Irony as relevant inappropriateness ☆

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Abstract

This article presents a theory of irony which claims that an ironical utterance is both inappropriate and relevant to its context. Extensive discussion of previous theories of irony is presented to justify the various aspects of the theory and in particular its two-stage processing approach and the vexing issue of the motivation for the speakers' use of irony. © 2000 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Irony; Irony markers; Appropriateness; Relevance; Processing; Cooperative principle

This article deals with the pragmatics of irony. Its purposes are:

1. to present a 'new' approach to the analysis of irony,
2. to discuss critically the main currents in the analysis of irony,
3. to highlight the symmetries and differences within the general framework of (Neo-)Gricean pragmatic analyses, and
4. to assess the impact of this discussion on the (Neo-)Gricean program for pragmatics revolving around the CP.

Many views of the nature of irony have been proposed. We will limit ourselves to the approaches to irony that are predominant within linguistics and deliberately ignore the vast literature on the literary and philosophical uses of irony (e.g. Kierkegaard, Romantic irony, etc.).

Two principal types of theories or approaches present themselves at first look. The first approach is essentially a rewording in linguistic terms of the traditional theory of irony as a trope (figure of speech). The second approach, presented as vastly different from the traditional theory, is based on the language/metalanguage distinction and is known as the theory of 'irony as mention/pretense'. The next sections will briefly review some central definitional issues, before turning to a review of some of the various theories of irony proposed in linguistics. Basically, I will discuss the (Neo-)Gricean approaches and their critiques, as well as the Relevance-theoretic and cognitive ones, reject the latter and significantly revise the former. A section will then present this author's proposal for a revision of the irony-as-trope theory, based on the notion of simultaneous inappropriateness and relevance.

1. Definitions

Irony has a very ancient tradition of studies and interpretations. Most of the research on irony has been done within the paradigm of literary studies, with all the implied interest in its aesthetic and emotional value, and the corresponding lack of formalization. Some issues are relatively well understood; for example the clues with which the ironist signals his/her ironical intention to the hearer have been studied in some detail, see Attardo (forthcoming). Others are left almost entirely unexplored, for instance why S^1 would prefer to use irony rather than a literal message. As an introduction to the problematics of irony from the linguistic point of view, the works of Muecke (1969, 1970, 1973, 1978a,b), Booth (1974), Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1976, 1980), Schaffer (1982: 1–24), Chen (1990), Gibbs (1994), Barbe (1995) and Giora (to appear) will provide a good starting point and useful references.

Irony is defined by Webster as "the use of words to express something other than and especially the opposite of the literal meaning". We will take this informal definition as operational, at least pre-theoretically. We turn now to a few definitional issues, best presented before the main body of critical analysis.

1.1. Verbal vs. situational irony

A basic distinction in the field of irony is that between verbal irony, which is a linguistic phenomenon, and situational irony (a.k.a. irony of fate; Muecke, 1970), which is a state of the world which is perceived as ironical, e.g. the fire station burning down to the ground. Most treatments of irony deliberately ignore situational irony (e.g., Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1976: *ironie référentielle*, 1980; Holdcroft, 1983). An exception are Littman and Mey (1991) who on the contrary deal exclusively with situational irony, Lucariello (1994), and Shelley (to appear). Some, e.g. Haverkate (1990: 78), distinguish further irony of fate and dramatic irony, within the broader

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[1] S is the speaker. Correspondingly, and for the rest of the article, H is the hearer. Speaker and hearer are here taken as generic terms, standing respectively as the producer of the communicative message and the receiver of the message. No speech-centrism should be read in this choice of terms.

situational irony. Dramatic irony is the telling of an ironical event. Kreuz and Roberts (1993) distinguish between four types of irony:

1. Socratic irony,
2. dramatic irony,
3. irony of fate, and
4. verbal irony.

Socratic irony is the pretense of ignorance of a given topic, for pedagogical purposes. Kreuz and Roberts define dramatic irony as the situation where the audience knows something that the character of a play, novel, etc. ignores (e.g. the case of Oedipus). Irony of fate corresponds to situational irony. In this context, however, we will consider exclusively verbal irony.

1.2. Sarcasm

Sarcasm is an overtly aggressive type of irony, with clearer markers/cues and a clear target. There is no consensus on whether sarcasm and irony are essentially the same thing, with superficial differences, or if they differ significantly. Some authors (e.g. Muecke, 1969; Mizzau (1984: 26), Gibbs and O'Brien, 1991; Kreuz and Roberts, 1993), including the present one, believe the former. Rundquist (1991: 26) notes (ironically?) that "there does not appear to be a consensus on how to determine whether an utterance is ironic or sarcastic". Other scholars try to distinguish sarcasm from irony. Haiman (1990, 1998) claims that irony does not require the intention of the speaker, whereas sarcasm does. Haiman (1998: 20) further notes that irony may be situational, whereas sarcasm may not. Sperber and Wilson (1981) distinguish between echoing one's own utterance (irony) and echoing another person's utterance (sarcasm). Schaffer (1982: 76–77) reports different verbal clues for irony and sarcasm. Perhaps the strongest claim for the differentiation between irony and sarcasm is Brown (1980: 111, 124n) who claims that a teacher who writes 'Nice cover – F' on a student's paper, in case he/she really likes the cover, is being sarcastic but not ironical; Kreuz and Glucksberg (1989: 374) concur (with different examples).

1.3. Unintended irony

Gibbs et al. (1995) introduce the concept of 'unintentional irony'. An instance of irony is unintentional if "the speaker did not intend the utterance to be understood this way" (1995: 189). Gibbs et al. (1995: 189) note that this type of irony is a complex case which contains "elements of both verbal and situational irony". They also note the similarity to Kreuz and Roberts' (1993) dramatic irony. While they make much of the distinction (Gibbs et al., 1995: 199), there seems to be no need to introduce the distinction at all: consider that to S, the unintentionally ironical utterance u is simply not ironical. On the other hand, u becomes ironical when H interprets it as such. Since H does so intentionally (after all, H has to recognize S's intention to be

able to detect the ironical mismatch between S's intended utterance and u), it follows that all cases of irony involve intentionality, except that, contrary to common belief, it need not be S's. On Gibb's theory of irony, see also below.

1.4. The attitude of irony

Many influential scholars have claimed that irony implies necessarily a negative, critical attitude towards its object (Grice, 1978, 1989; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1976, 1980; Sperber and Wilson, 1981). This claim, however, seems to be refuted by the rhetorical figure called 'asteism' as well as by numerous counter-examples.

Asteism is a rhetorical figure, described as 'genteel irony' (OED) which Fontanier (1977 [1830]; quoted in Mizzau, 1984: 19) defines as praising or flattering someone under pretense of blaming or criticizing.[2] Berrendonner (1981) also cites asteism as a counter-example of the claim that irony implies a negative attitude.

Holdcroft (1983: 496) claims that irony does not involve necessarily a negative attitude and can be "playful and affectionate". Some examples of irony expressing a positive attitude in a negative mode can be found in Berrendonner (1981: 225), Brown (1980: 114), Mao (1991: 179–189), Haverkate (1990: 90), and Glucksberg (1995: 53). Brown's (1980: 114) example is particularly good and deserves being repeated:

(1) Sorry to keep bothering you like this. (Spoken by your stock broker on calling for the third time to announce unexpected dividends.)

I have also collected the following example

(2) These American-made cars that break down after 100,000 miles!

Haverkate (1990: 90) reports a convincing argument by Myers Roy (1977) as to why positive irony is much less frequent than negative irony: positive irony involves saying something negative that one does not believe; this is obviously more dangerous than saying something positive that one does not believe, since, if the intent of having one's insincere utterance be recognized fails, one is taken as having said something negative. Based on her reinterpretation of Gibbs' and associates' results (see below, section 4.4), Giora (1995: 255) notes also that negative irony is harder to process (if for no other reason, because it involves an explicit negation) and that alone could account for its relative rarity.

1.5. One-stage vs. two-stage theories

A very significant issue has emerged recently in the theory of irony, namely, whether irony presupposes a two-stage processing which would involve the process-

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[2] It is not clear, however, if Mizzau does or does not believe that irony can have a positive meaning, as she claims, without explanation, that asteism has 'a different function'.

ing of a meaning of the text, the rejection of this interpretation on pragmatic grounds, and a subsequent reinterpretation of the text. The opposing approach claims that the processing of irony is not distinct from that of 'literal' meaning and that crucially, ironical meaning is arrived at directly, without the mediation of a first interpretation that is rejected. Grice (and the rhetorical approach to irony as a trope) can be seen as the principal proponent of the two stage approach to irony, while Sperber and Wilson's (1981) mention theory is the main proponent of the one stage approach.

This issue has assumed a central role in the debate over irony in the last years, as Gibbs' work (1994) has purportedly provided empirical support for the one-stage approach and therefore against the two-stage approach. The one-stage/two-stage distinction parallels that between 'equivalent' (one stage) and 'sequential' processing (two stages) in Giora (1997).[3]

2. Irony as a figure of speech

From the point of view of the traditional theory, echoed in the dictionary definition quoted above, irony may be defined as 'saying something while meaning something else' or more formally, if S utters a sentence whose (literal) meaning is M, he/she intends to communicate non-M, i.e. the complementary meaning. Kaufer (1981) and Haverkate (1990) note that the traditional theory, which sees irony as a trope (figure of speech), is too broad, since it does not differentiate between irony and other figures of speech such as metaphor, litotes, etc.

2.1. Irony as negation

A refinement of the theory of irony as a figure of speech has been proposed suggesting that irony does not express *any* other meaning but a more specific 'opposite' meaning (e.g. Brown and Levinson, 1978: 221). For example, Levin (1982: 116–118) proposes to distinguish between irony as a trope, when irony is focused on a word, or as a figure of thought, when it is focused on a sentence. In the former case, the relationship is that of antonymy, in the latter of negation. Haverkate (1990: 83–85) proposes the same distinction, arguing that irony may focus on the negation of a word or of a proposition.

Kaufer (1981: 496–502) reviews the problems involved in this approach: they essentially boil down to the fact that many sentences without truth conditions can be ironical (see below) and that the conditions under which an utterance should be recognized as ironical are not specified. Furthermore, when the irony revolves around non-truth functional aspects of meaning,[4] it is impossible to apply the negation to

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[3] A broader discussion of Gibbs' critique of the 'standard pragmatic model' is to be found in Attardo (forthcoming).

[4] Kaufer's example is the sentence 'Johnny was deprived of his spinach last night' where "it is is well known that Johnny has a passionate hatred for spinach" (1981: 499). The use of 'deprived' presupposes that the patient wants what he/she was deprived of, but this fact is not truth-sensitive.

any of the sentences in the utterance and/or its constituents. For a further 'negation' theory of irony, see section 2.3.

2.2. Irony as violation of quality: Grice's theory

As is well known, Grice (1975, 1989) lists irony as an example of implicature and shows how one can account for irony as a case of flouting the cooperative principle (CP), by violating the maxim of quality (Grice, 1989: 34). Grice later returned to the analysis of irony, but we will examine this revision separately in what follows.

Grice's theory of irony is not radically different from the traditional accounts (Sperber and Wilson, 1981). An analysis of Tanaka's (1973) and Cutler's (1974: 117) Gricean, or Muecke's (1973) and Booth's (1974) pre-Gricean accounts of irony does indeed confirm that assessment. Kaufer (1981: 499) also treats Grice's account of irony as essentially similar to the traditional accounts of irony, over which it constitutes a 'significant advance' in that it allows for the determination of the conditions in which an utterance should be considered ironic (i.e. the violation of the maxim of quality) and it allows the reconstruction of the ironical intent even when irony revolves around non-truth conditional elements of the sentence. However, Grice's account is flawed insofar as the violation of other maxims can be shown to trigger irony, as shown by Sperber and Wilson (1981) in the case of understatement. Holdcroft (1983: 507) lists a number of examples in which irony involves no breach of a maxim and further argues that, in the absence of a target of the irony, it is unclear why a violation of the CP should lead one to look for ironical meanings as opposed to any other form of indirect meaning.

Kaufer further shows that the violation of any of the maxims can be ironical (1981: 500–501). He does, however, go on to argue that the violation of a maxim is not sufficient for the creation/perception of irony (1981: 502), on the basis of the following apparent counterexample:

(3) America's allies – always there when they need you.

which Kaufer (1981: 501) claims follows all the maxims. Kaufer immediately below notes that "the statement is undeniably crafted as irony because of its obvious contrast with a much more common slogan that conveys an attitude diametrically opposed" (1981: 502) and that because of this, the statement achieves great relevance.[5]

I believe that Kaufer's analysis is incorrect, because it overlooks some of the dynamics of the intertextual allusion to the slogan 'X: Always there when you need them' (which, if I am not mistaken, was once used by the British Police). Because he/she has made the intertextual reference and inverted the subject and direct object

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[5] 'Relevance' should be taken in Sperber and Wilson's relevance-theoretical sense; Kaufer has 'impact', but is quoting from a manuscript of Sperber and Wilson's work.

of the embedded clause, the writer to *Time*[6] can no longer be said to be abiding by the maxim of manner, as (3) hardly avoids ambiguity. In fact, (3) is structurally built as a pun, the quintessential example of exploitation of ambiguity in language.

Interestingly, Mizzau (1984: 37) notes that Grice himself had used an example of ironical implicatures generated via the flouting of another maxim (manner):

(4) Miss X produced a series of sounds that corresponded closely with the score of 'Home Sweet Home'. (Grice 1989: 37)

although Grice does not call this an irony.

Chen (1990) presents a theory of irony based on an 'augmented' version of the CP.[7] Chen defines irony as a violation of the maxim of quality (1990: 188) in its augmented version. This formulation is clearly in error, cf. Myers Roy (1977, 1981), Schaffer (1982: 12), and Sperber and Wilson's (1981: 300) example:

(5) Two people [are] caught in a downpour ... 'It seems to be raining'.

Here, Sperber and Wilson point out, the speaker does not say the opposite of what he/she means, only *less*. There seems to be no doubt that the example does not violate the maxim of quality, but only the maxim of relevance (what is said is obvious, hence irrelevant) or quantity (the speaker is not saying enough).

Therefore, we conclude that Grice's theory suffers from a crucial flaw, i.e. it is too restricted, since the violation of any maxim, not just of quality, may trigger irony. We turn now to another account of irony, which, while Gricean in spirit, detaches itself from Grice's in significant ways.

2.3. Graded salience violation

An important contribution to the study of irony comes from the work of Giora (1995, 1997; Giora et al., 1998; Giora and Fein, to appear). Giora's theory is a two-stage theory, although she considerably revises Grice's approach. A discussion of Giora's refutation of the one-phase approach, exemplified by Gibbs' work, can be found in Giora (1995), Giora et al., (1998), and see section 4.4 for discussion.

Giora's theory revolves around the two concepts of 'indirect negation' and 'graded salience'. We turn to both, in that order.

2.3.1. Indirect negation

The basic concept of the indirect negation view is that irony involves the presence of both the literal and the implied meanings and that the relationship between the two is that of indirect (i.e. non-explicit) negation. As will be recalled, Grice's (and the traditional view's) approach postulates that the first meaning is discarded, and hence no longer available (Giora, 1995: 241, 245). In this respect, irony is quite dif-

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[6] The sentence appeared in a letter to *Time* on May 19, 1980, according to Kaufer (1981: 501).
[7] The nature of this augmentation need not detain us in this context.

ferent from the process of disambiguation, in which rejected meanings are discarded and are no longer available to the speaker for processing, since irony *retains* both senses (Giora et al., 1998: 97). This point constitutes, then, a second flaw in Grice's theory.

Giora (1995) lists a number of differences between explicit/direct and indirect negation. Primarily, direct negation is subject to a number of implicatures (e.g. scalar implicatures, cf. Horn, 1989) which irony, being indirect, avoids (Giora, 1995: 242). Also, direct negation implies the opposite of what one negates, whereas indirect negation accommodates "more mitigated interpretations" (1995: 244), i.e. intermediate values on the negated axis.

2.3.2. The graded salience hypothesis

The graded salience hypothesis (GSH), which has been developed and presented independently of the study of irony, consists in the idea that more salient meanings have priority in interpretation, i.e. when a polysemous item is encountered during processing, the speaker processes first its most salient meaning and then the other(s).

Needless to say, the definition of 'salience' is a central issue. Salience is defined as a function of

1. a word's meaning conventionality (i.e. whether a word has that meaning by convention; in other words, if it is listed in the lexicon as having that meaning),
2. familiarity (e.g. *freedom* is more familiar than *liberty*),
3. frequency (i.e. more frequent meanings are more salient), and
4. 'givenness status' in a linguistic co(n)text (Giora, 1997: 185).

Whereas the first three aspects of this definition, while not necessarily straightforward, are reasonably clear, the last one is more problematic, as the theme/rheme distinction has been found to be questionable (e.g. Levinson, 1983: x). This is not to say that a proposal based on the theme/rheme articulation should be automatically discounted; however, it should be kept in mind that there is a degree of vagueness in the present definition of the concept which may be problematic, since, for example, it precludes a quantification of the value of salience.

The processing of an utterance, from the standpoint of the GSH, looks as follows:

- salient meanings have priority,
- novel meanings are interpreted by accessing the salient meaning first, rejecting it as the intended meaning, and reinterpreting.
- novel meanings are harder to process. (Giora, 1997: 186)

In other words, Giora rejects the priority of literal meaning and instead postulates the priority of salient meanings (1997: 197). Thus, Giora rejects the traditional and Gricean interpretations of irony (and of figurative language, as well, incidentally), which postulate the unquestioned priority of literal meaning, while retaining the two-stage model, since her processing of novel ironies requires backtracking and reinterpretation. Giora (1997) suggests that a revision of the "standard pragmatic model"

along these lines would shield it from the psycholinguistic criticisms mentioned above (see further section 4.4).

The rejection of the primacy of the literal sense, in favor of the primacy of the salient sense (be it literal or figurative/indirect) constitutes then a third criticism of Grice's original model.

The GSH makes clear empirical predictions, which have been tested. These boil down to two principal claims:

1. literal meanings should still be available after non-literal meanings have been activated (from the 'indirect negation' aspect); and
2. ironical interpretations are less salient that literal readings, hence they should take longer to process.

These predictions have been empirically supported in experiments reported in Giora et al., (1998) and Giora and Fein (to appear).

2.4. Conclusion: Critical assessment of Grice's theory

The following critiques have been leveled at Grice's model of irony:

1. violation of any maxim (not just of that of quality) may trigger irony
2. the non-ironical sense is not discarded, but is used to compute the ironical sense,
3. the priority of the literal meaning of the text is rejected in favor of the priority of the most salient text,
4. irony implies an attitude towards its object (cf. Grice's own revision of the definition, below).

It should be kept in mind, however, that Grice is responsible for the basic two-stage model of irony, which will be defended in what follows.

3. Irony as an (insincere) speech act

We turn now to four analyses of irony from within speech act theory. As such, these could well be considered as Gricean theories of irony as well.

3.1. Amante

Ironical speech acts are not performatives (Amante, 1981: 81), they are necessarily indirect speech acts (1981: 81), and must be insincere (1981: 83). Amante argues that in an ironical speech act two propositions are predicated (or one is predicated and one implied). He claims that the propositions must conflict[8] '$P \neq P'$' (1981: 82), or in other words that

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[8] Actually, from the notation quoted in the text, merely that they must differ (but this is probably irrelevant).

"[They] must be in formal opposition to [one an]other through negation or through some opposing semantic relationship such as complementarity, antonymy, contradiction, or converseness. If no such formally negative relationship seems to exist between P and P', then there still must be a very discernible but perhaps non-polar difference [...]" (Amante, 1981: 82)

Amante insists that clues to the irony be present (1981: 82–83); "*It is mandatory that some clue to irony be provided by the ironist*" (1981: 83; emphasis in the original). However, he does not provide arguments for this position.

Finally, Amante argues that irony creates a 'quasi-perlocutionary' force, called 'affective force' (1981: 88) which is a "blend of illocutionary and perlocutionary forces" (1981: 88). The affective force of irony is, strangely, defined as drawing "attention to the language [of the irony] itself and focus[ing] on the message" (1981: 92), i.e. it "causes the audience to reprocess the illocutionary act" (1981: 92). No mention is made of the critical attitude often associated with irony.

3.2. Brown

A significant issue, highlighted by Brown (1980), is that irony is not limited to assertions, or in other words, that other speech acts can be ironical too. Brown (1980: 114) provides examples of congratulations, thanking, requesting, and apologizing. Brown initially defines irony as the performance of a speech act with an attendant flaunting of the absence of the required sincerity conditions. A corollary is that speech acts that do not have sincerity conditions (such as greetings) cannot be performed ironically (1980: 116). A possible counterexample to this claim could be comedian Jerry Seinfeld's famous 'Hello Newman' ironical/sarcastic greeting, said with a sneer which clearly belies the greeting.

Further examination of speech acts that do not just involve statements leads Brown to revise the definition, broadening it to the utterance of a sentence which is "use[d] in a speech act with a necessary associated psychological state"; here, S intends H to understand that the "psychological state requirement [is] intentionally unfulfilled" (Brown, 1980: 120). The psychological states of which he speaks, following Searle (1979), are such things as believing something, regretting something, desiring something, etc.

An advantage of this approach, as Brown notes, is that it ties irony to the normal processing of speech acts, without requiring special modes of communication or other apparatus. Thus, the theory is very economical.

3.3. Haverkate

Haverkate (1990) starts out by noting that irony can focus on predicates, on propositions, and on illocutionary force. He then expresses his adherence to the theory that "irony is the intentional expression of insincerity" (1990: 104), which corresponds essentially to Brown's (see 3.2), whose work is, however, not quoted. It should be noted that Haverkate qualifies his formulation, noting that S intends H to recognize his/her insincerity, in that it is 'transparent' (1990: 102) i.e. overt.

The article consists mostly of a discussion of various types of speech acts and how they can be employed ironically. It thus provides a valuable resource for the analysis of irony in speech acts other than assertives.

An important aspect of the speech act analyses of irony, which emerges powerfully in Haverkate's article, is their strong dependence on Gricean pragmatics. Essentially, one could recast the speech act theory of irony in a completely Gricean mold by calling it (as Haverkate does) an intentional and obvious violation (in this case, a flouting) of the maxim of quality.

3.4. Glucksberg

Glucksberg (1995: 52) introduces the concept of 'pragmatic insincerity' by which he means that "the speaker has violated at least one of the felicity conditions of well-formed speech acts, usually the sincerity condition". He then goes on to state that pragmatic insincerity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the creation/perception of irony (1995: 53). The other necessary condition is the allusion to "some prior expectation, norm, or convention that has been violated in one way or another" (1995: 53).

Despite these discussions, one still finds the violation of the maxim of quality quoted as the necessary and sufficient condition for irony; cf. Kreuz and Glucksberg (1989), Kreuz and Roberts (1995: 21–22): "nonveridicality is essential for the perception of irony".

4. Irony as mention

We now turn to a family of theories which claim to have introduced a substantial change in the analysis of irony. We will review the basic theory and then address its offshoots and the attempts at empirical verification.

The mention (or echoic mention) theories were first[9] presented in Sperber and Wilson's much quoted paper on irony as mention (1981) which has been somewhat revised in Sperber and Wilson (1986).[10] Specifically, Sperber and Wilson reject the notion of 'mention' as too limited and replace it with the notion of 'interpretation', i.e. "the use of a propositonal form to represent not itself but some other propositional form it more or less closely resembles" (1986: 264n). They also point out that this terminological change does not substantially affect their account of irony.

The notion of *echoic* utterance is introduced as a case of interpretation of someone else's thought (e.g. reported speech). In the case of reported speech, the relevance of the utterance is arrived at on the basis of the fact that the speaker informs the hearer that someone has said X. In the case of echoic utterances, the speaker

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[9] Although Mizzau (1984: 15) finds an anticipation of the mention theory in the work of Lausberg (1949) who speaks of the use of the words of one's opponent (1949: 128).

[10] See also Wilson and Sperber (1992), Sperber and Wilson (1998) and the other essays in the symposium on irony, published as Carston and Uchida (1998).

informs the hearer that he/she "has in mind" (1986: 238) X and has "a certain attitude to it". Thus in the following example,

(6) Peter: The Joneses aren't coming to the party.
     Mary: They aren't coming, hum. If that's true, we might invite the Smiths.
              (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 238)

Mary's reply is relevant not in virtue of informing Peter that he has just uttered the sentence 'The Joneses aren't coming to the party' but because it informs Peter that Mary "has paid attention to his utterance and is weighing up its reliability and implications" (1986: 238). Finally, echoic utterances must not necessarily be attributable to a given specific individual, as proverbs and sayings show.[11]

The speaker of an echoic utterance must necessarily have a certain attitude towards the echoic utterance itself. This attitude can be anything (positive, negative, neutral). Sperber and Wilson note that

"Sometimes, the speaker's attitude is left implicit, to be gathered only from tone of voice, context and other paralinguistic clues; at other times it may be made explicit." (1986: 239)

This corresponds to the weak and strong versions of mention theory (Attardo, 1993), respectively.

Sperber and Wilson proceed to expand their theory of irony on this basis. They argue that

"[Irony] invariably involves the implicit expression of an attitude, and that the relevance of an ironical utterance invariably depends, at least in part, on the information it conveys about the speaker's attitude to the opinion echoed." (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 239)

As to the attitude, they claim that it is "invariably of the rejecting or disapproving kind" (1986: 239), a claim falsified by numerous examples, as was seen above (section 1.4).

The implicatures of an ironical utterance, according to Sperber and Wilson (1986: 240) depend on the following factors:

1. "a recognition of the utterance as echoic",
2. "identification of the source of the opinion echoed",
3. "recognition that the speaker's attitude to the opinion echoed is one of rejection or disapproval".

Sperber and Wilson compare then their account of irony to the traditional account of irony (which is very close to Grice's, as we have seen). They find the biggest problem for the traditional account in the question why the speaker should choose to express his/her meaning indirectly when he/she can do so directly. In their opinion,

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[11]   Berrendonner (1981: 216) argues that irony is self-referential, besides being a mention.

because irony is echoic and critical of the echoed utterance, it is used to ridicule the utterance echoed. In other words, the point of irony is to express one's attitude towards an utterance.[12]

There are several weak points in this account of irony, which will lead to its rejection. In fact, it can be shown that mentioning is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition of the ironical status of a text.

Mention is not a sufficient condition of irony (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1980: 122; Carston, 1981: 27; Schaffer, 1982: 16; Chen, 1990: 36). This can be seen clearly from the fact that not all mentioned sentences are ironical.

(7) John said that Bob said X

The sentence in (7) is not ironical. Thus, whatever the status of the mentioning itself, some other factor would have to be present for the mention theory to function.[13]

The second point parellels the rejection of mention theory for jokes (Attardo, 1993: 277–286). One of the crucial claims of the echoic mention theory is that it must allow for implicit (i.e. non signaled) mention. Specifically, Berrendonner (1981: 217) notes that in irony there are no markers of mention. Explicit mention is set out by appropriate metalinguistic markers of the kind in (8)

(8) As my uncle Bob used to say ...

Implicit mention may also be fairly easy to spot, such as when a speaker verbatim repeats the previous utterance of the hearer. It is, however, clear that one can utter sentences that merely resemble (e.g. paraphrase) other utterances. For example, the following is likely to be recognized as a mention by most people familiar with Shakespeare: 'I wonder whether I should kill myself or not. Whether it would be better, as far as socially sanctioned behavior is concerned, to have patience, etc.' Also, consider that one may echo no one in particular, but merely an hypothetical speaker. It follows that if one utters any sentence, one may be mentioning/echoing another utterance. This leads obviously to an infinite regression; how does H know that S is not mentioning someone else's mention of an utterance?

Even if infinite regression is somehow avoided, one is left with the problem of identifying an implicit echoic utterance (cf. Schaffer, 1982: 16; Chen, 1990: 38). In many cases, as Sperber and Wilson say, the intonation or kinesic factors will reveal that the speaker does not endorse the utterance. However, there exists a so-called 'dead-pan' delivery, which consists precisely in *not* signalling that one's utterance is

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[12] It should be noted that Chen (1990: 38) directs essentially the same argument *against* the mention theory of irony, noting that the theory fails to explain why the ironist would choose mention and irony (indirectness) to express his/her feelings towards the situation. Needless to say, the irony of this counter-attack is not lost to this author.

[13] According to Kerbrat-Orecchioni, the extra element present is essentially the semantic opposition between what is said and what is implied, which corresponds to the traditional treatment of irony. Kerbrat-Orecchioni concludes that therefore the mention theory and the traditonal approach are not incompatible. This author's conclusion is much stronger.

a joke/irony; or consider the case of a written ironical text, in which no intonational or kinesic clues mark off the utterance. In these cases, it is necessary to use contextual clues to decide if an utterance is echoic or not (as per Sperber and Wilson's list of factors). The only factor in the context of the utterance which can identify an utterance as echoic is that the utterance is somehow inappropriate either to the context or to the set of beliefs that the hearer knows the speaker to have. Suppose that I were to say

(9) Only Italians can make good pasta.

Given knowledge of my background (namely that I am partly Italian), the sentence would be perfectly reasonable. H therefore has no reason to believe that I am echoing some unnamed chauvinistic Italian gourmet. On the other hand, suppose that I say

(10) We should throw all these immigrants, legal or illegal, out of the US.

The knowledge of my background (namely that I am a legal alien residing in the US) and the logical assumption that I would not want to advocate something that would be damaging to myself, will lead H to believe that I am echoing some unnamed American xenophobe.

As seen in the quote above, Sperber and Wilson's (1981) mention theory of irony explicitly allows for 'implicit mention', i.e. mention of an utterance without any overt trace of the mentioning. This means that the mentioned status of an utterance has to be determined inferentially, since by definition there is no co-textual clue to the mentioned status of the utterance. How can this status be determined? Apparently, through contextual inappropriateness, i.e. if S utters a sentence that is patently inappropriate, H can decide that that sentence is being zero-mentioned in S's utterance. But if this account is valid, then the ulterior step of the mentioning is unnecessary, since I propose that purposeful inappropriateness is a necessary and sufficient cause of irony in an utterance (see below). Schaffer (1982: 16) points out that the same problem exists at the level of deciding whether a given mention of an utterance is a case of ironical mention or one of non-ironical mention. Schaffer believes that Sperber and Wilson are victims of circular reasoning: "[they] use the presence of mention to identify irony and irony to identify the presence of mention" (1982: 16). In conclusion, mention is not a necessary condition for irony.

Thus, we have seen that mentioning is neither a sufficient condition for irony (there exist non-ironical mentions) nor a necessary one (one can account for irony more simply without introducing the concept of mention). Finally, both the identification of the source of the echoic utterance and the negative attitude are unnecessary (per Sperber and Wilson's own account) or incorrect (see above).

Let us now return to the traditional/Gricean account of irony. In this account too, one recognizes a given utterance as non-literal (i.e. having implicatures) on the basis of perceived incongruity between the utterance and its context and/or the set of beliefs ascribed to the utterer. An inferred meaning intended by the speaker is then

looked for, using the CP (mostly relevance, probably). In particular, one assumes that if the speaker is bothering to be non-literal he/she must want to convey some attitude towards some fact/object in the context. If we go on a picnic and it rains, the utterance of

(11) What a nice weather! (with sarcastic tone)

will be interpreted as conveying annoyance at the weather, rather than towards the innocent sentence.

If we compare the echoic mention theory and the traditional/Gricean view, we can easily see that their explanatory power is the same, but that the echoic mention theory involves some extra steps (labeling the utterance echoic and looking for a source of the utterance) which are unnecessary, since mere contextual inappropriateness is enough to trigger the assumption of implicature.[14] This is not to say that one cannot have cases of echoic irony, but only that all irony is not necessarily echoic.[15]

4.1. Empirical verifications of the mention theory

An attempt has been made to test the claims of mention theory against empirical evidence (Jorgensen et al., 1984). The experiments consisted in reading tests, in which the subjects were presented with short stories ending in an ironical sentence which was either a mention of another sentence in the text or a sentence which did not echo anything in the text. This was obtained by omitting a sentence in the text which provided the first occurrence of the echo. The results were mixed: in two experiments, the echoic mention stories scored as well or barely better as the non-echoic stories. In the remaining four, while statistically significant higher numbers of subjects reported irony in the mentioned sentences, some subjects still reported irony. This seems to suggest, as Jorgensen et al. admit, that mentioning barely reinforces the ironic intent. Jorgensen et al. reject such a weakening of the mention theory (1984: 118) and propose alternative explanations (such as that the subjects may have imagined an antecedent of which the ironical sentence was a mention). Jorgensen et al.'s attempt at validating mention theory has been criticized on methodological grounds as well (Williams, 1984; Barbe, 1995: 46).

Gibbs (1994: 109, 384) reports some experimental results that seem to show that mention may reinforce the ironic nature of an utterance: subjects rated echoic utterances as more ironical than non-echoic utterances and processed echoic ironical utterances faster than non-echoic ironical utterances. The same results were found for sarcastic utterances.

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[14] It should be noted that these extra steps contrast with mention theory's claim of being a 'direct access' theory. See section 4.4.1 below for a fuller discussion of why mention is necessarily a two-step theory.

[15] Further discussion of mention theory can be found in Chen (1990: 68–73), Barbe (1995: 44–48). An interesting issue, brought up by Glucksberg (1995: 54), is that the mention theory fails to recognize both the allusion to a violated norm and the violation of a felicity condition for the speech act performed in the utterance (cf. above, section 3). Further discussion of this issue will be found in section 5.4 below.

4.2. Irony as pretense

Clark and Gerrig (1984) have presented a theory of irony as pretense. Essentially, the theory claims that when S is being ironical he/she pretends to be S' speaking to H' (a pretend hearer,[16] who may or may not be real and/or present). Clark and Gerrig (1984: 122) follow Grice's (1978, 1989) point that the attitude of the ironist is critical towards what S' is saying. H' is meant to take S' seriously (i.e. not to perceive the irony), while H is assumed to be able to understand all the above: "the pretense, S' 's injudiciousness, H' 's ignorance, and hence S' 's attitude toward S', H', and what S' said" (1984: 122). See also Clark (1996: 369–374) for the 'joint pretense' version of this theory.

While the two theories claim to be substantially different (e.g. Sperber, 1984) it has been claimed that they are for all practical purposes notational variants of each other (Williams, 1984; Winner, 1988; Chen, 1990: 39–42; Barbe, 1995: 48–50). Winner (1988) has noted that they are both 'substitution' theories. Furthermore, as Williams (1984: 129) notes, they both ultimately derive from the same traditional account of irony they seek to criticize.

While the above criticisms have their fair share of plausibility, I think that they end up throwing out the baby with the bath water: mention and pretense are indeed very similar concepts, but, as Clark and Gerrig note, mention is a far more restricted concept than pretense. Thus, pretense theory can be shown to be able to handle some cases that mention theory would struggle with (e.g. Swift's *A modest proposal*; for an opposing view, see Sperber, 1984: 133n); moreover, pretense theory can be expanded very easily to cover dramatic and situational irony (Clark and Gerrig, 1984: 124) while mention theory cannot, in principle, handle these cases (it would not make sense to say that an event is a 'mention' of another event). Furthermore, pretense theory does not fall victim as readily to the infinite regression that plagues mention theory. For example, it would be relatively easy to constrain pretense theory in such a way as to exclude cases in which the pretend nature of S's utterance is not somehow marked as such.

4.3. Reminder theory

Kreuz and Glucksberg (1989) revise mention theory in their 'echoic reminder theory'. They admit that not all ironies are echoic mentions (1989: 375), and they claim instead that an ironical utterance need only allude "to an antecedent event" (1989: 375) such 'events' may include expectations and implicit norms. The purpose of irony is, as in echoic mention theory, to express disapproval towards the situation. Kreuz and Glucksberg's (1989) results are "consistent with the notion of implicit reminding through positive social norms and expectations" (1989: 383).

Kreuz and Glucksberg test a number of predictions that they claim follow from their theory, but do not follow from a traditional/Gricean account of irony. The most significant are:

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[16]	I am standardizing the notation to the use adopted in this article, although I retain the numbering of Ss and Hs by primes.

1. positive statements are more readily interpreted as sarcastic,
2. positive sarcastic utterances do not require explicit antecedents, while negative ones do.
3. in particular, the presence of a victim (i.e., a target for the sarcastic utterance) should provide an explicit antecedent. (1989: 376)

Unfortunately, as seen in section 1.4, there are other reasons, outside of reminder theory, that positive ironical statements are difficult to process and/or occur more rarely. This fact undermines the conceptual basis of the entire experimental set-up.

Kreuz and Glucksberg find that their results are consistent with their theory when "taken as a whole" (1989: 383). Indeed, they find that the presence of an explicit antecedent and of a victim does increase the ratings of sarcasm and that positive statements are interpreted sarcastically more readily than negative ones (1989: 379). However, when they consider all the data, Kreuz and Glucksberg arrive at some results that are incompatible with reminder theory:

- The subjects in their experiment 1 expressed "an attitude towards the object of sarcasm by expressing the opposite of that attitude" (1989: 380). This, as Kreuz and Glucksberg note, is what the standard theory predicts.
- There was no interaction between whether a statement was positive or negative and the presence or absence of a victim, therefore suggesting that "a blatantly counterfactual statement may be a sufficient condition for inferring sarcastic intent" (1989: 381); this finding is also along the lines of a traditional theory of irony/sarcasm.

Kreuz and Glucksberg conclude that "when a statement is obviously counterfactual [...] this seems to be sufficient to prompt at least a suspicion of sarcastic intent" (1989: 382), and also that "people are likely to judge a remark as sarcastic whenever it is obviously false to both speaker and listener, *even when that remark has no explicit victim*" (1989: 382; my emphasis).

Overall, therefore, it seems clear that reminder theory fails to provide an alternative to mention theory, since per its proponents' own results, two out of three predictions are falsified by the data, and the third prediction can be explained by other means. Conversely, the results that Kreuz and Glucksberg report show clearly that the central factor in the stimuli used was the counterfactual nature of the utterance, and that the positive value of the utterance and the presence of a victim were mere facilitators. I would speculate that this is because the presence of an obvious target makes it simpler to direct the critical attitude of irony and because a critical attitude is more logically expressed about a negative fact (and hence with a positive utterance).

4.4. Psycholinguistic critiques of pragmatic approaches to irony

Gibbs and his associates have presented a large body of results of empirical research which they claim invalidates the general approach of pragmatic and logical

approaches to irony (e.g. Gibbs, 1986; Gibbs and O'Brien, 1991; Gibbs, 1994). For the purposes of this discussion, we can describe a 'standard pragmatic model' (SPM) as a two-stage model which prescribes that the literal, non-figurative, direct meaning of the linguistic expression be processed first and the non-literal, indirect, figurative meaning be arrived at via implicature (or other inferential processing).

Basically, Gibbs and his associates have shown that the most straightforward prediction of the SPM can be shown to be incorrect: it does not take longer to process indirect, figurative language.

I have shown elsewhere (section 4.4.2 below and see Attardo, forthcoming) that, while interesting and thought provoking, the results discussed only refute one of the several possible psychological models that can be derived from Gricean pragmatics, and that it is possible to design a theory of processing of indirect speech (including irony) which is consistent with Gibbs' results while retaining the basic two-stage model of implicature (see also section 4.4.2 below).

Other models have also been presented. For example, Mizzau argues that

"A comment such as 'Paul is smart', accompanied by an eloquent facial expression, produces simultaneously a characterization of the message as ironical and its antiphrastic translation. If the same sentence is said without any accompanying non-verbal indices, but everybody knows the obtuseness of the person referred to, the understanding of the irony seems to be somehow posterior to the discovery of the true meaning. (Only this second case represents the mental process hypothesized by Grice.)" (Mizzau, 1984: 38; my translation)

We find here the same argument as that used by Gibbs, viz. that the context primes the ironical meaning directly without the need to access the literal/non-ironical meaning first. However, Mizzau acknowledges the possibility of all three paths of interpretation: i.e. ironical meaning first, literal first, and simultaneous interpretation (her first example in the quote above).

4.4.1. The 'computability' problem

Furthermore, the one-stage model that Gibbs and associates (as well as relevance theoretic adherents) propose, runs into the logical problem of computability, which I discuss in Attardo (forthcoming). Basically, the issue boils down to the fact that a one-stage model is logically incapable of accounting for novel input, since it will fail to differentiate between a semantically ill-formed sentence and a novel instance of metaphor, irony, or other indirect figure of speech.

The one-stage model cannot utilize a 'fail-then-recover' strategy since, obviously enough, a fail-then-recover strategy is a two-stage model. A one-stage model is forced to succeed or fail in its interpretation at first try, so to speak. So, if faced with an utterance u whose meaning is ironical, a one-stage model would necessarily arrive at the intended meaning without considering the possibility of a different interpretation. To do so would eo ipso transform the one stage model into a two-stage model.

Consider now that it is known that Ss will backtrack and reanalyze a text fragment they have misprocessed (e.g. garden-path sentences); in other words, we know that fail-then-recover strategies are used by Ss/Hs. It follows that a two-stage model of

processing must be admissible, at least in those cases. The question becomes now: If a two-stage processing model is possible, why isn't it used in irony, metaphor, etc.?

In fact, Sperber and Wilson's (1981) mention theory is a two-stage model: the recognition that u_1 is a mention of u_0 presupposes a metalinguistic distance between u_1 and u_0 which could be represented as in (12), where s_0 and s_1 are the original speaker and the mentioning speaker, respectively.

(12) $S_1 \vdash u_1 \ (S_0 \vdash u_0)$

To say that u_1 'echoes', 'mirrors', etc. u_0, implies the recognition that $u_1 \neq u_0$ (note that the proposition p_1 asserted in the sentence of which u_1 is the utterance may in fact be equal to p_0). If $u_0 = u_1$ there is no mention, since u_0 cannot differ from u_1, as it would have to if u_1 were a mention of u_0, as per (12). Therefore, for S_n to recognize that $u_n \neq u_0$ and then to infer (12), there must be a two-stage process. Gibbs (1994) admits to as much when he introduces the category of 'product'.

Let us examine the processing of a metaphor, for example. Suppose that a one-stage processing mechanism encounters a novel combination of attributes. It either discards as ill-formed a semantically 'inappropriate' combination or it looks for a prior instance of the combination in its database. The search may fail, which would then lead the model to also discard the input, or it may succeed, with the possibility that either the novel input does match the older one (in which case it is not really a novel input) or it does not, in which case the model will fail to attribute the intended meaning to the novel input (it will analyze it in terms of the old input). A more sophisticated processor may perhaps realize that this novel input needs to be added to the database and do so. Thereafter, the processor will recognize the (now no longer novel) input and proceed accordingly. It remains, however, that the processor cannot, short of bootstrapping itself into a two-stage device, process the input as novel and anomalous, yet not to be discarded on first run.

Consider the following example, consisting of my saying:

(13) I love Heidegger.

Let us assume that no kinesic or suprasegmental cues are available (such as that S is busy ripping up a copy of *Being and time* and feeding it to the flames). The only bit of information available is that I dislike phenomenological thought. The one-stage model, faced with (13), may either:

1. process the utterance at face value,
2. process the utterance and reject it as incompatible with what is known about my system of beliefs.

Consider similarly what would happen if I uttered (14):

(14) I am not Salvatore Attardo.

Here the only options available to a one-stage model are

1. to discard (14) as a contradiction,
2. to revise the database and delete the link between the speaker and the 'Salvatore Attardo' identifier.

In other words, a one-stage model has no reason (or capacity) to look for a second, ulterior interpretation of the text, just because the first one it runs into is anomalous.[17]

A possible objection to this argument may go as follows: since H (or a model of H) has available as contextual information both (13) and the attending information in (15), and both (14) and (16), then from the combination of (13) and (15) H can infer that S does *not* in fact like Heidegger.

(15) S dislikes phenomenology and Heidegger is a phenomenologist,
(16) S is Salvatore Attardo,

However, this reasoning begs the question: why should not H rather conclude that S is being inconsistent or irrational? If H is to entertain and discard this hypothesis, then *eo ipso* we have no longer a one-stage model but a two-stage model. Then, how can H decide which of the two possible interpretations is to be preferred? The obvious answer is: via the CP (or by appealing to relevance). But this does not solve the original problem: at some point in the processing (not necessarily as the first step), H will run into a second possible interpretation. At this point a choice will have to be made, presumably on the assumption of cooperation/relevance. However, the very fact that there is a choice entails that this is in fact a two-stage model. Note that the escape solution that H directly arrives at the antiphrastic meaning without *ever* considering the positive meaning is impossible, as shown by Giora's (1995) argument that the two meanings must coexist, since they need to be compared to compute the distance between them, which is the source of the value judgment implicit in irony.[18]

Consider further that from the combination of (14) and (16), S is somehow supposed to arrive at an interpretation, such as for example that S is joking, which is incompatible with a literal, CP abiding interpretation of the text. Since there is no available information in H's knowledge about ritual denials of identity or about playful memory loss, H is forced to: a) register his/her failure to assign (14) a satisfactory interpretation (given its clash with 16), and (b) look for a reinterpretation along novel lines, if possible.[19]

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[17] Consider Sperber and Wilson (1986: 109 and passim) who list the following 'contextual effects', besides inferences: adding, deleting, reinforcing, and weakening of assumptions. As we can see, there is no reinterpretation option available. I owe this point to Rachel Giora (personal communication).

[18] The same argument can be made for humorous texts, such as jokes: the incompatible meanings (scripts) must coexist in the text (however playfully) if their opposition is to be ascertained. See Attardo (1994) for discussion.

[19] Note that I deliberately leave the interpretation of the utterance open, to stress the fact that at this first stage there is no appropriate interpretation at all. It is only at the second stage, that is *after* a failure to accommodate the utterance (and its presuppositions) to the common ground, that a suitable interpre-

4.4.2. Empirical studies contradicting Gibbs' conclusions

McDonald (1992) reports an empirical study with patients suffering from closed head injury. He finds that while the patients can identify the literal meaning of sentences and the illocutionary force of an indirect speech act, they have considerable more difficulty rejecting the literal meaning when it is presented as an option. More significantly, the subjects who had suffered head injury failed to identify ironical/sarcastic statements. These results are interpreted as going against the one-stage mention theory account of irony and sarcasm. Dews and Winner (1995) report results that go against Gibbs' theory, by showing that speakers must access the literal meaning of the ironical utterances, since the literal meaning affects the perception of the degree of aggressiveness of the utterance. Dews and Winner (1995) use assessment scales (instead of reaction times as does Gibbs) and argue that the difference in testing methodologies may be responsible for the different results.

Work done by Giora and her associates (Giora, 1995, 1997; Giora et al., 1998; Giora and Fein, to appear) has shown that ironical utterances take longer to process (see section 2.3 above for discussion). Giora (1995) also demonstrates that Gibbs' results, in one representative study, can be reinterpreted as showing that the subjects are reacting more to the high informativeness of the ironical/sarcastic test sentences and the corresponding low informativeness of the literal sentences, than to the presence or absence of irony. By ingeniously comparing results from different examples and carefully reading Gibbs' own materials, Giora comes to the conclusion that Gibbs' own data show that irony takes longer to process than equivalently informative literal sentences.

5. Irony and the principle of least disruption

Having reviewed the literature on irony, we can now turn to the present discussion of irony, which is Gricean at the core, but includes several significant departures from Grice's own model. Let us start with the following points:

1. the ironic meaning is arrived at inferentially, hence
2. irony is entirely a pragmatic phenomenon,
3. the interpretation of the ironical meaning depends crucially on the active guidance of the CP, ergo
4. the CP needs to be immediately restored into functionality after having been violated. This I will call the 'principle of least disruption'.

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tation will be generated out of contextual pressure and cooperative/relevance assumptions. Note also that a recourse to the relevance theoretical principle is *a priori* ruled out, since the speaker has clearly just violated it and hence the presumption of relevance is no longer available to generate implicatures. Admitting the violation of the CP, backtracking, and reinterpretation nullifies the claimed differences between mention theory and the Gricean interpretations. See, however, Curcó (1995, 1996) and Yus Ramos (1998) for two-stages relevance theoretic accounts of humor.

The reconstruction of the ironist's intended meaning is supposed to be based on a set of shared presuppositions: H knows that S cannot mean M, and S knows that H knows that, and therefore S can count on the fact that H will not stop at S's literal meaning M, but rather look for a more suitable meaning among the infinite set of other meanings which may have been implicated by S.

5.1. How is the ironical meaning arrived at?

The fact that irony does not necessarily implicate the opposite or the converse of the literal meaning is important. Schaffer (1982: 15) sums up the situation brilliantly:

"Recognition of irony rarely comes from the words themselves [...], but rather from cues in the conversational context or nonverbal communication of the speaker. The ironic implicatures resulting from such cues *merely point to the possibility that the speaker's meaning may be other than that of the literal content of the utterance*; other conversational implicatures and semantic considerations can then supply an alternative interpretation." (Schaffer, 1982: 15; my emphasis)

Therefore, it follows that irony is a completely pragmatic phenomenon, with no semantic correlates. As such, it is entirely dependent on context, including but not limited to, S's intentions and goals. The ironical meaning needs to be inferred, it is never 'said' (in Grice's sense), i.e. found in the text itself.

This point is quite important and bears restating. There are two distinct phenomena at work: (1) the determination that a (part of) a text is ironical (the recognition of irony), and (2) the determination of the intended meaning of the irony (the interpretation of the value of the irony).

We turn first to the determination of the value of the irony and will return to the recognition of irony in a subsequent section.

5.2. Principle of least disruption

To be noted here is the fact that Grice's CP, momentarily suspended when an ironic utterance is first encountered – since H notes the violation of at least one maxim[20] – becomes fully operational again once the first step of rejecting the literal meaning has been taken, for example in (17):

(17) S: 'What nice weather.' (context: it is raining.)

H will assume that the utterance is relevant to the condition of the weather, and not to, say, the location of our cat.

There seems to be a, to the best of my knowledge, yet unnoticed principle of 'smallest possible disruption'[21] of the CP at work here. As a first approximation to

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[20] Actually, as will appear below, this is strictly not true, but as a beginning this wording will do.

[21] Parts of this section were originally developed jointly with Victor Raskin as an appendix to Raskin and Attardo (1994). Editorial reasons led to the elimination of the discussion of irony from that paper. The text included in this section has been heavily revised, but I would like to acknowledge Raskin's contribution.

its formulation, it seems that the principle of smallest possible disruption warns S to limit his/her violation of the CP to the smallest possible conversational unit (one utterance, one conversational turn, one speech exchange), and to try to link the entire CP-violating unit to the rest of the interaction, for example by finding a certain appropriateness to the CP-violating unit.

Thus, in example (17) above, H, upon noticing the disruption of the CP does not withdraw from the conversation (which would be a safe move, since his/her inter-locutor has just given manifest proof of being untrustworthy) but assumes that the violation of the CP is the smallest possible and, therefore, that the violation must somehow refer to the context, and be meaningful. Let us note that in principle, one might say

(18) What nice weather.

with an ironical tone while it is raining, and upon the hearer's interpretation of utter-ance (18) as ironical say something along the lines of (19).

(19) I was just kidding, as a matter of fact I love rain.

In other words, here S would be deceiving H about his/her intention to be ironical. There is no *a priori* reason for limiting the violation of the CP to the smallest possi-ble context, except for the desire of the speakers to facilitate communication even when a violation is present or necessary. This means that there is another, broader communicative principle, that tolerates violations as long as they are kept as limited as possible. This issue is further developed in Attardo (forthcoming).[22]

Grice remarked that irony was problematic in a straightforward implicational framework because "irony is intimately connected with the expression of a feeling, attitude, or evaluation" (1989: 53). On the basis of the principle stated above, it is now easy to see how the expression of a speaker attitude towards the ironical refer-ent would fit the descriptive framework, since the ironical utterance would be inter-preted as referring, cooperatively, to some element of the context. It is necessary, however, to further specify the cooperative nature of the inferential process that determines the value of the irony. As we have seen, Grice himself realized that his original account left a significant gap in the description of irony, namely, that irony points to an evaluative aspect of S's intention (or intended meaning). I am here sug-gesting that two factors direct the inferential processing of the value of the irony:

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[22] An interesting issue, brought to my attention by Rachel Giora, is the problem of how the principle of least disruption can be reconciled with entire texts, such as Swift's *A modest proposal*, which violate the CP. At one level, the issue is fairly simple: by advocating a practice the author finds abhorrent (can-nibalism), he draws attention on the conditions of the Irish poor (via relevance); thus the text behaves according to the second part of the principle of least disruption. However, it remains that the text as a whole violates the CP in that it seems to fly in the face of the first requirement of the principle of least disruption. Possibly, texts such as this (and other) pamphlet(s) are seen as one utterance or conversa-tional turn (however large). It is obvious that further work is needed here.

1. the maxim of relevance,
2. the antiphrastic/antonymic assumption of irony (cf. Giora's 'negation').

In other words, after having recognized (a part of) a text as ironical, H assumes that the maxim of relevance holds and that the relevance of the irony lies in the direction of an antiphrastic meaning (i.e. in the direction of the opposite of what S is saying) with a special emphasis on S's value judgments. Berrendonner (1981: 183) argues that an utterance can be used ironically only if it has an 'argumentative value' (*valeur argumentative*), i.e. it can be seen as part of an axiological and/or teleological system from which it acquires its value. In other words, someone is trying to do something with the utterance, such as convince someone or argue for something; see also Braester (1992: 84–85).

5.3. A contextual-appropriateness theory of irony

We have seen that irony is non-cooperative at first reading. In what respect does irony violate CP at that first moment? This is an interesting issue, since every ironical utterance seems to be literally false and/or not appropriate to its context. Let us consider a few examples, starting with the standard Gricean violation of quality.

(20) I love children so.

If one says 'I love children so' while, in fact, disliking them, clearly, one is technically lying, but one's tone of voice or other signals may make it clear that one is deliberately and conspicuously violating the maxim of quality, and signalling to the hearer(s). Then one is not 'really' lying (since one wants to be 'outguessed'), but rather being ironical. This type of example can be readily explained as an implicature. Let us turn now to examples that would be problematic for a straightforward Gricean model.

(21) This is the happiest night of my life, (uttered during the middle of the day)

Katz and Fodor's (1963: 481) famous example in (21) – which may well be the only well-known example of the seriously underexplored category of appropriateness[23] – is neither true or false (hence, it does not violate quality), when pronounced in daylight, but it is inappropriate, i.e. it violates the rules that determine the deictic anchoring of discourse in reality. In the appropriate context, (21) could also be ironical (if for instance pronounced in the early morning by a speaker well known for his/her late-rising habit). Or consider the following situation:

(22) Two farmers in a drought-stricken area are talking and farmer A says: 'Don't you just love a nice spring rain?'

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[23]   The notion of appropriateness explored in the text differs significantly from the one used incidentally in De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981), where it is only a stylistic element.

While probably literally true (farmer A and B may like spring rains) and not (necessarily) a mention or an echo of another utterance, the utterance is contextually inappropriate because it is not raining.

The earlier example (17) uttered while it is raining, clearly belongs to the inappropriateness category of irony as well, but unlike (21), it also involves a literal non-truth. In other words, appropriateness and several other conditions and maxims can be violated in an ironic utterance, just as the violation of more than one maxim at a time in a joke is a common phenomenon (see Attardo, 1993, and references therein).

What examples (17), (21), and (22) have in common is that they would fail to be identified as ironical by a Gricean account of irony (they fail to violate a maxim); however, they all entail an inappropriate utterance, given the context in which they occur. Violation of a maxim, needless to say, creates an inappropriate utterance. Therefore, all examples of irony accounted for by implicature can be accounted for as inappropriate utterances as well. Consider again (20) above: if one does not like children, then it is inappropriate to say that one does.

It is possible to extrapolate these observations and define as ironical an utterance that, while maintaining relevance,[24] explicitly or implicitly violates the conditions for contextual appropriateness, either deictically or more broadly in terms of the knowledge by the participants of the opinions and belief systems of the speakers (see Searle, 1979: 113 for a brief mention of an account of irony in terms of inappropriateness).

Let us note also that we are introducing here an interesting exception to CP, since we are drawing an inference on the basis of a rule not included in it: 'be contextually appropriate' (which is not the same as being relevant). We will return to the issue of the relationship between relevance and appropriateness in section 5.4. The most obvious consequence is that we are hereby extending Grice's CP.

In light of the previous discussion, we can state the theory of irony that we are proposing as follows: an utterance u is ironical if

1. u is contextually inappropriate,
2. u is (at the same time) relevant,
3. u is construed as having been uttered intentionally and with awareness of the contextual inappropriateness by S, and
4. S intends that (part of) his/her audience recognize points 1–3,
5. unless H construes u as being unintentional irony, in which case 3–4 do not apply.

Usually, irony is used to express an evaluative judgment about a given event/situation which is commonly, but not exclusively, negative.

I believe that most of the aspects of this proposal are fairly obvious (at least to those with some familiarity with Gricean pragmatics). Some theoretical issues are dealt with in more detail below, but a few relatively minor points are better

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[24] Note that as per Attardo's (1997) two-stage approach to implicatures, it is perfectly acceptable for S to violate the maxim of relevance in the first stage and then follow it in the second. Thus, the definition in the text should be understood as 'maintaining relevance' in the second stage of processing.

addressed immediately. The proviso on point (4) that at least part of the audience recognizes the ironical intent of S, is meant to account for a situation in which, as Clark and Carlson (1982) point out, S addresses two different audiences at the same time, one who is essentially the "butt" of the irony and another audience who is 'in' to the ironical intent and appreciates the irony (or at least appreciates the fact that S intends to be ironical; cf. Schaffer, 1982: 8). Consider for example, the situation in which a child is pestering his/her parents for ice cream and S, one of the parents, says to him/her

(23) Are you sure you want ice cream?

intending the other parent to understand the ironical intent, but clearly aware that this will be lost on the child. Point (3) is thus meant to remind the reader of Grice's reflexive intention.

The following questions need now to be addressed:

- How is 'appropriateness' defined, and is it necessary to introduce such a new concept? Couldn't we do just with Grice's four maxims, or Sperber and Wilson's principle of Relevance? Is the role of appropriateness the same as that of 'felicity conditions' for speech acts? Should/could appropriateness be replaced by the concept of graded salience (see section 2.3)?
- Does the proposed theory account for all the data and the speakers' intuitions about the phenomenon?

5.4. Appropriateness

Consider the following operational definition of appropriateness: an utterance u is contextually appropriate iff all presuppositions of u are identical to or compatible with all the presuppositions of the context C in which u is uttered (cf. the notion of 'common ground'; Clark, 1996), except for any feature explicitly thematized and denied in u.[25]

From this definition it follows that appropriateness is truth-sensitive, since if we change the truth-value of a proposition presupposed by an utterance, the utterance's appropriateness may change:

(24) John should leave the room.
(25) John is in the room.

The utterance in (24) presupposes (25). If (25) is false, then (24) becomes inappropriate.

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[25]   The last clause is necessary to handle certain more or less metalinguistic utterances of the type 'This table is not a Duncan Phyfe' which presupposes (roughly) that H has the belief that the table is a Duncan Phyfe.

Relevance, on the other hand, is not truth-sensitive. This is clearly established by Sperber and Wilson: "Our definition of the relevance of an assumption in a context takes no account of the objective truth or falsity of the assumption itself." 1995 [1986]: 263)[26]

Consider the sentence in (26), uttered as the answer to the question in (27):

(26) The cat is on the mat
(27) Where is the cat?

Given a non-idiosyncratic context, we can readily assume that the sentence is a relevant answer to the question. Suppose now that we go to the next room and discover that the cat is in fact not on the mat; then (26) is false and hence the answer was false. This does not alter its relevance to (27). Hence the claim that relevance and truth are independent. Thus, lies can go undetected, as they are relevant but false (misleading) accounts of the state of affairs.[27]

On the other hand, a false utterance may be inappropriate because of its falsehood:

(28) Father: 'Did you eat the chocolate?'
      Daughter: 'No.' (her mouth is covered with chocolate)

In this example, which I collected personally during extensive fieldwork, the daughter's utterance is clearly inappropriate, because the factual evidence of the chocolate smears on her face belies her statement. Note that the daughter's utterance in (28) is inappropriate both as an (inept) lie (since H will inevitably fail to be misled, at least in face-to-face communication) and as a truthful statement (since the statement is contradicted by ostensive evidence). Note that as either speech act, the utterance would be relevant. Relevance and appropriateness are thus not coextensive, since relevance is truth-insensitive and appropriateness is truth-sensitive.

Katz and Fodor (1963) call example (21) a 'token-oddity' because the presuppositions do not match the context ('setting') in which the sentence is uttered (day-

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[26] Sperber and Wilson (1995 [1986]: 263–266) go on to revise the original definition of relevance (by taking into account the truthfulness of utterances), when they recognize that Ss may be more interested in true statements than false ones. This idea is then incorporated in the revised definition of relevance under the label of 'positive cognitive effect' i.e. "a cognitive effect that contributes positively to the fulfilment of cognitive functions or goals" (1995 [1986]: 265). This strikes me as both too little and too late: too little because it does not recognize the independence of the truthfulness of the utterance as a separate pragmatic principle, which needs to be assumed if communication is to take place; too late, because the essentially purposeful, goal-oriented nature of communication (e.g. Attardo, 1997) fails to be recognized and made a central tenet of the theory. Purposeful communication is invoked only to rescue the faltering definition of relevance.

[27] In fact, the picture about lies is a lot more complex, but we simplify here for the sake of the argument; see Winner and Leekam (1991) and Winner and Gardner (1993) on the differences in understanding irony and lies. By and large, irony is much harder to understand than lies. Irony is also harder to understand than metaphor; see Winner (1988).

light). The question to be asked in this context is: is the sentence relevant? It may be; suppose the sentence is the answer to the question, 'How are you feeling?' Although clearly inappropriate to the context, the sentence is relevant and would count as an answer. Better still, consider the inappropriate question:

(29) How is this night treating you? (uttered in daylight)

Here (21) is perfectly relevant, although still entirely inappropriate. Incidentally, I will readily admit that most frequently, the relevance of a sentence and its appropriateness go hand in hand, since saying something that is inappropriate will tend to render it irrelevant as well.

Cf. also Sperber and Wilson's (1986) example of Mary telling Peter, an Iris Murdoch fan, that her latest book is at the bookstore, while Peter already knows that. Sperber and Wilson comment: "It may turn out that Peter already has this information in which case [it] will be irrelevant to him. However, it would still have been perfectly appropriate ... [for Mary to say that]" (1986: 160).

5.4.1. Is appropriateness necessary?

Let us begin with the easy part of this question: since appropriateness has been shown not to be coextensive with relevance, it follows that both Gricean pragmatics and Relevance Theory would require the introduction of the concept.

The situation is more complex with regard to speech act theory, and in particular in relation to the concept of 'felicity conditions'. As is well known, the latter were introduced by Austin (1962) to account for the fact that some performatives may be performed 'unhappily'. Austin lists several such conditions, but we need focus only on the second sub-type of the first case: "the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked" (1962: 15). An example of this 'misfire' would be the performance of a wedding ceremony when one or both of the couple is already married, or the performance of the ceremony at sea by someone else than the captain (1962: 16). Other examples discussed by Austin are the naming of a ship by someone not entitled to do so, and the baptism of penguins by a saint (1962: 23–24).

Clearly, the notion of inappropriateness invoked above and Austin's use of the term are quite close, the biggest difference being that Austin's discussion, at this point in the text, is limited to performatives, while inappropriateness has been introduced as applying to all utterances. Appropriateness is also defined here much more technically than in Austin's work, but it seems fairly clear that the two concepts overlap significantly.

Returning to the original question, we can conclude that, while there is a significant overlap between appropriateness and one of Austin's felicity conditions, it is nevertheless necessary to introduce the concept alongside the CP, since the CP is merely a subset of the felicity conditions (and as was shown above, does not cover appropriateness).

5.4.2. Appropriateness and pragmatic insincerity/allusion

Are pragmatic insincerity and appropriateness distinct? Or are they different formulations of the same concept? Since pragmatic insincerity is defined in terms of

felicity conditions, it is clear that the discussion above also applies to this case. However, Glucksberg's (1995) emphasis on the allusion to a violated norm needs to be handled separately.

As we have seen, according to Glucksberg, pragmatic insincerity is not a sufficient condition for irony; an allusion to an expectation or norm that has also been violated is necessary. The theory of appropriateness, however, conflates the two violations into one, since a violation of felicity conditions or Gricean maxims may subsist only on the background of societal norms and expectations. Returning to Austin's example of a saint baptizing penguins, the violation of felicity conditions is clearly dependent on the violation of the norm/expectation that penguins are not baptizable.

Moreover, as seen above, appropriateness includes deictic (in)appropriateness, which would not be subsumed under allusions to cultural norms (except, perhaps, as a norm governing the contextually appropriate, which begs the question).

5.4.3. Appropriateness and the graded salience hypothesis

At first blush, it appears that the graded salience hypothesis (GSH) and appropriateness theory are incompatible: "According to the [GSH] the factor determining initial activation [i.e. the meaning first accessed by S] is neither literality *nor compatibility with context*, but, rather, the salience status of the verbal stimulus" (Giora and Fein, under review: 5; my emphasis". However, if we recall the definition of salience discussed above, it incorporates a metric of 'givenness status' in a linguistic co(n)text (Giora, 1997: 185). Furthermore, when discussing the similarities between humor and irony, Giora notes that in both phenomena "the passage from the least- to the most-informative message is abrupt and surprising" (1995: 256).

It seems fairly clear that abrupt and surprising shifts in informativeness and contextual inappropriateness are very closely related concepts. In fact, I would argue that 'contextual salience' may be triggered by contextual inappropriateness. From information theory, we know that the most appropriate element is also likely to be the least informative, since it will be the most predictable. The least appropriate element will tend to be the most informative. For example, research in jokes has shown that they tend to end in a punch-line (unexpected/inappropriate element) which is also the rheme of the last sentence of the text, and hence the most informative element (Attardo et al., 1994).

I would therefore suggest that when we encounter a contextually inappropriate element in the text, that element becomes highly informative and hence salient. Needless to say, other factors may also determine saliency. My interest is here limited to establishing that contextual inappropriateness may trigger salience.

Let me note in passing that the second half of Giora's theory (indirect negation) is subsumed by the definition of inappropriateness: if A is a function which returns a boolean value v (1 = appropriate, 0 = inappropriate) of appropriateness, given an utterance u and a context C

$$A(Cu) = v$$

then it follows that

$$A \ [(\neg \ C(u)) \lor (C \ (\neg \ u))] = \neg \ v$$

Or, in other words, the notion of inappropriateness presupposes that of negation and furthermore, since this is achieved by flouting a maxim, it is done indirectly.[28]

5.5. Coverage of the theory

Because of its general Gricean character, the (in)appropriateness theory is at least as powerful as any of the (Neo-)Gricean theories of irony. However, the inappropriateness theory is an expansion of the Gricean approach, and as such it is broader. Trivially, this is so because it encompasses the notion of appropriateness. Much more significantly, appropriateness is explicitly context-based, and as such it can elegantly handle contextual factors. Therefore, the approach proposed in this paper can handle not only all cases of irony derived from the violation of a Gricean maxim, but also those that derive from a violation of appropriateness conditions or felicity conditions; since felicity conditions encompass significantly more ground than the CP, this is a theoretical gain of some significance.

Let us note that the appropriateness theory accounts for Kaufer's (1981) 'tension' between S's 'subjective attitude' and the expectation sets of the utterance. In particular, it answers his principal objection to pragmatic and logical accounts of irony: "they try to explicate irony primarily through objective properties of ut[t]erances [sic] rather than through the interaction of these with expectation sets of utterances and the subjective attitudes of communicators" (1981: 505).

In fact, by calling for relevant inappropriateness, the theory accounts for the *ethos* of irony and addresses Grice's concern that the function of irony is to express an attitude and/or a judgment. The stipulation that the inappropriate utterance must be nonetheless relevant provides an inferential path towards reconstructing S's intention (criticism, derision, etc.).

Furthermore, the inappropriateness theory makes a strong principled stand on the issue of one- vs. two-stage processing of irony, coming down on the side of the two stages. This is probably the most significant aspect of the discussion, although it is overshadowed by the fact that this has been common knowledge for a couple of millennia. Essentially, the neo-Gricean analyses of irony end up confirming the traditional analysis of irony as a trope and the present analysis is no different, in that respect. As far as the order of the processing of the ironical meanings goes, strictly

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[28] An interesting issue, discussed in some detail in Attardo (1997) in the context of humor, is related to the nature of the negative relationship between the two senses of the irony/humor. In Attardo (1997), I showed how the concepts of salience and accessibility may be a good starting point to account for the intuitively richer notion of 'negation' used in humor and irony. I believe that an account of antonymy, antiphrasis, etc. based on the concept of 'conceptual axis' (1997: 400) may in fact be necessary to account for these issues. The conceptual axis is, roughly speaking, what the words 'married' and 'unmarried' have in common. The negation of 'married' is *not* 'green', as would be acceptable to a purely set-theoretic account of negation. For a treatment of antonymy, contrast, etc. see Lyons (1977: 270–290).

speaking, the inappropriateness theory does not need to choose a given order of processing (literal first, salient first, or contextually imposed first, etc.); it is in principle compatible with any order of processing, provided that a two stage model is used, which allows for the determination of the inappropriateness of the meaning accessed first. However, the work of Giora and her associates seems to point towards the answer that processing is done in order of salience.

Still, the aspect of the inappropriateness theory which strikes me as most interesting is the fact that it links inappropriateness and violation of the CP to the (perlocutionary) goals of S via the principle of least disruption. By doing so, the pragmatic function(s) of irony follow logically: if S is being inappropriate, he/she must have a goal for doing so, and this goal[29] may be arrived at inferentially via the Principle of Perlocutionary Cooperation (PCP; Attardo, 1997).[30] Therefore, the present treatment of irony may claim to have provided at least a good starting point to answer the vexing question of 'why would S use irony?' (on which, see Attardo, forthcoming).

6. Consequences

The previous discussion has brought about a number of interesting conclusions and consequences. These include effects both for the theory of irony and for the CP.

1. The theory of irony
   - the reconstruction of the intended meaning (value) of the irony is entirely inferential and abductive: it is totally indirect, no aspect of the meaning is given in the text, except the presumption of relevance (and not of quality, manner, or quantity); or, in other words, irony is a purely pragmatic phenomenon;
   - irony is essentially an inappropriate utterance which is nonetheless relevant to the context;
   - irony crucially involves a two-stage processing. The order in which the conflicting senses are accessed is (probably) determined by salience.
2. The CP
   - we need to add a 5th maxim, 'be appropriate' since appropriateness is not equal to relevance nor truth;
   - the graded salience specification needs to be added to the maxim of manner;

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[29] One of the anonymous reviewers notes (somewhat ironically?) that he/she finds the claim that the PCP can infer a specific goal 'stunning'. Obviously it all depends on what we mean by 'specific'. Clearly, the PCP cannot predict, outside of a given context, what the individual instance of irony is intended to achieve. However, in context, the PCP will guide S (and especially H) along their inferential paths towards a 'best available educated guess' as to what that specific instance of irony's specific goal is.

[30] It should be noted that I have deliberately avoided, as much as possible, wording the discussion of the inappropriateness theory in terms of the PCP in order to make this treatment self-contained. It is a relatively trivial task to rephrase the above discussion in terms of locutionary and perlocutionary cooperation.

– a super-principle of smallest possible disruption of the CP needs to be assumed as operational above and beyond the CP itself.

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