16 Irony, Exaggeration, and Hyperbole: No Embargo on the Cargo!

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Introduction

Suppose Clem claims that "Ezra's a clever guy" and Speranza reacts ironically with "Sure, Ezra's a genius," because she thinks that Ezra isn't clever and that Clem should have known better than to claim he was. This irony *embeds* exaggeration: Clem only claimed that Ezra was clever, not a genius. But Speranza, in her allusion to that claim, exaggerates the claimed cleverness, portraying it as being at genius level. Some questions raised by this are: What modifications, if any, does such embedded exaggeration make to the meaning of the irony? In particular, what modifications does it make to the *affect cargo* of Speranza's irony – her mockery of Clem for his claim, or other emotion or evaluation she expresses implicitly about Clem or his claim by means of the irony? What modifications does it make to the impression that a hearer of Speranza's comment gets of how clever or stupid Ezra is in Speranza's view? How do the modifications come about? This article seeks answers to these questions and others.

Embedded exaggeration is common. It comes in many forms, some more subtle than in the preceding example, as in "He's SUCH a clever guy," "He's SO clever," and "What a clever guy!" The exaggeration can be more elaborate and even absurd as in "Yeah, he's so clever, everyone else can stop work" (in the context of an academic department, say). Embedded exaggeration has been widely held to intensify ironic meaning somehow. This article supports this view, giving a distinctive account of the nature of the intensification and how it comes about.

A crucial aspect of this account is a particular stance on what the "meaning" of an irony is. Often, the main meaning of an irony is portrayed as being a message about the *explicit issue*, such as the issue of how (non)clever Ezra is, leaving the expression of affect cargo – for example, mockery of Clem – to be viewed merely as an accompanying message. Often, also, the message about the explicit issue is portrayed as some sort of inversion of the overt content of the ironic utterance. The overt content in our example is that Ezra is a genius, and the inverted content is that he is, for instance, very stupid. By contrast, this article takes Speranza to express one unified message, and takes this message to *be* the affect cargo. Certainly, that affect cargo, in involving the

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specific claim Clem made, does indirectly involve the explicit issue. Moreover, the hearer may be able to conjecture something about Speranza's specific view of the explicit issue, by considering that affect cargo (her mockery). But such conjecturing is not an essential part of understanding the utterance. One way of putting the point is that, for instance, Speranza's mockingly ironic "Sure, Ezra's a genius" is more like

(i) the (nonironic) utterance "I find Clem mock-worthy for claiming that Ezra is clever"

where the affect cargo about Clem is now made explicit, than it is like

(ii) the (nonironic) utterance "Oh yeah? Ezra's actually pretty stupid!"

The utterance in (i) is, simply, about *Speranza's affect concerning Clem*, not about Ezra in any direct way. To understand the utterance in (i), a hearer need only realize that there is something about Ezra, Clem, and his claim that leads Speranza to find Clem mock-worthy for making that claim. What Speranza's specific view about Ezra's level of cleverness is – for instance, that Ezra is fairly stupid – is not something the hearer needs to grasp in order to qualify as understanding (i). Equally, it is not part of what the hearer needs to grasp in understanding the ironic utterance "Sure, Ezra's a clever guy/a genius." Of course, the hearer *might* for some reason go on to try to discern what Speranza's specific view of the explicit issue (Ezra's level of cleverness) is. But this endeavor is just as much an optional extra, and a subsidiary matter, as it is with utterance (i). Another useful analogy is that if someone says "I really like my new car" a hearer might wonder what the new car is like and why the speaker is so fond of it – nevertheless, if the hearer does not wonder about this, or does not come to a plausible conclusion about it, he is not showing a lack of understanding of the utterance.

I should stress that I am not saying that the utterance in (i) is equivalent to the ironic utterance we started with, only that it is similar enough in a certain way.

This view of irony – that the meaning, or at least its main component, *is* the affect cargo – is compatible with the two most salient existing types of approaches to irony: pretense-based and echoing-based approaches. (For the former – Clark & Gerrig, 2007; Currie, 2006, 2010; Kumon-Nakamura et al., 2007; Récanati, 2007: 224–226; Walton, 1990: 222–224; for the latter – Sperber, 1984; Sperber & Wilson, 1981; Wilson, 2006; Wilson & Sperber, 2012.) Popa-Wyatt (2014), in a detailed examination of the two types, states that they cast irony as *being* a matter of attitude expression (i.e., affect expression), with at least some theorists explicitly denying that an irony implicates an "inverted content" about the explicit issue, such as that Ezra is very stupid. On the other hand, some authors have attempted to add a treatment of inverted content as such, as in Camp (2012). But, overall, the approaches concentrate on what the speaker of the irony is doing, such as pretending to believe something, echoing a claim that has been made, and dissociating from such as claim or expectation. It does not matter to most of this chapter what these approaches specifically propose. The important point is that they are able to leave the question

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of what the hearer conjectures about the ironic speaker's specific view of the explicit issue as an additional, subsidiary concern.

Thus, the article's approach to some extent takes an established stance toward irony. Nevertheless, it has some distinctive aspects:

- It distills the *irony-as-affect-expression* idea out, freeing it from commitments to any particular existing type of approach to irony such as pretense-based or echo-based ones.
- It clarifies what is involved in the hearer nevertheless deriving, as a natural, constitutive part of understanding an irony, some information about what the speaker's view of the explicit issue is. The approach holds that this information casts her view in an *affect-framed* way. To continue our example, the information might be to the following effect: "Ezra is stupid enough for Speranza to be mocking Clem for thinking he's clever." The level of stupidity is here framed as being one that would be suitable for stimulating the affect in question, in the particular speaker (Speranza) in the current particular discourse context. It is not framed as being on a specified part of some scale of cleverness.
- The affect-framed information is the basis for any more specific working-out of the speaker's view that the hearer might optionally go on to do. And, in particular, such working-out is *not* guided by trying to find some inversion of the irony's overt wording (such as "Ezra is a genius").
- With the help of this affect-framing notion, the approach provides a more detailed, specific and systematic account of *how embedded exaggeration works* within irony than has previously been available.
- In particular, the approach takes account of the *affect cargoes that exaggerations themselves tend to carry*, such as the amazement or celebration that might normally be carried by a *non*ironic exaggerative statement that "Ezra is a genius." There is then a complex, indirect connection between such affect cargo and the irony's own affect cargo (Speranza's mockery of Clem in our example).
- The approach makes the key claim that an irony with embedded exaggeration *is itself an exaggeration as well as an irony.* This exaggeration is different from the embedded one. Instead, it is an exaggeration of the discrepancy between the speaker's view of the explicit issue (e.g., Speranza's view that Ezra is somewhat stupid) and what was claimed/expected about it (for instance, that Ezra is clever).
- The approach more carefully distinguishes between different potential targets for the affect conveyed in irony (different things that the affect is about).

The example, in the second bullet point, of "affect-framed" information about the ironic speaker's view was effectively that the discrepancy between Ezra's noncleverness in Speranza's view and what Clem claimed was appropriate, in context, for leading Speranza to mock Clem for his claim. So, not only does an irony not convey specifically what the speaker's view is, the limited information it does convey about that view is centered on the affect cargo.

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That affect-framed information arises naturally, because the affect cargo exists precisely because of the discrepancy.

The advocated treatment of embedded exaggeration respects the insight of Popa-Wyatt (2020a, b) that irony with embedded exaggeration is far from being a simple bolting together of irony and the embedded exaggeration. It is not a compounding of figures of speech in any straightforward sense. Rather, the embedded exaggeration modulates the nature of the ironic meaning in an intricate and indirect way. However, the present article goes further in explicating that modulation. Continuing with our Speranza/Ezra/Clem example, the key to the modulation is that the embedded exaggeration about the explicit issue (e.g., the exaggerative use of the genius notion), which of course isn't actually a real exaggeration the speaker herself is engaging in (she does not take Ezra to be clever at all, let alone to be a genius), does nevertheless imply a real exaggeration by the speaker – an exaggeration of the discrepancy underlying the irony. *This* exaggeration amplifies the ironic affect cargo, the mockery of Clem, because of the general nature of exaggeration, rather than because of anything specific to do with irony. This amplification *in turn* tends to intensify the noncleverness of Ezra that Speranza indirectly conveys to a hearer.

The plan of this chapter is as follows. The next section expands some of what has been said so far to provide a fuller overview of the proposed approach to exaggerative irony (irony containing embedded irony). The section after that, namely "Irony and Exaggeration Separately," provides some more detail on the approach's account of irony irrespective of exaggeration and exaggeration irrespective of irony. The succeeding section, "More on Irony with Embedded Exaggeration," uses those specifics in returning to and deepening the account of exaggerative irony. The section "Further Discussion" includes a speculative exploration of the relationship between irony and the nature of thought, examining the way the chapter's proposal presses toward a simulation-based view of thought about affect. It also sets out some possible research questions for future (theoretical and) empirical investigation that are stimulated by the chapter's proposal. Finally, there is a "Summary and Conclusions" section.

There are two important points I need to make at the outset about the coverage and theoretical positioning of this chapter. First, I explicitly address only verbal irony, leaving aside situational irony, dramatic irony, irony expressed in nonlinguistic media, and other types. Second, there are many disparate characterizations of verbal irony, a difficulty that is often pointed out (e.g., Kreuz & Johnson, 2020). So, following typical practice, I mainly rely on readers agreeing that the examples I employ are indeed ironic.

The questions that this chapter addresses arose, in my own case, in research (Barnden, 2017, 2020a) toward a detailed processing model of irony – detailed enough, ideally, to be implementable as a computer program in some future project. The chapter further develops core theoretical ideas from that work. I have not developed a computer program based on this chapter's approach, but computational modeling is the out-of-sight *geist*, and its demands have deeply affected the ideas. Also, the work on my own nascent irony model, ATT-Iro,

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owes much to my earlier, partially computer-implemented, ATT-Meta theory of metaphor processing (Barnden, 2015, 2016), and has been unified with that metaphor theory (Barnden, 2020a). However, the present chapter implicitly involves adjustments and refinements to what I have said in such works.

Irony with Embedded Exaggeration: Overview of the Account

More on the Main Claims

Here I expand on and add to the claims made in the previous section.

Some basic examples of verbal irony that will recur throughout this chapter are (1a, b) and (2a, b) as follows.

(1a) "Sure, Ezra's a clever guy," said ironically by Speranza, in reaction to a claim by Clem that "Ezra is clever."

(1b) "Sure, Ezra's a genius," in the same discourse situation and other circumstances as (1a). (1b) is an *exaggerative* version of (1a).

(2a) "Nice weather" said ironically by Sparta, on seeing that the weather clashes with a "norm" or general expectation that, at the current time of year and in the current location, the weather is pleasant.

(2b) "Wonderful weather," in the same discourse situation and other circumstances as (2a). (2b) is an exaggerative version of (2a).

It will mostly not matter whom the speakers say these sentences to, whether to themselves, some hearer Harry, or to Clem himself in the case of (1a) and (1b). But some considerations later depend to an extent on who the addressee(s) (intended hearer[s]) or other hearers are.

As usual, "speaking" and "hearing" in this chapter are short for speaking-or-writing and hearing-or-reading. For the sake of simplified pronoun usage, I usually recruit female speakers (e.g., Speranza, Sparta), male claimants (e.g., Clem, Clarence), male hearers (usually Harry), and male persons involved in explicit issues in ironies (e.g., Ezra). The explicit issue in (1a, b) is Ezra's cleverness level, and in (2a, b) it is the issue of how good the current weather is.

I now consider what (1b) adds to (1a) by first discussing the meaning of (1a) and then considering how (1b) changes things.

The Nonexaggerative Case (1a)

Suppose Speranza ironically says (1a) to Harry, with mild scorn concerning Clem for making his claim. Ironic affect cargo can take many forms other than scorn, and need not be directed at a person, but in this section I stick to scorn of Clem for definiteness and simplicity. I assume she feels scorn because (i) she sees an important discrepancy between Clem's claim and her own view of Ezra, *and* (ii) she feels that Clem *should* have a more informed view of Ezra than he seems to have. On (i), perhaps Speranza thinks Ezra is stupid, or

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thinks he is merely of a thoroughly average level and type of cleverness, and so shouldn't be picked out as being "clever." On (ii), perhaps she thinks Clem knows Ezra well.

As regards the impression that Harry gets about Speranza's view of Ezra's cleverness, I claim that the most that can normally be assumed is that: Harry thinks that *the discrepancy between Speranza's view of Ezra's cleverness and Clem's claim is of an appropriate type and extent, in the particular discourse context and the situation at hand, to have led to her expressing mild scorn of Clem for making his claim.* (This assumes that he correctly picks up on the type and intensity of affect that Speranza is expressing. I say something on this matter in the subsection "Detecting and Reasoning about Affect" (p. 282) of the present section.) In particular, I claim that it is not the business of a theory of irony to assume that Harry comes to any specific conjecture about Ezra's level of cleverness in Speranza's view – for example, that Ezra is very stupid, or is of average cleverness – let alone for the theory to define what that specific conjecture would be. Despite this, it is plausible that, under typical circumstances, Harry does at least take Speranza to view Ezra as being less clever than Clem claims him to be.

The Main Effect of the Embedded Exaggeration in (1b)

First, notice that the term "embedded exaggeration" is slightly misleading, as the ironic utterance is actually not performing <u>that</u> exaggeration. Obviously, Speranza is not claiming that Ezra is very clever, let alone a genius. Rather, Speranza's overt statement that Ezra is a genius *would have been* an exaggeration had she uttered it nonironically. It's an embedded would-be exaggeration.

But I do nevertheless claim that Speranza *really is exaggerating something*; in other words, that her ironic utterance is at the very same time a real exaggeration. This exaggeration is closely connected to the would-be, embedded one, but importantly different from it. It is not an exaggeration of Ezra's cleverness. Rather, what it exaggerates is the *discrepancy* between her view of Ezra and Clem's claim. Note that (1a) just preserves the actual discrepancy between Speranza's view and Clem's claim: Speranza is presenting Clem's claim as it really is, as the proposition that she diverges from. But with (1b), the discrepancy, which is still really between Speranza's view and the view of Ezra as *clever*, is exaggerated as being between Speranza's view and the view that Ezra is a *genius*. Notice that such an exaggeration exists *whatever* Speranza's view is, as long as it ascribes less cleverness to Ezra than Clem's claim does. That Ezra is a genius is then automatically further from her view than that he is clever.

We have to be slightly careful here, because, of course, being clever does include the case of being a genius: one could say that cleverness covers a vast region of the positive half of the scale, including the genius point or substretch. So, a more careful statement might be: that Ezra is a genius is further from her view than the range of levels of cleverness that his level *would typically* lie in if he

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is simply characterized as clever. But there is no need to keep this complication in mind, and I'll proceed on the basis of my earlier, rougher comment, at the end of the previous paragraph.

Thus, an exaggerative irony – an irony containing a would-be exaggeration, of the explicit issue – is also and at the very same time a real exaggeration, of the relevant discrepancy.

It will help now to take a look at what is involved in understanding an ordinary, simple exaggeration, such as "Peter has millions of pets." Someone who makes this utterance is likely to be conveying some affect. This affect could be amazement, for instance. Exaggerations often, and perhaps usually, have such affect cargoes. (The exaggerations might then be called hyperboles, in one common use of that term – more on this later.) Apart from the affect cargo, let's assume that the utterance conveys that Peter has very many pets, without of course making it clear how many, but very probably far fewer than millions. If the speaker had simply said "Peter has very many pets," the hearer might take the speaker to be expressing some affect such as mild surprise, but the surmised affect is likely to be less intense than the amazement conveyed with "Peter has millions of pets." So, notice carefully that the exaggerating utterance using "millions" is not just pulling the number of pets to a high level but also probably pulling the affect cargo intensity to a high level, or at least to a significantly higher level than would otherwise have been the case. The reason for this pulling-up of the affect strength is that *the exaggeration imports affective intensity from the literal meaning* of *"Peter has millions of pets."* If Peter really did have millions, the speaker would no doubt be amazed to an extreme degree. The intensity of affect probably gets attenuated when the sentence is used as an exaggeration, but is still open to staying at a high level (e.g., still being describable as amazement as opposed to descending to mere surprise). The level or range of levels that is actually conveyed to a particular hearer (if any such levels are conveyed to him at all) will depend on intonation, the speaker's facial expression and demeanor, other things she is saying in the discourse, Harry's own views about pets, and possibly other discourse factors.

Thus, the main moral from the example is that part of the effect of the exaggeration is to increase the intensity of the affect cargo beyond that of the cargo (if any) that would have been carried by a corresponding nonexaggerating utterance such as "Peter has very many pets."

Going back to (1b), we said that it exaggerates the discrepancy between Speranza's view of Ezra and Clem's claim. We can regard this discrepancy as being analogous to the number of pets in the previous paragraph, so that the exaggeration of the discrepancy magnifies the attendant affect cargo beyond what would have been carried by a corresponding nonexaggerating utterance. That utterance would have been (1a). So, the exaggeration of the discrepancy comes with an affect cargo that is more than the affect cargo of (1a). That affect cargo was mild scorn. So, one prime possibility is that the intensity of scorn is increased. The point is that this claim of intensification is based on

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theorizing just about exaggeration, and *not* specifically about irony. The same sort of intensification would happen with a *non*ironic, exaggerative comment about the discrepancy such as "Clem's view of Ezra's cleverness couldn't be more different from mine."

Another in-principle possibility, for the intensification of the affect cargo, is that a new affect type is added rather than that an existing type of affect is intensified. For instance, Speranza might be expressing not only intensified scorn but also some amusement, say. Taking the possibility into account, it is useful to say that the affect cargo is *"amplified"* by embedded exaggeration rather than "intensified". Amplification includes both the possibility that existing affect types are intensified and the possibility that new ones are added.

In brief, *the amplified ironic affect cargo arising from the embedded exaggeration is just the affect cargo of the ironic utterance considered as an exaggeration of the relevant discrepancy*.

Interestingly, the increase in scorn can now work back to affect the severity of any conjecture that Harry does happen to make of how nonclever Ezra is in Speranza's view. Notice that Harry as hearer of (1a) or of (1b) takes Speranza's scorn or other affect cargo to have been caused by the discrepancy the irony is based on – crucially, caused by the *actual* one, between Speranza's view and Clem's *actual* claim, and *not* by the magnified discrepancy between Speranza's view and the *magnified version* of Clem's claim that appears in the ironic utterance (1b). The more that that cargo is amplified by that embedded exaggeration, the bigger the discrepancy that Harry is likely to surmise (if he thinks about the size of the discrepancy at all). Then – provided Harry knows what Clem's actual claim was – the bigger that Harry surmises the discrepancy to be, the less clever he will take Ezra to be in Speranza's view. Of course, if he doesn't know what Clem's claim was, he doesn't have a reference point from which to estimate Speranza's view.

To summarize so far, the magnification involved in the embedded exaggeration can have a processing effect within Harry that is as follows:

> Embedded, hence merely would-be, exaggeration of Clem's claim →
>
> real exaggeration of the discrepancy between Speranza's and Clem's views →
>
> Harry perceives a bigger IRONIC AFFECT CARGO than he would otherwise have done →
>
> on the basis of this affect cargo he conjectures a bigger discrepancy between Speranza's view from Clem's ACTUAL CLAIM than he would otherwise have done →
>
> Harry conjectures a lower cleverness (within Speranza's view) than he would otherwise have done.

I said that the embedded exaggeration *can* have the depicted effect, because, as I stressed previously, I do not assume that Harry necessarily goes to the lengths of trying to work out how nonclever Speranza takes Ezra to be. His processing may stop with just perceiving the affect cargo and its relationship to the discrepancy.

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An Additional Effect

There is a further turn of the screw in the story. This is that Speranza is exaggerating the discrepancy between her view and Clem's claim not only by (ostensibly) magnifying Ezra's cleverness as such. Rather, *this magnification also drags in some affect cargo that further increases the discrepancy*. By analogy to the millions-of-pets example, if "Ezra's a genius" were literally stated, it would carry an affect cargo such as amazement, celebration, envy, or fear. Let's fix on celebration, for brevity. This celebration would be imported (with probable attenuation) into a nonironic exaggerative use of "Ezra's a genius." I now propose *that it is also imported into an ironic exaggerative use*, that is, when embedded in an irony as in (1b).

But I propose that attenuation, of the celebration, does *not* apply here. Remember that (1b) is not actually performing an exaggeration of Ezra's cleverness. So, the "genius" level cleverness is *not* interpreted as indicating some lower level of cleverness. Speranza's actual view of Ezra is contrasted with an imaginary view of him as a *genius*, and not just as some very clever person who is short of genius-hood. So, as there is no reduction from genius-hood, there is no need either to postulate any attenuation of the normally attendant celebration.

But, going further on this line, I propose that the scenario with which Speranza's view is contrasted is not simply one in which Ezra is a genius, but one in which Ezra is a genius *and this fact is being celebrated*. I'll be vague in this chapter about who might be doing the celebrating. It can be an imaginary person, as the scenario is imaginary.

Now, in Speranza's actual view, Ezra is at least somewhat nonclever. *This* is presumably not to be celebrated. So, we have an additional difference between Speranza's view and the scenario she overtly presents with her utterance, on top of the discrepancy we considered in our analysis earlier. The exaggerated discrepancy is not just in how clever Ezra is but also in the celebration being included on one side but not on the other.

As we have a greater exaggeration of the discrepancy than we had before we considered the celebration, we conclude, by our reasoning in the previous subsection about how affect gets amplified in exaggerations in general, the ironic affect cargo is further amplified.

Thus, in all, the ironic cargo is amplified not just by virtue of the magnification of Ezra's cleverness by the embedded exaggeration but also by virtue of the celebration or other affect cargo that this stated magnified cleverness (genius-level cleverness) imports (brings along with it).

And then, because of the potential effect of the ironic affect cargo on Harry's thinking, *both the cleverness magnification and its attendant affect cargo the celebration can affect now nonclever he estimates Ezra to be in Speranza's view*, if be bothers to think about this.

Notice carefully that the affect cargo, such as celebration, imported by the embedded would-be exaggeration does not itself become a part of the *ironic*

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affect cargo. It is merely something that indirectly influences the latter cargo, by magnifying the discrepancy that we have discussed. Also, keep in mind that the imported affected cargo is *not*, in general, exactly the affect cargo the exaggeration would have had if it had been used nonironically. *That* affect cargo would probably have been an attenuated version of the affect cargo of a literal use of the wording. Rather, what is imported is that literal-use affect cargo itself.

The Effect of the Embedded Exaggeration in (2b)

The exaggerated irony (2b) can be treated in fundamentally the same way as (1b). But utterances (2a, b) differ from (1a, b) in two ways that we need to account for. The first is that (2a, b), as presented, do not involve any specific claimant. I assume that not even Sparta herself, prior to today, formulated a specific expectation about the weather today. (If we supposed she had, then the example would be somewhat similar to (1a, b), with herself in place of Clem.) Rather, she is consciously or unconsciously aware of the *general* expectation that the weather is pleasant, and then notices that the weather today departs from it. And a general expectation can well be in the form of a default, not a definite proposition that the weather in the current location at the current time of the year will *definitely* be good. So, the weather today does not even prove that the expectation is somehow illegitimate as a general expectation – the weather today just serves as an exception to the expectation. For an expectation to be violated by an exception is not for it to be defective. So, what is the affect cargo of the irony directed at, and what type of affect does it involve? Later I will discuss this sort of issue further, but for now I just propose that a main possibility for the effect cargo is that *Sparta is disappointed about the departure of the weather from the general expectation.* That is, the affect cargo is *directed at the discrepancy*, not at the general expectation as such, or at anyone who might have expressed it or believed it, or at anyone who might have formed a specific expectation about today on the basis of it.

The bigger such a discrepancy between (general) expectation and reality, the bigger the disappointment. So, exaggeration of the discrepancy as in (2b) tends to increase the disappointment. This is an amplification of the ironic affect cargo. So, as before, if a hearer conjectures what Sparta's actual view of the weather is, he will tend to conjecture a more negative view than in the case of (2a). The affect-framed description of Sparta's view is on the lines of *The discrepancy between Sparta's view of the weather and the normally expected weather is big enough and of a type that, in context, is leading her to express disappointment, at the intensity that she is doing so.*

The second difference between (2a, b) and (1a, b) is that in (2a, b) *the explicit issue itself is intrinsically affective*, in being a matter of *how good* the current weather is, whereas the explicit issue in (1a, b) is not affective. (The terms "clever" and "genius" there are of course typically used in an approving way – that is, they have an accompanying positively valenced affect cargo – but in themselves they are just about mental capability. Someone's having great

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mental ability may be good – or bad, perhaps depending on how good/evil the person is! – but this is not something said by the terms themselves.) I point out this difference in order to express a caution; namely, the affect intrinsically involved in the explicit issue should not be muddled up with the ironic affect cargo. The goodness or otherwise of the weather is a distinct affectual matter from the affect cargo of disappointment or whatever. The former affect is about the current weather itself, the latter is about its departure from the general expectation.

Others such as Popa-Wyatt (2014, 2020a) have suggested that embedded exaggeration can amplify the affect cargo. However, as far as I know this chapter's proposal is unique in making any intensification of the conveyed message about the explicit issue itself be, at least primarily, an indirect result of affect-cargo amplification. I hedge here by saying "primarily" because it is certainly possible that familiarity with particular, frequently used exaggerative wording in irony, such as "genius" or "wonderful," may lead entrenchment to the creation of a shortcut to a particular opposing value, such as very stupid or terrible. But it remains merely a shortcut, not a fundamental feature of the way irony works.

Detecting and Reasoning about Affect

The preceding account assumes that hearers are at least reasonably good at guessing the affect that a speaker is expressing in utterances, notably ironic ones. Most theories of irony do give weight to the affect cargo, and must similarly assume good affect detection. But the present account makes the detected (or rather, conjectured) affect cargo to be the hub around which everything else revolves, so the issue of affect-cargo detection is made yet more salient.

Part of this hub status is that any processing the hearer does toward conjecturing the speaker's actual view of the explicit issue (e.g., conjecturing how clever Speranza thinks Ezra is) involves inferencing about affect, more than other accounts apparently suggest. This is a fundamental feature of the account that bears much upon the question of how irony relates to thought, as discussed in the subsection "Irony and Thought" (p. 299) in the Further Discussion section.

On the detection front, much work has been done on "cues" to irony i.e., clues, hints, or signals that an utterance is ironic. Matters considered have included the presence of embedded exaggeration, special lexis within utterances (e.g., wording starting the utterance such as "Sure" and "Oh great," which, incidentally, could be analyzed as mild forms of exaggeration), the intonation with which the utterance is orally delivered, orthographic devices such as capitalization in written ironies, facial expression including such things as eye rolling, and past behavior of the particular speaker (Attardo, 2000a; Colston, 2020; Kreuz & Johnson, 2020; Kreuz & Roberts, 1995; Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano-Palacio, 2021; Tabacaru, 2020). Many such cues are also clues as to type and strength

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of the affect cargo. A sarcastic tone of voice is easy to identify, for instance. Angry or scornful expressions seem fairly easy to notice. When the affect cargo is humor, then of course facial expressions and laughter may help. Knowing the relationship between the speaker and anyone whose claim the speaker is ironically reacting to can help make guesses between alternative possibilities, such as real criticism and friendly teasing. Thus, there are good prospects for the account's enhanced affect-centeredness not to fail in respect of needed affect-cargo detection.

Irony and Exaggeration Separately

Ironies (Putting Aside Exaggeration)

Traditional Definitions of Irony

As noted earlier, this chapter's stance that the meaning of an irony is (mainly) its affect cargo, with any message about the explicit issue being a subsidiary and derivative matter, is in line with much previous research, while distilling and extending the previous views in certain ways. However, I should briefly note the contrast between this chapter's view and definitions of verbal irony given in dictionaries.

For instance, the definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (full online version) is: "The expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect." So the "meaning" of, for example, (1a) must be an opposite of "Ezra is clever," and is about the explicit issue. The affect cargo, in the form of humor or emphasis, is left as a *additional purpose* for uttering the irony, not as a part of the meaning, let alone as the whole or main part of the meaning.

A definition that is closer to this chapter's stance is this one from *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (1961 edition): "humor, ridicule or light sarcasm that adopts a mode of speech the intended implication of which is the opposite of the literal sense of the words (as when expressions of praise are used where blame is meant)." This does seem to equate being ironic with expressing an affect cargo, with the conveying of the "intended implication" (e.g., that Ezra is not clever) now viewed as some sort of tool for that expression. However, the definition, in my view, goes too far in supposing that there always is a specific "intended implication" (a proposition that the hearer is expected to grasp) about the explicit issue.

Oppositeness, and Vagueness of Speakers' Views

The preceding pair of dictionary definitions say that the intended message about the explicit issue is at least normally the "opposite" of what is overtly said. While the research literature also sometimes appeals to oppositeness,

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this chapter agrees with many researchers that have rejected oppositeness as being too restrictive or ill-defined to qualify as the relationship between what the intended message and what the speaker overtly says or what was claimed or expected (e.g., Athanasiadou, 2017; Burgers & Steen, 2017; Colston, 2017; Fogelin, 2011: 10). Such researchers (and also dictionaries of literary terms such as Baldick, 1990) emphasize that all that is needed is some suitable level of contrast or discrepancy, not oppositeness, between what has been claimed or expected and what the speaker thinks the actual situation involves. In (1a, b) the level of cleverness that Speranza actually attributes to Ezra does not need to be opposite, in any strict sense, to the level Clem claims, let alone to the level of genius that Speranza exaggerates it to. We can make the point maximally crisp in the following somewhat fantastical way. Suppose we could measure cleverness levels numerically, with 0 being some typical level, and 1,000 being genius level. If Speranza takes Clem to be assigning a cleverness level of 30 to Ezra, the level she herself privately attributes to Ezra need not be –30, let alone –1000.

But, even worse, there is no guarantee that any such quantitative scale of cleverness, or even a qualitative one, is consistently involved in producing and understanding utterances concerning cleverness in the first place. Even if there were, it is not clear what scale points or ranges are signified by words such as "clever," "genius," "ingenious," and "canny," or similarly negative words such as "stupid," "idiotic," and "moronic." And if there is no scale to which such words and corresponding concepts consistently relate, then it is even more up in the air what "the opposite" of the meaning of "clever," or "genius," and so on is. Very similar points apply to words that one might apply to weather such as "wonderful" in (2b).

But, interestingly, even if we reject oppositeness, the discrepancy motivating an irony is typically in roughly the opposite *direction* to a direction implied by the ironist's overt comment. This is clear with Speranza's use of "genius" in (1b). She is overtly saying something in the direction of more cleverness than was claimed, whereas in fact believing a cleverness level lying in the opposite direction, that of less cleverness than what was claimed. When she is nonexaggeratedly ironic, as in "Sure, Ezra is clever," the question of direction is less clear, but this overt claim is still facing in the direction of higher cleverness, in that "clever" does not impose any upper limit on cleverness whereas it does have some minimum requirement. So, again, the level of cleverness that Speranza believes is in the opposite *direction* to what was claimed by Clem. It is possible that talk of "opposite" meanings in characterizations of irony should only ever have been taken in the weak sense of oppositeness of direction along a scale, not in the strong sense oppositeness of position on a scale.

This chapter's approach declines to have an opinion on what the relationship is between the speaker's view of the explicit issue and what she says or the claim/expectation she is alluding to, other than to say that there is a discrepancy and that, in context, it is appropriate for motivating the type and intensity of affect that she is expressing.

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And indeed, depending on what the explicit issue is, it may be quite plausible that the speaker doesn't have any very specific view in the first place. Speranza might just have a vague sense of marked stupidity in Ezra, but be unable to characterize his stupidity more precisely. This would be enough to motivate being ironic in response to Clem's claim. Sparta might only have a vague sense of bad weather when she wakes up because the light through the curtains seems greyish and there seems to be a sound of wind and rain.

I do assume that there is some important discrepancy between the speaker's view of the explicit issue and what was claimed or expected about it. The hearer surely realizes that there is some discrepancy between Speranza's view of Ezra and his being clever, and a good guess is that Speranza thinks he is not clever, in some way and to some degree. However, it would be possible for Speranza to say (1a) ironically in reaction to someone who should have realized that Ezra was *extremely* clever but only seems to think he is somewhat above the normal level. In this case, the discrepancy goes in the direction of higher cleverness and not in the opposite direction, and (1a) is a type of ironic understatement. This point highlights the extreme, context-sensitive variability in what counts as a discrepancy that can motivate irony.

The Range of Affect Types in Ironic Cargoes

Affect of many types has been proposed as part of irony affect cargo (see, e.g., Gibbs, 2007; Kumon-Nakamura et al., 2007; Dynel, 2018; Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Watling, 2020). Particular types that are commonly mentioned are contempt, bitterness, criticism (which may fall short of sarcasm or ridicule), and teasing, and there are types I regard as deserving more attention, such as annoyance, disappointment, regret, relief, and gladness. The affect cargo can be multifarious – Speranza in (1a, b) might not only be scornful of Clem but also disappointed and surprised about his low level of competence in judging cleverness.

A particular note about echo-based approaches to irony: here, the discrepancy-based affect is involved in the ironist's "dissociating" from what she's "echoing." "Dissociation" is a vague and ambiguous term, and it's worth pointing out that she's not just *refraining from endorsing* what's echoed, or claiming its falsity, but also expressing affect of any of a wide range of types (see, e.g., Burgers & Steen, 2017; Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017; Willison, 2017). In particular, Ruiz de Mendoza and Lozano-Palacio (2021) cast dissociation, considered as attitude with a broad nature, as being able to be contextually parametrized into particular forms such as skepticism, derision, and criticism.

The reason for emphasizing the variety of possible affect types is that it interacts with the concern of the next subsection.

The Diverse Targets for Affect in Irony

The consideration of embedded exaggeration in irony highlights the following point. In analyzing irony, it is important to keep in mind the distinctions between (at least) the three classes of affect listed in the following bullet points.

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All are sorts of affect that the speaker may be conveying in an ironic utterance, but they are directly *about* different things – they have different *direct targets*.

- *Speaker's Explicit-Issue Affect.* For instance, Sparta's negative evaluation of the weather in (2a, b). The explicit issue here is the intrinsically and explicitly affective matter of the goodness/badness of the weather. But a speaker's explicit-issue affect can also arise implicitly in a case like (1a). Even under the assumption that ascribing noncleverness does not *intrinsically* involve affect on the part of the ascriber, it may be that people do nevertheless feel some extent of disapproval when they think of someone being nonclever. Then such disapproval by the speaker could be part of what the irony conveys.
- *Blemish Affect.* For instance, Speranza's mockery of Clem for being wrong about Ezra. As I discussed, I include here also affect directed at a wrong or defective claim, rather than directed at the claimant of such a claim, and I include affect directed at a wrong or merely unfulfilled general expectation, rather than directed at people who has expressed or believed it. The affect, whatever it is targeted at (e.g., claim, claimant, expectation, society for constructing that expectation), need not be severe or hostile, and can be a matter just of teasing or being humorous.
- *Discrepancy Affect.* For instance, Speranza's possible disappointment in (2a,b) that the weather turned out bad, thus departing from the general expectation. But other affect types are possible here, including positive ones such as relief. The affect is directly targeted at the discrepancy.

One, two, or all three of these can be simultaneously present in an irony, but if only one is then it needs to be Blemish or Discrepancy affect. Notice also that Speaker's Explicit-Issue affect is not the affect adhering to the overt explicit-issue wording of the irony, such as "Ezra is clever/a genius" or "the weather is wonderful," and so for instance it is not the celebration discussed in the subsection "An Additional Effect" (p. 280) of the previous section.

As an example of the possibility of Speaker's Explicit-Issue affect being missing, suppose someone, Cliff, has claimed that he would be wearing a red tie, but turns up with a blue one, and Speranza ironically says "I see you're wearing a red tie." There is no reason to think she is expressing any affect about the mere fact that Cliff has a red tie on. Nevertheless, my impression is that most examples of irony discussed in the literature do have Speaker's Explicit-Issue affect, whether because the issue intrinsically involves affect, for instance when it is the issue of how good the weather is, or because affect is a natural concomitant of the issue, as might be the case when ascribing cleverness.

I now turn to Blemish affect and Discrepancy affect. This chapter's proposal has it that at least one of these is always present in irony, but it might only be one of them.

There is a consensus in the field that irony is motivated by some discrepancy. In particular, a discrepancy of some sort is what *motivates* Blemish affect. Claims being wrong or expectations being unrealistic or unfulfilled is a matter

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of discrepancy between the claim or expectation and how things are (in the speaker's view). But it is important to note that Blemish affect is nevertheless not (in general) *directly* about the discrepancy itself. Speranza mocks Clem for making a claim that has a discrepancy with reality, but what her affect is directed at is Clem himself or his making of the claim (alternative analyses are possible here).

She may have entirely different affect directed at the discrepancy itself (Discrepancy affect). This is clearer with a variant of (2a, b). Suppose someone, Clarence, who should know better, has specifically forecast that the weather would be nice today. It turns out to be bad. Sparta then says (2a) or (2b), mocking or otherwise criticizing Clarence for his forecast. But, separately, she might be either disappointed or relieved about the discrepancy itself, that is, the discrepancy between the actual poor weather and the predicted nice weather. The more normal case, no doubt, is for her to be disappointed. But she might be relieved if the rain and so forth excuses her from some gardening that she would otherwise have had to do (she doesn't like gardening). Her criticism of Clarence is motivated by the discrepancy, but is not directed at it, whereas her disappointment or relief is both motivated by and directed at it. And Blemish and Discrepancy affect elements could be of completely different types; for example, criticism versus relief, or amusement versus disappointment.

To further muddy the waters, Blemish and Discrepancy affect might interact. Sparta's sharp disappointment about the weather may cause her to be more hostile and nastily derisive to Clarence than is really justified by his forecasting failure – she's lashing out at him unfairly. (I return to the question of influences on Blemish affect later.)

On the other hand, there could be Blemish affect without Discrepancy affect, or Discrepancy affect with little or no Blemish affect. In the preceding case of Clarence making a specific forecast about the weather, Speranza might not care whether the weather has or has not turned out as predicted, while caring that Clarence got it wrong, and being motivated to, say, tease him on this score. So she has affect directed at his blemish, but none directed at the discrepancy itself.

The opposite case, of Discrepancy affect with little or no Blemish affect, is possible especially when there has just been a general expectation rather than a specific claim, as in the original (2a, b) examples. In the subsection "More on the Main Claims" (p. 276), I concentrated on the disappointment that Sparta might feel, implicitly leaving it open whether she is expressing Blemish affect. That disappointment was directed at the discrepancy. She might instead feel relief about it (cf. the preceding gardening issue). It's certainly possible that she also expresses some negative affect that the general expectation has turned out wrong in the current case: that it has this limited defect. She might even feel annoyed that the general expectation as such has been misleading: it made her unnecessarily depressed at the prospect of gardening. But I would submit that it is equally if not more likely that she is not expressing any Blemish affect at all, but only Discrepancy affect. She may, certainly, *recognize* that the general

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expectation has suffered an exceptional case, but this does not mean she experiences or expresses any *affect* directed at the exception arising (unless one just stipulates that any such recognition is inherently an evaluation and hence an instance of affect).

The moral here is that, while irony and its affect cargo is always motivated by a discrepancy in which reality has departed from a claim or expectation, and so, necessarily, something must have been defective in some sense, this does not mean that that affect has a component targeted at the defect, so much as at the discrepancy itself.

Going back to cases whether there may be both Blemish and Discrepancy affect, it is especially difficult to distinguish between these types in a common sort of example in the literature, where a speaker, Spaniola, is ironic about a friend (or alleged friend), Fido, doing something that sits badly with friendship. Spaniola might sarcastically say "Fido's such a fine friend" to someone else, or "What a fine friend you are" to Fido. Spaniola is, plausibly, expressing both bitter disappointment that Fido has not lived up to her expectations about him as a friend, and criticism of him for this failure. So the discrepancy is at the same time a fault in Fido. It is quite difficult to see the distinction between the two elements of affect, even for Spaniola herself perhaps. But there are still two different elements of affect. The distinction is easier to see in a variant case where Fido has not in fact done anything unfriendly in Spaniola's view, but he feels he has, saying that he's been a bad friend. Spaniola might ironically say, "You're such a terrible friend!," mildly chiding him for unnecessarily feeling guilty. Here the discrepancy is between Fido's actually being a good friend and his claim that he has not been. Now the discrepancy as such is not a fault of Fido's. A possibility here is that Speranza is expressing Blemish affect in the form of mild chiding or teasing for believing his claim, while expressing surprise about the discrepancy (she's surprised he should think he's done something wrong when it's plain to her that he hasn't).

The three different classes of affect may tend to involve different affect types to a degree. For instance, mockery seems more appropriate for Blemish affect than for the other two types, while disappointment seems more appropriate for Discrepancy affect than for the other two types. A big divide is between positive and negative forms of affect. Explicit-Issue affect and Discrepancy affect can both be positive or negative, although there appears to be a bias toward the negative, a matter discussed in subsection "'Positive' versus 'Negative' Irony" (p. 302) of the Further Discussion section. But Blemish affect is always negative when it's present – it's always about a *defect*, albeit possibly a mild one.

The Diverse Influences on Affect Cargo

Consider again an affect-framed description of a speaker's view, such as the following: *the discrepancy between Ezra's noncleverness in Speranza's view and what Clem claimed is appropriate, in context, for leading Speranza to mock Clem for his claim*. This description is yet more open-ended as regards what Speranza's view actually is than might appear at first sight. Notice the

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"in context" qualification it contains. Whether a discrepancy is such as to lead Speranza to be ironic at all, and if so, with what particular affect cargo, and with what particular intensities of affect of the types in that cargo, is likely to be dependent on further factors. Some such factors are: (i) her view of how well Clem ought to be able to judge cleverness; (ii) her prevailing emotions toward Clem, if any; and (iii) her current overall mood (e.g., irritable, laid back, generous). To illustrate factor (i), suppose the context is the possible appointment of Ezra to a senior academic post in a university department, and Speranza and Clem are members of the department. Speranza could legitimately expect Clem to assess how clever people are relative to typical expectations for the post in question. But suppose Clem seems to be basing his cleverness claim on some rather irrelevant ability of Ezra's that a nonacademic person might view as clever, but that wouldn't qualify as clever in the academic setting as hand. For example, Ezra has the ability to add up a restaurant bill quickly in his mind. Then Speranza might well feel derisive or critical toward Clem, and therefore be ironic as stated earlier. But if Clem were instead an ordinary person, Speranza would have much less cause to be critical or sneering toward Clem. Depending on her mood, personality, and so forth, she might still go ahead and be sneeringly ironic, but there is less of a spur toward and justification for such irony, because there is less reason to expect Clem to be able to make a relevant judgment. And even if there is a very large discrepancy between Speranza's view of Ezra's cleverness and what Clem claims, Speranza might well not be ironic at all, if there is no reason at all for Clem to be able to judge appropriately.

Factor (ii) comes in because if, for example, she is already annoyed with Clem about something else, she might sneer at him when she otherwise wouldn't. Alternatively, if she feels very friendly and positive toward him, she might at most use irony to gently tease him. Similar observations arise for factor (iii).

The factors that enter into whether and how a speaker is ironic are somewhat different when she is reacting to an exception to an implicit general expectation, as when Sparta reacts to the weather being bad at a time of year when it "ought" to be good, rather than reacting to a stated claim or specific expectation. As we have seen, one appropriate type of affect cargo element would be disappointment, although she could also or instead be critical of or amused about the general expectation. But whether Sparta is ironic, and with what precise affect cargo and intensity thereof, may still depend on her mood, personality, and so forth.

Why Be Ironic?

A question that is often raised is, why are speakers ironic when they could just directly state what they mean? For instance, why doesn't Speranza in (1a, b) simply say that Ezra is not clever, or very stupid, or whatever it is she thinks? After all, in the latter case one might argue that there are many ways in which the speaker could still convey ridicule, amusement, and so on, through intonation

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or whatever, or by explicitly and separately stating this affect. So, the same message can be conveyed in a clearer way by avoiding irony, thus possibly avoiding gross misunderstanding – or so one might claim.

However, I believe that, in light of the affect-cargo-as-the-meaning view, the very question misses the point. It seems to be framed on the presupposition that a rough paraphrase of the ironic utterance as in (ii) in the Introduction section is appropriate: something like "Oh yeah? Ezra's actually pretty stupid!" However, I maintain that a rough paraphrase such as in (i) in that section is appropriate: something like "I find Clem mock-worthy for claiming that Ezra is clever." So the real question is actually, in the case of (1a): *why ironically say "Yeah, Ezra's clever" rather than nonironically say "I find it mock-worthy [ridiculous/amusing/…] for Clem to claim that Ezra is clever."* This question is easier to answer than the original, misguided one. I suggest the following answers:

(a) The ironic version is shorter and syntactically less elaborate. Let's turn the tables: why bother to say the circumlocutory, nonironic version when you can get by with the briefer, ironic one?

(b) The fact that Speranza is experiencing some affect toward Clem for his claim does not mean she can clearly and accurately express it. We all know that feelings can be difficult to formulate explicitly in language. The implicit expression as with the ironic version, helped by intonation, facial expression, and so on, may do just as good a job of conveying her affect as, or a better job of doing so than, an explicit linguistic description could.

(c) Ironically perhaps, the nonironic statement might itself inadvertently come over as ironic unless accompanied implicitly by accompanying, so-called "para-linguuistic" signals of the very affect that it itself is explicating, such as eye rolling, a mocking tone of voice, or laughter, as appropriate. This point depends in part on what the affect type is, but suppose that it is amusement, for instance. If the speaker says the nonironic version ("I find Clem amusing for claiming that …") in a completely deadpan, serious way, the hearer might think she is being ironic and actually conveying *non*amusement. This sort of effect is perhaps less likely if the affect is ridicule. But again, the amount of ridicule conveyed is likely to be dependent on not just the words but also on the intonation and accompanying demeanor of the speaker.

To explicate (c) a little further: the nonironic alternative statement is not only (as per [a]) circumlocutory, but is in fact *pointlessly* so to some extent, given that the affect that the speaker wishes to express needs not just explicit expression but also implicit expression via intonation, demeanour, and so on; and it *adds* possibilities of misinterpretation that are less likely with the ironic version, precisely to the extent that we are inclined to regard (unconsciously or otherwise) intonation and demeanor as true revealers of affect, compared with words, given that these are often deceptive.

Interestingly, if (c) is on the right track, it means that the very presence of the ironic mode of expression in language contributes to its own usage justification, in that trying to avoid being ironic could itself make one be misinterpreted as being ironic. And that's pretty ironic in itself!

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Exaggerations (Putting Aside Irony)

Here I put forward a view of exaggeration, a view that resonates strongly with the view of irony in the preceding subsection.

First, a preliminary matter. I will be exclusively concerned with nondeceptive exaggeration. There is, of course, the phenomenon of people telling lies that are exaggerations of the truth, as when someone says that their salary is higher than it is, intending people to believe the stated value, and not to take the statement as an exaggeration. By contrast, the exaggerations of interest in this chapter are ones that are intended to be taken as exaggerations and not literally, as in saying

(3) George is a genius

without intending the hearer to think that one is claiming that George is literally a genius, but just very clever. Similarly, if someone were to say that the weather is "wonderful," meaning the hearer only to gather that she thinks it is pretty good, she would be nondeceptively exaggerating.

Exaggeration involves overtly presenting an artificially *magnified* value of (some quality involved in) the explicit issue. Here, (3) magnifies George's actual level of cleverness to genius level. Even if something is exaggerated in an intuitively downwards direction, there is magnification – for instance, a small object said exaggeratedly to be "tiny" has its smallness, or nonlargeness, magnified.

Affect Cargo of Exaggeration

The view here of exaggeration agrees with many researchers that it often (or usually, or perhaps even always) has an affect cargo – an exaggeration often conveys that the speaker has some affective state or other about the explicit issue. In (3) the explicit issue is George's level of cleverness. The utterance usually expresses that the speaker *approves* of George for his great cleverness, or is to an extent *surprised* or *amazed* or *wonder-filled* about his cleverness (she finds it *remarkable* that he is so clever), or is *celebrating* George's cleverness, or is perhaps simply feels emphatic about (or wishes to emphasize) his cleverness – in other words, evaluates it as *important* that he is so clever. Other researchers have discussed such emphasis on the high intensity(/magnitude) of the explicit issue (Carston & Wearing, 2015; Popa-Wyatt, 2020a, b; Watling, 2020), and emotions or value judgments the speaker has concerning that intensity (Brdar-Szabó & Brdar, 2010; Carston & Wearing, 2015; Colston & Keller, 1998; McCarthy & Carter, 2004; Musolff, 2017; Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017; Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017). Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza's (2017) illustrate the matter with "This suitcase weighs a ton" as expressing considerable *frustration* at inability to lift the suitcase. There could also, or instead, be other emotions such as *amazement* or *amusement*. What types and intensities of affect are in play in the affect cargo is a highly contextual matter.

Had the speaker stated the suitcase's great weight literally (by specifying, e.g., 50 kg), there might anyway have been some emphasis, frustration, and

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so on. So the cargo of an exaggeration is not necessarily a matter of a type of affect that wouldn't have been present without the exaggeration. The exaggerativeness of the utterance may merely keep the same affect types, intensifying some of them; for example, frustration. But it could indeed *add new types* of affect, such as amazement. But in all cases we can say *the affect cargo of an exaggeration is an amplification of the affect cargo, if any, that would have been present if the speaker had stated the value she had in mind without exaggeration (e.g., 50 kg for the suitcase)*.

As with the affect cargo of ironies, the affect cargo of an exaggeration is confined to the *speaker's* emphasis, emotion, and so on. If Speranza says "Peter's suitcase weighs a ton," it may be that only Peter is frustrated, while Speranza is merely amazed. Then, the cargo is restricted to her amazement. But the cargo *could* have included frustration on her part, if for instance Speranza herself were to have been suffering delay as a result of Peter's struggles.

For brevity I avoid examples where exaggerations explicitly state speaker affect, as in "It's so frustrating – my/Peter's suitcase weighs a ton!" At least some of the cargo here is explicit, noting that there could still be implicit cargo on top, such as amazement. But for simplicity in this chapter I confine attention to cases where it is entirely implicit.

Import of Affect Cargo from Literal Use; and Two Dimensions of Magnification

If a suitcase were literally to weigh a ton, one would be likely to have some extremely strong affect about this. One could well be any or all of: amazed, frustrated, puzzled, worried, nonplussed, amused, and so on. This would be affect cargo of the literal use. As suggested by Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza's (2017) account of hyperbole (see also Ruiz de Mendoza, 2014, 2017), I hold that such literal-use affect cargo can be *imported* (my term) by an exaggerative use of the ton weight.

Of course, it is likely that the importing of a particular type of affect involves attenuation (some of the cargo leaks out and sinks into the sea, one might say). One is likely to be less amazed that the suitcase weighs 50kg than that it weighs a ton. But notice that is not certain that there will be attenuation. If one is totally incapable of lifting a 50 kg suitcase, the level of frustration could be as high as being confronted by one that weighs a ton – beyond a certain point it doesn't matter how heavy the suitcase is. There could even be intensification of an affect type: amusement at one's predicament with the suitcase could be higher with the 50 kg one that it would be with a 1 ton one, even supposing that the latter would attract amusement at all. This last qualification underscores the point made earlier that not all the affect cargo need arise from the exaggerating. The main conclusion here is that *elements in an exaggeration's affect cargo can be attenuated or nonattenuated versions of the literal-use affect cargo.* Whether attenuated or not, these elements are stronger than would have occurred if the speaker had stated the nonexaggerated, explicit-issue value.

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Putting all this together, we see that the exaggerating involves not only overtly presenting a magnified value ("genius," "wonderful") for the explicit issue but also more implicitly presenting the affect that would have accompanied a literal use of that magnified value. Much as the magnified explicit-issue value leads the hearer to understand that the speaker is conveying the existence of a lower, but still notably high, actual value, the literal-use affect leads the hearer to understand that the speaker is expressing a (probably) less intense version of that affect, but a version that is still notably intense. Assuming that this version is higher than would have occurred with the nonexaggerated value, we get an *amplification of (some of) the affect cargo* that would have occurred with a nonexaggerated statement. The exaggeration in the suitcase example overtly presents a magnified weight of the suitcase and, in so doing, also presents the amazement (say) that would have occurred if the suitcase had weighed a ton.

Here we see (again following the Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza account) that the exaggerating generally makes the affect cargo more easily and confidently inferable than it would be had the speaker spoken without exaggeration. How high an explicit-issue magnitude, such as suitcase weight, needs to be in an actual, realistic situation in order to lead to significant affect in a given speaker is a complex, uncertain matter. It may greatly depend on her mood, what she regards as a normal weight, the particular discourse circumstances, and so forth. Thus, for a speaker just to say that the suitcase weighs 50 kg may well fail to express affect clearly. Saying it weighs a ton much more easily suggests amazement, frustration, or whatever, even if this then gets attenuated somewhat to become appropriate for a real situation. In this vein, Watling (2020) theorizes that, for instance, using "forever" to exaggerate "too long" (in exaggerations like "you take forever to tie your shoelaces") avoids the murky issue of what "too long" amounts to in the particular context. And clearly, "forever" expresses exasperation more clearly and definitely.

Affect-Framed Description of Actual Intensity

What do hearers of exaggerations conclude about actual intensities (magnitudes) in explicit issues? For example, what does Harry conclude about the weight of Speranza's "ton"-weighing suitcase, or how clever George is according to (3)? The literature provides only sketchy suggestions on this, typically casting hearers as stepping down relevant scales from overtly presented values (values such as a ton, genius-level cleverness) to some reasonable lower values, *but not giving any indication of how big such steps should be*. (There are some limited empirical results. For example, Kao et al., 2014 consider exaggerated statements of the prices of household items and report results concerning hearer's views of likelihood of the actual values.) This comment is not actually a criticism of such work, because in fact it is misguided to think that *a theory of exaggeration* should say how big they should be or are. The reasoning and outcomes here are much as in the view expressed above of irony, though with one or two differences, and are as follows.

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First, it would be entirely unreasonable to insist that hearers conclude exact scale positions such as a particular number of kilograms – values that hearers couldn't plausibly divine in most realistic situations. At most we can only expect hearers to surmise rough ranges or vaguely, qualitatively specified positions; for example, as represented by some mental representation analogous to the English phrase "extremely heavy." For brevity I will refer to such a mental representation by a label such as *extremely heavy*. (I say more on this matter in the subsection "Irony and Thought" (p. 299) of the Further Discussion section.)

I claim instead that the main thing that the hearer of Speranza's "My suitcase weighs a ton" concludes is that the suitcase is heavy enough, in the given context, for Speranza to be frustrated (and/or amazed, and/or amused, and so on) about this to the extent that she is. This would be an affect-framed conclusion about the explicit issue, much in line with the affect-framed descriptions proposed above for the case of irony. (This proposal about exaggeration continues to be inspired by the proposal of Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017, though somewhat refined by Barnden, 2020a.)

And, given these suggestions, we ask: what point would there be in *also* deriving a vague qualitative weight estimate such as *extremely heavy* – even supposing one could justifiably choose this estimate over another candidate, such as *very heavy* or *considerably heavier than normal*? Presumably the hearer should see the connection between the suitcase's weight and other matters, especially the speaker's difficulty in lifting the suitcase and her affect. But if he *does* see the connection, what use is the separate *extremely heavy* estimate to him?

Therefore, I suggest that, while I have no evidence that hearers do not typically come up with mental estimates like *extremely heavy*, there is no reason for a theory of exaggeration to claim that they do so, or to specify what those estimates should be.

On the other hand, it does seem reasonable to suggest that hearers do typically come up with crude range estimates in many types of exaggeration. These could be on the lines of the proposal of Popa-Wyatt (2020b) that the hearer concludes that the actual intensity is somewhere between an expected, hoped-for, or desired intensity (or range) and the overtly conveyed, magnified one.[1] For instance, in the suitcase example the hearer might conclude that the suitcase weighs somewhere higher than the normal weight range he has encountered but less than a ton. Of course, in this case the hearer can conclude that the suitcase weighs *way* less than a ton, but in other cases of exaggeration, where the overtly stated value is actually a realistically possible value, he may have to let the range go up as high as that value.

Thus, in all, I suggest that, in general, the *only* type of conclusion that the hearer should reasonably be thought to derive is a (partially) affect-framed one

1 Caveat: Watling (2020) rightly remarks that in some types of exaggeration there's no reason to suppose there's any particular scale-point that is expected, hoped-for, regarded as standard, and so on.

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on the preceding lines (*so heavy that it is very difficult for the speaker to lift it and makes her frustrated)*, plus possibly the lower and upper bounds as in the Popa-Wyatt proposal. *So it is only this type of conclusion that can be generally assumed to be within the meaning of an exaggeration*. This is especially so given that different speakers and discourse contexts will vary widely on how heavy suitcases need to be to cause lifting difficulty, frustration, and so on.

Naturally, the hearer *might* seek to discover more about the weight, and perhaps try to guess a rough number of kilos, because he is concerned about airline restrictions, say. But this would just be a matter of special circumstances leading to special hearer behavior. It's not a matter of what hearers of exaggerations can generally be presumed to do. Similar inferencing might arise if a speaker said "My suitcase is frustratingly heavy." It is nothing to do with exaggeration especially. Here there is a close analogy with remarks made about irony earlier, in the subsection "Ironies (Putting Aside Exaggeration)" (p. 283).

For the purpose of the affect-framed aspect of what hearers understand, I assume they quickly detect at least some of the affect cargo of exaggerations. As pointed out in subsection "Detecting and Reasoning about Affect" (p. 282) of the Overview section, the definiteness of imaginary situations depicted by exaggerations can help hearers surmise affect and its intensity. So can clues such as intonation, facial expression, and staggering around with the suitcase.

Hyperbole

An appropriate near-synonym for the type of exaggeration of most intense interest in this chapter is 'hyperbole'. This is because it may be reasonable to take "hyperbole" just to mean exaggeration that carries affect cargo. This would fit well with some dictionary definitions and research works. For instance, *The Chambers Dictionary* (2003 edition) says that hyperbole is "a rhetorical figure that produces a vivid impression by extravagant and obvious exaggeration." We can take vividness to be affect cargo. However, the suggestion would not fit the highly variable usage of the term "hyperbole" in the literature, where for instance it often seems just to mean exaggeration. So, the suggestion could be confusing. I therefore avoid the term "hyperbole" in this chapter and just discuss "exaggeration," typically with affect cargo.

The literature cited earlier suggests that exaggeration does tend strongly to have affect cargo. But we only need assume it arises frequently enough to be important.

More on Ironic Embedded Exaggeration

This section adds some additional detailed considerations to the account as summarized in the earlier section "Irony with Embedded Exaggeration: Overview of the Account" (p. 276).

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More Than an Ironicity Signal

It is certainly plausible that embedded exaggeration can serve as a clue that the utterance is ironic (Attardo, 2000a; Carston & Wearing, 2015; Kreuz & Roberts, 1995, 2020; Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017; Wilson, 2013, 2017). But it is also highly plausible that embedded exaggeration does more than such signaling, and influences the ironic meaning itself. There are claims in the literature that embedded exaggeration amplifies ironic affect (see, e.g., Popa-Wyatt, 2014, 2020a; Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano-Palacio, 2021), and the point is quite intuitive: I hope the reader agrees that "Sure, Ezra's a genius" sounds more critical than just "Sure, Ezra's a clever guy." But, in addition, we notice that ironic speakers often include elaborate exaggerations going far beyond the needs of signaling the presence of irony. Consider, for instance, "Sure, he's a genius. Way ahead of Einstein, Beethoven, Picasso, and all those dudes." (Some real examples of elaborate exaggerations are quoted in Barnden, 2017). Finally, there is experimental evidence that embedded exaggeration influences meaning. For example, Colston and Keller (1998) show that ironies with embedded exaggeration express more surprise than comparable ironies without it. Here, embedded exaggeration influences affect cargo intensity. On the other hand, Colston and Carreno (2020) show that when people make an ironic statement that overtly accepts an accusation, thus in fact denying the accusation and claiming innocence, the innocence message is intensified by embedded exaggeration. Here the influence is on the explicit-issue aspect of ironic meaning. Both results fit the general, intuitive idea that embedded exaggeration tends to intensify some aspect of ironic meaning.

A Staged Solution Is No Good

It would be natural to think of the following two-stage analysis of the meaning of an exaggerative irony.

(a) Consider the overt, exaggerative wording, such as "Ezra is a genius" in (1b), and take a meaning of it as if it had been uttered at top level in the discourse (i.e., a real exaggeration, not embedded in anything). For the sake of example, let's say the meaning is *Ezra is very clever.*

(b) Now treat the original ironic utterance as if its overt wording had nonexaggeratively had the meaning from (a). For example, treat (1b) as if it had been

(1c) "[Sure/yeah…] Ezra is very clever."

Popa-Wyatt (2020a) and Carston and Wearing (2015) argue that an analysis along these lines is no good. The problem can be put as follows. The replacement sentence (1c) is still an exaggeration of what Clem claimed. We have not actually made any progress at all in explaining how embedded exaggeration influences ironic meaning. The analysis would only have a chance of working if it would be reasonable to understand *"Ezra's a genius"* (at top level) as claiming merely that Ezra is clever to the *same* degree as the degree claimed by Clem.

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But this is surely implausible in general, because that degree may well not be high enough to merit being even exaggeratively reported with the word "genius."

Moreover, I would add that the analysis as it stands says nothing about the affect cargo the exaggeration would have at top level in the discourse – the sort of affect cargo discussed in the subsection "An Additional Effect" (p. 280) of the Overview section.

On Inclusion of the Embedded Exaggeration's Imported Affect Cargo in the Discrepancy

According to this chapter's account as applied to (1b), Speranza's view of Ezra is contrasted with a scenario in which Ezra is a genius and there is celebration (say) about this. This celebration is imported from the hypothetical case where Ezra is literally and sincerely claimed to be a genius. I now observe that this is a natural stance to take under either of the main, broad approaches to irony, namely the echoic approach and the pretense approach. (I conjecture that other approaches would also make the stance natural, but there is no room to argue the point here.)

Under the echoic approach, consider first what would happen if Speranza ironically but *non*exaggeratedly used (1b) "Sure, he's a genius," to react to a claim by Clint that "Ezra's a genius." Her irony would directly echo what Clint said. But Clint's utterance would implicitly involve celebration, let's say. It would be entirely unmotivated to suppose that Speranza wouldn't be echoing that celebration itself. Its implicitness doesn't matter. After all, the necessarily loose notion of echo in the echoing approach must already allow "echoing" of highly implicit things like societal expectations (see, e.g., Attardo, 2000b). Then, since the approach postulates that ironic speakers "dissociate from" what they echo, she would be dissociating from the celebration just as much as from Ezra's being a genius.

Let's now return to the exaggerative case of (1b), where Clem has merely claimed that Ezra is "clever," not a genius. Let's assume for simplicity that such a claim does not involve any celebration. (The discussion can be straightforwardly modified to accommodate mild versions of celebration.) Speranza is echoing Clem. But the echoing is loose, and can more strongly be viewed as an echoing of an imaginary claim that Ezra is a genius. In line with claims in Carston and Wearing (2015) and Popa-Wyatt (2014, 2020a), Speranza is dissociating both from the imaginary claim and from Clem's actual one. But then, there is just as much reason to take her to be dissociating from the celebration carried as cargo by the imaginary claim as to take her be dissociating from its attribution of genius-hood.

Now for the pretense approach. Take the exaggerative use of (1b), in response to Clem's claim that Ezra is clever. Under the approach, it is natural to take Speranza is pretending to be someone who believes that Ezra is a genius. It is then also natural to suppose that her pretended state of mind includes celebration appropriate to Ezra being a genius. Now, while pretense accounts do not

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normally use the term "dissociation," they nevertheless implicitly involve dissociation from what is pretended, as Musolff and Wong (2020) point out. There is no less reason to take this dissociation to be from the affect in the pretended state of mind than from anything else there. This means that the discrepancy is enriched by celebration.

More on the Affectively Enriched Discrepancy

The effect of embedded exaggeration is to exaggerate the discrepancy motivating the irony, such as the discrepancy between Speranza's view of Ezra's cleverness and Clem's claim about it. The discrepancy is exaggerated not only in a quantitative sense, in that it is now portrayed as being between Speranza's view and the claim that Ezra is a *genius* rather than just clever. It is also exaggerated in a more qualitative sense, because the genius claim drags in the celebration or other affect cargo that "Ezra's a genius" could have had if uttered literally, at top level in the discourse. The discrepancy is *enriched* by inclusion of this affect. Subsection "More on the Main Claims" (p. 276) says that both that quantitative aspect and this qualitative enrichment aspect, in magnifying the discrepancy, can motivate an amplification of the ironic affect cargo.

Now suppose that the affect cargo of the nonironic exaggeration "Ezra's a genius" is taken to include amazement. The effect of this on the exaggerated discrepancy in ironic (1b) is potentially more complex than the effect of celebration. In the case of celebration, it is easy to assume that Speranza's own view of Ezra does not include it, so that its presence in the exaggerated, genius view of Ezra does magnify the discrepancy. But suppose the hearer, Harry, eventually conjectures that Speranza thinks that Ezra is very stupid. *This* view could itself well involve amazement. So, amazement would not (or at least would not in any simple way) be a factor in the extent of the discrepancy between Speranza's view and the exaggerated, genius view.

This point then introduces the interesting possibility of a sort of settling process being needed. Harry might not at first conjecture that Speranza's actual view involves a stupidity attribution and attendant amazement. So, at this stage of his processing, the amazement in the genius view of Ezra *does* contribute to the extent of the discrepancy. This extent contributes to the intensity of the ironic affect cargo conveyed to him. This amplified ironic cargo could lead him to his conjecture that Speranza thinks Ezra is very stupid. But this very conjecture then introduces amazement into Speranza's view and thus tends to *reduce* the discrepancy somewhat. So a sort of oscillation may occur in landing on a final version of the ironic affect cargo and of the conjectured specific view of Ezra.

Opposites Can Arise

In subsection "Oppositeness, and Vagueness of Speakers' Views" (p. 283), I subscribed to the line that an ironic speaker's view of a value such as a degree of cleverness or goodness of the weather is not necessarily (or even usually) the

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"opposite" of the overt value she states, such as "genius"-level cleverness or "wonderful" weather, if we take the word "opposite" in a narrow way. But it is useful to see that something like a narrow opposite can happen to arise according to this chapter's approach. Because "genius" is higher up in cleverness than "clever" is, the result of the use of "genius" in (1b) is to tend to make Harry's conjecture about Ezra more negative, and down to a point that *could* be construed as a mirror image of "genius." Let's use the colloquial label "moronic" for the mirror-image point, for ease of illustration.

Conceivably this could happen if Speranza seems to be extremely scornful (caustic, sarcastic). But what is driving the pressing-down is *the overall strength of the ironic affect cargo*, not particularly the embedded exaggerative wording in itself. That exaggerative wording conspires with other factors, such as Speranza's way of delivering the utterance, to increase the affect cargo strength, and then this increase can in turn press down Harry's estimate of the cleverness. Just to emphasize the looseness of the role of the exaggerative wording here notice that, with sufficient causticness in Speranza's tone, Harry's estimate could, in principle, be pushed down to the moronic level even by (1a), which has no embedded exaggeration. It's just that it's more likely to be pushed down to a low level such as moronic by exaggerative (1b) than by (1a), other things being equal.

Further Discussion

Irony and Thought

Here I briefly and speculatively address some major, general issues that the chapter's proposal and attendant considerations bring up. They are problematic and as yet unresolved matters with large contentious literatures. They come up in some form or another for much of cognitive science, but it is convenient to see how they arise in the context of the present chapter. The two issues I mention are:

- What the mental representation of affect is like, and how thinking about affect proceeds.
- Whether and how such thinking can be conscious or unconscious.

This chapter's proposal is not unusual in being much about the thinking that the hearer of an irony may need to put into understanding it. It is also in tune with an approach to language such as Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), where the thinking involved in understanding language is at least largely just an application of general-purpose thinking processes. (Relevance Theory is historically the home for the echoic approach to irony, but one could follow an echoic approach without adhering to Relevance Theory.) But this chapter's approach is distinctive in posing an even stronger requirement to think about matters of affect than existing echoic or pretense approaches do. Speakers and

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hearers of ironies must think (in at least some rough, and often unconscious sense) about: the ironic affect cargoes of ironies, exaggerative or not; the affect cargoes of exaggerations not embedded in irony; and the affect imported into irony along with embedded exaggeration.

This increased emphasis on affect is entirely in line with the importance of affect for much of our everyday getting-about in the people-filled world, irrespective of whether we are engaging in ironic language as a part of that activity. It is fairly obvious that to interact effectively with others we must be constantly taking into account their psychological states, including, very importantly, their feelings and evaluations about all sorts of things, including ourselves and our own feelings. Jing-Schmidt (2008) provides literature pointers on the evolutionary importance of emotion, and on its overall organizing function in cognition. Colston (2015, 2019), in extensive discussion of pragmatic effects of language and on linguistic meaning not directly conveyed in wording, covers many linguistic communication phenomena where social purposes are a key part of the overall purpose and where those social purposes are often highly affective. Affective social purposes include expressing and eliciting emotion, being humorous, being ingratiating, extoling, being impolite, and reducing negative appearance (Colston 2015: 141), as well as impressing people, being complimentary, being insulting, diffusing tension, establishing trust, and many more (Colston, 2019: 166–167). Pursuing such purposes requires thinking about affect.

It's possible that the hearer, Harry, of, say, (1b) does try to infer an estimate of how nonclever Speranza thinks Ezra is, though this is not a necessary part of irony understanding. His inferencing would be based on the hypothesis that, given the discourse context at hand, the discrepancy between Speranza's view and Clem's claim is appropriate in extent and type for leading her to express the ironic affect cargo (let's say intense scorn) that she is expressing. The context can include matters such as what Speranza's general current mood seems to be, what her relationship to Clem is, and how much Clem can be expected to know about Ezra. Now, it is in principle possible that hearers such as Harry have rules and knowledge about affect, communicative behavior, and so on that would allow Harry to infer reasonable conjectures about Speranza's view. That is, perhaps Harry has a suitable common-sense "theory" of how affect works in relation to other matters. Notice that this theory would have to involve mechanisms for representing the intensities of particular affect types, not just the yes/no presence of affect. This theory would be part of a theory of mind, and our account of irony would become a branch of so-called "theory-theory" (so labeled because it would be a theory that attributes, to people engaged in natural reasoning about mental matters, the use of a theory that is explicitly about such matters).

I would suggest, however, that so-called "simulation-theory" provides a more viable proposal for some central purposes of this chapter. (See the collection of papers in Davies & Stone, 1995, including Barnden, 1995, on simulation theory versus theory-theory.) Simulation here is where one reasons about someone's

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mental states, including affective states, by imaginatively putting oneself in their shoes (to a manageable and reasonable extent) and seeing what mental states arise in the simulation. For instance, one might make inferences as if one were the other person, or let emotions naturally arise from beliefs, and then ascribe these to the person simulated. In applying the method, one can try out different possibilities for what one "seeds" the other person's overall mental state with. The advantage of simulation is that one is just engaging *in* inferencing and other processing much as normal, albeit vicariously, rather than using special, elaborate machinery that allows one to make inferences that are explicitly *about* such inferencing and other processing.

So, for instance, for Harry to get an idea of Speranza's view of Ezra, he could try to find a level of noncleverness such that when he simulates Speranza (a) attributing this level to Ezra, (b) being confronted with Clem's claim, and (c) holding a belief about how much Clem should know about Ezra, he then feels intensely scornful toward Clem (vicariously on behalf of Speranza).

A special advantage of the use of simulation to think about intensity-graded states such as affect states is that one can, in effect, represent the state at a particular intensity by vicariously *experiencing it at* that intensity. One does not need a mental representational format that explicitly *states that* someone's affect of a certain type has such and such an intensity (or is in such and such a range of intensities). And note that Harry's perception of the affect cargo of Speranza's utterance could itself be in the form of a "static" simulation that is simply a static state, one of vicariously feeling the affect in that cargo (scorn, amazement, or whatever). For instance, seeing a scornful expression on someone's face may be enough to construct such a static simulation, without ever having to entertain an explicit representation of the person being scornful at a particular intensity.

It is worth stressing that the simulation abilities I am supposing here are not peculiar to irony understanding. If someone says something scornful but nonironic to us, we may need or want to conjecture what is in their minds that has led to their comment, if this is not already plain from the comment. Thus, one might reject this chapter's proposal about irony but still be left with the problem of how to link affect and communication.

I would not like to propose that much of the thinking about affect that this chapter proposes is conscious, though some results or intermediate results of the thinking may be. But the preceding simulation suggestions might seem inherently to involve consciousness for much of the time. I certainly maintain that feelings of scorn, bitterness, disappointment, celebration, amazement, and so on are part of one's phenomenal consciousness when they occur. Thus, to avoid committing to an excessive involvement of consciousness in the simulating, I propose instead that there are also pale, nonphenomenal "precursors" of affect states that can take part in simulations that proceed entirely outside consciousness. On occasion, a precursor might become enriched into a fully-fledged, phenomenal state, in a partly or fully conscious simulation.

I would not wish to propose, either, that the precursors act within simulations in exactly the same way that the corresponding phenomenal states do.

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In separate work (Barnden, 2020b, 2022), I subscribe to a physicalist identity theory of consciousness, implying that conscious states can have their own physical, causal powers. Thus, unconscious simulative thinking about affect may be inaccurate compared with a conscious variety, because, through involving the mentioned precursors rather than phenomenal affect states, it gets the causal effects of affective states somewhat wrong. But it is likely that simulations are generally fairly inaccurate anyway. For instance, Harry may not know all the relevant features of context, may misjudge Speranza's belief about Clem's knowledge of Ezra, and on top of that Speranza might work psychologically in a different way from him. So, the extra "noise" thrown in by using affect precursors instead of affect itself may be bearable.

"Positive" versus "Negative" Irony

It is generally remarked that "positive" irony is less common than "negative" irony – there appears to be a negativity bias in their usage, or an "asymmetry of affect" (see, e.g., Kreuz & Johnson, 2020). Negative irony here is as in (1a, b, 2a, b) where the speaker is conveying a negative message about Ezra or the weather. Corresponding "positive" ironies would include "Sure, Ezra's really stupid," or "What terrible weather again today!" when the speaker thinks respectively that Ezra is *clever* and the weather today is *good*. But this is just Speaker's Explicit-Issue affect (see subsection "The Diverse Targets for Affect in Irony," p. 285), and it is crucial to remember that in both negative and positive irony there's also the separate affect cargo, which typically contains Blemish affect, which is necessarily negative. So, in the positive-irony examples just given, there could be, respectively, criticism of someone for claiming that Ezra is stupid, or ruefulness about a general expectation that the weather today would be bad. This point about positive irony has been pushed especially by Dynel (2018). She brands positive irony as a myth, in the sense that there is never just positivity – there's always the separate negative element. (She is not doubting the existence of irony where there is speaker positivity about the explicit issue.)

Various explanations for the negative usage bias have been proposed, some of which are critiqued by Dynel (2018). One explanation she calls into question is based on the point that much irony is prompted by violation of some specific claim or implicit expectation based on sociocultural norms, combined with the claim that these norms tend to lead to expectations of positive outcomes (the "normative bias": Wilson, 2013). Thus, a violation of such an expectation is a negatively evaluated outcome, and the irony is therefore negative (the speaker expresses negative Explicit-Issue affect). But Dynel points out that the positive-expectation claim about norms is questionable, often being a matter of viewpoint and context.

Another possible contributing factor to the negative usage bias is a general positivity bias that language has been claimed to have. This bias is to the effect that people find positive wording easier to process cognitively than negative

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wording, and positive wording in language taken as a whole is much more common than negative (Matlin et al., 1979; Jing-Schmidt, 2008[2]). Thus, negative irony, where of course the overt wording is *positive*, may be easier to produce and understand than positive irony, where the overt wording is negative. This greater ease of either understanding or production could perhaps in turn promote greater use of negative irony. Or perhaps the greater prevalence of positive wording in language generally reveals that people just like saying and hearing positive wording more than they do negative wording, irrespective of any hidden messages.

A further possible explanation for the negative usage bias is the way irony allows one to be indirect about saying something negative about an explicit issue. When the explicit issue is a feature of a person, or of something that is valued by a person, this could allow one to be or seem to be more polite about or to a person. But, of course, considerations of politeness would not normally make one want to disguise, through positive irony, a *positive* message about someone or something they value.

While there may be such contributions to the negative usage bias, there is an explanation for it that is much more systematic, more strongly founded in the fundamental nature of irony, and less reliant on special assumptions about cognition and language. This explanation is readily apparent, and leads to a richer view of positivity and negativity in irony, if one firmly keeps in mind the distinctions between Speaker's Explicit-Issue affect, Blemish affect and Discrepancy affect. The "obligatory" negativity of Blemish affect contrasts with the possibility of positive *and/or* negative affect elements within Explicit-Issue and Discrepancy affect. All we have to do now is to make the following assumption: it is easier to think about, and produce and understand communications about, situations where there is just negative affect or just positive affect, rather than a mix of positive and negative. Since we must have negativity in Blemish affect, the less that Explicit-Issue and Discrepancy affect are positive the easier the irony is to understand and produce. This could be the main explanation of the greater frequency of negative irony.

The explanation gains additional force in the case where the Explicit-Issue and Blemish affect are both about a claimant that the ironic speaker is reacting to. This would occur in Speranza saying ironically "Clem's such a genius" (negative irony) when Clem has smugly claimed to be a clever, or "Clem's such an idiot" (positive irony) when Clem has over-modestly questioned his own cleverness. Here the positive case requires simultaneous handling of positive and negative affect about the very same person, Clem: positivity about his actual cleverness and friendly criticism of his misplaced lack of confidence. This could be yet more difficult than when the positive and negative affects are about more distantly related things.

2 The title of the Jing-Schmidt paper is misleading as it actually discusses a positivity bias as regards frequency of usage, relating it, paradoxically, to a negativity bias in cognition about emotion.

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We can also note here that if Explicit-Issue affect is negative, then there is likely to be a negative Discrepancy affect as well. Our earlier example of negative Explicit-Issue affect and positive Discrepancy affect – the speaker evaluating the weather as bad but nevertheless being relieved that it is so because it excuses her from gardening – seems to be of a relatively uncommon sort. (I have no empirical evidence here, but I am going by the fact that this sort of case is hardly ever discussed in the literature.) Dually, if the Explicit-Issue affect is positive, there is likely to be positive Discrepancy affect as well: if the speaker thinks things are better than the relevant claim or expectation, she is likely to have a positive view of the discrepancy as such. Again there can be uncommon exceptions – such as a speaker who evaluates the weather as good in violation of a forecast, but is annoyed that it has turned out to be good. So, while "negative" and "positive" irony are so-called in the literature on the basis merely of the polarity of Speaker's Explicit-Issue affect, negative irony is likely to be entirely negative (the Discrepancy affect is also negative, and of course the Blemish affect, if any, is negative as always), and positive irony can be more positive than usually noted in the literature (when not only is the Explicit-Issue affect positive, but so is the Discrepancy affect).

Nevertheless, this does leave room for Explicit-Issue and Discrepancy affect to have different polarities, and indeed for each individually to consist of a mix of positive and negative. In the next subsection, I post this as an interesting topic for future research, but for now I highlight two interesting possibilities already covered or implied. One is of an irony being positive in the new, if still limited, sense of having positive Discrepancy affect even though it has negative Explicit-Issue affect. This happens in the case when the speaker is relieved that the weather is bad. More invidiously, someone who criticizes a friend with "What a fine friend you are!" could experience some sneaking gladness that this otherwise angelic person should have proven defective (perhaps the speaker is feeling guilty about some past betrayal of her own, and is lashing out in an "Aha, got you!" spirit). So there is some positive Discrepancy affect, though it could be mixed with negative Discrepancy affect too.

The other possibility to highlight is of *entirely* positive irony, where there is no Blemish affect and both the Explicit-Issue and Discrepancy affect are positive. This is rare on the assumption that Blemish affect is typically present in irony. But an example could be "What terrible weather!" said with relief (positive Discrepancy affect) about good weather (positive Explicit-Issue affect), in the face of merely a general expectation that the weather is bad at the time of year, where the ironist has no negative affect about the expectation having an exception (does not regard the exception as an affect-worthy blemish), while of course being motivated to be ironic by virtue of that exception occurring.

Possible Future Investigations

This chapter's proposal raises many possible questions for empirical and further theoretical investigation. The questions apply not just to how irony with embedded exaggeration works, but also to how exaggeration in general works

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and how irony in general works. I confine myself here to a few particular suggestions for questions that empirical studies could look at, whether these are experimental or instead empirical in the sense of studying corpora of language. The suggested questions are:

- What is the effect on understanding ease, production ease and usage frequency of the complex space of possibilities for combined positive and negative affect in irony, as mentioned at the end of subsection "'Positive' versus 'Negative' Irony" (p. 302)?
- How vague are hearers in their conjectures about the affect cargoes of ironic utterances and exaggerative utterances, as opposed to their conjectures about speakers' views of the explicit issues? Similarly, do they form the former conjectures more confidently and/or easily than the latter? (Our proposal predicts less vagueness, and greater confidence and ease, for the former.)
- How often do hearers spontaneously make conjectures about the affect cargoes as compared with conjectures about the speakers' views of the explicit issues? For irony at least, our proposal predicts that they always spontaneously make conjectures about the affect cargo, but suggests that only do so on the explicit issues when there's a specific impetus or need to do so. The situation is less clear with nonironic exaggerations, because there our proposal does *not* require that such utterances always have affect cargo, or that hearers always pick up on it when present. However, an exploratory investigation would be interesting to get a picture of the frequencies here.
- Suppose it is possible to find exaggerations that are roughly equal on how much they magnify some explicit issue but are noticeably different on their affect cargo. Do they have different effects on ironic affect cargo when embedded within an irony? Our proposal predicts that the one with affect cargo that is "heavier" in some sense (a sense that would need to be operationalized in the study itself) would have the greater effect on the ironic affect cargo.
- What is an ironic speaker's intention and expectation about what hearers will grasp about the affect cargo and about the speaker's view of the explicit issue? Most importantly, do speakers intend/expect a hearer to get a clear, specific view of the latter, or only of the former, leaving the latter to receive a vague, affect-framed characterization?

Summary and Conclusions

The proposed approach to irony, exaggeration, and the embedding of exaggeration in irony is highly integrative. Instead of leaving the ironic affect cargo (e.g., scorn of Clem for claiming that Ezra is clever) and the Explicit-Issue meaning (e.g., that Ezra is far from clever) as separate channels of meaning that need somehow to be coordinated, it makes the affect cargo be the overall meaning, with values such as the level of Ezra's cleverness, or how good the weather is, merely intrinsic parts of that meaning, and which can

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be left as merely being framed in terms of the affect cargo. Exaggeration is also treated (often, at least) as having an affect cargo. When exaggeration is embedded, its effect is smoothly and naturally catered for by just taking the irony now also to be a consequent exaggeration of the motivating discrepancy. This discrepancy-exaggeration has, by the general nature of exaggerations, an affect cargo, which now doubles as the amplified ironic affect cargo. Moreover, the affect cargo that the exaggerative wording would have if used literally is itself naturally brought in, itself further increasing the discrepancy-exaggeration and amplifying the ironic affect cargo. All such influences on the ironic affect cargo combine seamlessly with others such as from intonation or facial expression. The nature of the affect cargo, however it has been influenced, can then optionally be used by the hearer to make inferences about the speaker's view of the matter at hand. In sum, by centering everything on the ironic affect cargo, embedded exaggeration among other matters can be dealt with very little in the way of special assumptions about either exaggeration or irony.

The approach appears to be unique particularly in taking account of affect cargo imported by an embedded exaggeration, and carefully weaving that affect into the overall complex affective picture. The endeavor here prompted an unusual amount of care in distinguishing between different classes of affect in irony while attending to their close relationships. This in turn prompted a new look at positive versus negative irony. The usual distinction here turns out to be an over-simplification of the complex space of possibilities for irony having positive and negative affective elements.

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