ABSTRACT

Irony and culture: on the dynamic adaptation of ironicity across history

Throughout history, irony has proven to be an analytical enigma for experts from a wide variety of disciplines ranging from rhetoric to artificial intelligence, who have explored aspects such as the underlying mechanisms of irony or the principles that guide its usage. As a trope heavily bound to its communicative and socio-cultural context, irony relies largely on the shared knowledge between the ironist and the interpreter. This seems quite obvious when two friends are ironising about a common acquaintance, but considerably less so when the ironist is a 16th century writer, and the interpreter a 21st century reader. In the latter case, the ironist and the audience are much less likely to share the relevant contextual knowledge than in the former. Previous explorations of the cultural nature of ironic usage (cf. Muecke 1970, Hutcheon 1994, Colebrook 2004) have addressed this issue by mainly using the analytical tools of literary theory. Based on the principles of Cognitive Modelling, Ruiz de Mendoza and Lozano-Palacio's (2019) unified approach acknowledges the importance of including socio-cultural factors in a linguistic study of irony. These authors have further provided a classification of ironists and interpreters. While ironists can be *solidary and non-solidary*, depending on whether they make an effort to make themselves understood as ironic, interpreters can be either *naïve or non-naïve*, depending on the degree of shared knowledge among them. The combination of ironist and interpreter types yields different communicative situations and results in more of less felicitous ironies. The present study makes use of previous work in inferential pragmatics and Cognitive Linguistics by the author (e.g. Lozano-Palacio, 2019) to address *ironic uses*, that is, irony types envisaged from a socio-cultural and historical perspective, with some being developments of previous ones. Ironic uses are modulated by the degree of felicity of the outcome of ironist-interpreter combinations. The essence of ironic uses is the purpose of irony measured in terms of a combination of factors, among them, its impact on the audience (e.g. raising awareness) and the ironist's attitude on cultural constructs including their medium of transmission. This presentation postulates the existence of a limited number of uses, called *basic ironic uses*. These may evolve over time and give rise to variants, labelled *re-adapted ironic uses*. Six basic uses of irony are distinguished: Socratic irony, rhetoric irony, dramatic irony, tragic irony, satiric irony, and metafictional irony. Then, the presentation examines re-adaptations of these uses and accounts for them in terms of their cognitive and communicative complexity. The introduction of the cultural variable in the study of irony, in combination with the analytical apparatus provided by linguistic accounts, endows the study of this trope with greater explanatory adequacy.

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