
Ironic quotations and similar patterns: Some complexities of interpretation

Elda Weizman

Bar-Ilan University

Elda.weizman@biu.ac.il

This talk addresses the complexities of assigning ironic speaker's meanings to single words in quotation marks (QMs). Specifically, it compares **ironic** uses of QMs (e.g., *People do not belong to the “right” religion*), with their polysemous counterparts, **naming** (*I like shopping at “Harrods”*) and marking the speaker's awareness of **lexical peculiarity** (*He made “history”*) (Weizman et al., under review). The analysis is based on a corpus of op-eds in the Israeli online daily *Ha'aretz*, containing 4190 instances of the patterns under study.

In an empirical study aiming to train a neural network to distinguish between the abovementioned patterns, good results were obtained for *ironic quotations* (precision: 79.7%; recall: 85.3%), better ones - for *naming* (precision: 95.1%; recall: 86.6%), and unsatisfactory ones - for *lexical peculiarity* (precision: 67.7%; recall: 43.4% (*ibid.*), which partially overlaps with 'scare quotes' (Härtl & Bürger 2021). Human taggers were also hesitant about the latter. I suggest a few criteria for the characterization of *lexical peculiarity* as opposed to *irony*. Single words in quotes are considered echoic mentions (Wilson & Sperber 1992), whereby irony detection is enhanced by partiality (Weizman 2020).

References. Härtl, H. & T. Bürger (2021). ‘Well, that's just great!’ An empirically based analysis of non-literal and attitudinal content of ironic utterances. *Folia Linguistica* 55(2), 361-387. • Weizman, E. (2020). The discursive pattern ‘claim+ indirect quotation in quotation marks’: strategic uses in French and Hebrew online journalism. *Journal of Pragmatics* 157, 131-141. • Weizman, E. et al (under review). Detecting verbal irony: A pragmatic-based approach to neural-network training. • Wilson, D. & D. Sperber (1992). On verbal irony. *Lingua* 87 (1-2), 77-90.