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# Oh, the Irony!: Interpersonal Variation in the Processing of Foreign-Accented and Native Irony

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## Abstract

Research shows that language processing mechanisms are permeable to the speaker's accent, but virtually no data exists on non-literal language. Our online rating study investigated whether accent-based biases could hinder making inferences from ironic speech. Ninety-six participants listened to dialogues between native and foreign-accented English speakers and rated them on several scales. We found that the ironic intent in the accented speech was missed significantly more often than in the native speech for all irony types. Importantly, participants' individual differences significantly affected the ratings and interacted with both accent and irony-type. More conservative participants were worse at detecting irony than their liberal peers but this effect was stronger for accented speech and a rarer irony type. In contrast, high empathy facilitated irony detection. The results demonstrate that interpersonal variation in personality and moral values affects language comprehension and needs to be accounted for in models of language processing.