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## FRAME AS A COGNITIVE MODEL OF IRONIC MEANING

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### Abstract

*The concept of irony seems erroneously easy for understanding on the level of 'folk linguistics'. Nevertheless, the cognitive aspects of perception and comprehension pose the question of ironic blindness, that is when the interlocutors cannot decipher or retrieve the implied meaning. The problem of adequate comprehension of irony arises to its structural, linguistic and cognitive structures. If so-called direct or negative irony is more obvious for the interlocutors and thus is perceived almost unmistakably, the positive irony creates numerous problems for them.*

*This study investigates the irony comprehension from the cognitive point of view. Based on the analyzed in the paper text fragments the author shows that in the lingo-cognitive approach to understanding irony, both linguistic and non-linguistic levels are reflected. It provides an analysis of linguistic factors in their connection with the organization of the conceptual system. The starting point for the formation of ironic discourse, particularly in English journalistic texts, is the polysegmental concept of IRONY, objectified by various language tools of different levels. The explication of ironic discourse in English-language journalism occurs through the ironic framing of the message, serving as a cognitive model of ironic meaning. The paper proposes the term 'ironic frame' as a designation of an integrated / 'hybrid' language-thinking structure that arises in the mind of a native speaker due to the interpenetration and interaction of several mental spaces, associated with a verbal expression of negative, disapproving, critical or skeptical attitude to the object of irony.*

**Keywords:** irony, frame, mental space, cognitive model, cognitive unit.

### 1. Introduction.

It is possible to find historical and current studies of irony in different fields, such as anthropology, literature studies, philosophy, philosophy of humor, music, psychology, linguistics and cognitive science point of view.

The classical definition of irony is “the idea of opposition of what is meant and what is said”. Still, this approach, which is universally acknowledged, does not explain this cognitive and linguistic phenomenon.

While most people very naturally create and appreciate ironic language, without having to exert a lot of deliberate effort, some can find it difficult to define it. To attempt a taxonomy and definition of a phenomenon so nebulous that it disappears as one approaches it is a desperate adventure (Muecke, 1969).

We will not cast a critical glance at the traditional and contemporary definitions of irony. Our task is to propose the model of ironic statement understanding from a cognitive paradigm. Irony is usually analyzed from the pragmatic perspective (Attardo, 2002; Ito & Takizawa, 1996; Kreuz & Caucci, 2009; Sperber & Wilson, 1998), cognitive theories – Graded Salience Theory (Giora, 1991, 1995, 1997), neo-Gricean approach (Clark & Gerrig, 1984), surrealistic irony (Kapogianinni, 2011) just a few to mention. Still, all these approaches, though they have contributed a lot to the general analysis of ironic utterances, have their limitations and cannot explain numerous ironic statements. Moreover, as irony has been seen as a negative statement in classical works (for instance, it was, and is still, considered to be the violation of Quality Maxim), these theories do not shed light on such a phenomenon as a positive irony.

## **2. Aims and Objectives.**

*The aim* of this study is to examine cognitive models of an ironic frame. Irony is analyzed from the perspective of a cognitive paradigm and is considered to be a cognitive phenomenon. Irony can be aptly conceptualized as a cognitive multilayer phenomenon which comprises numerous mental units, background knowledge and mental spaces. Thus, one of the study *objectives* was to investigate and elaborate on the process of irony perception and comprehension.

## **3. Methodology.**

Irony is a complex cognitive and linguistic phenomenon therefore it cannot be analyzed within the scope of a single theory. General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), The Conceptual Integration Theory (CIT), and The Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH) have been chosen as the theoretical foundations of this study.

## **4. Results and Discussion.**

The cognitive approach studies the role of human factor in cognitive processes, emphasizing the individual and collective knowledge of communication participants, their understanding, and their vision of the world. It is assumed that each person lives in her cognitive space, which is reflected in their speech. In this case, the communication process can be successful or unsuccessful depending on the degree of identity of these spaces.

To date, the main achievements of cognitive linguistics are represented by theories of conceptualization and categorization of the world and mechanisms of mental information processing. Fundamental to the study of cognitive-communicative orientation is the position of cognitive science that “the world is not reflected, but interpreted, [...] man not only perceives the world but constructs it” (Фрумкина, 1999, p. 90).

Understanding irony as a cognitive phenomenon involves taking into account the data of many scientific areas. Simultaneously, the cognitive nature of irony, which is a consequence of its understanding in the perspective of the anthropocentric approach, allows integrating the experience of all approaches to its study.

Essential for understanding the cognitive essence of irony is the awareness of the multilayered structure, the presence of explicit and implicit layers expressed in antiquity and engraved in the very name of this ontological phenomenon (from Old Greek εἰρωνεία *eirōneía* literally “pretend”). Therefore, those researchers and scientists who call the

ironic contradiction an integral part of irony are undoubtedly right (Беляева, 2015). Contradiction as the “most common element” of all types of humor (one of which is irony) is postulated in the theories of frames by M. Minsky (Minsky, 1988) and semantic scripts by V. Raskin (Raskin, 1985). The contradiction is the property, which generally allows the existence of irony as an ontological phenomenon.

In irony, the explicit meaning contradicts the implicit, the statement acquires the opposite meaning due to the unusual context, the way the statement is used contradicts the pragmatic rules of its use, there is a discrepancy between the proclaimed and the real state of affairs. Pretending is an emotional aspect of irony that distinguishes it from a purely rational understanding of contradictions. The essence of ironic deception, in contrast to hypocrisy as deception, as an immoral attempt to disguise a lie as the truth, is that what is hidden in the process of irony must be revealed. “Irony is designed to understand the true meaning, it does not hide the truth, but expresses it” (Беляева, 2015; Ермакова, 2015, p. 221).

Understanding irony as a multilayered phenomenon determined the essence of the original approach to its study, proposed in J. H. Ruiz's work. In his vision of the phenomenon of irony, the scientist relies on the concept of mental space introduced into cognitive linguistics by G Fauconnier and M. Turner (2002), which is the central concept of the theory of mental spaces (Mental Space Theory) and the theory of conceptual integration (Blending Theory). It denotes cognitive constructs that are modified continuously, as they are built-in real-time in discursive activity and stored in the speaker's memory. Appealing to theories of mental spaces and conceptual blending and combining them, J. H. Ruiz considers irony as a design of two different mental spaces in which the real features or attributes of a phenomenon contrast with the expectations of the recipient (Ruiz, 2009, p. 155). According to the scientist's point of view, the functioning of ironic contrast can be detected by applying the theory of conceptual integration of Fauconnier – Turner (ibid., p. 154), which is widely used as an effective method of studying dynamic (occasional) linguistic phenomena and contextual formations, which include ironic statements.

Mental spaces are in many respects similar to traditional cognitive models, frames structure them, and other mental schemes removed in text processing and correlated with individual spheres of the real or imaginary world (Дойчик, 2011, p. 114). Simultaneously, mental spaces are based on background knowledge and exist in the human mind, not in the form of ready-made structures, but arise again and again in the process of discourse (Fauconnier, Turner, 199, p. 276–278). Opposite mental spaces are constructed directly in an ironic statement. Thus, the first entrance space makes a lingual unit (ironic statement), and the second is based on a real cognitive environment. The generic space has the structure needed to adjust the correlations between the input spaces. As a result of combining and interacting conceptual projections of two different, contextual-oppositional mental spaces, an ironic assessment is created, and a new meaning (blended space) arises, the essence of which is that the speaker expresses, with the opposite in mind, in order to achieve a specific contextual effect.

Ruiz claims that even if the input spaces are not opposed to each other in content, they can still contain some contrasting information, which creates irony (Ruiz, 2009, p. 156–167). It can be seen in the following **example (1)**:

*There's nothing we like more than a dash of salmonella wrapped in a deceased calf's spine (ST10.03.02).*

Not essentially conflicting mental spaces, represented by the basic tokens like and salmonella (bacteria that live in low-quality food and can cause infectious disease), are integrated into one statement and generate an ironic connotation.

Researchers emphasize the complexity of the cognitive process of decoding ironic meaning. Thus, according to the French philosopher and language theorist J. Bataille, the difficulty of recognizing the irony of discourse is due primarily to the fact that "it involves the author's and reader's cognitive spaces, which are connected by a verbal form of text space" (Батай, 1994, p. 16).

Cognitive units, which are a result of human mental activity and while undergoing verbalization, appear in the form of a frame that determines the semantic framework of future utterances and focuses on the volume and content of cognitive structures in the process of its linguistic embodiment.

As widely known, the concept of "frame" was first introduced into wide circulation by American scientist M. Minsky. According to the scientist's interpretation proposed in the work "Frames for the presentation of knowledge" (Minsky, 1975). According to Charles Fillmore, the author of the frame semantics theory, who introduced the term into wide scientific circulation, "the frame is a unified schematization of experience" (Fillmore 1988, p. 54). Frame is "a universal category that combines a variety of human knowledge, experience, and which is characterized by maximum level of formalization and encyclopedic knowledge" (Никонова, 2008, p. 224). According to the conclusion of scientists (Павлова, 2014.), the idea of introducing such a unit as a frame was to concentrate all knowledge about a particular class of objects or events in a single data structure, rather than distribute them among smaller mental models such as logical formulas or generating rules (ibid, p. 120).

In the development of cognitive linguistics, the understanding of the frame as a two-level structure of nodes and relationships, which includes: 1) vertex nodes or macro-proposal (topic), which contain all the data always valid for the situation and 2) terminal nodes (terminals), or slots that are filled with data from a specific practical situation and are often presented as subframes.

Thus, introduced into the modern scientific paradigm as a model of knowledge presentation, the frame in the course of cognitive linguistics development begins to be thought of as a structure of knowledge that correlates with the actual verbal, linguistic signs (Скрипко, 2017, p. 29). Cognitively mediated formations that provide communication between the mental and speech levels, connecting the frame's nodes with the verbal components of the semantic structure of the verbal implementation, are the slots that define the semantic framework of the frame. Slots activate the frame, providing reproduction of the entire structure of the typical thematic situation in general.

As a reflection of the non-language situation, the frame includes a relatively free set of slots (subframes) determined by the prototypes' social, cultural, economic, political, and individual conditions.

A complete and comprehensive representation of each situation is carried out using not one frame but the frame system, which is a set of linguistic and cognitive guidelines that organize and represent the individual's worldview within a particular socio-cultural context and discourse (Скрипко, 2017, p. 29).

The development of the theory of frames and cognitive semantics determines, as stated by the Ukrainian linguist F. Batsevych (Бацевич, 2006, p. 93), the increase in the use of frame analysis methods, the logical consequence of which are attempts to reconstruct the frames taking into account the communicative intention of the sender of the message. For example, Lviv researcher O. Kuzyk uses the concept of an invective frame in her Ph.D. work (Кузык, 2019).

Such tendencies in modern linguistics create a precedent for the separation of the cognitive structure, which can be described as an ironic frame.

Based on the theory of conceptual integration (blend theory) by M. Turner and J. Fauconnier, in which blend is thought of as a mental space (frame, script) that arises as a result of mixing or integration of two or more mental spaces, an ironic frame can be represented as a blend – a “hybrid” or integrated space, which arises as a result of the merger of different mental spaces and, imitating the roles and properties of these source spaces, acquires its structure and new properties.

The ironic blend arises as a result of the ironic intention of the addressee, which determines the specific for irony “unacceptable combination of objects”. This allows us to understand the mechanism of action of frames in the perception of the ironic effect, i.e., the logic that follows human consciousness in deciphering the implicit (ironic) meaning and determining the universal algorithm of irony. As rightly observed by O. Bryukhanov, usually, the ironic effect arises from the interaction of two frames, the first of which presents a stereotypical situation corresponding to the expectations of the reader or listener, and the second – crosses these expectations (Брюханов, 2004).

I. Kotyurova, analyzing the emergence of irony from the standpoint of frame theory, emphasizes that two prerequisites are fundamental for recognizing irony. First, the incoming information must be more or less in conflict with the fixed frames in mind, and secondly, this contradiction should be perceived not as a mistake – the author of the statement or their frames – but as a deliberate intention of the addresser (Котюрова, 2007).

This awareness is based on the listeners’ confidence that the author of the statement assumes that they have the frames that they consciously contradict in their ironic statement. The source of such confidence can be general knowledge of some information or experience, such as universal values, or some relevant and much-discussed topic in the press, or the previous context.

**Example 2**

*Having lost more than 13,000 people in an ongoing conflict with its belligerent neighbor, Ukraine was now being told to make a deal with the aggressor, because – according to President Trump – “President Putin would like to do something.” (DB 04.10.19).*

Ironic modeling occurs through the interaction of two frames. The first of them – “RUSSIA-AGGRESSOR,” contains well-known information “13 thousand Ukrainians died because of the military conflict provoked by Russia”; the second contradicts the content of the first – “Ukrainians are offered to cooperate with the aggressor, who claims the role of peacekeeper”. The consequence of such cognitive dissonance is irony.

**Example 3**

*But we already know the truth about Putin. People laughed when Bush said he'd looked into Putin's soul and saw a good man (NYP 13.04.10).*

The ironic effect arises from a presupposition of the statement. We already know the truth about Putin. This knowledge makes it impossible to see the Russian ruler as a good man, as a result of which President Bush, who publicly expresses such an opinion, becomes an object of ridicule. Irony in this context is manifested as a deliberate violation of the causal link between the well-known information which is expressed in the presupposition and the illogical conclusion of the object of irony.

**Example 4**

*John McCain <...>looked into Vladimir Putin's eyes and saw “a K, a G, and a B.” (BG 27.03.17).*

The irony of the statement is a result of the information actualization which is contained in the frames “KGB (KGB – repressive organization)” and “V. Putin is a former

KGB officer,” and their textual content by using the statement as mentioned above by J. Bush as a precedent text.

Thus, based on the above considerations and conclusions of scientists, later in our work, we will consider the ironic frame as an integrated / “hybrid” language-thinking structure that arises in the mind of the native speaker due to interpenetration and interaction of several mental spaces, associated with verbally expressed negative, disapproving, critical or skeptical attitude towards the object of irony.

However, in some situations, such an ironic blend can be used as a means of manipulation, speech aggression, and entertainment purposes.

For example, in an article with the ironically labeled title “The Perils of Going Off Script” from “The National Review” (**example 5**):

*President Trump gave one of his rally speeches Thursday in North Carolina, which went on ... and on ... and on. I believe it was clocked at close to 90 minutes. The president obviously enjoys these performances, and his favorite parts are when he wings it, departing from the prepared teleprompter script (NR15.10.20).*

With the help of irony (repetition went on... and on... and on; the use of the verb construction wings it), a comic, somewhat grotesque image of a narcissistic politician who loves a variety of performances is created.

A striking example of the use of irony as conditional aggression, we find, in particular, in the description that former US President Barack Obama gave his political opponent – Senator Edward Cruz (**example 6**):

*Galileo believed the Earth revolves around the sun. Ted Cruz believes the Earth revolves around Ted Cruz (Tm 01.05.16).*

In this case, his opponent's ironic comparison with Galileo, the figurative meaning of the phrase “The earth revolves around Ted Cruz” “works” to lower the image of a politician, creating the image of a short-sighted, arrogant man who is focused on his personality.

Thus, the considered examples show that the linguistic mechanism of irony is a violation of the text linearity, in the simultaneous presence of two meanings (superficial and deep), as a result of which two semantic fields appear in the text, contrasting with each other. As a result of the interaction of frames, the first of which is responsible for the accuracy of the information, and the second – for fictitiousness, there is a paradox of understanding (Брюханов, 2004), which consists in the concurrent presence within one statement of mutually exclusive principles – truth and falsehood. Thus, knowledge works in two modules – in the module of direct perception, which allows correlating the content of expression with reality, and in the module of fictitiousness, which denies the first possibility (Брюханов, 2004).

Thus, the specificity of the cognitive model of ironic utterance lies in the contradictory / contrasting setting of frames. The application of the method of frame analysis allows outlining the mechanism of irony: the contradiction inherent in irony arises due to the collision of two oppositely directed frames; moreover, the first frame implies a stereotypical situation that meets the expectations of the reader or listener, and the second frame, as can be seen from the examples, crosses these expectations.

As an expression of a particularly stereotyped situation, the ironic frame presupposes the author's presence/sender of the message (explicit or implicit), ironic intention, object of irony. It is a specific model of constructing the statement's sender to realize the ironic intention as a global communicative goal.

### 5. Conclusion.

The analyzed text fragments show that in the lingo-cognitive approach to understanding irony, both linguistic and non-linguistic levels are reflected. It provides an analysis of linguistic factors in their connection with the organization of the conceptual system. In this case, language structures are considered through the prism of general human knowledge about the world, the individual's experience of interaction with the environment, and their (experience) of psychological, communicative, and cultural factors, subjective and evaluative, usually critical development of reality.

The starting point for the formation of ironic discourse, particularly in English journalistic texts, is the concept of IRONY, which is polysegmental, has its structure, and is objectified by various language tools of different levels.

The explication of ironic discourse in English-language journalism occurs through the ironic framing of the message. The paper proposes the term “ironic frame” as a designation of an integrated / “hybrid” language-thinking structure that arises in the mind of a native speaker due to the interpenetration and interaction of several mental spaces, associated with a verbal expression of negative, disapproving, critical or skeptical attitude to the object of irony.

The lexical content of an ironic frame uses a vast arsenal of language tools, and ironic framing is based on several models, the specificity of which is determined by the nature of the logical connections between the frames that constitute an ironic blend.

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### **Анотація**

Сутність іронії вдається оманливо легкою для розуміння на рівні так званої ‘народної лінгвістики’. Проте, когнітивні аспекти сприйняття та розуміння виявляють проблему іронічної сліпоти, коли інтерлок’ютери не можуть зрозуміти іронічну сутність повідомлення. Проблема адекватного сприйняття іронічного висловлення криється у складній когнітивній та лінгвістичній структурі означеного явища. Якщо ‘традиційна’ негативна іронія сприймається безпомилково більшістю інтерлок’ютерів, то позитивна іронія викликає когнітивні складнощі.

Стаття присвячена інтерпретації іронії з когнітивної точки зору. Аналізуючи фрагменти текстів, автор демонструє, що застосування лінгво-когнітивного підходу до розуміння іронії дає змогу виявити її прояви як на лінгвістичному, так і нелінгвістичному рівні. У статті запропоновано аналіз лінгвістичних факторів відносно організації концептуальної системи. За відправну точку для формування іронічного дискурсу, зокрема в англійських журналістських текстах, є полісегментарний концепт *IRONY*, що об’єктивується за допомогою різних мовних інструментів на різних рівнях.

Експлікація іронічного дискурсу а англійському журналізмі відбувається завдяки іронічному обрамленню (побудові фрейму) повідомлення, що слугує когнітивною моделлю іронічного значення. Ми пропонуємо новий термін ‘іронічний фрейм’ як означення інтегрованої лінгво-ментальної структури, яка виникає у свідомості мовця завдяки інтерпретації взаємодії та взаємопроникнення декількох ментальних просторів, які асоціюються з вербальним висловленням негативної, критичної або скептичної оцінки до об’єкта іронії.

**Ключові слова:** іронія, фрейм, ментальний простір, когнітивна модель, когнітивні одиниці.