"You won't get it unless you're bilingual, kid"  
ON IRONY COMPREHENSION IN POLISH MONO- AND POLISH-ENGLISH BILINGUAL CHILDREN

Dorota Jaworska, Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University

introduction

POSSIBLE PITFALLS

- the very concept of verbal irony is fuzzy
- how to classify ironic utterances as to get mutually exclusive categories
- how to deconstruct the cases of irony comprehension?

Solutions

- irony can be expressed by all types of Searle’s Speech Acts
- three basic components of irony comprehension appear in the literature

Participants: 58 mono- and bilingual children

- 2 age groups
- younger (7-9 years): understanding most basic aspects of verbal (irony)
- older (11-12 years): 2nd order Tom seems to be fully developed
- analysis in progress: adolescence (13-14 years): formal operational stages of development

Control group: 16 adult mono- and bilinguals
- Faculty of English and Technical University

Experimental stimuli

- 40 contexts with comments (20 literal; 20 ironic)
- situations familiar to children
- speakers have the same status
- all comments have similar form and length
- 4 questions to each target string: probing

1. surface context comprehension
2. Theories of Mind / speaker belief
3. speaker intention
4. speaker attitude / irony perception

Procedure

- auditory presentation of stimuli
- after exposure to each target string, participant answers 4 questions
- visual aids used
- participants tested individually (younger children) or in groups (older children, teenagers and adults, at schools)

Data analysis

- a series of t-tests
- group effect (age, gender, status, utterance type)
- factors: type of speech act
- utterance type ( ironic x literal)
- age
- language of the test
- factor (mono- x bilingual)

Conclusions

- young bilinguals are not better at understanding irony than their monolingual peers
- the bilingual advantage kicks in only after age (a statistically significant result)
- children tend to have a negative perception of irony
- older bilingual children are not just better at understanding irony, but also seem to be more apt at identifying and labelling it
- further analyses needed (esp. gender differences and differences in irony perception among adolescents)
- possible applications: teaching methodology (pragmatics) and language rehabilitation

irony comprehension

- three components analysed together:
  - context, Tom, and speaker intention ("was not speaking seriously" instead of "made a mistake"/"wanted to deceive"); "none of the above"
- younger group
  - no significant difference in how mono- and bilinguals understood irony (47.7% and 60.7% respectively; F=0.085, p>0.05; test for two independent groups, N=30)
- older group
  - bilingual children understood significantly more ironic slurs (60%) than did monolingual children (32.9%); F=8.04, p<0.05 (test for two independent groups, N=28)
- theory of mind results: no significant difference in the performance of mono- and bilinguals (for both age groups, 2 tests for two independent groups):
  - in the older group, bilinguals’ performance slightly better than monolinguals’
  - further analysis will demonstrate whether this difference increases with age

- data from further age groups are being analysed

IRONY PERCEPTION

- young bilinguals are not better at understanding irony than their monolingual peers
- the bilingual advantage kicks in at an older age (a statistically significant result)
- children tend to have a negative perception of irony
- older bilingual children are not just better at understanding irony, but also seem to be more apt at identifying and labelling it
- further analyses needed (esp. gender differences and differences in irony perception among adolescents)
- possible applications: teaching methodology (pragmatics) and language rehabilitation

bibliography


"You won’t get it unless you’re bilingual, kid"  
ON IRONY COMPREHENSION IN POLISH MONO- AND POLISH-ENGLISH BILINGUAL CHILDREN

Dorota Jaworska, Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University

introduction

POSSIBLE PITFALLS

- the very concept of verbal irony is fuzzy
- how to classify ironic utterances as to get mutually exclusive categories
- how to deconstruct the cases of irony comprehension?

Solutions

- irony can be expressed by all types of Searle’s Speech Acts
- three basic components of irony comprehension appear in the literature

Participants: 58 mono- and bilingual children

- 2 age groups
- younger (7-9 years): understanding most basic aspects of verbal (irony)
- older (11-12 years): 2nd order Tom seems to be fully developed
- analysis in progress: adolescence (13-14 years): formal operational stages of development

Control group: 16 adult mono- and bilinguals
- Faculty of English and Technical University

Experimental stimuli

- 40 contexts with comments (20 literal; 20 ironic)
- situations familiar to children
- speakers have the same status
- all comments have similar form and length
- 4 questions to each target string: probing

1. surface context comprehension
2. Theories of Mind / speaker belief
3. speaker intention
4. speaker attitude / irony perception

Procedure

- auditory presentation of stimuli
- after exposure to each target string, participant answers 4 questions
- visual aids used
- participants tested individually (younger children) or in groups (older children, teenagers and adults, at schools)

Data analysis

- a series of t-tests
- group effect (age, gender, status, utterance type)
- factors: type of speech act
- utterance type ( ironic x literal)
- age
- language of the test
- factor (mono- x bilingual)

Conclusions

- young bilinguals are not better at understanding irony than their monolingual peers
- the bilingual advantage kicks in only at an older age (a statistically significant result)
- children tend to have a negative perception of irony
- older bilingual children are not just better at understanding irony, but also seem to be more apt at identifying and labelling it
- further analyses needed (esp. gender differences and differences in irony perception among adolescents)
- possible applications: teaching methodology (pragmatics) and language rehabilitation

irony comprehension

- three components analysed together:
  - context, Tom, and speaker intention ("was not speaking seriously" instead of "made a mistake"/"wanted to deceive"); "none of the above"
- younger group
  - no significant difference in how mono- and bilinguals understood irony (47.7% and 60.7% respectively; F=0.085, p>0.05; test for two independent groups, N=30)
- older group
  - bilingual children understood significantly more ironic slurs (60%) than did monolingual children (32.9%); F=8.04, p<0.05 (test for two independent groups, N=28)
- theory of mind results: no significant difference in the performance of mono- and bilinguals (for both age groups, 2 tests for two independent groups):
  - in the older group, bilinguals’ performance slightly better than monolinguals’
  - further analysis will demonstrate whether this difference increases with age

- data from further age groups are being analysed

IRONY PERCEPTION

- young bilinguals are not better at understanding irony than their monolingual peers
- the bilingual advantage kicks in at an older age (a statistically significant result)
- children tend to have a negative perception of irony
- older bilingual children are not just better at understanding irony, but also seem to be more apt at identifying and labelling it
- further analyses needed (esp. gender differences and differences in irony perception among adolescents)
- possible applications: teaching methodology (pragmatics) and language rehabilitation

bibliography