IRONY AND THE THEATRICAL FRAME OF PERSPECTIVATION

Ioana-Florentina SCĂUNAȘU[G]

Abstract: *Perspectivation represents the principle according to which the communication unfolds in cooperative or conflictual talks, allowing the interchange of convergent or divergent/ contrastive perspectives to occur. Perspectivation or attributing someone a perspective implies two relevant aspects: the setting and the taking of a certain point of view with the purpose of communicating social differences.*

At this theoretical level, we can place irony as a strategy of `setting` a perspectives or voices clash between the dictum and the implicatum. The indirect expression of this evaluative cleft has social consequences, as well as pragmatic involvements in connection to politeness and impoliteness principles.

The ironical speakers indulge themselves in this playful kind of conversation by verbally dissimulating or pretending to be someone who literally praise the ironized victims but implicitly criticize them, and this double talk is interrelated, in our examples, to speech acts and intertextuality, the prototypes of pluriperspectivity and multivoicing.

Keywords: *setting perspectives, voices clash, social differences.*

1. Theoretical preliminaries

In the present article, we are going to theoretically and analytically trace both the concept of "perspectivation" as well as the structure "irony as pretending".

Perspectivity and its synonyms, such as *vision* or *point of view*, reflect an important aspect of human communication, namely that each person gives a different interpretation to the same state of affairs, and people become aware of their own perspective or the others' perspective by means of talking[22]. So this interchange of perspectives cannot be grasped outside verbal communication[23].

The key-expression is *different viewpoints* which implies that perspective can adopt a dichotomic nature[24] that is it might be either consonant or dissonant and this fact

[*] "Zaharia Stancu" School Teacher, Roșiorii de Vede; scaunasu_ioana@yahoo.com

[22] "perspective is grounded in discourse" (Linell, 1998 *apud* Graumann, 2002: 27).

[23] "But, as a rule, it takes others to persuade us to look at or to think about something from a different viewpoint, which means that setting a perspective in another person requires talking to that person" (Graumann, 2002 : 26).

[24] *Monoperspectivity* can be explained in connection to another important concept that is the *egological perspective* which alludes to a type of individualistic way of thinking or self-centredness lifestyle: "If I take it for granted that "I" am the subject and origin of "my" seeing and interpreting the world or even that cogito me cogitare is the ultimate certainty of my existence, I will also take any perspectivity of which I may become aware as originating in myself and any diverging perspective with which I may be confronted as residing in or emanating from other selves (or egos). Theoretically, we conceive of this experience as "egological", making use of Husserl's term that refers to the (transcendental/empirical) Ego, i.e., the center of my consciousness as constitutive subjectivity, preceding all intersubjective constitution" (Husserl, 1950 *apud* Graumann, 2002: 31).On the contrary, *multiperspectivity* or *intersubjective perspectivity* encourages diversity in thinking, feeling or behaving, and explores the idea of perspectives-sharing as a means of negotiating antagonistic viewpoints, underlining the dialogical

BDD-A24543 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:01:06 UTC)

leads to cancellation of the idea of *monoperspectivity* and embracing the notion of *multiperspectivity* (Graumann, 2002: 29-31) with social consequences (on the one hand, we can take into consideration the positive impact that is the variety of ideas, ways of thinking and expressing and, on the other hand, the negative effect namely the fact that the same variety has led so far to a wide range of stereotypes, prejudices, critical or even insulting prototypes of behaviour which amplify a dialogue based rather on aggression and competition than on agreement and lack of conflict).

Although *multiperspectivity* also embraces a negative aspect, sharing perspectives is a necessary prerequisite of human communication because it helps people to know each other or even to reciprocally influence because the "others" may sometimes change their perspectives by adopting "our" perspectives and, starting from this idea, we can discuss about the *setting a perspective* and the *taking of a perspective* (Kallmeyer/Keim, 1996: 286/287 *apud* Kotthoff, 1998: 15)[25] and the two processes can be observed in every day conversation.

However, when it comes to irony, the setting of a perspective or the process of *perspectivation* is not genuine any longer, but it suggests the coexistence of two levels of communication, namely the dictum and the implicatum and here we are already approaching the idea of *double talk* (Goffman, 2003: 218) or the *indirect nature* of language (Searle, 1975: 60-61)[26]. In relation to irony, attributing or setting someone a perspective has a *theatrical character* and it represents the principle which allows the comprehension among interlocutors when they mentally ask themselves: "What did X want to tell me?". The reader has to decode these implicit perspectives by means of inferences, by means of an indirect comparison between the literal form of the ironical enunciation and the context, in order to reveal the ironical speaker's inner meaning which, in the case of illocutionary failure, remains "inaccessible to our immediate awareness" (Wegner & Vallacher, 1997: 16 *apud* Graumann, 2002: 27).

---

side of interpersonal conversation: "Since all "communication presupposes asymmetries" (Linell, 1998: 14), it is that only by mutually taking the perspective of others we are able to communicate and, thereby, to become aware of our own (and others') perspectivity" (Mead, 1934, 1959 *apud* Graumann, 2002 : 31).

[25] "In verbal interaction, the taking into account of the other's perspective, at least up to a certain extent, is a constitutive precondition in order to establish an interactive exchange. As a consequence, verbal interaction is –on a certain level- structured as a process of perspective setting and perspective taking (Graumann, 1989). Perspective setting means that in order to make one's actions comprehensible and to enable others to deal with one's perspective, a speaker has to reveal his/her perspective, at least up to a certain extent. Perspective taking means that recipients have to show how they interpret the manifested perspective, how they relate their own perspective to it, and to what extent they adopt the speaker's perspective, or incorporate it at least partly in their own. Perspective setting implies a claim of social relevance for the manifested perspective, and perspective taking deals with this claim" (Kallmeyer/Keim, 1996: 286/287 *apud* Kotthoff, 1998: 15).

[26] "In indirect speech acts the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and nonlinguistic, together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer. To be more specific, the apparutus necessary to explain the indirect part of indirect speech acts includes a theory of speech acts, certain general principles of cooperative conversation and mutually shared factual background information of the speaker and the hearer, together with an ability on the part of the hearer to make inference" (Searle, 1975: 60-61).

BDD-A24543 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:01:06 UTC)

The theatrical character of irony is not a new piece of information, but it rather relates historically to theoreticians like Grice (1989: 54)[27], Clark & Gerrig (1984 *in* Gibbs & Colston, 2007: 26-27)[28] or Currie (2006: 116)[29], just to mention a few. They all share the same rational consideration and that is, by ironising somebody, the speaker flouts the maxim of quality (or the truth condition) at the literal level, but he also spreads some clues which indirectly lead the reader to recover a secondary illocutionary force corresponding to a derogatory, critical or insulting attitude.

The mechanism of processing the ironical meaning is based on a *voice clash* (Mey, 2006 *in* Mey, 2009: 554) between the perspective set at the dictum level and the perspective set at the implicatum level, taking into account the concept of *evaluation* as well. This means that the traditional view of *irony as opposition* between what is said and what is implied is now replaced with a *clash* between the explicit, generally positive evaluation, and the indirect, generally negative evaluation. The concept of *evaluation* is borrowed by Kotthoff (1998: 16) from Elstermann (1991) and Hartung (1998) and it refers to the mental process according to which the speaker attributes an object, a person or an event a normative value that alternates between the positive and the negative poles. This activity is based on a comparison between the person, the object or the event and the mental standard made of all the relevant attributes to make an "evaluative judgment" (Graumann, 2002: 28).

Starting from these theoretical notes, we can emphasize the idea that irony deals with *polyphony* or *multiperspectivity* or *multivoicing* which have, as a final purpose, the intention of ironizing in an indirect way and, in order for this indirect perspective to be correctly decoded, both the ironical speaker and the reader have to "theatrically" engage in this kind of playful discourse because, without this social jointing, the ironized victim can protest against a perspective which has been attributed to him, but which does not belong to him and, in this case, the ironical game turns into a verbal conflict (Ghiță, 1999).

The purpose of creating the dialogical conventions has to do with the necessity of making legitimate the use of insults or critics, or divergent perspectives, without these affecting someone's public or personal *face/image (*Goffman, 1967, Brown &

[27] "To be ironical is, among other things, to pretend (as the etymology suggests), and while one wants the pretense to be recognized as such, to announce it as a pretense would spoil the effect" (Grice, 1989: 54).

[28] "The pretense theory may be expressed as follows: Suppose S is speaking to A, the primary addressee, and to A, who may be present or absent, real or imaginary. In speaking ironically, S is pretending to be S speaking to A. What S is saying is, in one way or another, patently uninformed or injudicious, worthy of a `hostile or derogatory judgment or a feeling such as indignation or contempt` (Grice, 1978, p. 124). A in ignorance, is intended to miss the pretense, to take S as speaking sincerely. But A, as part of the `inner circle` (to use Fowler`s phrase), is intended to see everything- the pretense, S`s injudiciousness, A`s ignorance, and hence S`s attitude toward S, A, and what S said. S and A may be recognizable individuals (like the TV weather forecaster) or people of recognizable types (like opportunistic politicians)" (Clark&Gerrig, 1984 *in* Gibbs&Colston, 2007: 26-27).

[29] "This suggests a general point about the nature of ironic pretence. The pretence one engages in with irony is partly one of behaviour; one pretends to be doing something which one is not doing: speaking seriously and assertively, seriously asking a question, seriously expressing distaste. But the pretence that is fundamental to irony is not a pretence of doing; it`s a pretence of being. In pretending to assert or whatever, one pretends to be a certain kind of person - a person with a restrictive or otherwise defective view of the world or some part of it" (Currie, 2006: 116).

BDD-A24543 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:01:06 UTC)

Levinson, 1987) because "indirect speech acts are usually considered to be more polite than their literal counterparts" (Huang, 2006 *in* Mey, 2009: 1006).

In conclusion, the reader gets in touch with an indirect message that is less critical than its literal counterpart. So, irony works as an over strategy of tinging or attenuating the *underlying evaluative message* (Schwoebel, Dews, Winner & Srinivas, 2000 *in* Gibbs & Colston, 2007: 254) in order not to split the social relationships between the ironical speaker and his victim, but to fortify them, to allow them to continue and not to vanish away.

In the Romanian parliamentary discourse, the reader is going to identify some of the strategies towards which the Members of Parliament express their option in order to implicitly ironize, such as flouting the truth condition (by means of indirect speech acts), manipulating contra factual presuppositions (generated by attributive structures), resorting to intertextuality (by exploring quotation) or to off-record insults (when it comes to using nicknames).

2. Analytical aspects of perspectivation and irony

(1) Aşadar, stimați colegi parlamentari, vă invit să fiţi buni români şi să votați iniţiativa legislativă pe care cred că o voi depune cât de curând pentru crearea unui fond din care preşedintele să-şi poată cumpăra haine de la firmele favorite. Nu putem permite să-l lăsăm în degringolada modei, iar gândul că mâine, poimâine, ar putea fi văzut într-un second-hand alături de cei pe care îi conduce, mă deprimă atât de tare încât consider că niciun efort nu este prea mare. Medici şi profesori mai avem, dar, până la urmă, preşedintele este unul singur. (Lazăr Constantin, 14 februarie 2011)

(1) So, honourable colleagues, I invite you to be good Romanians and to vote the legislative initiative which I believe I shall hand in as soon as possible in order to create a fond out of which the president should be able to buy himself clothes from his favourite firms. We cannot allow leaving him at the fashion hand and the thought that one day he could be seen in a second-hand shop next to the people he leads, is getting me so depressed that I think no effort is too big. We still have doctors and teachers, but, eventually, the president is only one. (Lazăr Constantin, 14th February 2011)

In (1), if the reader is to consider this enunciation a directive speech act (through the verb "to invite") he might fail into a misinterpretation. In order for this not to happen, the reader must go beyond the literal level and find a secondary communicative intention, namely he must sense the fact that there cannot be such an invitation to vote for a law regarding a fond from where the president may take money and buy expensive clothes. So, what the reader will perceive is a simulated illocutionary force that is the invitation may rather count as a refusal to such a proposal. The reader cannot let himself "trapped" by the literary positive perspective which the speaker has set, but he must recover the ironical intention. That is, the speaker suggests an intention to criticize the lack of preoccupation from the president's side for politics, but instead he shows great concern in the physical appearance. Thereby, this underlying message is really a disguised attack towards the victim's public image.

(2) Domnul ministru care se ocupă de soarta economiei naţionale este cel mai priceput poet al Guvernului României. Este cel care spune poezii şi poveşti de adormit copiii despre cât de bine îi merge astăzi mediului de afaceri. Este ministrul care s-a remarcat cu nimic util economiei româneşti în ultimul an de zile. (Gheorghe Florin, 1 octombrie 2013)

BDD-A24543 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:01:06 UTC)

(2) Mr Minister who is in charge with the fate of the national economy is the most ingenious poet of the Romanian Government. He is the one who keeps telling poems and bed time sleeping stories about how prosperous the business medium is. He is the minister who has remarked by nothing useful to the Romanian economy this year. (Gheorghe Florin, 1st October 2013)

In (2), the attributive structure generates, omitting the collocation "by nothing useful", a double expectancy for the reader: on the one hand, he accepts the idea that the locutor sincerely believes in the qualities of the Romanian Prime Minister because of the appreciative verb "has remarked" and, on the other hand, he cannot have any reason to doubt the truth of the enunciation. Yet, the reader cannot ignore the strategic character of putting the verb "has remarked" (that brings up-to-date the locutor's intention of expressing appreciation towards the political figure with the purpose to save the two images) forward the analytical structure "by nothing useful" (which produces a new presupposition, namely that the locutor implicitly criticizes the one who now becomes the target of his ironizing intention). This indirect attack is much more visible if we notice the locutor's option for an analytical structure "by nothing useful" instead of a synthetic structure "useless" for stressing both the sarcastic critics and the disapproval oriented towards the ironized person.

(3) "În timp ce noi de-abia articulăm câteva cuvinte, domnul Boc este capabil să editeze câteva fraze întregi". Asta spunea cu ceva timp în urmă Elena Băsescu despre idolul politic al Domniei Sale de la acea vreme. Faptul că fiica preşedintelui este în mod evident certată cu şcoala, în general, şi cu limba română, în particular, nu reprezintă un handicap, ci dimpotrivă, o cale bătută spre multiple "succesuri" europarlamentare. (Dragomir Gheorghe, 22 februarie 2011)

(3) "While we hardly utter some words, Mr. Boc is able to write some complete sentences". This is what Elena Băsescu was declaring some time ago regarding her political idol at the time. The fact that the president`s daughter is obviously quarreled with school in general and with the Romanian language in particular does not represent any disadvantage, but on the contrary it represents a straight way towards a lot of euro parliamentary "successes". (Dragomir Gheorghe, 22nd February 2011)

In (3), we can hear two voices: the locutor's voice who is quoting and Elena Băsescu's voice that is being quoted. By resorting to the common knowledge, the reader will update the original meaning of the quoted notion which represents an incorrect form previously used by Elena Băsescu and which the locutor strategically recontextualizes in order to generate a conversational implicature by using cause-effect connectors (if Elena Băsescu does serious expression errors, then it is unlikely for her to be able to lift up to the euro parliamentary performance standards), out of which a voice clash might result and indirectly the intention to ridicule the political character.

(4) De câţiva ani încoace, singurul crez politic al greviştilor de lux ai poporului este repetat cu obstinaţie pe micile ecrane, într-o perpetuă campanie electorală: JOS BĂSESCU! E tot ce au de spus onorabilii colegii noştri din opoziţie în privinţa viitorului naţiunii. La atât se reduce şi proiectul lor de guvernare, în ipoteza absurdă că ar mai ajunge vreodată la putere. Asta a fost singura idee pe care au articulat-o cu prilejul discursului din Parlament rostit de şeful statului. După cum s-a relevat ulterior, guriştii din balconul sălii de şedinţe fuseseră plantaţi acolo de către şeful ăl mare al peneleului, vestitul comic al micului ecran, domnul Antonescu, zis şi Antenescu, din cauza apetenţei sale pentru antenele partidului-televizor. (Niţă Mihai, 12 martie 2010)

BDD-A24543 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:01:06 UTC)

(4) From several years now, the only political belief of the Romanian expensive strikers is obstinately repeated at TV, in an eternal electoral campaign: DOWN WITH BĂSESCU! It`s everything our honourable colleagues from the opposition have to say regarding the future of Romania. This is their entire governing project, hypothetically considering that they will sometimes reach the power again. This was the only idea they uttered during the president`s speech in the Parliament. As it was afterwards revealed, the big mouths guys from the balcony of the conference room had been put there by the big boss of the PNL party, the famous comic of the TV, Mr. Antonescu, also called Antenescu, because of his appetency for all the Antena programmes-party supporters. (Niță Mihai, 12th March 2010)

In (4), if we are to consider the phonological pair "Antonescu"- "Antenescu" as only a playful game that presupposes a switch from the vowel "o" to the vowel "e", then we will not grasp the implicit meaning but we will only remain with the literal message and this means disregarding the felicity conditions of a speech act and implicitly a communication failure. But if we understand the way the nickname "Antenescu" has been formed (namely from the proper name of a Romanian Prime Minister Crin Antonescu which became Antenescu because of his desire to constantly show up at the TV programmes bearing the name Antena), we will also comprehend the real perspective the speaker wanted to communicate that is an intention to ironize, namely to suggest an indirect attack towards Antonescu's ethos or moral profile (he is more concerned with appearing on TV than being preoccupied with parliamentary obligations). So, the reader has to identify the speaker's pretending that he focuses on a genuine game between Antonescu and Antenescu and sense the intention to criticize the parliamentary figure, but not in a direct way because the speaker has to simultaneously save his negative face and his victim's image and also to create his own ethos.

3. Conclusions

Pretending can be put in relation to the term of "responsibility" or "commitment" in the sense that the ironical speaker wants to strategically use language resources so as to create his own ethos and for this to happen he must operate with ambiguity or indirectness.

This way, he assumes responsibility only for the literal perspective, the implicit one belonging to the reader who also becomes "an author".

The contradiction between the explicit and the implicit perspectives must turn into the right path for the reader to recover the speaker's intention to criticize or to ridicule the ironized political characters.

Thereby, perspectivation and the indirect or disimulated nature of the ironical enunciation offer it a "theatrical" or "dramatic" appearance which can be updated through the co-creation act between the speaker and his possible reader.

Bibliography

Brown, P., S. Levinson, *Politeness. Some universals in language usage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987

Currie, G., „Why Irony is Pretence", în S. Nichols (coord.), *The Architecture of Imagination. New essays on Pretence, Possibility and Fiction*, Oxford University Press, 2006

Ghiță, Andreea, *Analiza pragmatică a ironiei*, Universitatea București, București, 1999

Gibbs, R., H. Colston (eds.), *Irony in Language and Thought*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, New York/ London, 2007

Goffman, E., *Viața cotidiană ca spectacol*. Editura comunicare.ro., București, 2003

BDD-A24543 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:01:06 UTC)

Goffman, E., *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour*, Doubleday, New York, 1967
Graumann, F. Carl, „Explicit and implicit perspectivity", în Carl F. Graumann, Werner Kallmeyer (eds.), *Perspective and Perspectivation in Discourse*, John Benjamins B.V., 2002
Grice, H.P, *Studies in the Way of Words*, Harvard University Press, London, 1989
Kotthoff, Helga, „Irony, Quotation, and Other Forms of Staged Intertextuality: Double or Contrastive Perspectivation in Conversation", 1998, *InList No 5*, 1-25
Mey, J. (ed.), *Concise Encyclopedia of Pragmatics*, Elsevier Ltd., Oxford, UK, 2009
Searle, John R., „Indirect speech acts", 1975, în Peter Cole, Jerry L. Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics, vol. 3: Speech Acts*, Academic Press, 1975

Electronic Resources
http://www.cdep.ro/pls/parlam/structura.de?par=A

BDD-A24543 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:01:06 UTC)