, Double Results, Dramatism, Catch – 22 and Coincidence**).

Speaking for ourselves, our observations regarding the use of irony are ones that rest in the pragmatic field and, although they don't propose a whole new perspective of analysis. We like to think that our observations clarify some aspects in irony usage, such as the procedure of encodation of ironic utterance, which, in our opinion, involves an operation of reference change, the semantic part of the irony being, practically, unchanged by any internal means. So irony it is not a matter of semantics as it is a matter of pragmatics – the literal part of the utterance is the same in non ironic usage and in ironic usage. What differentiates the ironic utterance from its unironic form is the reference that, in the moment of speaking, is given to some word from the ironic sentence, other than the word has usually. We called this linguistic operation that takes place not only in the case of irony **the operation of assigning the reference**. With this tool the speaker can say in a rainy day, ironically: *What a sunny day!*, given to the word *sunny* a temporary reference, other than its normal reference.

In the same time, we underlined that a motivation that may be in back of this shift of reference is some intention of the speaker to perform an unusual utterance, one that will reveal his ability to perform atypical utterances, like an experienced speaker. We see in irony a form of self appreciation, specifically a form of superiority or ascendancy over the listener, even if the listener is the speaker. We, sometimes, have an auto appreciative opinion about ourselves that can be made loud even in those moments that we are alone. Irony tends to be governed by such an attitude.

We also indicate that speaker intends, through irony, to reveal a discrepancy, as Rachel Giora points out. At the same way, the ability of identify and adequate understand the ironic utterance rests, on many occasions, on the ability of attributing mental states by the receiver of the irony. This is in accordance to the echo theory proposed by Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson.

Another crucial operation in the procedure of irony interpretation is that of **recognition of the utterance sincerity**. At this inferential step, second in the procedure of interpretation, as we pointed put, the receiver chooses a way of interpretation, namely a literal direction of interpretation or an indirect one, based on the conviction that the utterance has multiple layers of signification. This second option carries the receiver to the ironic interpretation and, implicitly, to the right way of interpretation.

We analyzed the attitudinal aspect of irony usage and we agreed that there are two main attitudes which join the irony: an attitude of **superiority** and an attitude of **complicity**, both generated by the speaker in his intention to express his moral, intellectual, social etc. ascendancy over the victims of his irony.

In the third part of our thesis, we made some analysis over the irony in literature, observing that irony can be a textual mechanism that interferes with the text significations or can be just a sophisticated way of mocking or to communicate some attitudes in a indirect way.

In subchapter „From certainty to uncertainty and viceversa – „Toma’s Sunday” by I.L.Caragiale, we tried to describe the role of irony in a literature novel, where the act of narration begins and ends with an ironic tone of voice, an discrete one. We observed some ironic tehncis used by the author such as **the contrast with mocking purpose, the pseudo encomiastic tone, the terminological accumulations, the ironic use of infinitive with imperative value, the ironic discordances, the juxtaposition of terms with antithetical meanings, the amalgamation of discursive registers** etc.

We also observe the use of irony in Ion Creangă’s literary creation and we discovered that for the author from Humulești, irony is mainly a way of mocking besides other ways of humour. We’ve noticed, in the same time, **the functioning of irony as a linguistic form with the goal of diminishing the negative, dramatic proportions of some event.**

We have take notice that, sometime, irony, even in literature, may denunciates an attitude of disappointment, and we state an **principle of disillusion:**

When things are far from expected, there is always some probability that discrepancy between the real situation and the ideal situation may be indicated by an ironic utterance.

At the same time, we claimed that, in the use of irony, the speaker expresses an attitude of superiority and we stated also an **principle of superiority.**

Sometimes, irony is used by Ion Creangă for the purpose of amplifying an tensionate situation. In the same time, we’ve observed the use of self irony and we explained the semantic mechanisms that create this kind of irony, also.

Irony in the work of Ion Creangă is a way of approaching the text at the verbal communication, an particularity that the literary creations of this author always had.

The last subchapter of our thesis, „Irony as a sign of superiority. The «Moromeții» case” proposes an analyse of the use of irony in a literary novel from XX-th century, namely „Moromeții” by Marin Preda. Here, the ironist is, in the most of the situations, just one character, actually the main character of the novel, Ilie Moromete, who exercites his authority over the other members of his family frequently by the use of irony. The types of irony that we found in this novel are some sarcastic ones, representing a particularity of the character, but we found also the echoic type, the antiphrastic type, and even some atypical forms. At some point, Ilie Moromete is mocking Victor Bălosu, his neighbour son, because he is acting

as he had living principles and rules far more civilized than others, just because for a short time he was selling agent for a company that was commercializing sewing machines. The irony that Ilie Moromete uses in this particular situation is one that we called **multidirectional** and **nonfinite** because it mocks not only one person, but an entire class of persons.

In many occasions, Ilie Moromete makes use of irony in the situations in which he senses that it is opportune to stop some nonuseful emotions or intrafamilial tensions. He uses the irony as a psycho – social instrument, with efficiency in maintaining the emotional balance of his family.

With other occasions, Ilie Moromete uses irony as a way of showing how disappointed he is because he notices that he is the only one who thinks about his family problems. In these situations he uses a sarcastic tone of voice, and his criticisms became more virulent in this way. This type of irony is used also by the primary school teacher Toderici when he yells at the young men who he prepares to become good soldiers. This kind of irony we found it is an antyphrastic one, which can be interpreted by a semantic operation of switching the literal sense of the term with its opposite significance.

Sometimes, irony is associated with a kind attitude, as in the scene when some inhabitants of Siliștea- Gumești are in Ioan's opening and discuss if the king of the country has some fertile land for agriculture, at least a few.

Observing that irony is sometimes performed by most humble speakers we stated another rule of irony usage, which says that:

Even that irony is an sophisticated linguistic construct, in its simple forms can be performed by the speakers with a minimal linguistic competence.

Remarking that in the procedure of irony interpretation one step is particularly important, namely the step of detecting the insincerity of the irony utterance, by the receiver, we also emitted an postulate which says:

In the interpretation procedure of a nonusual irony, the receiver will emit assumptions regarding the sincerity of the utterance and, depending on the assumptions accepted as valide, will choose a direction of interpretation, a literal one or an ironic one.

In conclusion, we express our hope that our thesis will become a work instrument for those who want to find informations about irony usage, about linguistic mechanisms that govern the ironic performance, about the role of irony in literary texts and about many other aspects related to the irony. In the same time, we consider that our research work can be useful for those who are passionate by linguistic subjects. But in

first place, we consider that our thesis addresses to the ironiologists, those linguistic researchers that want to find answers for the problematic questions that the use of irony generates. We don't insinuate that our thesis offers answers to all that questions, but we believe nevertheless that some aspects of irony usage may be more clear for someone who reads our thesis. And maybe that person will continue an idea or an observation that we made. If this happens, it means that our work it was not for nothing.