

Book review

Garmendia, Joana (2018). *Irony*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Verbal irony research is fascinating and valuable, if somewhat difficult to approach. Of interest to both linguists and psychologists, it offers a window into many cognitive processes (including on the neuropsychological level; Filik et al. 2014) as well as interpersonal interactions in various contexts (Averbeck & Hample 2008; Milanowicz et al. 2017). Irony can also be studied as a cultural phenomenon (Dynel 2017; Young 2019). However, despite its ubiquity and the breadth of approaches it allows for, irony defies easy definition and classification (Colston & Athanasiadou 2017). Numerous theories and methodologies abound, empirical studies often produce contradictory results, and boundaries between definitions and concepts tend to be blurred at times (see, e.g., Attardo 2001). For example, cognitive psychological studies on the time course of irony processing are a notoriously contentious topic. Such studies will likely use different definitions and methods than psycholinguistic studies on the personality differences in irony use. Theoretical articles on the pragmatics of irony and qualitative analyses of irony as a social phenomenon will be even more different still in terms of form and content. Therefore, integrative overviews seem to be in demand. Here, such landmark volumes as Colston & Katz (2005), Gibbs & Colston (2007), or Athanasiadou & Colston (2017) can be identified.

However, these works comprise several distinct chapters which focus on many different issues and only when taken together do they present a broad perspective. In contrast, Joana Garmendia's *Irony* (2018) takes a more precise approach and offers a thorough, detailed, and organised account of the most important pragmatic theories of irony as well as several important related issues which continue to generate studies and articles. This way, the book is a unique and welcome addition to the literature.

Joana Garmendia is an experienced scholar of irony in language who has published numerous highly cited works on this topic for over ten years. Notably, she has also advanced a novel theory of the pragmatics of irony (Garmendia 2014). Based on irony being conceptualized as an "overt clash between what the speaker intends to communicate and what she is apparently putting forward" (p. 656), Garmendia's theory seeks to avoid the shortcomings of the dominant theories and settle several long-standing debates. Thus, it signals the author's penchant for succinctly presenting and unifying various points of view, highlighting their strengths and uses. Therefore, she is well positioned as the author of a comprehensive, high-quality textbook.

The book begins with situating verbal irony within the broad spectrum of nonliteral language. The author goes to great lengths to carefully specify what she means by verbal irony and what types or groups of ironic cases she will discuss. Simultaneously, everything falling outside of the book's scope is not dismissed as unimportant, but acknowledged and given a brief overview. Each chapter presents the Gricean, echoic, and pretense views on irony, representing the aforementioned major pragmatic theories. Presenting Grice's account of irony as opposition (Chapter 2), the author summarises the cooperative principle and locates irony as a specific type of implicature. Then, she proceeds with discussing the "three ideas that have subsequently been extensively discussed in the pragmatics of irony" (p. 22) and which stem directly from the Gricean view: irony as always negative, irony as pretending, and the existence (or lack thereof)

of an “ironic tone of voice.” This structure is followed in Chapter 3, where the author first identifies irony as a specific type of echo and shows how Sperber & Wilson’s (1981) echoic account addresses the above three ideas: irony can sometimes be positive, irony is not pretense, and irony is associated with a “tone of voice that stands for a certain attitude and this may be what is considered to be the ironic speaker’s tone of voice” (p. 50). Likewise, Chapter 4 defines the pretense theory of irony and outlines how it addresses the issues of positivity, pretense, and tone of voice. Importantly, the chapters not only summarise the three pragmatic theories, but also describe their major issues (“Problems”) and the current state of the literature within the chapter’s domain (“Some developments”). This is done with great detail, precision, and care by the author. The chapters do not stand in separation, but elaborate the arguments step by step. The reader’s attention is constantly brought back to the three major issues structuring the book, and both the similarities and differences between the theories are given equal weight. There are numerous summaries, reminders, and highlights which help underscore the most important arguments. There are also numerous “Activity” and “Discussion” boxes, which prompt the reader to consider the practical applications of the discussed theories. The author also consistently uses the same set of ironic examples, which facilitates comparisons. As a result, the reader gains a deep, synthetic understanding of the pragmatics of irony rather than a disjointed catalogue of definitions and representative studies.

In the second half of the book, the chapters are devoted to how each of the three pragmatic theories address a range of broader issues: attitude expression in irony, including the tinge hypothesis, motivations and cues of ironic utterances, and the relationship between irony, sarcasm, and humour. Here, it has to be appreciated that the author attempts to tackle issues which are, at times, very difficult – the question of what “making as if to say” actually means in Grice’s account, the question of the difference between echo and pretense, the question of whether irony can be positive, or the distinction between irony and humor. The greatest strength of the book, namely, the author’s careful and exhaustive elaboration of each point, is especially evident here.

The stated goal of the book is thus accomplished. One shortcoming stemming from the author’s approach is that the bibliographic references and the suggested literature is rather sparse at times. Although the definitions, arguments, and the evidence is presented very effectively, the relatively low number of references may make it difficult for interested readers to continue pursuing particular points. This is somewhat alleviated by the “Suggested Reading” sections appended to each chapter. Nevertheless, the point of the book is not to be an exhaustive review of research but rather a textbook introduction leading to an integrated theoretical picture. Judged by this criterion, the book is a valuable addition to the field. Students seeking a point of entry as well as scholars looking for a useful summary and reference point for the theories of irony will appreciate the book’s specificity, conciseness, and readability.

Piotr Kałowski

University of Economics and Human Sciences in Warsaw, Poland
p.kalowski@vizja.pl; piotr.kalowski@psych.uw.edu.pl

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