

President Kais Saied versus Sonia Dahmani : Verbal Irony as a Victimization Discourse in Tunisia**KAMANDA KAMANDA OMOY Joseph**

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Abstract

Irony is an intricate way of using language. Its juxtaposition of incompatibilities which generates dual meaning. Socrates may be considered as the victim of verbal irony, Sonia Dahmani has been jailed because of her irony addressed to President Kais Saied in Tunisia. The case is accounted here because it has been broadcasted by many Medias all over the world. The present article verifies in which way her verbal statement is depicted as ironic. Starting with the definition of irony and the presentation of political context of Tunisia under President Kais Saied's leadership, the article comes to the conclusion that there is a verbal irony in her saying. Pragmatics helps to analyse natural language meaning context as the physical environment of the speaker (Sonia Dahmani) and the nature of communication (verbal irony). This means that the interest will be on the context because her intention is motivated by the defence of contrary ideas. Verbal irony is viewed here as a controversial instance or conflict between the speaker and the listener.

This article studies the subtleties of verbal irony in an asymmetric interaction. The main questions it tries to answer here are : Why is the President Kais Saied victimized Sonia Dahmani. What is the effect of the verbal irony. Why does her irony modifies the temper of the president. The answers to these questions show the importance of considering her reaction as a source of duality that has been understood by her listener.

Keywords: Irony, victimization, verbal irony, private irony and covert irony

Introduction

The present article is a continuation of Kamanda research on concrete confrontation of worldwide known or very important persons with ironical discourse [1]. Irony in the article will be analysed to show how it can victimize its user. It will be the case of Sonia Dahmani versus President Kais Saied in Tunisia. Irony has been used by Sonia Dahmani, a Tunisian television chronicler.

She has been arrested by concealed policeman during her presentation on TV 5 screen and the scene has been watched directly by her followers.

Socrates may be considered as the first philosopher who took verbal irony as a standpoint or the governing principle of his intellectual activity. In fact, he used irony to let his interlocutors discover their ignorance. In doing so, he helped them to discover the gap existing between what they pretended to know or to be and what they really were, or what they really knew. He used rhetorical irony of a barrister, the self-disparaging irony, or completely situational or dramatized irony of a novelist or a playwright in his dialogues. He showed that irony had a philosophical

function because its subject matter was frequently the basic contradictions between human nature and human condition. In other terms, the basic feature of every irony may be viewed as the contrast between intended and what really happens.

The article uses Pragmatics conception of the language and the politeness theories, in a verbal irony analysis. Pragmatics helps to analyse natural language meaning which is the physical environment of the speaker and the nature of communication. This means that the interest is on the context because the intention of the speaker is motivated by the defence of contrary ideas. Verbal irony has been widely documented by many scholars and is viewed here as a controversial instance or conflict between the speaker and the listener. This article studies the subtleties of verbal irony in asymmetric interaction. The main questions it tries to answer here are : Why is the President Kais Saied victimized Sonia Dahmani. What is the effect of the verbal irony. Why does her irony modifies the temper of the president.

The President Kais Saied's reaction is based on ad hominem argumentation and sarcasm. Verbal irony as a controversial instance implies pathos effect. Pathos as a form of victimization is due to the fact that the context plays the role of clutcher which leads to climax. There is a jump of the social cultural patriarchal norms combined to emotions. He victimized the journalist because her ironical reaction has used language in a form of provocation, accusation, denegation or insult. It has been felt by the listener (here the President Kais Saied) as violent in the gestures, the intonation (ryhtm, intensity) of the voice. It has produced pragmatic effect such as questioning and revival reformulation. Violence is a natural movement of protection and defenses in front of a danger which can go until to the destruction of the other and himself.

The conflict is divergence of point of views, which is at interpersonnel level and social norms which lead to tension between the two asymmetric interlocutors. Tension is a central element in such dialogue exchange [2].

The goal of this article entitled **President Kais Saied versus Sonia Dahmani: Verbal Irony as a Victimization Discourse in Tunisia** is to study the validity of the irony used by Sonia Dahmani against the President of Tunisia allegation as a verbal irony. The ironist (Sonia Dahmani) mocks the ironized (President Kais Saied) and his audience (security forces) through the mask of a speaker. This means that beyond the Sonia Dahmani's perception of a situation lays her ironic perception.

Apart from the introduction and the conclusion, the article turns around the following points : The Context of Tunisia, Definition of irony, Definition of verbal irony, Description of Sonia Dahmani's irony, Presentation of the situation, Sonia Dahmani's irony duality, Sonia Dahmani's irony as verbal irony, Degree in Sonia Dahmani's irony, Dahmani's irony as a private and Dahmani's statement as a self-disparanging irony

The Context of Tunisia

President Kais Saied is on power since 2019, he is most of the time accused of authoritative drift. He has arrested and jailed his main opponents. Sonia Dahmani has been sentenced for eight months of prison because she has criticised him by using irony. She is a lawyer and television Chronicler arrested by concealed policemen while being on television on May 11th, 2024. Her condemnation is on the basis of the presidential decree 54 on the "Broadcasting of the false news." Since its publication, more than sixty journalists have been arrested according to the

Tunisian Journalist Labour Union. The decree also arose a violent anti-migrant campaign in Tunisia [3].

Definition of irony

The difficulties to define, to interpret and understand irony are the same which are encountered in defining art or poetry in general. They are due to the fact that its expansion has awakened several definitions.

Irony is the use of language and situations that are widely inappropriate or opposite to what might be ordinarily expected. It is based on the human capacity of having several attitudes while facing someone, something or a problem to resolve [4]. Technically, irony is a trope in which the intended meaning is the opposite of that is expressed by the words used. It is related to the outcome of events and mockery. In fact, irony is a transferred or figurative sense, a behaviour (condition of affairs) or events of a character opposite to what was, or might naturally be, expected; a contradictory outcome of events in mockery of the promise and fitness of things [5]. The notion of participant roles helps to make the distinction between the speaker as one who animates the message and the author or a person who composes the message. The speaker is the central person because he/she is responsible of the message he/she puts in the mouth of the characters or he/she attributes to characters [6].

The analysis, or interpretation of irony must account a given number of elements such as the interaction of interpreter, ironist and text with intentionality, the modality of perception, the issue of discourse communities, the contextual conditioning and irony makers. [7]. This means that irony is intentional; thus its understanding is an interpreter's act. The modality of perception suggests that the interpreter should rely on the image presented by the sequence in order to understand the message.

The context is the specific circumstantial, textual, and intertextual environment of the passage in question. This means that the meaning of irony is perceived in relation to other external circumstances [8]. It gives the circumstances or situation of uttering/interpreting the utterance as a whole, other intertext. In fact, the role of the context is decisive in comprehending irony; hence, it suggests both the ironic meaning and its creativity. It helps the reader/listener to access to a new meaning which is related to the context. The typical victim of an ironic situation or event is virtually innocent. But if what is said is the contrary of what is meant, a slighter degree of confidence seems to be sufficient for irony.

The context suggests that the prime step in the understanding of irony implies the identification of the quality maxim. The quality maxim helps to warn the addressee that he/she should go over (reject) the literal meaning and subsequently derive the implied one. The notion of the literal meaning implies that irony disrupts and undermines its notion. There is no natural and inevitable relationship between the word (the sign) and what it refers to (the signified) [9]. The relation between the two is arbitrary. This is to mean that the word does not necessarily mean what it says [10]. Since irony challenges the fact that language has both direct and indirect relationship to the real world, this duality suggests the possibility of saying or writing not the opposite of what is meant. This is quite true because an ironic utterance has always two meanings which have to be discovered: the explicit and the implicit. This is what is called as the duality of irony. Irony

functions as infrastructure and determinant of the discourse. In this way, to ironize something or someone is to place it in the category of the implied maxim [11].

Very often, scholars make a distinction between simple irony and dual irony. There is simple irony when the invalidating term of the duality is in turn invalidated in the second duality. In fact, the reality that ironizes an appearance is not ironized by the higher reality. In fact, the simple irony is the one in which an apparent or visual true statement, serious question, valid assumption, legitimate expectations which are corrected, invalidated, or frustrated by the true meaning [12].

Irony subject matter is frequently the basic contradiction of human nature condition. It is accurate because it is more self-conscious, more tentative (lacking the element of resolution), and a more dialectical exposition [13]. The most familiar ironic confrontation is that in which one of the confronting reality is revealed or discovered to be only an appearance.

Some scholars insist on one's experience in any matter dealing with the interpretation of irony. One term of the ironic duality is seen, more or less immediately, as effectively contradicting, invalidating, exposing, or at the very least, modifying the other [14].

Definition of verbal irony

Verbal irony contains a kind of binary opposition that is implicitly expressed. It is used when one says something and really means something else in an asymmetric conversation. It is a linguistic phenomenon exploiting the incongruity between reality and expectation and consequently unveiling an attitude towards such an incongruity [15]. It is also a figure which enables a speaker to convey his meaning with greater force by means of a contrast between his thought and his expression, or to speak more accurately, between his thought which he evidently designs to express, and that which his words properly signify. The speaker constructs the disruptive forces of irony. He/she can understand and reproduce the dialectic of self-creation and self-destruction, the alternation of order and chaos which clarifies the main pattern of experience [16]. Verbal irony involves a confrontation or juxtaposition of incompatibilities and the meaning intended by the speaker (which) differs from the meaning understood by one or more of the characters [17]. The character who unintentionally betrays himself falls in a kind of verbal irony. This means that verbal irony links upon the recognition of presence and incongruity in all the meanings [18].

Presentation of the situation

Sonia Dahmani's reaction against the President Kais Saied of May, 2024 has been qualified ironical. Here it is *Which extraordinary country is he talking about*. To understand in a right way the outcome of the apparently negligible statement, it is necessary to refer to the context of the political system in Tunisia. Tunisia is officially the Republic of Tunisia. Tunis is the capital city. It is the northmost county in Africa. It is part of the Maghreb region of North Africa. It is situated between Algeria and Lybia. It has an accessible Mediterranean Sea coastline and strategic location have attracted conquerors and visitors through the ages, and its ready access to the Sahara has brought people into contact with inhabitants of African interior. Tunisia's culture is highly diverse, in part because of long periods of Ottoman and then French rule but also because populations of Jews and Christians have lived among a Muslim majority for centuries [19].

At a given time, the country remained vacant, it was plunged into a constitutional crisis when no judicial body was able to resolve a standoff between the parliament and President Kais Saied that

began in January 2021. He suspended the constitution in September and presented a new constitution to referendum in July 2022.

Sonia Dahmani has been blamed to have ironized on television screen in May 2024, on the allegations of the President Kais that *the sub-saharians migrant want to stay forever in Tunisia in spite of the economic breakdown. It is a plot for changing the demographic composition of people in Tunisia.* Her reaction is *Which extraordinary country is he talking about.* She was retorting to another Chronicler who asked her point of view on the migration of persons from sub-Saharan. She has been condemned to eight months of jail arrested on 11, May 2024 as depicted above.

Description of Sonia Dahmani's irony

The first characteristic of irony suggests that there is a confrontation or juxtaposition of contradictory, incongruous, or otherwise incompatible elements and that should be seen as invalidating the other. In the case under study, there is a contradictory confrontation between the President Kais Saied's saying : *The sub-saharians migrant want to stay forever in Tunisia in spite of the economic breakdown. It is a plot for changing the demographic composition of Tunisia.* Dahmani's reply : *Which extraordinary country is he talking about.* The latter wants to mean that the extraordinary country referred by the former (Tunisia as an eldorado) is utopia or does not exist.

There is something missing in the understanding of Dahmani's irony. It is the echoic utterance that confirms the existence of irony. In general, echoic means something intended. In other terms, the literal meaning of an ironic statement echoes an expectation which has been violated; it secretly reveals what has been transgressed. That expectation might be based on cultural norms: on salient attitude of the listener or another participant, or on previous discourse (President Kais Saied's saying) [20]. Irony is an echoic phenomenon that repeats an earlier remark or an implicit view [21], (Tunisia is marvellous country envied by sub-Saharan migrants). The earlier remark to which Dahmani reacts is the President Saied castigating the arrival of crowds of sub-Saharan illegal migrants [22].

Sonia Dahmani's intention is echoic because it repeats another utterance at a meta-level and shows the speaker's opinion about the earlier utterance. This is the main characteristic of verbal irony that shows that irony is a communicative message in which is found a blank between what the President Kais Saied said and what he meant. This characteristic of verbal irony is illustrated as follows:

- The President Saied : (1. a). Why the arrival of flood of migrants in Tunisia ?
- (2. a). The sub-saharians migrant want to stay forever in Tunisia.
- b. [puzzled] : In spite of the economic breakdown.
- c. [Cluttered] It is a plot for changing the demographic composition of Tunisia.
- (3). [Irony] Which extraordinary country is he talking about.

Sonia Dahmani's reply (3) expresses irony which is the echo of Saied implicit utterance (1. a). It shows that irony is a communicative message in which is found a blank between what the speaker says and means. Therefore, ironic utterance takes time to be comprehended than the literal meaning (The sub-Saharan migrants want to stay forever in Tunisia). This implies that in the process of interpretation of irony the main problem to solve is the speaker's and the listener's communicative competence. It is necessary here to recall that to decode irony means reading between lines [23]. Sonia Dahmani's irony occurs intentionally and its interpretation becomes also an intentional exercise. The role of the context is decisive in its understanding. Hence, it suggests both the ironic meaning and the creativity, as the listener/reader accesses a new point of view of the context. This is certain because an ironic utterance has always two meanings which have to be discovered: the said and the implicated. In the process of interpretation of Sonia Dahmani's irony, the main problem is the listener's/reader's communicative competence. She pretends to ignore the country referred by the speaker (the President Kais Saied). There is at this instance, the formal requirement of an invalidating contradiction (Sonia Dahmani). It needs to be aware of some degree of confident unawareness or impercipient in the victim (Sonia Dahmani who has been condemned to eight months of prison), as an innocent, but with positive assumption that nothing is wrong (she was condemned after her lawyer's second appeal on the court). The invalidating term of the duality has been elaborated with reference to the second rule of the syllogism, which stipulates that in the conclusion, the terms cannot have greater extension than in the previous statement from which another is inferred [24]. In fact, the ironized term somehow carries a duality that renders the statement coherent. It is this coherence that helps irony to be expressed.

Another still-vexing problem in the interpretation of irony is that it is polemical, functional, phenomenological and mystical in its constitution. It is polemical because it belongs to the category of figures of speech (a special way of using language). It is functional because the factor time should also be taken into account in its interpretation (flood of migrants which is a recent phenomenon). It is phenomenological because it can be read in the conceptual logic of the natural world (we live in a world of ironies). It is mystical in the way that it transcends the natural world in its perception by humans (it engages the destiny).

The so-called basic contradictions are found in the fact that irony deals with consciousness (lacking the mechanism of experimental proposals) and relies on dialectical exposition. Irony goes together with incompatible elements and that should be seen as invalidating the other, (3) invalidates (2. a). Masks in irony serve to disorient the audience, and not to instruct it, (2. b.).

There is a paradox between the two arguments, (2. a) and (3). There is a formal requirement of binary opposition elements. Sonia Dahmani's intention is first that expelling migrants is contrary to both Muslim religion which is a major religion in Tunisia, Christianity and human rights. Second, she is the one who animates the controversy because she verbally retorted to President Kais Saied's ideological message. The irony becomes a communicative message in which there is a great gap between what she says and means and what the ruling opinion think about it. As a matter of fact, ironic utterance is kept immediately. The irony does not take suppletive time to be comprehended because the two statements carry the dual meaning that lead to Dahmani's victimization.

Sonia Dahmani's irony duality

The irony duality appears here like an apparent or visually true statement, serious assumption and legitimate expectation which is invalidated, or frustrated by the ironist's real meaning. The real meaning is surfaced by the true state of affairs, or what actually happens (she is arrested while being on television screen on 11 May, 2024 by concealed policemen). Reading irony is like translating, like decoding, like deciphering, and like peering behind a mask. The duality is seen, more or less immediately, as effectively contradicting, exposing, or at the very least, modifying the other. Irony functions as infrastructure and determinant. Dahmani's irony fulfils the duality criterion because to ironize something is to place it in its context. The first step is the identification of the quality maxim, which implies the fact that the reader should go deeper to derive the implied meaning. There is verbal irony when the invalidating term of the duality is in turn invalidating in a second duality. The assertion that *Which extraordinary country is he talking about* invalidates that of *It is a plot for changing the demographic composition of Tunisia*.

There is a couple of pretention in her irony. The first is that Tunisia is not a paradise gained nor lost because the situation becomes less good. She accuses the President Kais Saied of being the responsible of the degrading situation in Tunisia. The second is that there is incongruity between him and the reality. Tunisia is not what he pretends to be. Dual irony, on the other side, is characterized by a dominant feature which is contradictory at a given level.

The dual aspect of irony is characterized by a dominant feature being in opposition at the lower level. There is another variant of double irony when there is a single victim to whom all terms even contradictory seem equally true (there flood of migrants in Tunisia and economic breakdown). It is the case of Dahmani's irony ; in reality, dual irony takes the form of sarcasm. It criticises the turn taken by President Kais Saied's leadership after the Arab's Spring Revolution. There is no way to talk about *the economic breakdown* while *The sub-saharians migrant want to stay forever in Tunisia*. Irony does not appear as a simple correction, but arises absurdities in his opinion and behaviour. The two utterances invalidate each other. It is clear that Sonia Dahmani's irony is effective at such extent that it goes from an apprehension of incongruity to a more or less immediate recognition of the validity of her pretention.

Sonia Dahmani's irony as verbal irony

There is a juxtaposition of binary opposition in verbal irony. Sonia Dahmani is aware that she uses irony, this is the reason why she becomes the victim of it. As a matter of fact, she fulfils her intention. As the main protagonist of the verbal irony, she rejects President Kais Saied's allegation. He wants to overpraise his views on Tunisia. The irony is clearly undertood by the antagonist and his helpers. The irony is that there is no link between the sub-saharans migrants and *the plot for Tunisia*. The protagonist betrays himself and recognizes the absurdity of his message.

Degree in Sonia Dahmani's irony

Qualifying Dahmani's irony as an overt irony is examining its proficiency, quality or value. It is also looking at the way her irony is expressed. As can be read above, it goes from the simple to the complex or from the subtle to the pervasive. Anyone who knows the context of Tunisia understand its entire meaning. Irony here is revealed by the judgement which is opposed to the listener's versus the speaker's knowledge of the truth, the real opinion as depicted in the verbal irony. In fact, it is always the internal logical contradiction that reveals the presence of her irony.

Her irony is a gradient phenomenon, ranging from subtle to crass, depending in part on the power of its contextual cues. It is the case of the *It is a plot for changing the demographic composition of Tunisia* and *Which extraordinary country is he talking about*. The two statements are in binary opposition. But inserted into the context, the two are sources of meaning constructions. The degree expresses the level at which irony may be understood. The two statements carries negative valence coupled to the intonation. The degree is also presented in binary opposition, that is positive versus negative effect. Generally, ironic tone of voice has always negative effect. This is the case of Sonia Dahmani's irony which has mainly a negative intonation.

Sonia Dahmani's irony as private

Sonia Dahmani's irony may be viewed as a private irony because it is supposed to be understood by the victim or any listener who is aware of the context. An irony is private when it shares a private joke [25]. Sonia Dahmani is involved in private irony because it expresses through her reaction that she is in possession of external evidences on the President's Kais Saied's false intention. For example, she juxtaposes *It is a plot people for changing the demographic composition of Tunisia* to *Which extraordinary country is he talking about*. The former is related to the migration of the sub-saharans people while the latter is related to the internal organization of the country. In fact, private irony here expresses humour or mischievous deception shared by Sonia Dahmani in the way Tunisia is lead by the President Kais Saied who recently won the Tunisia's presidential elections.

Sonia Dahmani's statement as a self-disparanging irony

Sonia Dahmani's irony may be considered as a self-disparanging irony which is depicted as irony of manner. It helps to distinguish the character and the personality of the speaker. The ironist is not simply apparent in what she alleges as an impersonal voice, but in disguise, as a person who transmits the liberation message to his people. She uses narrative subterfuges and ironical language strategies to paint the chaotic world surrounding her. She reveals the nakedness of the victimizer of her irony (the President Kais Saied). Therefore, irony appears as an intellectual exercise than a moral one. Her irony is a mental alertness and agility. Her irony makes life unbreakable for troglodytes, to keep open house for ideas, and to go on asking questions. Her irony challenges Tunisia actual social norms. Conventional norms echoes ironical discourse since social norms are always positive. Like Socrates, she shows a skillful use of language by showing to the President Kais Saied his false awariness or ignorance, weaknesses, errors, or follies through what he says and does.

Conclusion

Sonia Dahmani's irony fulfils the three functions of verbal irony. First, it may be considered as a rhetoric device to boost the meaning in the context of migrants from sub-Saharan. It depicts the literary thirsty of contradiction, the incogruity as well as the paradoxical, discordant and absurd realities of the President Kais Saied. Second, her irony may be considered as the first power of the world in miniature. Last, her irony may be viewed as a heuristic device to lead the reader to realise that things are not as simple as they seem to be.

The clash between *a plot for changing the demographic composition of Tunisia* to *Which*

extraordinary country is he talking about may be considered as Sonia Dahmani's verbal irony implication in the statement meaning. Her irony expresses her warm reaction to Tunisia's people cold reaction to the way President Kais Saied leads the country to dictatorship.

The article has also shown that Sonia Dahmani's statement fulfils ironic criterion as meaning in context. It has depicted the fact that it has expressed the gap between appearance and reality. This is to mean her irony has contradicted the President Kais Saied's expectation. It has raised a number of questions which have helped to demonstrate that she has used irony as a communicative strategy rather than a direct address to push her listener to decipher the message. Irony is a discourse used in the crisis time as in the case studied to divert the listener. It has involved interaction and stimulated imagination.

Pragmatics has been important in the interpretation of Sonia Dahmani's verbal irony because its indirect nature belongs to speech act and not to language phenomenon. As a process of inference, pragmatics is a meaning generation or interpretation. It has revealed the true identity of the implicit language and the relationship between irony and the context.

The analysis of Sonia Dahmani's verbal irony has shown its vitality and intelligibility. It is an utterance of social liberation which goes from diagnosis of Sonia Dahmani's social traumas in Tunisia to the therapy (values in governing). It is a virtual process explaining the hidden meaning of her statement through analysis.

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