Book review

Kreuz, Roger (2020). *Irony and Sarcasm*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Irony and sarcasm are two intertwined terms and it is hard to distinguish irony and sarcasm clearly. However, this book provides an enlightening and comprehensive overview of two terms to address the current issues (e.g., the definitions of irony and sarcasm and the controversy over irony usage and signals) by mapping their advances from Greek philosophy to their current usage. In all, the whole book contains nine chapters where it discusses the varieties, the prerequisites, the components, the signals and the online usage of irony.

Chapter 1 aims to highlight the background of irony/sarcasm as nonliteral language. The author introduces some frequently utilised figurative forms (e.g., metaphor, simile, idioms, exaggeration, overstatement, hyperbole) strongly associated with irony and presents some examples. Then, the advances of the two schools – prescriptivism, which adhere to the standardisation of the definition of irony via reference works, and descriptivism, which focuses on the practical usage and the development of irony - are briefly demonstrated and discussed. Through the discussion, the concerns of being prescriptive to define irony (e.g., the judgments of acceptability of language changes over time) are raised.

Chapter 2 presents eight types of irony (e.g., Socratic irony, dramatic irony, cosmic irony, situational irony, historical irony, romantic irony, verbal irony and sarcasm). The author provides their definitions and the advances of each type of irony by using some examples in literature (e.g., *Twelfth Night, The Late Show*). Meanwhile, the author points out the problems (e.g., the difficulty of differentiating verbal irony with other indirect language or the rhetorical device of antiphrasis) in two common dictionary definitions of verbal irony as scholars regards irony either as the opposite of what the speaker says or something different from what the speaker literally says. To prove these problems, the author's previous experiment results and some conversation with his students are cited. Next, the author talks about the importance of the ironic attitude and emphasises the conceptual overlaps between romantic irony and the ironic attitude.

In Chapter 3, the author describes the prerequisites of irony (e.g., juxtaposition and contradiction, common ground, pretence, the asymmetry of affect). Several instances of juxtaposition and contradiction in irony are given to introduce how these characteristics attract our attention and why we register some situations as ironic. Regarding common ground, the author agrees with the concept of common knowledge proposed by Clark & Schaefer (1989). The author introduces the advances of the common ground and enumerates some examples of how common knowledge works between interlocutors in irony communication. However, another different voice has not been discussed within this section as the common ground concept contradicts with Relevance Theory proposed by Sperber & Wilson (1986), which advocates mutual manifestness instead of mutual knowledge. Sperber & Wilson (1986) suggest that it is impossible to define what is mutual knowledge. Instead, knowledge could be mutually manifest to all interlocutors. A significant deficiency in the concept of common knowledge is that no clear definition or explanation could be given to demonstrate what it is and how the interlocuters ensure their conversation involving the knowledge that the others could process.

Then, the author explains the role of pretence in ironic cases by discussing the two different explanations from Fowler (1926) and Sperber (1984). By doing so, the author concludes that pretence is not the nature of all types of irony as individuals do not always dissociate themselves from the conversation and pretend to be an injudicious speaker or an uninitiated listener to be involved in the conversation. Instead, pretence could be utilised as a clue to differentiate literal expressions and non-literal expressions. In terms of the asymmetry of affect, a bias is clearly pointed out by the author that individuals tend to employ positive expressions to evaluate negative things and some explanations (e.g., the Pollyanna hypothesis) of the asymmetry of affect in the use of verbal irony are provided.

Chapter 4 illustrates the differences between verbal irony and sarcasm and how different theories (e.g., Theory of Mind, Cooperative Principle) interpret individuals' comprehension of verbal irony. Through Theory of Mind, the author demonstrates that a close connection exists between verbal irony and other nonliteral languages. Besides, verbal irony and sarcasm are different things sharing the same mental machinery. Then, the author discusses the differences between verbal irony and sarcasm via the type and the number of victims. After that, several critical theories (e.g., Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, Sperber & Wilson's (1981) Echoic Theory, Glucksberg & Kreuz's (1989) Pretence Theory, Giora's (1997) Graded Salience Hypothesis and Pexman's (2008) parallel constraint satisfaction) in irony comprehension are discussed.

Chapter 5 serves to distinguish coincidence, paradox, satire, parody and irony. In terms of coincidence, the author introduces the debate over coincidence and situational irony as they are commonly regarded as exchangeable terms. The author believes that coincidence has resemblances with irony in involving juxtaposition and incongruity; it does not contain pretence or explicit echoes. In all, the most distinguishing feature for these two is whether a juxtaposition is coincidental. In terms of paradox and irony, the author believes that both sometimes involve juxtaposition, which may trigger incongruity and deviation from expectation. Regarding satire and irony, pretence and common ground are regarded as the essential elements of both. However, the author believes that being different from irony, satire is subtler in identifying a clear pretence and it is much more often expressed by parody. Like irony, pretence is also the critical component of parody, but parody is an intentional imitation.

In Chapter 6, the author discusses the functions (e.g., aggression, an excuse, humour and intimacy) of irony. Being negative in emotion is widely regarded as a stereotype of irony: irony could be received as less harmful or positive than direct expressions. For instance, Dews & Winner (1995)'s Ting Hypothesis suggests that verbal irony could mute criticism and praise. Besides, using irony provides the speaker with a chance to retrieve their remarks once the listener fails to understand the underlying meaning. But the plausibility is reduced with the frequency of using irony as an excuse to retrieve the remarks. In terms of the relationship between irony and humour, humour seems to be a critical element of situational irony and the ironic attitude, but Dynel (2014) claims that it is improper to define irony via humour. Instead, laughter could be regarded as a cue for identifying or comprehending both of them from the speaker's perspective as Gibbs's (2000) research found that a great deal of laughters is produced by speakers instead of listeners.

Chapter 7 illustrates how irony is signalled through the tone of voice, face, gesture, exaggeration, understatement and irony marks. The author discusses the multiple prosodic characteristics (e.g., lower pitch, decreased tempo and greater intensity) and some paralinguistic cues (e.g., rolling eyes, smirking, air quotes) mentioned in the existing literature. However, the author concludes that neither the ironic/sarcastic tone nor the paralinguistic cues are critical factors for creating irony. Also, he points out that some previous experiment materials with sarcastic tones are in doubt as they are not as natural as those occurring in impromptu. In terms

of irony markers, the author lists some common markers (e.g., exclamation, tilde) appearing in the current literature and illustrates how those markers develop as time goes on. Even though these irony markers present the interlocutors with clear clues to identify it, it may weaken the ironic expression itself. Regarding words and word categories, the existing literature confirms that certain words such as some adjectives and adverbs could serve the signalling function. Besides, the author's experiments show that interjections could signal irony as well.

In Chapter 8, the author presents what is the 'context collapse' of irony in online communication and how it is addressed through various cues such as emoticons, emojis, hashtags and memes. The advance of emoticons was explained first and some particular emoticons (e.g., the winking face ;-), tongue face ;-P) are mentioned as they are frequently associated with sarcasm. However, there is no standard way of depicting irony and sarcasm via emojis. Then, the hashtag evolves in online communication as a more explicit ironic intention marker. Even though the hashtags provide researchers and readers with a new way to pinpoint sarcasm, it reduces the frisson of unexpectedness. Third, memes contribute to irony construction in internet communication. At the end of this chapter, the author discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the sentiment analysis and concludes that sentiment analysis could be improved by incorporating other explicit irony markers.

Chapter 9 discusses the problems of non-ironic sarcasm and the death of sarcasm. The non-ironic sarcasm lacks empirical attention as it does not have a clear counterfactual statement like sarcastic irony and its concept is too obscure. Besides, the author believes that language changes over time will affect the clarification of irony and sarcasm as sarcasm will have a broader definition while irony will be skunked.

To conclude, this book provides the readers with a clear picture of what is irony and how irony is signalled. Meanwhile, it points out deficiencies and controversies in the existing research. However, in this book, the author uses some informal expressions such as 'a fly in an ointment', which may cause reading difficulties to learners of English as a second language. Besides, the author does not provide a clear classification of irony in this book as several terms such as situational irony, sarcastic irony and ironic sarcasm are mentioned. All in all, I still recommend this book to all possible readers who are interested in irony, especially those who are eager to know the advances of irony.

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