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An Introduction to Verbal Irony

A common definition which can be found in any dictionary states that irony is when the intended meaning differs from the literal meaning of an utterance.
Normally utterances are interpreted based on their literal meaning.

(1a)   Oh, I'm so sorry.

For example (1a) is analysed to mean that the speaker feels remorse. The intended meaning of the utterance is in accordance with what is said. But if the same sentence is uttered in certain situations as in (1b), the intended meaning differs from the literal meaning. This phenomenon in which there is a disparity between what is said and what is intended has been termed *verbal irony*.

(1b) [1]   Context: *Voldemort has taken over the Ministry of Magic. Death Eaters have appeared at Bill and Fleurs wedding party. Hermione Apparated with Harry and Ron, hiding in the Muggle-World in an all-night café only to be attacked by two Death Eaters again. They have overpowered the Death Eaters and are now clearing up the mess.*

Ron struggled for a moment before managing to extract his wand from his pocket.

"It's no wonder I can't get it out, Hermione, you packed my old jeans, they're tight."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," hissed Hermione, and as she dragged the waitress out of sight of the windows, Harry heard her mutter a suggestion as to where Ron could stick his wand instead.

In (1b) the intended meaning is the opposite of the literal meaning. Hermione wants to communicate that she is not sorry.

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[1] HP DH, Chapter Nine.

A. Theories of Irony

1. The Classical View of Irony

Examples such as (1b) have motivated the classical definition of verbal irony. Here, irony is viewed as an invisible, i.e. non-verbal, operator which inverts the literal meaning comparable to verbal negation. Sometimes this definition is softened in its claim that the intended meaning is the exact opposite of what is meant in saying that there is a disparity between what is said and meant.

To accommodate *situational irony* this definition is often widened to state that irony is a disparity between what is said and what is reality. Situational irony, for instance, would be a situation where somebody wants a job very badly and is putting all his efforts into his life's ambition to get this job, only to realize, once that person has that very goal, that he or she doesn't like the job.

The classical view of irony is based on the *code model of communication*. The code model assumes that communication is the act of the speaker putting his or her intensions into words (encoding) and the hearer analyzing these words to reconstruct the speaker's intensions from them (decoding). Researchers challenging the code model are Grice with the *Standard Pragmatic Model* and Wilson and Sperber with the *Relevance Theory*.

The Standard Pragmatic Model assumes communication to be a more complex process than encoding and decoding in that speakers draw inferences from utterances and compute the intended meaning by assuming the speaker of that utterance to obey the *cooperative principle* (stating that individuals in their objective to communicate effectively agree to cooperate in the exchange of information) and subsequently the four *conversational maxims of Quality* (say what is true and what you can prove), *Quantity* (say no more and no less than necessary), *Relation* (make your contribution relevant) and *Manner* (be clear and avoid ambiguity and obscurity) which derive from the cooperative principle.

The Relevance Theory opposes Grice's claim that speakers obey the cooperative principle in conversation and replace it with the *relevance principle*, which states that

speakers assume utterances to be relevant in their information and try to accommodate seemingly 'irrelevant' information by drawing inferences from contextual knowledge.

Besides verbal irony proper and situational irony, irony in classical time referred to what is now called *Socratic irony*. Socratic irony is when a speaker in an argument pretends to be ignorant only to let his opponent contradict himself in his own arguments. The Socratic ironist only uses questions which ask the opponent to explain a point further, thereby forcing the opponent to go into more and more detail and ultimately to reveal inconsistency in the opponent's argumentation. But Socratic irony also refers to the language of the con man that deceives people to believe him to be somebody he is not and to know what he does not know. Socratic irony aims to deceive the addressee. It is also the inspiration for the *Pretence Theory* of irony in modern times.

2. The Gricean Treatment

The Gricean view of irony is a modern adaptation of the classical definition of irony using the machinery of the *Standard Pragmatic Model* (Grice 1975, Searle 1979). He treats the tropes irony, metaphor, hyperbole and meiosis as flouting the maxim of Quality (say the truth and what you can prove). To *flout* a maxim, in Grice's theory, means to blatantly violate it. When a speaker is flouting a maxim, it is clear to the addressee that the speaker is doing so. Grice views verbal irony as an 'obvious lie'. The violation of the maxim of Quality, in the case of these tropes, triggers a related true implicature. In the case of a metaphor the implicature would be a simile or comparison derived from the literal meaning. In the case of meiosis the implicature would be something stronger than the literal meaning. In the case of hyperbole it would be something weaker than the literal meaning. And in the case of irony it would be the contrary of the literal meaning. So irony, according to Grice, is an 'obvious lie triggering an implicature contrary in meaning to the literal meaning of the statement'.

According to the *Standard Pragmatic Model* in comprehending non-literal language, first the literal meaning of the utterance is computed. To compute the non-literal meaning a process additional to the first stage is require thus predicting the comprehension of non-

literal language to be more complex in processing and longer in processing speed. The second stage in computing the non-literal meaning is sensitive to contextual information while the computation of the literal meaning is assumed to be impenetrable by contextual information (Fodor 1983).

(1a)   Oh, I'm so sorry.

For example, the utterance in (1a), repeated here, could be analyzed in two ways given the Gricean approach. In the first case the literal meaning would be computed. If the context is biased toward a literal interpretation no further computation would be needed. The utterance in (1a) would be analysed as meaning "I am very sorry".
In the second case again the first step would be to compute the literal meaning, but if it was embedded in a context biased toward an ironic interpretation, as in (1b), a second computational step would be required. As contextual information does not interfere with the computation of the literal meaning it may only be taken into consideration in the second step. The literal meaning of (1a) in a context biased toward irony would be contradictory to the context, i.e. be counterfactual or state something untrue and thereby violate the *maxim of Quality*. If this violation is made apparent to the other people in the conversation (flouting) it triggers the ironic interpretation. Consequently the non-literal ironic meaning would be computed resolving this disparity between what is said and what is factual – effectively inverting the literal meaning. Also the computed non-literal meaning overrides the literal meaning after which the literal meaning is discarded.
Grice later (1978) suggested that what was missing from this account of irony is the idea that irony involves the expression of a certain critical judgement or attitude.

Beyond Grice

Since Grice's proposal for the derivation of the ironic meaning as an implicature contrary in meaning to the literal meaning of an utterance, three theories of irony have emerged that oppose the Gricean treatment (and consequently the classical definition) of irony.

These three theories are the *Echoic Mention Theory* (Wilson and Sperber 1998, 2006), the *Pretence Theory* (Clark and Gerrig 1990; Currie 2002, 2004; Recanati 2004; Walton 1990; Nichols and Stich 2000; Kumon-Nakamura, Glucksberg and Brown 1995) and the *Indirect Negation Theory* (Giora 1995, 1997, 2003, 2007, 2009).

3. The Echoic Mention Theory

Wilson and Sperber (1981) criticise the Gricean treatment of irony for not explaining why speakers would state a blatant falsehood in order to convey a true implicature that could just as well have been expressed literally. Instead they proposed a definition of irony that sees it as an *echoic allusion* to an utterance or thought which can be attributed to a person. Later (Wilson and Sperber 1998), the term *echo* has been widened even more to encompass also all real or imaginary thoughts, previous utterances, ideas, concepts, general norms, principles and standard expectations which need not be attributed to a specific person or group of people. The term echo as it is used in this theory of irony is therefore a technical one. It goes beyond the repetition or quotation of something another speaker has uttered.

Wilson and Sperber claim that utterances fall into two major categories of usage. Utterances may be *used descriptive* or they may be *used figuratively*. When utterances are used descriptively the speaker does not distance himself from what he says (as in 1a). When a speaker utters something figuratively (as in 1b) he does distance himself from what is said. Additional to an echo, i.e. the previous utterance or thought the figuratively used utterance alludes to, the speaker expresses an *attitude* toward this echo. Distinguishing irony then is a matter of distinguishing the attitudes express in ironic utterances from other attitudes. Wilson and Sperber argue that the attitudes expressed in irony are the ones that indicate that the intended meaning is the opposite of what is said.

As Wilson and Sperber's account of irony is based on the Relevance Theory it is important to point out a crucial difference between the Relevance Theory and the Standard Pragmatic Model. In the Gricean treatment the literal meaning of an ironic statement is computed in a first stage. No context may interfere in this first stage. In the

second stage, when the non-literal meaning is computed, however, contextual information may be considered. From the perspective of Relevance Theory contextual information may interfere already in the computation of the literal meaning. As a consequence, Relevance Theory predicts that in comprehending irony, *only* the ironic, non-literal meaning is computed, because the context is biased toward that interpretation, but not the literal meaning is computed. This claim has been empirically falsified by Giora (2007) in showing that the literal meaning is always computed first and that in irony the literal meaning is not overridden by the non-literal meaning but both meanings are stored to mark the contrast between what is said (the literal) and what is intended (the non-literal).

The following example (2a) from *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* shows a case of irony that uses an echoic allusion to a Ministry of Magic leaflet mentioned in the previous chapter (2b). The wording of the leaflet is not directly repeated, but Dumbledore only alludes to its content. Dumbledore and Harry have both read the leaflet so Dumbledore can assume that Harry will catch on to his allusion and perceive the echo as such. Dumbledore also expresses an attitude distancing himself from what the leaflet advises to do thereby implying that the leaflet's advice is useless and that the Death Eaters could not be discovered so easily. This is also an example where the intended meaning is not an inversion of the literal meaning but rather a substitution. Dumbledore is not seriously scolding Harry but mocking the advice of the Ministry.

(2a) [2]   "Sir — I got a Ministry of Magic leaflet by owl, about security measures we should all take against the Death Eaters…"

"Yes, I received one myself," said Dumbledore, still smiling. "Did you find it useful?"

"Not really."

"No, I thought not. You have not asked me, for instance, what is my favorite flavor of jam, to check that I am indeed Professor Dumbledore and not an impostor."

"I didn't…" Harry began, not entirely sure whether he was being reprimanded or not.

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[2] HP HBP, Chapter Four.

"For future reference, Harry, it is raspberry… although of course, if I were a Death Eater, I would have been sure to research my own jam preferences before impersonating myself."

(2b) [3]   — — *ISSUED ON BEHALF OF* — —

The Ministry of Magic

PROTECTING YOUR HOME AND FAMILY AGAINST DARK FORCES

4. Agree on security questions with close friends and family so as to detect Death Eaters masquerading as others by use of the Polyjuice Potion (see page 2).

But examples such as (3) show that it is not enough to say that irony consists of an echo and a certain attitude. Wilson and Sperber do not say how one is to identify this attitude. Example (3) contains an echo—Ron puts the advice on how to compliment girls into practice by complimenting Hermione on the decoration she is putting up for Bill and Fleur's wedding.

(3) [4]   Context: *Ron makes Hermione a compliment as instructed by his book on how to date girls.*

Hermione made purple and gold streamers erupt from the end of her wand and drape themselves artistically over the trees and bushes.

"Nice," said Ron, as with one final flourish of her wand, Hermione turned the leaves on the crabapple tree to gold. "You've really got an eye for that sort of thing."

"Thank you, Ron!" said Hermione, looking both pleased and a little confused. Harry turned away, smiling to himself. He had a funny notion that he would find a chapter on compliments when he found time to persue his copy of *Twelve Fail-Safe Ways to Charm Witches*; he caught Ginny's eye and grinned at her before remembering his promise to Ron and hurriedly striking up a conversation with Monsieur Delacour.

Because Wilson and Sperber use attitude as an indicator of the speaker's true intent the puzzle of when, why and how a hearer interprets an ironic utterance to have an intended

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[3] HP HBP, Chapter Three.
[4] HP DH, Chapter Six.

meaning that differs so significantly from its literal meaning, is not resolved. They appear to resort here to the use of intuition to determine this attitude. They have not provided a deductive mechanism for this intuitive interpretation.

In augmenting the term echo to encompose practically every thought imaginable the term loses its power to distinguish. Assuming the *Echoic Mention Theory*, we now have a wide range of echoes: literally verbalised thoughts, i.e. literal echoes; we have figuratively verbalised thoughts, i.e. figurative echoes; and some of these figurative echoes are ironic echoes. When Wilson and Sperber widened the echo term to even refer to utterances or thoughts a speaker had before the time of uttering the irony the echo term has become useless. All utterances express thoughts, ideas, concepts, propositions and so forth. Grouping these under a collective term echo does no help us to identify and distinguish irony. Consider the following example. Harry is haunted by the echoes of what Ron and Hermione said, because he feels that he has let them down. These are clearly echoes and Harry feels criticise by them, i.e. the attitude Ron and Hermione originally expressed was a derogatory one, but these echoes are not cases of irony.

(4) [5]   Context: *Because they have not made any progress in finding and destroying the remaining Horcruxes, Harry thinks he has let Ron and Hermione down. He is haunted by what they said earlier.*

Cudgel his brains though he might, Harry could not remember Dumbledore ever mentioning a place in which he might hide something. There were moments when he did not know whether he was angrier with Ron or with Dumbledore. *We thought you knew what you were doing…We thought Dumbledore had told you what to do…We thought you had a real plan!*
He could not hide it from himself: Ron had been right. Dumbledore had left him with virtually nothing. They had discovered one Horcrux, but they had no means of destroying it: The others were as unattainable as they had ever been.

Harry feels that in his cluelessness in how to find and destroy the remaining Horcruxes he has let down those who put their trust in him. Ron and Hermione's accusations haunt him as echoes. But these echoes are not ironic but could all be finished by a clause such as 'but, obviously, you/Dumbledore did not'. So in a way these haunting thoughts mock Harry. Nevertheless they are not ironic because there is no disparity between form and intent. They say what they mean.

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[5] HP DH, Chapter Sixteen.

In Wilson and Sperber's account the identification of irony is completely a matter of identifying the speaker's attitude. The only indicator other than intuition Wilson and Sperber have addressed is the *ironic tone of voice*. But the ironic tone of voice is not present in all cases of irony. Empirical studies suggest that children rely more on prosodic indicators, while adults can catch on to irony by solely relying on background knowledge and knowledge about the situation. Some researchers (Bryant and Fox Tree) claim, based on acoustic analyses, that there is no particular ironic tone of voice.[6] Wilson and Sperber claim that the literal content of the utterance does not factor into the identification of irony, but that the identification is purely determined by context. As context biasing the interpretation of an utterance toward irony the following factors have been empirically tested and falsified: (i) Is only the non-literal meaning computed in comprehending irony, (ii) level of intimacy and richness of the common ground, (iii) profession of the speaker, (iv) the likeliness of the speaker to speak ironically, and (v) does situational irony influence the use and comprehension of verbal irony.

In interpreting irony the literal meaning of the utterance is understood first and the ironic non-literal meaning later. The literal meaning is not discarded but remains to mark the contrast between what is said literally and what is meant ironically. The ironic meaning overrides the literal meaning only in the sense that the non-literal meaning is interpreted as the intended meaning of the ironic statement. The literal meaning can be retrieved at all times (Giora 2007).

The *direct access model* (Gibbs 1986, 1994, 2002) has been falsified. The direct access model predicts that if a context is an ironic situation, i.e. a context which displays a disparity between what is expected (by the protagonist) and the reality that motivated the contrast in the first place, and further more conveying negative emotions, this will result in more ironic interpretations. The direct access hypothesis has been falsified by Giora (2007). That is to say, a context that sets up an ironic situation, that is one where there is a contrast between what is expected and what really happens, does not result in more ironic statements or in more ironic interpretations (Giora 2009a).

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[6] Although there is no particular ironic tone of voice, what might be referred to as ironic tone of voice is when there is a disparity between the tone of voice and what is said, i.e. when the tone of voice contradicts what is said. For instance, when something totally implausible and obscure is uttered with a matter-of-fact tone of voice.

Friends do not use irony more often nor do they recognise and interpret it faster than people who are less intimate. Thus the richness of the common ground (as claimed by Clark 1996; Clift 1999; Eisterhold et al. 2006; Gibbs 2000; Kotthoff 2003; Pexman and Zvaigzne 2004), i.e. the background knowledge speakers share, does not result in more ironic interpretations or in facilitating ironic interpretations (Eisterhold et al. 2006; Giora and Gur 2003; Kotthoff 2003).[7]

The likeliness of the speaker to use irony does not effect ironic or literal interpretation. This has been shown for different social groups and professions, for instance among friends (Attardo et al. 2003; Eisterhold et al. 2006; Gibbs 2000; Partington 2007; Rockwell 2004; Tannen 1984), elementary school teachers (Lazar et al. 1989), and others (Haiman 1998; Hartung 1998) and the failures to detect them (Attardo 2002; Rockwell 2004).

Neurological studies show that irony is mainly processed in the right hemisphere, which is used for inferencing and remote associations. More literal interpretations are processed in the left hemisphere (Eviatar and Just 2006; Giora et al. 2000; Kaplan et al. 1990; McDonald 1999; Peleg and Eviatar 2008; Shamay-Tsoory et al. 2005; Wakusawa et al. 2007).[8]

For *conventionalised ironies*, i.e. for those ironies that are in such frequent use that their meaning has become lexicalised, Wilson and Sperber (1998) suggest the following treatment: Idiomatic ironies, comparable to dead metaphors, lose both their original echoic status and their ironical force, i.e. their is no longer a difference between the literal and ironic meaning, but the ironic meaning has become the literal meaning.

The Echoic Mention Theory seems insufficient in explaining *non-conventionalised* uses irony. I will use the (traditional) term 'echo' to refer only to quotations or repetitions without any changes to it or evaluations of it or attitudes expressed toward it. That is to say, I wish to distinguish sharply between the quotation or repetition of some utterance in form and the effect this quotation or repetition yields. The effect a certain form has, I assume, does not solely result from interpreting the speaker's attitude, but also takes the literal meaning of the utterance and background knowledge into account.

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[7] Taken from Giora 2009b.
[8] Taken from Giora 2009b.

4. The Pretence Theory

The *Pretence Theory*, like the Echoic Mention Theory, has challenged Grice's claim of a two-step computation for irony. Gibbs (1986) in his much discussed study claims that the comprehension of irony is as fast as the comprehension of literal language. (2a) is an excellent example of the pretence account of irony. Dumbledore is pretending to be someone who takes the leaflet's advice seriously and scolds Harry for being too trustworthy and not following the leaflet's advice. Harry does not ask for information only Dumbledore can know about. In pretending to be this person Dumbledore mocks the advice given in the leaflet. Dumbledore only makes as if to perform the speech act of scolding Harry while in reality Dumbledore is criticising the advice of the Ministry of Magic.

The opposite, that irony comprehension is more complex than the comprehension of literal language, has been shown by an overwhelmingly larger number of studies (Giora 2007, Giora et al. 1998, Giora 1995, Lagerwerf 2007, Katz et al., 2004, Ivanko and Pexman 2003, Colston and Gibbs 2002, Anolli et al. 2001, Pexman et al. 2000, Schwoebel et al. 2000, Dews and Winner 1997). Giora (1995) has also re-analysed Gibbs's findings to show that irony comprehension is more complex than comprehending literal language (Giora 2009b).

The idea behind the Pretence Theory goes back to Socratic irony (for a definition see above, *The Classical View of Irony*) in claiming that the ironist is pretending to be another real or imagined person holding the believes, characteristics, ideas, thoughts and so forth and at the same time by imitating that real or imagined person distancing oneself from that person's believes and criticising them. The speaker is not himself performing a speech act, but is pretending to perform it or is pretending to be a person who is performing these speech acts (Clark and Gerrig, 1990; Currie, 2002, 2004; Recanati, 2004; Walton, 1990; see also Nichols and Stich, 2000).

Pretence theory has been heavily criticised for confusing verbal irony with parody and has, in reaction to the criticism, been reviewed and altered – taking in elements form the echoic mention theory. Kumon-Nakamura, Glucksberg and Brown (1995), for instance,

have amended their account to an *allusional pretence theory* claiming that an ironical utterance must be both *pragmatically insincere* and that it alludes to a *failed expectation or norm* (an aspect of the Echoic Mention Theory). An utterance is pragmatically insincere if the speaker is not himself performing the speech act but "making as if to say", i.e. pretend to perform the speech act. Currie (2006) adds that what is targeted is a faulty characteristic or defective view of the world.

The following is a counterexample to the Pretence Theory. In (4) Wormtail, one of Voldemort's Death Eaters, has been sent to the dungeon of Malfoy Manor where, among others, Harry and Ron are held captive. Harry and Ron manage to overpower Wormtail, but Lucius Malfoy gets suspicious as he hears the commotion. When Lucius calls for Wormtail, Ron pretends to be Wormtail.

(5)[9]   Context: *Harry and Ron overpower Wormtail who is to check on the prisoners.*

> "We're going to have to try and tackle him," he whispered to Ron. They had no choice: The moment anyone entered the room and saw the absence of three prisoners, they were lost. "Leave the lights on," Harry added, and as they heard someone descending the steps outside the door, they backed against the wall on either side of it.
> "Stand back," came Wormtail's voice. "Stand away from the door. I'm coming in."
> The door flew open. For a split second Wormtail gazed into the apparently empty cellar, ablaze with light from the three miniature suns floating in midair. Then Harry and Ron launched themselves upon him. Ron seized Wormtail's wand arm and forced it upwards. Harry slapped a hand to his mouth, muffling his voice. Silently they struggled: Wormtail's wand emitted sparks; his silver hand closed around Harry's throat.

> "What is it, Wormtail?" called Lucius Malfoy from above.

> "Nothing!" Ron called back, in a passable imitation of Wormtail's wheezy voice. "All fine!"

This is neither a case of irony nor parody but imitation or impersonation. Imitation is to parody as lying is to irony. Imitation like lying is intended to deceive while parody and irony are intended to (primarily) criticise. In the case of parody the audience is aware that the speaker is only pretending to be another person. In the case of imitation or

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[9] HP DH, Chapter Twenty-Three.

impersonation the speaker intends to deceive his audience. He wants them to really think he is that person. This crucial difference, that the lie must be obvious both in parody and irony is missing from the Pretence Theory.

In their first proposal of a *Pretence Theory* of irony Clark and Gerrig (1984) remark several aspects of irony by looking at Swift's A Modest Proposal and data used by Jorgensen et al. (1984)—some of which I find confirmed by my data (taken from Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince and Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows), namely that hearers of irony may take it seriously, i.e. comprehend the literal meaning first, at the beginning but may later change their interpretation when the disparity between the literal content and the given background knowledge widens—when new information has been provided in the conversation—and that both a *critical aspect* and a *deceptive aspect* are present in ironic statements. Ironies are critical in that they are often used to criticise specific people, groups of people or general norms. They are deceptive in that they also lie. Clark and Gerrig regard this deceptive aspect as a new discovery but it has been mentioned by Grice and many classical definitions of irony through the ages. Clark and Gerrig also remark, correctly I think, that the irony in utterances is not perceived by all hearers and that those who do not perceive the irony comprehend the literal meaning. They also point out, correctly I think, that intended irony is only perceived ironically if the speaker and hearer(s) share the background knowledge the ironic utterance hinges on. They reject the need for echoes but emphasise that the ironic utterance must be relevant to the topic, i.e. must obey the Gricean maxim of Relation (relevance). Absurd statements are thus ruled out.

Regrettably, the Pretence Theory is mainly concerned with the way the ironist presents his ironic statements, but does not say anything about how the ironic interpretation is derived. The examples used go beyond examples where the non-literal meaning is the opposite of the literal meaning, but no mechanism for deriving the non-literal meaning is presented.

Nevertheless, all in all I regard the Pretence Theory to be a theory of parody not of irony.

5. The Indirect Negation Theory

Giora (1995) has challenged Grice's claim that in irony the literal meaning is overridden by the non-literal meaning. Instead, Giora claims that when the non-literal meaning is computed the literal meaning is not discarded but both are stored to mark the ironic contrast between what is literally said and what is non-literally intended. She emphasises that the literal meaning of an utterance is always computed first, in literal and non-literal language, thereby opposing the *Echoic Mention* and *Pretence Theory* which claim that for non-literal language the non-literal meaning is computed purely through context without computing the literal meaning first. Here she agrees with Grice who claimed that the literal meaning is always computed first without interference of context.

Based on her own empirical work Giora claims what she calls the *Graded Salience Hypothesis* (Giora 1997, 1999, 2003) which states that it is not *literality* but *salience* that is the differentia specifica. That is to say, Giora claims that not the divide between literal (descriptive) and non-literal (figurative) language is important in understanding irony, but between salient and non-salient language. A meaning is salient if it is prominently stored in the mental lexicon. The prominence is determined by the conventionality, frequency, experiential familiarity and prototypicality of a meaning relative to another. For instance, the word *bank* has the salient meaning 'an institution for storing money' and the salient meaning of 'a sandy patch in a river or lake'. Salient meanings are context-independent. Non-salient meanings such as conversational implicatures are not coded in the mental lexicon (Giora 2003).

Her Graded Salience Hypothesis does not only seem convincing in light of the empirical evidence Giora has provided herself, but is also backed up by neurological studies which suggest that irony processing recruits the right hemisphere, which is used for inferencing and remote associations, which in Giora's terminology correspond to non-salient meanings (those that are not stored in the mental lexicon but computed on the fly). More familiar literal meanings and familiar metaphors (salient interpretations), however, rely heavily on the left hemisphere (Eviatar and Just 2006; Giora et al. 2000; Kaplan et al. 1990; McDonald 1999; Peleg and Eviatar 2008; Shamay-Tsoory et al. 2005; Wakusawa et al. 2007). This can be seen from the fact that people with autism and other right-hemisphere deceases tend to interpret irony literally.

Concerning verbal irony the Graded Salience Hypothesis predicts that for conventional or idiomatic ironies the non-literal, ironic meaning is as salient as their literal meaning and thus stored in the mental lexicon—while for novel ironies the non-literal meaning is non-salient, which means it is not stored in the mental lexicon but has to be computed in a two-step process as an implicature. Here she adapts a stance challenging Wilson and Sperber (1998) who had claimed that for frequently used ironies the ironic meaning becomes more prominent than the literal meaning and Gibbs (1986) who had claimed that the ironic, non-literal meaning is computed as fast as the literal meaning. According to Wilson and Sperber (1998), the ironic, non-literal meaning in conventional ironies has become the most prominent meaning (lexicalisation) although the original literal meaning can be reconstructed by conscious analysis. Giora's example for a conventional irony is:

(6) Very funny.

Although I do not find her example convincing, because I do not see why (6) should *always* be understood ironically, I find her argument convincing that if there are ironies that are more frequently used than others, they should be grouped with other fixed expressions in the mental lexicon.

According to Giora (2007), irony comprehension is a two-step process, but differing from Grice she claims that in the first step the most salient meaning is computed and stored not the literal meaning. In the second step the ironic meaning is computed by means of *indirect negation* taking contextual information into account. Importantly, she claims (and has tried to show in several empirical studies and to my opinion convincingly) that the salient meaning is not discarded but stored to mark the contrast between it and the ironic, non-literal meaning.

However, for novel ironies Giora's account does not differ from Grice. In Grice's treatment of ironic utterances the literal meaning is computed first. The Graded Salience Hypothesis also predicts that the literal meaning is computed first, i.e. is looked up in the mental lexicon. The non-literal, ironic meaning is not stored in the mental lexicon and thus has to be computed in a second step. Although Giora's salience account seems

convincing, this detour does not help us in determining the non-literal meaning or tell us anything new that had not been said by Grice or others already.

Giora (2003), just like Grice, says that if an utterance is uttered in a context biased toward a literal interpretation, the first computational step (the look-up of the literal, or in Giora's terminology, most-salient meaning in the mental lexicon) is sufficient. But when the context is biased toward a non-literal, ironic interpretation, a second step to compute this implicature is required. But Giora does not say what a context must be like so that it biases the interpretation process toward an ironic, non-literal interpretation.

However, she claims is a different mechanism of computing this implicature. Differing from Grice, who had adapted the classical definition of irony and assumed the non-literal meaning to be the exact opposite of the literal meaning (direct negation, an invisible negation operator similar to verbal negation), Giora claims that the non-literal meaning is *not* the exact opposite but an approximation—she calls this process an *indirect negation*. Giora (1995) gives the following examples, showing that the ironic meaning is an indirect negation of the literal meaning differing from verbal negation.

(7)   He is sort of silly.
    (a) I don't think so,   *He is not sort of silly.
    (b)   He is not silly.

Additionally, Giora (2005) claims that when verbal negation is inserted into ironic utterances the non-literal, ironic meaning is not reverted to the literal meaning, but the ironic effect is mitigated while the concept, idea and content of the ironic utterance stays intact. Giora provides the following example. Although (8a–c) would be rated as ironic, with (8a) being most ironic and (8c) being least ironic, (8d) would be rated as hardly ironic, that is, non-ironic, she says:

(8)   Although Max was working very hard preparing for his exams, he failed them all.

    a. Max is exceptionally bright   (affirmative overstatement).
    b. Max is not exceptionally bright   (negated overstatement).
    c. Max is not bright   (negated non-overstatement).
    d. Max is stupid   (opposite of the affirmative).

Based on her observations that the intended meaning in novel ironies is not the exact opposite but an indirect negation of the literal meaning she suggests to invert scales such as the scale 'stupid...bright...intelligent...genius'. Giora (1995) defines verbal irony by three conditions:

First, the ironic utterance must be relevant to the conversation in that it provides information about a discourse topic.

Second, it is either more or less informative than expected and required in the given context. This second point is a weaker claim than stated by other researchers, that the information literally stated in an ironic utterance must be at odds with what we know about the situation (for instance calling somebody a genius while everybody knows he is an idiot).

Third, the ironic utterance evokes a non-literal interpretation (as an implicature) in the addressee which is then compared to the literal meaning to mark the ironic contrast between what is said and what is intended. Giora has later (2005) fleshed out this third point in stating that the ironic meaning is the indirect negation of the literal meaning (see above).

The first two conditions are Gricean in nature describing irony as being an obvious lie that triggers a related implicature. The only new insight of this definition is that the implicature that is computed is not the exact opposite of the literal meaning, i.e. a direct negation, but an indirect negation. What is more compelling to me about Giora's account is not this definition of irony, but her insights into (i) the mitigating effect of verbal negation when inserted into ironic utterances and (ii) that both the literal and non-literal, ironic meanings are stored in comprehending irony. Especially (ii) I think can help explain (a) why hearers who do *not* perceive the irony comprehend the literal meaning and (b) why hearers who *do* perceive the irony comprehend the literal meaning *nevertheless*.

Summing up the theoretical background

The comprehension and interpretation of irony (non-literal language) is more complex and requires more processing time and resources than the comprehension and

interpretation of literal utterances. In interpreting an ironic utterance, the literal meaning is computed first and than the ironic, non-literal meaning is computed. The non-literal meaning does not override or substitute the literal meaning (in the mind of the hearer), but the literal meaning is stored to mark the ironic contrast. Hearers of irony can retrieve the literal meaning while at the same time stay aware of the ironic force in the original utterance. Hearers who do not perceive the irony comprehend the literal meaning nevertheless. No coherent mechanism describing the deduction of the non-literal meaning has been proposed, but the non-literal meaning appears to be an indirect inversion of the literal meaning. The influence of contextual factors such as the likeliness of the speaker to be an ironist, situational irony facilitating irony creation and comprehension, and the richness of the common ground has been empirically rejected. The data discussed by the theories is either comprised of highly conventionalised ironies (and therefore the non-literal meaning is lexicalised) or focuses on very simple examples of irony where the intended meaning seems to be the opposite of the literal meaning. Negation in irony mitigates the ironic force rather than inverting the ironic meaning. The concept negated is kept intact by the negation marker. Consequently, this predicts that the criticism often expressed in irony should be toned down. Irony contains both a deceptive and a critical element, that is to say that ironies are obvious lies and at the same time criticise individual people, groups of people, norms or expectations.

Some guidance for what follows

Firstly, since existing theories of irony have mainly looked at cases of irony where the intended non-literal meaning appears to be the (more or less diametrical) opposite of the

literal meaning I will look for examples where no inversion of meaning seems to be involved. Secondly, if there prove to be cases of irony where no meaning inversion takes place I shall attempt to provide an explanation how the non-literal meaning is inferred. Thirdly, I will try to define some distinguishing features of irony to separate it from lies, compliments and plainly obscure, nonsensical statements by looking at examples of miscommunication, i.e. where irony is intended but not perceived (as what is it perceived) or where no irony was intended but interpreted into the utterance (and why this is possible).

My data is taken from J.K. Rowling's two novels Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince and Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. For a complete list of the cases under scrutiny see the appendix. As irony is a highly context-sensitive phenomenon the fictional world of Harry Potter limits the required set of background knowledge.

As you will notice, my examples are much longer than those found in the literature by other researchers. That is (not to fill pages ;-) but) because I have not only cited the utterances which I have identified as ironic but have surrounded those utterances by as much context as I saw fit to show which situational factors allow the ironic effect to arise and more importantly when they do not or there is a miscommunication between speakers hinging on the literal and non-literal meanings of utterances. Also note that most of the examples are novel ironies for which the non-literal meaning must be computed on the fly and cannot be retrieved from the mental lexicon.

B. A Different Approach to Irony

1. New Data and Analysis

In the following examples the non-literal meaning cannot be said to be an inversion or negation of the literal meaning, neither direct nor indirect.

(9) [10]   Context: *After Draco had knocked out Harry on the train, Harry is running late, has missed the carriages to the castle and is now standing before the closed gates with Tonks (assigned as bodyguard to protect the school).*

Harry looked around, "I could climb a wall," he suggested.

"No, you couldn't," said Tonks flatly. "Anti-intruder jinxes on all of them. Security's been tightened a hundredfold this summer."

"Well then," said Harry, starting to feel annoyed at her lack of helpfulness, "I suppose I'll just have to sleep out here and wait for morning. "[11]

In example (9) the intended meaning can be said to be something like:

(9a)   Don't let me try on my own because it's pointless and I don't wanna stay out here till morning but help me to get in.

The non-literal meaning in (9a) is not an inversion of the literal meaning, which would be something like (9b) or (9c):

(9b)   I don't suppose I'll (just) have to sleep out here and wait for morning.
(9c)   I suppose I won't have to sleep out here and wait for morning.

The classical and Gricean treatment fail to predict the irony here. The echoic mention and pretence accounts also fail. The Echoic Mention Theory might point at the attitude Harry expresses. He is 'starting to feel annoyed'. But if all hearers of irony needed was a

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[10] HP DH, Chapter Eight.
[11] The "just have to" mitigates the ironic force. Without it the statement would be more ironic: "I suppose I'll sleep out here and wait for morning.

sensitivity for interpreting the emotions and attitudes of the ironist to infer the non-literal meaning, Harry might as well have grunted to convey his annoyance. But uttering an ironic statement conveys much more complex information than a grunt could. Although the non-literal meaning does not match the literal meaning, the compositional semantics of the sentence can help Tonks interpret Harry's utterance nevertheless, because the literal content shows what topic Harry is talking about (staying outside all night) and his previous suggestion (climbing the walls) has already been denied. Harry cannot be said to pretend here. He wants to convey that he thinks Tonks, who knows how to get in, should help him and that he will be annoyed if she refuses to. Harry criticises Tonks's lack of helpfulness.

Surprisingly, the inversions of the literal meaning in (9b) and (9c) are also ironic, because they still do not match the intended meaning. Harry wants Tonks to help him get inside. He does *not* want to imply that he does not assume he will have to sleep outside or that he will not need to do so. But the ironic force in (9b) and (9c) seems to be weakened as Giora predicts. But Giora's indirect negation is *not* applicable here, because Giora looks at scales such as the scale 'stupid...bright...intelligent...genius' and suggests that the scale is inverted. But what scale should 'sleeping outside' or 'waiting for morning' be part of? Is the opposite of 'sleeping outside' 'sleeping inside' or is the inversion of 'waiting for morning' 'waiting for nightfall'?

(9d)   I suppose I'll just have to sleep inside then and wait for nightfall.

Again, the ironic force is retained, because this derived meaning does not match the intended meaning. Example (10) is similar to (9) in that the non-literal meaning is the literal meaning with the addition of background knowledge, but (10) is not ironic.

(10) [12]   Context: *The giant spider Aragog is dead. Harry and Professor Slughorn happen to meet Hagrid who is about to bury Aragog. Harry and Ron were attacked by Aragog's family of hundreds of spiders after wandering in the Dark Forrest and narrowly escaped being eaten (Chamber of Secrets, 2ⁿᵈ year).*

Slughorn: He had a family I trust?   (about Aragog)

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[12] HP HBP (the film).

Harry: Oh, yeah.

The intended meaning can be said to be something like:

(10a) Oh yes, he had a family and a very large one at that, because I've seen them myself. Hundreds of spiders.

In order for Harry's answer in (10) to be ironic it would have to be be:

(10b) Oh, no. (Aragog did not have a family)

A definition of irony should be able to explain why this example is not ironic. The classical, Gricean and Giora's treatment can account for this fact, because the non-literal meaning is neither a direct nor indirect negation of the literal meaning. Harry's answer simply alludes to certain background knowledge which enriches his statement. Again the Echoic Mention Theory may point at the prosodic cues as indicator of Harry's attitude, but this is not a satisfactory explanation of how the non-literal meaning comes about— just like saying that the inteded meaning is intuitively such and such is not satisfactory. Harry is not pretending but answering a question and his utterance is too short to really impersonate somebody.

Note that unlike in example (9) the inversion of the literal meaning in (10b) is counterfactual, while in (9b-c) the inversions were again ironies. (10) alludes to the background knowledge that Aragog had a family of hundreds of flesh-eating spiders, while in (9) Harry makes a proposition that he wishes to present as an undesirable suggestion about what to do—Harry indirectly alludes to what Tonks could do. So (9) also violates the claim by Grice, Giora and the Pretence Theory that the ironic utterance when taken literally is a lie. Harry makes a suggestion which he intends to mark as implausible and undesirable—he does not lie. The only thing we might say Harry is lying about is that if a suggestion presupposes that we think the suggestion is plausible and that we commit to putting it into action, then Harry can be said to lie about upholding these presuppositions. Sleeping outside is not implausible but it probably will be dangerous given the fact that Voldemort's Death Eaters are trying to get into Hogwarts and are likely to kidnap Harry.

The intended meaning in (10a) seems to be an amendment of background knowledge to the literal statement in (10). Similar to example (10) example (11) hinges on the fact that Dumbledore's statement about Voldemort's job at Borgin and Burkes leaves room for interpretation considering the background knowledge about Voldemort. Just like example (10), example (11) is not ironic but shows how the non-literal meaning, which seems to be an extension of the literal meaning, is derived by alluding to background knowledge relevant to the topic (skills a salesman at Borgin and Burkes should have and Voldemorts skills as a dark wizard).

(11) [13] "So Voldemort went off to Borgin and Burkes, and all the staff who had admired him said what a waste it was, a brilliant young wizard like that, working in a shop. However, Voldemort was no mere assistant. Polite and handsome and clever, he was soon given particular jobs of the type that only exist in a place like Borgin and Burkes, which specializes, as you know, Harry, in objects with unusual and powerful properties. Voldemort was sent to persuade people to part with their treasures for sale by the partners, and he was, by all accounts, unusually gifted at doing this."

"I'll bet he was," said Harry, unable to contain himself.

Like in example (10) the intended meaning of (11) is an extension of the literal meaning but no irony. Harry's comment reinforces a certain interpretation of Dumbledore's statement, namely that Voldemort was very good at persuading customers.

(11a) Yes, very gifted at luring, lying, using Dark Magic, threatening, torturing and killing. That's how he "persuaded" those people.

Harry wants to imply that Voldemort was very good at it because he used certain methods. Harry mocks Voldemort's methods of persuasion. He does not want to imply that Voldemort was not good at persuasion.

(11b) I don't bet he was.
(11c) I'll bet he wasn't.

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[13] HP DH, Chapter Twenty.

The direct inversion of the literal meaning in (11b-c) does not match the intended meaning, so the classical, Gricean and Indirect Negation theories can account for the fact that Harry's statement is not ironic. Harry is echoing the proposition Dumbledore just made about Voldemort being very good in persuading customers. But the Echoic Mention Theory has no clues to Harry's attitude here and can thus not explain why this is not a case of irony. The Pretence Theory fails to explain why Harry's utterance has no ironic force for the same reason as the Echoic Mention Theory. If Harry is pretending at all, he is pretending to be someone who believes and reinforces Dumbledore's statement. The Pretence Theory also claims that the person that is mocked is often the person that is imitated, but Harry is mocking Voldemort and his cruel methods of torturing and killing people and not Dumbledore whose statement he is echoing. Harry is imitating neither Voldemort nor Dumbledore in their mannerisms or believes, but is hinting to the fact that he has a certain interpretation in mind when Dumbledore says 'unusually gifted'. Although the intended meaning of Harry's comment does not equal the literal meaning it is not ironic—the non-literal meaning wishes to express more information in alluding to the background knowledge both Dumbledore and Harry have about Voldemort—namely that Voldemort is the most dangerous and cruel dark wizard of all times. He has killed and tortured many Mudbloods, Muggles, Half-Bloods and wizards alike.

Harry takes Dumbledore's phrase 'unusually gifted at doing this' as a euphemism for Voldemort's acts of cruelty. This is possible because Dumbledore's phrasing gives leeway—'unusually' is somewhat marked but still leaves room for speculation. Harry's comment is only ironic if he reads Dumbledore's expression non-literally. As Dumbledore says it is unusual for a wizard to work in this shop, so how could he be unusually gifted for it? So although Dumbledore has not implied that Voldemort used Dark Magic to persuade the clients, he has nevertheless emphasised that Voldemort's career choice was unusual, i.e. surprising, and that his success at it was even more surprising. The literal meaning of Dumbledore's phrase 'unusually gifted at doing this' may activate two spheres of associated background knowledge. On the one hand it may activate background knowledge about what skills salesmen need to persuade clients to sell their treasures. This background knowledge might be very general about what professional skills salesmen would have or it may be very specific about what skills a

salesman at Borgin and Burkes would have. On the other hand Dumbledore's phrasing may activate background knowledge about Voldemort and what his methods and powers as the most dangerous dark wizard are. By reinforcing Dumbledore's statement Harry connects these two spheres of background knowledge thereby emphasising the interpretation that Voldemort used Dark Magic to persuade the clients. Just like in (10) the non-literal meaning seems to be an addition of background knowledge to the literal meaning. Harry can use this underspecification in the phrase 'unusually gifted at doing this' to widen its scope from skills needed in this shop to skills a (dark) wizard like Voldemort might have.

The example (9) has been a counterexample to the five approaches to irony—the classical, the Gricean, the echoic mention, the pretence and the treatment as indirect negation. Examples (10) and (11) demonstrated that the theories of irony fail to distinguish irony from other phenomena in which the non-literal meaning differs from the literal meaning. It has been shown that these theories do not provide sufficient mechanisms to infer the non-literal, ironic meaning. The following examples look at cases of miscommunication.

In example (12) an ironically intended utterance is taken literally. It mirrors Harry's use of an undesirable suggestion from example (9) in that the speaker intends to mark his proposition as an unlikely explanation for the death of Dumbledore's mother. Elphias Doge implies that Ariana murdered her mother, which he thinks is highly implausible because of Ariana's weak health. Aunt Muriel takes it seriously because she thinks Ariana took revenge on her mother for imprisoning her in their own home.

(12) [14] Context: *Aunt Muriel and Elphias Doge, one of Dumbledore's oldest friends, discuss Dumbledore's sister Ariana who is believed to have been a Squib, i.e. a magically-impaired person born to a wizard family.*

"If the mother in question was capable of imprisoning her daughter for years on end, why not?" shrugged Auntie Muriel. "But as I say, it doesn't fit, because Kendra died before Ariana – of what, nobody ever seemed sure-"

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[14] HP DH, Chapter Eight.

> "Oh, no doubt Ariana murdered her," said Dodge with a brave attempt at scorn. "Why not?"

> "Yes, Ariana might have made a desperate bid for freedom and killed Kendra in the struggle," said Auntie Muriel thoughtfully.

Surprisingly, the intended meaning in (12) equals the literal meaning, but alludes to background knowledge—namely that Muriel has taken all her information from the unreliable source of a biography of Dumbledore's life written by Reeta Skeeter, a journalist renown for her lurid newspaper articles in the Daily Prophet. Taking this background knowledge into account the full intended meaning might be something like:

(12a)   You're crazy, Muriel, believing everything Reeta Skeeter wrote in her biography of Dumbledore. You couldn't be more wrong. So here's another crazy suggestion for you. You'll no doubt believe that too. Ariana murdered her mother.

Elphias is heavily mocking that Muriel believes everything Reeta Skeeter wrote in the biography without questioning the coherence, plausibility or reliability of it. He is deceiving Muriel because he pretends to be making a valid suggestion to how Dumbledore's mother died. Elphias is testing Muriel as if he was saying 'I'm gonna make you a totally implausible suggestion. If you believe me you have proven that you'll believe anything, no matter how absurd it is.'

The classical, Gricean and indirect negation accounts of irony fail to predict the irony here and cannot explain why the full intended meaning is the literal meaning with the addition of background knowledge. The Echoic Mention Theory actually can explain this example quite well. Elphias is echoing an imagined suggestion of how Dumbledore's mother died and he also expresses it with a tone of voice ('attempt at scorn') that hints at a derogatory attitude toward Muriel. However, I do not see why it is necessary to call this hypothetical suggestion an imagined echo. The Echoic Mention Theory can analyse but not predict the irony here, because it does not take background knowledge (about Reeta Skeeter's unreliability as an investigative journalist) into account. The Pretence Theory accounts well for the impression that Elphias is pretending to make a serious suggestion while in fact marking a wildly absurd one. The irony is perceived by the reader but not by Muriel.

In example (13) Luna perceives irony in Ron's statement while Ron did not intend any irony.

(13) [15] Context: *Harry, Ron and Hermione run into Luna who had commentated the Quidditch match in which Harry got injured.*

> "Nice commentary last match!" said Ron to Luna as she took back the green onion, the toadstool, and the cat litter. Luna smiled vaguely.
>
> "You're making fun of me, aren't you?" she said. "Everyone says I was dreadful."
>
> "No, I'm serious!" said Ron earnestly. "I can't remember enjoying commentary more! What is this, by the way?" he added, holding the onionlike object up to eye level.

This example shows quite strikingly that the perceived non-literal meaning must not match the intended meaning of the speaker. A theory of irony should be able to account for this distinction—that is to say it must describe what conditions must be met for an utterance to unfold an ironic effect and it must give conditions under which an ironic effect may be perceived. The classical and Gricean view of irony have tried to look at both sides. Grice gave the following example and tried to explain why no irony is perceived here although the maxim of Quality is flouted:

> A and B are walking down the street, and they both see a car with a shattered window. B says, Look, that car has all its windows intact. A is baffled. B says, *You didn't catch on; I was in an ironical way drawing your attention to the broken window*. (Grice 1967/89: 53)

Grice concluded that what was missing was the expression of a critical judgement. The Echoic Mention Theory has almost exclusively focused on the side of the hearer perceiving irony. The Pretence Theory has mainly focused on the side of the ironist who intends to speak ironically. The Indirect Negation Theory has mostly taken the perspective of the hearer perceiving irony.

Luna takes Ron's comment ironically. She has good reasons to do so. While she was commentating the Quidditch match the spectators booed her comments. This is the

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[15] HP HBP, Chapter Twenty.

background knowledge she takes into account and interprets it, as she tells Ron, to mean that 'Everyone says I was dreadful'. If Ron is being honest and sincere with his compliment than there should be no ironic tone of voice or insincere tone of voice present. If this is so, his *attitude* should be sincere and not ironic. Ron expresses his thoughts, but the Echoic Mention Theory would have to assume that Luna would have to see this as an echo. But the Echoic Mention Theory cannot deny that Ron's attitude is not ironic. Therefore the Echoic Mention Theory fails to explain why Luna can perceive Ron's compliment as irony if Ron's attitude is by all means sincere and truthful. This shows quite clearly that the Echoic Mention Theory falsely puts emphasis on 'attitudes' without even being able to explain how to distinguish them other than to say that some interpreters of irony might just be *more sensitive* to detecting them than others. This is no more an explanation of when and why irony is perceived than to say one just has an *intuition* that it is ironic or not. A theory of irony must be more than a gut feeling.

The Pretence Theory also fails to explain why Luna can misinterpret Ron's statement. If Luna takes Ron's utterance as ironic, she views Ron as pretending to be someone who liked her commentary but at the same time it should be clear that Ron is only "making as if to say" this. As with the Echoic Mention Theory the Pretence Theory must assume that Ron displays some sort of attitude or emotion that lets Luna see through his pretence. But as I have already said this is not the case with Ron. He does not imitate any of the spectators who were angry at Luna's way of commentating the game neither in appearance, behaviour nor way of saying it. Luna cannot refer to any attitude or emotion Ron conveyed to justify her ironic interpretation.

The classical, Gricean and Indirect Negation account of irony can analyse this misinterpretation better than the Echoic Mention and Pretence Theory. First Luna must perceive the literal meaning of what Ron says to be a lie (a violation of the maxim of Quality). She was booed for her commentary at the match and she can interpret this to mean that her commentary was bad. When Ron says her commentary was nice this contradicts Luna's interpretation of the background knowledge. When she says 'Everyone *says* I was dreadful' we can conclude that other spectators have also talked to her after the match, like Ron, and have told her her commentary was bad. Ron was at the hospital when the match took place and Luna went to the hospital first to visit him, so she

might think he did not hear the commentary and only heard about it from other spectators. So Luna can reasonably assume that Ron has come to the same interpretation of background knowledge as she has, namely that she was a bad commentator and that he is thus blatantly lying to be ironic.

Only after Luna tells Ron 'You're making fun of me, aren't you? Everyone says I was dreadful' Ron is able to infer that this is how Luna interpreted the booing during the match and that Luna took his compliment ironically. This shows that not only hearers are able to perceive, comprehend and store both the literal and non-literal meaning and can retrieve it later, but the same holds true for the speaker. Ron intended his compliment literally, so he did not intend to imply any ironic, non-literal meaning, but as soon as Luna tells him *her* interpretation of the background knowledge Ron is able to deduce a non-literal meaning of his original utterance that fits Luna's interpretation. This in turn shows that speakers and hearer are well aware of the conditions that hold on the relation between interpretations of the background knowledge and how those are conveyed through utterances. It also shows that irony mainly arises from the logical deduction of interpretations of background knowledge and what the speakers know about how the other people in the conversation interpret this background knowledge. If this deduction of background knowledge yields a very convincing interpretation (in the opinion of the individual hearer) an utterance that contradicts that interpretation in its literal meaning triggers the deduction of the non-literal, ironic meaning. Even more so, it shows that the non-literal meaning is computed with respect to the interpretation of the background knowledge and what the interpretations of other people in the conversation are rather than with respect to the literal meaning.

Luna interprets the non-literal meaning of Ron's utterance to be an (indirect) inversion of the literal meaning. This analysis is illusive because not in all cases is the ironic, non-literal meaning the direct or indirect inversion of the literal meaning. Instead, I claim that it only seems to be an inversion, but the non-literal, ironic meaning is inferred from the hearer's own interpretation of the background knowledge she has and the understanding she has of the interpretations of that relevant background knowledge of the other people in the conversation and most importantly of the possible ironist. The computation of the literal meaning remains the first step (as in the Gricean approach) and is important to see

the difference between what is literally said and what the speaker has deduced from these interpretations. The relevance of what background knowledge to take into account is determined by what the hearer identifies as the current topic of the conversation.

In the analysis of example (13) I came to the conclusion that the Gricean treatment (along with the classical view and Giora's Indirect Negation) was quite effective in predicting the irony, while Echoic Mention and Pretence Theory failed to do so. The following example (14) diminishes this praise because it shows that irony is more than to blatantly lie.

(14) [16] Context: *Fleur is still determined to marry Bill Weasley although he has been heavily injured by the werewolf Fenrir Greyback. Harry comments on Fleur.*

"She's not that bad," said Harry. "Ugly, though," he added hastily, as Ginny raised her eyebrows, and she let out a reluctant giggle.

Fleur is very beautiful, so Harry's statement that she is ugly is obviously a lie. According to the classical, Gricean and Indirect Negation theories, this statement should qualify as ironic, but it is only an obvious lie. Harry and Ginny are in love, so the last thing Harry wants to imply is that he thinks Fleur is good looking or beautiful because Ginny despises Fleur as fiancée for her brother Bill. However, even Ginny knows that Fleur is not ugly. Harry could be assumed to echo what Ginny's thinks about Fleur, but I do not think his attitude toward Fleur is derogatory or critical or his attitude toward Ginny. Although the Echoic Mention Theory seems to be able to predict that no ironic force is present here, it fails to provide an explanation, because the perceived attitude of Harry is nothing more than the intuition we have about what Harry intends to say. Harry can be said to pretend to be someone who thinks Fleur is ugly and this pretence is obvious to Ginny, but this is no case of irony. There is no ironic force in this example because Harry wants to deceive not criticise.

The last example (15) is a counterexample to the Echoic Mention Theory in that it shows that even echoes that are accompanied by a critical, mocking and derogatory attitude are

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[16] HP HBP, Chapter Thirty.

not necessarily ironic. No ironic effect arises here because the criticism is verbalised. For true irony the criticism must not be verbalised.

(15) [17] Context: *Harry sees through Voldemort's eyes how he killed Harry's parents.*

> *He could hear her screaming from the upper floor, trapped, but as long as she was sensible, she, at least, had nothing to fear…He climbed the steps, listening with faint amusement to her attempts to barricade herself in…She had no wand either…How stupid they were, and how trusting, thinking that their safety lay in friends, that weapons could be discarded even for moments…*
> *He forced the door open, cast aside the chair and boxes hastily piled against it with one lazy wave of his wand…and there she stood, the child in her arms.*

Voldemort imagines what James and Lily Potter think, what their believes are for acting how they do. Voldemort echoes imagined thoughts attributed to the two of them. His attitude is clearly mocking and derogatory. Yet no ironic effect arises because the attitude is verbalized ('how stupid they were') and this prohibits an ironic interpretation.

Summing up the Analysis of the Data

First, not in all cases of irony is the non-literal meaning the direct or indirect inversion of the literal meaning, but sometimes a substitution or extension of the literal meaning. Second, the theories have difficulty to sufficiently explain cases of miscommunication involving irony. To explain these cases it must be shown how the utterance under question interacts with background knowledge and what speakers know about each others interpretations of that background knowledge. Third, irony is more than to blatantly lie. Fourth, irony is more than echoing real or imagined thoughts accompanied by a critical, mocking or derogatory attitude.

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[17] HP, DH, Chapter Seventeen.

2. Irony as an Effect

As the previous section showed, deriving the non-literal meaning from the literal meaning varies severely from case to case. In some cases a negation operator has to be inserted in the literal meaning so that for example *That's funny* becomes *That's not funny*. If the literal meaning contains scalar items the scale has to be inverted so *That's very funny* does not become *That's not very funny* but *That's not funny at all*. In other cases words, phrases or entire sentences have to be substituted (*I suppose I'll just have to sleep out here and wait for morning* is substituted for *Don't let me try on my own because it's pointless and I don't wanna stay out here till morning but help me to get in*). In some situations the simple answer *yes* to a question has to be inverted to *no*, while in other situations information has to be added to the literal meaning without inverting the literal meaning first. If the utterance is an ironic hypothetical proposition or suggestion additional information has to be added to the literal meaning and the literal meaning is not inverted. This shows quite clearly that the derivation of the non-literal meaning from the literal meaning is a highly complex process. There is no ironic operator that either universally inverts, substitutes or adds to the literal meaning, but the appropriate derivation has to be selected based on the situation the utterance is used in. And because there is no single ironic operator and because the appropriate derivation has to be decided by context, there is no ironic form, that is to say, there is no overt or covert ironic operator in an ironic utterance which takes the literal meaning and yields the non-literal meaning. The form of an utterance can never be ironic—it is *a-ironic*.

There are no universal verbal triggers for irony[18], but the *ironic effect* arises when we doubt the speaker's sincerity after examining the literal meaning and what we inferred about the speaker's possible intent from background and situational knowledge. In that, the ironic effect is very much like humour. No utterance can be amusing or humorous without being embedded in context, i.e. making reference to people, characteristics, events and so forth. I use the term *effect* here to express that while a speaker may use a certain form to serve a certain function, namely to achieve a certain effect, a hearer may interpret a certain form to have a certain effect and by means of analysing that effect may

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[18] Compare for instance similes which feature a degree word such as 'as.'

be able to interpret what function the speaker intended. There is no direct connection between form and ironic effect as there is no direct connection between literal and non-literal meaning. The ironic effect arises from using an utterance in a certain situation and not by using an utterance by itself. [19]

The *speaker's intention* for using irony is often to criticise or mock someone as in example (9), repeated here for convenience.

(9) [20]   Context: *After Draco had knocked out Harry on the train, Harry is running late, has missed the carriages to the castle and is now standing before the closed gates with Tonks (assigned as bodyguard to protect the school).*

Harry looked around, "I could climb a wall," he suggested.

"No, you couldn't," said Tonks flatly. "Anti-intruder jinxes on all of them. Security's been tightened a hundredfold this summer."

"Well then," said Harry, starting to feel annoyed at her lack of helpfulness, "I suppose I'll just have to sleep out here and wait for morning. "

Irony is a way of indirectly criticising. In order to achieve the ironic effect the ironist must first think about what he wants to criticise in the scope of the current topic of the conversation (Harry and Tonks arrived late, got locked out and need to get in), in example (9), Tonks's lack of helpfulness. Next, the ironist must think about what the literal meaning of the utterance should be and how this contradicts his actual opinion, in this case, Harry has already made a suggestion how to get in which Tonks has rejected, so Harry decides to make another suggestion (another option would have been to address his point of criticism by saying something like *You're very helpful* or *You sure know a lot about protective spells. Know how to get past them?*). For Tonks to feel mocked by Harry she has to interpret Harry's sentence ironically—otherwise she would take his suggestion seriously. To ensure this, Harry has to make sure Tonks doubts the sincerity of the suggestion, i.e. she must doubt that the literal meaning of the utterance can be true in the given situation and given background knowledge. Harry and Tonks do not need to share a lot of background knowledge, but for Harry to achieve the ironic effect, he must

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[19] Note that I am looking at non-conventional ironies here. For conventional ironies I agree with Giora to assume their non-literal meaning to be as salient as their literal meaning – their ironic meaning has become lexicalised.

[20] HP DH, Chapter Eight.

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understand what background knowledge Tonks might have. Harry knows that Tonks is an Auror[21] and that she has been assigned to protect Hogwarts so she should know how to get past the schools security system of protective spells. Because of the heightened security Harry can be sure that Tonks knows that for Harry to stay outside could be dangerous as Voldemort's henchmen, the Death Eaters are on the move. Thus staying outside is undesirable and dangerous. So the suggestion Harry makes is not a reasonable option given the circumstances.

In order for Tonks to perceive the ironic effect she has to first comprehend the literal meaning of Harry's suggestion and next think about the implications following Harry's suggestion might have. Harry suggests to stay outside all night, but Tonks knows this could be very dangerous. So far the comprehension is not specifically biased toward an ironic interpretation. At this juncture Tonks could also conclude that Harry simply makes a stupid suggestion. But in order for Tonks to perceive the ironic effect she must understand what Harry might know, very much like Harry who had to think about what Tonks might know in order to produce the ironic effect. Tonks can assume that Harry, who has already encountered Death Eaters and even Voldemort himself in person, knows how dangerous and unreasonable it would be to stay outside. So she can assume that his suggestion was so stupid that Harry cannot seriously intended to suggest it and that is were she must deduce an alternative ironic interpretation that yields the non-literal meaning. In deducing the ironic interpretation Tonks must think about the topic, which is getting past the protective spells into the school, she knows Harry has already made a suggestion and thereby shown that he wants to get in and not stay outside. She remembers that she has just told him what safety measures protect Hogwarts. She remembers that she has informed Harry that she has been assigned to protect the school and knows about the spells. She remembers that she has rejected Harry's previous suggestion and that she has not suggested a way to get in herself—that is where she may perceive that Harry is mocking her lack of helpfulness.

As you can see most of the information that Harry needs to allude to in order to produce an ironic utterance and that Tonks needs to perceive the irony is information given

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[21] An Auror is a member of an elite unit of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement of the British Ministry of Magic trained to capture Dark wizards and witches. (from Harry Potter Wikia, http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Auror)

immediately preceeding the ironic statement. Only the fact that Voldemort's Death Eaters are bad guys is relatively old background information. All the other knowledge is information introduced within the same conversation. Note that all of the background and situational knowledge required for this deduction of reasons for the insincere suggestion is knowledge relevant to the topic, i.e. the topic limits the amount of background and situational information to take into consideration.

The speed at which the ironic effect is perceived does not differ from the comprehension of literal language, because perceiving the ironic effect is about evaluating the sincerity of an utterance, a process that constantly takes place. To evaluate the sincerity of an utterance, first, the literal meaning, after it has been computed, must be checked against knowledge about the world (people, places and entities mentioned have to find real world referents, events must have happened or be plausible, etc.) and second, mismatches between the literal meaning and referents in the real world have to be evaluated, i.e. *reasons* for the mismatches have to be deduced. The ironic effect is one of possible interpretations of mismatches—others might be that the speaker is lying. While perceiving mismatches might be fast, deducing the reasons for those mismatches might be slower and deducing the non-literal meaning following the reasoning about the mismatches might be even slower. This view of the perception of the ironic effect is supported by empirical studies which show that the ironic effect, i.e. that the literal meaning is not what the speaker intends to say, is perceived even if hearers are not able to deduce and articulate a possible non-literal meaning (see Gibbs and O'Brian 1991 for a discussion).

Here is a matrix which shows what information is needed to perceive the ironic effect and to deduce the intended, non-literal meaning of the speaker.

Topic of the conversation: sleeping outside over night (being locked out)

Intended meaning: "Don't let me try on my own because it's pointless and I don't wanna stay out here till morning but help me to get in."

Situational knowledge: Because Harry was running late he and Tonks got locked out.

Background knowledge: Tonks – being an Auror assigned to protect Hogwarts against attempts of the Death Eaters to infiltrate the school – should know how to get in. Staying outside might be dangerous.

Emotional cues: —

By situational knowledge I mean knowledge that has been introduced within the conversation, while background knowledge is information already known before the conversation. Emotional cues include for instance the tone of voice (see below) and non-linguistic physical features such as a character blushing, gestures, behaviour and facial expressions. Not all of these factors need to be satisfied in every case. The topic is always present, but with the addition of background knowledge or situational knowledge may be enough to reveal that what is said is implausible and that a non-literal meaning must be intended. Although emotional cues are the factor least present in the examples, their importance in face-to-face communication and the subtleness of their influence on how we judge the speaker's sincerity should not be underestimated. Given the limitations the topic poses on the situational and background knowledge to consider, far less information has to be taken into account to discover a possible disparity between what is said and what is plausible and in turn between what is said and what must be intended.

After this description of how the non-literal meaning may be deduced by making reference to the topic of the conversation, background and situational knowledge and what speakers know about the interpretation of other speakers of that same matter, I will remark some further conditions on the ironic effect and name distinguishing features.

The ironic effect is subjective, i.e. it is a matter of interpretation and therefore the effect may be different for every individual hearer. A certain form has a certain effect for a specific individual not in general. The ironic effect may mix and mingle with other effects. The ironic effect is therefore gradual not absolute. There is no ironic function because irony itself can serve many functions and not just one. It can be used to conceal one's true thoughts, one's true intent; to mock a certain addressee (present or not), a certain norm, idea, concept, a situation or dilemma the people in the conversation are in, and to be humorous or witty or it can convey sympathy.

The greater the disparity between what is literally said and what is intended, the more ironic the utterance is. This disparity can be emphasised by also applying a disparity between what is said and how it is said (tone of voice, saying something counterfactual with a matter-of-fact tone of voice).[22] For parody in order to present a convincing imitation what is said and how it is said need to be aligned.

If irony is used only to mock a specific person it is synonymous with sarcasm. In cases where general norms or principles are challenged only irony but not sarcasm is an appropriate term. Also sarcasm is harsher and more obvious than irony. Note that irony has a more deceptive effect than sarcasm. Conversely, sarcasm need not use irony.

For an ironic effect to arise the mocking attitude must not be verbalised, e.g. by using characterisations such as 'How stupid of you to think... .' See example (15).

Irony is perceived as such if the mocking element is recognized and not only the deceiving element.

Developmental studies suggest that while children have developed the capabilities necessary to deduce the ironic meaning between the ages 6 and 9, their performance increases when they are given sufficient context (for instance in the form of short stories preceding the ironic utterance). It could be assumed that this might be even more relevant when children are asked to judge ironies alluding to general norms they might not be as familiar with as adults. Nevertheless, these studies suggest that irony requires a context (the life experience of adults makes up for this) pointing toward the ironic interpretation and that the comprehension of irony is a complex process.

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[22] Although it has been shown that there is no *ironic tone of voice* because there is not specific intonational contour which only occurs in ironic utterances, I deem the term as useful. The definition of the ironic tone of voice, as the definition of verbal irony itself, hinges on the prosodic cues we interpret as conveying insincerity. I therefore propose that the term ironic tone of voice should be given to the intonation of an utterance in which there is a disparity between what is literally said or as what kind of speech act the utterance functions and what would be a fitting intonation. For example, a statement about the world such as *There is a cat* should be conveyed in a matter-of-fact voice. If not, this may enhance the ironic effect of that utterance. But further research needs to be conducted here as not every mismatch between these two spheres is fitting for ironic utterances.

Conclusion

I have claimed that all utterances are a-ironic—without context. That is to say, without reference to background knowledge and knowledge about the other people in the conversation, utterances can never be ironies. Irony is an effect that arises from context not from the form of the utterance itself.

In opposition to the Echoic Mention and Pretence Theory I have argued that not much contextual information is necessary for hearers to perceive an ironic effect or that ironists must be excellent actors in conveying their derogatory attitudes and pretences. Instead, I claim that merely an interpretation of the background knowledge which is relevant to the current topic of the conversation and an understanding of the interpretations the possible ironist has of this background knowledge is sufficient to deduce the non-literal, ironic meaning.

I have emphasised that this deduction, i.e. the comprehension of irony, is individual to every hearer—so different people may come to different conclusions in their deductions. And I emphasise that the deduced non-literal meaning is not equivalent to the intended meaning. After all people *cannot* read minds but only guess to their best knowledge what a speaker *might* have meant.

I have also emphasised that this deduction is not a special process that only takes place in the comprehension of irony, but rather I claim that it is a general deduction process that hearers constantly use during conversation to assess the sincerity of what the speaker tells them. The ironic effect is an effect because it is merely one result this deduction might yield (others might be that the speaker is lying, that the speaker is making a compliment, that the speaker says something totally absurd but does not know better, etc.) among others.

The ironic effect arises when the result of the deduction points to a disparity between the literal meaning of the statement on the one hand and on the other hand the interpretation of the relevant background knowledge and the understanding of the speaker's interpretation of that same background knowledge. As you can see this is almost the phrasing of the classical definition of irony, I have merely fleshed out the second part of it, which originally read 'what is meant or intended'.

I have rejected the classical definition that irony is saying the opposite of what you mean. The interpreted non-literal meaning might appear to be a direct or indirect inversion of the literal meaning, but this does not hold true in all cases and is thus only a coincidence. After all the Gricean account that irony is a lie that is perceived as such and the classical definition of irony as a disparity between what is said and meant or intended, seems to me to have been on the right track all along. However, the attempts of the Echoic Mention Theory to reduce the interpretation of irony to an interpretation of the 'attitude' of the speaker, seems futile to me. Apart from the introduction of an expanded echo term as a collective term for all real and imaginary thoughts, concepts, ideas, norms, believes and so forth, which is useless and unnecessary in explaining irony or distinguishing irony from other tropes and phenomena, the notion of 'interpreting the attitude of the speaker' held by this theory seems to be nothing more than a nice metaphor for saying 'go with your gut' and 'listen to what your intuition tells you about what the speaker thinks'.

But the Echoic Mention and Pretence theories are right in that irony can involve a critical attitude. Irony can have both a deceptive and a critical element. That is to say, it is a lie (which may be obvious to some but not necessarily all hearers; see double audience), but a lie that is used to criticise an individual person, a group of people or general believes, ideas, norms and expectations. The criticism may vary severely, but the intensity of the criticism is guided by what is criticised (which in turn depends on the content of the utterance, the literal meaning and the current topic of the conversation) and how harsh the criticism is intended. For instance, irony used among friends is not less critical because of their friendship. Contextual factors such as the level of intimacy among speakers that have been researched by the Echoic Mention and Pretence Theory are irrelevant.

The criticism is a result of the ironic interpretation in my account, not a prerequisite as in the Echoic Mention and Pretence Theory. That is to say the hearer first perceives the disparity between what is said and what he knows about the world, the speaker and the situation they are in, and then deduces what the speaker might have intended to convey. Only after this has taken place the criticism is perceived. For example, people who do not get the irony or sarcasm do not feel mocked. If the Echoic Mention and Pretence Theory were right, there would have to be cases where people first feel mocked and then comprehend the irony. This shows how important it is to distinguish the form in which

criticism can come. Criticism can be expressed more directly than by using irony. Irony is a good stylistic device to formulate criticism when you cannot speak openly, but irony need not be criticism in all cases (see functions of irony above, p. 37)

In a nutshell, my account views verbal irony as an effect arising under certain contextual conditions. The hearer doubts the sincerity of the speaker's statement in a way that leads the hearer to believe the speaker intends to say something different than what is literally expressed. The non-literal meaning of an ironic utterance is not derived from the literal meaning but deduced from contextual information – which includes the topic of the conversation, background and situational knowledge and specific knowledge speakers in a conversation have about each others interpretations of that knowledge.

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