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COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTIONS OF IRONY IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Abstract. This article investigates the communicative functions of irony in English and Uzbek from a contrastive-pragmatic perspective. Irony is approached as a complex pragmatic phenomenon arising from the incongruity between the literal content of an utterance and the speaker's intended communicative meaning, with contextual interpretation and implicit evaluation playing a central role. The study aims to identify the principal communicative functions of irony, describe their realization in English and Uzbek, and establish their shared and language-specific features. The research draws on contrastive, contextual, linguopragmatic, and semantic-pragmatic methods. Based on theoretical sources and constructed illustrative examples, the article examines the critical-evaluative, humorous, emotional-expressive, indirect-communicative, social-regulatory, and interpersonal-management functions of irony. The analysis suggests that irony is not limited to conveying a meaning opposite to the literal content of an utterance.

Keywords: irony, communicative function, pragmatics, contrastive analysis, implicit meaning, indirect communication, criticism, humour, evaluation, English, Uzbek.

КОММУНИКАТИВНЫЕ ФУНКЦИИ ИРОНИИ В АНГЛИЙСКОМ И УЗБЕКСКОМ ЯЗЫКАХ

Аннотация. В статье исследуются коммуникативные функции иронии в английском и узбекском языках на основе сопоставительно-прагматического подхода. Ирония рассматривается как сложное прагматическое явление, возникающее вследствие несоответствия между буквальным содержанием высказывания и коммуникативным намерением говорящего, а также благодаря контекстуальной интерпретации и скрытой оценке. Цель исследования заключается в выявлении основных коммуникативных функций иронии, описании особенностей их реализации в английском и узбекском языках и определении общих и различительных характеристик. В работе используются сопоставительный, контекстуальный, лингвопрагматический и семантико-прагматический методы анализа. На основе теоретических источников и специально составленных иллюстративных примеров рассматриваются критико-оценочная, юмористическая, эмоционально-экспрессивная, косвенно-коммуникативная, социально-регулятивная функции и функция управления межличностными отношениями.

Ключевые слова: ирония, коммуникативная функция, прагматика, сопоставительный анализ, имплицитное значение, косвенная коммуникация, критика, юмор, оценка, английский язык, узбекский язык.

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INGLIZ VA O‘ZBEK TILLARIDA KINOYANING KOMMUNIKATIV FUNKSIYALARI

Annotatsiya. Mazkur maqolada ingliz va o‘zbek tillarida kinoyaning kommunikativ funksiyalari qiyosiy-pragmatik yondashuv asosida tadqiq etiladi. Kinoya literal mazmun bilan so‘zlovchining ko‘zlangan kommunikativ niyati o‘rtasidagi nomuvofiqlik, kontekstual ma’no va yashirin baholash munosabati asosida yuzaga keladigan murakkab pragmatik hodisa sifatida talqin qilinadi. Tadqiqotning maqsadi kinoyaning asosiy kommunikativ funksiyalarini aniqlash, ularning ingliz va o‘zbek tillarida namoyon bo‘lish xususiyatlarini tavsiflash hamda umumiy va farqli jihatlarini belgilashdan iborat. Tadqiqotda qiyosiy, kontekstual, lingvopragmatik va semantik-pragmatik tahlil usullaridan foydalanildi. Nazariy manbalar hamda tahlil uchun tuzilgan namunaviy misollar asosida kinoyaning tanqidiy-baholovchi, yumoristik, emotsional-ekspressiv, bilvosita kommunikativ, ijtimoiy-regulyativ va munosabatlarni boshqarish funksiyalari ko‘rib chiqildi.

Kalit so‘zlar: kinoya, kommunikativ funksiya, pragmatika, chog‘ishtirma tahlil, yashirin ma’no, bilvosita kommunikatsiya, tanqid, yumor, baholash, ingliz tili, o‘zbek tili.

Introduction. Irony is a complex linguistic and communicative phenomenon whose interpretation frequently extends beyond the literal meaning of an utterance. In everyday conversation, literary dialogue, public discourse, and interpersonal communication, speakers may use apparently positive expressions to convey criticism, express dissatisfaction indirectly, create humour, or negotiate relationships with their interlocutors. Consequently, irony should not be investigated solely as a stylistic device based on semantic opposition. It should also be examined as a pragmatic strategy serving various communicative purposes.

The relevance of this study is determined by the need to establish how irony functions in English and Uzbek communication and how its communicative purposes are realized in two linguistically and culturally distinct contexts. While the interpretation of irony in both languages depends on context, speaker intention, and the interlocutor’s inferential activity, the particular linguistic forms and interactional conventions employed may differ. Grice’s account of conversational implicature provides a theoretical basis for explaining how speakers communicate meanings that are not explicitly encoded in their utterances [1]. Sperber and Wilson’s relevance-theoretic approach further emphasizes the role of inferential interpretation in understanding communicated meanings [2]. Attardo’s analysis of irony as relevant inappropriateness highlights the relationship between an utterance and the context in which it occurs [3].

From a functional perspective, irony may perform several tasks simultaneously. An ironic statement can criticize an interlocutor, produce a humorous effect, express an emotional attitude, and regulate interpersonal distance. Jorgensen’s study of sarcastic irony, for example, discusses its use in complaints and criticism among familiar interlocutors and examines its potential face-saving function [4]. This suggests that the social consequences of irony cannot be predicted from its linguistic form alone.

The present article addresses three research questions:

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1. What are the principal communicative functions of irony in English and Uzbek?
2. What pragmatic mechanisms underlie these functions?
3. What similarities and potential differences can be identified through a contrastive analysis?

The article aims to develop a functional classification of irony that can be applied to the comparative study of English and Uzbek discourse.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Irony as a pragmatic phenomenon

Irony has traditionally been associated with a discrepancy between an expressed meaning and an intended interpretation. Nevertheless, it is not always accurate to define irony as simply saying the opposite of what one means. In many cases, the speaker communicates an evaluative attitude through exaggeration, understatement, apparent praise, rhetorical questions, or contextually inappropriate expressions.

Consider the following illustrative example:

English: *"What a brilliant decision!"*

Imagine that the statement follows a decision that has caused an obvious problem. The positive adjective brilliant conflicts with the situation, inviting the listener to infer a negative evaluation.

A comparable Uzbek example is:

Uzbek: "*Juda aqlli qaror bo'libdi*!"

In an appropriate context, this utterance may function as an ironic criticism rather than genuine praise. These examples illustrate that ironic interpretation requires the interaction of at least three elements:

- the literal content of the utterance;
- the context in which the utterance is produced;
- the speaker's intended evaluative stance.

The listener must recognize the contextual incongruity and infer the intended meaning. Therefore, irony is not a fixed semantic property of an individual word or expression; it is a context-sensitive communicative phenomenon. The communicative intention behind an ironic utterance may differ considerably from its literal meaning. A speaker may wish to criticize without making a direct accusation, express disagreement without openly confronting the interlocutor, or establish humorous solidarity through shared understanding. From the perspective of speech act theory, the analysis of irony should therefore consider not only what an utterance says but also what the speaker does by producing it. An ironic statement may function as criticism, complaint, mock praise, warning, or indirect rejection, depending on its context and interactional purpose. It is important, however, to distinguish the pragmatic mechanism of irony from its communicative function. Contextual incongruity and inferential interpretation help explain how irony is understood, whereas communicative functions describe the purposes that irony serves in interaction. This distinction provides the methodological basis for the functional classification proposed below.

Methodology. The study employs a contrastive-pragmatic approach to the analysis of irony in English and Uzbek. The following methods are used: Contrastive analysis. This method identifies shared and potentially language-specific patterns in the communicative use of irony.

Contextual analysis. This method examines how situational circumstances influence the interpretation of ironic utterances. Linguopragmatic analysis. This method focuses on speaker intention, implicit evaluation, interactional goals, and the intended effect on the interlocutor.

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Semantic-pragmatic analysis. This method distinguishes literal meaning from contextually inferred ironic meaning. Functional classification. This method groups ironic utterances according to their principal communicative purposes. The examples presented in the article are illustrative examples constructed to demonstrate the proposed analytical categories. They are not presented as quotations from a systematically collected corpus. Consequently, the article offers a theoretical and qualitative functional framework rather than statistical claims about the frequency of particular functions in either language.

The critical-evaluative function is one of the principal communicative uses of irony. It enables a speaker to express a negative evaluation of an action, decision, behaviour, or situation without necessarily stating the criticism directly. Consider the following English example:

“Excellent work! You have managed to delete the entire document.” The expression excellent work conventionally conveys praise. However, the second sentence establishes a context in which the positive evaluation is inappropriate. The utterance consequently communicates criticism.

A comparable Uzbek example is: “Barakalla, hamma hujjatni o‘chirib yuboribsiz!” In this context, barakalla does not function as straightforward praise. Instead, it expresses disapproval of the interlocutor’s action. The critical function of irony depends on the relationship between the apparent evaluation and the actual communicative situation. It can make criticism more humorous, more indirect, or more rhetorically forceful. Nevertheless, indirectness does not necessarily make an ironic statement polite or harmless. Depending on the relationship between the speakers and the seriousness of the situation, irony may be perceived as tactful, dismissive, or openly hostile.

Jorgensen’s discussion of sarcastic irony is relevant here because it demonstrates that sarcastic criticism may sometimes reduce the perceived directness of a complaint, particularly in interactions between familiar interlocutors [4].

Thus, the critical-evaluative function can be defined as the use of irony to communicate disapproval, expose a perceived failure, or evaluate an action indirectly.

Irony may also serve a humorous function by creating a discrepancy between an expected evaluation and the actual circumstances.

For example: English: “You are incredibly punctual!” (Addressed to someone who arrives an hour late.) The apparent compliment conflicts with the observable situation. This incongruity may generate amusement because the listener recognizes the discrepancy between the literal expression and the intended evaluation. A comparable Uzbek example is: Uzbek: “Vaqtida kelishingizga gap yo‘q!” (Addressed to someone who arrives very late.) The humorous effect arises from the contrast between the expression of approval and the situation that makes such approval inappropriate.

However, irony and humour should not be treated as synonymous. An ironic statement may be serious, aggressive, or emotionally painful without producing amusement. Conversely, an utterance may be humorous without being ironic. The humorous function therefore depends on the interaction between contextual incongruity, the speaker’s stance, and the listener’s interpretation. Shared knowledge between interlocutors can strengthen the humorous effect because both participants recognize the discrepancy that underlies the utterance. In both English and Uzbek, the humorous use of irony may contribute to informal interaction, interpersonal solidarity, and the negotiation of shared attitudes. Whether the result is friendly humour or ridicule depends on the social context and the relationship between the participants.

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Irony can express emotional attitudes that are not stated explicitly. These may include disappointment, irritation, disbelief, frustration, resentment, or exaggerated admiration.

Consider the following example: English: "That is exactly what I needed today!" If the statement follows an additional unexpected problem, the speaker may be expressing frustration rather than genuine satisfaction. In Uzbek, a similar communicative effect may be produced by: Uzbek: "Bugun menga aynan shu narsa yetishmay turgandi!" In an appropriate situation, the utterance communicates dissatisfaction by presenting an unwanted event as if it were welcome. The emotional-expressive function differs from the critical-evaluative function in its primary orientation. Criticism focuses on evaluating an action, person, or situation, whereas emotional expression foregrounds the speaker's psychological response. These functions can nevertheless overlap. A speaker may criticize an action while simultaneously expressing irritation or disappointment. The emotional interpretation of irony also depends on vocal and contextual information. Intonation, pauses, facial expressions, and the surrounding discourse may help the listener distinguish genuine enthusiasm from frustration or mock approval. The same verbal expression can therefore produce different interpretations in different communicative situations.

One important function of irony is the indirect communication of meanings that a speaker may be unwilling or reluctant to express explicitly.

For example: English: "Perhaps we should consider your plan one more time." Depending on the context, this utterance may function as a cautious suggestion, a genuine request for reconsideration, or an ironic rejection of the proposal. A possible Uzbek example is: Uzbek: "Balki rejangizni yana bir bor ko'rib chiqarmiz?" This sentence is not inherently ironic. Its interpretation depends on the speaker's tone, the previous discussion, the perceived quality of the proposal, and the relationship between the interlocutors. This distinction is important: indirectness alone does not constitute irony. An utterance becomes ironic only when contextual evidence and the speaker's communicative stance support an ironic interpretation. The indirect-communicative function allows speakers to convey disagreement, dissatisfaction, or rejection without formulating an explicit negative statement. It may also leave room for the interlocutor to recognize the intended meaning without forcing an overt confrontation. Nevertheless, indirect irony can create ambiguity. If the listener fails to recognize the intended meaning, the utterance may be interpreted literally or as a genuine suggestion. The success of this function therefore depends on shared knowledge and the interlocutor's ability to infer the speaker's intention. The interpersonal-management function is closely related to politeness, face concerns, and social distance. Brown and Levinson's account of politeness provides a useful theoretical framework for investigating how speakers manage interpersonal relations and potentially face-threatening acts [5].

Nevertheless, irony does not automatically protect the interlocutor's face. Although an ironic statement may soften a direct complaint in one context, it may be more humiliating than explicit criticism in another.

In each language, speakers may use irony to criticize, create humour, express emotion, communicate indirectly, regulate behaviour, and manage interpersonal relationships.

The following table summarizes the proposed functional classification.

Communicative function	**English example**	**Uzbek example**
Critical-evaluative	"Excellent work!" after a serious	"Barakalla!" after an obvious

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	mistake	mistake
Humorous	"You are incredibly punctual!" after a long delay	"Vaqtida kelishingizga gap yo'q!" after a long delay
Emotional-expressive	"That is exactly what I needed today!" after an additional problem	"Bugun menga aynan shu narsa yetishmay turgandi!"
Indirect-communicative	"Perhaps we should reconsider that idea."	"Balki bu fikrni yana bir bor ko'rib chiqarmiz?"
Social-regulatory	"A very responsible way to handle it!"	"Masalaga juda mas'uliyat bilan yondashibsiz-da!"
Interpersonal-management	"A particularly convincing explanation."	"Juda ishonarli tushuntirish bo'ldi-da!"

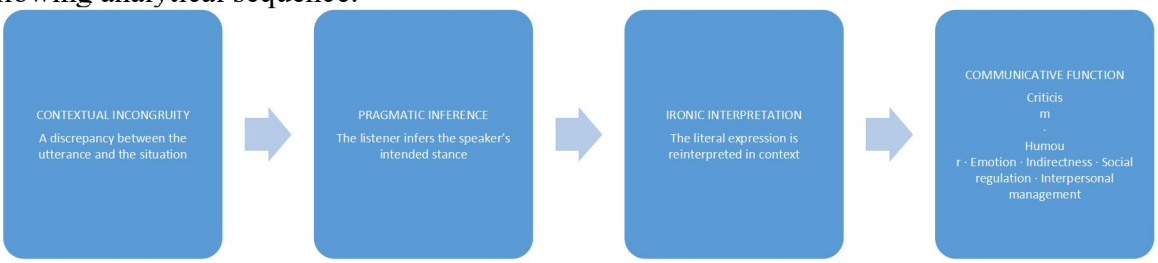
Note: The examples are illustrative rather than corpus-derived. Their ironic interpretation depends on context and cannot be established from wording alone. The table demonstrates that similar lexical structures may serve different communicative functions in both languages. A positive evaluative expression may communicate criticism, while an apparently neutral suggestion may express disagreement indirectly. At the same time, the examples do not establish that one language uses a particular function more frequently than the other. Such a claim would require a systematically compiled and comparable corpus of English and Uzbek interactions.

A reliable contrastive analysis should therefore distinguish between:

1. Shared pragmatic mechanisms - contextual incongruity, inferential interpretation, and the expression of an indirect evaluative stance.
2. Language-specific realization - lexical, grammatical, prosodic, and discourse-level resources used in particular contexts.
3. Sociocultural conditioning - the influence of relationships, communicative expectations, social norms, and shared knowledge.

This distinction prevents broad cultural generalizations from being treated as established empirical facts.

Based on the theoretical discussion, the communicative functions of irony can be represented through the following analytical sequence:



The model distinguishes the process through which an ironic meaning is inferred from the function that the utterance performs. Contextual incongruity and pragmatic inference explain how the ironic interpretation becomes available, whereas the final stage identifies the speaker's principal communicative purpose.

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The model is intended as an analytical framework rather than a claim that all ironic utterances follow an identical linear sequence. In actual communication, context, speaker intention, linguistic form, and non-verbal cues may interact dynamically.

Its principal contribution is the integration of the mechanism of ironic interpretation with the functional classification of ironic communication in a contrastive framework.

The analysis supports the view that irony should be studied as a multifunctional pragmatic phenomenon rather than solely as a stylistic device. Its communicative functions overlap, and the interpretation of an utterance depends on contextual evidence, speaker intention, and the listener's inferential activity.

The proposed classification distinguishes six analytical categories: critical-evaluative, humorous, emotional-expressive, indirect-communicative, social-regulatory, and interpersonal-management functions. These categories are not mutually exclusive. For example, one utterance may simultaneously criticize an action, express frustration, and create a humorous effect.

The comparative perspective also requires caution. Similar examples in English and Uzbek demonstrate possible functional correspondences, but they do not prove that the two languages distribute these functions identically. Establishing language-specific preferences would require empirical data drawn from comparable conversational, literary, or audiovisual corpora.

The scientific contribution of the article lies in the proposed organization of irony's communicative functions within a contrastive-pragmatic framework and in the distinction between ironic interpretation and communicative purpose. The proposed model may be used in further research on literary dialogue, everyday conversation, audiovisual discourse, translation, and intercultural pragmatics. It may also support corpus-based investigations into how different communicative functions are realized through lexical, grammatical, prosodic, and contextual resources in English and Uzbek. The study has examined the communicative functions of irony in English and Uzbek from a contrastive-pragmatic perspective. The analysis indicates that irony is a multifunctional phenomenon whose interpretation depends on the relationship between literal content, contextual information, speaker intention, and pragmatic inference.

Six principal analytical functions have been identified: critical-evaluative, humorous, emotional-expressive, indirect-communicative, social-regulatory, and interpersonal-management. These functions may occur separately or overlap within the same utterance.

The comparison suggests that English and Uzbek share fundamental pragmatic mechanisms through which ironic meanings are inferred. However, the particular realization of irony depends on the linguistic resources, communicative circumstances, interpersonal relationships, and sociocultural conventions involved in each interaction.

The proposed contrastive-functional model distinguishes contextual incongruity, pragmatic inference, ironic interpretation, and communicative purpose. It provides a framework for further empirical investigation without assuming that every ironic utterance follows a fixed pattern or that the two languages necessarily exhibit identical usage frequencies. In conclusion, the communicative functions of irony can be adequately investigated only when semantic interpretation is considered together with pragmatic intention, interactional context, and social meaning. This approach contributes to the comparative study of English and Uzbek pragmatics and offers a basis for future corpus-based research.

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