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

(Mã 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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ABSTRACT

This study is carried out in an attempt to investigate ironic expressions and their pragmatic functions in the development of female characters in some short stories written by W.S. Maugham. However, because of the data sources and knowledge, the writer will only focus on five short stories: “The Three Fat Women of Antibes”, “The Escape”, “The Luncheon”, “Louise”, and “Winter Cruise”. In order to conduct this thesis, the writer approaches irony from the stand point of Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1969). Through identifying and analyzing ironic expressions, it is revealed that in the selected short stories, verbal irony is the most widely used among three types. Verbal and dramatic irony perform representative and expressive speech acts which describe the female characters’ appearance, personalities, dialogues, and express the narrator’s feelings and attitude towards the female characters. Meanwhile, situational irony functions as ironic directives which lead readers to expecting a situation which is contrary to what actually happens. In the selected short stories, W.S. Maugham often combined two or three types of irony. Apart from using irony as a means to mock, Maugham also employed it to amuse and to emphasize the female characters’ special features. Some implications in language teaching and learning English are then drawn out. Hopefully, the thesis will serve as a useful reference for students who would like to enhance their knowledge about British Literature, the application of Speech Act Theory into studying irony as well as the translation of irony.
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PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale

The term “irony” is derived from the ancient Greek word εἰρωνεία (eirōneía), 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.
REFERENCES


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