

Sociolinguistic and pragmatic differences in the use of irony among speakers of different languages and their consequences: A comparative study of British English and Korean

Antoni Wałejko

1. My presentation structure:

- I. Main goals and questions raised by the project.
- II. Quick overview of problems in modern South Korean society
- III. Korean vs English – overall linguistic comparison
- IV. Theoretic Fundaments of the project
- V. Irony and sarcasm in Korean and English
- VI. Outcomes and partial solutions to problems I consider, as well as ideas I have for the project development.
- VII. Discussion

I. Main goals and questions raised by the project

- What difference, if any, are in ironizing between **British-English** and **Korean Seoul Dialect** (서울말)?

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- If there are pragmatic differences to be found, **what do they imply sociolinguistically?** Are these differences **creating voids** in Korean language use and social mechanisms?
- Can irony and sarcasm be viewed as **tools for social and political change** and as a **social equalizer**?

II. Quick overview of problems in modern South Korean society

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1. Not everything is bad!



Gangnam Style Statue, Gangnam, Seoul



Bukhansan National Park, Gyeonggi-do



Gyeongbokgung Palace, Seoul

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1. Not everything is bad!



Former President Yoon Suk Yeol (윤석열)



Protests in Seoul

II. Quick overview of problems in modern South Korean society

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Kookmin University Festival, Kookmin University, Seoul



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Former Samsung CEO, Lee Jae-yong charged with offering 38m\$ in bribes

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Anti-feminist men occupying seats in subway, which are reserved for pregnant women, became a common view in Seoul Metropolitan Area.

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- Rising **incel numbers** (sic!)
- Tragic **history**

III. Korean vs English – overall linguistic comparison

- Some of the issues mentioned before, drawing on **Sapir-Whorf language determinism theory**, can be connected with language used by participants in society's discourse, so let's compare Korean to English.

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English

S V O

Peter studies Korean.

(피터) (공부하다) (한국어)

Korean

S O V

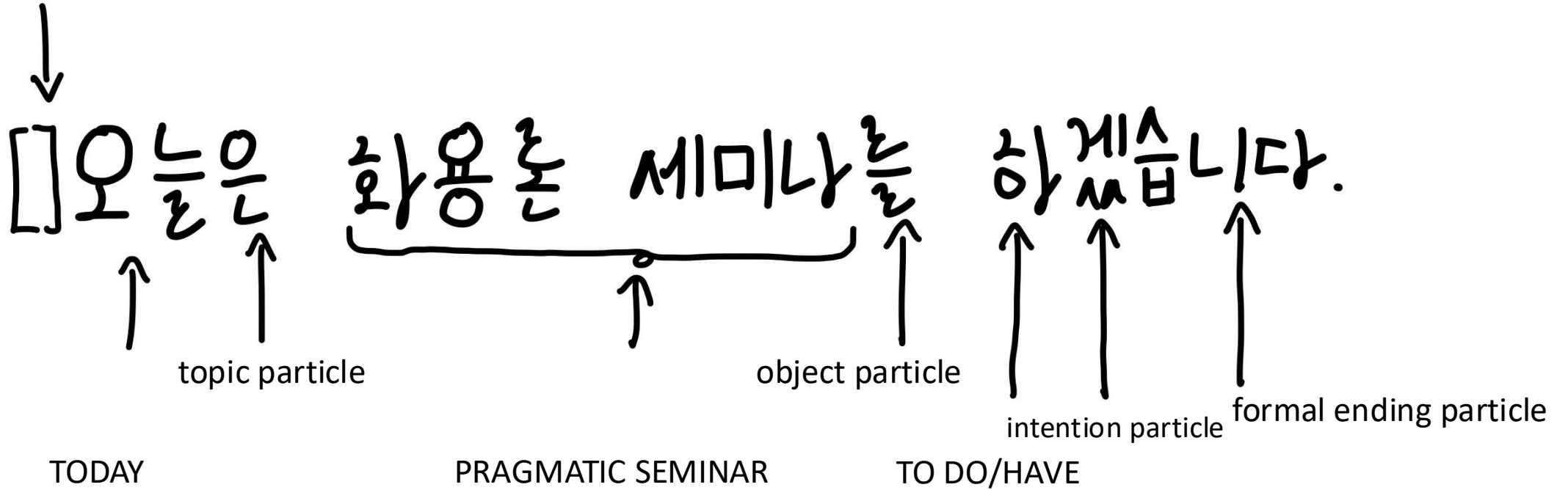
피터가 한국어를 공부해요.

(Peter) (Korean) (to study)

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- 60% of vocabulary comes from **Classical Chinese**
- Information structure: **SOV vs SVO**
- Korean is an **AGGLUTINATIVE LANGUAGE**, in which words are built by adding units (like lego bricks). Each unit (suffix or particle) has one specific meaning or function.

Implied **SUBJECT**



Today, we will have a pragmatics seminar.

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- 60% of vocabulary comes from **Classical Chinese**
- Information structure: **SOV vs SVO**
- Korean is an **AGGLUTINATIVE LANGUAGE** in which words are built by adding units (like lego bricks). Each unit (suffix or particle) has one specific meaning or function.
- Most importantly from this project's view, its grammar has a **HONORIFIC SYSTEM**, where speakers apply different speech modes depending on a social position of their interlocutor

진지 접수श्य



식사 하श्य



식사 햐श्य



밥 먹어



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- Young Koreans might have a **feeling of dissonance** hearing how freely English speakers use figurative communication acts.

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- But now, as Republic of Korea develops into a modern, western society, it's character **might conflict** with western linguistic culture
- Young Koreans might have a **feeling of dissonance** hearing how freely English speakers use figurative communication acts.
- This is how we end up with my question under discussion; **IRONY AND SARCASM**

IV. Theoretical Fundaments of the project

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- Irony as a **speech action** (Witek, 2022)

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- Irony as **joint pretense theory** (Clark and Gerrig, 1984)
- Irony as a **speech action** (Witek, 2022)
- More fundaments are yet to be added 😊

V. Irony and sarcasm in Korean and English

1. British-English irony example

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1. British-English irony

This example is uttered by Jeremy Clarkson from Top Gear Season 22 Episode 5, when Jeremy and other presenter, James May are mockingly testing Peugeot cars. I'll focus on this exact line:

J:

„It's a good job this car has a chimney. **Obviously, that's a very good design feature.**”

- Clarkson doesn't mean that this car has any good features at all, yet he's delivering it deadpan serious. Moreover, he often mocks french cars and it appeals to british audience
- What he does instead, according to **echoic mention theory**, is merely mentioning this sentence, as an earlier use which can be echoes of „popular wisdom” or „recieved opinion”. In this example his echoing a normal utterance that could be perfectly mentioned when testing a car.

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According to the **joint pretense theory**, there are two layers of action:

Layer 1: *A and B jointly pretend that the event in layer 2 is taking place*

Layer 2: *Ai is performing a serious communicative act for Bi.*

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According to the **joint pretense theory**, there are two layers of action:

Layer 1: *Clarkson and the audience jointly pretend that the event in layer 2 is taking place.*

Layer 2: *Implied Clarkson tells implied audience that the chimney is a very good design feature.*

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1. British-English irony

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J: „It's a good job this car has a chimney. **Obviously, that's a very good design feature.**”

- Actual Clarkson and actual audience (in layer 1) **appreciate the contrast** and **take delight in the secret intimacy** (inner circle), as mentioned by Fowler (1965, pp 305-306) in his *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*.

V. Irony and sarcasm in Korean and English

2. Korean irony example:

- This scene is taken from my cumulative search on irony (반어, literally opposite speech) and depicts a very popular saying that parents use ironically to criticize their children:

A: 와~ 잘한다 잘해~ 진짜~

This utterance can be translated like this: ***Wow! You did such a great, great job, really!*** And is used in a casual talk honorific structure which parents use towards children (반말). Its worth noting that prosodic cues are here highly noticeable and noted as {~}.

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- In irony as echoic mention we have here an echoic mention of an utterance which could be used in a normal, sincere way when praising a child.

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2. Korean irony example:

- This scene is taken from my cumulative search on irony (반어) and sarcasm (비꼼), literally opposite speech) and depicts a very popular saying that parents use sarcastically to criticize their children:

A: 와~ 잘한다 잘해~ 진짜~

- In **joint pretense theory** view, on Layer 2 we have a situation where parent A praises child B and in Layer 1 both sides pretend A is performing a serious communicative act.

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3. How Korean EFL learners understand sarcasm in L2 English– a study by Kim Jiyun (2013)

Name: _____

Scene #:

Utterance #:

Overarching communicative goals (Placed in order of severeness)	Detailed speaker intent and attitudes	Pick one or two
Attacking (상대를 말로 공격)	To insult (상대를 모욕 주기 위함)	
Criticizing (상대의 말이나 행위 비난)	To mock (상대의 행위나 말을 비웃고 조롱하기 위함)	
	To make fun of (상대의 행위나 말을 놀리기 위함)	
	To criticize in a non-jokingly manner (비농담조로 상대의 행위나 말을 비판하기 위함)	
Expressing negative emotions (부정적인 감정들의 표현)	To show anger (화나는 감정을 표현하기 위함)	
	To show annoyance (짜증나거나 성가신 감정상태를 표현하기 위함)	
	To show frustration (속이 답답한 감정을 표현하기 위함)	
	To make interlocutor feel guilty or stupid (상대를 죄의식을 느끼게 하거나 본인이 바보스럽다고 생각하게끔 만들기 위함)	
	To show (WRITE other type(s) of negative feelings) (그 밖의 다른 부정적 감정을 보이기 위한 경우 그 감정의 내용을 적으세요.)	
Venting (감정의 분출, 표출, 화풀이)	To vent anger (본인의 화를 분출, 쏟아내기 위함)	
	To vent frustration (본인의 답답함을 분출, 쏟아내기 위함)	
Complaining (불평)	To complain (불평하기 위함)	
Disagreeing (상대의 의견에 반대)	To disagree (상대의 의견에 동의하지 않기 위함)	
Bonding (상대와 친해지거나 어울리고자 함)	To tease in a friendly way (친근한 방식으로 가볍게 놀리기 위함)	
	To be witty or humorous (유머와 재치있는 말이나 농담을 하기 위함)	
Others (그 밖의 다른 의도 혹은 감정들)	Other intentions (WRITE) (그 밖의 다른 감정이나 화자의 의도가 있다고 생각하는 경우 그 내용을 적으세요.)	
Ambiguous (찾기 힘들거나 명확하지 않은 경우)	Not sure (확실히 모름, 잘 모르겠음)	

[Excerpt 2]

Chandler and Joey: Hey, buddy.

Ross: Hi. [He is wearing a piece of steep [sic] bandage on his nose. He tosses some forms onto the reception desk.]

Receptionist: (5a) *Oh, that's attractive.* [She giggles.]

Chandler: (5b) *Oh, I thought you were great in Silence of the Lambs.* Oh come on, admit it! All things considered, you had fun tonight.

Ross: (5c) *Fun? Where was the fun?* Tell me specifically, which part was the fun part? Where's my puck?

Joey: Oh. Ah, the kid has it.

(Scene 5, *Friends*)

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(Scene 5, *Friends*)

- 68% of Korean participants marked **rhetorical question (5c) as sarcasm**, while none of NS participants did!

[Excerpt 4]

Monica: What you guys don't understand is, for us, kissing is as important as any part of it.

Joey: (3a) *Yeah, right!* [Silence] You serious?

Phoebe: Oh, yeah!

Rachel: Everything you need to know is in that first kiss.

Monica: Absolutely.

(Scene 3, *Friends*)

*„(...) While the majority of NS participants considered utterance (1) in scene 3 (“Yeah, right”) as a highly conventionalized sarcastic expression, few Korean participants had this linguistic knowledge. Even among the Korean participants who selected it as sarcasm, **60% of them selected ‘to be witty or humorous’** as the main speaker intent, while NS participants picked ‘to disagree’ and ‘to make fun of interlocutor.’” – Kim J. 2013*

V. Irony and sarcasm in Korean and English

3. How Korean EFL learners understand sarcasm in L2 English– a study by Kim Jiyun (2013). Key takes:

- Irony is used by Koreans to **comment on unfortunate social and political realities**, rather than to **mock or insult any particular individuals** or groups (minorities etc.)

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- Koreans perceived English irony as **more insulting and offensive than native speakers**
- Also **deadpan delivery**, as Kim mentions, creates a big interpretation problem for Koreans, adding that they rely on highly noticeable prosodic cues and body movements

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- It is very important that Koreans perceive irony delivered in higher honorific structures as rude or non-existent at all, a claim that supports my theory of a lack of certain sarcastic and ironic comments in Korean.

VI. Outcomes and partial solutions to problems I consider, as well as ideas I have for the project development.

- It is very important that Koreans perceive irony delivered in higher honorific structures as rude or non-existent at all, a claim that supports my theory of a lack of certain sarcastic and ironic comments in Korean.
- Lack of, even linguistically, well structured irony makes it very hard to comment on some inadequacies or problems. Irony can be viewed as a highly sophisticated speech act, which as any illocution can alter the normative situation between participants. It's a tool, for making change in society.

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- Lack of, even linguistically, well structured irony makes it very hard to comment on some inadequacies or problems. Irony can be viewed as a highly sophisticated speech act, which as any illocution can alter the normative situation between participants. It's a tool, for making change in society.
- As younger generations acquire more and more from western cultures, they need a linguistic tool to create a modern, democratic and less hierarchical society.

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- Ideas for further development:

- Face concept and politeness theory (Brown and Levinson). But more research must be done in this point...
- Contacting Korean student and ask for collaboration...
- Applying this to other figurative communicative acts...

VII. Discussion