反讽话语的认知语用研究

A COGNITIVE-PRAGMATIC STUDY IN IRONIC UTTERANCES

文旭 著

反讽话语的认知语用研究

A COGNITIVE-PRAGMATIC
STUDY IN IRONIC
UTTERANCES

文旭 著

作者简介

文旭 1963 年 10 月生；北京师范大学博士。现为西南师范大学外国语学院教授，副院长，博士生导师，外国语言学及应用语言学专业硕士点负责人；中国语言与符号学研究会常务理事，中国语用学研究会常务理事，中国英汉语比较研究会理事，中国高校功能语言学会理事，重庆市翻译学会副会长。2002 年 1 月赴美国伊利诺伊大学（UIUC）研修，从师 Adele Goldberg 教授，学习认知语言学。目前的主要研究兴趣为认知语言学、语用学、语篇分析以及语义与句法的界面研究等。曾在《外语教学与研究》、《外国语》等学术刊物上发表论文 50 余篇，出版学术专著或教材8 部。专著《模糊语言学概论》获重庆市第一次社会科学优秀科研成果三等奖（1999），论文《国外认知语言学研究综观》获重庆市第二次社会科学优秀科研成果三等奖（2001）。曾主研完成国家社科基金项目"对外开放中跨文化交际的语用问题研究——英汉比较语用学"；目前，正主持研究国家社科基金项目"当代认知语言学理论在中国英语教学中的应用"以及教育部优秀青年教师计划项目"空间的认知及其语言表征：语言空间系统的认知研究"，主研国家社科基金项目"西部多语地区英语认知的特色及英语教育对策研究"。

Acknowledgements

Wen Xu

This book grew out of my Ph. D. dissertation, which was completed at Beijing Normal University. An enormous debt is owed to my advisor, Professor Zhou Liuxi, for his wisdom, enthusiasm, support and encouragement. It is his profound knowledge and insight, and constant strictness and kind understanding that help me succeed in mastering the important linguistic theories, ranging from the history of linguistics to the modern linguistic theories, which consequently assists me to finish this thesis as I have planned. Of course, any error it may contain is my responsibility alone.

My sincere thanks are also due to Professor Wu Tieping, who has helped me study theoretical linguistics for many years, which is obviously of great value to the fulfillment of this paper, and due to Professor Wang Qiang, the former chair of Department of Foreign Languages in Beijing Normal University, who has given me much help during the three years' study. And I am eager to take the opportunity to thank Professor Liu Runqing, Professor Shen Jiaxuan, Professor Qian Guanlian, Professor Xu Shenghuan, Professor Zhao Shikai, and Professor Yang Zijian, Professor Xiong Xueliang, Professor Jiang Wangqi, Professor Zhang Delu, Professor He Ziran who all have helped me a lot, which is of much help and

importance to accomplishing my dissertation.

I also make a grateful acknowledgement for Professor Hu Zhuanglin, Professor Lin Shuwu, Professor Chen Zhi'an, Professor Liu Jiarong, and Professor Li Li who have imparted me much knowledge of linguistics in the past communication and study, which is greatly beneficial to this research.

In addition, I am greatly indebted to Dr. Zegarac, professor of University of Luton in Great Britain, who has given me some useful materials and good advice on this paper. Moreover I offer my heartfelt thanks to Professor D. Sperber for her good suggestions on my thesis by e-mail.

My debt, too, to the staff of the Department library, must be recorded, particularly to Ms. Lu Peiwen, Ms. Pan Jun and Ms. Zhang Lixin, whose generous help is of great value to the completion of my thesis.

Very special mention should be made too of my dear and close friends, Chen Yongguo, Wang Min'an, He Honghua, Li Meixia, Liang Zhisheng, Liu Guiyou, Ma Hailiang, Ma Qiuwu, Si Lianhe, Wu Jiangsheng, Zhao Guoxin, Zhao Wanpeng, Zhou Lijuan, and some others, who have brought me too many pleasure and happiness over the three years' study, which is no doubt much beneficial to me to accomplish the dissertation.

And finally, I would like to thank my family who have kept me going with their encouragement and support, without that it is out of the question for me to complete this dissertation during the expected period of time.

May 1, 2002

Foreword

Zhou Liuxi

This doctoral dissertation of Mr. Wen Xu's is a good harvest in the field of pragmatics and textlinguistics. The author unfolds his topic, the study of ironic utterances, along the linguistic line and views it from a semantic and a pragmatic perspective. Having summed up the merits and weak points of various theories, he asserts that the understanding of ironic utterances can be best achieved only in the light of cognitive pragmatics, i.e., the Relevance Theory, which provides us with a key to the mechanism of inference for the understanding of discourse, especially its implicature.

In this view, an ironic utterance is an interpretive echoic utterance with the sense of disapproval. There are various kinds of ironic expressions; all of them can be regarded as echoic interpretive use of language. The dissertation broadens the concept of "echo" and explores its identification in discourse; and it studies the discourse functions and stylistic effects of ironic utterances, together with the contextual cues and constraints in their use. Besides, the procedure for understanding ironic utterances in terms of relevance is clearly manifested. All these issues are of great interest to the reader, who can be benefited from the book, as the author has fully displayed his insight into the topic.

Nevertheless, the gist of this book can be seen and felt far beyond the explanation of ironic utterances. It rests in the explication of the foundations and principles of cognitive pragmatics and, to some extent, the essential spirit of cognitive linguistics. To our understanding, cognitive linguistics, as a new branch of the developing cognitive sciences, marks the second "cognitive revolution" in modern linguistics (after the first "cognitive revolution" with the advent of generative linguistics). It is essentially a new approach of linguistics heavily depending on cognitive psychology. There have formed several substantial and fruitful research areas in cognitive linguistics: cognitive pragmatics, cognitive grammar, cognitive semantics, as well as certain macrocosmic studies that are significant in terms of general linguistics. That cognitive pragmatics seems to have taken the lead in the formation of cognitive linguistics is a happy omen that cognitive linguistics is likely to be welcomed by more and more scholars (even if they belong to different camps), and that it is also likely to make important contributions to helping us recognize some basic design features of human language (especially pragmaticity).

Mr. Wen Xu is to be praised for his persistent pursuit and achievements in cognitive linguistics and some related areas. We expect him to make greater success. This book, exploring theory from a case study, can certainly be inspiring to the readers who like to study cognitive pragmatics and linguistics in general.

Beijing Normal University

Oct. 1, 2003

Contents

1　Introduction

1.1　Ironic utterance as a topic of discourse understanding

This is a comprehensive study of ironic utterances within the general framework of discourse understanding in line of cognitive pragmatics. A discourse is a basic unit in verbal communication, and what is essential to communication is precisely the understanding of discourse. Therefore, the study of discourse understanding has both a theoretical value and practical signifance. It can bring about substantial enrichment to pragmatics, text linguistics and communication studies and yield benefits to the study and development of language teaching, translation (including machine translation), artificial intelligence, etc.

With the development of pragmatics and textlinguistics (discourse analysis) in recent years, the study of discourse understanding has attracted the attention of many scholars and acquired considerable progress. In particular, Relevance theory proposed by Sperber & Wilson has played a very significant role in this field. The present study takes ironic utterance as a case and makes a research into the essence of inference of its meaning and some related issues. I will combine a diachronic approach and logical-philosophical speculation in order to reveal its nature and try

to offer some new insight on the problem.

The word "irony" does not appear in English until 1502 and did not come into general literary use until the early eighteenth century; John Dryden, for instance, used it only once. The English word "irony" originates from Greek *eironeia* by way of Latin *ironia*, meaning dissembler in speech, or dissimulation. It was first recorded in Plato's *Republic*, where it appropriately has the meaning of "a glib and underhand way of taking people in". Socrates himself took the role of the dissembler and, assuming the pose ignorance and foolishness, asked seemingly innocuous and naive questions which gradually undermined his interlocutor's case and trapped him into seeing the truth. Thus Socratic irony is known as the assumption of ignorance, a way of leading on and eventually confuting an opponent, which is also called "Dialectic Irony".

Irony is usually intended and often understood in a number of ways in modern discussions; yet, as often as it has been left underdetermined no overarching concept called irony has been developed. Its movement from a Classical Greek lexeme to a later Latin figure of speech to a cosmic descriptor for the German romantics in the nineteenth century helped make the modern senses multifarious; American New Criticism privileged the word as a primary principle of structure in their textual manipulations, and Schlegel's moral and philosophical uses of it have recently returned to prominence. It is not simply the complex history of the word that makes it impossible to control; it is also that irony usually involves intentions and always involves contexts. Neither of these concepts has accommodated to analytic representation so that descriptions of irony are either weakly induced from the all too plentiful examples or artificially bounded for rhetorical aims. Therefore, it does little good to make a neat formal definition that neither the language nor even individual scholars can observe. "The

chimera can be neither slain nor tamed" (Marino, 1994: 1776).

There are three abstract participants in the ironic instance that are easily related to the grammatical categories of first, second, and third person. The postulated first-person speaker is the ironist, the second-person audience is the perceiver, and the third person is the victim of the irony. The coincidence of any of these persons creates specialized situations like self-depreciation and instructive irony, but the concepts of speaker, victim, audience, and the act itself will need to be variously differentiated for any discussion. The ideas of literal message, intended message, and context further define a normative vocabulary for the approaches to irony.

1.2　Types of irony

Because of its long and complex history, irony based on different dimensions of taxonomy has a lot of types such as verbal irony, dramatic irony, situational irony, Socratic irony, cosmic irony, romantic irony, tragic irony, stable irony and unstable irony. Kreuz and Roberts (1993) distinguish between four types of irony: Socratic irony, dramatic irony, irony of fate, and verbal irony. However, from the perspective of pragmatics four categories of irony can be generated: verbal irony, dramatic irony, extant irony, and artifacted irony (Marino: 1994: 1776—1777). Any claim to mutual exclusivity or comprehensiveness for these categories would be ironically naive. In the following subsections, we will have a brief view of them one by one.

1.2.1　Verbal irony

Verbal irony is a linguistic phenomenon. It is the simplest and is re-

ally at the tips of people's tongue in everyday life. It is frequently associated with a wide variety of classical tropes. The heavy hand of *sarcasm* involves the knowledge by both the speaker and the victim of the irony, whereas in irony proper only the speaker and audience need understand the multiple meanings. Both *hyperbole and meiosis* (e.g. He was a little intoxicated) or litotes (e.g. It is not bad) involve a discrepancy of degree between the literal message and the intended message, the first ironically overstated and the second understated. *Innuendo* suggests the subtle insinuation of an intended meaning by the speaker. The range of invective that exists from the personal lampoon to the more general burlesque (high, low, travesty, caricature, parody) can be captured in the manner called *satire*. Satire shares the derision and wit that are a part of irony; yet, it might be said that like a modern sense of irony it also recognizes incongruities in human situations. O'Connor (1974) adds *antiphrasis* (contrast), *asteism* and *charientism* (jokes), *chleuasm* (mockery), *mycterism* (sneering), *mimesis* (ridiculing imitation) to the list of forms; he argues that pun, paradox, conscious naivete, parody, and more can be ironic secondary to their uses; the listing demonstrates that any manipulation of language can be classified as ironic. The usual invocation of an opposite meaning seems far too strong since so many verbal ironies are only subtly different from their literal messages.

1.2.2 Dramatic irony

Dramatic irony starts with the idea of a dramatist (speaker) putting words into the mouth of a character (victim) that have one meaning for him but another meaning for the audience. Either the audience already knows more than the character or the other elements of the play show the discrepancy. A simple instance of dramatic irony is the· following passage

from W. Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* :

(1) Portia, disguised as Balthazar, a lawyer, asks Bassanio for his ring as a token of recompense. Bassanio does not know Balthazar is really Portia, and says, in dramatic irony:

"Good Sir, this ring was given me by my wife; and when she put it on, she made me vow that I could neither sell, nor give, nor lose it."

The audience, on hearing this utterance, could not help having a good laugh.

Dramatic irony applies mainly to drama, and has a close relationship with the plot and structure of a play. However, the term has been applied beyond drama to other types of narratives and sometimes to actual situational discrepancies where someone else is aware of something that one of the participants is not. Although comedies can have dramatic ironies, it is in tragedies that the reversal of fortune is a natural context for dramatic ironies which are often called *tragic ironies*. For example, B. C. Sophocles (496? —406 B. C.), one of the three greatest tragedians in ancient Greece, produced many such ironies; hence the homonymic term Sophoclean irony for tragic irony. Dramatic irony is present not so much in the contrast between what is said and what is meant as does verbal irony, but in the opposition between what is established and what existed either in the rest of the fiction or even the world.

1.2.3   Extant irony

Extant irony suggests the existential condition and can be regarded as an infinite form of the worldly *situational irony*, a state of the world which is perceived as ironic (e. g. the fire station burning down to the ground). *Cosmic irony* suggests the universe's indifference to the efforts of man and can be expressed in a view that God or the universe manipu-

lates outcomes in some way that is not known to human beings or not considerate of their desires. *The irony of events* suggests a more moderate viewpoint of man's lack of control over his situations, while *the irony of fate* looks back to events controlled by unmastered personalities or society or even the gods, particularly if one takes advantage of Fate. The existentialism of the 19th and 20th centuries in its recognition of the isolation of the individual in an indifferent universe has certainly encouraged the concept of cosmic irony, but it has always been a theme of the conscious human condition. Irony is extended to an organizing principle for the psychology of Lacan and the epistemology of Foucault and an important modality for many modern thinkers.

1.2.4 Artifacted irony

Artifacted irony takes the making of irony beyond immediate ironic intentions. *Romantic irony* found the literary techniques of paradox suggested by the paradoxical nature of reality. While verbal ironies and dramatic ironies are certainly created and cosmic irony purports to be extant, some ironies are particularly artifacted for effects beyond their irony. Romantic irony created a particular illusion so as to destroy it later: a character might take over control of the writing of his own work, presenting a paradox. Such artifacting did not begin with the German romantics; however, they do seem to have made it their own, often paradoxically commenting on a work from within itself. As far back as Socrates, clearly artifacted special circumstances yielded the type of irony that bears his name, viz. *Socratic irony*, which is the pretense of ignorance of a given topic for pedagogical purposes; the naivete of the pose created allowed him subtly to disclose the error of his victim and effectively to understate his own view of truth. And the relativism or perspectivism of the 20th