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## UNIT 7 FIGURES OF SPEECH-2

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### 7.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit, we are going to study some other literary devices as we have done in the previous unit. After completing the unit, you should be able to understand the following literary devices:

- Irony,
- Satire,
- Paradox, and
- Antithesis.

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### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the last unit, we discussed some figures of speech like simile, metaphor, etc., used as literary devices. We shall now take up some other devices like

- i) **irony**, in which the intended meaning is the opposite of, or at least in sharp contrast to, the literal meaning,
- ii) **satire**, which ridicules vice or folly, or attacks an individual with some kind of non-literal use of language,
- iii) **paradox**, which makes use of contradictory or incompatible elements, and
- iv) **antithesis**, which uses a contrast of ideas.

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### 7.2 IRONY

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Irony consists in using words which are opposite to one's meaning. For example, if you say 'What a good friend you are!' when you mean just the opposite, you are using the device of irony. This is the most commonly used kind of irony.

Example 1

"Mr. Bennet, how can you abuse your own children in such a way? You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves."

"You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least."

" Ah! You do not know what I suffer. "

(From Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*,  
chapter I)

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet form an odd couple owing to their different temperaments. Mr. Bennet is serious and objective and has a mature understanding. Mrs. Bennet is uninformed, 'of mean understanding', and 'nervous when discontented.' Her main concern in life is to get her daughters married. She asks her husband to invite Mr. Bingley, a rich young bachelor who has settled down in their neighborhood. Mr. Bennet remarks that he does not consider any of their daughters, except Lizzy, worthy of being recommended to that gentleman. At this remark Mrs. Bennet flares up saying that he 'abuses' his own children and takes pleasure in annoying her, and that he does not care for her nerves and how they will be affected by his remarks. Mr. Bennet replies that he has been trying to be patient with her for the last twenty years. Mrs. Bennet, however, knows that Mr. Bennet's attitude is in fact just the opposite of what he has said. This is an example of verbal irony.

The following passage is another example of irony where the reader knows what was meant, but the character does not.

### Example 2

"Permit me to say, Madam, that as I never yet have had the pleasure of seeing Miss Languish, my principal inducement in this affair at present is the honor of being allied to Mrs. Malaprop, of whose intellectual accomplishments, elegant manners, and unaffected learning no tongue is silent."

(From Sheridan: *The Rivals*, Act III, Scene III)

Note that Captain Absolute has been meeting Lydia Languish, of which the reader of the book is aware, and that he is playing to the vanity of Mrs. Malaprop, who wants to be admired for her fine vocabulary. In reality he is fooling her. The irony is that the reader understands the situation but Mrs. Malaprop does not.

## 7.2.1 The Irony of Situation

Another type of irony is that of situation, in which the true meaning of a set of circumstances is not revealed until the outcome of the circumstances is seen; then a contradiction in the outcome is the result. The situation may seem to be developing to its logical conclusion, yet almost at the end it takes an opposite turn. This unexpected, or unintended, development is an example of irony of situation.

In the short story given below, *The Gift*, by O. Henry, Della sells her beautiful long hair in order to buy her husband, Jim a chain for his watch. Meanwhile Jim pawns his cherished watch in order to buy Della a present of hair combs. This ironic twist of fate produces a conclusion which is unexpected by both the characters and readers.

### Check Your Progress 1

Read the following story and answer the questions given at the end.

## The Gift of the Magi

### Figures of Speech-2

O. Henry

One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all she had saved. Three times Della counted it. Only one dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

There was clearly nothing left to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and weep. So, Della did. You see, life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles — but mainly of sniffles.

When Della had finished crying, she patted her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a grey cat walking along a grey fence in a grey backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim, her husband, a present. She had been saving every cent she could for months; but twenty dollars a week — which was the total of their income - doesn't leave much for saving. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. And now she had only \$ 1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Many happy hours she had spent planning something nice for him. Something fine and rare — something worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim.

There was a mirror between the windows of the room. Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. Her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its colour within twenty seconds. Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.

Now, there were two possessions of Della and Jim in which they both took a very great pride. One was Jim's gold watch, which had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair. It fell about her, rippling and shining like a cascade of brown water. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her.

She did it up again nervously and quickly. She hesitated for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet.

On went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown hat. With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she ran out of the door and down the stairs to the street.

Where she stopped the sign read: 'Madame Sofronie. We Buy Hair Goods of All Kinds.' One flight up Della ran, and paused for a moment, panting. She opened the door.

'Will you buy my hair?' asked Della.

'Yes, I buy hair' said Madame. 'Take your hat off and let's have a look at it.'

Down rippled the brown cascade.

'Twenty dollars', said Madame, lifting the mass of hair with a practiced hand.

'Give it to me quickly,' said Della.

The next two hours went by as if they had wings. She was searching the shops for Jim's present.

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the shops, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a gold watch chain, simple in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by ornamentation- as all good things should do. As soon as she saw it, she knew that it must be Jim's. It was just right for him. Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the remaining eighty-seven cents. Grand as Jim's watch was, he sometimes looked at it with shame on account of the old leather strap that he used instead of a chain.

When Della reached home her excitement gave way a little to prudence and reason. She looked at what was left of her poor hair — and started to work at it with nimble fingers.

Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderful, like a naughty schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror for long- carefully, and critically.

At seven o'clock the coffee was made and the frying-pan on the back of the stove was hot and ready to cook the supper.

Jim was never late. Della held the newly bought chain in her hand and sat in the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his steps on the stairway and she turned pale for just a moment. She had a habit of saying little silent prayers about the simplest everyday things, and she whispered: 'Please God, make him think I am still pretty.'

The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed the door. He looked thin and very serious. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two and had a family to care of! He needed a new overcoat and his shoes were old and worn.

Jim stepped inside the door. Then he stood still. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read, and it terrified her. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, nor any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for. He simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face.

Della wriggled off the table and went to him.

'Jim!' she cried, 'don't look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold it because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow again — you won't mind, do you? I just had to do it. My hair grows very fast, you know. Say "Merry Christmas!" Jim, and let's be happy. You don't know what a nice — what a beautiful, nice gift I've got for you!'

'You've cut off your hair?' asked Jim, slowly, as if he had not yet arrived at that obvious fact even after the hardest mental labour.

'I've cut it off and sold it', said Della. 'Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? My hair is gone, but I'm just the same.'

Jim looked about the room curiously.

'You say your hair is gone?' he said with an air almost of idiocy.

'You needn't look for it', said Della. 'It's sold, I tell you — sold and gone, too. It's Christmas Eve, Jim. Be good to me, for it went for you.'

Jim seemed quickly to wake out of his trance. He drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.

'Don't make any mistake about me, Della', he said, 'I don't think there's anything about a haircut that could make me like my dear wife any less. But if you'll unwrap that package you will see why I was upset for a while at first.'

White and nimble fingers tore at the string and paper. And then an excited scream of joy; and then, alas! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails.

For there lay the combs — the set of combs that Della had worshipped for many months ever since she saw them in a shop window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise shell, with jeweled rims — just the colour to wear in her beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had longed for them without the least hope of possession. And now they were hers, but with her hair gone there could be no use for them.

But she hugged them to her chest, and at last she was able to look up with tearful eyes and a smile and say: „My hair grows so fast, Jim!'

Then Della remembered something else and cried, 'Oh, oh!'

Jim had not yet seen his beautiful gift. She held it out to him eagerly in her open hand. The precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit.

'Isn't it lovely, Jim? I hunted all over the town to find it. You'll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it.'

Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch, put his hands under the back of his head, and smiled.

'Della,' said he, 'let's put our Christmas gifts away and keep them a while. They're too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs.

'And now, let us have our supper. '

1 What do the following words and phrases mean?

- i) flop down \_\_\_\_\_
- ii) whirled \_\_\_\_\_
- iii) cascade \_\_\_\_\_
- iv) garment \_\_\_\_\_
- v) panting \_\_\_\_\_
- vi) proclaiming \_\_\_\_\_
- vii) ornamentation \_\_\_\_\_
- viii) prudence \_\_\_\_\_
- ix) mental labour \_\_\_\_\_
- x) trance \_\_\_\_\_
- xi) hysterical \_\_\_\_\_
- xii) wail \_\_\_\_\_

2 Can you find words in the story that have the following meanings?

- i) a waterfall  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ii) a coat worn outside another or over indoor clothes for warmth in cold weather  
\_\_\_\_\_
- iii) the state of being poor  
\_\_\_\_\_

3 Why did Della change to hysterical tears and wails?

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4 What image has been used to describe Della's hair?

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### 7.2.2 Ironic Contrast

Ironic contrast is achieved by showing the imaginary and the actual situation at the same time. In the following passage William Saroyan describes suicide in a way that is so different from what one would expect in real life.

#### Example 3

Poor Tom. He is sinking to his knees, and somehow, even though it is happening swiftly, it seems that this little action, being the last one of a great man, will go on forever, this sinking to the knees. The room is dim, the music eloquent. There is no blood, no disorder. Tom is sinking to his knees, dying nobly. I myself hear two ladies weeping. They know it's a movie, they know it must be fake, still, they are weeping. Tom is man. He is life. It makes them weep to see life sinking to its knees. The movie will be over in a minute and they will get up and go home, and get down to the regular business of their lives, but now, in the pious darkness of the theatre, they are weeping.

All I know is this: that a suicide is not an orderly occurrence with symphonic music. There was a man once who lived in the house next door to my house when I was a boy of nine or ten. One afternoon he committed suicide, but it took him over an hour to do it. He shot himself through the chest, missed his heart, then shot himself through the stomach. I heard both shots. There was an interval of about forty seconds between the shots. I thought afterwards that during the interval he was probably trying to decide if he ought to go on wanting to be dead or if he ought to try to get well.

Then he started to holler. The whole thing was a mess, materially and spiritually, this man hollering, people running, shouting, wanting to do something and not knowing what to do. He hollered so loud half the town heard him.

This is all I know about regular suicides...the way this man hollered wouldn't please anyone in a movie. It wouldn't make anyone weep with joy.

I think it comes to this: we've got to stop committing suicide in the movies.

(From William Saroyan: 'Love, Death, Sacrifice, and So Forth' in *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze*, Copyright 1989, by William Saroyan foundation).

**Glossary**

**'holler:** shout or yell

**Check Your Progress 2**

1 Restatement is a common device used to emphasize a particular point. Do you find the writer using this technique in the above passage? Where?

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2 Bring out the irony in the passage.

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**7.2.3 Irony in Satire**

Satire is a literary weapon directed against persons or institutions that the author believes should be corrected. The writer often describes a completely different situation, but makes indirect parallels and reference to the things we know, so that we realize what it is that the writer is criticizing.

Satire may be humorous and witty. Humour is the sugar coating which makes the criticism easier to take. A writer of satire uses laughter against a situation, a particular person, or a type of person with the aim of correcting an undesirable situation or human folly, or saving people from committing follies.

**Example 4**

“Yes, Caroline of Brunswick was innocent; and Madam Laffarge never poisoned her husband; and Mary of Scotland never blew up hers; and poor Sophia Dorothea was never unfaithful; and Eve never took the apple — it was a cowardly fabrication of the serpent's.”

(Thackeray: *King George II of England*)

## Literary Devices

In the example quoted above Thackeray is evoking moral indignation at some of the famous names in history. By saying the opposite of what he means, he is emphasizing the true facts about Caroline, Madam Laffarge, Mary of Scotland, Sophia Dorothea, and Eve, and their unfaithfulness to their husbands.

Here is an excerpt from a powerful satire, perhaps the most powerful of all, aimed at improving the status of the Irish people. Ireland was subjected to many commercial and economic Restrictions under the British regime at the time Swift was writing. It had become a question of survival for the Irish people.

### Example 5

I shall now therefore humbly propose my own thoughts, which I hope will not be liable to the least objection.

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked or boiled, and I make no doubt that it will serve in a fricassee.

(Jonathan Swift: *Modest Proposal*)

### Glossary

*'fricassee* a dish made of pieces of bird or other meat cooked and served in thick sauce.

### Check Your Progress 3

1 Do you find the use of extended metaphor in the above passage?

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2 Is the aim of the author to hurt, to improve, or to prevent a situation?

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3 What is the irony in the passage?

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## 7.3 PARADOX

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As a figure of speech, a paradox is an apparently self-contradictory statement which is nevertheless found to be true. A paradoxical situation contains contradictory elements



that put together make sense. For example, the celebration of a fifth birthday anniversary by a twenty-year-old man is paradoxical, but makes sense if the man was born on February 29.

### Example 6

Tell me not, Sweet, I am unkind,  
That from the nunnery  
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind  
to war and arms I fly.

True a new mistress now I chase,  
The first foe in the field;  
And with a stronger faith embrace  
A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such  
As you too shall adore;  
I could not love thee, Dear, so much  
Loved I not honour more.

(Richard Lovelace: *To Lucasta, Going to the Wars*)

The poem is about a soldier who must leave his beloved to fight in a war. He calls the foe in the battle-field his new mistress. The paradox is that he asks his beloved to adore his inconstancy. The fickleness in his affection for his beloved is due to his sense of duty as a soldier. The statement is paradoxical, but can be understood in the total context of the poem.

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## 7.4 ANTITHESIS

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Antithesis refers to the putting together of contrasting ideas or words so as to produce an effect of balance.

### Examples

- 1 My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.
- 2 The prodigal robs his heir; the miser robs himself.
- 3 Excess of ceremony shows want of breeding.

### Check Your Progress 4

- 1 The following poem is divided into two stanzas. In what way does this formal division correspond to the organization of ideas?

At twenty, stooping round about,  
I thought the world a miserable  
place, Truth a trick, faith in doubt,  
Little beauty, less grace.

Now at sixty what I see,  
Although the world is worse by far,  
Stops my heart in ecstasy,  
God, the wonders that there are.

(Archibald Macleish: 'With Age wisdom', from *The Human Season*.  
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2 Read the following passage and answer the questions given below:

May she be granted beauty and yet not  
Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught,  
Or hers before a looking-glass, for such,  
Being made beautiful overmuch, Consider  
beauty a sufficient end,  
Lose natural kindness and maybe  
The heart-revealing intimacy  
That chooses right, and never find a friend. (William  
Butler Yeats: 'A Prayer for My Daughter')

*Glossary*

*distraught*: very anxious or troubled; agitated

i) What kind of beauty does the poet want his daughter to have?

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ii) What are the hazards of „being made beautiful overmuch'? How does the poet illustrate his point?

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## 7.5 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit, we have studied incongruities or discrepancies involved in the use of language, as in Irony, and the use of contradictory or incompatible elements as in a Paradox and Antithesis, which help convey the meaning more effectively.

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## 7.6 KEY WORDS

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**Antithesis**: the putting together of two **opposite** ideas (e.g., 'We want deeds, not words.')

**Irony:** use of words which are clearly opposite to one's meaning, usually with an amusing purpose (e.g., saying *What a nice weather!* when the weather is bad).

**Paradox:** a statement which **seems** to be contradictory, but which has some truth in it. (e.g., „More haste, less speed.“)

**Satire:** a literary word or speech intended to show the foolishness or evil of some establishment or practice in an amusing way.

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## 7.7 SUGGESTED READING

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Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*.

### Answers

#### Check Your Progress 1

- I
- i) fall suddenly
  - ii) turned round quickly
  - iii) waterfall
  - iv) article of dress
  - v) gasping for breath
  - vi) making known
  - vii) adornment
  - viii) carefulness to avoid undesired consequences
  - ix) an effort of the mind
  - x) sleeplike state; half-conscious state
  - xi) uncontrolled; arising from nervous excitement
  - xii) long, loud, high pitched cries

- 2
- i) cascade
  - ii) overcoat
  - iii) poverty

3 Jim bought Della a Christmas gift of combs made of tortoise shell studded with jewels on the edges, which Della had longed to buy all these months but had found too expensive to afford. Della bought a gift for Jim by selling her long beautiful hair, her most prized possession. The realization that she did not now need the combs as she had sold her hair made her cry in an uncontrolled hysterical manner.

4 Della's hair is compared to a brown-coloured waterfall. The hair was wavy and shining and looked like a waterfall. It reached below her knee, and almost covered her body like a garment.

#### Check Your Progress 2

- I Paragraph I : repetition of
- i) *sinking to his knees*
  - ii) *weeping*
- Paragraph 2 : repetition of *shot*  
Paragraph 3 : repetition of *holler*

2 Death and suicide are serious matters, which the author has treated in a non-serious way while giving an account of the two incidents. We, therefore, find an ironic contrast between the author's account and the world of reality.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- 1 Yes. A young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most *delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food*, whether *stewed, roasted, baked or boiled*, and I make no doubt that it will serve in a *fricassee*.
- 2 To prevent a situation.
- 3 *The irony consists in treating children as animals cooked for food.*

**Check Your Progress 4**

- 1 In the first stanza of the poem, the poet makes a statement that the world is a miserable place. In the second stanza he says that the world is a wonderful place. The two stanzas together balance his views.
- 2
  - i) He wants his daughter to be moderately beautiful.
  - ii) A very beautiful woman distracts the attention of other people. It also makes her vain; she loses her natural kindness and can never have good friends.



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