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THE PRAGMATIC MODELS OF UNDERSTANDING SARCASM

The aim of the present paper is to analyze the pragmatic theories of irony and sarcasm, namely, the Cooperative Principle, the Standard Pragmatic Model, the Echoic Mention Theory, the Pretense Theory, and the Echoic Reminder Theory to demonstrate the pragmatic understanding of sarcasm in theoretical studies, and to develop a relevant model for sarcasm interpretation applicable in various contexts. The introduced features of the presented models allow us to highlight some challenging aspects of the pragmatic insights of sarcasm. Several examples from academic studies, fiction, TV series, and TedTalk videos are analyzed to examine the suggested frameworks in terms of pragmatic comprehension of sarcastic language and single out a combined model of sarcasm analysis to assist further practical research.

Key words: *sarcasm, irony, pragmatics, Cooperative Principle, Standard Pragmatic Model, Echoic Mention Theory, Pretense Theory, Reminder Theory*

The pragmatic studies of irony and sarcasm have been in the scope of research of various scholars /Grice, 1975, 1989; Brown, 1980; Sperber, Wilson, 1981; Clark, Gerrig, 1984; Kreuz, Glucksberg, 1989; Glucksberg, 1995; Giora, 1997; Attardo, 2000; Gibbs, Colston, 2007/. The current article deals with the pragmatic theories of irony and sarcasm suggested by the theorists of pragmatic language studies, and the discussion of singling out a relevant pragmatic model of understanding sarcasm. Several examples are analyzed to support the relevance of the application of the suggested model.

The debate around the pragmatic knowledge of interpreting ironic utterances has been on stage since the Gricean theory of *Cooperative Principle* (1975) where he suggested that ironic implicatures appear with an apparent breach or violation of the maxim of Quality (1989). In Kaufer's terms, ironic utterances tend to violate all maxims, namely, Quantity, Quality, Relevance, and Manner, of Grice's CP (Cooperative Principle) /Kaufer, 1981: 501/. In a later study, Attardo discussed the same notion as well referring to the violation of the maxims of Quantity and Relation to trigger ironic implicatures /Attardo, 2000: 799/.

The three steps of interpreting sarcastic utterances are represented in a framework that Gibbs calls the *Standard Pragmatic Model* /Gibbs, Colston, 2007/. He believes that those steps fall short in answering essential questions regarding the comprehension of a sarcastic intended meaning of the utterance.

The distinction between literal and non-literal meanings was the focus of the pragmatic studies of irony and sarcasm until a completely new insight was suggested by Sperber and Wilson (1981) which is the distinction between the use and mention of utterances. The theory was later tested on experimental grounds by Jorgensen et al. (1984). However, this theory was strongly criticized by Clark and Gerrig in their *Pretense Theory of Irony* which proposed that in being ironic the speaker is pretending an attitude rather than mentioning a previously expressed utterance, and he/she intends the listener to discover the pretense as well as the intended attitude towards the audience and the utterance /Clark, Gerrig, 1984: 121/.

In their study of the *Echoic Reminder Theory* of verbal irony, Kreuz and Glucksberg conducted several experiments to assert the listener's perception of sarcasm when the speaker alludes to a familiar state of affairs /Kreuz, Glucksberg, 1989: 374/. This theory of sarcastic irony claims that positive statements are more likely to be perceived as sarcastic than negative ones.

Thus, we are inclined to analyze all these above-mentioned theories of pragmatic understanding of sarcasm and generate a relevant model in view to apply it for further practical research.

In his famous article "Logic and Conversation", Grice (1975) discusses the so-called non-conventional implicatures and represents special categories of *maxims* of Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. In his terms, these conversational implicatures are a maximally effective exchange of information and rational behavior for successful communication. He calls this strategy the *Cooperative Principle* and explains each conversational category as such:

- *Quantity* – Make your contribution as informative as is required and do not make your contribution more informative than is required;
- *Quality* – Do not say what you believe to be false and do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence;
- *Relation* – Be relevant;
- *Manner* – Avoid obscurity of expression, avoid ambiguity, be brief, and be orderly /Grice, 1975: 45-46/.

At the first sight, in the case of sarcastic implicatures, as Grice discusses in a later study (1989) we encounter a breach or violation of the maxim of Quality since the sarcastic intention of the speaker does not correspond to the category of "do not say what you believe to be false". However, as noticed in a Wilson study on the pragmatics of verbal irony, the interpretation of a sarcastic utterance does not only depend on the hearer's ability to identify that the speaker has violated the maxim of

Quality but also on how that sarcastic implicature is derived /Wilson, 2006: 1725/. Wilson considered that sarcastic implicatures do not violate the maxim of Quality for a number of reasons. One of them deals with the problem of whether a proposition is simply expressed or asserted. To understand the presented notion let us have a look at the following examples:

(1) a. *What a surprise!*

b. *It is not a surprise.*

If the sarcastic utterance (1a) is expressing a proposition with a commitment to its truth by implicating (1b) then Grice's framework is right about the violation of the Quality maxim. However, Wilson challenges the framework by introducing the idea of whether saying something is *asserting* a proposition with a commitment to the truth of the proposition that is expressed literally and, in this case, there is no violation of the Quality maxim /Wilson, 2006: 1726/. Another reason that the Quality maxim might not be violated is the usage of sarcastic understatements:

(2) *Humility is not his best quality.*

In this example, the speaker does not violate the category "do not say what you believe to be false", because he/she expresses a literal meaning of the utterance that does correlate with the implicature of the utterance. As a matter of fact, the felicity condition of the utterance is not violated either since the listener does not question the truthfulness of the expressed meaning. Wilson believes that in the analysis of sarcastic implicatures it is not the Quality maxim that is violated first but instead the maxims of Quantity and Relation, namely, the speaker's contribution to the informativeness and relevancy of the utterance /Wilson, 2006: 1727/. To justify this statement, we need to mention an earlier Sperber and Wilson notice where they demonstrate that sarcastic utterances do not implicate an opposite meaning but rather express less truthfulness /Sperber, Wilson, 1981: 300/. For instance, in a situation when someone arrives a lot late at a meeting the speaker might sarcastically say:

(3) *I guess you are a bit late.*

This looks like the utterance does not violate the maxim of Quality, meanwhile, it does violate the maxims of Quantity and Relation since the speaker's contribution is not informative enough and is also irrelevant. In this respect, Attardo believes that Grice's framework suffers from a crucial flaw since not only the violation of Quality but Quantity and Relation maxims as well might be a cause of an ironic statement /Attardo, 2000: 799/. The concerned notion is also discussed in an earlier Kaufer study where he assumes that ironic utterances tend to violate all maxims /Kaufer, 1981: 501/.

Thus, the represented concepts allow us to expand the scope of understanding of the sarcastic nature of language and consider that the *Cooperative Principle* is

restricted to provide a complete insight into the recognition of sarcastic utterances in various contexts.

Gibbs believes that most of the interest in sarcasm comes from linguistic, philosophical, and literary theorists, who have been primarily concerned with a rationalistic account of the factors involved in understanding sarcasm. The most traditional view which Gibbs calls the *Standard Pragmatic Model* proposes that a hearer must first analyze an expression's literal interpretation before deriving its nonliteral, sarcastic meaning /Cutler, 1974; Grice, 1975; Searle, 1979/. Sarcastic utterances are interpreted in three steps. A person must:

   a) *compute the context-independent, literal meaning of the utterance;*

   b) *decide whether the literal meaning is the speaker's intended meaning;*

   c) *if the literal interpretation is inappropriate, compute the nonliteral meaning by assuming the opposite of the literal interpretation* /Gibbs, Colston, 2007: 174/.

However, this approach does not correlate with the cases when people do not typically concentrate on the literal meaning of non-literal utterances until their conveyed meanings are discovered. For example, the speaker might allude to a previously mentioned utterance by saying:

(4) *No wonder you knew it.*

In this situation, the listener had mentioned something that would happen, and the speaker's sarcastic intention cannot be conveyed immediately because the literal meaning of the utterance does not contradict the intended non-literal meaning, thus at least on this ground, it is hard for the listener to recognize the sarcastic intention of the speaker.

There are a number of reasons why the *Standard Pragmatic Model* might fall short in answering some questions concerning the pragmatic analysis of sarcasm. The first one is that people usually take no longer time to analyze the literal meanings of non-literal expressions before understanding their intended meanings /Gibbs, 2007: 174/. This statement is supported by several experiments /Gibbs, 1979/ which demonstrate that people identify the non-literal meanings of indirect speech acts without first recognizing the literal interpretations. Then, it is false to assume that the literal meanings of utterances are automatically determined before the non-literal ones /Glucksberg, Gildea, Bookin, 1982/.

These statements suggest that *Standard Pragmatic Model* may not be an accurate account of the processes involved in understanding sarcasm. The model has great difficulty in specifying exactly how hearers arrive at speakers' sarcastic intentions. For example, if your friend says "Thanks", when he or she does not really appreciate what you have done, is inappropriate and you are forced to render it appropriate by determining in what way the sentence and speaker meanings

differ. Sarcastic interpretation is usually assumed to be the opposite of the literal meaning. In this case, your friend's opposite comment would be something like "No thanks", but this does not capture the true sarcastic intention of the speaker /Gibbs, Colston, 2007: 175/.

There are also cases when speakers actually do mean what they literally say but are still speaking sarcastically /Sperber, Wilson, 1981: 299/. For example, during a football game, one of the side's fans may say to an opposite side's fan:

(5) *I adore your team's defense!*

The speaker absolutely means it and is still being sarcastic as, thanks to the poor defending of the rival team, his or her team is winning. So in this case, the sarcastic attitude is not expressed by meaning the opposite of what is being uttered but it is still context-dependent and used intentionally.

Thus, we can notice that all three points of the *Standard Pragmatic Model* which rely on the recognition of the literal meaning of the utterance, attempt to find the intended meaning, and compute the nonliteral meaning by assuming the opposite of the literal interpretation fail to meet the requirements of complete recognition of sarcastic utterances since not in all cases of interpreting non-literal meanings the mentioned sequence of the model is maintained.

The previously discussed models all try to demonstrate the distinction between literal and non-literal meanings. However, there is another theory that suggests a different perspective for comprehending sarcasm which is the distinction between the use and mention of utterances. The theory was first suggested by Sperber and Wilson (1981) and later developed by Jorgensen et al. (1984).

According to the *Echoic Mention Theory*, there is no nonliteral proposition that hearers must substitute for the literal proposition. Rather, the listener is reminded echoically of some familiar proposition (whose truth value is irrelevant) and of the speaker's attitude toward it. There are many different types and degrees of echoic mention, some of these are immediate echoes, and others are delayed; some have their sources in actual utterances, others in thoughts or opinions; some have real sources, others have imagined ones; some are traceable back to particular individuals, whereas others have a vague origin /Sperber, Wilson, 1981: 309/. Let us consider the example when a speaker says to his or her friend:

(6) *You came and helped a lot.*

Sarcasm comes from the fact that the speaker echoes a previously mentioned statement that the friend had offered saying "I'll come and help you", but in fact did not put a lot of effort.

Sarcasm involves mention rather than use of words /Sperber, Wilson, 1981: 303/. The sarcast quotes or otherwise repeats other people's words or possibly just the very words he or she used earlier and, by repetition, draws attention to their peculiar inappropriateness. A sarcast may quote not only another's actual words but

also another's diction and syntax. There are many cases when sarcasm is achieved by derisory mention, i.e., repetition and quotation of inappropriate words /Haiman, 1998: 25/. One of Sperber and Wilson's best examples is Mark Antony's increasingly sarcastic repetition of the phrase "honorable man" in his rabble-rousing speech against the conspirators in "Julius Caesar" by William Shakespeare /https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56968/speech-friends-romans-countrymen-lend-me-your-ears/.

> (7)   *Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest–*
> *For Brutus is an* **honorable man***;*
> *So are they all, all* **honorable men***–*
> *Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.*
> *He was my friend, faithful and just to me:*
> *But Brutus says he was ambitious;*
> *And Brutus is an* **honorable man***.*
> *He hath brought many captives home to Rome*
> *Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill:*
> *Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?*
> *When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept:*
> *Ambition should be made of sterner stuff:*
> *Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;*
> *And Brutus is an* **honorable man***.*
> *You all did see that on the Lupercal*
> *I thrice presented him a kingly crown,*
> *Which he did thrice refuse: was this ambition?*
> *Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;*
> *And, sure, he is an* **honorable man***.*

According to a later review on the *Echoic Mention Theory* by Wilson the argument of the study was to demonstrate that the interpretation of the expressed meaning does not depend on the recognition of the opposite meaning, rather it relies on the ability to identify that the speaker is mentioning or echoing an expression that has been uttered before /Wilson, 2006: 1728/. Several experiments conducted by Jorgensen et al. (1984) indicate the truthfulness of this statement by claiming that the sarcastic intention of the utterance is easier to decipher when there is a previously mentioned utterance that is echoed now by the speaker.

In response to Sperber and Wilson's theory of the *Echoic Mention*, Clark and Gerrig (1984) propose the *Pretense Theory of Irony* which is a counter-theory based on earlier suggestions by Grice (1975, 1978) and Fowler (1965). According to the *Pretense Theory*, in being ironic the speaker is pretending an attitude rather than mentioning a previously expressed utterance, and he/she intends the listener to discover the pretense as well as the intended attitude towards the audience and the

utterance /Clark, Gerrig, 1984: 121/. They believe that the *Pretense Theory* succeeds to explain some cases better than the *Mention Theory* and propose three features that assist us to recognize ironic statements:

1) ***Asymmetry of Effect*** – *positive statements are more likely to be interpreted as ironic than the negative ones,*

2) ***Victims of Irony*** *– there are two kinds of victims: one is the audience, and the other one might be the speaker himself/herself;*

3) ***Ironic Tone of Voice*** *–pretense is an act of playing and people tend to have a natural account of the ironic tone of voice* /Clark, Gerrig, 1984: 122/.

Firstly, people universally tend to pretend something that is in accordance with social norms and morals, thus, in the case of being sarcastic, the speaker is more likely to use a positive statement than a negative one. Then, there is always a victim whom the speaker wants to express his/her sarcastic attitude and, finally, the speaker naturally uses a sarcastic tone of voice since he/she is pretending a specific attitude. Let us analyze the following example to see whether these features provide a complete comprehension of recognizing sarcastic utterances. In one of the most famous TV series full of sarcastic remarks, "The Big Bang Theory," we can come across numerous cases where one of the main heroes, Sheldon, uses positive statements to express a sarcastic attitude and satisfy his superiority complex:

(8) Sheldon: *Dr. Greene, you've dedicated your life's work to educating the general populous about complex scientific ideas;*

Dr. Greene: *Yes, in part;*

Sheldon: *Have you ever considered trying something useful, perhaps, reading to the elderly?*

Dr. Greene: *Excuse me?*

Sheldon: *I kid, of course, big fan!* /https://youtu.be/QdD2tL71b7A/.

In this example, Sheldon might be pretending two attitudes at the same time. One is the criticizing comments regarding Dr. Greene's career where he is using a negative statement by a direct face attack which can be interpreted as an active-aggressive verbal act. The other one is pretending with another attitude using a positive statement without a direct face attack which is interpreted as a passive-aggressive one. Now, according to the *Pretense Theory* to detect sarcasm in Sheldon's words we need to understand whether he is pretending an attitude in any of the cases. In the case of a direct face attack, we might encounter less pretense than in the case of passive verbal aggression which is the statement "I kid, of course, big fun". However, if we want to come to this assumption, we need to be aware of the macro context of the whole TV series which will allow us to propose that Sheldon is actually pretending an attitude of being a *big fan* of Dr. Greene.

Therefore, it is apparent that the recognition of sarcastic intention through pretense is mostly context-dependent and does not only come from the fact whether the utterance is a positive sentence with a negative intended meaning or not. In regard to the victim of the situation, we can state that Dr. Greene is subjected to the sarcastic comments by Sheldon. However, the audience can also be a victim of sarcasm since they may uncritically acknowledge Dr. Greene's speech as truthful causing the sarcast, Sheldon, to target them as well. On the other hand, Sheldon might also be the victim of his own sarcasm since his statements could be considered misjudgments. Finally, what concerns the sarcastic tone of voice of Sheldon's utterances, there can be no other opinion after watching the featured video.

Thus, the analysis of the *Pretense Theory of Irony* is parallel to the study of the sarcastic intention of the speaker in terms of pretending a specific attitude, yet we saw in the analysis of the example that not all categories of the *Pretense Theory* can be absolutely applicable in comprehending the sarcastic implicatures on a co-textual or contextual level since not all utterances follow the asymmetric effect in comprehending sarcastic intention of the speaker.

The Echoic Mention Theory has been subjected to several revisions and one of them is the *Echoic Reminder Theory* suggested by Kreuz and Glucksberg (1989). According to the theory positive statements can rapidly be used sarcastically and negative ones can be used sarcastically only under special circumstances. They conducted three experiments to support their theory of sarcastic irony and the arguments are as follows:

a) *Positive statements are more rapidly interpreted as sarcastic;*

b) *Positive sarcastic utterances do not require explicit antecedents, while negative ones do;*

c) *In particular, the presence of a victim (i.e., a target for the sarcastic utterance) should provide an explicit antecedent* /Kreuz and Glucksberg, 1989: 376/.

In this study, sarcasm is considered to be expressed by means of verbal irony, therefore it is referred to as sarcastic irony. Kreuz and Glucksberg assume that people can use verbal irony without being sarcastic and can also be sarcastic without being ironic /Kreuz and Glucksberg, 1989: 374/. In the following example of a TedTalk the speaker, Mike Collins, begins his speech with a positive overstatement with an increasingly sarcastic tone of voice:

(9) *What a tremendous honor and genuine pleasure it is to be speaking with you today. A tremendous honor and genuine pleasure. Or to put it another way: a tremendous honor and genuine pleasure* /https://youtu.be/U-PW1mSSacg/.

Here, we can see that Mike delivers the sarcastic intention of his speech by positively overstating his attitude to the audience and this goal is achieved by a repetition of similar positive statements. However, if he had started his speech with just one positive statement and not the repetition of it, the sarcastic effect would have been achieved not as quickly as it happens in this case. Therefore, we believe that positive statements are even more interpreted as sarcastic when they are repeated or echoed. In regard to explicit antecedents of sarcastic utterances, we can see that in Mike's speech there is no specific antecedent to his positive overstatement yet there is a particular presence of a victim which is the audience.

The above-discussed theories and frameworks in pragmatic studies of irony and sarcasm lead us to a necessity of distinguishing a combined pragmatic model for analyzing sarcastic properties of non-literal language and implementing the features of the model into the practical research of sarcastic utterances. The Gricean approach to interpreting conversational implicatures and the later buzz over his framework on whether sarcasm does actually violate the proposed maxims give us the insight to suggest that sarcasm may be detected as the speaker's intention breaching not only the maxim of Quality but the maxims of Quantity and Relation as well since sarcastic utterances mostly lack informativeness and relevancy in the context. Gibbs's conclusions on the incompleteness of the Standard Pragmatic Model correspond to our assumptions that sarcastic utterances do not rely on the recognition of the literal meaning of the utterance in an attempt to find the intended meaning and compute the nonliteral meaning by assuming the opposite of the literal interpretation since not in all cases of interpreting non-literal meanings the mentioned sequence of the model is maintained. The studies in the Echoic Mention Theory provide a significant amount of research where sarcastic utterances are viewed as echoic mentions of previously expressed utterances. This theory demonstrates that the interpretation of the expressed meaning does not depend on the recognition of the opposite meaning, rather it relies on the ability to identify that the speaker is mentioning or echoing an expression that has been uttered before. The analyzed examples and discussed experiments on the validity of the theory increase our inclination to consider the proposed features for our further pragmatic analysis of sarcasm. Nevertheless, the Echoic Mention Theory is immensely challenged by the Pretense Theory where sarcastic utterances are believed to be pretending an attitude rather than mentioning a previously expressed utterance. Given the analysis of the use of the speaker's positive statements as an expression of sarcastic attitude, we highlight the importance of implementing the features of the Pretense Theory in parallel to the study of the sarcastic intention of the speaker in terms of pretending a specific attitude, yet we question the absolute applicability of the framework in comprehending the sarcastic implicatures on a co-textual or contextual level since not all utterances follow the asymmetric effect

in comprehending sarcastic intention of the speaker as seen in the presented example. Further practical research is required to assess the proposed assumptions. With regard to the Reminder Theory, we do believe that the suggested features are highly applicable in understanding the pragmatic properties of sarcastic language as analyzed in a TedTalk speech by Mike Collins where the sarcastic intention is delivered as a positive overstatement of utterances excluding the requirement of an explicit antecedent. In the meantime, negative statements require explicit antecedents as a target for the sarcastic utterance. All these assumptions are required to be tested in our further pragmalinguistic analysis of sarcasm based on linguistic, social, cultural, media-political, and other discourses.

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Ա. ՉՈՒԲԱՐՅԱՆ, Հ. ԴԱՆԻԵԼՅԱՆ – *Սարկազմի ընկալման լեզվա-գործաբանական մոդելները*. – Հոդվածի նպատակն է վերլուծել հեգնանքի և սարկազմի լեզվագործաբանական տեսությունները, մասնավորապես՝ համագործակցության սկզբունքը, ստանդարտ լեզվագործաբանական մոդելը, արձագանք-հիշատակման տեսությունը, ձևացման տեսությունը և արձագանք-հիշեցման տեսությունը՝ բացահայտելու սարկազմի լեզվագործաբանական ընկալման գոյություն ունեցող տեսակետները և առաջարկելու այն-

պիսի մոդել, որը կապահովի սարկազմի ճիշտ մեկնաբանությունը տարբեր համատեքստերում: Ներկայացված մոդելների առանձնահատկությունների դիտարկումը հնարավոր է դարձնում վերհանել սարկազմի լեզվաբանական քննության որոշ բացեր: Ակադեմիական ուսումնասիրություններից, գեղարվեստական գրականությունից, հեռուստասերիալներից և TedTalk տեսանյութերից քաղված մի շարք օրինակների վերլուծությամբ ուրվագծվում են սարկազմի լեզվաբանական ընկալման համալիր մոդելի շրջանակները՝ հիմք ստեղծելով հետագա գործնական վերլուծությունների համար:

Բանալի բառեր. սարկազմ, հեգնանք, լեզվագործաբանություն, համագործակցության սկզբունք, ստանդարտ լեզվագործաբանական մոդել, արձագանք-հիշատակման տեսություն, ձևացման տեսություն, արձագանք-հիշեցման տեսություն

А. ЧУБАРЯН, А. ДАНИЕЛЯН – *Прагматические модели понимания сарказма.* – В статье представлен анализ прагматических теорий иронии и сарказма, а именно принципа кооперации, стандартной прагматической модели, теории эхо-упоминания, теории притворства и теории эхо-напоминания с целью выявления прагматического понимания сарказма в теоретических исследованиях и выделения релевантной модели, применимой в различных контекстах. Изучение особенностей представленных моделей позволяет выделить некоторые сложные аспекты прагматического понимания сарказма. Анализ примеров из академических исследований, художественной литературы, телесериалов и видеороликов TedTalk способствует созданию комбинированной модели прагматической интерпретации сарказма, которая может быть использована в дальнейших практических исследованиях.

Ключевые слова: сарказм, ирония, лингвистическая прагматика, принцип кооперации, стандартная прагматическая модель, теория эхо-упоминания, теория притворства, теория напоминания