UNIVERSITY OF CRAIOVA

„ALEXANDRU PIRU" DOCTORAL SCHOOL

The ironic speech in post-postmodern fiction

Rhetoric-pragmatic perspective

- PhD Thesis Summary -

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SUMMARY

The approach of ironic literary speech from rhetoric and pragmatic perspective (the theoretical component) and its illustration by examples given by the douǎmiist novels (the applicative component) is the central problem of our thesis. The objectives of the research, set out in the first chapter, together with the presentation of the interdisciplinary methodological framework, have been important stages of our approach, besides defining the basic concepts ("irony", "speech", "postmodernism", "post-postmodernism") and the specification of the appropriate body of analysis.

The critical inventory of the theories about irony and highlighting of the original way in which the post-postmodern Romanian literature exploited the semantic and pragmatic valences of irony represent the main directions of research that propose the inclusion of the douǎmiist generation in the tradition of the Romanian prose, due to the use of different forms of manifestation of irony as ways of organizing the literary speech. The chosen subject and the interdisciplinary methodology used in its treatment highlights the originality of the research.

The manner in which writers report to the evolution of post-communist society conditioned and stimulated the emergence of a new vision on the world, materialized in the douǎmiism fiction. Its appearance created a new poetics, different from the eighty and ninety. The influence of the communist regime was fundamental in choosing the themes. The writers who have been remarked and who we consider that they will resist the time are those concerned with the interests of the public and willing to adapt to the new requirements. We consider it important to make clear that not all the douǎmiist literary works belong to writers who actually began in the specified period; some of them belong to authors who started before 2000, with poetry, publishing or essay, but later turned to prose (novel) - in this category are both young authors and representatives of the eighty and ninety generations.

The supporting texts for the applicative approach, belonging to the young authors who started in prose since 2000, have been selected to grasp the differences from the literature of previous generations, which have emerged from the desire to change the postmodern aesthetics,

to ensure the diversity of the forms of manifestation of the post-postmodern ironic speech, but also to give them individuality. The following novelists have been used in examples:

Bobe, T.O., 2007, *How I spent my summer vacation*, 2nd Edition, Iaşi, Polirom.

Bradea, Ioana, 2010, *Scotch*, Iaşi, Polirom.

Florescu, Cătălin Dorian, 2010, *Zaira*, Iaşi, Polirom.

Florian, Filip, 2008, *King's days*, Iaşi, Polirom.

Lăzărescu, Florin, 2014, *Our special messenger*, 2nd Edition, Iaşi, Polirom.

Lungu, Dan, 2004, 2012, *The heaven of hens – false novel of rumors and mysteries*, Iaşi, Polirom.

Lungu, Dan, 2007, *I am a Communist old lady*, Iaşi, Polirom.

Lungu, Dan, 2013, *Gang boys*, 2nd edition, Iaşi, Polirom.

Paul-Bădescu, Cezar, 2006, *Luminiţa, mon amour*, Iaşi, Polirom.

Popescu, Bogdan, 2007, *Who's the last to fall asleep*, Iaşi, Polirom.

Sociu, Dan, 2008, *Urbancolia*, Iaşi, Polirom.

Sora, Simona, 2012, *Universal hotel*, Iaşi, Polirom.

Teodorovici, Lucian Dan, 2004, *Then I slapped her*, Iaşi, Polirom.

Zeca, Daniela, 2000, *Angels on road*, Bucharest, Coresi.

Douămiiştii have reorganized the ironic literary speech by using the ways of manifesting irony according to their own vision, influenced by the post-postmodernist perspective and by proposing the concept of "post ironic sincerity". The originality of the authors comes, paradoxically, from the surprise of the reality of communist regime. The ironic speech allows the remembrance of the unpleasant memories of the totalitarian system without influencing the post-communist life of the characters.

The methods used and selected according to the reality of the text (*pragmatics*, *speech analysis*, *stylistics*, *comparative analysis*), focused on the significance and structure of the post-postmodern ironic speech and the profile of douămiist generation.

From a *pragmatic* point of view, I started from the premise that literature is an act of communication, in which the author and the reader are the transmitter, respectively the receiver. The ironic speech, a component part of literature, is an act of speaking. The pragmatic concept of

"interaction" is an important element that also occurs at the level of literary speech, due to the relationship established between the interlocutors. The decoding of the information involves the permanent reporting of the receiver to the code, channel and context of the communication. If we refer to a common communication situation, the message must be interpreted literally; in the context of an ironic speech, to correctly interpret a message means to cancel the ironic effect originally set up by the emitter.

By *analyzing the literary speech*, we found that the interpretation of a speech is not limited to interpreting the enunciations that make it up; the speech manifestation must be adapted to the situational context and understanding level of the interlocutors. The issue that concerns us, from a pragmatic point of view, refers to the mechanism of organizing and functioning of the literary speech.

From a *stylistic* point of view, we noticed each writer's own way of building the literary subject using a direct, free language, and the *comparative analysis* of the novels helped us to distinguish similarities and differences under the same aesthetic formula.

The poetics of post-postmodernism, contoured with difficulty due to instability, evolution, was analyzed in Chapter II by reference to the last two generations of literary creation, starting from the features of postmodernism and signaling the similarities and differences between them. The young authors tried to change the aesthetics of predecessors, while the precursors maintained the style, formula, and programmatic ideas. Among the debutant writers, very few have affirmed and continued to evolve, publishing more novels, perhaps to the support of media through advertising. The principle of the biological age of the authors has been an important factor in selecting the corpus of texts necessary for our application, but it is not a decisive one in shaping the douămiist vision, because we must consider both the debut of young people and the reorganization of the authors between two ages. It is also necessary to bring into discussion the concept of "authenticity", but this is not true for the younger generation, because many writers have chosen to imitate the works of the ancestors. It is obvious the opposition between generations regarding the used language, the discontinuity, detachment from the old paradigm, the homogeneity of the themes, change of the aesthetic formula. The disappearance of a context has led to the disappearance of culture, which has led to the emergence of a new type of literature, which cannot be subordinated exclusively to a literary stream or a universal literary

formula. The solution that the douămiism is considered a new literary and independent paradigm is the proposition of a new homogeneous vision on the world, on life.

The most important part of this thesis (Chapter III) is the recording of some theories about irony, grouped on the basis of principles (cooperative principle, of politeness, relevance) that helped us in the performance of the applications (conversational rules, the relevance of the ironic speech, interpretation). We have to mention that some theories are not approached in their entirety, but partly, depending on the interest of our research.

The analysis of certain fragments of the supporting texts has been the means by which we have succeeded in highlighting irony as a textual strategy. Defining the *literary speech from a pragmatic perspective* created the support on which we built the ironic literary speech, not before highlighting the distinction between *text* and *speech*.

The introductory incursion into defining irony from a diachronic point of view has established similarities and differences in the way it has been interpreted over time, and the clues that facilitate the recognition of the ironic speech have revealed different manifestations of it.

The theories lodged by Paul Grice (*Cooperative Principle*), John Searle (*theory of the acts of speaking*) and Rachel Giora (*the theory of indirect negation* applied to the novels: *Gang Boys* (2013) by Dan Lungu, *Angels on Road* (2000) by Daniela Zeca, *Zaira* (2010) by Cătălin Dorian Florescu, *The heaven of hens. False novel of Rumors and Mysteries* (2004) by Dan Lungu highlighted the conversational principles of communication in general and literary speech in particular.

The distinction between *verbal irony and situational irony* was pointed out by the means put forward by the theories proposed by Richard Rorty (*irony as a space of freedom*), Anolli, Ciceri, Infantino (*dueling*) and Joan Lucariello (*situational irony*); the applications were made on the excerpts from the novels: *How I spent my summer vacation* (2007) by T.O. Bobe, *Luminiţa, mon amour* (2006) by Cezar Paul-Bădescu, *Then I slapped her* (2004) by Lucian Dan Teodorovici, *Urbancolia* (2008) by Dan Sociu, *Angel on Road* (2000) by Daniela Zeca, *I am a Communist Old Lady* (2007) by Dan Lungu.

The comparative theorization of the concepts of "irony" and "comic" has been reported in texts from *Who's the last to fall asleep* (2007) by Bogdan Popescu, *Then I slapped her* (2004) by Lucian Dan Teodorovici, *Gang Boys* (2013) by Dan Lungu.

We have also found that the relevance of ironic literary speech is the basic condition for interpreting hidden meaning. If irony is deliberately used to send a cryptic, hard-to-interpret message, the speech is difficult to understand. We think in the same context whether the ironic attitude complies or not with the *Politeness Principle* (Geoffrey Leech, Brown & Levinson) and whether its violation is accepted in favor of the ironic speech. *The heaven of hens* (2004), I'*m a Communist Old Lady* (2007) and the *Gang Boys* (2013) by Dan Lungu, *Angels on Road* (2000) by Daniela Zeca, *Universal Hotel* (2012) by Simona Sora, *Luminiţa, mon amour* by Cezar Paul-Bãdescu were our support for analysis.

Exposing the theories of Herbert Clark and Richard Gerrig (*irony as a simulation*) and Linde Hutcheon (*double-sense theory*) brought to our attention the effects of the irrelevance of the ironic message: ambiguity, uncertainty, but also the need to interpret, to issue solutions, to search for hidden meanings (Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni: *the theory of coding and decoding the irony*). The application was performed on the following texts: *Scotch* (2010) by Ioana Bradea, *Angels on Road* (2010) by Daniela Zeca, *Urbancolia* (2008) by Dan Sociu, *King's Days* (2008) by Florian Lăzărescu. So we made a panorama of the studies on irony, focusing on the pragmatic approaches that were mirrored in the fiction of the new generation.

In Chapter IV, we proposed to set conceptual boundaries between the terms *irony*, *humor*, *sarcasm*, *litho*, *paradox*, *antiphrase*, *and euphemism*, as these notions are easily confused. Although there are fine resemblances between irony and the other aesthetic styles / categories we have analyzed, irony is highlighted by the mechanisms available to express the opposite of what the emitter thinks in a way that does not insult the receiver, but to achieve its intended purpose. Humor is used to produce a pleasant, funny situation, while sarcasm is built out of an express desire to denigrate the receiver. Litho, paradox, antiphrase, and euphemism have in common the indirect way of expression and the need to interpret the message in order to gain access to the hidden meaning, although in most cases such a process remains without result.

The irony is manifested in different verbal and nonverbal modes, depending on the interlocutors, their ability to perceive the non-natural meanings, but also the situational context in which the verbal exchange takes place. The examples we used in our application, though of various expansions, have proved the diversity of the forms of expression of ironic literary speech. There is no Romanian post-postmodern pattern of irony; there are only modes of manifestation, different from one generation to another, in which any literary text containing

indices of ironic attitude falls. All the novels that made up our applicative support are built, more or less, based on irony and humor.

Positively, irony maintains or restores the social relationships and leaves the impression of the false aggression, reduces tension and drama, limits the emotional expression. Negatively, it does not comply with the condition of truth; is a duplicate communication, generates illusions, expectations, produces a disagreement between the meanings of a message, uses disguised statements, and represents an exclusion strategy for those who do not understand it.

Chapter V presents the results of the research at both theoretical and applied level. We have noticed how irony changes its form of manifestation due to the different contexts in which it occurs. The deductive approach of our analysis has allowed us to define the post-postmodern aesthetics and to identify the specific characteristics of irony as a textual strategy by analyzing the novels of douămiist generation.

Although we recognize that our study can be expanded based on the new information provided by the future context of post-postmodern literature, it could incite the reading of the post-postmodern novels at present, because it provides the reader with the mechanisms of understanding the ironic subtleties on which douămiist literature is made on.

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