A STUDY ON IRONY RELATED TO FEMALE CHARACTERS IN SOME SHORT STORIES BY W.S. MAUGHAM

(Nghiên cứu về phép châm biếm liên quan đến nhân vật nữ trong một số truyện ngắn của W.S.Maugham)

M.A. MINOR PROGRAMME THESIS

Field: English Linguistics
Code: 60220201

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PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale

The term “irony” is derived from the ancient Greek word εἰρωνεία (eirōneia), which means dissimulation. As a rhetorical device, irony refers to the disagreement between the meaning intended by the author and what is actually said.

It is believed that irony plays an important role in literature as one of the most effective rhetorical devices. In some cases, it is even more efficient than a direct statement since it helps create a private joke between the author and the readers. Besides, irony is also intended to provoke the readers into critical thinking and analyzing a situation. By comparing and contrasting what appears to be the case, and what is actually the case, the readers can arrive at a better understanding of the author’s intent. For example, in “Lemony Snicket: The Unauthorized Autobiography”, Snicket writes:

“Today was a very cold and bitter day, as cold and bitter as a cup of hot chocolate; if the cup of hot chocolate had vinegar added to it and was placed in a refrigerator for several hours.”

As can be seen from the above sentence, Snicket makes an enjoyable ironic statement by creating a structure that is more complex than what a reader may usually expect.

In terms of pragmatics, irony can also be considered a subject of interest which has been studied by many linguists such as Grice (1975), Amante (1981), Kaufer (1981), Muecke (1982), Brown and Levinson (1987), and Hutcheon (1992). However, irony has still remained its attraction as well as complexity as Balconi and Amenta (2008, p.9) stated:
“Although frequent in our everyday conversations, irony remains a complex communicative and pragmatic phenomenon whose correct decoding requires specific linguistic, communicative and cognitive abilities.”

Since how irony works, positively or negatively, depends on several factors such as people’s taste, points of view, habits, education, it seems to be really difficult to fully understand irony in daily communication and especially literary works.

Being inspired by the complexity of irony in literary works, the writer of this thesis would like to investigate how ironic expressions are employed in some fiction writings. When she approached British Literature, she was strongly impressed by W.S. Maugham. Maugham is a famous English writer whose writings are characterized by narrative facility, simplicity of style and an ironic point of view. After reading a collection of Maugham’s short stories, the writer was fascinated by the way Maugham portrayed his characters, especially female characters. They were described not only specifically but also vividly.

All of these inspire the study: “A Study On Irony Related To Female Characters In Some Short Stories By W.S. Maugham”

2. Aims of the study

The main aims of the research are as follows:
- To identify different ironic expressions used in the development of female characters in some short stories by W.S. Maugham
- To realize the role and contribution of these ironic expressions to the development of female characters in the selected stories.
- To propose an insight into Maugham’s use of irony
In order to achieve the above aims, the study is conducted to find out the answer to the following research questions:

1. What are the ironic expressions used in the development of female characters in some short stories by W.S. Maugham?
2. What are the pragmatic functions of these ironic expressions?
3. What are the features of Maugham’s use of irony displayed through the selected short stories?

3. Scope of the study
This study focuses on the ironic expressions in only some short stories written by W.S. Maugham. The main emphasis of the study is put on identifying these ironic expressions and their pragmatic functions to propose an insight into Maugham’s use of irony.

4. Significance of the study
Theoretical significance: This study is expected to verifying the correctness and significance related to pragmatic theories of irony by working on some fiction works

Practical significance: This thesis helps gaining an insight into the use of ironic expressions in some short stories by W.S. Maugham.

5. Design of the study
The study consists of three main parts:
Part 1: Introduction
In this part, the writer would like to present the rationale, the aims of the study, the research questions, the significance and the scope of the study as well as the research methodology.
Part 2: Development
This is the most important part of the study which consists of the following contents: Review of theory and related literature, Data collection and analysis, and Findings and discussion.

Part 3: Conclusion
In the final part, the writer will briefly present the summary of the study, the limitations, the implications in language teaching and learning as well as some suggestions for further study.
PART II: DEVELOPMENT
CHAPTER 1: REVIEW OF THEORY AND RELATED LITERATURE

In this chapter, the writer presents the theoretical background related to characterization, irony and irony in pragmatics. Basic information about W.S. Maugham as well as previous studies on irony is also briefly reviewed.

1.1. Theoretical Background
a. Characterization

According to Harrison (1998, p.51), characterization is the concept of creating characters for a narrative.

Writers build characters by revealing their appearance, speech, thoughts, actions and other characters’ reactions.

Regarding appearance, writers portray characters by describing their looks, clothes, and demeanor. For example, in “A Christmas Carol”, Charles Dickens described Scrooge with the following lines:

“The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shriveled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue…”

Apart from appearance, characters can be created through speech. If a story is told by a first-person narrator, he reveals his personal trait as he tells his own story as well as what he thinks or feels by using pronouns like I, me or we. However, there are some cases in which some first-person narrators mislead or lie to the audience. Besides, dialogue also reveal a lot about characters and their relationships with each other. Therefore, when analyzing the characterization in a story, readers should pay attention to what characters say and do not say and how they respond to each other.
Concerning actions, what characters do and how they treat each other often reveal the most about them. By observing characters’ actions, readers are able to determine what characters’ personality is, what motivates them and how they deal with conflict.

Additionally, writers can take readers into the characters’ minds to describe their thoughts and feelings. As reading, readers are able to investigate whether the characters’ thoughts and feelings match their speech and actions. Last but not least, writers also build a character by describing how other characters react to him/her.

In terms of types, there are two types of characterization: direct and indirect. While direct characterization tells readers directly what characters are like or what their motives are, indirect characterization shows readers the characters through speech, appearance, thoughts, actions and other characters’ reactions but allow readers to decide what characters are like.

b. An overview of irony

Definition of Irony

Until now, it seems that there is no persistent definition for the term “irony” since it depends on the study field in which irony is researched.

The term “irony” has its root in Greek and derives from εἰρωνεία (eirōneía), which means dissimulation. Nowadays, irony is widely used to refer to a contradiction between appearance / expectation and reality. As a figure of speech, irony refers to the disagreement between the meaning intended by the author and what is actually said.

According to Thompson (1948, p.10), irony can be understood as
“a discrepancy or incongruity between expression and meaning, appearance and reality, expectation and event. What we notice and then call irony is a striking discrepancy which is artfully arranged to draw attention to itself, or which, through occurring by chance, likewise compels our attention.”

Specifically, Muecke (1969, p. 53) defined irony as
“ways of speaking, writing, acting, behaving, painting, etc., in which the real or intended meaning presented or evoked intentionally quite other than, and incompatible with, the ostensible or pretended meaning.”

Besides, briefly, Galperin (1971, p.142) claimed that irony was a rhetorical device which based on recognition of the logic – dictionary meaning and contextual meaning while these two coexisting meanings were opposite.

From these views, it can be concluded that irony means far more than just “saying one thing meaning another”. The term is used to refer to the way of using words to express something different from and often opposite to their literal meaning. In short, an expression or utterance is considered as an ironic one when it is characterized by a contrast between apparent and intended meanings.

Types of irony

There are two classifications of irony; while the first one is based on what the ironist expects from his semantic displacement, the second one takes modern theories of rhetoric as its basis.

- Classification based on semantic displacement

First and foremost, irony can be classified on the basis of what the ironist expects from his semantic displacement. These are classic irony, romantic irony, and critical irony. (Erdogan, 2010)
REFERENCES


