

Commentary on Hoppmann's "Grice, Machine Head and the problem of overexpressed premises"

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Irony is probably one of the most fascinating issues for linguistics and pragmatics. Of course, there are different kinds of irony, which Micheal Hoppmann recalls at the beginning of the paper. I'm fascinated, like Michael Hoppmann, by the verbal irony, because the same utterance P ("what a beautiful dress" can mean (P) as well as (not-P) depending on its context, which is quite challenging for the logical law of non-contradiction.

Pragmatics have different approaches on irony. Mainly, we can find Oswald Ducrot's ideas on polyphony (Ducrot 1984) which states that irony is a double enunciation. This is to say that two voices, in quotation marks, are behind one single utterance: one voice is uttering (P), while another, which is the only one taken in charge by the speaker, is saying (non-P) in the same time. This double enunciation is tied with the classical and contested Gricean account of "communicating the opposite of the literal meaning"; to be clearer, (P) is said but means, in fact (non-P). There is a small problem with a Ducrotian point of view. When it's pouring down outside, and the speaker is saying "Nice weather"!, the double enunciation theory implies that an unknown and (rather stupid or blind) speaker is really saying "Nice weather" while a second voice, which is affiliated to the actual speaker is in fact meaning "Awful weather!". Pragmaticians as Sperber and Wilson solve this incongruity of the first blind "speaker" by developing another idea, which does not need the idea of a double enunciation, but states that irony is systematically referred to a stance which is taken in charge by the speaker relatively to another's one idea or utterance: "type of an echoing allusion to an attributed utterance or thought" (Wilson 2006, p 1724). "Nice weather" is echoing a past utterance, which is not relevant or clearly an opposite to the current situation and from which we can infer the critical and mocking attitude behind it. It may be described as a kind of reported speech, even if it's maybe too strong for a vague echo of the past... I will not go on with the nature of irony and with the differences of definitions and visions in different thought-stimulating papers on irony,

because, first, I am well aware that Michael Hoppmann isn't writing a paper on verbal irony and he doesn't need Relevance Theory's account on irony for his demonstration. He is explicitly supporting a Gricean approach which seems to be a perfect frame to describe peculiarities of the Socratic irony. Secondly, the nature of irony is maybe less relevant for this commentary than the process of locating irony. How can we recognize ironic utterances? I will use here another French theory on irony. Alain Rabatel is a French linguist whose ideas on irony are worth mentioning, since they are related to the main idea that Michael Hoppmann is using in his paper: overexpressed premises.

Rabatel has written some papers on irony vs. humor. In one of his papers, Rabatel uses Ducrot's ideas on double enunciation but refines it a bit: for him, a first point of view is pretended to be taken a charge just before the speaker let implicitly infer his real point of view, which is more relevant than the first one (2012, 43). While doing so, the ironist takes some distance from her target, and mocks the first point of view. And this is why, according to him, irony is tied with over-enunciation or over-expression. In order to let the audience infer the MeaningR, the ironist needs to show a distance with the first point of view that she is mocking and therefore needs intonation markers, obvious movements and facial expressions, clear linguistic markers of distance or a clash between the utterance and its context to let the audience infer the other, often contrary or contradictory, point of view. In brief, it needs overexpression to let the real intended meaningR be inferred from the meaningL.

The main difference between classical irony and Socratic irony is the speaker's posture. And Rabatel mentions that an ironist must rely on 'a strong and indisputable feeling of axiological and/or cognitive superiority, a feeling that permits her to critique or to mock, more or less aggressively, the other point of view' (REF, my translation). In the Socratic irony, Socrates is not uttering his superiority: he proves it by flattering his targets' superiority, targets who do not understand that they are mocked. Socrates is showing his superiority while he is saying a pretended inferiority. In Hoppmann's first example, different linguistic markers permit us to infer the mocking utterances behind what has been said. Socrates is indeed overexpressing his flattery with universal qualifiers, comparisons and hyperboles: 'Whenever, in any view, whoever, all in your possession, not as wise as you are, do not care for me as you do, all of these qualities which the rest of them lack'. Here, it's not only a maxim of quality which is violated, but a maxim of quantity which helps us infer the hidden ironic point of view. In a Socratic irony, hearers are praised while the speaker is denigrating her own intelligence.

This is precisely the reason why I'm puzzled by Michael Hoppmann's second and third examples. In the second one, Sperber and Wilson's echoic theory has found a perfect example here since there is no

doubt that 'bug bad dude' is literally reported speech which highlights its own inadequacy to describe reality. In the third one, the Machine Head's song, 'faggots' 'niggas' and 'spics' are linguistic designations which are explicitly referred as not taken in charge by the speaker: YOUR faggots, YOUR niggas and YOUR spics', and 'YOUR SO-CALLED terrorists'.

Michael considers two criteria to define Socratic irony: a contrast between meaning_L and meaning_R, and an implicit reference to the content of a second or a third party'. In my vision of Socratic irony, I would put forth the question of pretended inferiority as a major criterion as well as a difference of targets: Socratic irony is targeting the statuses and roles of interlocutors in a communicative situation whereas classical verbal irony is targeting the content of what has been said, is more related to what has been said than about who has said it.

Therefore, for me, Tiffany Crutcher's and Machine Head's examples do not pretend inferiority and thus not examples of Socratic irony. Even if I consider Michael's criteria, the second one 'implicit reference to the content of the third party' seems not to apply in the Machine Head's lyrics since 'niggas faggots and spics' are explicitly said as 'not my words' but 'yours'.

I'd even go further: I wonder if these examples are ironic at all. Indeed, many scholars consider that irony is a sufficient condition of taunting. While every irony is taunting, taunting is not always ironic. What Tiffany Crutcher's and Machine Head's examples have in common is to be about metalinguistics. They target an inappropriate – to say the least – use of words and mock the people who use these words in this situation. The speakers pretend for a moment to borrow the words of the opposing parties to widen the gap between the words that have been said and the reality they are supposed to denote. There is, of course, a family resemblance with classical irony, if only because of the double enunciation and the pretence of adopting other people's words. And there is a resemblance with Socratic irony – as I envision it – since it's more targeting the opponent and his words than the content of what has been said. But the inference process is not the same. In classical irony, the content of (P) is not relevant with the context and this lack of relevance lets us infer non-P. In Hoppmann's examples, the inference is triggered because it is not relevant to imagine such words said by such a speaker. The clash is not between what is said and the situation of communication but between what is said what the speaker is supposed to take in charge.

My last words here are echoing Michael Hoppmann's words in his fourth section of the paper. I totally agree with him when he says, for example, 'Machine Head cannot be reasonably expected to defend the racists'. The main difference is that I only see taunting and not irony. More broadly, one of the merits of his paper is precisely to shed light on a mechanism of abductive inference, important in argumentation, which

is triggered by the 'overexpressed' premises. What is overexpressed is a sign which invites us to infer the hidden standpoint. This process seems to have links with Levinson's M-principle. But it makes me think about the relation between overexpressed premises and *ad personam* attacks as well. Although I do not seem to agree with what is at the heart of the article, I think that Michael Hoppmann has touched on a sore point in this paper and I thank him for the stimulating thoughts that his paper provokes.

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