

Semantic Mechanisms of Irony in Nadezhda Teffi And Salomat Vafo: A Linguo-Literary Approach

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Abstract: This article examines irony as a semantic and pragmatic mechanism in the prose of Nadezhda Teffi and Salomat Vafo. The study proceeds from the assumption that irony should be analyzed not only as a stylistic trope, but also as a mode of semantic tension arising from the interaction of conceptual, structural, pragmatic, and denotative aspects of lexical meaning. The comparison of Teffi's short prose with Salomat Vafo's psychologically intensive Uzbek prose shows that irony in the two corpora is realized through different configurations of semantic conflict. In Teffi, irony often emerges from the disproportion between elevated lexical forms and trivial everyday reality. In Salomat Vafo, by contrast, irony tends to arise from the discrepancy between literal utterance, emotional restraint, and implicit judgment. Special attention is paid to the stories *Elat* and *Arg'imchoq*, where portrait, landscape, silence, and socially ritualized speech deepen the latent ironic effect. The article argues that the semantic trapezium provides a productive model for understanding irony as a multidimensional relation between sign, concept, denotation, and contextual interpretation.

Keywords: Irony, lexical meaning, semantic trapezium, pragmatics, Nadezhda Teffi, Salomat Vafo, Uzbek prose, psychological prose, comparative literary analysis.

Introduction: Irony occupies a special place in literary discourse because it is built on semantic doubleness. A word or utterance remains formally intact, yet its actual meaning is displaced by context, evaluation, and the reader's interpretive work. For that reason, irony cannot be reduced to mockery, inversion, or comic effect alone. It is more productively approached as a semantic phenomenon emerging in the gap between what is said and what is meant. Such an approach is especially relevant for prose in which inner conflict, everyday speech, and implicit value judgment are central to artistic structure. The present article compares two different ironic systems: Nadezhda Teffi's Russian short prose and the prose of the Uzbek writer Salomat Vafo. Salomat Vafo, born in 1966, is presented in authoritative Uzbek literary resources as a prose writer whose published books include *Farida* (1984), *O'zini izlayotgan ayol* (1989), *Ko'ngil farishtasi* (1995), *Tilsim saltanati* (2005), and *Ovoraning ko'rgan*

kechirganlari (2008). The same source also links her name with a group of published stories, including *Elat*, *Devor*, and *Tutilgan oy*.

Critical studies describe Salomat Vafo as a representative of contemporary Uzbek psychological prose and emphasize her artistic attention to the inner world of the person, emotional states, and subtle means of psychological depiction. A recent article in *Foreign Languages in Uzbekistan* further shows that in *Elat* and *Arg'imchoq* she uses dynamic portraiture and landscape imagery to reveal the characters' inner experience, often through parallelism and contrast. These features make her prose especially suitable for a semantic study of irony at the intersection of lexis, pragmatics, and narrative perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In semantic theory, lexical meaning is commonly treated as a multi-layered phenomenon rather than a simple link between word and object. Your source draft

frames the problem through four aspects of lexical meaning: meaning as reflection of reality, meaning as a system-bound linguistic unit, meaning as the speaker's evaluative attitude, and meaning as denotation. This framework is especially productive for irony because ironic speech typically preserves denotative plausibility while shifting pragmatic orientation.

Teffi's prose has long invited readings centered on the collision between elevated language and banal reality. In this type of ironic construction, pathos is not formally destroyed; instead, it is redirected toward an object unworthy of such verbal scale. The semantic effect comes from disproportion. In the draft article you provided, this mechanism is connected with the distinction between the semantic triangle and the more flexible model of the semantic trapezium, which better captures the gap between lexical sign, conceptual content, and contextualized meaning. With regard to Salomat Vafo, the available scholarship points in a different direction. Holbekova explicitly characterizes her as a master of psychological prose and states that the main focus of the analysis is the writer's artistic devices and her means of representing the inner world of the human being. Achilova, analyzing Elat and Arg'imchoq, argues that Vafo's portraits are dynamic and integrated into plot movement, while landscape is used to reveal mental states, mainly in parallel and sometimes in contrast to the characters' emotions. Together, these studies indicate that irony in Vafo is less likely to be based on overt comic contrast and more likely to arise from restraint, inner fracture, emotional displacement, and value-laden subtext.

METHODS

The study combines semantic analysis, pragmatic reading, close textual interpretation, and comparative literary analysis. Its theoretical basis is the model of layered lexical meaning outlined in the source draft, especially the distinction between conceptual, pragmatic, and denotative levels. Methodologically, the article reads irony as a tension between the stable lexical surface of the utterance and the interpretive reorientation produced by context.

The empirical material includes Teffi's short prose and Salomat Vafo's stories available through Ziyouz, especially Elat and Arg'imchoq. The choice of these two texts is additionally supported by Achilova's article,

which treats them as representative for Vafo's use of portrait and landscape imagery. For bibliographic grounding, the study also notes the existence of the English-translated collection *A Nameless Ship* (Nomsiz kema), listed in a dissertation bibliography hosted by Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Irony as semantic disproportion in Teffi

In Teffi's prose, irony frequently emerges through semantic disproportionality. The utterance activates a conceptual frame associated with tragedy, destiny, passion, or existential seriousness, but the denotative object belongs to a trivial domestic sphere. The result is not mere parody, but a cognitive disturbance: the reader recognizes the validity of the lexical register and simultaneously its mismatch with the immediate object. In semantic terms, the sign remains outwardly normal, yet its contextual calibration becomes unstable. This is why Teffi's irony is both comic and epistemological: it tests the reliability of ready-made cultural meanings.

2. Psychological irony in Salomat Vafo

The prose of Salomat Vafo invites a different model of irony. Available criticism repeatedly emphasizes psychological density rather than overt comic deformation. In Elat, the opening lines are built around fear, haunting images, memory, and belated recognition of guilt toward the mother and the native place. The narrator is wealthy and socially successful, yet emotionally estranged from kinship and memory; this discrepancy between external achievement and inner ethical failure creates a field in which irony can be read as tragic self-exposure rather than laughter. The text itself does not announce irony openly, but it constructs a tension between the narrator's former self-assurance and the moral emptiness revealed by recollection.

In Arg'imchoq, the ironic effect becomes visible through ritualized speech and emotional dissonance. The story opens with an atmosphere "as if someone had died," although the burial arrangements are ready and "there is no corpse." The dialogue that follows mixes fatigue, drinking, family hierarchy, and ceremonial language. Read semantically, such scenes produce irony by exposing a gap between the

conventional forms of speech and the ethical or emotional inadequacy of the actual situation. The denotative level remains ordinary and socially recognizable, but the pragmatic level redirects the reader toward implicit critique. This is irony not as wit, but as moral dislocation.

3. Portrait, landscape, and the hidden ironic charge

Achilova's analysis is especially important because it shows that in Vafo's prose portrait is dynamic and landscape is functionally tied to the revelation of inner states. This observation helps explain why irony in these texts often remains latent. It is distributed not in a single striking phrase, but across descriptive details, tonal shifts, and the arrangement of emotional perspective. When portrait and landscape parallel the mental condition of the character, the reader receives not an explicit judgment, but a structured atmosphere that reinterprets the literal utterance. When they work in contrast, the discrepancy itself becomes semantically productive and may carry ironic force. This is visible already in the openings of *Elat* and *Devor*. In *Elat*, the remembered village, animals, darkness, and the mother's waiting gaze accumulate into a symbolic landscape of delayed conscience. In *Devor*, the hospital room, the disturbing roommate, and the grotesque mixture of fear, pity, and absurd narration create a perceptual instability that makes literal statements unreliable. In such prose, irony is embedded in perspective: the world appears ordinary, yet every detail weakens the credibility of ordinary naming.

4. Comparative perspective: Teffi and Vafo

The comparison of Teffi and Vafo makes it possible to distinguish two principal modes of ironic meaning-production. In Teffi, irony tends to emerge through scale mismatch: the lexical form is too "high" for the denotative object. In Vafo, irony more often arises through value mismatch: the spoken form is socially acceptable or emotionally restrained, but context reveals fracture, guilt, indifference, or concealed suffering. In the first case, irony is strongly linked to comic disproportion; in the second, to psychological and ethical subtext. Both, however, rely on the same general principle: denotation alone does not exhaust meaning. Pragmatic orientation and contextual interpretation are decisive.

From this perspective, the semantic trapezium remains

a productive model because it allows the researcher to account for the interval between sign, concept, denotation, and implied interpretation. Irony is born in that interval. It is therefore more accurate to describe it not as an ornament of style, but as a structural principle of meaning in literary discourse.

CONCLUSION

The analysis shows that irony in Teffi and Salomat Vafo is generated by different but comparable semantic mechanisms. Teffi's prose foregrounds the disproportion between elevated lexical framing and everyday denotative reality. Salomat Vafo's prose, by contrast, develops irony through psychological tension, suppressed evaluation, and the discrepancy between surface utterance and ethical truth. Studies on Vafo's prose support this reading by emphasizing her mastery of psychological representation and her use of dynamic portrait and emotionally charged landscape in stories such as *Elat* and *Arg'imchoq*.

The article therefore argues that irony should be studied as a semantic-pragmatic formation rather than a narrowly stylistic trope. Such a perspective makes it possible to bring together lexical semantics and literary interpretation and to reveal how a word in fiction exceeds its denotative function. In this sense, both Teffi and Vafo demonstrate that irony is a special way of producing truth through semantic displacement.

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