The Relationship Between Figurative Competence in L1 and L2: Focusing on Sarcasm in the Iranian EFL Context

Farideh Nazem

MA in TEFL, Shahreza Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran

Saeed Taki *

Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics, Shahreza Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran

Abstract

Understanding sarcastic language is often a great challenge to EFL learners. Hence, this study aimed at investigating Iranian EFL learners' ability in identifying and interpreting instances of sarcasm both in their L1 (Persian) and L2 (English). To this end, 34 TEFL master's students at Islamic Azad University of Shahreza participated in the study. They were asked to watch ten video clips from the American television sitcom *Friends* and ten video clips from the Persian Comedy *Bitter Coffee (*Ghahv-e Talkh). The data were collected through test sheets and descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. The analyses revealed no statistically significant correlation between the participants' abilities to identify instances of sarcastic language in English and Persian. Participants also performed better in Persian than in English and used almost similar contextual cues in both languages to process instances of sarcastic language. Findings imply that pragmatic competence needs to be explicitly taught in EFL contexts.

Keywords: sarcasm, pragmatic competence, figures of speech, EFL learners, figurative competence

INTRODUCTION

Irony is an indirect form of speech used to convey feelings in an indirect way. In other words, ironic utterances are characterized by opposition between the literal meaning of the sentence and the speaker's meaning (Winner, 1988). One form of irony is sarcasm. Sarcasm is usually used to communicate implicit criticism about the listener or the situation. It is usually used in situations provoking negative affect and is accompanied by disapproval, contempt, and scorn (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). The interpretation of sarcasm involves understanding of the intentions expressed in the situation and may include processes of social cognition and theory of mind as well as pragmatic competence.

---

* Correspondence: Saeed Taki, Email: taki_saeed@yahoo.com

While there is a rich literature on ironical language in linguistics, relatively little is known about the perception and use of this figure of speech by second language (L2) learners (Shively, Menke & Manzón-Omundson, 2008). This is even more so about sarcastic language. It is often acknowledged that appropriate understanding of sarcasm is a great challenge for L2 learners (Ackerman, 1982; Creusere, 1999; Giora, Federman, Kehat, Sabah, 2005; Rockwell, 2000). There have been different studies to determine how sarcastic language is processed (e.g., Channon, 2004; Giora et al., 2000; McDonald, 2000; Shamay-Tsoory, 2005). For instance, by studying the technical aspects of the English language, Kruez and Caucci (2007) suggest that cues can be drawn from the syntactic structure of the sarcastic text. In a different study, Bryant and Jean (2006) investigated the role of 'ironic tone of voice' and concluded that there was no specific identifier in this regard and that tone and intonation were only peripheral clues that helped understanding sarcastic language.

It has long been assumed that sarcasm is basically a pragmatic phenomenon, and many studies from psycholinguistics have demonstrated the social, contextual, and interpersonal factors that influence its use and interpretation (e.g., Gibbs, 1994, 2003; Giora, 2003). Moreover, according to recent research on comprehension of sarcasm, it has been concluded that interpreting sarcasm and irony is a physical process of the brain function (Gangasudhan, 2001). It is postulated that it occurs in the left hemisphere as the part of the brain that interprets the literal meaning, the frontal lobes and right hemisphere as the parts that process the intention and context, and the right ventromedial prefrontal cortex as the part that integrates these elements to determine the true meaning (Shamay-Tsoory, Tomer & Aharon-Peretz, 2005). Such findings basically come from research on comprehension of sarcasm and irony in L1.

What is a more intriguing area of research is whether L1 and L2 speakers make use of the same clues in order to interpret sarcastic language. Hence, the present study aimed to investigate whether Iranian EFL learners could interpret sarcastic expressions in both English and Persian contexts in a similar manner. Based on the aims of the research, the following research questions were specifically addressed:

1) Is there any relationship between Iranian EFL learners' ability to identify instances of sarcastic language in English and Persian?
2) Are Iranian EFL learners able to interpret sarcastic language in both English and Persian equally well?
3) Are there any contextual cues that the participants use most often in English and Persian to process instances of sarcastic language?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Sarcasm

Attardo (1999) defines sarcasm as "an overtly aggressive type of irony, with clearer markers/cues and a clear target" (p.793). Dauphin (2000) points out that irony can be

used unintentionally and unconsciously. However, sarcasm must be intentional and conscious.

According to Toplak (2000), there are many factors which affect the use, or degree of sarcasm in everyday language: exaggeration, nature of the speaker, relationship of speaker to victim, severity of the criticism, and whether or not the criticism is being made in private or in front of an audience. In McDonald's (1999) view, there is one basic factor regarding sarcasm: it is a form of ironic speech commonly used to convey implicit criticism with a particular victim as its target. According to Dauphin (2000), people frequently use sarcasm as a means of 'breaking the ice' during initial encounters with others demonstrating sense of humor. Also, people use sarcasm as a means of being comedic with groups of friends. Comedians usually say something contrary to what they feel and/or believe for the purpose of being funny.

Dauphin's Model of Sarcasm

According to Dauphin (2000), sarcasm is overt irony intentionally used by the speaker as a form of verbal aggression. Furthermore, sarcasm can be considered a male-dominated form of communication used mostly among peers. She supports her view on Haiman's (1998) proposal, who proposes a distinction between irony and sarcasm. On the one hand, irony is a kind of unintentional and unconscious linguistic expression. On the other hand, sarcasm is an in as by the physical gestures of the 'sarcaster'. Also, sarcasm tends to be a more efficient way of conveying emotion or thought. It can convey social attitudes, such as disapproval, contempt, scorn or ridicule. Toplak and Katz (as cited by Dauphin, 2000) define sarcasm as a means of verbal aggression, with the victim's reactions in mind. Dauphin (2000), also points out that sarcasm may be inefficient in communicative terms if the listener takes the remark humorously, even if the speaker intends to be serious but derisive. Finally, McDonald (1999), complements Dauphin's (2000) definition of sarcasm by stating that "It is a form of ironic speech commonly used to convey implicit criticism with a particular victim as its target" (p. 3).

Dauphin's theory is based on Ducharme's (1994) proposal. The latter suggests six parameters involved in sarcastic transactions: a) social control, b) declaration of allegiance, c) establishing social solidarity, d) establishing social distance, e) venting frustration, and f) exercising humorous aggression. Each of these factors is described below.

Social control is intended to reprimand members of a particular group when inappropriate or undesired behavior is displayed (e.g., *Great job*! to a member of a baseball team in a row).

Declaration of allegiance involves self-directed sarcasm, (e.g., telling who oneself *You're such a genius*).

Solidarity and social distance involve sarcasm directed at outsiders of a group. This kind of sarcasm is expressed when others do not fit a group's expectation of what is

conventionally acceptable (e.g., a group of girls sitting at a table may comment on another girl by saying 'She is the most beautiful creature on this planet').

Venting frustration involves sarcasm used to express disapproval of a situation or object that does not uphold the standards of an individual (e.g., making the following comment: *These are the best seats in the house*, where one's seat is behind that of someone wearing a top hat).

Humorous aggression is used in order to be funny. It is expressed by stating the opposite of a fact or belief shared by members of a group (e.g., *Pat is not as smart as you all think he is; he is only a Valedictorian because he bribed college students to do his work for him*). This can be a manner of joking about the Valedictorian graduate's level of intelligence and ability to graduate at the top of his/her class.

Empirical Studies of Sarcasm

Over the past few decades, researchers have studied sarcasm through comparing and contrasting different languages and among native and non-native speakers. Sarcasm has also been investigated cross-culturally; that is, researchers compared sarcasm in different languages. For example, in the study done by Kim (2009) on how Korean EFL learners could interpret sarcasm in L2 English, the analysis of the results revealed that learners drew upon certain features of L1 schema during the L2 comprehension process. Similarly, Cheang and Pell (2011) conducted a study on recognizing sarcasm without language; a cross- cultural study of English and Cantonese. The goal of the research was to determine whether certain speaker intentions conveyed through prosody in an unfamiliar language could be accurately recognized. The results showed that participants successfully identified sarcasm spoken in their native language but identified sarcasm at near-chance levels in the unfamiliar language. The data suggested that while sarcastic utterances in Cantonese and English shared certain acoustic features, these cues were insufficient to recognize sarcasm between languages; rather, this ability depended on (native) language experiences. In a similar way, Linh (2011) investigated a Vietnamese – English cross-cultural study on expressing sarcasm to find out the differences and similarities between Vietnamese and English speakers in using puns to express their sense of sarcasm. The results indicated that the main similarity was that both Vietnamese and English speakers use puns in expressing sarcasm mostly to show wit and the sense of humor, and the main difference was that Vietnamese people were more open to puns in expressing sarcasm. In addition, informants' age, gender, marital status, and living area had, to various degrees, affected the ways Vietnamese people pun to express their sense of sarcasm whereas these factors did not seem to strongly interfere with English speakers' punning choices.

In another study performed on using sarcasm as a tool for language acquisition in Singapore, Gangasudhan (2009) explored the feasibility of incorporating into teaching through a limited research into teacher's perceptions. Based on the findings of this research in neuroscience and language studies in relation to sarcasm, inferences were drawn to support the use of sarcasm-based lessons. Consequently, utilizing the

quantitative opinion of 46 education practitioners of English Language out of 62 respondents who participated in an anonymous online survey, this paper arrived at the conclusion that there was indeed strong support and good potential for such an approach.

Still in another study done by Campbell and Katz (2012), the contextual components utilized to convey sarcastic verbal irony were investigated. Given a set of statements that out-of-context were not rated as sarcastic, participants were instructed to either generate discourse context that would make the statements sarcastic or meaningful (without further specification). These findings supported the predictions of direct access models and contradict the predictions of the standard pragmatic model of language processing. The findings from the studies were seen as consistent with constraint satisfaction models of sarcasm processing in which various linguistic and extra-linguistic information provide probabilistic (but not necessary) support for or against a sarcastic interpretation.

METHOD

Participants

Thirty-four Iranian TEFL master's students were selected from Islamic Azad University of Shahreza through the convenience sampling method. They were chosen from both genders (27 females, 7 males). Their age range was from 24 to 41 years old. The majority of the students had studied English language education for their bachelors and others learned English in English language institutes. None of them had received English language education outside of Iran nor had any of the participants lived abroad more than two weeks. No participant had previous instruction on the concept and use of sarcasm in English.

Instruments and Materials

Research data were collected from a written test using the following materials: video clips, video scripts and test-sheets. The test-sheet consisted of three tasks that included (1) a sarcasm identification task (2) a speaker's intention task (3) a potential sarcasm cue identification task. Using video materials was the most crucial part of this test because prosodic cues (e.g., stress, intonation, and pause) and visual cues (e.g., facial expressions, gesture, and body movements) are the primary clues in both revealing and understanding the speaker's sarcastic intent.

Video clips

Ten video clips of the American television sitcom *Friends* and also ten video clips of the Persian Comedy *Bitter Coffee (*Ghahv-e Talkh) were used. Each clip was approximately two minutes long and contained one to two sarcastic utterances. No captions in English or subtitles were included. Laugh tracks in the English clips were not removed because they were played frequently in the show in response to every type of humor. Therefore, the audience laughter components did not serve as an indicator of sarcasm. Some of the

participants reported that they had previously watched some episodes of *Friends* but none of them had watched any of the ten English clips selected for the study. About the Persian comedy, most of the participants had watched it. For those who were not familiar with the show, explanations of each character's information (e.g., personality, profession and the relationship between characters) were provided.

Test-sheets

Test-sheets consisted of the transcriptions of each clip in English and Persian and also three different tasks as follows:

a) Underline the sarcasm you identify on the script
b) What is the speaker's intention from sarcastic expression?
c) Write all the visual cues (e.g., body movement, facial expressions and gestures) and prosodic cues (e.g., stress, intonation and pause) you attended to while detecting and understanding the sarcastic utterances.

For task (b), the participants were asked to select just one sarcastic utterance and decide its cues accordingly. The same tasks were to be performed for the Persian tasks as well.

Procedure

To ascertain that the goals of the research would be achieved and to make sure that the participants would be all familiar with the tasks, in a 15-minute orientation the concept of sarcastic language was elaborated. For this purpose, before the experiment, the researcher showed a dictionary definition of sarcasm in English, "The activity of saying or writing the opposite of what you mean or speaking in a way intended to make someone else stupid or show them that you are angry" (*Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*). Then, the researcher provided some examples of sarcastic utterances within their contexts (e.g., I am trying to imagine you with a personality, means you don't have personality! It's time for your medication or mine? Which means you are telling nonsense?)

To collect the data, the researcher made use of test-sheets consisting of the transcripts of each clip and also three different questions following each clip. All the participants were seated in a classroom with a projector connected to a computer. The test-sheets were distributed among 34 TEFL master's students, both males and females, studying at Islamic Azad University of Shahreza.

There were 20 clips related to sarcasm which were all in the form of dialogues. The students were asked to watch each clip and then answer the questions. The allocated time to answer the questions of each clip was two to three minutes. The English clips were played back first and then the Persian ones. The participants were asked to answer the three questions on the test-sheet during the experiment.

First, they were asked to identify and underline every expression of sarcastic speech presented in the show using the transcripts provided. Second, participants were instructed to report what the sarcasm users' actual communicative goals were by selecting the appropriate choice. The goal of the second task was to find out which (possibly different) kinds of speaker intents and attitudes interlocutors meant through sarcastic utterances. Third, the participants were asked to indicate the knowledge they used and the cues and features they looked for, attended to, or found that helped them perceive and understand sarcasm, they wrote this information down on their test sheets.

The researcher paused the video at the end of every clip to give the participants time to make notes on their sheets. No talking or sharing of information was allowed while watching. Each clip was played twice. Then, the researcher collected the test-sheets and corrected them to see how many of the students identified the sarcastic expressions correctly, how many of them recognized the speakers' intentions truly, and which clues they used more for recognizing the speakers' intentions.

In order to analyze the data, for the first research question, which was about the relationship between the participants' ability to perceive sarcastic language in Persian and English the correlation coefficient was computed. For this purpose, Pearson correlation was used. As for the second question which had to do with comparing the participants' performance on tests and identifying the intention behind using sarcastic language in Persian and English, the statistical test of paired-samples t-test was run. Finally, the participants' answers to the third question dealing with the type of clues they used to interpret the speakers' intentions were categorized and descriptive statistics were provided, which will be presented in the following section.

RESULTS

Ability to identify instances of sarcastic language in English and Persian

The first research question of the study asked whether there was a significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' ability to identify instances of sarcastic language in English and Persian. To determine the degree (and the direction) of such a relationship, the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated. The results of this correlational analysis are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Ability to Identify Sarcastic Language in English and Persian

		English	Persian
English	Pearson Correlation	1	.292
Persian	Pearson Correlation	.292	1

Notes: $p < .05$

As demonstrated in Table 1, the correlation coefficient was found to be .29 ($r = .29$, $p < .05$), which, according to Cohen (1988, as cited in Pallant, 2010), shows a weak positive relationship. Cohen (1988) considers a relationship between 0.000 and .30 weak, while

one between .31 and .49 is moderate, and above .50 is strong. The *p* value in front of *Sig.* (2-tailed) turned out to be .41, which is greater than the significance level (.41 > .05), indicating that the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' ability to identify instances of sarcastic language in English and Persian failed to reach statistical significance. In other words, the relationship between the participants ability to identify sarcastic language in English and the in Persian appeared to be statistically non-significant (*r* = .29, *p* < .05)

Ability to interpret sarcastic language in English and Persian

The second research question of the study was concerned with whether Iranian EFL learners were able to interpret sarcastic language in both English and Persian equally well. To find out any possible differences between the mean scores of the learner' interpretations of sarcastic language in English and Persian, the paired-samples t-test was utilized, the results of which are displayed in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Comparing English and Persian Interpretation Scores

	Scores	n	M	SD	Std. Error Mean
Interpretation	English	10	4.100	1.96	.622
	Persian	10	9.60	3.71	1.17

Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation are shown for both English and Persian in Table 2. The mean score of the participants' interpretations of sarcastic expressions in English (*M* = 4.10, *SD* = 1.96) appeared to be smaller than their mean score for their interpretations of sarcastic language in Persian (*M* = 9.60, *SD* = 3.71).

To ascertain whether this difference between the two mean scores was statistically significant, the *p* value under the *Sig* (2-tailed) column in the *t* test table had to be checked. For this purpose, the data were submitted to a paired-samples t-test.

Table 3. Paired-Samples T- Test for Comparing English and Persian Interpretation Scores

	Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	M	SD	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
English-Persian	-5.50	3.77	1.19	-8.20	-2.79	-4.60	9	.001

According to Table 3., there was a statistically significant difference between interpretation scores in Persian (*M* = 9.60, *SD* = 3.71) and English (*M* = 4.10, *SD* = 1.96), *t* (9) = -4.60, *p* = .001. This was so because the *p* value was less than the specified level of significance (i.e., *p* < .05).

Contextual cues for processing sarcastic language

The third research question of the study asked what contextual sources the participants used most often in English and Persian to process instances of sarcastic language. To

determine the frequency with which the clues selected by the participants, they were listed. Then, they were categorized into certain identifiable groups, namely, visual cues such as body movement, facial expression, gesture, and prosodic cues like stress, intonation, and pause. These categories were adopted from Yus (2000). The results are demonstrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Contextual Cues Selected in English and Persian

Language	Intonation	Facial Expression	Body Movement	Gesture	Stress	Pause
	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %	f %
English	183 28%	149 23%	114 17%	64 13%	72 11%	52 8%
Persian	213 31%	192 28%	93 13%	65 10%	94 14%	24 4%

According to Table 4, the participants selected the contextual cues in English and Persian in this way: in both languages the participants employed almost similar cues in order to identify and interpret instances of sarcastic language. At the top of the list stands intonation with 183 instances in English (f = 183, P = 28%), and 213 instances in Persian (f = 213, P = 31%). Following that facial expressions appear in the second place both in English (f = 149, P = 23%) and Persian, (f = 192, P = 28%). Body movement as another visual cue occurred with 114 instances in English (f = 114, P = 17%) and 93 in Persian (f = 93, P = 13%). Then, gesture in English, (f = 64, P = 13%); in Persian, (f = 65, P = 10%) and stress in English, (f = 72, P = 11%); in Persian,(f = 94, P = 14%) follow. Lastly, pause as a prosodic cue was selected by the participants with a frequency of 52 (f = 52, P = 8%) in English, and a total count of 24 (f = 24, P = 4%) in Persian.

DISCUSSION

This study explored how Iranian EFL learners could identify and interpret instances of sarcastic language in both English and Persian, using different contextual clues. Specifically, the research addressed three key areas related to figurative language processing. The first question investigated whether there was any relationship between Iranian EFL learners' ability to identify instances of sarcastic language in English and Persian. The second area was to provide the differences between the interpretation of sarcastic expressions in English and Persian by asking this question "Are Iranian EFL learners able to interpret sarcastic language in both English and Persian equally well?" And the third one was to examine the contextual clues selected in English and Persian by posing this question "Are there any contextual cues that the participants use most often in English and Persian to process instances of sarcastic language?"

This study explored how Iranian EFL learners could identify and interpret instances of sarcastic language in both English and Persian, using different contextual clues. Specifically, the research addressed three key areas related to figurative language processing, relationship between L1 and L2 in terms of figurative competence, ability to interpret sarcastic language in L1 and L2, and strategies used to identify and interpret sarcasm in both languages.

The results as presented above could reflect that there was a weak relationship between Iranian EFL learners' ability in identifying the instances of sarcastic language in both languages but the relationship was not statistically significant, meaning that there is no significant relationship between them. Not only in this study but also in other previous studies (Kim, 2009; Linh, 2011) learners could interpret sarcastic expressions in their native language better than the unfamiliar one. The studies in literature also empirically support this issue (Cheang & Pell, 2011) on recognizing sarcasm without language, a cross- cultural study of English and Cantonese. The goal of the research was to determine whether certain speaker intentions conveyed through prosody in an unfamiliar language could be accurately recognized. The results showed that participants successfully identified sarcasm spoken in their native language but identified sarcasm at near-chance levels in the unfamiliar language.

According to Bachman and Palmer's (2000) model, pragmatic knowledge refers to abilities for creating and interpreting discourse, It includes two areas of knowledge: knowledge of pragmatic conventions for expressing acceptable language functions and for interpreting the illocutionary power of utterances or discourse (functional knowledge) and knowledge of sociolinguistic conventions for creating and interpreting language utterances which are appropriate in a particular context of language use (sociolinguistic knowledge) are necessary for detecting sarcastic utterances in an unfamiliar language. The results of the study revealed that the pragmatic competence of learners in their own language is better than the unfamiliar one because they are familiar with their own culture and language so, they can activate the schema. They lack the pragmatic competence and cultural knowledge in the unfamiliar language (English) to identify the sarcastic expressions; therefore, they failed to perform as well in English.

Furthermore, the results are indicative of a clear difference between English and Persian interpretations. The participants could interpret sarcastic expressions in their own language better than in the unfamiliar one. The findings from other studies (Linh, 2011; Campbell & Katz, 2012) lend support to this research as well. The findings of the study by Campbell and Katz (2012) are consistent with constraint satisfaction models of sarcasm processing in which various linguistic and extra-linguistic information provide probabilistic (but not necessary) support for or against a sarcastic interpretation.

According to Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor's model (2006), there are five components in a communicative approach to language, namely, discourse, linguistic, pragmatic, intercultural and strategic. Pragmatic competence concerns the knowledge of the function or illocutionary force implied in the utterance that is intended to be understood or produced, and the contextual factors that affect its appropriacy, as well as intercultural competence which refers to the knowledge of how to interpret and produce a spoken or written piece of discourse within a particular sociocultural context and the knowledge of cultural factors such as the rules of behavior that exist in the target language community as well as cross-cultural awareness, including differences and similarities in cross-cultural communication beside linguistic competence, are necessary for interpreting speaker's intentions.

Finally, according to the results, the participants used both visual cues (i.e., body movement, facial expression and gestures) and prosodic cues (i.e., intonation, stress, and pause) almost in a similar manner in both English and Persian. However, slight differences could indicate that they gave more weight to intonation, facial expressions and stress in Persian, but they used body movement, gesture and pause in Persian less than that in English. In a previous study conducted by Kim (2009) it was also revealed that Korean participants incorporated their L1 knowledge of linguistic cues (or strategies) to understand or produce sarcastic utterances. In that study it was observed that if they identified any overlapping strategy that coexisted in both L1 and L2 sarcastic utterances, they suspected that the utterance might be sarcastic. Indeed, like English speakers, Korean speakers used multiple linguistic strategies to construe sarcastic messages. However, the fact that there exists overlapping linguistic strategies for formulating sarcastic utterances may not guarantee that learners readily recognize and understand L2 sarcasm. Studies show that English speakers in the U.S. tended to find nonverbal cues as better indicators of speaker intent than verbal cues (McNeill, 1985, 1987; Baldwin, 1991; Carpenter et al., 1998). It could be the case that lack of contextual sources to detect sarcasm could have led them to resort to visual cues that stood out the most and seemed relevant. Some visual cues were especially noticeable because certain types of facial expressions (i.e., raising eyebrows, upward and downward pull of mouth and cheek muscles, eyeball rolling) and gesture seemed too exaggerated and unnatural through their L1 analytic lens. Another possible reason could be that there exists a lesser variety and frequency of nonverbal cues in the Iranian context than in the English context. Therefore, there should be less overlap in the types of visual cues between the two languages. However, more research needs to be conducted to support this claim.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on EFL learners' pragmatic competence to interpret sarcastic language as a speech act in L1 and L2. The results obtained from the performance of a group of Iranian TEFL students can indicate that the relationship between students' abilities to identify and interpret sarcastic language in their mother tongue and a foreign language is not strong, though there is a positive relationship. This seems to be due to their command of language in L1 as well as their richer cultural repertoire in their mother tongue.

Furthermore, the students' performance in identifying and interpreting instances of sarcastic language in L1 outweighs that in L2. This is again as a result of the cultural capital available to L1 speakers and also their familiarity with different aspects and norms of communication in L1. The EFL learners may find themselves at a loss as they cannot pick up the relevant cues from the context. This can be the consequence of deficiency in the linguistic competence as also pragmatic competence.

Finally, learners seem to use similar cues in order to interpret cases of sarcasm in both L1 and L2. This similar pattern may be due to the fact that EFL learners automatically rely on the contextual sources they often draw on in their L1.

All in all, there appears to be a need for providing enough cultural input and pragmatic experience in an EFL context very much the same way it is done with regard to the linguistic competence. Further research, however, needs to be conducted on other aspects of the issue. For one thing, the data can be used to test specifically the constraint satisfaction models mentioned earlier on in this paper. This could be done by systematically manipulating factors that point towards a sarcastic response and those that introduce ambiguity. Also, there can be more research to investigate the potential role of other contextual components which could help further the understanding of what factors shift our processing patterns of literal and figurative utterances

REFERENCES

Ackerman, B. P. (1982). Contextual integration and utterance interpretation: The ability of children and adults to interpret sarcastic utterances. *Child Development, 53*, 1075-1083.

Attardo, S. (2000). Irony as relevant inappropriateness. *Journal of Pragmatics, 32*, 793 - 826.

Baldwin, D. A., (1991). Infants' contribution to the achievement of joint reference. *Child Development, 62* (5), 875-890.

Bryant, G. A., & Fox Tree, J. E. (2005). Is there an ironic tone of voice? *Language and speech, 48* (3), 257-277.

Campbell, J. D. & Katz, A. N. (2012). Are there necessary conditions for inducing a sense of sarcastic irony? *Discourse Processes*, *49*, 459–480.

Carpenter, M., Nagell, K., Tomasello, M., Butterworth, G., & Moore, C. (1998). Social cognition, joint attention, and communicative competence from 9 to 15 months of age. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 63* (4), 1-174.

Cheang, H. S., & Pell, M.D. (2009). Acoustic markers of sarcasm in Cantonese and English. *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America, 126*(3), 1394–1405.

Creusere, M. A. (1999). Theories of adults' understanding and use of irony and sarcasm: applications to and evidence from research with children. *Developmental Review, 19* (2), 213-262.

Dauphin, V. (2000). *Sarcasm in relationships*. University of Pennsylvania. Available at http://ccat.sas.upehn.edu/plc/communication/valerie.htm

Ducharme, L. J. (1994). Sarcasm and interactional politics. *Symbolic Interaction, 17*, 51-62.

Gibbs, R. W. (1994). *Poetics of Mind: Figurative thought, language and understanding.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Giora, R. (2003). *On our mind: Salience, context, and figurative language*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Giora, R., Zaidel, E., Soroker, N., Batori, G., & Kasher, A. (2000). Differential effects of right and left hemispheric damage on understanding sarcasm and metaphor. *Metaphor and Symbol*, *15*, 63-83.

Giora, R., Federman, S., Kehat, A., Fein, O., & Sabah, H. (2005). *Irony aptness. Humor, 18*(1), 23-39.

Haiman, J. (1998). *Talk is Cheap: Sarcasm, alienation, and the evolution of language*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kim, N. (2014). How Korean EFL learners understand sarcasm in L2 English. *Journal of Pragmatics, 60,* 193-206.

Linh, N. T. (2011*). A Vietnamese–English cross-cultural study on expressing sarcasm.* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Languages and International Studies. Available at http://ebook.net.vn/ebook/a-vietnamese-english-cross-cultural-study-on-expressing-sarcasm-5079.

Kreuz, R. J. (2000). The production and processing of verbal irony. *Metaphor and Symbol, 15* (1/2), 85-99.

McDonald, S. (1999). Exploring the process of interference generation in sarcasm: A review of normal and clinical studies*. Brain and Language*, *68*(3), 486-506.

McNeill, D. (1985). So you think gestures are nonverbal? *Psychological Review, 92* (3), 350-371.

Rockwell, P. (2000). Lower, slower, louder: Vocal clues of sarcasm. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research, 29* (5), 483-495.

Shamay-Tsoory, S. G., Tomer R., & Aharon-Peretz J. (2005). The neuroanatomical basis of understanding sarcasm and its relationship to social cognition. *Neuropsychol, 19*, 288–300.

Shively, R., Menke, M., & Manzón-Omundson, S. (2008). Perception of irony by L2 learners of Spanish. *Issues in Applied Linguistics, 16* (2), 101-132.

Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1998). Irony and relevance: A reply to Seto, Hamamoto and Yamanashi. In R. Carston & S. Uchida (Eds.), *Relevance theory: Applications and implications* (pp. 283-293). Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Toplak, M., & Katz, A., (2000). On the uses of sarcastic irony. *Journal of Pragmatics, 32*, 1467- 1488.

Usó-Juan, E., & Martínez-Flor, A. (Eds.). *Current trends in the development and teaching of the four language skills*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Yus, F. (2000). On reaching the intended ironic interpretation. *International Journal of Communication, 10* (1-2), 27-78.