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# **Translating Irony: An Interdisciplinary Approach**

**With English and Arabic as a Case in Point**

**Raymond Chakhachiro**

**Sayyab Books – London**  
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*To Denise, Matilda and Ibraaheem*



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## Romanisation conventions

Note: previously published Arabic names may not conform to these conventions	Proper names	Quotations, book titles, linguistic notions, etc.
ا <i>alif wasla</i>	a	a
ء	'	'
ا long vowel	aa	aa
ب	b	b
ت	t	t
ث	th	th
ج	j	j
ح	h	H
خ	kh	kh
د	d	d
ذ	dh	dh
ر	r	r
ز	z	z
س	s	s
ش	sh	sh
ص	s	S
ض	d	D
ط	t	T
ظ	z	Z
ع	'	'
غ	gh	gh
ف	f	f
ق	q	q
ك	k	k
ل	l	l
م	m	m
ن	n	n
هـ	h	h
و consonant	w	w
و long vowel	ou	uu
ي consonant	y	y
ي long vowel	ee	ii
--	a	a
--	i	i
--	u/ou	u
ة	a	a, t
آ	aa	'aa
ى	a	a
لا	laa,	laa
ال	al-	al-
ي diphthong	ay	ay
و diphthong	aw	aw
	Double consonants, digraphs or vowels	Double consonants, digraphs or vowels
ي	ayy	ayy
يي	iyy	iyy
وو	ouww	uww

## ***Abbreviations***

AT1	Arabic Text 1
AT2	Arabic Text 1
CS	Conversational Strategy
ET1	English Text 1
ET2	English Text 1
I, II, III, etc.	Utterance No.
S	Sequence
ST	Source Text
STL	Source Text Language
TT	Target Text
TTL	Target Text language

## 0 Introduction

The main premise of this book is that the translation of irony is not amenable to conventional translation theories. Taking English and Arabic as a case in point, the way speakers of this pair of languages employ this pervasive tool to express their attitude reflects the linguistic and cultural distance between these languages, and adds a significant translation problem to the interpretive challenge.

Verbal irony is essentially purposeful, constructive and instrumental. It has been used, feared, revered and studied through the ages. In modern times, literature and journalism are two major grounds where irony flourishes. What we know about irony, however, is passed on to us through philosophy and literary criticism, where irony is seen as poetic, contextual, artistic, modular, non-linear and multi-dimensional, hence not lending itself to rigorous linguistic scrutiny. Literary critics in recent times (e.g. Booth 1974; Muecke 1969) have identified rhetorical devices, strategies and modes of irony, hence have taken a reconciliatory approach with the textual, as well as the 'hypertextual', representation and interpretation of irony. Considering these illuminating works, I argue that the rhetorical devices of irony are linguistically identifiable, and that there are linguistic, non-rhetorical devices that serve ironic purposes. I also argue that ironic devices inherently contribute to the structural development of discourse and that their interaction with the discourse structure and context of situation constitutes a framework for the overall rhetorical meaning of texts or discourse goals.

The book then ventures into contrastive linguistic and stylistic analyses of irony in Arabic and English from literary, linguistic and discourse perspectives. It sheds light on the interpretation and the linguistic realisation of irony in Arabic and English through an interdisciplinary approach, and, consequently, identifies similarities and discrepancies in the form and function of ironic devices between these languages. As such, the book has in mind professional translators, instructors and students of translation, as well as language learners, language teachers and researchers in cross-cultural and inter-pragmatic disciplines.

Western studies provide a large body of work on the interpretation of verbal irony, albeit mainly in literature. To tackle the concept for translation purposes, however, this book addresses the following pertinent interpretive and translation shortcomings: first, the lack of a systematic approach in Arabic literature to the analysis of ironic devices from functional and discursive perspectives. Arab stylisticians, rhetoricians and literary critics have provided a wealth of textbooks and scattered observations on style embellishment and rhetorical devices; irony, however, has not been specifically addressed. Second, the lack of linguistic discussion of the formal realisation of irony in the classifications of ironic devices, found in a handful of Western works on philosophy and literary criticism, is addressed. In this context, I also take to task the relativistic, open-ended views that cast doubt on the plausibility of interpretation of irony. Third, the need for a theoretically grounded approach to the translation of irony, where hitherto its discussion has been patchy in translation literature (e.g. Hatim 1997), treating it from a conversational

# Chapter 1

## The contribution of literary theory

### 1.1 Definition of irony

This book is, by its nature, about intentional irony found in prose, about instrumental irony in which language is the instrument, about ironic satire in stable irony that lends itself to reconstruction (Booth 1974), and about corrective irony; therefore, it is about irony that entails an author, a victim and a reader. As such, it does not concern dramatic irony perceived only by a receiver, situational irony that springs from an earnest intention and ironic result, or 'theatrical' irony (Muecke 1982). Despite the pervasiveness of irony throughout the history of verbal literature, studies dedicated to the 'language' of irony have not matched its prevalence. This stems, at least in the Western world, from the fact that irony is taken for granted or, as Muecke (1969: ix) puts it, "to be able to be ironical is perhaps part of the definition of our [Western] civilisation". Another factor may well be that irony is such a highly rhetorical and elusive tool that it is difficult to define in terms of its interpretation, let alone style and language.

In his attempts to describe the variable features that affect the quality of irony, Muecke recognises the necessity for ironists "to break with advantage the rules of art" (1982: 52) in order to enhance irony. He suggests four principles for a successful irony based on his observation that "A rhetorically effective, an aesthetically pleasing, or simply a striking irony owes its success... largely to one or more of a small number of principles and factors" (ibid: 52).

These principles are: 1) the principle of economy, which implies the use of few signals. It is used in parody, advice and encouragement, the rhetorical question and other ironical tactics. 2) The principle of high contrast, which takes place when "there is a disparity between what might be expected and what actually happened" (ibid: 53), or when there is antithesis, semotactic anomalies or internal contradiction. 3) The position of the audience, particularly in the theatre where "the quality of the irony depends very much on whether the audience already knows the outcome or true state of affairs or learns of these only when the victim [of irony] learns" (ibid: 54); and 4) the topic. This last factor or principle relates to the importance of emotions in generating and enhancing both the observer's feelings toward the victim or the topic of the irony and the reader's awareness and appreciation of the irony on an equal footing, among "the areas in which most emotional capital is invested: religion, love, morality, politics, and history" (ibid: 55). Although only the fourth principle above seems to touch on the function of irony, it is fair to say that the first three principles are integral to get to grips with ironic messages.

Irony for the father of irony, Socrates, is pedagogical. In addition to its aesthetic function, verbal irony (henceforth irony) is mainly used for corrective purposes, i.e. as an

instrumental tool (Muecke 1982) which serves to realize a purpose using language ironically. Booth (1974) refers to such phenomena as ironic satire. The other class of irony to Muecke (1969) is the unintentional and art-for-art's-sake 'observable irony'. Booth (1974), on the other hand, speaks of stable irony and unstable irony. Stable irony offers the reader a stable reconstruction of the message through rhetorical tools shared with the writer, not to be undermined at a later stage. Unstable irony implies that "no stable reconstruction can be made out of the ruins revealed through the irony" (ibid: 240).

It is the thesis of this book that instrumental and stable ironies are integral to verbal irony used as a weapon to reveal and correct social injustice and hypocrisy, and dwell on culture-language-specific and on rhetorical and stylistic devices that are – hypothetically – shared by the ironist, the victim and the reader; hence, these devices are analysable and translatable.

The intricacy of irony in definition is well documented in the myriad of papers, theses and books written mainly by literary and philosophy – but non-ironist – experts on the concept, and the emphasis placed on the indeterminacy of meaning imparted by irony as opposed to the simplistic definition of saying one thing and meaning another.

However, a determining factor in pinning down the concept of verbal irony is the consensus among ironists that it is largely a means to an end. Following Muecke (1969), the main uses of irony in prose are satiric, heuristic and rhetorical. It may be used as a rhetorical device to enforce meanings and as a satiric device in any of his four modes of ironies – the Impersonal, the Self-Disparaging, the *Ingénu* and the Dramatised (see section 1.2 below) – "to attack a point of view or to expose folly, hypocrisy, or vanity. It may be used as a heuristic device to lead one's readers to see that things are not so simple or certain as they seem, or perhaps not so complex or doubtful as they seem" (ibid: 232-233). Apart from the above three uses, Muecke speaks of two other 'expressive' uses of irony employed by a 'private ironist' (ibid: 236): self-protective irony and self-regarding irony. Self-protective irony takes place when irony is "a means of avoiding decisions in situations in which a decision is either impossible or clearly unwise" (ibid: 236), or "it may be an expression of prudence or wisdom in the face of a world full of snares or a world in which nothing is certain" (ibid: 238). Compare also Kierkegaard's self-defeat of the ironical man in Romantic Irony (in Muecke 1969: 242-246). Self-regarding irony is employed by one "who may, for example, be determined to tell the truth, to satisfy one's own conscience, in circumstances in which telling the truth is dangerous" (ibid: 236). This book is only concerned with the satiric, heuristic and rhetorical uses of irony, that is, with 'public irony' as opposed to 'private irony'.

To this end and to gain a first-hand insight into the treatment of form and function of irony in prose, highlighted in Muecke's principles above, from a literary perspective, the sections below will attempt to wade into the concept with particular reference to the literary critics and ironologists Booth and Muecke, and Arab rhetorician al-Jaahiz. English and Arabic literary excerpts and examples from the data set in Chapter 5 will be used for illustration. First, the pertinent question of delimitation between irony, sarcasm, satire and humour is addressed.

### 1.1.2 Borderline of irony with sarcasm, satire and humour

This section is deemed necessary to demystify the confusion between irony and concepts that are often inappropriately attributed to, or associated with irony based on common features. Sarcasm, satire, and humour share similar methods with irony but to different ends and in different settings, therefore there is a need for criteria that assist in telling the difference between the ironic and comic, for example. Another pertinent factor is the fact that, at times, there is a thin line between irony and sarcasm, and reliance on heavy explicit irony, bordering on sarcasm, can be a function of the degree of the freedom of speech enjoyed by the ironist.

In *The Oxford Book of Humorous Prose*, Frank Muir (1990) touches explicitly on some of the characteristics of irony when he defines, in his own personal theory about comedy, the concepts of 'comedy', 'wit', 'buffoonery', and 'humour'. Comedy in some of its forms shares with irony a corrective purpose. He calls such comedy satiric, denoting an attack on somebody using "invective, parody, mockery, or anything else which might wound" (ibid: xxvi). However, irony differs strategically from comedy; the former is reserved and a means to an end, while the latter is unreserved and an end in itself.

With wit, irony shares elitist language, such as poetic references, paradoxes and puns. The definition of wit, as an upper social class offensive weapon, classifies it as one of the devices of irony. This is not confined to English. Irony is widely used in oral, i.e. colloquial, and written standard Arabic; in both forms, a high degree of linguistic and cultural competence shared by the producer and receiver of irony is required.

Muir also relates English humour to the English culture, the environment of a free society and individuality. He considers humour a variety of irony confined to and originating from England. He remarks that "[European] visitors were dismayed... by the way the English used irony to a degree unknown across the Channel; not only literary irony employed in satirical humour... but also in ordinary conversation when wrong words were used but the sense came through clearly" (ibid: xxix). He then says that "satire expressed through humour was found to be more widely effective... [and] had a deeper appeal" (ibid: xxxiii). Any Arab can perhaps argue with Muir's exaggerated and subjective view of humour. The Egyptian sense of humour is well known in the Arab world, and so is that of other Arab countries, as seen in Lebanese and Syrian ironic-humorous plays. Humour is part of Arab life; one can almost argue that humour kept the Arab spirit going in the darkest of recent times. Egyptians and, indeed, all Arabs ironised their defeat in 1967. Arabs laugh at their misery, whether it stems from political oppression or economic depression, in their gatherings in *cafés*, in literary writing – for example, Taaha Houssayn, Naguib Mahfouz and Maroun Abboud – and through their comic actors who have used humour and irony covertly or overtly since plays were introduced to the Arab world. Historic evidence for the inherent nature of humour in the Arabic culture is documented and is further illustrated in my discussion on al-Jaahiz and bin al-Mouqaffa' below.

In arguing that one of Henry Fielding's works, *Tom Jones*, is ironic, Booth (1974) attacks the views that draw distinction between irony and satire based on an epistemological



## Chapter 2

### The contribution of linguistic theory

It seems an arduous, if not impossible task to tackle the topic of irony from a linguistic perspective. However, the question is whether the classifications and general descriptions discussed in Chapter 1, as true as they may seem, are plausible enough for enquiries into areas such as translation. Literary criticism and literary theory provide us with the sensitivity to recognise the text-type, to understand the meaning and to extract the weaknesses and strengths in a text. This is quite essential but, perhaps, not sufficient for the purpose of translation.

Translation is a contrastive stylistic exercise resulting from a careful analysis and assessment of the source text's message and function versus its function in the target language and culture. Therefore, in addition to the identification of ironic texts and their formal and rhetorical devices, which are less amenable to immediate formal identification, a more sophisticated analysis that provides an explanation of the communicative function of these devices, as well as the grammatical, lexical and paralinguistic (if any) realisation of the rhetorical devices, is required. In other words, to be able to 'work' with ironic texts we need to move towards a more objective and applicable approach to these texts; an approach akin to al-Jaahiz's bi-planar view of rhetoric outlined in Chapter 1: the intuitive, creative and innate البيان (*al-bayaan* 'eloquence'), and the linguistic and scientific التبيين (*al-tabyeen* 'demonstration').

To this end, linguistic disciplines and sub-disciplines are revisited for insight relevant to the analysis and translation of corrective irony, as identified in Chapter 1.

#### 2.1 Irony in pragmatic studies

Attardo (2000: 814) argues that a principle of "smallest possible disruption" of Grice's (1975) cooperative principle is put to work when irony is employed (see discussion on the cooperative principle in 2.5 below). He explains that limiting the violation of the cooperative principle to the smallest possible context makes the violations tolerable and facilitates communication (2000: 815). The examples in Chapter 1 support the idea of minimal ironic devices to build discourse. Sperber and Wilson (1995: 239) consider that "the relevance of an ironical utterance invariably depends, at least in part, on the information it conveys about the speaker's attitude to the opinion echoed". This broad "echoic mention" (1995: *passim*) insight, i.e. referential property of utterances to something said or that has happened, is valid to critical analysis of verbal corrective irony.

Gibbs (1994: 362) considers that the understanding of verbal irony requires "shared sensibilities" between the speaker and the listener "about the subject being referred to",

and suggests a number of devices that signal the possibility of irony in print typographical indices. He argues for the necessity of breaking Grice's (1975) truthfulness maxims and having a context of situation. Gibbs, Attardo and Sperber and Wilson do not venture, however, into a discussion on the type and role of linguistic devices in the formulation and reception of irony or the "interaction between [the] utterance, the hearer's accessible assumptions and the principle of relevance" required for the interpretation of utterances (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 249).

Hutcheon (1995) takes a closer look at the concept and makes an important contribution to the analysis of irony by taking a holistic approach to the interpretation of irony in general terms, involving the interpreter of irony as an agent (see also Simpson (2004) below) and engaging him/her in a complicated interpretive process that includes the making of meaning and the construction of sense, with reference to "conflictual textual or contextual evidence or markers socially agreed upon" (1995: 11). These markers are activated by a "discursive community" (1995: *passim*) whose interpreting expectations "are a function of the culture, language and social context in which both participants [the interpreter and the ironist] interact with each other and with the text itself" (1995: 91). The author makes extensive reference to the use of markers, clues, signals and triggers supplemented by various linguistic and communication theories and maintains that the interaction of the context with a discursive community "provides a framing that makes signals, such as quotation marks, understatement and echoic mention into markers of irony" (1995: 153). Hutcheon rightly considers that no lists of ironic markers can be provided, given that the functioning of language cannot be separated with reference to any "absolute criterion of grammar or vocabulary" (1995: 154), and not even necessarily by relying on violations to Grice's (1975) conversational maxims. She suggests that certain markers act as triggers by having "a '**meta-ironic**' function, one that sets up a series of expectations that frame the utterance as potentially ironic" (1995: 154) [emphasis in original]. Interestingly, Hutcheon proposes a second function of markers, that is, "to signal and indeed to structure the more specific context in which the said can brush up against some unsaid in such a way that irony and its edge come into being" (1995: 154). She hastens to doubt, however, the potential of this structuring function to lead directly to "a 'reconstruction' of a latent and opposite or even 'true' meaning" (1995: 154), arguing that markers "simply act to make available... both the relational, inclusive and differential semantics and also that evaluative edge that characterize ironic meaning" (1995: 154-155). Considering corrective irony, a more assertive claim than Hutcheon's general and cautious position on the structuring and interpretive function of ironic markers can be made on two accounts: 1) 'all' markers of irony in corrective irony 'always' contribute to cohesion as well as coherence, i.e. to text development and rhetorical meaning, respectively; in other words, they "function structurally to enable irony to happen in semantic and evaluative terms" (1995: 156); and 2) ironic markers 'must' rely on identifiable context of situation. The function of corrective irony simply suggests that commentary writers, for example, cannot in fact afford to employ ambiguous ironic remarks in the development of their argument with recourse to the extreme of making a piece of literary art out of their article.

## 2.2 Irony in satiric discourse

Simpson also attempts to “build a generalised model of satire through a textual base that is derived largely from British popular satire” (2004: 112), which he claims to be “a macrosocial model of satire” (ibid: 156-57). He admits, however, that the potential for the ‘generic’ application of his model’s categories remains to be proven (ibid: 112). Simpson, unhelpfully, considers satire as irony within irony and that the latter is “the space between what is meant and what is asserted” (ibid: 91), and considers satire as a “multilayered mode of humorous communication” (ibid: 43) (cf. discussion on irony and satire in Chapter 1). The author agrees with Hutcheon’s (1995) holistic views in that ‘getting the point’ of satire requires reaching a “‘macro-resolution’ for the text as a whole and not just to reach a series of localised resolutions for individual embedded jokes” (2004: 43). Following Foucault, Simpson argues that irony functions as “the infrastructure and determinant of the discourse” (ibid: 83) and proposes for satiric discourse a three dimensional model in which irony plays a major role: the echoic prime or mention, which constitutes the first ironic phase; the dialectic dimension, which involves an “oppositional irony” (ibid: *passim*); and the text processing stage, the “irony of conferral” (ibid: *passim*), which involves the satiree. The author adopts philosophical concepts that depart from established linguistic and stylistic ones, although the model is claimed to be grounded in ‘linguistic pragmatics’ (ibid: 66) and stylistics in the ‘prime phase’ and ‘dialectic dimension’ (see for example the mention of “text-internal elements as textual evidence for inferencing” (ibid: 89-90), “style shift and incongruence as trigger of satirical footing” (ibid: 103), “requisite stylistic ingredients for satirical composition” (ibid: 141 and 145), “lexi-grammar features that realise satire” (ibid: 142), and the interplay between “pragmatic framing devices [and] textual design and discourse organisation” (ibid: 166)).

This emphasis on style, structure and texture is not developed, however, through either the analyses of the “symptomatic according to the analyst’s judgement” (ibid: 216) satirical excerpts taken mainly from *Private Eye*, or the linguistic explanations, which hinge on puns in humorous prose. Simpson employs a sociopolitical philosophical model on ‘universal pragmatics’ to try to account for his third ironic phase: the satirical uptake (ibid: 158), where the application of Grice’s (1975) seminal work on cooperative principle and Halliday’s (1994) functional theory adequately, and more practically, cover his three validity claims, each of which has another “three interactive permutations – raising, recognising and redeeming” (Simpson 2004: 163). The author argues that “for satirical humour to work, it requires ultimately that irony be conferred on the discourse event by the satiree” (ibid: 175), and hence “the overall disposition of the satiree in the participation framework” (ibid: 176). ‘Participation’ is also covered by Halliday’s (1994) functional theory, and, more specifically, in stylistic/pragmatic analysis (e.g. Crystal and Davy 1969). Other new terms covering ironic rhetorical devices (see below), described as “discourse techniques used in the formation of a dialectic component in satire” (Simpson 2004: 189), include ‘saturation’ and ‘attenuation’ instead of the well-documented ‘overstatement (hyperbole in rhetoric)’ and ‘understatement (litotes in rhetoric)’.

Simpson’s work falls into complex generalisation and his linguistic and claimed stylistic analyses (ibid: 211, 215 and 219) do not materialise despite the many notions and theories

# Chapter 3

## Translation theory and the translation of irony

### 3.1 Overview

Similar to language studies, translation theory approaches language from two standpoints: literary (e.g. Friedrich and Dryden cited in Shulte and Biguenet 1992; Lefevere 1992b; Steiner 1975), and linguistic (e.g. Nida 1964; Catford 1965; House 1977; Wilss 1982; Newmark 1988; Hatim and Mason 1990). Literary translation theorists, as Delisle (1982: 48) argues, “have tried to justify their own concept of the art of translation rather than trying, through studies and empirical data, to deduce general hypotheses and rules, hence their effort is unscientific”. Recent literary approaches to translation theory, e.g. Even-Zohar’s polysystem theory (1990), have attracted criticism for the limitations they place on translation and texts (see Bassnett and Lefevere 1998). The linguistic approach, on the other hand, deals with translation studies from three angles: prescriptive, evaluative and descriptive<sup>1</sup>. Prescriptive studies advise translators on how a translation should be done, evaluative studies review translation that has taken place, while descriptive studies are based on observation and empirical data. The present work falls into the descriptive empirical category, given the stylistic nature of irony, its rhetoricity and deviancy, and the cultural and linguistic gaps between the English and Arabic languages.

First, a brief review of the historical changes in translation theory and discussion of their potential implications for ‘corrective irony’ is due. A significant shift from the literary approach, i.e. translation as an art, to the linguistic approach, i.e. language as an analytically descriptive and reproductive entity, has taken place in the field of translation. Parallel to this, translation theory, from the Roman Empire to the Renaissance, was marked by the exploitation of original texts for cultural, linguistic or political reasons (Schulte and Biguenet 1992: 2-3). With the turn of this century, the century of translation, as Newmark (1988) calls it, and the emergence of Saussurian, Jakobsonian and Hallidayan linguistics, translation has shifted towards an applied linguistics discipline restoring recognition to original texts.

Much has been said about the important changes that have taken place in translation theory in the last four decades or so. Many critics have accused the state of the art of translation theory as being chaotic in regard to the number and the approaches of translation studies, claiming a lack of uniformity. Not much, however, has been said about the fact that this state of affairs is dictated by the need for more flexible and tangible models to encompass the dynamic diversity of text-types and languages and to try to grasp the complexity, elusiveness and creativity of the process of language production itself.

Modern translation theories, despite this diversity, have commonly focused on macro-linguistic approaches. Although differing on how translation equivalence can be achieved, they agree that equivalence is ruled by the genre and type of texts. For example, the different purposes of the following statement in an advertisement for Ford

Exemplary driving dynamics is a key element of the Ford DNA and Mondeo is no exception. Customers will be impressed with how good the overall package is.

and the comment in the first paragraph of the political background feature article in ET1 (Chapter 5) should be addressed in translation. The former is to convince the reader of the Mondeo's appeal, while the readers of the latter are called to assess the merits of the argument as the text unfolds (cf. Hatim and Mason 1990: 156-158).

Almost every modern linguistic theory of translation puts forward two broad approaches to achieve equivalence: Source text (ST)-oriented, or Target Text (TT)/readership-oriented translation (Nida and Taber 1982). The former is culture-bound while the latter is, more or less, universal (House 1977). The first entails semantic and the second communicative translation (Newmark 1988), or, in Catford's (1965) words, formal as opposed to textual equivalence. From those two common bi-strategical approaches emerge tactical models that aspire to achieve one or the other.

Any overview of linguistic theory of translation will necessarily come across a number of major models as diverse as that of linguistics. They include structural linguistic models, e.g. Catford 1965; psycholinguistic, e.g. Nida 1964, and Nida and Taber 1982; stylistic, e.g. House 1977; discourse, e.g. Hatim and Mason 1990; functional, e.g. Vasconcellos 1986, Bell 1991, and Nord 1991; comparative stylistic and contrastive linguistic, e.g. Vinay and Darbelnet 1977, and James 1980, respectively.

However, it can be said that all of the above models share the concepts of the revolutionary Hallidayan sociolinguistic approach to language; more specifically, the role of field, mode and tenor in shaping meaning. Some scholars embrace the social and cultural factors indirectly. For example, Nida and Taber's (1982: 131-132) "well-structured discourse" refers to event constraints, i.e. temporal, spatial and logical relations; participants', i.e. author/readership, point of view, kind of participation in the speech event; and content, i.e. the subject matter and form of the message. Similarly, in models that claim universality, social factors constitute the field upon which all textual and extra-textual factors are based. In her *modèle interdisciplinaire de la traduction* (interdisciplinary model of translation), Opolska-Kokoszka (1987: 21) argues that the translator must be aware of "the specificity of the socio-cultural conditions of the translated piece, the environment in which it was created, and its readership" when analysing its socio-cultural factors.

Nevertheless macro-linguistic approaches to translation, including language variation – temporal, geographic, participation, social role relationships, discourse rhetorical function – are coupled with micro-linguistic consideration, addressing the textual realisation of messages, including, texture and structure (e.g. Catford 1965; Vinay and Darbelnet 1977).

The shift in translation studies has occurred at two levels: 1) language as a communicative, interactive and sociological event; 2) the unit of translation, which, because of the approach to language as a social event, becomes utterance-oriented, focusing on the pragmatic meaning as opposed to the de-contextualised sentence approach. On both levels, comparative and contrastive linguistic approaches are rigorously applied. These are derived mainly from disciplines such as discourse, e.g. Coulthard 1985, and Stubbs 1983; text-linguistics, e.g. Halliday and Hasan 1976, 1985, de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981, and van Dijk 1977; and stylistics, e.g. Crystal and Davey 1973, Enkvist *et al.* 1964, and Widdowson 1975.

### 3.2 Translation theory in the Arab world

Although Western theory dominates the field of translation, it is fair to say that Arab thinkers and writers have had their insight into translation throughout their history until, to use Didaoui's (1992: 374) terms, the current 'translation renaissance' that has occurred in the Arab world. A brief overview of the theory and the prominence of authors on translation in the Arab world shows that translation studies are based on the experience and the situation (ibid: 378) of the translators/ authors themselves. Thus, the theory in the Arabic language, as Holmes (cited in Didaoui 1992: 374) indicates, was mere unclear thinking in regard to the problems tackled, without any logical theorising procedure. Al-Jaahiz, for example, gave a brief description, in his book *الحيوان (The Animals)*, of translation and its requirements as well as the translator and his/her qualifications (ibid: 374). Al-Safady, who lived in the fourteenth century, posited two general schools of translation: literal and free (ibid: 374).

In modern times, well-known Arab writers and thinkers have expressed their thoughts while or after translating their own works, or presented criticism and assessment of translated works, among them al-'Aqqad, Sarrouf, Moutraan, N'aymih and Houssayn (ibid: 374). However, according to Didaoui (ibid: 375), there are attempts to synthesize these isolated and dispersed Arabic approaches and thoughts, or to borrow from the West<sup>2</sup>. Arabs are also resorting to translating foreign textbooks and theories on translation, e.g. Newmark's *A Textbook of Translation* and Nida's *Towards A Science of Translation*. There are also academics who have tackled translation from Arabic linguistic and literary perspectives, such as *The Art of Translation in the Arabic Literature* by Muhammad 'Abd al-Ghani Hasan (1966) and *Translation and its Problems* by Ibrahim Khorshid (1985). In addition, there is a host of prescriptive Arabic translation textbooks for secondary and tertiary students, which are based on grammar and 'simplistic' impractical comparative linguistics (Didaoui 1992: 375).

Nevertheless, not all efforts in Arabic translation studies come from individual interest in the field. Translation is witnessing, as noted, a renaissance in the Arab world, and has gained, albeit modestly, recognition and support from Arab governments in the form of subsidies to universities, computer networks, e.g. Arabterm, conferences and academic studies on translation and Arabisation.

## Chapter 4

### Towards a model for translating corrective irony in argumentative texts

It is safe to say that any translation model aiming at a specific text-type – corrective, argumentative irony in this account – must build on 1) existing models, if proven to be applicable; 2) existing linguistic and/or literary theories; and 3) the analysis of texts at hand, in both source and target languages. To date, no ‘linguistic’ study on the translation of irony in general and the text-type at hand in particular, has been undertaken. Argumentative and literary texts, which constitute two main vehicles of corrective irony, have been adequately tackled in the translation literature in English (e.g. Hatim and Mason 1990; Venuti 2008; Toury 1995) and Arabic, (e.g. Hatim 1989a; and Sa’addedin 1985; 1987; 1989). The second point above constitutes the crux of the argument in this book as it provides the theoretical groundwork on which the text-analyses and subsequent suggested translation strategies are based.

For the purpose of establishing a specific theoretical background to the analysis, and given the inseparable nature of the two constituents of corrective irony, the irony itself and the (embedded) argument, the argumentative text structure and the linguistic explanation of ironic devices need to be addressed.

#### 4.1 The structure of argumentative texts

In Chapter 2, I argued that Grice’s conversational maxims, discourse and stylistics, as well as Muecke’s and Booth’s theories of irony, suggest that text structure plays an important role in the process of identification and interpretation of ironic devices.

Text structure is seen, following Crystal (1991: 331), as a network of interrelated units where the meaning of the parts is specifiable with reference to the whole and the hierarchy of text forming, as in Hatim and Mason’s (1990: 165) element (utterance), sequence and text. Topic shift, as discussed in Section 2.6, ought also to be adopted from the latter authors based on their argument that text structures are marked by topic shift, a feature which “enables us to identify boundaries not only between texts, but also between sequences and elements [utterances] within a given text” (ibid: 177). The change of topic is considered from three perspectives: the propositional meaning; the illocutionary force, i.e. the indirect speech act or the meaning the writer intends to convey in performing the illocutionary act; and the sign, or textual role of sequences.

The topic shift notion would result, for structural analysis purposes, in a refinement of the strategies, therefore definitions, of the text-type at hand. Hatim and Mason (1990) posit

two forms of argumentation: through argument and counter argument. The former is characterised by the substantiation of an initial thesis while the latter deals with the rebuttal of a thesis cited. However, although Hatim (1991; 1997) argues for a language-specific normative structural strategy in argumentation between Arabic and English, my own research (Chakhachiro 2007) shows that through argument is the predominant strategy in English and Arabic to communicate irony in the background feature article, a primarily argumentative text-type.

## 4.2 Ironic devices

As discussed in the review of the literary and linguistic theories, two types of ironic devices can trigger meaning and provide inference, namely formal – i.e. grammatical, lexical and paralinguistic – and rhetorical. The first are textual and identifiable in the text; the second are not subject to immediate identification by textual means. Identification here denotes the ability of the reader to locate irony within the actual words of the text. Both kinds of devices require the same type of analysis. The questions of how we infer that a device is rhetorical and how we know that a rhetorical device is ironic have been discussed earlier, supported by examples, with reference to the ironologists Muecke and Booth, and to Grice's conversational maxims. Muecke and Booth give a comprehensive classification, and describe common instances, of irony, while Grice suggests a set of conversational rules or maxims, by deliberately flouting which inference could be detected or rather triggered.

Suggesting that rhetorical devices cannot be textually identified means that a tangible description of these devices is required for the purposes of contrastive analysis and translation. There is a need then to demonstrate that these devices have specific linguistic forms, lexico-grammatical and/or paralinguistic, which can be identified and made use of monolingually and across a pair of languages.

Although Grice's maxims can trigger ironic inferences, a theory of meaning is required, to inform, for example, why a parallel structure may mark a specific intended meaning. This leads us to modern linguistics, namely, the communicative function of language, as discussed above. First, a brief explanation of the function/s of texts employing corrective irony is pertinent. Using Ogden and Richards' (1949: 226-227) functions of language and Jakobson's poetic function (see above), and given that these texts are shaped by the attitudes of the author, the reader and, in case of feature articles, the newspaper, four main functions are suggested:

- 1) Expression of attitude to readership
- 2) Expression of attitude to the victim of irony, which could be a person/s, government, political party, situation, or all of the above
- 3) Imparting a specific message
- 4) Maintaining participation of, and solidarity with the readership

Following House (1977: 36-37), one can state that these functions are most commonly found in the text-type at hand. However, I adopt House's view that:



In order to characterize the function of an individual text specimen, we have to define function differently: the function of a text is the application... or use which the text has in the particular context of situation. It must be stressed that any text is embedded in a unique situation (ibid: 37).

Bearing this in mind, and as discussed above (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4.3), Halliday's (1994) theory of functions (the ideational, interpersonal, and textual), and the three features of the context of situation – field, mode, and tenor – realised through these functions, respectively, can be posited as plausible analytical tools. In addition to Halliday's context of situation, the geographical and temporal settings also play an important role in understanding the ironic inference of the devices. The above text-type functions, the Hallidayan context of situation and the geographical and temporal setting, fall into Hymes's (1974) situational constraints, namely, setting, participants, purpose, genre, key, and norms of interaction, which enable a competent analyst/contrastivist to interpret speech events.

In other words, an inference model is warranted to trigger the irony in the texts, a functional model to explain meaning and describe linguistic events within their extra-linguistic settings, and a stylistic model to account for formal and rhetorical devices in the text, perceived from two angles, texture and structure.

### **4.3 Discourse model**

In this section, the hypothetical analysis/translation model highlighted above is developed into a practicable model that can serve both the analysis and translation processes. A model that identifies the techniques and tools required for the analysis of Arabic and English ironic texts must encompass concepts that identify the strategies required for the contrastive analysis and, eventually, the translation of those texts.

In setting the aim of this book, I mentioned five major strategies, three of which relate to the analysis of the text-type at hand, namely: 1) describing the lexical, grammatical, paralinguistic, and rhetorical devices; 2) describing the linguistic exponents of the rhetorical devices; 3) identifying the relation between ironic devices, coherence and text structure. In Chapter 1, I presented a lengthy overview and discussion of irony from a literary point of view, leading to a broad description of the rhetorical devices in the general sense of irony. The overview in Chapter 2 shed light on modern linguistic theory and its implications for the analysis of irony, particularly that found in corrective ironic texts. In the discussion, a number of examples from the data set have been employed. So far, these discussions have shown that for modern linguistics to explain irony, it must, in addition to making use of sub-disciplines and concepts such as pragmatics, speech acts and macro-structure, employ an inferential theory based mainly on conversational approach.

Part of the identification of ironic devices from a linguistic perspective is viewing the devices in their context, in addition to the structural concern of individual communicative

# Chapter 5

## Data Analysis

In this chapter, a comprehensive analysis of the data set is conducted following the model proposed in Chapter 4. Thus, the analysis is tackled interactively at three interconnected levels: texture, structure, and discourse or overall rhetorical meaning. Texture covers the multifaceted forms of ironic devices proper and, functionally, reflects and is affected by the context of situation, language varieties and, in many instances, the conversational strategies. The contribution of ironic devices to the communicative function of the texts' structures, i.e. sequential organisations, draws upon Hatim and Mason's (1990) 'topic shift' notion (discussed in Chapters 2 and 4), which identifies the boundaries between sequences and utterances. Utterances are viewed, following Allen and Corder (1975) as 'individual communicative acts', and sequences as stretches of texts "long enough to allow for the emergence of a rhetorical purpose" (Hatim and Mason 1997: 98). Therefore, utterances (identified below with Arabic numerals) and sequences (identified with Roman numerals) are not necessarily bound by sentences and paragraphs, respectively, although the majority of them are. Lastly, the text's overall rhetorical meaning draws upon the interaction between texture and structure from three perspectives: the writer's attitude, the text's province and the readership's participation.

Utterances are the smallest unit in the analysis, and as discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.4) and Chapter 4 (section 4.3.2), due consideration must be given to Halliday's language functional dimensions: the ideational or experiential, the interpersonal and the textual, to infer the communicative function of utterances at the structural, rhetorical and stylistic levels. These dimensions are an integral part of each utterance, hence the speech act. However, depending on their idiosyncratic style, the ironist can opt for the manipulation of one or more dimension to convey irony or none at all. The ironist can also deliberately flout Grice's conversational maxims (see Chapter 2), an optional tool but in many instances necessary, to evince irony. Therefore, references made to functional dimensions or conversational maxims in the analysis highlight the crucial role played by these factors in informing the irony and illocutionary force at the device and utterance level and in shaping these devices and utterances as stepping stones to achieving the overall message.

It is also important to reiterate that, in line with the discussion in Chapters 2 and 3, due reference is made to the linguistic, i.e. the lexico-grammatical exponents that realise the rhetorical devices. The analysis may seem, at times, repetitive, as in some instances the same item serves as a vehicle of irony in different capacities. As such, an item may be discussed and cross-referenced under a different heading within the same category, e.g. synonymy and metonymy, or across categories, e.g. lexical and grammatical devices. This is an inevitable product of the adopted analytical approach and multiple functions that the linguistic and rhetorical devices generally have at the textual and discursive levels, and,

more specifically, the multiple roles some of the devices, tackled below, play in bringing irony to life and in engaging the readership.

## 5.1 The data set

Throughout the book, reference has been made to examples hinting at the content and context of the data set. The commentary texts chosen for the analysis are drawn from leading Australian newspapers and involve local politics. Two background feature articles are selected in English and two background feature articles in Arabic. Two factors guided the selection: 1) to obtain a picture of the degree and implicitness or explicitness of the use of corrective irony in political commentary in general; and 2) feature articles deal with Australian current affairs, which in practice are the topics that would more likely be chosen for translation. In addition, local current affairs are more commonly dealt with in the Arabic press in feature articles. In contrast, Arabic editorials are scarce, are usually preoccupied with issues related to their audiences' countries of origin, and tend to be stylistically more standardised and cautious when they do address Australian politics.

The articles belong to the same period, which meets the temporal setting in addition to the geographical and sociological ones. This contextual parallelism is coupled with cotextual parallelism (cf. Snell-Hornby 1988). The topics of texts 1 in both languages deal with mismanagement in the politics of the state of New South Wales and the Liberal Government at the time of publication. The same political figure (John Fahey) is under fire, albeit from different perspectives: in English text 1 Fahey is depicted as an ambitious upwardly mobile politician who was ridiculed as a pawn in the hands of the principal victim of irony who commissioned him to produce reports to cover political scandals. In Arabic text 1, published a year later, Fahey who had become the Premier, is ridiculed, this time as the principal victim of irony, for an identical issue: commissioning someone to produce a cover-up report. Texts 2 deal with Australian federal politics on different topics.

The Arabic texts are faithfully translated to illustrate and analyse the representation of irony in these texts, and, ultimately, conduct the pertinent contrastive analysis necessary to suggest translation strategies. The chosen translation method of the Arabic texts follows Newmark's (1988: 46) definition of 'faithful translation' which reproduces "the precise contextual meaning of the original within the constraints of the TL grammatical structures... [and] 'transfers' cultural words and preserves the degree of grammatical and lexical 'abnormality' (deviation from SL norms) in the translation." As such, the aesthetic value of the SL text is not considered (ibid: 46). The above faithful translation method highlights stylistic variations between Arabic and English in general and assists in discussing the inevitable representational discrepancies that are likely to be more prominent in text-types employing a deviant stylistic and rhetorical tool, such as irony. On Newmark's list or continuum of translation methods (ibid: 45-47), faithful translation falls between literal translation and semantic translation.

In this chapter and in Chapter 6, the ironic devices in English and Arabic are identified by their sequence and utterance numbers for reference. Roman numerals are used for

sequences and Arabic numerals for utterances. The Arabic devices are followed by a faithful translation for reference.

## 5.2 Analysis

### 5.2.1 Analysis of Arabic text 1 (AT1)

Background feature article

*Al-'Aalam Al-'Araby* العالم العربي

By Rami Kurouch بقلم: رامي القروش

	Faithful translation	Source Text
	<b>The laughable..tearful [Laugh..till you cry]</b>	<b>المضحك..المبكي</b>
I	[1] If the teenage years are considered by the human being the most important stages of craving for learning and knowledge, they are also undoubtedly known as the years of bewilderment and bemusement. [2] Bewilderment and bemusement for knowing things or hearing words we used to find extremely hard to digest and chew ... that is, understand in every sense of the word. [3] Among the words and sayings that caused us some mental confusion for example are [sic]: "the most devilish matters are those which bring laughter [it would be funny if it were not so sad]" or "the laughable tearful [Laugh till you cry]".	[1] إذا كانت سنوات الفتوة بالنسبة للمخلوق البشري تعتبر أهم مراحل التلهف للعلم والمعرفة، فهي أيضاً بدون شك تعرف بأيام الدهشة والاستغراب. [2] الدهشة والاستغراب من معرفة أشياء أو سماع كلمات كنا نجد صعوبة قصوى في هضمها ومضغها... أي فهمها بكل معنى الكلمة. [3] ومن الكلمات والأقوال التي سببت لنا بعضاً من الارتباك الذهني مثلاً هي: "شر الأمور ما يضحك" أو "المضحك المبكي".
II	[4] Today, wilfully and premeditatedly, we find that the Premier of New South Wales, Mr John Fahey, is trying to either test these sayings on us or implement them [sic], without any consideration or concern for the reactions that may be generated in us. [5] The week before last and following the scandals of the "Family Financing Program" known in Australia and by the Government as "Home Fund" and given his willingness, according to him, to show the face of innocence and wisdom of [wise] behaviour that he and each minister in his government has, he promised to form an impartial parliamentary committee of experts, giving it many powers to enable it to reach the depths of the motives of failure.	[4] واليوم، عمداً أو متعمداً، نجد أن رئيس حكومة نيو ساوث ويلز السيد جون فاهي يحاول اما أن يجرب فينا هذين القولين أو ان يطبقهما، دون مراعاة أو اهتمام لردات الفعل التي قد تتولد لدينا. [5] في الاسبوع قبل الماضي وبعد فضائح أزمة "برنامج التمويل العائلي" المعروفة، أستراليا وحكومتها، بتسمية "هوم فاند" ورغبة منه، على حد تعبيره، في اظهار وجه البراءة وحكمة التصرف عنده وعند كل وزير في حكومته، وعد بتشكيل لجنة برلمانية محايدة من الخبراء موقراً لها صلاحيات جمة لكي تستطيع من خلالها الوصول إلى أعماق دوافع الفشل.

# Chapter 6

## Translating strategies

The comprehensive analysis in Chapter 5 shows that both English and Arabic have employed shared and language specific devices to communicate irony. Section 1 below outlines and contrasts the results of the analysis, and establishes the analytical ground rules required to suggest a discursive correspondence to translating the ironic devices in the data set. Drawing on this, Section 2 sets general strategies for the translation into Arabic of ironic devices identified in the English texts with reference to the analysis in Chapter 5 and translation model in Chapter 4. To put theory into practice at the textual level, full translation of the English texts is provided in Section 3.

### 6.1 Form, function and translation equivalence

The analysis shows a lack of correspondence in form and function between English and Arabic, although similar devices are observed at major structural signs (Table 6.2). What's more, the number of devices and their frequency of use are in stark contrast considering the word count of the analysed texts (Chart 6.1). 59 devices are employed in the two languages: 28 rhetorical, 18 lexical and 13 grammatical. Arabic employs 19 rhetorical devices 104 times, 15 lexical devices 95 times and 6 grammatical devices 26 times. English employs 20 rhetorical devices 65 times, 8 lexical devices 66 times and 10 grammatical devices 32 times. In total, Arabic uses 225 ironic devices in the two articles compared with 163 in the English articles. Arabic managed to use 62 more devices in shorter texts and in a much lower number of utterances; the equivalent English word count of the Arabic articles is 1398 while the word count of the English articles is 1836. The English articles employ 87 utterances as opposed to 45 in the Arabic articles.

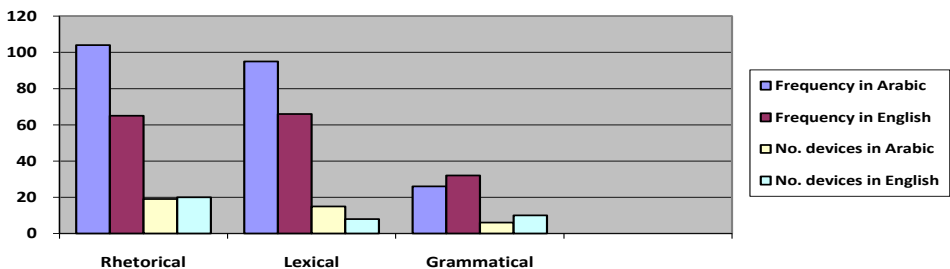


Chart 6.1 Frequency of devices in English and Arabic texts

Furthermore, despite the higher score of devices in Arabic, relative to the number of words and utterances, the English counterparts exhibit a higher level of sophistication,

covertness, economy and complexity, structurally, rhetorically, linguistically and conversationally. Table 6.1 highlights, for example, that the English articles resort mainly to the violation of the maxims of quality and manner to communicate irony, compared with Arabic, which emphatically outscores English in violating the maxim of quantity (33 to 10), particularly by giving more information (relative to the Arabic standard) than is required. Considering the number of utterances in each language, the maxims and their frequency of usage indicate that English counts more on reader involvement, planned structure and content than on writer exhortation, circumlocution and form to communicate irony and the overall rhetorical meaning. In other words, English seems to address a more elite readership in tune with politics and therefore requires less explicit and emphatic explanation. This is not surprising given that the Arabic target readership are migrants who are, characteristically, more versed with the politics of their countries of origin than their host country. In this sense the first Arabic article really ventures into Australian politics of interest to mainstream Australians, compared with the second article, which sticks to Australian politics that relate to and affect Arabs and Muslims in particular.

*Table 6.1 Frequency of violation of conversational maxims*

Maxim	Arabic		English		Number of utterances		Number of maxims flouted per utterance	
	Text 1	Text 2	Text 1	Text 2	Arabic	English	Arabic	English
Quality	19	20	17	12				
Quantity	17	16	8	2				
Manner	17	14	33	17				
Relation	3	4	1	5				
Total	110		95		45	87	2.44	1.09

The statistical, formal and functional discrepancies indicate the diversity and the pervasiveness of ironic devices as text-building and intention-forming tools in just two English and two Arabic feature articles. It is also evident that the devices that assisted in communicating irony in the data are as elusive as the concept of irony itself. Shared devices, in particular, have little formal features in common. This entails that a formal equivalence in translation is only remotely plausible, and suggests a functional or dynamic (Nida 1964) equivalence approach, that requires the translator to claw his/her way up from the overall rhetorical meaning of the texts to the sequences' communicative function, brought about by ironic devices at the utterance level. A functional equivalence may therefore yield a myriad of linguistic and rhetorical devices that can be appropriate as translation for a given ironic device in a given context, subject to the observation of the degree of explicitness and implicitness expected by the target readership and to the achievement of the overall rhetorical meaning.

Equally, the analysis in Chapter 5 suggests that the translation of ironic devices must consider these devices as signs in the development of the structure and, ultimately, of the overall intended meaning. Therefore, it is important to consider the textual and discursive strategies used by both languages, and identify which particular devices at particular junctions of the articles commonly contribute to achieving the rhetorical meaning of the Arabic and English texts. Compare, for example, the use of rhetorical questions in the

argument and conclusion sequences in Arabic as opposed to condensation, semotactic anomaly, internal contradiction and understatement in the conclusion in English. This bases the suggested translation strategy on a micro/macro contrastive analysis in line with the devised model in Chapter 4.

Table 6.2 provides a snapshot of form and function of ironic devices at the structural level, including the conversational strategies employed to steer ironic inference.

Table 6.2 Ironic devices as signs in the text development of the feature articles

Structural signs	English devices and conversational strategy (CS)	Arabic devices and CS
Thesis cited to be substantiated; thesis cited to be argued through	<b>Rhetorical devices</b>	
	<i>Shared:</i> pretended defence of the victim*; paralinguistic device; semotactic anomaly; antithesis	
	<i>Language specific:</i> pretended advice to the victim; understatement; stylistic placing, parallelism; formula; pretended ignorance; condensation; indirect appeal	<i>Language specific:</i> overstatement; shift of register; cliché; aural mode
	<b>Lexical devices</b>	
	<i>Shared:</i> lexical choice	
	<i>Language specific:</i> figurative expression; modality; chain of collocational cohesion; compound; idiom	<i>Language specific:</i> binomial; repetition; collocation; personification of abstract; paraphrasing
	<b>Grammatical devices</b>	
<i>Shared:</i> reference		
<i>Language specific:</i> inversion; free indirect speech; adjunct adverb; inversion; reference	<i>Language specific:</i> redundancy	
<b>CS: (Violation of the maxim of) quality; quantity; manner</b>	<b>CS:</b> quality; quantity; manner; relation	
Specific thesis to be substantiated	N/A	<b>Rhetorical devices</b> understatement; pretended defence of the victim; overstatement; internal contradiction; praising in order to blame
		<b>Lexical devices</b> near synonymy; repetition; synonymy; root- echo; collocation; modality
		<b>Grammatical devices</b> free indirect speech; redundancy
		<b>CS</b> manner; quality; quantity
Substantiation of specific thesis	N/A	<b>Rhetorical devices</b> paralinguistic device; parallelism; understatement; overstatement; pretended defence of the victim; shift of register; aural mode; praising in order to blame; cumulation; antithesis; semotactic anomaly
		<b>Lexical devices</b> repetition; synonymy; near-synonymy; collocation; modality; reference
		<b>Grammatical devices</b> redundancy; free indirect speech
		<b>CS</b> quality; quantity; manner; relation

