

A Pragmatic Approach of Types and Functions of Irony in Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain"

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مقاربة تداولية لأنواع و وظائف التهكم في القصة القصيرة (قطعة في المطر) للكاتب همنغواي

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الملخص:

يتناول البحث الحالي دراسة لأنواع ووظائف التهكم في القصة القصيرة (قطعة في المطر). يعتبر التهكم احد ابرز السمات الاسلوبية في الكتابات الادبية, لذا تحاول الورقة الحالية التركيز على هذا الجانب في القصة القصيرة المذكورة انفا. يحاول البحث و بشكل دقيق الاجابة على السؤال التالي: ما هي انواع التهكم و ما هي وظائفها التداولية في القصة القصيرة (قطعة في المطر). لذا تحاول الدراسة الاجابة على السؤال السابق و لانجاز هذا الهدف تم التطرق الى الجانب النظري لمفهوم التداولية في الادب و من ثم عمل تحليل للالفاظ التي تحتوي على اتهم في هذه القصة. الكلمات المفتاحية: التهكم, انواع التهكم, وظائف التهكم, التداولية.

Abstract

Although the notion of irony occurs frequently in the criticism of many works and many writers, little effort has been made to discuss the various possibilities for different types of irony and their manifestations in the literature. This research is a textual examination of the different types and functions of irony in Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain". The notion of irony is usually synonymous with a straightforward form like satire with an accompanying contention of narratorial moral presupposition. So, the present paper sets itself to deal with this notion from a pragmatic point of view. More specifically, the study attempts to answer the following question: What are the pragmatic functions of the types of Irony used in the short story "Cat in the Rain"?

Hence, the main aim of the paper is to answer the question raised previously, and according to this aim it is hypothesized that evaluation, persuasiveness and politeness constitute the pragmatic functions used in the short story and echoic and verbal irony are the most evident types of irony in the story.

For achieving the aim of the study and verifying or rejecting its hypothesis, a theoretical survey of the notion of irony and its types and pragmatic function is carried out to depend on in the analysis of the data under study.

Keywords: Irony, types of irony, functions of irony, pragmatics, cat in the rain.

1. Introduction

Irony is one of the most ubiquitous ingredients nonliteral (or humorous) language. Wilson and Sperber (1993:76) point out that irony is considered a complicated pragmatic phenomenon because it is ruled by a variety of mental processes.

An ironic utterance is typically creates a form of contradiction between what it actually means and what is intended to be conveyed. This discrepancy is often a result of the pragmatic interpretation of an utterance. Thus, it is important not to take an ironic expression literally for the intended meaning of it is embedded in the pragmatic interpretation.

2. Theoretical Remarks

2.1 Definitions and Theories

In order to identify that some utterance is ironic, this involves the process of substituting the semantic meaning of an utterance for its figurative meaning, then both meanings both meanings have to be considered for the purpose of identification. However, irony is stated as "saying something but meaning the opposite". Irony is also described as a pragmatic phenomenon in that via an ironic expression some action is performed (Hutcheon 1995: 65).

An ironic utterance is identified when the hearer is aware of the violation of certain pragmatic principles, such as maxims of cooperation of some felicity conditions for a speech act, then the opposite of the literal meaning is conveyed, for example:

- This room is very clean!

This utterance is a typical example of irony, and the speaker, a mother, intends to convey something other than what the words explicitly mean (ibid).

(Grice 1975, Searle 1979) treat the tropes metaphor, irony, and hyperbole as flouting the maxim of quality (say the truth and what you can prove). To flout a maxim, in Grice's opinion, means to blatantly violate it. When a speaker is flouting a maxim, it is clear to the addressee that the speaker is doing so. Grice views verbal irony as an 'obvious lie'. The violation of the maxim of quality, in the case of these tropes, triggers a related true implicature. So irony, according to Grice, is an 'obvious lie triggering an implicature contrary in meaning to the literal meaning of the statement'. (Ziv, 1988: 69). This conception is criticized widely by Sperber and Wilson (1981) for not explaining why speakers would state a blatant falsehood in order to convey a true implicature that could just as well have been expressed literally. Instead they proposed a definition of irony that sees it as an (echoic allusion) to an utterance or thought which can be attributed to a person and accordingly they name their theory as (The Echoic Mention Theory). The theories of irony and the definitions regarding the term are widely different but the essence is always one in all of them, the difference lies in comprehending the term and the angle researchers look at it, this is why many theories have been established by different researchers, take for example Sperber and Wilson (1981) (Mention Theory) Gibbs (2005) (Pretense Theory), Fauconnier (1990) (The Mental Space Theory of Irony), and Giora (1995) (The Indirect Negation Theory).

2.2 The Pragmatics of Irony

Irony may be a strictly pragmatic development, with no semantic equivalent. That is, ironic and non-ironic utterances are semantically the same. This can be as a result of the fact that at a surface level each of them are grammatically and syntactically equal. It's at the pragmatic level that distinction emerges. Jokes tend to own a richer semantics than irony that depends nearly completely on inferential activation of scripts. The central part of irony contrasts between the "literal" and also the "figurative" or in alternative words between assertion and reality. (Colston and O'Brien, 2000: 122)

2.3 The Pragmatic Functions of Irony

2.3.1. Group Affiliation

Irony may serve for two opposed purposes: "an inclusive and an exclusive one. On the one hand, irony builds in-group solidarity through shared play; on the other hand, it can be used to express a negative judgment about someone. Lakoff notes that irony makes use of presumptive homogeneity and reinforces it; in other words, shared irony serves to create an in-group feeling." Irony can also be used to exclude (ibid. 125).

2.3.2 Sophistication

One of the functions of irony seems to be that of showing off speaker's detachment and hence superiority to/from the situation and speaker's ability to play with language (saying one thing, while meaning another). Speakers use irony to show themselves to be in control of their emotions. An ironic

utterance connotes its being ironic (indirect), and hence it's being sophisticated and requiring some mental dexterity to process it. Being associated with humour adds yet another prized connotation to irony, at least in Western society, being able to make other people laugh is a positive trait (obviously, within certain limits) (Attardo, 1994: 41)

2.3.3 Evaluation

Grice (1975: 30) notes that "irony is intimately connected with the expression of a feeling, attitude, or evaluation. Sperber and Wilson (1995) have claimed that the attitude expressed by irony is always negative since it tries to communicate an undercover message that attempts to threaten someone's face. However, there is some maintaining that a positive irony is also possible. Irony does mute both the negative effect of ironic criticism and the positive effect of ironic praise. This muting function would then be the point of using irony. The muting function of irony has been called into question."

2.3.4 Politeness

There has been much discussion about the use of irony as a tool for politeness. "It seems that actually irony itself is aggressive i.e., a FTA, but admittedly less damaging to face than sarcasm or overt, direct aggression. Furthermore, irony offers the option of retractability which also contributes to its use towards politeness" (ibid).

2.3.5 Persuasive Aspect

Barbe (1995: 87) notes that "irony is a powerful rhetorical tool because it presupposes the truth of the presupposed proposition to be self-evident. Giora et al (2005: 70) sees irony as a highly informative utterance. All of these aspects of ironic utterances can be used persuasively".

2.4 Types of Irony

2.4.1 Echoic Irony

In contrast with the traditional account of irony in terms of truthfulness, and mainly with Grice's proposal that irony is a case of violating the conversational maxims of Quality, relevance theorists suggest that "irony should be viewed as a case of echoic mention, and that recognition of an ironical utterance as a case of mention is crucial to its interpretation". According to Echoic Mention theory, Creusere (1999: 213) points out that "listeners understand ironic utterances by appealing to implicit or explicit thoughts, behavior, utterances or social norms". Yus (2000: 28) states that an ironical utterance in this respect, is an interpretation of another thought, utterance or an assumption, which it resembles or attributes to different speaker's utterance at another time.

Consequently, Attardo (2000a: 804) points out that the speaker of an echoic utterance must necessarily have a certain attitude (positive, negative and neutral) towards the echoic utterance itself. In this respect, Attardo quotes (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 239) as saying that "sometimes, the speaker's attitude is left implicit, to be gathered only from tone of voice, context and other paralinguistic clues, at other times it may be made explicit". In this regard Sperber and Wilson proceed to expand their theory of irony. They argue that "[irony] invariably involves the implicit expression of the attitude, and that the relevance of an ironical utterance invariably depends at least in part, on the information it conveys about the speaker's attitude to the opinion echoed" (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 239). As a result, an echoic utterance achieves relevance by "making it possible for the hearer to recognize, and perhaps to emulate, the speaker's interest in, and attitude to, somebody else's thoughts" (Sperber and Wilson, 1990:5).

2.4.2 Verbal Irony

Verbal irony is traditionally defined as "the figure of speech that conveys the opposite meaning of what is literally said. It is frequently used in daily discourse. In fact, it is so commonly used that many ironical utterances have become idiomatic, thus losing their ironic touch" (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 67).

3. Data Analysis

3.1 Data Collection and Description

The data analysis of the study has been obtained from a website (see references). This data is represented by particular utterances selected from the text of the short story "Cat in the Rain" written by Earnest Hemingway. The data is characterized by the following features:

A. Genre

The genre of the data of analysis in study is a literary text, more specifically a short story. This literary work is written by the American writer Earnest Hemingway.

B. Length

The length of the short story under study in this paper is two pages.

C. Theme

The central theme of the short story under study is the unsatisfied emotional desire.

3.2 The Pragmatic Functions of the Story

a- "I'm going down and get that kitty"

Right from the beginning, these words summarize the rest of the story. This sentence serves the evaluative function since it reflects the character's feelings and attitude concerning her need for a child and her loneliness.

b- "I'll do it"

This excerpt is said by the husband and it is ironic since he did not even move from his place to the end of the story. It serves an evaluative function since it reflects George's selfishness and negligence of his wife. Another function served by this excerpt is retractability since the husband does not state his feelings explicitly.

c- "You must not get wet"

This excerpt is said by the maid to the American wife while she is trying to get the kitty from outside. It expresses the polite behavior of the hotel keeper. So it serves the politeness function.

d- "A cat? the maid laughed. 'A cat in the rain?'"

These words reflect the fact that the cat is found only in the wife's imagination. The function served by this speech is the evaluative function. It evaluates both the wife's imagination and what others think about her need.

e- "Oh, I wanted it so much. I wanted a kitty"

The utterance expresses the ironic use of words which serves persuasiveness. The speaker tries to persuade others about her existence and that she needs care and attention.

f- "I wanted it so much," she said. I don't know why I wanted it so much. I wanted that poor kitty. It isn't any fun to be a poor kitty out in the rain."

This speech is said by the American wife, it is ironic since she criticized herself in the same excerpt when she said "I don't know why I wanted it so much". This speech reflects the loneliness of the American wife and it serves two functions. First, the evaluative function since it evaluates the wife's emotions, needs, and her inner feelings. Second, the retractability functions in the sense that she didn't make her needs explicit.

3.3 Types of Irony

3.3.1 Echoic Irony

Most of the speech is said with echoic irony for example:

a- "Don't get wet"

These words are said by the husband, they express George's carelessness and unresponsiveness. Later on, these words are said by the maid and they express the hotel keeper's warm feelings and politeness.

b- "You must not get wet, she smiled, speaking Italian. Of course, the hotel-keeper had sent her" - "A cat?"

This word is repeated by the characters but with different connotations.

c- "I wanted it so much" she said. "I don't know why I wanted it so much. I wanted that poor kitty. It isn't any fun to be a poor kitty out in the rain."

The speech is said by the wife to express the clearest example about the echoic use of irony since each time the wife utters the words, they carry new meaning and interpretation, for example at

the beginning she expresses her need for the cat and ironically speaking she is referring to the (child) and after that she criticizes her need to such thing.

3.3.2 Verbal Irony

This type of irony went hand in hand with verbal irony in order to express the theme of the story. An example about this type of irony is as follows:

- "The poor kitty out trying to keep dry under a table."

4. Conclusions

Depending on the analysis in the previous section, the study concludes the following:

1. The results of the pragmatic analysis verify the hypothesis of the study. Precisely, the pragmatic functions of politeness, persuasiveness, evaluation and retractability are the most common pragmatic functions that are used throughout the story.
2. Regarding echoic irony and verbal irony the study reveals that they are the most recurrent types of irony throughout the story.
3. Irony is represented throughout the short story through variety of ways that can be revealed via analysis of different type rather than pragmatic one.
4. The pragmatic analysis shows that the writing skills of the author has revealed that the ironic sense in the story is also used to express universal themes that have always been prominent in literature, such as the women's right in having equal status in society.
5. The analysis of irony has also revealed that wife is similar to the cat in under the rain, both are controlled by a husband or by the rain.

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