



## Irony in Shakespeare's play Hamlet: A pragmatic analysis

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### Abstract

Since the concept of irony appears extensively in the critique of various works and writers, little effort has been made to analyze the many opportunities for distinct types of irony and how they emerge in literature. On the other hand, we have to shed light on the concept of pragmatism. In its broadest sense, pragmatics is the characterization of meaning in context. One of the key intellectual areas of this multidisciplinary branch of linguistics is speech act theory, which examines literary works as good examples of human experience. The study aims to analyze Shakespeare's Hamlet using dramatic Irony. It seeks to understand how dramatic characters utilize their words to achieve specific roles in certain social contexts. The study proposes that language in the dramatic world serves both dramatic and pragmatic purposes during the play's tragic sequence of events. To be systematic, the study will be separated into three parts, but the focus will be on two important parts, While Part One focuses on the explanation of irony, Part Two will apply the pragmatic approach to the body of Shakespeare's Hamlet. The study demonstrated that Shakespeare's Hamlet is not a play created to be performed on stage, but rather a multidramatic discourse whose charters' utterances embody performativity activities. The investigation is completed with concluding remarks derived from the analysis.

**Key Words:** Pragmatics, Shakespeare's Hamlet, Irony, context, dramatic

السخرية في مسرحية شكسبير هاملت: تحليل براغماتي

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المخلص

على الرغم من أن مفهوم السخرية يرد كثيراً في نقد العديد من الأعمال والكتاب، إلا أنه لم يتم بذل الكثير من الجهود لمناقشة الاحتمالات المختلفة لأنواع مختلفة من السخرية ومظاهرها في الأدب. من ناحية أخرى، علينا أن نسلط الضوء على مفهوم البراغماتية. ففي أوسع معانيها، فإن البراغماتية هي توصيف المعنى في السياق. ومن المجالات الفكرية الرئيسية لهذا الفرع المتعدد التخصصات من علم اللغة نظرية الفعل الكلامي، والتي تدرس الأعمال الأدبية كأمتلة جيدة للتجربة الإنسانية. تهدف الدراسة إلى تحليل مسرحية هاملت لشكسبير باستخدام السخرية الدرامية. وتسعى إلى فهم كيف يستخدم الشخصيات الدرامية كلماتهم لتحقيق أدوار محددة في سياقات اجتماعية معينة. تقترح الدراسة أن اللغة في العالم الدرامي تخدم أغراضاً درامية وبراغماتية أثناء تسلسل الأحداث المأساوية في المسرحية. ولكي تكون الدراسة منهجية، سيتم تقسيمها إلى ثلاثة أجزاء، ولكن التركيز سيكون على جزأين مهمين، بينما يركز الجزء الأول على تفسير السخرية،



وسيطبق الجزء الثاني النهج البراغماتي على جسد مسرحية هاملت لشكسبير. وقد أثبتت الدراسة أن مسرحية هاملت لشكسبير ليست مسرحية تم إنشاؤها لتؤدي على خشبة المسرح، بل هي خطاب درامي متعدد حيث تجسد عباراته أنشطة أدائية. وقد اكتمل البحث بملاحظات ختامية مستمدة من التحليل.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** البراغماتية، هاملت لشكسبير، المفارقة، السياق، الدراماتيكية

## Chapter One

### 1.Introduction

The existence of irony in Shakespearean tragedy is one of its most remarkable elements, and its influence and significance deserve to be recognized. In Shakespearean drama, there are several opportunities to apply irony. The tradition of disguise and the mingling of complexities provide numerous opportunities for irony to occur in comedy. Similar prospects, though, exist in Shakespearean tragedy. A spectator's perspective of a Shakespearean tragedy is generally multifaceted, with aspects of his experience standing in sarcastic contrast to others. When one sees Romeo drink the fatal cup in order to join Juliet in death, one understands not only the misery of the situation, but also its irony. Shakespeare heightens the irony by having Romeo notice that Juliet still appears to be alive, and by making the audience comprehend that the act by which Romeo desires to be united with Juliet is the precise act that instead permanently separates him from her. This is typical of the way Shakespeare constructs his dramatic situations. Shakespeare often supplies the audience with information superior to that of the characters in the play, causing the latter to speak and act in a world where their senses are clearly limited. The audience understands when their actions and judgements are correct and suitable, when they are incorrect, and when they are misdirected. Irony develops from the contrasts that spectators are therefore able to see and must respond to.

#### 1.1 Irony

The term irony represents one of the most common elements in nonliteral (or hilarious) language. According to Wilson and Sperber (1993:76), irony is a complex pragmatic phenomenon governed by a number of brain processes. An ironic speech generally creates a discrepancy between what it actually implies and what it intends to communicate. This disparity is frequently the result of a pragmatic interpretation of a statement. Thus, it is critical not to accept a sarcastic expression literally, as the intended meaning has been incorporated in the pragmatic interpretation.

#### 1.2 Pragmatics

Lyons(1977:171)describes pragmatics as the study of real utterances, rather than meaning. It is sometimes characterized as the investigation of that portion of meaning that is not entirely truth-conditional, or the study of performance rather



than competency (Levinson, 1983: 32). Yule (1996: 3) added another concept to pragmatics: the study of the intentional meaning of speech acts, or the study of how the speaker conveys meaning. As a result, such a hybrid subject has emerged as a vibrant and intriguing area of inquiry. Though many previously unresolved difficulties involving the meaning and use of language have been resolved through its technique, many other complex phenomena continue to require consideration.

## Chapter Two Theoretical Remarks

### 2.1 Definitions of Irony

The irony has been defined as a literary or rhetorical strategy or way of thinking, feeling, and expressing (Cuddon, 1999:430). In the exact same sense, Muecke (1978:19) describes irony as the incorporation of the opposing, complementary impulses in order to establish a "balanced poise". Stylistically, according to Fowler (1965:295), is "a mode of expression which postulates a double audience, one of which is 'in the know' and aware of the speaker's intention, while the other is naive enough to take the utterance at its face value".

Webster (1969:448) defines irony as "the use of words to express something other than and especially the opposite of the literal meaning". In an identical style, The New Encyclopedia of Britannica (1983:432) addresses irony as "either speech (verbal irony) in which the real meaning is concealed or contradicted by the literal meaning of the words, or a situation (dramatic irony), in which there is incongruity between what is expected and what occurs".

In terms of language, linguistic irony is the most concerned with, as Gibbs (1994: 263) and Culter (1996: 59) argue that practically all varieties of irony include a confrontation or juxtaposition of incompatible ones.

### 2-2 The Pragmatics of Irony

In terms of both writing and reading, Leech and Short (1981:277-8) define irony as the "secret communion" between the author and the reader. This unity, they believe that is the foundation of irony. It is the author's communication goal that the reader should interpret as contrary or unsuitable.

In the context of communication, Leech (1981: 142) identifies irony more accurately as a pragmatic fundamental that allows the speaker to be disrespectful while appearing polite by violating one or more cooperative principle maxims. The irony is regarded dissociative because it involves some form of dualism in the form of incongruity, incompatibility, and opposition (Barbe, 1993: 589). This explains



why irony is defined as a broad notion, first in terms of literature and linguistics, before being defined pragmatically.

To determine if a statement is ironic, the semantic meaning of the utterance is substituted for its figurative meaning, and both meanings must be examined for identification purposes. However, irony is expressed as "saying something but meaning the opposite". The concept of irony is sometimes stated as a pragmatic phenomena in which an action is done through an ironic phrase (Hutcheon 1995: 65).

The ironic discourse is characterized when the listener becomes aware of the breach of some pragmatic rules, such as maxims concerning cooperation or some felicity prerequisites for a speech act, then the reverse of the literal meaning is given, for example:

- *This house is very clean !*

This remark is an example of irony, with the speaker, a mother, attempting to express something other than what the words explicitly mean (ibid).

The term irony could indicate a purely pragmatic growth and development, with no semantic equivalent. Which is, ironic and non-ironic expressions are semantically identical. This could be due to the fact that on the surface, they are both grammatically and syntactically equivalent. At the pragmatic level, difference arises. Jokes have a deeper semantics than irony, which is almost entirely dependent on script inference. The basic theme of irony is the difference between the "literal" and the "figurative," or, to put it another way, claim and reality. (Colston and O'Brien, 2000:122).

### 2.3 The Pragmatic Applications of The concept of irony

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).

Irony appears to serve the purpose of demonstrating the speaker's detachment and thus superiority to/from the circumstance, as well as the speaker's capacity to toy with words. Speakers employ irony to demonstrate their ability to regulate their emotions. An ironic utterance implies that it is ironic (indirect), nuanced, and requires some mental agility to interpret. Being connected with humour adds another valued meaning to irony; at least in Western society, the ability to make others laugh is a favorable characteristic (obviously, within certain boundaries) (Attardo, 1994: 41).



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."

Additionally, there's been much debate concerning the utilization of irony as a tool for civility. "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 retract ability which also contributes to its use towards politeness" (ibid). Barbe (1995: 87) reports 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 Irony's Types:

### 2.4.1 Irony of Echoic:

In opposition to the classic account of irony in terms of honesty, and primarily with Grice's claim that irony is an example of violating the conversational maxims of Quality, relevance theorists propose 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". Based on the Echoic Mention hypothesis, Creusere (1999: 213) states that "listeners understand ironic utterances by appealing to implicit or explicit thoughts, behavior, utterances or social norms". Yus (2000: 28) defines an ironic speech as an interpretation of another thought, utterance, or assumption that it resembles or attributes to a different speaker's utterance at a later moment.

As a result, Attardo (2000a: 804) asserts that the speaker of an echoic speech must have a specific attitude (positive, negative, or neutral) toward the echoic utterance. Attardo cites Sperber and Wilson (1986: 239) as claiming 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 sense, Sperber and Wilson continue to develop their own idea of irony.

So they claim 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 & Wilson, 1986:239). As a consequence, an echoic statement



gains importance by "allowing the hearer to recognize, and possibly emulate, the speaker's interest in, and attitude toward, somebody else's thoughts" (Sperber & Wilson, 1990:5).

#### 2.4.2 Irony Verbal

The classic definition of verbal irony is: "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 & Wilson 1995: 67).

#### 2.4.3. Clark & Gerrig's (1984) 'Theory of Pretence

Based on Fowler (1965) & Grice (1978), Clark & Gerrig's Pretense Theory (1984) asserts that somebody who uses an ironic phrase adopts a role and thereby borrows an ironic tone. When a S is being ironic, s/he pretends to be someone else and addresses someone other than the genuine H. An S pretends to be an injudicious person speaking to an uninformed audience; the S expects the addressee of the irony to find the pretense and so see his or her attitude toward the S, the audience, and the speech (Clark & Gerrig 1984: 12).

According to Grice (1978: 124), that they illustrate their hypothesis by supposing that S is speaking to A, the major addressee, as well as A, who could be present or absent, real or fictitious. When S speaks ironically, he pretends to be S speaking to A. What S is saying is clearly uneducated or injudicious in some way, deserving of a hostile or disparaging judgment or a feeling of outrage or scorn.

According to Wilson (2006: 1724), pretense alone can stretch extremely thin. However, echoic and pretense can sometimes work together to achieve ironic effects. Furthermore, she (ibid: 19) critiques the pretence theory of irony, claiming that non-echoic variants of the pretense account fail to explain why a S cannot make any clearly incorrect or improper speech and expect it to be perceived as sarcastic.

#### 2.4.4. Attardo's '2000' Theory of Relevant Inappropriateness

Attardo is skeptical of all of the above-mentioned theories about irony. Thus, he presents an irony theory in which ironic remarks are both inappropriate and relevant to their context (Attardo, 2000a: 793). According to Attardo's approach, all examples of irony can be handled, including those resulting from violations of appropriateness or felicity requirements.

He (ibid: 795) claims that his theory is Gricean in its foundation, although it differs significantly from Grice's model of irony. It incorporates the concept of inappropriateness, which has expanded the scope of this theory and made it entirely context dependant. Based on Grice's maxims, Attardo (ibid) rejects Colston's view (see 2.4.6), which is only dependent on felicity requirements.



## Chapter Three

### Irony In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

#### 3-1 *Hamlet*: The play

*Hamlet* is one of the greatest tragedies Shakespeare had written. Hamlet, the hero, had different morals towards every character he meets. He adopts himself to every person and situation he encounters many characters, and as a result, each has a different perspective of him. His detractors disagree on his mood and what it implies. The protagonist of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is Prince Hamlet of Denmark whose father, King Hamlet, is mysteriously deceased. Certain social clues assert that mystery, of which are the hasty marriage of Claudius, the dead King's brother, to Queen Gertrude, the late King's wife, and the sudden apparition of the King's ghost in Christmas Eve.

Hamlet's ghost sows the seeds of suspense, perplexity, and anxiety in the whole land of Denmark. Not only that, nature itself supernaturally participates in building up the horrific image of the world at Elsinore.

Shakespeare's tragedy opens with the changing of the guards on a dreary chilling night the Danish royal castle. The cold dead silence is hunted by the apparition of the late King's ghost. Socially, the audience of Shakespeare's age believed in ghosts and supernatural phenomena. They were more familiar with the stories that appealed to their imagination. The Elizabethans, in Turner's words, (1974:xix), were superstitious and believed in ghosts and magic, and that even the highest, including Queen Elizabeth and King James I, had strong Faith in the power of witches' and demons to affect the fortunes of men.

Turner (ibid.) concedes that it is not surprising that there was a task for the marvelous, and supernatural at that time; and this task also helps to explain the introduction of the fairies in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the ghost of Hamlet, and the witches in *Macbeth*. Beliefs are a crucial part of nations' culture. Culture, in the general sense, is the systematic network of beliefs, arts, literature, and customs. These various social patterns which descend from generation to generation are manifest in language. Language, hence, is functional. It is a functional semiotic activity (Cook, 1994:48).

The Elizabethan dramatic vision and the social collective awareness are fundamentally linked to the context of culture which construes: tribal economics, social organization, kinship patterns, fertility rites, seasonal rhythms, concept of time and space ( Kramsch, 2005:26-7).

#### 3-2. Grice's Pragmatic Model (1975) Of Irony

Grice's Model in pragmatics is known as the conversational implicature in which he develops a theory of relationships among an expression, its meaning, the speaker's, and the implication of the utterance. He postulates a cooperative



principle and a set of maxims. This principle is introduced to show that the differences in meaning the philosophers noticed in sentences using the same sentence itself. Instead of proposing rules for successful communication, Grice prefers to speak of maxims which participants conversationally adhere to in communication.

His pragmatic theory proposes that conversation is usually a cooperative activity, and that in all communications there is a general agreement between the speaker and the hearer to be called the cooperative principle states that you should make your conversational contribution as required by the recognized purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are participating.

Grice, for example provides a number of submaximums. They are as follows:

The Maxim of Quality:

1. Provide sufficient information for the exchange's current purpose.
2. Avoid making your input more informative than is necessary.

Maximum of Quality:

1. Do not say anything you believe to be false.
2. Do not assert something for which you do not have sufficient evidence.

Maximum of Relevance: Become relevant.

Maxim of Manner: Perspicuousness means avoiding obscurity in language.

2. Avoid ambiguities.
3. Be short (avoid unnecessary wordiness).
4. Be orderly.

Metaphor, irony, and hyperbole, according to Grice (1975), violate the quality standard. According to Grice, flouting a maxim is overtly violating it. When a speaker disregards a maxim, the audience is aware of this. Grice sees verbal irony as a 'clear falsehood'. In the case of these tropes, a breach of the quality maxim results in a related true implicature.

According to Grice, irony is a 'clear untruth sparking an implicature opposite to the literal sense of the sentence'. (Ziv,1988: 69). Sperber and Wilson (1981) strongly criticize this theory for failing to explain why speakers would say a clear deception in order to convey a true implicature that could have been expressed literally. Instead, they proposed a definition of irony as a (echoic allusion) to an utterance or thinking that may be linked to a person, and therefore named their theory The Echoic Mention Theory. The theories surrounding the concept of irony and 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, 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).

If a speaker does not observe these maxims he may violate, opt out, clash or flout them in which case a kind of implicature ensues since Grice has no term for this, Bach and Harnish (1979 : 167) adapt the neutral term "infringement" for any failure to fulfill a maxim. Grice distinguishes among the speaker is surreptitiously breaching them, for example, by lying. While violating the maxims, he refers to explicitly breaking them for linguistic effect as flouting. Finch (2000: 160) distinguishes between flouting and violation. Violation of a maxim involves some elements of communication failure, i.e., providing too little, or too much areas flouting is apparent rather than real violation on Grice's account, hyperbole is a flouting of the maxim of Quality (Do not say what you believe to be false).

### 3-3 Irony in Hamlet

Irony is a recurring trope in Hamlet. Irony is described as stating the opposite of what one intends, or saying one thing but meaning another, praising to blame and blaming to laud. According to classical rhetoric, in irony, the literal meaning is substituted with a figurative one. Metaphor, hyperbole, and irony, according to Grice, are flagrant violations/flouts of the truthfulness guideline "Do not say what you believe to be false" in order to convey a related true implicature.

In the literature, Gibbs (1993: 262) states that irony is concerned with the practice of employing incongruity to convey a distinction between reality and expectation, such as stating one thing and meaning something another while the audience is aware of both.

Consider the following example from Hamlet;

*1-Hamlet [Aside] A little more than kin, and less than kind. I. ii P.15*

Hamlet is responding to the King's enquiry that Hamlet is not in his mood. The King addresses him as "my cousin" and "my son", but Hamlet exploits the opportunity to direct his criticism to the King. The meaning is that I'm closer to you than a mere relative, because you are supposed to be my father now, but not very kindly disposed to you. This playing on words example implies a sense of irony.

*2-Hamlet It was brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there. II. ii P. 111*



The exchange now is between Hamlet and Polonius. He is speaking ironically about Polonius. Hamlet continues to treat Polonius unkindly; perhaps this is a feature of his assumed madness.

## The conclusions

Based on the findings in the previous section, the study concludes as follows:

1. The pragmatic analysis results verify the study's hypothesis.
2. The study found that echoic irony and verbal irony are the most common types of irony in the story.
3. Irony is reflected throughout the play in a variety of ways, which can be exposed through examination of different types rather than pragmatic ones.
4. The pragmatic analysis demonstrates that the author's writing talents have revealed that the sarcastic sense in the story is also employed to represent universal themes that have long been prevalent in literature.

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