

## Versatile Social Goals and Conceptualizations of Irony- Perspectives from Cross-Cultural Pragmatics

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**Abstract :** Background: Our study aims to explore the differences in the use and applicability of irony across cultures. We examined a group of students predominantly from individualistic- and from collectivistic cultures in their use and understanding of the social goals of irony in discourse. Method: We tested 24 subjects with 14 irony tasks based on a scenario with an ironic target sentence. On the basis of their judgments, conclusions were drawn about the interpersonal effects of irony in different cultures: namely, individualistic and collectivistic. Statistical analysis revealed quantitative differences in the judgments of humorous effect and rudeness, if irony will avoid or, rather, trigger conflict between the speakers, and the interpersonal effect of irony if it targeted performance, vs. behavior vs. the situation. Results: Findings confirm that collectivistic cultures strive for harmony at the group level, prioritizing status, and often find irony to be impolite and rude, also threatening the Face, i.e. their social self, whereas individualistic cultures see irony as having the opposite social purpose in communication; blunting remarks, adding humor and thus friendlier, funnier and even as a tool to avoid conflicts. Discussion and conclusions: Results revealed that there are significant differences in collectivistic vs individualistic cultures concerning the accepted and appropriate use of irony. In fact, in collectivistic cultures where gender equality is questionable, the use of irony may also be questionable: it may even be prohibited with opposite-sex individuals. Such cultural norms give significantly different communication patterns and, importantly, frameworks for interpretation in our everyday lives.

**Keywords :** irony, social cognition, cross-cultural pragmatics, social goals

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