**Irony and reservations in the Op-Ed section of the daily press: a comparative study between Israeli Hebrew and Argentinian Spanish**

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# Abstract

This study examines the discourse patterns used to convey reservations and ironic criticism in the *Opposite Editorial* section (henceforth "Op-Ed") of the daily press in Israeli Hebrew (henceforth "Hebrew") and Argentinian Spanish (henceforth "Spanish"), and compares the use of these patterns in the data-sets in both languages.

The theoretical framework of this study is anchored in the following pragmatic models: the interpretation of indirect speaker's meanings in non-literary texts (Dascal & Weizman, 1987; Weizman & Dascal, 1991), which distinguishes between *cues* and *clues*, and the postulate of Quantity Scales that argues for a characterization of culture-specific discourse norms (Weizman, 2007), based on the degree of accepted informativeness and the principle of discursive redundancy (Weizman, 1997, 2007). Irony is accounted for in terms of Grice's Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975, 1978) and the Echoic Mention theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1981; Wilson & Sperber, 1992).

The study is based on a coding scheme, which serves as a unifying principle for the analysis of the two data-sets. The coding scheme consists of a paradigm of discursive patterns which are used either in isolation or in a variety of combinations, to convey the writer's attitude towards the propositional content of an utterance under consideration, towards its linguistic form, or towards both. The discourse patterns examined are the following: quotation marks that do not include any type of reported speech; parentheses; quotation marks within parentheses; and the insertion of a partial

proposition in quotation marks within an indirect speech structure preceded by a declarative verb. A combination of two or more patterns is considered as discursive redundancy.

Two single-language data-sets were utilized to identify discourse patterns as posited in the research goals. Each data-set includes 100 articles from the Op-Ed section of the online sites of the following newspapers: *Ha'aretz* and *YNET* in Hebrew, *La Nación* and *Clarín* in Spanish.

The selection of the data-sets derives from a pilot study conducted over the course of two different periods, during which a sample of Op-Ed articles in Spanish was collected, in order to identify discourse patterns used to convey reservations and irony, and carry out an examination parallel to the one which has been accounted for previously in Hebrew (Weizman, 2011, 1997, 1984, 1981). The findings from the pilot study served as the basis for the design of the coding scheme as described therein.

The discourse patterns were retrieved by the corpus management system Sketch Engine, which sorted and classified them in response to queries formulated according to specific linguistic and lexical criteria, subject to the categories that make up the coding scheme, in accordance with the research purpose and questions. This querying tool served to evaluate the distribution and frequency of the discourse patterns and perform a two-dimensional comparative analysis – within the same language and across the two languages under study.

The research methodology draws on two approaches: the corpus-based approach and the corpus-driven approach (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001). The categories of the coding scheme were defined based on data extracted from the pilot study sample, while at the same time relating the corpus data to existing theories. The use of corpora was therefore designed to add the quantitative dimension to existing theoretical parameters.

Furthermore, the corpora provided the rigorous methodological framework for the analysis of the discourse patterns and the empirical evaluation of the research hypotheses.

Based on the findings of the pilot study and the aforementioned pragmatic theories, my main hypotheses were as follows:

1. In both languages, Hebrew and Spanish, the most frequent pattern for the purpose of conveying reservations and ironic criticism is the use of quotation marks – either to demarcate a single word or utterance, or within an indirect speech structure framed by a declarative verb followed by a partial proposition embedded in quotes.

2. Both languages display a high level of discursive redundancy.

3. The use of punctuation and typographic markers – parenthesis, quotation marks within parentheses, cursive and bold letters – is exploited only in Spanish to enhance the degree of indirectness.

4. Languages differ in terms of the quantity of discourse patterns utilized for the purpose of conveying attitudes of reservations and irony.

The data indicates that the use of quotation marks to demarcate a single word or phrase, i.e., without the combination of other markers such as the indirect speech structure preceded by a declarative verb, is the most frequent pattern in the given discourse type (62% in Hebrew, 54% in Spanish), thereby confirming the first research hypothesis. An evaluation of the findings also showed a clear tendency towards redundancy in both languages (found in 77 articles in Hebrew and 64 in Spanish – out of a total of 100 articles), as formulated in the second hypothesis. However, as far as the discourse patterns employed by Op-Ed columnists to convey indirect messages of reservations and irony is concerned, the findings revealed a great deal of similarity between the two languages and no significant differences were found in terms of their type and quantity, contrary to prior expectations as postulated in the third and fourth hypotheses. This

result suggests that there may seem to be no variation between the two data-sets examined in terms of the discursive norms applied in the interpretation of indirect utterances. Furthermore, a high degree of informativeness was manifest in both Spanish and Hebrew, and the two languages are located close to each other near the informative end of the Quantity Scale.