

A Comparative Analysis of the Functions of Vietnamese and English Irony in Idioms and Proverbs and Implications for Further Research: A Cultural Perspective

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ABSTRACT: Idioms and proverbs are integral to language, capturing shared wisdom and social experiences. In both English and Vietnamese, idioms and proverbs offer rich insights into cultural and linguistic traditions, reflecting the values and experiences of their speakers. In this study, the focus is on the role of irony in idioms and proverbs, particularly how irony functions in idioms and proverbs in English and Vietnamese, and the cultural insights that can be gained from examining the ironic use of these sayings in both languages. Through comparative analysis, these expressions reveal much about cultural values, societal norms, and the intricacies of communication. This study employs a qualitative approach, using comparative and content analysis to examine how irony functions in English and Vietnamese idioms and proverbs. The findings show that in Vietnamese, irony often carries a more didactic function, emphasizing values rooted in Confucian traditions such as humility, respect for elders, and social harmony and in English, irony is often used humorously or critically, serving as a tool to challenge authority and societal norms. Besides, there are notable similarities in the themes that idioms and proverbs address, revealing universal aspects of human experience such as critique undesirable

behaviors, encourage introspection, reinforce social values, the unpredictability of success and failure in life, highlights contradictions in human behavior or the discrepancy between one's words and actions and reflect each culture's values, historical experiences, and communication preferences. By examining the use of irony, we gain a deeper understanding of how language reflects and influences cultural norms and social interactions.

Keywords: *Idioms, proverbs, irony, irony in idioms, irony in proverbs, Cultural and Linguistic Functions.*

INTRODUCTION

Idioms and proverbs are integral to language, capturing shared wisdom and social experiences. They serve as tools of communication that go beyond literal meaning, often relying on figurative language to convey deeper truths (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In both English and Vietnamese, idioms and proverbs offer rich insights into cultural and linguistic traditions, reflecting the values and experiences of their speakers (Nguyen, 2010; Cambridge University Press, 2011). According to Fernando (1996), idioms not only embody fixed expressions but also reveal the mental lexicon of a community. Irony, as a stylistic device, introduces layers of contrast and humor into everyday expressions, offering speakers a way to say one thing while implying another. Muecke (1969) and Booth (1974) describe irony as a rhetorical tool that highlights contradictions and adds depth to what is said. In Vietnamese, irony is often interwoven into proverbs to convey moral lessons or social commentary, much like in English (Nguyen, 1998). As Truong (2013) observes, Vietnamese proverbs frequently use irony to critique societal norms, drawing on subtle wordplay and double meanings.

In this study, the focus is on the role of irony in idioms and proverbs, particularly how irony functions in idioms and proverbs in English and Vietnamese, and the cultural insights that can be gained from examining the ironic use of these sayings in both languages. Through comparative analysis, these expressions reveal much about cultural values, societal norms, and the intricacies of communication. While both languages employ irony, the ways in which they do so are influenced by their

respective cultural and historical contexts (Nguyen, 2010; Hickey, 2005). By examining these cross-cultural elements, the study aims to deepen understanding of how irony operates within idiomatic and proverbial structures.

Irony is commonly understood as a figure of speech where the intended meaning is opposite to the literal meaning (Colebrook, 2004). This notion of irony as a form of contrast or opposition can be traced back to classical rhetoric, where Quintilian (circa 95 AD) described irony as a method of saying one thing while meaning another, often to achieve a humorous or critical effect. Kierkegaard (1841) elaborates on irony as a form of existential reflection, suggesting it as a way to question reality and emphasize individual freedom in interpreting situations. Hutcheon (1994) expands on this, viewing irony as both a rhetorical and ideological tool that allows individuals to critique societal norms through indirect language. This study focuses specifically on verbal irony, which is commonly found in idioms and proverbs to emphasize contradictions and convey humor.

Verbal irony is a powerful communicative tool that relies on the listener's ability to interpret meanings beyond the literal level. For example, the English idiom "Break a leg" expresses good wishes despite its literal suggestion of harm. Booth (1974) emphasizes irony's ability to engage listeners in layered interpretations, requiring them to recognize both surface and underlying meanings. Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, especially the maxim of quality, explains how irony creates non-literal communication by stating something untrue, expecting the listener to interpret the opposite. Psychological studies, such as those by Giora (2003), also explore irony's cognitive demands, finding that understanding irony requires increased mental effort to resolve the incongruity between literal and intended meanings.

Irony serves various social functions, including entertainment, critique, and reinforcement of cultural norms. Gibbs (1994) suggests that irony often reflects societal values, providing a tool for subtle criticism and commentary on social issues. Attardo and Raskin's (1991) General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) links irony to humor, demonstrating how humor functions as a social critique across cultures. Studies on irony in American and Japanese cultures by Yamanashi (1998) show that while Americans frequently use irony to express indirect disapproval, Japanese

speakers tend to avoid it due to politeness norms. This cultural variance supports the view that irony adapts to different societal expectations, reflecting each society's preferred methods of critique and dissent.

Idioms are fixed expressions with meanings that cannot be directly inferred from the words themselves (Liu, 2003). They often convey metaphorical meanings rooted in cultural context, as Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory suggests, which posits that idioms reflect common cultural metaphors. For example, the English idiom "Bite the bullet" implies courage in adversity, with no literal reference to bullets or bravery. Fernando (1996) highlights idioms as essential elements of the mental lexicon, deeply embedded in everyday language and reflective of cultural attitudes. Cross-linguistic studies, such as those examining Spanish and Chinese idioms, illustrate that idioms often convey culturally specific values and worldviews, further supported by Gläser (1988), who points out the pragmatic functions idioms serve, such as politeness or emphasis, in communication.

Proverbs are short, well-known sayings that convey traditional wisdom and often carry moral lessons (Mieder, 2004). The proverb "Too many cooks spoil the broth" warns of over-involvement but can also be used ironically when teamwork succeeds. Tannen (1989) emphasizes the narrative structures of proverbs, highlighting how they pass down cultural values across generations. Proverbs like "Lắm thầy thối ma" (too many teachers, the corpse rots) provide metaphorical advice, warning against excessive input in Vietnamese culture. Norrick (1985) adds that proverbs frequently employ irony and paradox, making the lessons more memorable and effective. Comparative studies on proverbs from African and Middle Eastern cultures show similar trends, underscoring the universal role of proverbs in guiding social behavior while reflecting each society's unique moral and ethical values.

Many idioms derive their impact from ironic meanings. In English, idioms such as "Break a leg" and "Spill the beans" carry meanings that are opposite to their literal interpretations. Gibbs (1994) argues that irony in idioms introduces incongruity, encouraging speakers to look beyond literal meanings. Sperber and Wilson's (1986) Relevance Theory further explains how ironic idioms require listeners to interpret implied meaning, which adds depth to everyday language. In Vietnamese, idioms

such as “Chết như sung rụng” (to die like fallen figs) convey sudden, unexpected outcomes, often with an ironic twist. Nguyen Thi Hong Nhung (2013) highlights how Vietnamese idioms often blend metaphor and irony to communicate complex social and moral ideas. Irony in idioms also varies culturally. While English idioms often employ humor, Vietnamese idioms tend to emphasize moral lessons or social critiques. For example, the idiom "Cười người hôm trước, hôm sau người cười" (He who laughs today, will be laughed at tomorrow) carries an ironic undertone that emphasizes humility. Fernando (1996) suggests that idioms condense complex ideas into concise expressions, and irony adds an element of depth, allowing idioms to reflect the values and norms of a society.

Proverbs often use irony to teach lessons by highlighting contradictions. The English proverb “The early bird catches the worm” promotes punctuality but can be used ironically when early action does not lead to success. Similarly, in Vietnamese, “Cười người hôm trước, hôm sau người cười” cautions against arrogance, using irony to underscore its moral lesson. Mieder (2004) observes that irony in proverbs invites reflection, making the lessons they impart more memorable. Honeck (1997) discusses irony as a universal cognitive device, with studies showing that ironic proverbs, whether reinforcing social norms or challenging them, are widely recognized across cultures. Norrick (1985) adds that the complexity irony brings to proverbs encourages critical thinking, making them effective tools for social critique.

Idioms and proverbs are deeply tied to cultural experiences, with irony reflecting societal values and historical contexts. According to Gibbs (1994), irony serves as a cultural mirror, offering speakers a tool to question norms and critique authority. Hall’s (1976) concepts of high-context and low-context communication help explain cultural differences in irony use, with high-context cultures favoring subtle irony while low-context cultures are more overt. Vietnamese proverbs, influenced by Confucian values, often emphasize humility and respect, while English proverbs might critique authority indirectly. Nguyen Đăng Na (1998) suggests that irony in Vietnamese proverbs reinforces social values, such as humility and harmony, through nuanced critique, whereas Hutcheon (1994) notes that English speakers often use irony to subtly question authority.

Irony can be challenging to translate across cultures, as what is ironic in one language may not be perceived as such in another. Nida (2003) argues that cultural expectations shape how irony is understood, with Katan (1999) suggesting that cultural misalignment may cause humorous irony in English to be lost in translation to Vietnamese. Studies by House (2006) show that irony's cultural underpinnings mean it often loses its intended nuance when translated, emphasizing the importance of cultural competence in cross-cultural understanding. Laineste (2013) notes that irony relies on shared context, which may be absent in cross-cultural interactions, while Kövecses (2005) highlights the role of cultural metaphors in shaping ironic meaning, underscoring how translation challenges often arise from different cultural associations.

For non-native speakers, irony is especially challenging. Gibbs (1994) observes that non-native speakers often struggle to understand idioms and proverbs involving irony, as they lack the cultural knowledge necessary for full comprehension. Kecskes (2000) explains that context plays a significant role in interpreting irony, with language learners often relying on literal meanings due to limited cultural familiarity. Tomasello's (2003) theory on language acquisition highlights how immersion in the culture is necessary for learners to grasp the nuances of ironic expressions. Bouton (1999) reports that second-language learners frequently miss ironic cues, as they tend to interpret statements literally, while Lazar (2003) adds that idiomatic and ironic language requires a high level of cultural and linguistic competence, which is difficult to acquire without extensive exposure.

The study of irony has evolved significantly, encompassing rhetorical, cognitive, and linguistic perspectives. Early work by Muecke (1969) emphasized irony as a literary and rhetorical device, exploring how irony creates layers of meaning by introducing contradiction. Colebrook (2004) continues this exploration, examining irony's role in modern language as a tool for subtle critique and humor. Booth (1974) underscores the importance of context and tone in verbal irony, suggesting that understanding irony requires both literal and inferred interpretation, which complicates communication. Cognitive research by Dews and Winner (1999) investigates how irony is processed in the brain, showing that recognizing irony

requires additional cognitive steps to identify intent beyond literal meaning. Giora's (2003) work on the graded salience hypothesis further highlights how irony demands a shift from surface to deeper meaning, making irony more complex than literal statements. This complexity positions irony as a unique tool in both casual and formal communication.

Idioms are widely studied in linguistic and cultural contexts due to their reliance on figurative language and cultural specificity. Fernando (1996) argues that idioms are essential elements of everyday language and serve to encode cultural knowledge, values, and beliefs. Liu (2003) provides a detailed analysis of idioms in English, noting that idioms are often metaphorical and draw from shared cultural experiences. Studies by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) on conceptual metaphor theory demonstrate that idioms are embedded in cultural metaphors, such as "Time is money" in Western cultures, underscoring the importance of cultural context in idiom usage.

Cross-linguistic research by Langlotz (2006) and Phan (2004) investigates idioms in English and Vietnamese, respectively, illustrating how idioms vary across languages due to cultural differences. This research shows that English idioms often emphasize humor and exaggeration, while Vietnamese idioms, influenced by Confucian values, are more likely to convey moral lessons or social expectations. This difference emphasizes how idioms function not only as linguistic tools but also as reflections of societal norms.

Proverbs are short, conventional sayings that carry cultural wisdom and often have didactic or moral functions. Mieder (2004) classifies proverbs as "carriers of traditional wisdom" and argues that they serve as moral guides, reinforcing shared values within a community. Taylor (1931) also highlights proverbs' role in transmitting cultural knowledge across generations, as they encapsulate social norms, life lessons, and historical insights. Norrick (1985) examines the rhetorical devices used in proverbs, including irony and paradox, which make these sayings memorable and impactful.

Comparative studies on proverbs from various cultural contexts, such as African (Seitel, 1972) and Middle Eastern proverbs, reveal how these expressions function as

social commentaries, shaping individual behavior within the community. In Vietnamese culture, as Phan (2004) notes, proverbs often focus on moral guidance and social harmony, aligning with Confucian principles. Proverbs in English, however, may emphasize individualism and indirect critique, reflecting Western cultural values (Hickey, 2005).

Irony is a significant feature in both idioms and proverbs, adding layers of meaning that enhance their communicative impact. Honeck and Temple (1994) observe that irony in idioms and proverbs often serves to critique social norms or highlight contradictions, making these expressions more nuanced. Attardo's (2000) research on irony as "relevant inappropriateness" supports the notion that irony creates contrast, prompting listeners to interpret deeper meanings. Nguyen (2013) specifically explores how Vietnamese idioms use irony to convey moral and social lessons, while studies like those by Laineste (2013) compare the use of irony in proverbs across different cultures, revealing both universal and culturally specific patterns. For instance, while Vietnamese proverbs may use irony to emphasize humility and respect, English proverbs frequently use irony to challenge social expectations, offering a more critical stance (Nguyen, 2010; Mieder, 2004).

Irony presents unique challenges in cross-cultural contexts, especially in translation and interpretation. Nida (2003) emphasizes that cultural expectations shape how irony is understood, noting that humor and irony are often culture-bound. Katan (1999) discusses the "cultural filter" in translation, explaining that what may be considered humorous or ironic in one culture might be misunderstood in another. House (2006) also highlights the difficulties in translating ironic expressions, as these often rely on shared cultural references that may not translate effectively across languages. Studies by Kövecses (2005) on metaphor in culture underscore the role of cultural associations in shaping irony, pointing out that different languages employ irony according to specific cultural schemas. Cross-cultural misunderstandings can arise from these differences, leading to potential misinterpretations. Laineste's (2013) study on humor and irony notes that humor is often dependent on shared context, which can be lacking in cross-cultural communication, thus complicating ironic expression and interpretation.

With the rise of digital communication, irony has adapted to new formats, such as social media, where context and tone are often harder to convey. Seitel (1972) and Spears (2000) explore how irony continues to evolve with societal changes, adapting to new contexts like memes, hashtags, and online discourse, where irony is often expressed through text without vocal or facial cues. This modern shift presents new challenges, as digital platforms allow for rapid, global communication, potentially increasing the risk of ironic statements being misinterpreted due to cultural or contextual differences.

While much research has been conducted on irony, idioms, and proverbs individually, there is limited comparative research specifically on irony within idiomatic and proverbial expressions across English and Vietnamese. This gap highlights the need for further studies exploring how irony functions within idioms and proverbs in these two languages, as cultural contexts can significantly shape how irony is used, understood, and valued (Nguyen, 1998; Colebrook, 2004). By addressing this gap, this study aims to offer new insights into how cultural frameworks influence ironic communication.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach, using comparative and content analysis to examine how irony functions in English and Vietnamese idioms and proverbs. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the linguistic and cultural elements that shape ironic meaning in each language.

A qualitative, comparative analysis framework is used to explore the cultural nuances of irony. This design facilitates a contextual interpretation of irony in idioms and proverbs, providing insights into each language's unique values and communicative styles. Data were collected from English and Vietnamese idiom and proverb dictionaries, literary sources, and cultural anthologies. Key sources included *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* and *Dictionary of Vietnamese Proverbs and Idioms* (Nguyen, 2010). A total of 100 idioms and proverbs (50 in each language) were selected based on their frequent use and clear ironic meanings. The study examined the structure, themes, and functions of irony across both languages, focusing on

linguistic structure, cultural themes, and communicative functions. Analysis involved interpreting both literal and intended meanings, informed by Attardo's (2000) irony theory and Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). Content analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes, such as moral guidance, social critique, and humor. Themes were coded and compared across languages to highlight cultural differences and similarities in how irony is used. To ensure validity, multiple sources and expert consultations with native speakers were used to verify interpretations. Reliability was enhanced through consistent selection criteria and independent coder reviews to maintain objectivity.

The study adhered to ethical standards by using public sources and consulting cultural experts to ensure respectful and accurate representation of each culture's idiomatic expressions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explores the function of irony in idioms and proverbs in both English and Vietnamese, shedding light on the cultural values and societal norms embedded within these expressions. The findings reveal that, although irony is a universal linguistic tool, its use varies considerably across cultures, reflecting distinct worldviews and communication styles.

Differences:

Irony in English and Vietnamese idioms and proverbs serves different purposes and reflects contrasting cultural priorities.

Irony in English Idioms and Proverbs:

In English, irony is often used humorously or critically, serving as a tool to challenge authority and societal norms (Hutcheon, 1994). This aligns with Western values that often emphasize individualism and freedom of expression (Hofstede, 1980), where irony can be used to question or subtly criticize power structures and social expectations. English idioms like "*Speak of the devil*" carry a humorous undertone, reflecting a cultural tendency to use irony playfully rather than for didactic purposes (Mieder, 2004). English proverbs often use irony to critique societal expectations in

an indirect, palatable way. For example, the saying "*The road to hell is paved with good intentions*" cautions against misguided efforts without directly admonishing the individual, a technique that aligns with the Western preference for indirect criticism (Norrick, 1985). This differs from Vietnamese proverbs, where the focus is more explicitly on moral guidance. Booth (1974) describes irony in English as having a "*dual-layered*" function, where the surface message may subtly contradict underlying social norms without overt judgment.

Irony in Vietnamese Idioms and Proverbs:

In Vietnamese, irony often carries a more didactic function, emphasizing values rooted in Confucian traditions such as humility, respect for elders, and social harmony (Nguyen, 2010; Nguyễn Đăng Na, 1998). This reflects the collectivist nature of Vietnamese society, where social harmony and respect for hierarchical relationships are prioritized (Hofstede, 1980). Vietnamese proverbs and idioms frequently employ irony to reinforce moral lessons and discourage socially undesirable behavior. For instance, "*Cười người hôm trước, hôm sau người cười*" (He who laughs today will be laughed at tomorrow) conveys a moral lesson on the importance of humility and self-awareness.

Nguyen Thi Hong Nhung (2013) points out that Vietnamese idioms often include a moralistic undertone, using irony not only to entertain but also to guide behavior. This didactic function is particularly evident in idioms and proverbs that address social roles, such as those involving family respect and community harmony, which are central to Confucian philosophy. The Vietnamese proverb "*Con hơn cha là nhà có phúc*" (The son is better than the father, the house is blessed) emphasizes in the family, if the children are good and successful in life and career, it is a very lucky and happy thing. Laineste (2013) highlights, the moral aspect of irony in Vietnamese idioms often reflects traditional values and warns against individualism, underscoring the cultural importance of collectivism. For example an idiom like "*Ăn quả nhớ kẻ trồng cây*" (, the proverb means that when we eat the fruit, we are the ones enjoying it; and the one who plants the tree is the one who creates the results) uses irony to express the good morality of gratitude from the past to the present of the Vietnamese people in daily life.

Similarities:

While English and Vietnamese use irony differently, there are notable similarities in the themes that idioms and proverbs address, revealing universal aspects of human experience.

Critiquing Social Behavior:

Both languages employ irony in idioms and proverbs to critique undesirable behaviors, encourage introspection, and reinforce social values. According to Attardo (2000), irony has a universal role in highlighting contradictions within human behavior, which helps individuals reflect on their actions. For example, both cultures use proverbs that caution against arrogance, such as the English proverb "*Pride comes before a fall*" and the Vietnamese proverb "*Cười người hôm trước, hôm sau người cười.*" These proverbs serve as moral reminders of the risks of overconfidence, with irony emphasizing the potential.

Life's Unpredictability:

Idioms and proverbs in both cultures often address themes of fate and the unpredictability of life. Kövecses (2005) explains that proverbs commonly reflect shared human experiences, such as the unpredictability of success and failure. English proverbs like "*The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry*" and Vietnamese proverbs such as "*Nói trước bước không qua*" (Do not speak of the future as it may not happen) underscore the limitations of human control, using irony to remind speakers of life's inherent uncertainties. The similarities in these themes reflect universal values, such as the importance of humility, introspection, and acceptance of life's unpredictability. As Honeck (1997) observes, proverbs often transcend cultural boundaries by addressing shared aspects of the human experience, with irony serving as a linguistic tool to deepen the moral impact of these sayings.

Universal and Context-Specific Elements

Irony serves universal communicative functions, such as reinforcing social norms and encouraging reflection, but its application is shaped by each culture's historical, moral, and social contexts.

Universal Functions of Irony:

Across cultures, irony reinforces social norms and provides a way to express criticism indirectly. As Attardo (2000) notes, irony's indirect nature makes it a flexible tool that can be adapted to fit various cultural contexts. In both English and Vietnamese, irony in idioms and proverbs prompts listeners to consider deeper meanings and underlying lessons. This universality aligns with Gibbs' (1994) assertion that irony operates on multiple levels of meaning, enabling it to serve similar functions across languages, even when applied to culturally specific contexts. Irony in proverbs or idioms often highlights contradictions in human behavior or the discrepancy between one's words and actions. For examples in English: "*Actions speak louder than words.*" means that people are more likely to believe what you do rather than what you say, because there is a difference between the two. And Vietnamese: "*Lời nói gió bay, việc làm mới là vàng.*" ("Words are like the wind, actions are what count.") means that words, exchanges, and agreements that are spoken by mouth are like the wind, cannot be retained, are easily forgotten, and also do not become reliable evidence. Both expressions use irony to emphasize that actions reveal one's true character or intentions, often pointing out the contradiction between what people say and what they do. Irony can also be used to draw attention to situations that are absurd, paradoxical, or illogical. For examples When you want to say that someone is criticizing someone else for something they themselves do, you can use the idiom "*The pot calling the kettle black in English*". In Vietnamese: "*Mèo mù vớ cá rán.*" (The blind cat catches fried fish) means that a case of being lucky and unexpectedly achieving something completely beyond one's ability (sarcastic,ironic).

Context-Specific Variations:

The specific application of irony in English and Vietnamese reflects each culture's values, historical experiences, and communication preferences. English speakers tend to use irony more casually, often as a form of humor or social critique without direct moral intent. This casual use reflects Western values of individualism and tolerance for ambiguity (Hall, 1976). For example, English idioms such as "*to butter someone up*" involve ironic praise but lack the moral undertone typically found in Vietnamese idioms.

In contrast, Vietnamese culture uses irony in a way that reflects the community-focused and hierarchical structure of society. Vietnamese proverbs and idioms are often more direct in conveying moral lessons, using irony to encourage conformity to social expectations (Nguyen, 2010). For example: "*Ăn cây nào, rào cây ấy*" (Literal translation: "Eat from a tree, build a fence around that tree.") This is advice on ethics and lifestyle, referring to the rights and responsibilities of the beneficiary. Wherever or whoever gives us a benefit, we must serve that person and that place. This cultural specificity is influenced by Confucian values that prioritize moral education and societal harmony (Hofstede, 1980). As Katan (1999) discusses in his theory of cultural filters, such values shape how languages encode irony, with Vietnamese idioms and proverbs often serving as implicit lessons on behavior within the context of the family and society. For example: "*Con vua thì lại làm vua, con sãi ở chùa lại quét lá đũa*" (Literal translation: "The son of the king will become king, and the son of a monk will sweep the leaves."). This proverb describes the realism of ancient Vietnamese society with clear class distinctions. The king's son was born to enjoy wealth and glory, destined to become a king, while the monk's son could only sweep banyan leaves in the temple, living a life of hardship and poverty. These findings underscore that while irony is universally present in language, its nuances and applications are heavily shaped by cultural contexts, revealing how English and Vietnamese use idioms and proverbs not only to communicate but also to reflect and reinforce cultural ideals and social structures.

Implications for Further Research

The findings from this study highlight the complexity and cultural specificity of irony in idioms and proverbs. There are several promising avenues for future research that could extend the understanding of irony's function in both traditional and modern contexts:

Irony in Political Discourse:

Irony plays a critical role in political discourse, where it can serve as a means of indirect critique, satire, and dissent. Future research could examine how irony functions in political rhetoric across different cultures, analyzing how idioms and

proverbs are used to comment on political figures, events, or policies. According to Hart (2013), irony allows political speakers to communicate dissent subtly, which is especially useful in contexts where direct criticism may be censored or culturally inappropriate. For example, studies on political communication in restrictive environments (e.g., Lu & Ahrens, 2008) reveal that irony and metaphor provide a means for expressing critique without overt confrontation. Examining irony in political discourse could reveal how cultural and political contexts shape the ways people use idiomatic expressions to discuss sensitive topics, offering insights into the function of irony as a tool for social commentary and resistance.

Irony in Digital Communication and Social Media:

With the rise of digital communication, the use of irony in online platforms, such as social media, has become more prevalent and complex. Online users frequently employ irony in the form of memes, hashtags, and emojis, which are often based on or inspired by idioms and proverbs. Research on irony in digital contexts could focus on how traditional idiomatic expressions are adapted and reinterpreted in internet slang and digital discourse. Studies by Shifman (2014) suggest that memes and digital humor often rely on irony to spread ideas in a culturally resonant and accessible way. Examining how irony evolves in online communication could reveal whether traditional idioms and proverbs retain their meanings or take on new interpretations, particularly among younger generations who engage in global, intercultural exchanges on social platforms. Moreover, studies on the role of emojis and non-verbal cues in conveying irony online (Derks et al., 2008) could shed light on how digital environments adapt and modify traditional forms of ironic expression.

Comparative Studies of Irony in Diverse Cultural Contexts:

While this study focuses on English and Vietnamese, further research could examine how irony functions in idioms and proverbs across other cultural and linguistic contexts. For instance, African proverbs and idioms often carry deeply rooted wisdom and humor, which may include subtle ironic undertones reflective of local customs and social structures (Seitel, 1972). Middle Eastern idioms and proverbs also frequently employ irony to address societal norms and offer moral lessons, as

seen in studies on Arabic proverbs (Feghali, 1997). By conducting cross-cultural studies on irony in idioms and proverbs, researchers can explore whether irony serves similar purposes in other languages and what unique features arise from each cultural context. This line of research could benefit from Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions framework, examining whether irony correlates with specific cultural dimensions such as power distance, individualism, or uncertainty avoidance. Comparative studies could further our understanding of irony as both a universal and culturally adaptive rhetorical device.

The Influence of Globalization on Idioms and Irony:

Globalization has led to increased intercultural exchange and exposure to different languages, which influences the development of idioms and the use of irony. Future research could investigate how globalization affects the way people understand and use irony, especially as English idioms and proverbs are increasingly adopted and adapted by speakers of other languages. Dagnino's (2012) work on global Englishes suggests that idioms, often introduced through popular culture and media, undergo transformations in meaning when they are assimilated into other cultures. This raises questions about whether the original ironic meanings are preserved, altered, or lost. Additionally, studies on the spread of Western media and the internet (Crystal, 2004) indicate that young people in non-English-speaking countries may adopt Western ironic expressions, merging them with local idioms and proverbs, which could lead to new hybrid forms of ironic expression.

Irony in Second Language Acquisition and Teaching:

Understanding irony in a second language can be challenging for learners, especially when idioms and proverbs are involved. Research on how non-native speakers interpret and use irony in idiomatic expressions could provide insights into the role of cultural knowledge in language learning. Bouton (1999) notes that non-native speakers often struggle to understand the pragmatic functions of irony, which are heavily dependent on cultural context. Future studies could focus on pedagogical methods to teach irony and figurative language, potentially using idioms and proverbs as tools for understanding cultural nuances in humor and

criticism. For example, research could examine whether exposure to authentic cultural materials (e.g., proverbs, idiomatic expressions in films or literature) enhances learners' comprehension of irony in the target language. This research could contribute to the field of second language acquisition by identifying strategies to help learners grasp the subtle, context-dependent nature of irony in a foreign language.

Evolution of Irony in Multicultural Societies:

As societies become increasingly multicultural, examining how irony evolves within multicultural and multilingual settings could offer insights into how different cultural groups interact and adapt each other's idiomatic expressions. Studies in multicultural cities, such as Toronto or New York, could explore whether diverse communities adopt and modify each other's idioms and proverbs, creating new, shared forms of irony. Research by Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) on language and identity in multilingual societies suggests that speakers often blend cultural expressions to foster a sense of belonging. Understanding how irony is used within such contexts could highlight its role in social integration, as well as its adaptability and resilience as a communicative strategy. Moreover, examining how bilingual and multilingual speakers navigate irony in idioms and proverbs across languages could reveal cognitive and social mechanisms underlying cross-cultural communication.

CONCLUSION

Irony remains a powerful tool in shaping language and culture. Through idioms and proverbs, it enables speakers to convey humor, critique, and wisdom, offering valuable insights into the shared values, beliefs, and experiences of societies. By examining the use of irony, we gain a deeper understanding of how language reflects and influences cultural norms and social interactions. This comparative study highlights that while irony serves similar communicative purposes in English and Vietnamese—such as moral instruction, social critique, and cultural expression—its manifestations differ depending on cultural traditions and societal values. English often employs irony with humor or indirect criticism, whereas Vietnamese tends to use it for didactic purposes rooted in Confucian principles. These differences

emphasize the role of cultural context in shaping figurative meaning. Understanding irony across cultures not only fosters deeper intercultural competence but also enriches second language acquisition. Future research should continue to explore how irony evolves in digital communication, political discourse, and multilingual environments, ensuring that its nuanced role in language is preserved and appreciated.

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