

# THE IMPLEMENTATION OF IRONY OF THE OLD MAN AS INDICATED ON LUIGI PIRANDELLO'S WAR

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## THE IMPLEMENTATION OF IRONY OF THE OLD MAN AS INDICATED ON LUIGI PIRANDELLO'S WAR

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**Abstract:** Irony is an act to say something other than literal meaning. Somehow, it is used to cover up the sadness experienced. The old man is a character in a short story entitled War written by Luigi Pirandello. In a conversation in the Night Express, so many people talked about their sadness that nothing could cheer them up. Then, an old man came and told them that they should not be sad for their son who died. Actually, the old man feels the same sadness but he would never want to show it off to others. Then, how is the implementation of irony of the old man indicated on Luigi Pirandello's War? Through qualitative method, this writing underlines irony as the way the old man covered the sadness he experienced when he lost his son. Supported by theory of Ronald Tanaka, the implementation of the irony of the old man is seen when he spoke a lot to cover his grief. He said that their sons are on their own and belong to the state when they grew up. Then, they should also be proud of their son because they are the heroes of country. In conclusion, the old man covered up his sadness by complimenting others' son. Meanwhile, the irony is his son as a hero is also included in his saying.

**Keywords:** irony, luigi pirandello, ronald tanaka, war.

## INTRODUCTION

*War* by Luigi Pirandello is a story set against the backdrop of World War I. This short story tells about people who accidentally meet on a Night Express [1]. All of them have the same history; they lost their sons because of the war. They had dialogues by telling and competing about the sad stories of those who lost their son. It went on until an old man came and said that they should not be sad because their son died for the country. Their son belonged to the country. The old man spoke reassuringly as if his son had not died. Until finally the old man shed tears, indicating his sadness for his son who died in a war [1]. The old man said many things that were inversely proportional to the state of his heart. The words that were issued are very convincing and strong. Even many people nodded to anything that he said on the train. On the other hand, the old man said these things to strengthen himself. The reality is different from what is said. It is called as irony.

This journal discusses more about implementation of irony of the old man as indicated on Luigi Pirandello's *War*. In many cases, irony is used like sarcasm that works like satires for comedies to mock other people [2], [3]. In this short story, the old man may do sarcasm, but it did not only apply to others, but also to his own self. The irony was done not to mock others, but to calm himself in the intense dialogues with other people. It is done for good, especially for himself who must keep his grief deep down in his little heart [1], [3].

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Idea 6 Irony and Its Continuances

The term irony entered the English language in the sixteenth century and came from the French "ironie" and before that, from the Latin "ironia." All these terms are originated from the ancient Greek stereotypical character known as Eiron. An Eiron figure brings down his opponent by understating his abilities, thus engaging in a type of irony by saying less than what someone means [17-], [5]. From this definition, it can be said that irony is an act of lying to cover up the existing reality. The irony lies in the relationship between what is the case and what the speaker believes ought to be the case or between different points of view [3], [5]. In Tanaka's view, irony does not become an irony because of an event that occurred. However, an irony occurs because of that person's views/the person's expectations are different from the existing reality. It is the relationship between the event and the person's point of view that causes irony [8], [7].

The historical and contemporary studies of irony can also be found in fields as diverse as anthropology, literature studies, linguistics, clinical psychology, philosophy, cultural studies and others. The topics related to irony are as widely arrayed as art, literature, dance, music, media, language, speech, image, thought, cartoons, journalism, theater, politics, situations and many others [4], [5]. Irony can be used in various fields so that the researchers choose to use irony in literature. One related discussed topic is named the irony of the character in the short story written by Luigi Pirandello entitled *War*. [9]

The criterion of irony is when someone breaks certain expectations from the other person. It is argued that speakers make use of irony in order to produce certain perlocutionary effects on their hearers, the principal ones being to break their patterns of expectation, and involve them in a type of verbal interaction that is characterized by interpersonal distance [4], [8]. It is done by disturbing expectations of other persons, or by saying what is not in accordance with existing expectations. For example, when someone expects to be successful in doing something, but in reality it is not. The person was not successful. This causes a drop in expectations from someone. This can be referred to as the criterion of irony. Furthermore, irony can be implied in identifying situations in literary works. The definition of irony as a literary device is a situation in which there is a contrast between expectation and reality [3], [4]. In many cases, irony is related to figurative words as both are used to cover up the reality that is different from the existing expectations. [14]

Characteristically, any irony speaks words of praise to imply blame and words of blame to imply praise, though its inherent critical quality makes the first type more common than the second [3], [9]. The characteristics of irony are indicated when someone praises to imply fault, or imply error to praise. Irony is an act of sarcasm lying that does not really speak for what it is. As explained by Tanaka, the first characteristic is truly about the choice that is often used to criticize something, like being praised while being insulted. While the second characteristic disfigures someone to praise [9], [10].

### 2.1 Types of Irony in Realities

The word "irony" has come to mean far more than just "saying one thing and meaning another". Its field of reference has expanded to include wit, humor, and the comic, as well as dramatic and tragic irony, situational irony, and the irony of fate [3], [5]. Irony is a lie that someone does to cover up the facts. Indeed, it is done by saying something with a different meaning, or vice versa. Sometimes, to cover up the existing irony, someone can cover it with a joke. In discussing irony, there is something called situational irony. Situational irony is the opposite of what people actually really expected. A simple example of this is when someone wears a thick coat while it is sunny outside [7], [11]. When verbal irony is saying words that are not in accordance with what actually happened. So situational irony discusses a situation that is different from what is thought. When someone expects something, then it does not happen as expected, then it becomes an irony. The idea is focusing on being contextual.

Verbal irony is categorized as an indirect language that contains more polite messages even including humor in its wider terms. Hence, people find criticizing with verbal irony is possibly more effective [12], [13]. Figure of speech in this case is expressed in words which carry the opposite meaning. Irony is likely to be confused with sarcasm but it differs from sarcasm in that it is usually lighter, less harsh in its wording though in effect probably more cutting because of its indirectness [3]. Verbal irony is also related to explicit evaluative utterance that implicates opposing evaluation [2], [13]. Irony occurs when the reality is different from what is said. Therefore it is called a more subtle sarcasm. In its delivery, irony can be sentences that criticize things that exist in realities.

Irony is also taken from the word *eironeia* as firstly used to refer to double meaning in the Socratic dialogues of Plato [3], [14]. In this case, irony exists when someone wants to hide what is happening to him or herself by saying words that are completely different from the facts. In practice, speakers of irony hide

the true reality, with lies that are said or done [2], [14]. This sometimes helps the perpetrator of irony to strengthen their self from the bitter reality they received. Besides, irony allows a speaker to highlight the expectation that has been violated [7], [13]. There must be difference between expectations and realities in irony. The success of the practice of irony is the listeners, or readers, or even the surroundings. If the audience more desire to find out more about what happened, then the irony is successful.

Marking the irony and being part of it has arisen because those factors which are part of the irony (e.g., exaggeration and/or under-statement, or co(n)textual inappropriateness) [3], [11]. In analyzing the presence of irony in a story, the ideas can be seen from the characters who say or do something excessively, disparaging, or telling things that are not true. In order to cover up unwanted incidents, the characters have to do these things. It can also be said as someone's gesture in covering a lie. Behind the lies that cover reality, there is a function or benefit for the perpetrators of deep irony [7], [10].

In practice, doers of irony hide the true reality, with lies that are said or done. This sometimes helps the perpetrator of irony to strengthen their self from the bitter reality they received [10], [15]. By lying to others and to himself, perpetrators of irony said that everything was fine, even though it was not. An example is someone who just had an incident that caused him to lose a part of his body but he said that everything is fine. The words that person said were an irony, where he said things that did not match reality [7], [10]. Nevertheless, those words have the power to help the person at least appear stronger.

Irony is an act (and also art) of lying, of course there must be an indicator that makes irony successful. In the successful performance of irony, the speaker depends on the shared context with the hearer and on the hearer's will [3], [11]. The main thing for successful verbal irony is to have listeners who pay attention to the irony may have a deeper desire to understand the irony that exists. Moreover, it will be more successful if the listeners begins to believe and sympathize with the story of the perpetrator of irony.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses qualitative method by using data of books, journals, and internet sources. The data used in this research is about irony in *War*. The chosen character for this research is the old man. The steps of analysis include reading the short story, indicating ideas about irony in books and journals, comparing them both in an analysis, and writing down the paper alongside with its quotations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Death and Sadness in Post-War Conditions

*War* by Luigi Pirandello begins with the story of the passengers on the Night Express who told each other how sad they were when they lost their son. The passengers seemed to compete who is the saddest parent among them. The debate started when a husband and wife wanted to tell the world that they were suffering a lot because their son died. The husband and wife had a 20-year-old son who planned to go to Rome to continue his studies. Suddenly, his son was called to war and died out there. They lost his son when they were at the happiest point as their child was just starting a real life as an adult. Their son's death indeed made them sad and they needed sympathetic feelings from others. The ideas are indicated below;

*"And he felt it his duty to explain to his traveling companions that the poor woman was to be pitied for the war was taking away from her only son, a boy of twenty to whom both had devoted their entire life, even breaking up their home at Sulmona to follow him to Rome, where he had to go as a student, then allowing him to volunteer for war with an assurance, however, that at least six months he would not be sent to the front and now, all of a sudden, receiving a wire saying that he was due to leave in three days' time and asking them to go and see him off. [1]"*

The couple were not alone in their sadness. Other passenger of the train also came up with another experience. So were repeatedly sent to the front lines and died out there. The aspects are shown below;

*"You should thank God that your son is only leaving now for the front. Mine has been sent there the first day of the war. He has already come back twice wounded and been sent back again to the front. [1]"*

Hearing some of the sad stories, other passengers also shared their sadness for their sons who died in the war. Some said that they lost their two sons and three nephews. There was also a story about the only son they had who had died in the war. The quotations are in following;

*"What about me? I have two sons and three nephews at the front," said another passenger. "Maybe, but in our case it is our only son," ventured the husband [1].*

The conversation went on and on. It was shaped by the debate about who had suffered the most among the parents who had lost their sons to the war. It was sympathetic feelings at first, but it seemed to be a competition from one to another. The dialogues were becoming uprising debates since no one would like to stop speaking their own sadness.

Then, an old man came and said that what they were talking about was nonsense. Their sons did not belong to their parents, but they belonged to the country. In this story, the old man reassured the Night Express passengers who were trapped in grief because of their son who died. The old man said that their sons were not born to belong to his parents for the rest of their lives. However, they were born because they were destined to be born in this world. Indeed, as long as their sons were alive, the sons are the responsibilities of the parents, but it does not mean that the children are theirs. A person belongs to the person him or herself, not other people including parents. That is what the old man is trying to say in quotations below;

*"Do we think of the country when we give life to our children? Our sons are born because...well, because they must be born and when they come to life they take our own life with them. This is the truth. We belong to them but they never belong to us. ..." [1]*

The age of twenty is the age at which a person becomes legally and officially an adult. When boys become adults, they will face various life choices. As the old man explained, boys will have cigarettes, jobs, women, and even calls for the country. Their lives are their own choices. Even if parents say no to their sons' choices, they could not totally forbid those choices. The day will come when it was time for their sons to choose whatever their wills were. The decisions to choose something when one is growing up has also been felt by those parents when they were young. Therefore, parents no longer have the right to prohibit their sons' choices. Everyone who reaches adulthood will experience a period when he or she has to choose something best for him or herself. Parents will lose the ability to control their sons' wishes because their sons have grown up. Indeed, it included situation when they decided to go to war because of their love for their country. Parents could not forbid this because going to war for the country is their sons' proud choice. Those are referred below;

*"... And when they reach twenty they are exactly what we were at their age. We too had a father and mother, but there were so many other things as well...girls, cigarettes, illusions, new ties...and the Country, of course, whose call we would have answered—when we were twenty—even if father and mother had said no...." [1]*

The old man says that at the age of these old parents, they must have had a great love for the country. It happens too to especially with their young sons who are still young and have stronger physical energy than their parents. So that their sons' willing to give their lives for the country must be appreciated. With their sons' choices, as parents, they should be proud of the choice their sons have chosen, including their children's choices to go to war. The old man's words made the passengers of the Night Express speechless. Those are indicated below;

*"...Now, at our age, the love of our Country is still great, of course, but stronger than it is the love of our children. Is there any one of us here who wouldn't gladly take his son's place at the front if he could?"  
There was a silence all round, everybody nodding as to approve. [1]*

The old man said that it was natural for their sons to love their country more than their parents. Because when they grow up, their boys will choose anything that they love as reflections of their own choices, not their parents. As young people aged 20, it was only natural that their sons would go with the power they had as young men. Even when fathers turn 20, it is only natural that they would also go to war. Those are referred from below;

*"Why then," continued the fat man, "should we consider the feelings of our children when they are twenty? Isn't it natural that at their age they should consider the love for their Country (I am speaking of decent boys, of course) even greater than the love for us? ..." [1]*

In the end, parents are weak humans who do not have much power, unlike their sons. Parents are just people who have difficulty in moving. Parents can only end up sitting at home. With parents' incompetence, it was only natural that their sons would like to go to war, replacing their parents' roles as men.

*"... Isn't it natural that it should be so, as after all they must look upon us as upon old boys who cannot move any more and must sit at home?..." [1]*

Country is a place where people can safely live. It is just as important as food and drink, so people do not get hungry or thirsty. Humans need a country to live, so naturally young men go to war in the name of the country and win it. It is their calls to defend the country to realize a safe place for humans to live. Moreover, the man said that the only ones who can do that are their sons as seen below;

*"... If Country is a natural necessity like bread of which each of us must eat in order not to die of hunger, somebody must go to defend it..." [1]*

So when their sons died in battle, it should be something to be proud of. Of course, the boys did not want to be cried over by their deaths. They are heroes who fought for the country. They represented the country, and they died proudly. Those are represented below;

*"...And our sons go, when they are twenty, and they don't want tears, because if they die, they die inflamed and happy (I am speaking, of course, of decent boys)..." [1]*

Maturity means that boys will face all kinds of sadness, delusions, bitterness, and all the bad things that can happen. When their sons had to die young, then they will not face the hardships, illusions, and bitterness of the world that are suffocating to do. The old man's saying is shown below;

*"...Now, if one dies young and happy, without having the ugly sides of life, the boredom of it, the pettiness, the bitterness of disillusion..." [1]*

In the end, the old man strengthened the other passengers on the Night Express for not to be trapped in grief. The old man said that parents should stop crying, and thanked God. Although they were saddened by the death of their sons, their sons died in the best possible way namely fighting to protect the country where parents could be comfortable. It is seen below;

*"...what more can we ask for him? Everyone should stop crying; everyone should laugh, as I do...or at least thank God—as I do—because my son, before dying, sent me a message saying that he was dying satisfied at having ended his life in the best way he could have wished. That is why, as you see, I do not even wear mourning..." [1]*

The old man said many things that could strengthen himself and others so that they would not be trapped in sadness. However, behind the great words he said, there was a sad heart because of the death of his son. Actually, the old man was also not much different from the other old people who were there when they experienced grief. The difference is that the old man knew how to pick himself up and get up, not let himself to get caught up in prolonged sadness. The old man himself understood that he must also continue his life in the world as a human. Yet, of course, the old man's beliefs made other parents in the Night Express doubt about his life. Was his son really died?

*"Then...is your son really dead?"  
Everyone stared at her. The old man, too, turned to look at her, fixing his great, bulging, horribly watery light gray eyes, deep in her face. For some time he tried to answer, but words failed him. He looked and looked at her, almost as if only then—at that silly, incongruous question—he had suddenly realized at last that his son was really dead—gone for ever—for ever. [1]*

Of course hearing this question made the old man cried. Behind the great words, the old man is the one who lost his son too. The old man was unable to answer the questions from the woman at the Night Express. Then, everyone in the train knew that the old man's son died. It was seen from the tears he shed. What the old man said were completely different from what actually happened. Actually, the old man was very sad behind his proud words. The situation is seen below;

*His face contracted, became horribly distorted, then he snatched in haste a handkerchief from his pocket and, to the amazement of everyone, broke into harrowing, heart-breaking, uncontrollable sobs. [1]*

The old man's uncontrollable cry made the other passengers feel shocked. Unexpectedly, the old man lost his son. The other passengers did not expect that because of the great words that the old man said. Other passengers felt very sad to witness this fact. The old man was able to convince himself that everything is fine, even though he was also hurt. He is the one that cheered everyone up but indeed, he is the most saddened one.

#### **Existence of Irony in Luigi Pirandello's *War***

As discussed in the previous discussion that apart from verbal irony, there is also situational irony where events that occur do not match expectations [6], [15]. It is clear in this short story that the expectations of every passenger, including the old man, that their expectations did not really match the truth. Every parent who is a Night Express' passenger, hoped that their children were currently doing well and not going to war [1]. Nevertheless, the expectations are clearly different. Their son died in the war, which causes them to dissolve in grief. In fact, the passengers of the Night Express argued over who was the saddest of all. Of course, the old man also experienced deep sorrow over the death of his son. However, in the middle of the debate over who the parents were the saddest, the old man came with his words that ensured not to dissolve in sadness.

The irony is quite situational since it happened on the train. Each people in that train may already have the experience of losing a son. However, they did not say it to any people. In the train, all grief is coming out and filled the place with sorrow [1]. It becomes more situational in irony when everyone shared the same sadness, but the old man refused to feel the same feeling. In reverse, he was trying to shape logical perceptions of any sorrow that people feel [1]. It may be logic, but it will never eliminate and erode the idea of sorrow. Indeed, the irony is seen clearly when the old man finally cried as he also lost his son in the war.

It is known that verbal irony is irony that is conveyed through sarcasm, but lighter than sarcasm [6], [15]. In the story, the old man says many things how he was proud of his son who died in war for various reasons. The first reason explained that his son died defending the country. It means that his son has a great love for his country, even greater than his love for his parents. A child who has become an adult has many choices in life, such as cigarette, woman, and others [1]. In this case, the old man was proud because his son wanted to go to war for the country. This shows how much his son loved his country. As a weak old parent, the old man was happy with his son's decision to choose to defend the country. It is because the country is a place where humans can live comfortably. The country is a human place can eat and drink. With the departure of his sons who fought for the country, the weak old man could live comfortably in his country. The old man was also grateful for the death of his son. It is because his son was no longer trapped in the world's delusions. Even the old man thanked God for his son's choice. Adult life is full of temptations, but his son has chosen the right choice to go to war and died [1]. His son was not caught up in the world's temptations, for he had died at a young age. There is no more worry in the old man that his son will face the bitterness of the world, because his son has already dead.

Second, it is explained that irony is a lie. What the perpetrator of irony said was not the same as the actual situation [3], [6]. What is discussed can be very far from the problem at hand. In this story, the old man seemed proud and grateful for the death of his son. Of course that is a lie that the old man said. The old man told lies to protect himself from the pain he feels. At the end of the story, a woman in the train asked the old man, "*Did his son really die?*". The question was asked by the woman because there is no sadness in the old man's words. It is as if the old man is just talking nonsense, or his son went to war but survived. In answering that question, the old man is unable to utter a single word. Tears came out of the old man's eyes. Without needing to answer "yes", the old man's answer is very clear [1]. His son also died in the war. Then, it is known that the old man experienced great sadness behind his great words. The old man's great words are spoken to convince himself, that it would be okay even if his son died. The old man convinced himself that there are good things that happened even though his son died and the old man is proud of his son. The irony of lies that the old man did is to cover up his sadness with sentences that did not match his feelings with great sentences that were proud and grateful of the death of his son. Verbal irony in idea of such lighter sarcasm may also help people to gain strength [3], [11]. It is since, in this case, verbal irony is words of lies that are done to cover up the existing reality.

Third, the success of the perpetrator of irony in uttering his sentence is when other people believe in his sentences and looking deeper into the existing story [16]. At first, the passengers who listened to the sentence from the old man thought that the sentences were just for entertainment so that existing passengers did not feel mourn. This raises big questions for every passenger who listens, thus asking the question in the end. The question arose because the passengers began to believe and wanted to find facts about the irony that existed. This indicates that the verbal irony said by the old man was successful and the cry of the old man is the answer [1]. It is the answer that makes all the passengers understand that the old man's son

was gone either. The old man's cry made the passengers who were hesitant at first to believe in the old man. It is because the old man also experienced the same thing as the other passengers that their sons were gone. The story ended with the tears of the passengers, their hearts being torn apart by the loss of their sons.

## CONCLUSION

The implementation of irony in the old man as indicated on Luigi Pirandello's *War* is seen from the feelings and sentences spoken by the old man. What the old man said were far different from the feelings the old man had. The old man said proudly and gratefully for his son's death, but he actually felt deep sorrow behind his beautiful words. He even urged passengers of the Night Express to laugh and be happy with their sons' choice to go to war. He stated his sentences like entertainment, but the real meanings are that the words were intended to cover up his own deep grief of losing his son in war either.

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