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**G. PROKOFIEV,**  
*candidate of philological sciences, associate professor  
of the department of Ukrainian and foreign languages  
of Uman National University of Horticulture*

## **DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN IRONY AND SARCASM IN CONTEMPORARY LINGUISTIC STUDIES**

The paper aims to evaluate the contemporary claims for differentiating between irony and sarcasm within linguistic pragmatics and from the perspective of some neighboring fields of research. Their contribution to solving this provocative problem is described. The issues that need further comprehension and investigation are defined.

*Key words: irony, sarcasm, verbal, speech act, politeness, evaluation, constitutive rules.*

**A**nother 40 years have passed since Dan Sperber compared the vicennial account of irony in psycholinguistics to the two millennia long rhetorical tradition in irony research [1, p. 130]. Such a relatively insignificant historical period has not brought many changes to the rhetorical paradigm, whereas temporal and substantial contribution on the part of psycholinguistics more than tripled. Besides, there have appeared numerous studies of verbal irony within the bounds of sociology, discourse analysis, speech act and politeness theories, corpus-based and computational linguistics, sentiment analysis and other academic viewpoints. Obviously, no unified theory to cover the whole range of the figure of irony is at hand yet, moreover, it might seem ironic, that a lot of vexed issues have hardly changed their status irrespective of numerous and diverse research endeavors. One of such highly provocative and enlightening topics is irony versus sarcasm differentiation.

There is no consensus on whether sarcasm and irony is essentially the same thing with superficial differences or if they differ significantly [2, p. 795].

Under the developmental approach sarcasm is described as a culturally salient phenomenon (as a genre of speech and a type of personhood), easily labeled and offering a clear-cut case of discrepancy between the content and literal meaning. Ironic utterances are considered to be more subtle and sophisticated, than sarcastic ones. They will usually require explicit antecedents within the discourse while sarcastic utterances do not need them [3, p. 431]. The discrepancies between sarcasm and irony are reported to include differential conventionality, differential valences of the «literal» meaning of the utterance (positive vs. negative), different attitudinal states of the different forms (positive vs. negative), and differential frequency in everyday discourse. Ironic utterances are seen as less frequent and less conventional [3, p. 433].

There has been some debate about the consistency of people's intuitive understanding of the terms «sarcasm» and «irony». Megan L. Dress et al. carried out an experiment, the participants of which provided definitions for these terms in their own words and without any special instructions. By decreasing evidence, irony was evaluated as unexpected, counterfactual, verbal, negative and humorous. The parameter of tone of voice in defining irony was ignored by all the participants. Although they had some difficulty in providing multiple criteria for the term «irony», the participants were in broad agreement that it refers to unexpected outcomes that are opposite of what one expects. Also by decreasing evidence, sarcasm was assessed as verbal, negative and counterfactual. Tone of voice parameter occupied the next position, while the index of

unexpectedness which came first in the evaluation of irony was ignored by all of 156 participants but one. Compared to irony, the participants provided more characteristics in their definitions of sarcasm and broadly agreed that it is a verbal phenomenon, expressing the opposite of what is meant, and that it involves negative emotion though being humorous [4, p. 80].

Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr. describes irony as an umbrella category, comprising jocularly, sarcasm, hyperbole, rhetorical questions and understatements. It is worth mentioning that the participants of his experiment viewed 75% of sarcastic remarks as humorous, while only half of them as critical. The author had to admit that the analysis of the corpus did not allow him to clearly distinguish irony from sarcasm [5, p. 23–24].

Description of sarcasm as the crudest form of irony, an aggressive form of ironic criticism, a means to ridicule the victim, a vehicle of pejoration seems to be very common for different analytical perspectives [6–9]. However, it is the contribution of sociologists and conversationalists which offers the most detailed and systemic investigation of the role sarcasm plays in human communication, describing it as humorous aggression [10, p. 51], jocular aggression [11, p. 192], emphasizing the non-affiliative character [12, p. 545] and social-purposive use of sarcasm as a linguistic form of biting communication, which differentiates it from irony. Where irony has to do with content, the thrust of sarcasm is in terms of social function [13, p. 193].

Another aspect, the study of which appears to have acquired traditional character, refers to the issues of multimodality and prosodic properties of ironical and sarcastic utterances. The most frequently quoted prosodic markers of irony and sarcasm are flat contour, lower pitch, exaggerated pitch, higher pitch, singsong melody, heavy exaggerated stress, monotonous intonation, long pauses between the words, softened voice, rise-fall contours, nasalization, broad stress patterns, slowed speech rate, syllable lengthening, laughter syllables. Among facial markers the quoted signals are raised or lowered eyebrows, wide open, squinting or rolling eyes, winking, nodding, smiling, blank face of the speaker [14, p. 244–246].

Rachel Rhoda Schaffer differentiates between vocal cues for irony and those for sarcasm. As to irony, she mentions any phonological non-typicality which will not work as well with sarcasm. Pauses and segmental lengthening are supposed to work in signaling irony, but not sarcasm. Such cues as high pitch, wide pitch range, large pitch variation, emphatic stress, heavy aspiration and nasality are said to signal sarcasm with the greatest degree of consistency, especially in combination with each other. The author concludes, that the difference in the cues marking irony and sarcasm may well be linked to the affective force they carry [15, p. 76].

Though there are a multiplicity of tones of voice usable to convey irony, in sum, just as we cannot conflate irony with its most salient cultural form, sarcasm, we cannot conflate the intonation stereotypically paired with sarcasm with the role of intonation in irony in general [3, p. 432]. Intonation can act as a relational cue depending on existing contextual relationships [3, p. 438]. No pitch pattern functions as an absolute marker of irony or sarcasm. Intonational cues to irony exist as a contrastive, not a substantive feature [14, p. 252]. S. Attardo et al. emphasize, that there is an important distinction between the markers and the actual phenomenon which boils down to the fact that an ironical utterance would still be ironical without any markers, but would cease to be such if we removed all its constituent factors [14, p. 244].

It is easy to construct a situation, represented by a literary dialogue, in which the prosodic and paralinguistic markers are neutralized, while internal, essential (semantic and pragmatic) factors stay intact. The unique and paradoxical property of the literary dialogue seems to lie in the fact that readers are allowed (or even supposed and empowered) to restore the signals of irony and sarcasm on the basis of their ability to see the binary and find contextual cues and clues of different nature.

The politeness theory suggests another analytical paradigm, built on the oppositions of face-saving vs. face-threatening acts and mock politeness vs. mock impoliteness. For Geoffrey Leech sarcasm is a synonym of conversational irony which is described as a second-order pragmatic principle that exploits politeness in order to realize a strategy of mock politeness [16, p. 233]. Banter, as another second-order pragmatic principle that exploits impoliteness while realizing a strategy of mock-impoliteness, can simultaneously exploit irony and thus become a third – order principle of «mock sarcasm». In this case the Irony Principle has to precede the Ban-

ter Principle in a series of implicatures, not vice versa. So, there is apparently no «mock banter» corresponding to «mock sarcasm» [16, p. 242].

Jonathan Culpeper defines the labels «irony» and «sarcasm» as problematic ones. He describes sarcasm as a lay term which is used for different purposes, and, in order to delimit it, doubles it with «mock politeness» label [17, p. 165].

Katharina Barbe notes that it is difficult to talk about sarcasm in its relation to irony, because many examples can be understood as ironical or sarcastic or both. In order to separate them, the notions of face-threatening and face-saving acts are used. Irony is seen as a kind of face-saving criticism while the instances of sarcasm are said to realize a face-threatening action. Sarcastic utterances have a more personal character. Their critical potential is immediately obvious to all participants in a situation, which means that shared experience is not a necessary factor. Nevertheless, a sarcastic utterance possesses a face-saving capacity, but only for the hearer and not for the speaker. A hearer can decide to ignore the sarcasm, while speakers compromise themselves, because sarcasm leaves no room for guessing or doubting, which may be found in non-sarcastic instances of irony [18, p. 27–29].

Looking for a special ironic vocabulary and rules to manipulate it with the aim of constructing a computational theory of irony, researchers have to solve the task of distinguishing it from non-irony. Irony, as well humor in general, is thought to be one of sarcasm's main ingredients. Thus the boundaries between them get blurred and the question arises whether the difference between them is one of mere degree or of quality. Though sarcasm may be viewed as strong, upgraded irony, built by adding more of the same (in the sense of its critical potential), and irony remains to be one of its most useful tools, it is not always a use of irony. It cannot exist independently of the communication situation, without its speakers, listeners, and utterances. It is the latter that can be perceived as sarcastic, the situation as such is not [19, p. 148].

In the paradigm of sentiment analysis, sarcasm is considered to play a role of an interfering or disruptive factor which can flip the message polarity. The automatic detection of irony and sarcasm is important for the development and refinement of sentiment analysis systems, being at the same time a serious conceptual and technical challenge [20, p. 29].

Correctly identified ambiguous utterances can improve the performance of software for opinion mining and sentiment analysis [21, p. 17]. A research of sarcastic and ironic utterances in corpora, which took into consideration lexical properties of the texts, choice of words, constructions and their order showed, that ironic texts tend to have more constructions with negation, more proper names (which may be evidence of intimate character of communication), whereas sarcastic texts demonstrate ten times higher frequency of constructions with the verb «love» and are more egocentric (their authors tend to use many more «I» pronouns). As to the distribution of positive and negative lexis, sarcastic texts were found to be slightly more positive than ironic ones. However, negative polarity prevails in both types of the corpora. Besides, in ironic tweets people give more replies to other users, while sarcasm corpora include «rhetorical» texts that are not aimed at anything and don't imply any answer. The data suggest that people use irony on various topics but they use sarcasm when talking about usual everyday concepts, so there could be frames they tend to be consistent with. Word-tokens ratio tends to be lower in sarcastic tweets. The lexis the authors use is not as divergent as in ironic texts. Besides, sarcastic tweets prove to be more emotional which is evidenced by a high number of interjections and exclamation marks [21, p. 19–21]. The analysis conducted by Maria Khokhlova et al. appears to support the approach to sarcasm as conventionalized, culturally salient means of communication, which presupposes a minimal shared context, limited intellectual tension on the part of interlocutors and ensures virtual transparency of the author's intention.

Another group of researchers carried out a distribution and correlation analysis over a set of features, including a wide variety of psycholinguistic and emotional indices, the results of which give further arguments for the separation between irony and sarcasm [22, p. 132].

Po-Ya Angela Wang combined quantitative sentiment analysis with qualitative content analysis in probing the similarities and distinctions of irony and sarcasm. The score of the quantitative analysis illustrated that sarcastic tweets are more positive, while ironic ones are more neutral. The content analysis showed that sarcasm-tagged tweets carry subjective utterances, while irony-tagged texts describe events [23, p. 355].

The confusion of verbal (implicitly realized) and situational (explicitly described) types of irony is common occurrence within different paradigms of research. The distinction is due to the opposite perspectives of evaluation: an implicit ironist acts inside the situation, being a part of it, whereas the user of explicit irony stands outside of it [18, p. 144]. Marta Dynel's criticism of labeling the utterances carrying people's recognition of situational irony as ironic appears to be well-grounded [24, p. 6].

Robert L. Brown emphasizes, that sarcasm has a clear function, occurs only in language, and is not a discrete logical and linguistic phenomenon, but a family of attitudes of scorn, disdain or derision, which are not constituted by general rules or principles, while irony, though occurring not only in language, is a discrete phenomenon, being something people do with words on the basis of definable knowledge, including knowledge of constitutive rules [25, p. 111–112].

An obvious reason for differentiating between irony and sarcasm is that irony, as an "open ideology", is relativistic, while sarcasm is absolute. The sarcastic perceives only two versions of reality, but the ironist understands that what he thinks may be far from ultimate reality [26, p. 20–21].

Evidently, not all instances of verbal irony are sarcastic, but we cannot say, with the same confidence, that not all sarcastic utterances are ironic. The answer lies in the nature of constitutive rules underlying irony and sarcasm. The idea that inversion is a tool of irony is rejected by some authors. The entry of the classic edition of H.W. Fowler's «A Dictionary of Modern English Usage», first published in 1926, suggests that method and means of irony are those of mystification, whereas sarcasm uses inversion [27, p. 241]. However, the same author defines irony as the use of expressions conveying different things in another entry of the same book, adding that sarcasm does not necessarily involve irony while irony has often no touch of sarcasm, and that irony is so often made the vehicle of sarcasm, that in popular use the two are much confused [27, p. 513].

Much has been said about the semantic change of the terms «irony» and «sarcasm», which is undergoing in some varieties of English. In the result of this process, the term «irony» is assuming the meaning of an unpleasant surprise, while the semantic space, previously occupied by irony, is taken up by the term «sarcasm» [14, p. 243; 7, p. 227; 28, p. 40]. In Geoffrey Nunberg's opinion, the word «sarcasm» has not preserved much trace left of the original meaning of a word that's derived from the Greek for «tear the flesh». For a lot of people, it is now simply a cover term for pointed humor of any kind, while «ironic» has become a synonym of coincidental [29, p. 91].

Salvatore Attardo states, that, but for extreme cases, it is impossible to reliably differentiate between irony and sarcasm either on theoretical grounds or for practical purposes. This is due to the fact that they are folk concepts that have existed for centuries and even millennia and have been used in a variety of situations. All the existing claims for solving this problem ultimately fail to convince, because they don't provide reliable criteria for analysis [28, p. 40].

In our opinion, the sought after criteria for differentiating between irony and sarcasm are hidden in the answers to the following questions:

1. Does sarcasm [as a linguistic (and pragmalinguistic) tool] exist without irony?
2. What are the constitutive rules of sarcasm?
3. Are there any instances of non-ironic sarcastic utterances? How are they constructed?
4. Does the adjective «homonymic» explain anything in the relations between irony and sarcasm?
5. What is the role of humor in irony and sarcasm?

"Five" appears to be a good choice. It goes without saying that the author of the review, which has a purely theoretical character, belongs to the fortunate few, who are known to be better at asking questions, than at answering them.

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Статтю присвячено оцінці сучасних спроб диференціації понять іронії та сарказму в дослідженнях у галузі лінгвістичної прагматики, а також з точки зору деяких суміжних наукових напрямів. Описується внесок дослідників у вирішення цієї складної та цікавої проблеми, визначаються питання, що потребують подальшого усвідомлення і вивчення.

*Ключові слова: іронія, сарказм, вербальний, мовленнєва дія, ввічливість, оцінка, конститутивні правила.*

Статья посвящена оценке современных попыток дифференциации понятий иронии и сарказма в области лингвистической прагматики, а также с позиций некоторых смежных направлений исследований. Описывается вклад исследователей в решение этой сложной и вызывающей интерес проблемы, определяются вопросы, которые нуждаются в дальнейшем осмыслении и изучении.

*Ключевые слова: ирония, сарказм, вербальный, речевой акт, вежливость, оценка, конститутивные правила.*

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