A Corpus-based Study of Chinese Fanyu on Social Media from the Neo-gricean Perspective

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Abstract: The present article takes as its departure point the Gricean Philosophy, with a few of modifications and extensions being added to Grice’s original theory from pragmatic and cognitive perspectives. Then after reviewing Dynel’ s classification of English irony as propositional negation irony, ideational reversal irony, verisimilar irony and surrealistic irony (Dynel 2013: 403), The analysis of Chinese fanyu usage is based on examples from NTU irony corpus as well as Sina Weibo. We further argue that unlike English irony which intrinsically expresses the speaker’s attitudes and carries a reversed evaluation of the referent and generates conversational implicature invariably carrying negative evaluation, Chinese fan yu conveys positive evaluation in some instances (Huang 2017: 96).

Keywords: Neo-Gricean; irony; comparison between English and Chinese; corpus

***1. Introduction***

Traditionally, irony has been studied as a rhetorical device for its definition, classification, functions and rhetorical effects, while linguists are concerned about the oppositeness of its surface significance and intended meaning. In the past decade, the rise of cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, and psycholinguistics in China has brought many new ideas and approaches to the study of irony. Consequently a large number of papers have emerged, It is thus challenging to provide systematic patterns of analysis. Bearing this in mind, this paper combines description with comparison and makes detailed study of Chinese irony on the basis of corpus.

The corpus approach can provide a large number of natural and authentic Chinese ironic examples for this study, thus help us draw objective conclusions based on linguistic reality and avoid subjectivity and bias. We will first review the definition of Chinese *fanyu* focusing on its complexity and ambiguity and I will propose the concept of overt untruthfulness and thereby a working mechanism of irony. I will cite various examples of Chinese *fanyu* from the corpus, categorizing them based on the neo-gricean classification of irony.

***2. The notion offanyu***

In Chinese, *fan yu* is verbal phenomenon akin to irony in English. *Ci Hai* (Chinese Dictionary of Words) defines *fan yu* as one of rhetoric figures, which expresses the intended meaning with words that are contrary to their original meaning, often used to ridicule. Regarding *fan yu*, Chen Wangdao (1997) defined it as "the verbal meaning of the speaker is completely opposite to the meaning in his heart, and the name is an inverted word". *Fanyu* is characterized by extreme semantic abnormalities (Huang 2008: 19).

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According to the above definitions, *fanyu* has considerable resemblance to verbal irony in English. However, this does not make entirely clear a variety of characteristics of*fanyu* which I will further explicate in this paper.

***3. Collection of Chinese fanyu examples***

***3.1 Source of examples***

In order to combine description with comparison, this paper makes a systematic and detailed study of English and Chinese irony mainly on the basis of National Taiwan University Irony Corpus (hereinafter referred to as NTU). The corpus can provide a large number of natural and authentic Chinese *fanyu* examples for the study.

NTU is the world’s first Traditional Chinese irony corpus, constructed by Department of Computer Science and Information Engineering of Taiwan University. The NTU Irony Corpus is accessible at <http://nlg.csie.ntu.edu.tw/nlpresource/irony>\_corpus/ (Tang and Chen 2014). 3.17 million (3,178,372) messages with each consisting of maximum 140 words from June 21, 2008 to November 7, 2009 were collected from Taiwan’s microbloging site [(www.plurk.com)](http://www.plurk.com/), among which 1,005 ironical utterances were identified by computer screening and manual screening.

Messages were selected from this microbloging platform to form an irony corpus based on the use of emoticons, and ironic messages and patterns. Bootstrapping approach is used to build the corpus and discover ironic patterns. Furthermore the structure of ironic expressions is also analyzed. An ironic utterance is usually composed of ironic word/phrase, context, and rhetoric element. Labels representing the three components of an irony are added to all messages in the irony corpus. Among the three components of irony, ironic words/phrases (<ironic>) and contextual information (<context>) are indispensable while a rhetorical element (<rhetoric>) is not. In this corpus, every ironic utterance is marked with the above three labels. For example:

（1）<context sentiment="pos">才刚买的书，竟然掉页了， </context>这品质<rhetoric> 也太</rhetoric><ironic sentiment="neg">好</ ironic>了<rhetoric>吧</rhetoric>

The book I just bought has lost its pages, so its quality is too good.

***3.2 Patterns of Chinese fanyu***

In NTU corpus, all the patterns of Chinese irony generally are divided into the following 5 types: (1) degree adverb+ positive adjective; (2) the use of positive adjective with high intensity; (3) the use of positive noun with high intensity; (4) the use of “很好”（very good）; (5) “可以再.. 一点”（It’s OK to be worse). To construct NTU corpus, negative emoticons and positive word are used as clue to locate irony. All the ironical patterns in this corpus exist in negative context and they are all negatively evaluative Chinese fanyu.

In order to capture more ironic patterns in Chinese, we use the methodology described for construction of NTU corpus (see Tang and Chen 2014) to collect Chinese *fanyu* messages from Sina Weibo, a Twitter-like microblog social network which has more than 500 million users and millions of posts per day, and is adding 20 million new users per month in China. Besides the above 5 ironic patterns in NTU corpus, another 4 patterns of*fanyu* are dug out consequently as follows: (1) the use of positive/negative verb with high intensity; (2)“敢不敢再……一点” (Dare… be more…?); (3) the use of “谢谢” (thankyou); (4)the use of “恭喜”（congratulation）. Moreover, it should be noted that the Chinese irony corpus of Taiwan University contains

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only negatively evaluative irony, but no positively evaluative irony. But we cannot deny that in Chinese language daily use, some *fan yu* being negative literally imply positively evaluative meaning. Such kind of positively evaluative irony can be spotted from Sina microblog, for example:

(2) 昨天收到一份礼物， 很 nice,谢谢，混蛋。

I received a gift yesterday. It is nice. Thank you, bastard.

Specific nouns that represent highly negative meanings are also used to express irony. These nouns include “死鬼” (ghost), “混蛋” (bastard) and “傻瓜” (fool). When they are used with a positive context, an ironic expression is formed. This pattern is not found in NTU corpus.

***4. Working mechanism of irony***

***4.1 Grice’s approach to irony***

Grice derived his definition of irony from Aristotle initially in his article “Logic and Conversation” as “saying something but meaning the opposite”. He remarks that the speaker A wants to communicate something opposite to what he says and he makes a statement which “he does not believe and the audience knows that A knows that this is obvious to the audience” (Grice 1989a: 34). Thus, Grice suggests being ironic, the speaker overtly flouts the first maxim of quality to say what he believes to be false in order to implicate (Grice 1989a: 24).

Grice (1978: 113- 128) later in his “Further Notes on Logic and Conversation” made a further step to point out that Plato’s idea of irony can be viewed as pretense. Because “a hearer only recognizes the ironical tone in connection with an ironic remark, which is usually contemptuous in nature”, Grice “restricts the purpose of irony to criticism and expressions of negativity” (Barbie 1995: 38). For example, suppose a mother says to her child “you are so clean today!” when this child looks so dirty. The understanding of the case of irony can be explained as a violation of the maxim of quality because the mother said what she believed to be false according to Grice’s violation-based view on irony.

***4.2 Dynel’s overtuntruthfulness theory: a revision of the Grice’s approach***

Like Grice, many linguistic approaches assume irony to be counterfactual assertions (Kreuz and Glucksberg 1989; Kumon\_Nakamura et al. 1995; Gibbs 2000; Colston 2000; Pexman et al. 2000; Creusere 2000), nonveridical assertions (Kreuz and Glucksberg 1989; Kreuz and Roberts 1995; Colston 1997, 2000) or insincere assertions breaching at least one of the Austinian/Searlean felicity conditions (Haverkate 1990; Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995; Glucksberg 1995; Colston 2000; Creusere 2000; Gibbs 2000). However, the notion of “counterfactuality” is problematic for what the speaker believes to be the case is his perception rather than objective truth, therefore, Dynel (2013) replaced “counterfactuality” by the notion of “untruthfulness” and proposed overt untruthfulness theory of irony.

“Overt untruthfulness” is the form of irony as derived from Grice’s view of flouting the first maxim of quality to produce conversational implicature which is transparent and thus recognized by the hearer. However transparency of irony cannot be indicated explicitly by the speaker to the hearer, thus resulting in pretense. On the other hand, aided by the background knowledge, the hearer can recognize the speaker’s ironic intention and infer an evaluative meaning. The speaker’s untruthfulness is characterized by negating what he makes as if to say. Furthermore, the speaker

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inherently purports to convey implicit evaluation of a referent, irrespective of whether any evaluation is present in the utterance (Dynel 2013: 404). As Grice (1989b)suggests, what makes irony unique is its expression of feeling, attitude or evaluation for one cannot say something ironically unless what he says is intended to reflect a hostile or derogatory judgment or a feeling such as indignation or contempt. Thus Dynel (2013: 407) thinks evaluation and unannounced pretense then form the sine quanon for irony but not for other forms of pretense or untruthfulness, such as metaphor.

To be more specific, a speaker utters an ironic remark which is expressed with one or more of the verbal features exhibiting overt untruthfulness. The contents and contexts of the remark suggest that the speaker has flouted the first Quality maxim. Thus, the remark takes on an ironic tone showing the speaker’s negative emotion or evaluation as it is directed at a target (the addressee or a third party) which is seen as the reason of the blatant violation. Overt untruthfulness is facilitated by the flouting the first maxim of Quality. In accordance with the overt untruthfulness theory, a novel classification of English irony is offered.

***4. Chinese fan yu based on neo-Gricean classification of irony***

Grice originally proposed that irony is based on the contradiction, inversion and negation of literal meaning. This view cannot explain all irony, because irony has many manifestations. The opposite of the literal meaning of an utterance is not always obvious (Colston and Gibbs 2007; Utsumi 2000). As illustrated above, the reason why irony shows overt untruthfulness is that it violates the quality maxim of the cooperative principle and produces evaluative meanings. Based on this understanding, English irony can be divided into four categories: propositional negation, ideational reversal, verisimilar irony and surrealistic irony (Dynel 2013: 403). These four types of English irony will be used as a framework to examine Chinese irony. If the types of Chinese *fan yu* which are similar to the above four types of English irony can be found, it shows that there are similarities between English irony and Chinese *fan yu*. Otherwise it means that there are differences between English irony and Chinese *fan yu*.

***4.1 Propositional negation irony***

For this type of irony, it is the propositional meaning that is subject to negation (cf. Amante 1981; Jorgensen et al. 1984; Wilson and Sperber 1992; Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995; Curcó 2000; Partington 2006, 2007). An example of this type of irony is "X is a fine friend" which actually means "X is not a fine friend". The speaker expresses a certain proposition on the surface, but actually expresses the opposite meaning of the proposition. The literal meaning of the proposition is false, while the actual meaning to be expressed is true. This kind of irony is based on the semantic relations of complementarity, contradiction and opposition. There are also this type of ironic utterances in Chinese as we collected from the NTU corpus.

(3) 作业全是错的， 我太聪慧了。

My homework is full of mistakes, so I am too clever.

The first clause is the contextual information and the underlined expression is the linguistic form of negated proposition. In the second clause the adverbs “太” (tái) is adegree adverb for intensification. Although the positive word “clever” is used, the speaker means the opposite. The first clause indicates why he thinks he is not clever, and therefore, provides the contextual

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information.

***4.2 Ideational reversal irony***

Irony maybe based on ideational (Partington 2006, 2007) or conceptual reversal (Wilson and Sperber 1992; Wilson 2006), not propositional negation. Such irony focuses on the reversal of semantic meaning of an untruthful lexical element in an utterance, or the reversal of the pragmatic meaning of an entire utterance. Ideational reversal irony is also caused by deliberate violation of the quality maxim of Grice's cooperative principle, but it does not involve the negation of propositions. Ideational reversal irony consists of two types, semantic meaning reversal and pragmatic meaning reversal.

***4.2.1 Semantic meaning reversal irony***

In the first case, semantic meaning reversal refers to the fact that the actual meaning of a word in the utterance is opposite to its literal meaning, for example, "As I reached the bank at closing time, the bank clerk helpfully shut the door in my face" (Wilson 2006: 1722) involving the semantic meaning reversal of the word "helpfully" used as an irony. The actual meaning of this sentence is "As I reached the bank at closing time, the bank clerk unhelpfully shut the door in my face." Then there is only one lexical term "helpfully" in the entire sentence that violates the first quality maxim. In the Chinese corpus, we also found similar irony, such as:

（4）在酒店里享受“最好” 的早餐。

I am enjoying the “best” breakfast in the hotel.

This kind of Chinese irony arises because the literal meaning of a word in the utterance is opposite to its actual meaning. Since quotation marks is usually used in Chinese to indicate the expression within it to be ironic, the adjective with high intensity “ 最好”（best）expresses non-literal meaning with the semantic meaning of this adjective being reversed.

***4.2.2 Pragmatic meaning reversal***

The second type of ideational reversal irony is pragmatic meaning reversal. According to the Neo-gricean theory, exclamatory sentences can be used as irony, as when a dancer fails in dance ballet, her teacher says, "Wow!" literally to mean "It's amazing!", but in this negative context it was ironically used to express "That was a total failure!" Interestingly, imperatives and questions may also be ironic, even if they are not assertions and do not have truth-value (e.g. Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995). For example, the teacher is disappointed by the student's keeping silence performance in the seminar and says, "Yes, please do keep silent whenever I ask a question", but what she wants to imply is "You should actively participate in the discussion." In this imperative sentence, the derivation of the speaker's intention needs to be based on the reversal of the pragmatic meaning of the whole utterance. Another example is the teacher asking students a rhetorical question "Must you sit so silently?" It does not really elicit an answer, but implicitly criticizes students for not cooperating in class. Therefore, the irony can be regarded as based on pragmatic meaning reversal of the whole utterance.

Generally speaking, non-declarative sentences such as exclamation sentences, interrogative sentences, imperative sentences which cannot express complete propositions in English can be regarded as pragmatic meaning reversal types of irony if they show obvious untruthfulness inconsistent with the facts. There are also such ironic utterances in Chinese, for example:

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（5）感冒... 很好! 我的假期飞了.

I caught a cold… Very good!! My vacation is gone.

（6）敢不敢再冷点？

Dare it be even colder?

（5）is an exclamatory sentence. The speaker says it is good on the surface, but in actual circumstances, it is not good to catch a cold in vacation. It deliberately violated the first quality maxim, obviously showing untruthfulness and thus to convey ironic meaning. Although (6) is not a statement with truth value, in this example, the rhetorical question is not made genuinely to elicit an answer, but implicitly conveys dissatisfaction with low temperature of the weather. Both of these two examples of Chinese irony from the corpus can be regarded as based on the reversal of pragmatic meaning.

***4.2.3 Litotic and hyperbolic irony***

The use of understatement and overstatement in English can produce ironic effects, which is called litotic and hyperbolic irony (Wilson and Sperber 1992; Wilson 2006; Colston 2000; Partington 2006, 2007). For example, a person says "This meal was quite rich" after a big meal, but what he actually wants to express is "This meal was extremely rich." Similarly, when two people encounter heavy rain, one of them says, "It seems to be raining" (Sperber and Wilson 1981: 300), but he ironically implies "It is transparent that it's raining heavily." Examples of the litotic irony involves flouting the first maxim of quality though they exhibit partial truthfulness.

Grice (1989a: 34) believes that exaggeration like understatement also violates the first maxim of quality and can also be used as an irony. For example, when a person sees his wife worrying about a small matter, he says "This is an enormous problem indeed!" The implied meaning is "This is a tiny problem indeed!" The literal meaning is inconsistent with the fact, which achieves an ironic effect. Similar ironical utterances were found in the Chinese corpus.

(8) 零下十一度...你可以再冷一點。

It's - 11°C…It is okay to be colder.

(9) 躺在地上人事不省，他喝得还真是有点醉。

Lying unconscious on the ground, he is really a little intoxicated.

As Dynel (2013) suggests, it can be concluded that litotic irony will frequently subscribe to propositional negation irony, while examples not affecting the whole proposition can also be conceived of. (8) is a commonly used ironic pattern in the NTU corpus, which literally states that it is okay for something to become worse. Being hyperbolic, this utterance does not coincide with truth but convey evaluation. (9) is a litotic irony which also flouts quality maxim for the fact is he is a lot intoxicated rather than a little.

***4.3 Surrealistic irony***

Surrealistic irony is often a response to the previous turn. For example, "Perhaps this problem will resolve itself" can invite the response "Perhaps Superman will arrive to solve your problems", which shows that the speaker has made assumptions about the "problem" and gave a negative evaluation. What it actually expresses is "Your idea is ridiculous". Although surrealistic irony does not involve reversal of meaning, it can still be seen to violate the quality maxim.

Surrealistic irony deliberately violates the first quality maxim, often showing inherent absurdity and expressing what is impossible or highly unlikely in the real world. Kapogianni

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(2011) also pointed out that surrealist irony is often inappropriate with the context. There is also such kind of ironical utterances in Chinese. For example, we found the following examples in the NTU corpus.

(10) 经过修炼，悟出了睡觉的真谛。 阿弥陀佛

By persistent self-cultivation, I realized the true meaning of sleep. Amitabha!

What (10) states is obviously impossible or even absurd in reality, thus literal meaning of the utterance violates the quality maxim. The speaker’s actual intention is to criticize laziness by ridiculing the understanding of true meaning of sleep with hard efforts. In this way, the speaker gave negative evaluation of too much sleep.

***4.4 Verisimilar irony***

For this kind of irony, while its literal meaning is true, what is overtly untruthful is the as if implicature inferred by the hearer. In other words, what is denied is the implicit evaluation of the speaker derived by the listener, rather than the literal meaning clearly expressed by the speaker (Colston and O’Brien, 2000; Colston, 2000). For example, a mother walks into her son’s messy room and says, “I like/love children who keep their rooms clean” (Sperber and Wilson 1998; Utsumi 2000; Partington 2007; Kapogianni 2011). Partington (2007) believes that the mother in this example is telling the truth, but it does not match the context. The evaluative meaning of this kind of irony needs to be reversed to be relevant to a specific context. What this mother actually wants to express is "I don't like children (that is, you) who have untidy rooms."

Kapogianni (2011: 54) observes that ironic utterances manifest intrinsic counterfactuality, either in the form of a direct contrast with reality (which should be understood as what the speaker believes to be the truth, rather than objective truth), or in the inferences an utterance promotes, which bears relevance to verisimilar irony. For verisimilar irony, what is contradictory with the fact is not what the speaker literally says but what the hearer infers from the speaker’s utterance. The speaker violates the relation maxim first. In order to make the utterance relevant to the context, the hearer needs to obtain what is implied by the speaker (as if implicature) , which in the above example is “I like your keeping your room clean now”. In the second step, such an implicature violates the quality maxim, and serves as the inferential basis for the central ironic implicature (e.g., “I don’t like your room being messy”).

The scope of this type of irony is difficult to define, and it rarely appears in English. Verisimilar irony is different from other types of irony for it is its implicature which embodies overtly untruthfulness and violates the quality maxim. Other types of irony violate only the quality maxim but verisimilar irony violates the relation maxim first and then the quality maxim. In contrast with other types of irony, the speaker is being truthful on surface but untruthful when uttering verisimilar irony. That means verisimilar irony is based on inferential overtly untruthfulness while other types of irony on literal overtly untruthfulness. This kind of irony was not found in the Chinese irony corpus used in this study.

***5. Evaluative meaning of Chinese Fanyu***

All of the above four types of irony express the speaker’s evaluation as supported by many scholars that irony inherently expresses the speaker’s attitude and shows an evaluation of the

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referent such as an utterance, action, event or situation (e.g., Grice 1989b; Holdcroft 1983; Haverkate 1990; Dews and Winner 1995; Glucksberg 1995; Creusere 1999; Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995; Hamamoto 1998; Attardo 2000; Utsumi 2000; Kotthoff 2003; Partington 2006, 2007; Garmendia 2010, 2011; Kapogianni 2011; Gibbs 2012).

Partington (2006, 2007) even proposes that evaluation is the single sine qua non for irony. Accordingly, Dynel (2013) made a distinction between positively evaluative irony (negative literal meaning conveying positive ironic meaning) and negatively evaluative irony (positive literal meaning carrying negative ironic meaning). There is an obvious lack of balance between positive irony and negative irony in English, which is called the asymmetry of affect in verbal irony. Most examples of English irony express the speaker's negative attitude and carries negative evaluation though being positive on the surface. However, there are also few counter-examples which show positive evaluation actually but being negative literally. Atypical example of positive irony is that Andy is worried about test scores, but when the results come out, Tim finds Andy did well in the test. Tim will say such ironic words to Andy as "your results are indeed terrible!" The implied meaning is “your results are great!” What needs to be emphasized is that such a positively evaluative ironical utterance tends to express negative evaluation more implicitly than the negatively evaluative ironical utterance in English. Irony in English expressing positive evaluation is abnormal, while irony expressing negative evaluation is more common (Kumon-Nakamura et al., 1995). So English irony often expresses negative evaluation or derogatory attitude (Wilson and Sperber 1992; Dews et al. 1995; Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995; Gibbs 2000; Attardo 2000).

As stated above, in the English irony conveying positive evaluation, criticism is more implicit and therefore more difficult to identify. Compared with praise expressed literally, praise expressed by English irony is insulting. But criticism expressed by English irony is less aggressive than criticism expressed literally. When irony is aimed at the hearer's bad behavior, it can reduce criticism to protect the hearer's "face". When irony is aimed at the offending behavior of the hearer, it can protect the speaker's "face" by reducing his anger and enhancing his own control. In addition, by using irony to criticize, the relationship between the speaker and the hearer is much less damaged than the literal expression. This is the social function of English irony.

Comparatively speaking, positively evaluative *fanyu* and negatively evaluative *fanyu* coexist in Chinese. For example, when friends call each other "fool", they use derogatory words to express intimacy implicitly. Chinese *fanyu* can be used not only to express negative attitudes, but also to express positive emotions such as intimacy, affection and admiration. In Chinese, love and intimacy expressed by literally negative *fanyu* is much stronger than if expressed literally. On the other hand, criticism expressed by literally positive *fan yu* in Chinese is usually harsher than its literal counterpart. Consequently, Chinese *fanyu* can increase the "emotional load" of utterance. Speaker’s use of Chinese *fanyu* does not protect the "face" of the hearer like that for English irony, but is more threatening and insulting to the "face" of the hearer. Therefore, the use of literally positive *fanyu* which expresses the negative evaluation in Chinese sometimes can be disastrous for the relationship between the speaker and the hearer. On the contrary, the use of positively evaluative *fan yu* which is negative literally in Chinese expresses more affection and intimacy than literal expression, which makes the relationship between the speaker and the hearer closer.

Chinese *fanyu* on the basis of speaker’s evaluative meaning can be classified as positively evaluative *fanyu* and negatively evaluative *fanyu* (Huang 2017).We first identify the type of *fan*

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*yu* in which the speaker’s positive evaluation conveyed by negative literal expression *(zheng hua fan shuo*) and the other type of*fan yu* for which the speaker’s negative evaluative meaning is expressed by literally positive meaning (*fan hua zheng shuo*).

***5.1 Positively evaluative Chinese fanyu and English irony***

This type of Chinese *fanyu* intends to convey the speaker’s positive attitudes or emotional states such as intimacy, fondness, compliment, amusement, agreement, respect, care and so on through expressions indicative of literally negative evaluations such as sadness, condemnation, criticism, alienation, disgust, satire and scorn and so on. Some examples of positively evaluative

*fanyu* are given as follows.

(11)说想你了？我才不想你呢。

Did I say I miss you? I don't miss you.

(12)可爱死了~睫毛好长！脸蛋长得太惹事了

It’s so cute~ the eyelashes are so long! The face is too annoying.

(13)我讨厌你宋承宪， 没事儿长那么长的睫毛做什么嘛......

I hate you Song Seung Heon, what do you do with such long eyelashes?

These *fanyu* examples exist in actual Chinese language use. Example (11) actually conveys the speaker’s affectionate evaluation for the target while example (12) and (13) show the speaker’s enviousness and fondness. Comparatively speaking, we are more used to the literally positive irony expressing actually negatively evaluative meaning out of politeness in English. Grice didn't even mention positively evaluative irony which is being negative literally. For example, when one person has a good relationship with another person, he can say, "What a scoundrel you are!" But it's a banter, not irony. This asymmetry of affect is still mentioned in most western major irony theories. Sperber and Wilson believe that irony generally expresses rejection or disapproval (Wilson and Sperber 1992:75).

In addition, according to Sperber (1984:133), cultural and social norms are usually positive. Therefore, we often echo the norms to express negative evaluation implicitly by using irony. However, the norms are rarely negative and this explains the asymmetry of affect in English verbal irony. Clark and Gerrig also believe that an ironist is more likely to say "What a clever idea" of a bad idea than "What a stupid idea" of a good one because people tend to see the world according to norms of success and excellence (Clark and Gerrig 1984: 122). People in ignorance should adhere to these norms, as the sort of person ironists pretend to be. That is why we should be more likely to make positive pretenses than negative ones. Garmendia (2010:405) even proposed that literally negative irony with positive evaluative meaning in English is "pseudo-positive", which is also critical. Just like the above example, in a certain context, we can understand Tim's words as irony. The literal meaning is that Andy did poorly in the exam, but actually it means that he did well in the exam. So Tim wants to praise Andy with superficial criticism. However, the meaning of the speaker in this example is not only that Andy did well in the test, but also that Tim is tired of Andy's unrealistic complaints and will no longer believe Andy's words. In fact, it expresses the speaker's negative attitude. Therefore, English irony is always critical.

***5. 2 Negatively evaluative Chinese*** *fanyu*

This kind of Chinese *fany*u intends to be negative to show the speaker’s attitudes and moods such as distance, disgust, satire, scorn and condemnation etc. though the words state what is

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opposite literally. Literal meaning of this type of*fan yu* is positive but its implied evaluation is negative. I will give several examples as follows.

(14) 我告诉您了,根据报纸上官方介绍,他是天底下头等大好人,浑身上下毫无缺点,连 肚脐眼都没了。

I told you that according to the official introduction in the newspaper, he is the best man in the world. He has no shortcoming, even his bellybutton is gone.

(15) 今天的＂红人儿＂ ，呵呵。

"Popular man" today, he he.

In (11), the speaker shows absurdity and impossibility by saying “so perfect that he has no navel”, thus violates the quality maxim to produce a *fanyu* which is similar to English surrealistic irony. This irony implies an negative evaluation and expresses the speaker’s disapproval towards the newspaper’s comments on the person ．(12) as a Chinese *fan yu*, is as same as a semantic meaning reversal irony in English. By using quotation marks, the speaker indicates that he has violated the quality maxim and reversed the semantic meaning of “popular man”, which consequently conveys the negative evaluation of contempt.

***6. Conclusion***

Guided by Grice's philosophical thoughts and from the pragmatic and cognitive perspectives, this paper studies Chinese irony. For verisimilar irony, not only the quality maxim but also the relation maxim is violated by the speaker to promote the overt untruthfulness while the hearer has to recognize the speaker’s intention and reverse its implicature. However, for other three types of irony, the sole quality maxim is violated blatantly.

In addition, there are a lot of Chinese irony for expressing affection and intimacy. As Wilson and Sperber (2012) suggest, only under special circumstances can English irony express positive evaluation. As illustrated above, there exist instances of irony which literally express negative attitude but actually convey positive evaluation, whereas English irony is always critical. In English, the speaker cannot say “What a cheat!” to be ironic about someone who is honest. Similarly, when sun is shining, we cannot say “awful weather” ironically. English irony is usually used for mockery and satire. The reason why Chinese irony can be used to imply positive evaluation such as intimacy, affection and fondness should be explained from the perspective of cultural psychology. Cultural psychology emphasizes the dynamic and mutually constructive relationship between social cultural situation and psychological experience (Markus &. Hamedani 2007: 3). The way people interact with the social and cultural environment always affects their emotion, cognition, motivation, behavioral pattern and language expression. The norms such as intimacy, including linguistic behavior, are acquired through intergenerational enculturation, which is a vertical intergenerational communication process (Zhong 1993: 75-80). In Chinese culture, people cannot express their emotions including love and intimacy directly, because it is regarded as being bald on record. Therefore irony is used on such occasions. There are also similarities between Chinese irony and English sarcasm and banter, which needs further study in the future.

**Funding Information**

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“A Comparative Study of English and Chinese Irony based on Corpus” is supported by “Humanities and Social Sciences Fund of the Ministry of Education of China”

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