

Irony processing: L1/L2 interface

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Irony is a complex communicative phenomenon employing implicit meaning to communicate beyond words (e.g. Wilson and Sperber 2012). In everyday communication, next to saying explicitly what they think, speakers commonly impart their opinions implicitly, employing irony to tinge the affective impact of the message (e.g. Sperber and Wilson 1981; Dews and Winner 1995; Barbe 1995; Kothoff 2003; Partington 2007). Numerous attempts have been undertaken to factor in social, mental and linguistic mechanisms involved in irony comprehension, and to explain their dynamic interactions in on-line processing (e.g. Shelley 2001; Kihara 2005; Gibbs and Colston 2007; Shibata et al. 2010; Regel et al. 2010). So far, irony processing research attempts have been exclusively dedicated to exploring monolingual figurative competence. The present study sets to investigate irony processing in a non-monolingual population of second language users: Polish (L1) users of English (L2).

4 on-line experiments, employing diversified input pacing and responding conditions, were designed to test the speed and accuracy of explicitly (literal meaning) and implicitly (ironic meaning) expressed opinions in participants' L1 and their L2. Study one (experiment 1, 2) tested the explicit processing of ironic and literal meanings in emotive decision task, and study two (experiment 3,4) explored the implicit processing of the same sets of comments in a lexical decision task. 248 Polish proficient users of English took part in these experiments. The overarching aim was to tease out whether the explicit and implicit meaning processing in study participants L1 and L2, would reveal convergent or divergent patterns in terms of response latency and accuracy.

Both studies offer consistent findings evidencing L1/L2 response latency and accuracy patterns convergence for all tested conditions. L1 response latency patterns showed no irony processing advantage over L2. Also, accuracy patterns for the examined languages converged. This suggests that, for proficient users of a foreign language with a good knowledge of their non-native language, irony on-line comprehension poses no bigger challenge in L2 than it does in L1.

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