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The Translation of Irony

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Article abstract

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THE TRANSLATION OF IRONY

Résumé

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1. A BRIEF STUDY OF IRONY

The first problem that arises when studying irony is that of its definition. Nowadays, most critics agree that the old concept of irony as "saying one thing and

meaning another" is no longer a comprehensive or accurate description of the multifarious and complex techniques that writers use to create irony. On the other hand, irony, and in particular verbal irony, is not something that can be recognized by a fixed set of linguistic or stylistic features: there is no recognizable ironic tone or style. Irony depends on context. Just as there are no words or expressions which are humorous per se but by reason of their semantic or syntactic use in a context and which, as Walter Nash puts it, will have to be defined "extrinsically" by their contextual linkages and semantic relationships, so irony depends on context since it springs from the relationships of a word, expression or action with the whole text or situation. Irony is a pragmatic category which activates "an endless series of subversive interpretations." (Muecke 1982: 31), as a product of the contextual setting of a character's words or actions. The double interpretation of irony is therefore different from that of wordplay, which is the product of a linguistic structure and it is a question of different *meanings* rather than *interpretations*.

Muecke identifies three essential elements for irony (Muecke 1969: 19-20): a) a two-storey phenomenon: a lower level, the situation as it appears to the victim or as it is deceptively presented by the ironist, and an upper level, the situation as it appears to the observer or the ironist ; b) some opposition between the two: contradiction, incongruity,... ; c) "innocence": a victim unaware of the existence of an upper level, or an ironist pretending he is unaware. The first element relates irony to humour since it recalls what Nash defines as the complex structure of humour, consisting of a "superstructure" — the formulaic structure of the joke — , and a "substructure" — the underlying context that the reader/listener needs to have in his grasp (Nash 1985: 31). The opposition between the two levels has to be wrapped up in a feeling of ambiguity, since it is a characteristic feature of irony that both reality and appearance should be presented as true. The main focus of irony is the relationship between the two interpretations intended, rather than the content itself (Tanaka 1974: 46). It is actually this feeling of contradiction between the two levels that distinguishes irony from sarcasm: irony "mal-codes" (Nash 1985: 152-153), it misrepresents the real content of the message so that the contradiction must be assumed as normal, whereas a sarcastic statement is ostensibly sincere and provokes no feeling of contradiction at all. The third element, real or pretended innocence, relates irony to drama, which, whether in its tragic or in its comic form, has blindness of characters as a basic feature. As can be observed, all three elements point to the significance of context or the pragmatic content in the creation of irony.

The fact that irony "mal-codes" or that it presents two opposed realities as true does not imply that its purpose should be to deceive: unlike deception, in which the contrast between the two levels is intended to conceal a real meaning, irony is meant to be understood, and the recognition of the real meaning, or

rather, of the fact that there *is* a real meaning different from what is being proposed, is essential for the full realization of irony.

Just as in any type of humour, a failure to signal the intention to joke may compromise laughter and the necessary quickness of response, so irony that is not explicitly stated may result in a wrong inference from the reader or hearer. The ironist does not always need to signal his intention to ironize: the topic itself or the values shared by both ironist and victim may imply he *must* be ironic. To put it differently, the signals may be in the context (the common values inform the victim that the ironist "cannot be speaking in earnest"), or they may accompany the text (gestures,...) or be part of the text itself. This is closely related to the factors that affect the correct/incorrect perception of irony, which will be of great significance for its translation, as will be examined later. According to Muecke (1973b: 38), these factors are: the Sender's capacity for irony and the Receiver's personal sensitivity to irony, the community rules relating to irony of both Sender and Receiver and the degree of coincidence between the two sets of rules, the Receiver's knowledge of the Sender and of his ironical technique, the Receiver's familiarity with the rules of the Sender's speech community and, finally, the probability of ironic intention and of assumption of irony. Not only individual qualities but also the rules of conversation affect this perception: Grice's "Cooperative Principle" in conversation may be broken in order to create humour or to signal an intention to be ironic. According to this principle, there is a tacit acceptance by the participants in a conversation to supply sufficient and appropriate information (a maxim Grice calls Quantity), to make contributions that are true and not to say anything that one believes is false (Quality), to be relevant (Relation), and to be brief and orderly and to avoid obscurity and ambiguity (Manner). The hearer's communicative competence enables him to perceive when the speaker is breaking these maxims and being ironic.

If neither the topic nor the common values are indicative of an ironic intention, or if the factors operating on Sender and Receiver are different, then the ironist will resort to other signals, usually as few as possible, such as the contradiction between expression and content (e.g. a formal register in an informal context), between various elements at the level of content (e.g. logical contradictions), between various elements at the level of expression (e.g. stylistic exaggerations), between linguistic systems, or between prosodic and other linguistic features (use of intonation). (Muecke 1973a: 163-164; 1973b: 41) According to Searle and Austin, words and sentences are speech *acts* with a *locutionary* force (a propositional meaning), an *illocutionary* force (they may constitute a question, a command,...), and a *perlocutionary* force (they intend to cause a reaction on the hearer). An ironist may revert the pragmatic significance of a sentence and interpret the illocutionary force of a speech act wrongly (e.g. taking a question as an assertion).

All these are ways for the ironist both to be ironic and to signal his intention, both to code his irony and to help his victim decode it, since although there must always be ambiguity in the recognition of irony — as opposed to sarcasm —, irony, as explained above, is ultimately intended to be interpreted correctly.

Irony may therefore spring from several factors, and it lends itself to classification into different types. A first division would be that of *intentional* vs. *unintentional* irony, which some critics call *linguistic* and *dramatic*, or *instrumental* and *observable*, the difference between the two lying in whether a speaker (the ironist) has the intention to make an utterance for two audiences (*i.e. intentional* irony, which is therefore mainly verbal) or whether a person perceives a contradiction in some situation or series of events and makes judgements about it, while there is another person who is completely unaware of it (*i.e. unintentional* or *dramatic* irony). Therefore, while intentional irony **is being** communicated, unintentional irony exists already in the situation. However, this existence has to be actualized by the ironist, and we may claim that in plays this type of irony is also **being** communicated, *i.e.* there is a playwright presenting an ironic situation, and the irony thus turns out to be intentional. Actually, as both Muecke and Tanaka point out, in literary texts the distinction between intentional and unintentional irony is not clear-cut, particularly since the author's point of view is not always obvious and easy to assess.

Muecke distinguishes four modes of irony according to the part played by the ironist (Muecke 1969: 61-93): *impersonal* irony, in which we are unaware of the ironist, and the irony lies in what he says rather than in the fact that it is a particular person saying it; *self-disparaging* irony, in which the ironist presents himself as ignorant and is a guide to our judgement; *ingénu* irony, in which the ironist withdraws, using a character, an ingénu, for his irony; and *dramatized* irony, in which the ironist withdraws completely and presents an ironic situation.

Impersonal irony offers a wide range of different techniques: praising in order to blame, blaming in order to praise, pretended agreement with the victim, pretended advice or encouragement to the victim, rhetorical questions, pretended doubt, pretended error or ignorance, innuendo and insinuation, irony by analogy, ambiguity, pretended omission of censure, pretended attack upon the victim's opponent, pretended defence of the victim, misrepresentation or false statement, internal contradiction, fallacious reasoning, stylistic contradiction and parody, understatement, overstatement and displaying the latently ironic. (Muecke 1969: 61-87)

Muecke mentions impersonal, self-disparaging and ingénu irony as characteristic of novels, and dramatized irony as, obviously, typical of plays. However, although from the playwright's point of view there would only be dramatized irony, we may claim that among the characters there may also be cases of impersonal irony: one character may be ironical and

use irony as a weapon in the same way as a novelist can. Irony is actually much more complex and sharper in drama that in any other type of text: not only can characters speak ironically of one another and to one another, but also a character's words may refer both to the situation as it appears to him and to the situation as it really is, he himself being unaware of this. And, although a character can never be taken to speak absolutely on behalf of the writer, the principle of textual embedding may always apply in drama, that is, the utterances of a character may be embedded in the text of another speaker, namely the playwright or even the actor, thus resulting in a complex type of irony which would involve not only the characters of the play but also external elements such as the actors, the playwright and even the audience itself. This is actually the type of irony that springs from those in-jokes actors and playwrights used to be so fond of in the 18th century. Nearly every theatrical element can be incorporated into the play to create an ironic situation: the performance and rehearsal of the play (play-within-the-play), the playwright or director, the dramatic conventions of the time, the actor, the audience, etc. The power of dramatic irony is also added to by the situation of all the characters at a given moment and by the relationship between them. Finally, a dramatic performance introduces a whole range of gestures, mime, intonation and comic spectacle which enhances the irony that arises either from the characters' utterances or actions and which places them in a much more complex context.

On the other hand, all types of irony have a dramatic component: the conspiracy element, which is common to other types of humour as well. There is always some need for cooperation between speaker and listener in humour. To quote M. Vasconcellos, "humor makes exaggerated claims on the relationship between speaker and listener; it is in fact the larger-than-life essence of that partnership." (1986: 145) In the case of irony, this cooperation becomes conspiracy. Nash proposes a formula for some types of humour, which actually exemplifies what happens not only in dramatic humour but also, I might say, in all types of irony:

(E _____ ») Et « _____ » Rt (« _____ R)

E: executant (author, "I",...);

Et: executant within the text (the *persona* who speaks for the author);

Rt: respondent within the text (*persona* controlled by Et and making responses shared or disclaimed by R);

R: Respondent (reader, as observer and censor). (Nash 1985: 19-20)

The outside respondent—whether reader, audience or character—is allowed into the joke, while the respondent within the text (which may be another character or a reader unaware of the ironist's real meaning), is left in the dark. This is actually how irony works and it is that conspiracy between the

speaker and the privileged receiver that provokes the sense of superiority and detachment characteristic of irony and, ultimately, of any type of comic pleasure.

2. THE TRANSLATION OF IRONY

The first conclusion that may be drawn from what scholars have written about the translation of irony so far is that most of them concentrate on the difficulty or ease of this task. Indeed, most studies of the translation of humour in general are devoted to this question alone. They therefore usually establish a gradation of difficulty and claim that the more humour relies on linguistic aspects (e.g. puns) the more likely we shall have to face untranslatability. Humour based on irony or on reversal of situation or tone will be more widely translatable. Cultural jokes need cultural familiarity or contact between the nations concerned in their translation and will be more difficult to translate when the linguistic and the cultural component are very closely related. Finally, universal jokes will be the easiest to translate, if they do exist.

Humour and irony are often linked to poetry and works of art, as they require the subjectivity, balance and striking formal structures characteristic of poetic language. It is therefore not surprising that the translation of humour should be linked to that of poetry in numerous analyses by critics, since the formal aspects are an integral part of both types of texts. The link is also established on the basis of the difficulty of both tasks: "When it comes to translating humour, the operation proves to be as desperate as that of translating poetry." (Diot 1989: 84)

Another aspect that is generally highlighted is the problem of context, which plays an important role in the creation of irony, as has been underlined above. There is always the need for background knowledge of a socio-cultural type to appreciate irony, particularly in the case of satire and allusion. The translation of humour and satire depends on the proximity of cultures: the more distant the culture, the more difficult the understanding of humour will be. And even if satire is understood, there may not be the same mechanisms to create it in the target language, or the new culture may just not find it funny, since for satire to be humorous it requires some sympathy after the criticism on the part of the reader/listener. It is no wonder then that publishers should generally be wary of translations of satire on the grounds that it is "too local" and that it would need recreation, a technique that some translators absolutely refuse to adopt and that translation critics often condemn.

A conception of translation as a process of transporting "sense" does not account for the intricate process of humour translation since "sense" in humour, and particularly in irony, has a much more complex nature, which includes the speaker's intentions, the background knowledge of speaker and listener, the assumptions and presuppositions implicit in the text, the connotations of each word, etc. Furthermore, it is

not sense alone that constitutes the core of a humorous or ironic statement or situation: the form is also very important, as was mentioned above. In a generative semantics approach, two sentences with the "same" meaning would have the same tree. But irony and humour may simply spring from an alteration in the usual syntactic order of a sentence, from the choice of an unusual collocation or, indeed, from the very use of a certain word. On the other hand, a linguistic approach is not sufficient either since "humour is an occurrence in a social play" and "it characterizes the interaction of persons in situations in cultures." (Nash 1985: 12)

Most critics agree that the translator must try to keep the original ambiguity, tone or style whenever they are significant in the source text. When that is not possible, they opt for an "equivalent effect" translation: taking the idea or the intention of the original humorous message and adapting it to the target culture in order to provoke an equivalent response in the new reader. As has been argued recently, the problem with the theories based on "equivalent effect" is that effect can only be measured or predicted by means of one's personal intuition: "in the absence of any objective basis of assessment, target language reader reaction is no more predictable than source language reader reaction is measurable, and the shift of emphasis away from the text to hypothetical reception aspects allows unrestricted leeway for any desired bias or distortion." (Brotherton s.d.: 37, quoted by Delabastita 1990: 63)

What most critics seem to be doing then is suggesting what the best way to translate humour really is, what should and should not be done, keeping the question of translatability always in mind: although one cannot be completely faithful, there is no need to change what is easily translatable: the translator should adapt to TL culture when there is an equivalent; one should not explain the irony (or the joke) since explanation destroys humour; one should concentrate on the essence of the joke (e.g. in linguistic jokes, the kind of relationship established between two meanings, between a certain style and a content, etc.) and then keep that essence adapting it to TL conventions even if one changes the specific meaning or facts; one should concentrate on the effect of the joke on the receiver, etc. The purpose of this paper is not that of questioning the validity of these recommendations. However, I would like to remark on the fact that all these scholars appear to be interested only in the essence of the source text, and they reduce the question of humour translation to the rendering of that essence — whether it is difficult, whether it is at all possible — or to the absence of irony or humour in a specific target text. This approach is not sufficient to explain the complex nature of the translation of irony and it does not provide us with any method for its analysis.

I would therefore like to encourage a new approach and suggest the development of descriptive research, which may not be valid by itself but which

may at least complement the other approaches. With a limited corpus of English comedies and their translations into Spanish, we may study which strategies translators have adopted when translating irony, whether they have been trying to be faithful to the source text at the expense of humour, or else whether they have managed to keep the irony introducing some significant changes, if they have used any editorial techniques to support a translational solution to a ST translation problem, which conventions have prevailed, etc. We may thus deduce the different points of view adopted by translators, which will, hopefully, point towards a poetics of translation.

I have decided on comedies for my corpus of study because of the complex nature of irony in this type of text, which can always count on the performance to enhance the irony in the text. The comedies studied, however, rely on verbal irony a great deal too, so that they offer not only instances of dramatic irony but also of all the different types of "impersonal" irony on the part of the characters

The following is a possible list of strategies which has been drawn from the comedies examined. The terms that identify the type of irony have been taken from Muecke's classification (1969). When the irony springs only from a single word or expression in a speech, the relevant words have been highlighted in italics:

1. ST irony becomes TT irony with literal translation.

Praising in order to blame.

Lady Bracknell. "The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever." *(The Importance of Being Earnest,* I 497-500)

(1952): "Todas las teorías modernas de la educación son enfermizas. Afortunadamente, la educación no produce ningún efecto en Inglaterra."

(1975): "La teoría de la educación moderna es íntegra y radicalmente falsa. Afortunadamente, en Inglaterra al menos, la educación no produce el menor efecto."

Internal contradiction.

Lady Bracknell. "London society is full of women of the very highest birth who have, of their own free choice, remained thirty-five for years. Lady Dumbleton is an instance in point. To my own knowledge she has been thirty-five ever since she arrived at the age of forty, which was many years ago now." *(The Importance of Being Earnest,* III 260-265) The matter-of-fact tone of this speech prevents it from being "irony displayed" or "innuendo" with ironic tone. Lady Bracknell is being ironic in a much subtler way, pretending she actually believes what is so obviously illogical. This would nevertheless depend on the actress.

(1952): "La mejor sociedad de Londres está llena de mujeres de elevada cuna que, por su libre decisión, se han quedado en los treinta y cinco. Lady Dumbleton,

por ejemplo. Que yo recuerde, ha venido teniendo treinta y cinco desde que cumplió los cuarenta, hace ya bastantes años."

(1975): "La sociedad londinense está llena de damas de elevadísima alcurnia que, por su propia elección, se han quedado en los treinta y cinco. Lady Dumbleton es un caso de éstos, por ejemplo. Que yo sepa, ha tenido treinta y cinco años desde que cumplió los cuarenta, hace ya muchos años."

Fallacious reasoning.

Cecily. "Oh, yes. Dr. Chasuble is a most learned man. He has never written a single book, so you can imagine how much he knows." *(The Importance of Being Earnest,* II 536-538)

(1952): "¡Por supuesto! El doctor Chasuble es un hombre cultísimo. No ha escrito nunca ningún libro. Ya puedes imaginarte lo que sabe."

(1975): "¡Oh, sí! El doctor Casulla es un hombre doctísimo. No ha escrito jamás un solo libro; así que puede usted figurarse lo mucho que sabe."

2. ST irony becomes TT irony with "equivalent effect" translation.

Innuendo.

Mrs. Candour. "[...] a certain widow in the next street had got rid of her Dropsy and *recover'd her shape* in a most surprising manner." *(The School for Scandal,* I i 203-204)

(1955): "cierta viuda, de una calle próxima, se había visto libre de su hidropesía y *había vuelto a sus andanzas* del modo más sorprendente."

3. ST irony becomes TT irony through means different from those used in ST *(e.g.* verbal irony becomes kinetic irony, the use of intonation is replaced by lexical or grammatical units, etc.).

Dramatic irony.

4th Avocatore. "We have done ill, by a public officer to send for [Mosca], if he be heir."

3rd. Avoc. "'Tis true; he is a man, of great state, now left."

4th Avoc. "Go you, and learn his name; and say the court entreats his presence, here; but, to the clearing of some few doubts." *(Volpone,* V x 36-42)

(1952): these speeches have been deleted, but the irony on the different treatment afforded to Mosca once they have learnt he is now a man of wealth is maintained in the fact that, when Mosca arrives, the avocatori address him with great deference. This would probably be emphasized on the stage by means of bows and an extremely polite tone.

4. ST irony is enhanced in TT with some word/ expression.

Dramatic irony.

Corvino (to his wife). "God's precious, this is scurvy; 'tis very scurvy: and you are-" [...] "An errant

locust, by heaven a locuste. Whore, [...]' (*Volpone*, III vii 116-118) The irony lies in the fact that it is actually him that is forcing his wife, who absolutely refuses to do so, to lie with Volpone in order to gain his favour and eventually his legacy. The irony is in fact twofold, as Corvino had been ridiculously and unreasonably jealous in all the previous scenes.

(1980): "Dios bendito, esto es un deshonor, un puro deshonor, y tú eres..." "Una nube de langosta, por el cielo, una devoradora!... Puta, [...]" the irony is enhanced by the use of the word "deshonor" in the translation.

5. ST ironic innuendo becomes more restricted and explicit in TT.

Innuendo.

Mrs. Candour. "Poor dear Girl- who knows what *her situation* may be!" (*The School for Scandal*, I i 326)

(1955): "¡Pobre niña, quién sabe en qué *aprietos* se encuentra!"

6. ST Irony becomes TT sarcasm (criticism is overt now, no feeling of contradiction at all).

Dramatic irony.

The subtle ironic allusion to the influence of a defendant's social status and wealth on judges' attitudes and decisions, illustrated in strategy number 3 with an example taken from *Volpone* (V x 36-42) was replaced in the 1929 translation with overt and bitter satire on judges. The translator has recreated the whole act and the weight has shifted now from Volpone's and Mosca's ambition and covetousness to the corruption of judges: the magistrates have now been offered money and presents to affirm what is evidently true and, like all the other characters in the play, they are all interested in Volpone's legacy.

Understatement.

[Algernon. "The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility!"]

Jack. "That wouldn't be at all a bad thing." (*The Importance of Being Earnest*, I 215-216)

(1952): Jack. "Mira, [en] eso iríamos ganando."

7. The hidden meaning of ST irony comes to the surface in TT. No irony in TT therefore.

Understatement.

Volpone. "[...] women and men, of every sex and age, that bring me presents, send me plate, coin, jewels, with hope, that when I die (which they expect each greedy minute) it shall then return tenfold upon them. [...] *All which I suffer*, playing with their hopes." (*Volpone* I i 77-85)

(1952): "¡Cómo gozo al jugar con sus esperanzas...!" With the shift from "suffer" to "gozo", Volpone now states what he feels clearly and with no irony whatsoever.

8. ST ironic ambiguity has only **one** of the two meanings translated in TT. No double entendre or ambiguity in TT therefore.

Innuendo.

Mrs. Candour's innuendo on "dropsy" and "recover'd her shape" illustrated in strategy number 2 (*The School for Scandal*, I i 203-204) has been translated as: "[una de nuestras amigas] fue a curarse de una hidropesía, y es más, lo logró y volvió a Madrid *perfectamente buena.*" (1861); and "cierta viuda de la calle próxima ha sido curada de su hidropesía, *recobrando la salud* de la manera más sorprendente." (1868) Both translators have chosen to translate "shape" only in its sense of "health", disregarding the other piquant sense of the lady having possibly been pregnant and having recovered her usual figure now.

9. ST irony replaced by a "synonym" in TT with no two possible interpretations.

Innuendo.

Mosca. "He knows the state of [Volpone's] body, what it is; that nought can warm his blood [...] nor any incantation raise his spirit; a long forgetfulness hath seized *that part.*" (*Volpone*, II vi 64-66) (trying to persuade Corvino to make his wife lie with Volpone since he is only a decrepit old man on his deathbed. A physician has already offered his daughter, Mosca says.)

(1929): "No ignora su estado físico, nada peligroso para la honestidad de su hija, ni el poder de captación que una muchacha joven y bien adiestrada puede ejercer sobre el débil *ánimo* de un enfermo."

10. ST irony explained in footnote in TT.

Pretended defence of victim.

Sir Oliver. "Yet [he] has a string of charitable Sentiments I suppose at his Fingers' Ends!-"

Rowley. "Or rather at his Tongue's end Sir Oliver- for I believe there is no sentiment He has more faith in than that 'Charity begins at Home'."

Sir Oliver. "And his I presume is of that domestic sort which never stirs abroad at all." (*The School for Scandal*, V i 27-32)

The (1868) translator has translated the first idiom literally but has felt the need to explain Sir Oliver's irony in a footnote:

Sir Oliverio. "Según creo, hay una cuerda sentimental que vibra en la punta de cada uno de sus dedos."

Rowley. "Sí: y su máxima favorita es ésta: 'La caridad bien ordenada empieza por uno mismo'." a)(footnote)

Sir Oliverio. "Pues presumo que la suya es una caridad sedentaria que no pasa de él a nadie."

"a) El proverbio inglés dice así: 'Charity begins at home'. 'La caridad comienza en casa'. Sir Oliverio responde que la caridad de José 'es de una especie sedentaria, que no sale a la calle'. Ha sido menester alterar algo el texto, conservando el sentido."

11. ST irony has literal translation with no irony in TT.

Parody.

Jack. "Miss Cardew's family solicitors are Messrs. Markby, Markby and Markby." (*The Importance of Being Earnest*, III 139-140). There is parody on English lawyers' practices, which were usually formed by fathers and sons. Both the 1952 and the 1975 translations have rendered it literally as "Markby, Markby y Markby"; there is humour in the repetition but no social allusion now.

12. Ironic ST completely deleted in TT.

Innuendo.

Mosca's speech with innuendo on "that part" mentioned in strategy number 9 from *Volpone*, II vi 64-66 has been deleted in the 1952 translation, which was an adaptation for the stage, performed at the time of firm censorship from the Spanish authorities.

Analogy and ambiguity.

Lady Bracknell. "Her unhappy father is [...] under the impression that [Gwendolen] is attending a more than usually lengthy lecture by the University Extension Scheme on the Influence of a permanent income on Thought." (*The Importance of Being Earnest*, III 77-80). There is double irony here: analogy with the pedantic titles of University Extension lectures and the suggestion that people with high incomes do not have to think and therefore **do not** think. This speech has been deleted in the 1952 translation, which seems to have removed all culture-specific references.

13. No irony in ST becomes irony in TT.

Chasuble. "Charity, dear Miss Prism, charity! None of us are perfect; I myself am peculiarly susceptible to draughts." (*The Importance of Being Earnest*, II 234-235). The comedy springs from the incongruity in Dr. Chasuble's comparison: he is talking about Ernest, who is supposed to have died, and referring to morals, virtues and vices, which he goes on to compare with a physical "weakness" he cannot be responsible for. The 1975 translator has rendered that sentence as: "Caridad, mi querida miss Prism, caridad. Ninguno de nosotros es perfecto. Yo mismo tengo una debilidad especial por el juego de las damas." By interpreting "draughts" as "checkers" and therefore rendering it as "juego de las damas" he has created a spicy pun, since that word has two meanings in Spanish ("draughts" — the game — and "ladies"), which results in dramatic irony as it is a priest that may be surreptitiously saying he is very susceptible to the game of ladies.

Irony belongs to the pragmatic level of a text, *i.e.* it is very closely linked to context, although it is also dependent on form, like all types of humour. Some translators choose to render the semantic content of an ironic statement or situation, rather than its overall meaning, namely its irony. Others will focus on the pragmatic value of the text, and sacrifice the specific semantic content. Sometimes translators manage to render both. In any case, they will always be determined by the type of text, by the translational, cultural and social conventions of their time, the type of receiver they have in mind, the medium that has been chosen for their translation, the values relating to irony in the target community, etc. All these factors affect the correct communication and perception of irony between two speakers of any given language and obviously also between two "speakers" of two different languages. Both speakers, or rather, both cultures will have to be, at any rate, "ready to play" for irony to be transposed successfully.

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ROSS: SEMANTIC DICTIONARY
FOR TEXT UNDERSTANDING
AND SUMMARIZATION*

RÉSUMÉ

Le dictionnaire sémantique russe à usage
général (ROSS) est un outil pour l'analyse séman-
tique et informationnelle de tout texte russe
cohérent La structure de ROSS reflète la philo-
sophie et les niveaux de représentation adoptés
par le système de compréhension de texte POLJText
actuellement en cours d'implémentation à l'Institut
des États-Unis et du Canada

THE PURPOSE OF ROSS

The Russian general-purpose semantic dictio-
nary, ROSS, is a tool for the semantic (both linguistic
and informational) analysis of texts. The rich seman-
tic information contained in the dictionary makes pos-
sible local (within one phrase) semantic interpretation
as well as the semantic analysis of coherent texts.
Some zones of the dictionary provide the possibility
of logico-situational analysis of a text and a link to
different domains.

The present version of ROSS is designed, firstly,
to construct a base of textual facts (BTF) for a given
collection of Russian texts. The vocabulary of the the
present version is based on communications about
political events. The procedure proposed for BTF
construction (Leontyeva 1992) enables any user to
form an individual BTF ordering the desired degree
of compression of the initial content. Secondly, the
dictionary is to ensure multi-language, above all,
Russian-to-English, knowledge based machine trans-
lation (KBMT) (see Johnson, King and Des Tombe
1985; Nirenburg 1989; Papagaaij 1986).

Though similar in many aspects to dictionaries
with rich semantic data belonging to some MT