

Irony in George Orwell's 1984: An Analysis from the Perspective of the Echo Theory

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ABSTRACT

Irony is a regularly used writing skill in literature and is an important research topic of many scholars. George Orwell is well known by his application of irony in his novel. As an opponent of totalitarianism, his works are always filled with satire art. He exposes the dark side of politics, culture and society of his time by applying irony in his novel. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a book that successfully shows his well-organized ironical language. This thesis intends to analyze the irony in George Orwell's *Nineteen Ninety-Four* from the perspective of the echo theory, which holds that ironic utterance is a speaker's echo towards an opinion other than himself and at the same time an expression of the dissociative attitude of the speaker. The thesis selects examples of verbal irony with representativeness and focuses on the identification and interpretation of them under the guidance of the Sperber and Wilson's echo theory, with the purpose to show that echo theory is a convenient and effective method to interpret irony in literary works, particularly in the subject of dystopia. Sperber and Wilson's echo theory, within the framework of the relevance theory, provides a new method to interpret irony. The author classifies the dissociative attitude into three degrees, from doubt, contempt to rage and respectively clarify the meaning of irony presented by different attitude. The combination of echo theory and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is meaningful. First and foremost, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is considered by many as a representative work of political irony. Second, the ironic language in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is so profound and accurate that it deserves much attention. Last but not least, as a dystopian literature classic; it supplies a totally different testing ground to demonstrate the feasibility of using echo theory to analyze verbal irony.

Keywords: *Echo Theory, Irony, Dissociative Attitude*

1. INTRODUCTION

George Orwell is a British journalist, novelist and critic. His early experience working in the Indian Imperial Police under British colony provides him with an opportunity to witness the social unrest, class contradiction, and the harsh inhuman punishment happening under the impact of imperialism and colonialism. His participation in the World War II and the misery of civilian he witnessed sharpened his hatred of totalitarianism. Therefore, based on his life experience, most of his work is of political nature, characterized by his opposition to totalitarianism. Jeffery Meyers, the author of the book *Orwell: Life and Art* believes that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is not only a paradigm of the history of Europe for the previous twenty years, but also a culmination of all the characteristic beliefs and ideas expressed in Orwell's works from the Depression to the Cold War. (Meyers 126) [10]

George Orwell is well known by his application of irony in his novel. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a fiction that successfully shows his well-organized ironical language. Winston Smith, a fictive protagonist, resists the regime of Big Brother who advocates totalitarianism. Winston looks like a loyal citizen while his thought diverges from "orthodoxy". After his anti-government thought is exposed, Winston is wrecked both physically and mentally by the Party and finally surrendered. Through the novel, George Orwell uses his ironic pen to examine the danger of totalitarian rule and gives his chilling warning against totalitarianism. In addition, he satirizes the world in which humans are degenerating persistently and living hopelessly and powerlessly with the purpose of showing his profound negative utopia idea. Therefore, the analysis of irony is necessary for readers to understand the subject of novel.

The word "irony" does not come into use until the sixteenth century in English. The basic meaning of irony

is the difference between how things seem to be and the reality. Irony has three categories. Situational irony occurs when something happens that is completely different from what was expected. This type of irony can be real events out of expectation in life. Dramatic irony is an incongruity between a situation developed in a drama and the accompanying words or actions that is understood by the audience but not by the characters in the play. Verbal irony, in Joana Garmendia's view, comes to play when a speaker says something but intends to mean another. The hearer will or will not understand what the speaker is communicating. (Garmendia 7) [8] This thesis will only concern instances of verbal irony and explain how Orwell brings his audience to understand what he is ironically talking about in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* under the guidance of Sperber and Wilson's echo theory.

Sperber and Wilson's echo theory, within the framework of the relevance theory, which holds that verbal communication is a mutual process of cognitive reasoning, provides a new method to interpret irony. They push the study of irony from the perspective of cognitive pragmatic. Ironic utterance is regarded as the speaker's echo towards an opinion other than himself and as an expression of a dissociative attitude of the speaker. The following is a comprehensive summary of the study of irony from different perspectives.

Wang Xiaoping (2016) [12] publishes a journal named "The Essence of Irony". She shows that the basis of irony study is the feature of irony and all the irony expression which is made by the speaker on purpose is opposite to the meaning of irony

From pragmatic perspective, Hei Yuyu (2017) [7] in the journal named "A Study of ironic humor in *Don Quixote* from the Perspective of Relevance Theory" analyzes the ironic utterance in *Don Quixote* within the framework of Relevance theory, indicating relevance theory is a reasonable tool to explain irony in literary works. Xu Tiantian (2017) [15] writes an essay called "A Study of Verbal irony in English TV Talk Shows from the Perspective of Adaption Theory: A Case Study of Real Time with Bill Maher", proving adaption theory is feasible to interpret irony in talk show. Xiong Lixiao (2014) [13] extracts ironic instances from *Gossip Girl* in his thesis "An Analysis of Pragmatic Functions of Verbal Irony with Echoic Mention Theory", revealing the positive and negative pragmatic function of irony in TV drama.

From philosophical point, Zou Chunlian and Niu Lianbo (2015) [16] co-publish a journal called "The Identity and Negative Indentity in Irony". Following Leibniz's principle of "identity", they interpret irony in a specific mode of operation in which the whole expression of irony and its relevant attributes are contrast on surface but in unity under the surface.

From cognitive point, Xu Qin (2018) [14] in the journal named "The Cognitive Study of Irony" shows that there are trigger factors in the mind of readers who comprehend irony. Unless the trigger mechanism works, readers cannot understand irony correctly. Li Yuchen (2008) [9] analyzes the internal cognitive process of irony generation and comprehension in her M.A thesis named "A Pragmatic and Cognitive study of irony". Chen Jingjing (2007) [4] in his thesis "A Note on the Production Interpretation-Mechanism of Irony" develops a cognitive mechanism to make a tentative exploration on the mental activity that supports the use of irony.

Paul Grice is the first scholar to study irony in pragmatic field. He proposes that what one communicates is the sum of what one says and what one implicates. The non-literal meaning is called "implicature" by Grice. The speaker violates the Cooperative Principle on purpose to let readers recognize what he intends to implicate. For example, ironic implicature is the opposition of the literal meaning and is generated when the speaker violates a maxim of quality, "Do not say what you believe to be false". The speaker will make an obvious violation to allow audience find out the contradictory of what the speaker appears to communicate. However, Grice's theory fail to explain the reason why the speaker prefer to say ironically when he has an equal chance to express what he want to say directly. [2]

Speech act theory (Austin 1962; Searle 1969) is a further development of Gricean account. It holds that speakers are expected to follow the sincerity condition in each speech act.[1] Ironic speaker, however, break the sincerity condition and is expected to make his insincerity transparent. Readers will find out his ingenuity and infer the ironic meaning. However, the speech art theory cannot explain ironic cases where no condition is broken.

Leech proposes Politeness Principle to solve the predicament of Grice's Cooperative Principle. According to Politeness Principle, if the speaker has to express his or her offense, he should at least uphold his politeness on surface by saying something sincerely and then implicate his ironic thought by abandoning the maxims of Cooperative Principle obviously. (Tatjana 90) [11]

Clark and Gerrig's Pretense Theory (1984) is an improvement of Grice's view of irony. When being ironic, a speaker is pretending to be someone addressing an unknowing audience, but the informed hearer will recognize the pretense and the irony the speaker is trying to convey. However, pretense theory has trouble distinguishing its pretense from many other non-ironic manifestation of pretense and has risks confusing ironic and non-ironic utterance.

Sperber and Wilson's echoic account is in complete disagreement with most of the view that speaker uses a literal meaning that is opposite to the one he actually intends communicate. They claim the premise of the theory is that the ironic speaker does not use a proposition but mentions it. Irony is a type of echoic interpretive use of language, by which the speaker dissociates himself from the utterance he attributes to a source. More details about the echoic account and its framework relevance theory will be discussed later.

Although echo theory is an influential way to analyze irony, it is often used to analyze verbal irony in TV series, rather than literary works, because compared with TV programs; literary works is not as humorous and dramatic as that in TV series. As a result, people pay less attention to ironic language in the form of text. In addition, the verbal irony in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is more implicit and elusive due to George Orwell's writing background, which adds difficulties on the recognition and analysis of verbal irony in this novel. Therefore, this thesis will select examples of verbal irony with representativeness and focus on the identification and interpretation of them under the guidance of the echo theory, with the purpose to prove that echo theory is a convenient and effective method to interpret irony in literary works, particularly in dystopia subject.

With the theoretical assistance of the echoic account, the following parts are going to discuss and analyze the verbal irony in dystopia literary works under one framework. The analysis of irony in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has three steps. At first, finding out what kind of source the speaker attributes to. Next, analyzing what kind of dissociative attitude the speaker is expressing. Last but not least, figuring out what information the speaker is conveying to the reader. Following these three steps, it is easier to analyze irony in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. All the extractions appeared in the following chapters are quoted from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and will be classified into three parts according to the intensity of dissociate attitude.

2. CHAPTER ONE. DISSOCIATIVE ATTITUDE—DOUBT

Since the echoic account was developed by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson in 1981, it has been used to explain and elaborate irony utterances. Garmendia describes when the utterance represents a thought that is about another thought, which the speaker attributes to a source other than himself or herself, it is called an "attributive" use of language. (Garmendia 44) [8] That is to say irony is an attributive use of language, because a certain source must be attributed by ironic speaker, including an immediate previous utterance/thought, a more distant utterance/thought or a general social norm or belief. Therefore, irony is always echoic. In the

following example in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, a general norm or human expectation is echoed by the speaker.

He set back. A sense of complete helplessness had descended upon him. To begin with, he did not know with any certainty that this was 1984. It must be round about that date, since he was fairly sure that his age was thirty-nine, and he believed he had been born in 1944 or 1945; but it was never possible nowadays to pin down any date within a year or two. (Orwell 7) [6]

The general norm or expectation Winston attributes to is that everybody is supposed to know exactly the date of a certain day with no question. By presenting "fairly sure" and "believe", it is clear that the author is declaring his age just as what a normal person does. His thought about his age is an echo towards a common human expectation that a man has a clear mind of his birthday. Even a baby has a sober mind of the date of birth, but when Winston asks himself about his birthday, he hesitates. Readers at the first glance will not find something ironic in the literal meaning, however; the irony is concealed in his attitude when he echoes. The relationship of attitude and its hidden meaning is the key to understand irony.

One of the functions of the attributive use of language is, said by Sperber and Wilson, to convey the speaker's attitude towards the attributed thought/utterance. The attitude of ironic speaker is called "dissociative attitude", which is not positive, because the speaker regards the utterance/thought that he or she attributes to others as both ridiculous and inadequate, as is manifested in Sperber and Wilson's view: "We will argue that verbal irony invariably involves the implicit expression of an attitude, and that the relevance of an ironical attitude invariably depends, at least in part, on the information it conveys about the speaker's attitude on the opinion." (Zhong 22) [18] In this case, Winston expresses his disappointment and doubt towards the general norm and his irony is revealed by his attitude.

The following elaboration will further explain how reader finds out the dissociative attitude and get the point of irony. According to relevance theory, to communicate well is to maximize relevance between speaker and listener. To obtain maximizing relevance, the speaker is responsible for enlarging contextual effect by modifying and improving the context to help reader find out and process the newly presented information which is most relevant to the context among other existing assumptions.

The contextual background that the author presents is that Winston Smith lost his memory about his childhood long time ago. The only thing that left in his mind is a series of unintelligible "bright-lit tableaux." Actually, his memory is distorted by the Party, contrived by the Big Brother who makes use of medical

way to delete or modify one's memory in order to control the public effortlessly. Therefore, only by making sure of his age could Winston infer an approximate date. According to common sense, answering a question about one's age requires no thinking, because the age is a natural thing that increases with time. By the time a year is over, one's age will also be one year older. Pondering over one's age is strange, saying nothing of what Winston Smith doubts. He has to ask himself what his age is; moreover, he has to be "fairly sure" that he is thirty-nine this year.

Normally, answering questions like "which year it is", "How old I am" needs no hesitation or inference that Winston Smith make when writing diary. However, "he believed that he had been born in 1944 or 1945", contradicting to a normal situation in human society that one's birthday is a fixed fact instead of a rough estimate that requires investigation, experiment and research and then a person could "believe" the assumption. Both the author and his reader understand the general norm that the date of birth is not an assumption that begins with guess and doubt. It builds the relevance between both sides and this relevance is the basis of understanding the irony from the standpoint of the reader. In addition, Orwell has said that Winston cannot able to remember his mother's appearance and where she was lost. He could only remember some fractions about his family. His mother, because of the persecution of the Party, disappears forever and to keep the purity of his mind, most of Winston's memory about his mother is deleted by the Party. As a result, Winston's memory is such a mess that he forgets many important things, in particular his birthday.

With the contextual background given by Orwell that Winston's memory is artificially modified, the reader could follow Orwell's ironic art. First, by presenting "fairly sure" and "believe", the author is echoing a general expectation that everybody should know the date with no doubt. Next, combined with the contextual information given by the author, the reader uses cognitive reasoning to infer that Winston dissociates himself from what he echoes and expresses his helplessness and disappointment to his situation. According to Sperber and Wilson's echoic account, Orwell achieves the effect of irony by echoing a general expectation of the reader, and provides enough contextual effect to interact with reader, letting them find out his dissociative attitude and get the point of irony.

The next example is also an irony revealed by the dissociative attitude of doubt:

Suddenly they were both leaping around him, shouting "Traitor" and "Thought-criminal!", the little girl imitating her brother in every environment. It was somehow slightly frightening, like the gamboling of tiger cubs which will soon grow into man-eaters...The

songs, the processions, the banners, the hiking, the drilling with dummy rifles, the yelling of slogans, the worship of Big Brother--it was all sort of glorious game to them. (Orwell 24) [6]

The last sentence is expressed by Winston after he visits Mrs. Parsons's house. She asks Winston to have a look at her kitchen sink that is blocked. In Mrs. Parsons's house, he encounters her cruel and ungovernable children. They shout at Winston calling him "traitor" and "a Eurasian spy", and with ferocity in their eyes they lift up the toy pistol wishing to hit or kick Winston. As their mother, Mrs. Parsons has no method at all to educate her children well, not because the mother spoils the boys and girls, but for the reason that all the young children are controlled by the organization of the Party to train all the children into spies who even keep an eye on their parents and will not hesitate to report their parents to the thought police and send them into jail.

According to relevance theory, verbal communication is a mutual process of cognitive reasoning. Sperber and Wilson hold that communication is a course of ostensive-inferential communication. Speaker is ostensive, because he produces stimulus to show his information. Listener is involved in inference, because he has to decode the speaker's information on the base of cognitive context which is a subset of the hearer's assumption about the world. It means people will search various knowledges in their brain including encyclopedic knowledge, lexicon knowledge and logical reasoning ability to derive the intent of the speaker by interacting with contextual information of the speaker. (Zhan 6) [17] In the mutual process, the speaker in text actually intends to inform something to the reader and let them infer what the author is trying to communicate to them. At the same time, the hearer understands the discourse by the deconstruction of meaning and reasoning.

In this case, Orwell produces enough stimuli to show his contextual information as assistance to help us understand irony. The children are systematically trained as savages who doubt anybody whose political orthodoxy is not perfect, but praise highly Big Brother and fanatically observe the discipline of the Party. Winston Smith is the victim of those children. He is kind enough to give a favor to repair their kitchen sink while be recognized as a traitor, hurt by the boy who uses catapult to hit the back of Winston's neck.

And then, according to the echoic account, the last sentence is an echo from both Winston and Orwell. What Winston echoes is the cruel utterance and rude behavior of Mrs. Parsons's children. He thinks the boys and girls are doing the most honorable and glorious thing asked by the Big Brother while doubts whether brainwashing the youth is something honorable and worth generalizing. Children show no respect to their

mother and their guest and even hurt Winston who does them a favor. It is all weird. Winston doubts whether the rude behavior of the teenager is really glorious and whether being a spy is glorious. Therefore, by echoing the children's previous utterance and behavior, Winston conveys his dissociative attitude that is doubt and unbelievable. In this example, Winston is not echoing an immediate preceding utterance but a more distant utterance. It is after he goes back his flat when he speaks out the echoic utterance that he attributes.

From the perspective of Orwell, he makes use of the ironic tone of Winston to express his attitude toward the ridiculous behavior and thought. "Child hero" is extensively used in newspaper and the children are so evil that even their parents become frightened of them. The children, such as Mrs. Parson's boys and girls, are trained as machine to pour all their anger to the enemy of the Party. The government takes advantage of children's ignorance and turns them into powerful weapon to control the public. Just as the slogan printed on the surface of the Ministry of Truth, ignorance is strength.

In this example, Orwell echoes that general norm frequently appeared in Nineteen Eighty-Four. He doubts deeply whether it is very honorable for the Big Brother to utilize the youth's ignorance to increase his strength. Orwell dissociates himself from the general norm he is echoing, by which Orwell conveys that it is the most shameful thing that Big Brother has ever done and it is awfully scary if it really comes true in reality. He doubts the rationality and validity of the general norm pursued by the Party-- ignorance is strength. As soon as readers get the point of irony, they will get the point of the caution Orwell presents. The youth is the future of a country and their value must be educated properly and be prevented from the invasion of the immoral opinions. Otherwise, ignorance will become the biggest and heaviest stone that will drag the development of society.

So far, both Winston and Orwell's dissociative attitude has been dominated by doubt. It is the slightest echoic reaction in the whole book, as Winston has just begun to write his doubt towards Big Brother and the rationality of the existence of the Party in the diary. Accordingly, so far, Orwell has just given his reader a glance of irony and has been ready to show more strength of his ironic tone in his dystopia novel.

3. CHAPTER TWO. DISSOCIATIVE ATTITUDE—CONTEMPT

In chapter 1, the ironic meaning is revealed by dissociative attitude. However, it is noticeable that dissociative attitude is not expressed monotonously by the speaker. Sperber and Wilson acknowledge diversity in this type of attitude: "dissociative attitudes themselves vary quite widely, falling anywhere on a

spectrum from amused tolerance through various shades of resignation or disappointment to contempt, disgust, outrage or scorn. The attitudes prototypical or verbal irony is generally seed as coming from the milder, or more controlled, part of the range." (Garmendia 45) [8] It means that in different situation, the dissociative attitude of ironic speaker varies. Accordingly, the meaning of irony expressed by dissociative attitude varies. In this part, dissociative attitude upgrades from doubt to contempt. The dissociative attitude is less milder while the ironic meaning is more intense, as is shown is the following example.

Syme: "By 2050--earlier, probably--all real knowledge of Oldspeak will have disappeared. The whole literature of the past will have been destroyed. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron—they will exist only in Newspeak versions, not merely changed into something contradictory of what they used to be. Even the literature of the Party will change...The whole climate of thought will be different. In fact, there will be no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking—not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness." (Orwell 53) [6]

Winston: "Syme would betray him instantly to the Thought Police. So would anybody else, for that matter, but Syme more than most. Zeal was not enough. Orthodoxy was unconsciousness." (Orwell 55) [6]

In this example, Syme is a philologist in compiling Newspeak dictionary. Newspeak, actually, is a kind of new language that contains no words of which the meaning is similar and that get rid of antonyms. In other words, compiling Newspeak dictionary is destroying hundreds of words in order to delete redundant use of words in daily communication and will impose restrictions on people's mind. The left words are all politically correct. No matter how people use the left verbs, nouns, and adjectives in the dictionary to make sentences, the expression is loyal to the Party. The Newspeak dictionary ensures the purity of the words the thought of civilian will be always politically correct. That means unorthodoxy thought has no incubation base at all.

However, Syme regards his job as a beautiful process in which he can witness the Newspeak becoming the only language in the world whose vocabulary gets smaller every year and turning into the most powerful weapon to narrow the range of thought. Whenever people communicate with each other, they have no chance of committing thought crime, for the reason that they will find no vocabulary to describe their unfaithful thought. By then, people will realize in the real sense the so called "freedom of thought", because they can say whatever they want using any word in the dictionary. However, people will never find out their freedom is in fact slavery on them, because the words they can use are already sifted by the official and the

definition of freedom is modified to work for the control of civilian. Winston, seemed as the only sober man in the novel, finds out the Newspeak is abnormal while people like Syme finds it fascinating. Syme believes the public of Newspeak dictionary is an emancipation of people's thought, as it is no longer necessary for them to think. All the deliberation will be abandoned by the upcoming generation. In this way, people will not spend time thinking whether a word is unfaithful or not and speak anything freely as long as within the range of the Newspeak.

Gradually, veneration of Big Brother, the faith of one's thought, and the respect of the Party will become a habit that people is not aware of. Just as Syme says, orthodoxy is unconsciousness and will show itself naturally in the way that people behave. Winston echoes Syme's opinion with the same content as is shown in the last sentence. As Winston has clear perception that Newspeak is a kind of slavery of its nature, the point of the irony here is to dissociate himself from an attributed thought. He repeats what Syme has said about orthodoxy and unconsciousness but dissociates himself from what he echoes.

In this case, Winston's dissociative attitude is contempt, finding Syme's compiling job as an unforgivable crime to destroy human civilization. Winston looks down on the Newspeak dictionary at the same time despises people like Syme who is both presumptuous and stupid. From the perspective of what Winston echoes, admiring Newspeak has become an unconscious behavior of hundreds of "Symes". It is unnecessary for them to think. In addition, they have no thought at all, for they are too stupid to tell right from wrong and too crazy about the Party to acknowledge the diversity of thought and the vitality of language.

By echoing the utterance attributed to Syme, Winston expresses his irony towards all those "Symes". In addition, Orwell also uses the last sentence to echo a general norm that is "freedom is slavery", another slogan that Big Brother advocates. Under Big Brother's governance, slavery is covered with the lie of freedom. Under the guidance of Newspeak dictionary, people can think and speak whatever they want to think and speak. To make the matter worse, people will mistakenly believe that they are living with real freedom because the use of Newspeak restricts people's thought into a controllable range and no unfaithful thought will exist. Just as Syme, orthodoxy has become an unconscious habit of all the people.

Orwell uses "orthodoxy is unconsciousness" to echo one of the stupid slogans "freedom is slavery in Nineteen Eighty-Four and dissociates himself from what he echoes, distaining that slogan and showing his contempt. Up to now, Orwell's irony has climbed up to a new stage from disappointment and hopeless to contempt and hatred. In addition, the warning effect of

dystopia navel has become more and more violent by now. By analyzing the gradually intensive dissociative attitude toward which the writer echoes, readers can feel the accordingly alerting effect through which Orwell hopes that readers can have a sober mind of the definition of freedom and take advantage of our mind to explore more about freedom.

The following is a dialogue between Winston and an old man in the pub. The ironic meaning is implicit, but it can be inferred from the dissociative attitude of contempt.

Winston: "you have been alive a very long time; you lived half your life before the Revolution. In 1925, for instance, you were already grown up. Would you say, form what you can remember, that life in 1925 was better than it is now, or worse? If you could choose, would you prefer to live then or now?"

The old man: "I know what you expect me to say. You expect me to say as I'd sooner be young again. Most people'd say they'd sooner be young, if you asrt'em...On the other 'and there's great advantages in being an old man. You ain't got the same worries. No truck with women, and that's a great thing." (Orwell 92) [6]

In this case, Winston is interviewing an old man in the bar. Winston wonders if there are still a few sober survivors who have the memory of the past. He wonders whether the life in history is freer and happier than the present situation where Winston has no personal property, privacy and family. He breaks the law to keep a diary book in secret and have a secret date with Julia. Not surprisingly, even if such an old man with past memory, he has to pretend that he remembers nothing in order to stay away from the arrest of the thought police. Perhaps the old man in case 4 gets the point of Winston, but he has no choice but to act as a fool, escaping from the chase of thought police. The truth is, in Nineteen Eighty-Four, the memory of rebellion before 1925 has been deleted and the written record has been falsified to fit the governance of the Party.

Orwell says if there is anyone alive who has memory of the early part of the century, it could only be proles, because they fight against the suppression of capitalism. Winston finds this old man in a dingy little pub where the proles always gather and believes the old man is one of those survivors who have a narrow escape from the persecution. According to the echoic theory, a speaker can not only echo an immediate or a more distant utterance, but can also echo tacitly attributed but unexpressed thoughts. It means that the speaker can echo an utterance/thought that is attributable to a specific person who in fact does not say something orally on the condition that the speaker understands what his companion is thinking about.

First, the old man says that he knows what Winston expects him to say. The old man suggests that he gets the point of what Winston asks and can express his dissociative attitude towards the unexpressed thoughts of Winston who wonders whether the past is better than the present. Second, the old man echoes that unexpressed question with his opinion that there are great advantages in being an old man and to some extent, the life now is better than then. He seems to be satisfied with the status quo because it is unnecessary for him to deal with the relationship with women.

However, it is the Party that forbids men and women falling into true love and free love, which will decrease the productivity. Love, under the guidance of Big Brother, has become a national distribution. Brainwashed by the Party, marriage in most people's view is only for finishing the task of reproducing future generations. Therefore, in the old man's echoic utterance, he maintains his dissociative attitude. He suggests his hatred towards Big Brother who deprives his happiness and thanks to that contemptible leader he lacks the companion of a wife and becomes a drunkard. In this way, readers can understand the true meaning of the old man and have a clear analysis of Orwell's irony.

There is another example of irony with the dissociative attitude of contempt.

He filled the glasses and raised his own glass by the stem. "What shall it be this time?" he said, still with the same faint suggestion of irony. "To the confusion of the Thought Police? To the death of Big Brother? To humanity? To the future?" "To the past," said Winston. "The past is more important," agreed O'Brien gravely. (Orwell 176) [6]

In this case, O'Brien makes an immediate ironic utterance to echo Winston's thought. O'Brien is a spy who pretends to be a member of the Brotherhood which is a secret organization planning a series of activities to rebel against Big Brother. However, Winston believes O'Brien as a loyal partner and fails to recognize his conspiracy. Therefore, when Winston visits O'Brien's house to devote all his loyalty to the Brotherhood, he is gradually kept in the trap of O'Brien. Winston leaves the evidence of his betrayal against the Party. As it is a plan of O'Brien in advance, all the conversation between him and Winston is full of irony and case 5 is the most evident example.

In Winston's view, the past is more meaningful than the future. Real and adequate records of the history are the most precious objects because he knows very well that the majority of history has been altered. For example, as Bolin states in his essay "For the future, for the unborn", Winston finds great pleasure when Julia gives him a glass paperweight which is a little chunk of history that the Party has forgotten to modify. (Bolin 91) [3] Furthermore, he writes a diary so that he could leave

some written record left for the future generation to explore the past, to investigate the authenticity of the history.

On the contrary, O'Brien, like all other dummies under the control of Big Brother, abandons the memory of the past, blindly follows the description of the Party and simulates as a friend of Winston. History is nothing for him. As a result, when he echoes Winston's remark about the past with the same content, he pretends to approve Winston's utterance but dissociates himself from what he echoes suggesting something else more. O'Brien despises the member of the Brotherhood including Winston, so his echo brings the color of contempt and distaste. It is not until the arrest of Winston that Orwell reveals that O'Brien is a spy, so after the second reading of the unlined sentence, O'Brien's echo manifests itself with more ironic feeling. Due to the contextual information such as O'Brien's hypocrisy given by Orwell, readers can grasp the dissociative attitude of O'Brien in his echoic utterance. After all, the past is never worth mentioning for that kind of people.

Through the "dissociative attitude" of the speaker, the reader can find out the ironic tone conveyed by the ironic speaker, just as Sperber and Wilson point out: "The attitude expressed by an ironical utterance is invariably of the rejecting or disapproving kind. The speaker dissociates herself from the opinion echoed and indicated that she does not hold it herself. Indeed, it may be obvious in the circumstances that she believes the opposite of the opinion echoed." (Zhong 23) [18]

In chapter two, the ironic meaning is shown by contempt. In this part, the dissociative attitude is less mild. Accordingly, the ironic meaning is more intense.

4. CHAPTER THREE. DISSOCIATIVE ATTITUDE—RAGE

In the following cases extracted from chapter 3 of the novel, the ironic tone has climbed up to the peak through the whole novel. The dissociative attitude of the speaker and Orwell has turned from doubt and contempt to rage and violence. The dark side of totalitarianism has been revealed by the most critical irony of Orwell.

The following is the most classic irony throughout the whole novel.

"Tell me, Winston—and remember, no lies; you know that I am always able to detect a lie—tell me, what are your true feelings toward Big Brother?" "I hate him." "You hate him. Good. Then the time has come for you to take the last step. You must love Big Brother. It is not enough to obey him; you must love him." (Orwell 282) [6]

He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother. (Orwell 298) [6]

According to Sperber and Wilson, during ostensive-inferential communication, the speaker and addressee abide by the Principle of Relevance: “every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance.” When the addressee hears an utterance, they will search for relevance in the initial context, if they fail to find the relevance; they will expand the context until the optimal relevance is achieved. (Chen 29) [5] Therefore, the speaker ought to produce enough contextual effects to meet the needs of the processing effort of the listener and from the view of listener; the communicator cannot make his utterance more relevant than the actual case. Only in this way can the listener use minimal cognitive effort to yield a satisfactory interpretation of the speaker’s intention.

On the basis of relevance theory, the essence of irony is an achievement of optimal relevance between speaker and hearer. In order to convey the hiding intention, the ironic speaker makes efforts to make the contextual effects more adequate and relevant. The hearer will cost the least processing effort to get the point of irony.

As for the contextual information given by Orwell in case 6, Winston is betrayed by O’Brien and sent into the Ministry of Love, a place where a person will be tortured to change one’s belief. Like all the “thought criminals”, Winston suffers from endless physical beating and restless brainwashing. Interrogation has become a routine of his prison life. As long as he refuses to admit that he love Big Brother from the bottom of his heart and from the bottom of his mind, his torture will never stop. In other words, the outcome of the torture of all the “thought criminals” is the same, which is losing consciousness over and over again until their willpower is too weak to repel the irrational opinion such as “war is peace”.

For Winston, the ultimate task of torture is letting him admit voluntarily that he loves Big Brother. It is nearly impossible because the chief criminal who gives rise to all the pain and misery in his life is Big Brother and the only remaining humanity of Winston supports him to believe that what Big Brother does is actually eliminating human civilization and creating a history of his own. Nothing could change his mind, especially the fact that he harbors an intense hatred for Big Brother, for the crime of the Party.

However, after he is tortured by electric shock and threatened by the rats, his power of arguing is destroyed totally. He sets up to exercise himself to accept fake propositions subjectively with no doubt only because those fake propositions are all true in the view of the Party, such as “the earth is flat” in order to avoid torture. Winston forces himself to lie without showing his true feelings to escape from the detecting of the lie machine. Therefore, when Winston echoes O’Brien’s utterance

with the same content to approve that he loves Big Brother in the end of the novel, the ironic tone is fermented to the peak of the whole novel.

The underlined sentence is not an immediate echo, so it is not easily identified in context. Winston echoes an utterance that is attributed to a specific person and that is a more distant utterance of O’Brien, so Winston does not show his dissociative attitude towards which he echoes as soon as he heard what O’Brien had said. Instead, after he suffers from the horrible torture and be released from the prison, Winston thinks of O’Brien’s preceding utterance that he should love Big Brother and shows his dissociative attitude towards that distant utterance. He loves Big Brother, indeed, but with endless pain and fear. He loves Big Brother, indeed, but he will carry incomparable indignation to love him. His love is true, because his memory is altered in the prison and his world view is transformed under the threat. His hate is also true, but is tacitly unexpressed.

When Winston echoes that he loves Big Brother, he dissociates himself from his echoic thought with unparalleled rage and deadly hopelessness. According to Sperber and Wilson, dissociative attitudes themselves vary quite widely, falling anywhere on a spectrum from amused tolerance through various shades of resignation or disappointment to contempt, disgust, outrage or scorn. The dissociative attitude of Winston has reached the peak and the ironic information that his echoic utterance wants to express is most profound.

The last example of irony also expresses the dissociative attitude of rage.

“I don’t mean confessing. Confession is betrayal. What you say or do doesn’t matter; only feelings matter. If they could make me stop loving you—that would be the real betrayal.” She thought it over. “They can’t do that,” she said finally. “It’s the one thing they can’t do. They can make you say anything—anything—but they can’t make you believe it. They can’t get inside you. (Orwell 166) [7]

“They can’t get inside you,” she had said. But they could get inside you. “What happens to you here is forever,” O’Brien had said. That was a true word. There were things, your own acts, from which you could not recover. Something was killed in your breast; burnt out, cauterized out. (Orwell 290) [6]

Similarly, it is one of the profound ironies in the novel, because the dissociative attitude expressed by the speaker is most intense. Before Winston and his secret lover, Julia are arrested, they both firmly believe that the Party can force them to change their behavior, but the Party will never succeed in changing their mind and their belief, because they think a man’s willpower and thought is the hardest thing to attack. However, they both underestimate the formidable power of inhuman torture. The merciless questioners slap his face, pull his

hair, refuse him to leave for restroom and bring the cage of rats to threaten him.

In the end, Winston surrenders to the control of Big Brother and he realizes his enemy is always too strong to defeat. He remembers what Julia has said before “they can’t get inside you” and echoes that distant utterance. For this time, Winston expresses his negative attitude against himself. He is that firm and confident that he will not lose his ability of reasoning and as long as he keeps a sober mind, he will not be defeated.

Nevertheless, after torture, he becomes such a poor man with weakness and hopelessness. When he repeats Julia’s words “they can’t get inside you”, he is actually dissociating himself from that attributed thought. He hates himself not keeping the promise, losing control of his own mind. He has to bear the irony he brings to himself. On the other side, this irony also reveals the tragedy of human in dystopia. People have no control of themselves. Everybody is degenerating hopelessly and helplessly.

There is another irony in the last example. O’Brien proposes that everything happen to Winston in prison is forever. It means all the reformation of his mind and thought will be lasting forever. The damage to his mind is irreversible. Winston echoes that utterance with the similar content but dissociates himself from that. He is not willing to admit that his “heresy” is altered and all other “heretics” will be defeated in future. He wants to accuse the crime committed by the Party and all his heart is filled with furious hatred anger against Big Brother. Orwell expresses his irony to the totalitarianism through the view of Winston. However, Winston’s dissociative attitude also inclines to helplessness in this example. He hates himself incapable of sticking to the loyalty of the heart and ultimately loses his way. He satirizes himself in this case.

From the perspective of Orwell, he pushes his irony to the peak in the novel in order to leave the most profound impression of totalitarianism and dystopia on readers. He uses those three slogans “freedom is slavery”, “war is peace”, and “ignorance is strength” to act as general norm and expectation in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the whole novel can be regarded as an echo toward three slogans, with writer trying his best to depict a society as real as possible to accord with the general norm that dominates *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. However, at the same time the writer creates an imaginary world, Orwell expresses his dissociative attitude against the general norm and expectation carried out in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and gradually reveals his art of irony to the reader.

There are also many other ironies that can be explained by echo theory in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. For example, Winston Smith works in the Ministry of Truth, where his job is to rewrite the report on the newspaper

to make sure any wrong record will be burnt and will never be known by the public. It is an irony related to “ignorance is strength” and echoes a human expectation that the government administration should be transparent. In addition, before Winston is arrested, he believes that he and Julia will never betray each other. However, both of them cannot persist in their principle after persecution. When they meet again after release from the jail and recall their pledge, their dissociative attitude is indifferent, because they have been deprived of the ability to love. Although they are free, they become emotionless. It is an irony related to “freedom is slavery”. Furthermore, Big Brother can change at any time which country is its enemy and which country is its ally with no reason. Orwell’s irony which targets this situation can also be interpreted with echo theory.

Briefly speaking, according to the echo theory, ironic utterances are echoic. A certain source must be attributed by an ironic speaker, including an immediate previous utterance/thought, a more distant utterance/thought or a general social norm or belief. The dissociative attitude of ironic speaker ranges from mild disagreement to outrage disagreement. From part 1 to part 3, the dissociative attitude is more and more violent and the ironic phenomenon is more and more dense. The comprehension of irony relies on the principle of optimal relevance and the contextual information given by the speaker.

5. CONCLUSION

Nineteen Eighty-Four depicts a completely bureaucratized society, in which human loses all sense of individuality. George Orwell expresses the mood of despair and gives readers his warning by writing this negative utopian novel in which powerlessness and hopelessness pervades through his writing and takes hold of the consciousness of people in the novel. Although we make great progress in technology and science after going through the industrial age and then the information age, we are facing an even greater danger that is the destruction of our civilization, such as the disappearance of the variety of language, the failure to maintain justice and peace in some area and the threat of the unprecedented virus. Most of the tragedies are attributed to the innocence and arrogance of human being. Therefore, to save human progress and reconstruct civilization, George Orwell writes this political novel with the assistance of a great deal of irony in order to make the warning effect more impressive and persuasive.

Furthermore, under the guidance of Sperber and Wilson’s relevance theory and their echoic account, it is accessible for the author of the thesis to analyze the ironic cases in the novel. By analyzing the dissociative attitude of Winston Smith and also George Orwell, the author can precisely infer the ironic meaning of the

speaker who uses ironic utterance or thought to echo a specific person or a general norm. The author lists seven cases to show that echo theory is significant in explaining irony in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and can be widely used to identify and explain irony in negative utopian novels. As for the limitation of the thesis, it ignores the application of echo theory to explain the positive irony for the reason that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* barely appears any positive irony. Therefore, the thesis cannot show whether the echo theory is feasible to analyze positive irony. At least, it is good to say that the echo theory is a useful tool to clarify negative irony.

The study of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has educational significance. As a political fiction, the whole story is filled with irony that is author's frequently used writing skill to describe the hopeless and powerlessness of people in the novel. Since George Orwell's main thought is contained in the three prominent ironic plots in book: people's ignorance brings about power, perpetual war ensures peace and freedom leads to slavery, only when readers get the point of irony can they comprehend the author's attack on the dark side of the totalitarianism. In a way, the analysis of irony is necessary for readers to understand the subject of novel.

In the meantime, the study of irony is helpful to increase reader's ability in telling right from wrong. Since Orwell successfully uses the art of irony to build a world that is contrary to democratic society and indicates that autocracy always has no vitality and will be destroyed soon, the readers are impressed by the fearful end of totalitarianism and be aware of the importance of upholding democracy. As a result, based on its large scale of readers, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has influential impact on guiding people to behave on the right path. Therefore, by analyzing the use of ironic language in the novel, it will reveal a sharp contrast between a world in novel with hopeless and a world we are living with bright future, deepening the alertness of never being caught in the trap of corruption.

In summary, this thesis through the study of ironic use of language within the framework of echo theory has social significance in preventing the degeneration of humankind and raising the level of democratic system and people's democratic consciousness, and at last improving the development of society.

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