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SUMMARY OF THE THESIS

ASPECTS OF IRONY IN PRESENT ROMANIAN NEWSPAPER DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

The present paper deals with the description and analysis of irony from a linguistic perspective in today's Romanian newspaper discourse. Although irony could be approached from a philosophical, literal, essay-like, stylistic or lexical point of view, our research has been focused on a pragmatic – rhetoric approach of irony by analysing the argumentative and persuasive mechanisms implied by it. This specific approach has enabled us to have a detailed image of irony as a discourse strategy used in present Romanian newspaper articles. By means of this method of analysis we have underlined the implications of irony, paying attention to the structure and significances of the texts belonging to the newspaper discourse area.

By pragmatically analysing the discourse, we have highlighted the role held by the implied contents in transmitting the significances present in the text. This method of research has also enabled us to describe the role held by irony as a poliphonic mechanism or as a strategy that triggers a certain type of interaction at the level of discourse (interaction that is based on the symmetry or asymmetry relationship between enunciation pole and response one). From a pragmatic perspective of the discourse analysis we have also paid attention to the implications that “politeness principle” has in organising the ironic discourse acts and to the effects created by “impoliteness strategies” in newspaper discourse. The „impoliteness strategy” is used in situations in which irony appears as an intended process of producing face-threatening acts (Brown, Levinson, 1978). Furthermore, the pragmatic dimension of our analysis is reflected on the aspects that belong to the apparent negotiation that is to be found in the texts from newspaper discourse area. For that purpose, we have presented the specific of irony from the perspective of the capacity of this strategy to contribute to the negotiation of the meanings or to the maintenance of the relationship with the collocutor.

On the other side, the rhetoric analysis has allowed us to establish the roles that the argumentative, manipulative and persuasives strategies play in the discourse we are dealing with. That is why, in presenting these mechanisms, we have tried to establish a starting point in demonstrating the argumentative character that irony might have. The theoretical analysis is accompanied by applied justifications, by excerpts from texts, by integral texts and by headlines taken from Romanian newspapers. In order to demonstrate the hypotheses that we have intended we have exposed in this paper some important theoretical conceptions that show how irony works first

on the level of conversational interactions and then on that of written interaction.

Thus, the novelty of our approach consist of the description and analysis of the newspaper discourse starting from the conversational model. Taking into account the theoretical aspects presented in Romanian linguistic studies, as well as foreign ones, we have brought forth a comparative, theoretical and applicative analysis that deals with the common and the different elements that are to be found both in speaking and writing as conserving the presence of irony in newspaper discourse.

As a conclusion, the findings have showed that, in order to evaluate the extent to wich irony works in newspaper discourse, we have to take into account the correspondence between the structural dimension of the discourse and the significances of the implied content. Therefore, the mechanisms that govern the efficient functioning of an ironic communication have to be understood by evaluating the symetry or the asymetry between enunciation and response in dual sequences.

The structure of the paper

The first chapter deals with the theoretical aspects that characterize the newspaper discourse as a particular form if interaction since this type of discourse must be understood from the point of view of its influences on the receiver. We have also paid attention to the social influences on discourse mechanisms, to the relationship between argumentation and the social, linguistic and extralinguistic contexts and to some interrogative / indirect-interrogative / ironic structures that are used to reinforce the argumentative strategies. Along the first chapter we have analysed the functioning of the argumentative mechanisms as compared to the conversational register, having in mind the role of the various types of implicit contents (voluntary or involuntary according to Ducrot's formula 1972) and presupositions or connotations.

Amongst the persuasive strategies that are to be found in present Romanian newspaper discourse we have explained the roles played by *intensification* and *reduction* (in Larson's terminology -2003- that developed a persuasive model belonging to Rank). By the theoretical scheme involved we have highlighted the presence of some specific tactics such as “repetition, association and composition or omission, diversion and confussion” at the level of discourse (see Larson, 2003: 33). Alongside these aspects that transmit the emitter's subjectivity we have also tried to demonstrate the distinction between persuasion and manipulation or argumentation and persuasion.

Even if some of the used examples do not explicitly or implicitly make use of irony, their presence in the paper is motivated by the relevance they have in the good functioning of newspaper discourse mechanisms. These examples have helped us to illustrate the valability of the described theoretical premises and to interpret the ironic argumentative strategies.

The first chapter leads to the second one smoothly and logically by passing from general information to specific studying of the irony mechanisms.

The second chapter, entitled *The Pragmatic Mechanisms of irony with Regard To Poliphony and discourse Principle*, deals with the definition of some conceptual reference points and with the studying of some sequences that are meant to demonstrate that irony (as a type of linguistic connotation – Orecchioni, 1986) could be interpreted as a type of antiphrase with an argumentative role or as a strategy that allows not only the superposition of discourse voices, but also their hierarchic defferentiation. In this way, we have paid attention to the way in wich the emitter gives up the idea of having a unique perspective of enunciating in elaborating discourse sequences that might have an ironic potential. Likewise, we have had in mind the idea of interpreting irony as a double – meaning language phenomenon or as a poliphonic mechanism that might describe the theoretical perspective of “an echo phenomenon” (Sperber, Wilson, 1981). Furthermore, we have taken into consideration the importance of allusion as a strategy that might signal irony and the poliphonic significances that headlines might have in Romanian newspaper discourse.

The third chapter deals with the pragmatic role of the paratextual elements in present Romanian newspaper discourse. We have demonstrated that the headlines, beyond their typological aspects that we have demonstrated that the headlines, beyond their typological aspects that we have enumerated, could function as veritable means of enacting ironic discourses.. Irony, as a subjective process, is strougly bound to social order, thus it renders a ritualistic or even theatrical character at the level of conversational exchanges. Along this chapter we have permanently referred to the importance of the relationship settled between the strategies used in conversations and those used in newspaperdiscourse. Starting from a theoretical perspective proposed by Goffman (1967) we have demonstrated that the process of communication implies performance, dissimulation and various relations of symetry and asymetry amongs speakers. A significant importance is held by the social role that participants have in their interactional exchange. We have used this theoretical arguments in order to highlight the relationship between the ironic discourse as a social practice and its pragmatics efficiency from the perspective of symetry or asymetry relationship as stated by Goffman.

In the second part of the third chapetr we have exemplified the aspects of irony by appealing to a pragmatic perspective on communication and we have also demonstrated that in

newspaper discourse irony functions and manifests itself as a contextual dependent interpretative process. Thus, if we take into account the ratio costs-benefits, we could find that irony demonstrates its efficiency by depending on the relevance degree that is held by information when it is related to a certain context. In this chapter we have also studied the following aspects that are specific to irony and that deal with agreement or disagreement: (1) the conflict, (2) the “devaluation” function of irony, (3) the “dissociating” function of irony, (4) the interpretative function of irony, (5) the evaluating contrast of irony, (6) the non-homogenous communicating process of irony, (7) irony as a second degree interpreting process, (8) violating sincerity, (9) solidarity, (10) humour, (11) teasing, (12) “face threatening acts” delivery and (13) negotiation.

In the last chapter entitled *Interacting in newspaper discourse. The relationship between text and reader from the perspective of mediated interaction* we have appealed to some other conceptual instruments that allow us to highlight the specific of irony as a discourse phenomenon present in Romanian newspaper discourse of today. Although it is generally considered that “in language the relationship between emitter and receiver is «bilateral» and «reversible»” (Slama-Czacu, 1999: 81). We have tried to adapt and compare some other theoretical considerations that belong to the conversational register to those belonging to the written one. Having in mind the fact that the studies that deal with issues concerning the structure or the content of the texts coming from present Romanian newspaper discourse area state that this type of discourse belongs to the conversational discourse, we have brought forward an analysis of the pragmatic phenomenon of irony by establishing an analogy to its manner of manifestation in this register.

Some other novelty of an research consist of the classification that we have established as concerning the relationship between emitting and receiving when it comes to ironic statements in the written register. Thus, we have two types of relationships: (1) symmetry / equality and (2) asymmetry / inequality. We consider that the acts of emitting and receiving a message are dependent upon certain factors that condition the efficient communication of an ironic statement, that is, the ironic intention / the lack of the ironic intention and the recognition of the ironic intention / the impossibility of recognizing the ironic intention. Our findings have shown that we have three different situations that are more stable in writing than in the case of conversation: (1) the ironic intention – the recognition of the ironic intention (the symmetry relationship), the ironic intention – the impossibility of recognizing the ironic intention (the asymmetry relationship) and (3) the lack of ironic intention – the assignment of ironic intention (the asymmetry relationship).

Our findings are based upon the analysis of the integral texts, excerpts and headlines belonging to present Romanian newspaper discourse.

Although we have frequently used the conversational register as a reference system from

wich we have taken over theories that have perfectly auted our research, we have also included our research in a pragmatic study of the mechanisms of irony that are to be found in present Romanian newspaper discourse, especially in editorials.

The description of the corpus

Our research focusses on a pragmatic analysis of some texts selected from present Romanian newspaper discourse for the purpose of studying how the pragmatic mechanisms of irony function at the level of discourse. The analysis is applied to texts taken from some Romanian newspapers during 2008-2012 "Catavencu Academy", "The Thruth", "The Daily Paper", "The old Dilemma", "The Guardian", "Financial Times", "Ace Formula", "The Thought", "The Day's Event", "The National Journal", "The National", "Free Romania". We have used the online sources of these newspapers and we have selected integral texts that make use of irony and some other procedures that reflect implicit contents. In building up the corpus we have included publications that approach a variety of themes. Considering the subjective character that the phenomenon of irony impregnates on the analysed texts we have found it important to favour those journalistic genres that abound in irony, especially the editorial.

In consequence, the theoretical hypotheses that we had in mind are backed up by newspaper articles and headlines belonging to present Romanian newspaper discourse area.

Conclusions

Therefore, in the presented chapters, among the most important characteristics of irony that we have described, we have to mention that irony could be identified by means of inferential processes, it could function on the contradiction principle ("implicit contradiction", "explicit contradiction" or "counter-truth" (Berrendonner, 1981:176), it is a double-meaning act, it is "essentially duplicitous" (Preda, 2006:93), it appeals to the dissimulation procedure and it could be understood as a complicity between speakers.

Trying to describe irony as accurately as possible, many theories have presented it by means of some unspecified characteristics. Thus, the difficulty lies in properly understanding it. If we replace

the conversational implicatures¹ by a literal meaning there is some chance for the irony to be misunderstood. On the other hand, irony, as an indirect strategy, could be organized depending on the aggressive potential it might have: „[...] irony is an output of an off-record strategy that attends to face threat. Alternatively, in cases where the irony is disambiguated in form, it may be the output of an on-record strategy, but in all cases irony is organized around the potential face threat posed by the critical content (including evasion of unambiguous responsibility for it)” (Brown, Levinson, 1978: 263).

Considering the aggressive potential of the ironic discourse, we have analysed the relationships among irony, sarcasm, humour, satire, all of them being strategies that we have identified in the newspaper discourse. For example, sarcasm, ridiculing and mocking are, according to Partington (2006), procedures that are aggressively used, the only difference among them being the intensity with which they are manifested. Used for an aggressive purpose, sarcasm could be interpreted as a "face-threatening act" (Partington, 2006:214).

Thus, the sarcastic commentary, the critical intention or the praise could reflect the conflictual charge of an ironic situation. In a context that appears conflictual, irony functions as "blame by praise", while in a cooperation context it could be viewed as "praise by blame" (see Anolli, Ciceri, Infantino, 2002, in Gibbs, Colston, 2007: 361).

As a discourse strategy that breaks up the quality rule, irony, together with lying, is a case of sincerity violation (Orecchioni, 1978:13), since it shows that the speaker intentionally uses clues of his insincerity in his discourse (in a more or less overt manner)². Still, the speaker who is lying in his discourse is concerned about his lies not being exposed.

According to some other theoretical classifications, this sincerity violation is " a pragmatic insincerity". Kumon-Nakamura, Glucksberg, Brown (1995) demonstrate that ironic statements imply "a pragmatic insincerity" and "an allusion to broken expectancies: „According to the

¹ Brown și Levinson describe irony an an indirect speech act: „a communicative act *is done off record if it is done in such a way that it is not possible to attribute only one clear communicative intention to the act*. In other words, the actor leaves himself an 'out' by providing himself with a number of defensible interpretations; he cannot be held to have committed himself to just one particular interpretation of his act. Thus if a speaker wants to do an FTA, but wants to avoid the responsibility for doing it, he can do it off record and leave it up to the addressee to decide how to interpret it. Such off-record utterances are essentially indirect uses of language” (Brown, Levinson, 1978: 211, s.n.).

² “Irony, an apparently perverse means of communication, *permits us to say the predicative or pragmatic opposite of what we mean, and get away with it*. It seems superficially *not very different from lying, where we say the opposite of what is true, or what we believe to be true, and hope to get away with it*. The difference lies in the speaker's assumptions about what the hearer will be able to interpret as intended meaning”(Myers Roy, 1981: 421).

allusional pretense theory, utterances will be perceived as ironic if they are perceived as insincere and if they are also perceived as alluding to a discrepancy between an expectation and reality” (Kumon-Nakamura, Glucksberg, Brown (1995) in Colston, Gibbs, 2007: 63). Likewise, this discrepancy that must be noticed by the receiver is, in Curco's opinion, a way of manifesting "a dissociative attitude" at the discourse level. (Curco, 2000).

As for "the communicative principle of relevance" (Sperber and Wilson, 1995), the receiver "has the right to assume that the statement procedures have sufficient cognitive effects, without implying efforts of unjustified interpretations". Thus, in Sperber and Wilson's opinion, the receiver, in interpreting irony, chooses the meaning that is the closest to the context of emitting. However, in Curco's opinion, it is unlikely to tell how many interpretations the speaker chooses before he attributes an intentional meaning to his interlocutor's speech³.

Consequently, the analysis of irony shows that this is frequently understood in terms of "incongruency, contradiction, incompatibility and opposition" (Barbe, 1995:94), but also depending on a basic feature that shows that by irony the speaker tries to alleviate the impact created by the critical attitude that an ironic sequence might intend to transmit.

Thus, we have framed these mechanisms of irony in the panel of the characteristics specific to present Romanian newspaper discourse.

³ „In computing the propositional form of an utterance, a competent hearer needs to be able to recognize the relationship between it and a thought of the speaker's, and also the relationship that holds between that thought and what the thought itself represents” (Curc3, 2000: 278). The theory proposed by Curc3, is based, therefore, on the metarepresentation process.