

## **A cognitive approach to echoing**

### **Abstract**

Stemming from the use-mention distinction by the philosophy of language, Relevance Theory introduces the notion of *echo* in the context of the echoic mention theory of irony (cf. Wilson & Sperber, 2012). Since then, echoing has awakened multidisciplinary interest, mostly in connection this figure of thought. Studies on echoing have provided a largely one-dimension approach. Within cognitive modeling studies, echoing is elevated to the status of cognitive operation. Taking cognitive modeling as a starting point, the aim of the present article is to study echoing from a multidimensional perspective, focusing on its features, functions, and usages. Specifically, the present study addresses echoic implicitness, completeness, complexity, accuracy, and non-ironic echoes (i.e., parodic echoes, denotational and non-denotational echoes). All in all, this study introduces a higher degree of systematicity in the study of echoing in general and endows echo-based studies of irony with greater explanatory adequacy.

### **1. Introduction**

Echoic mention has been an object of in-depth discussion in the philosophy of language and in Relevance pragmatics in connection to irony. The echoic mention theory of irony arose as a challenge to the so-called ‘standard theory’ of irony (Gibbs, 1986; Grice, 1975) and the claim that in irony comprehension the hearer first computes the literal meaning of the utterance and then the figurative meaning involving a reversal of the literal interpretation. The echoic

mention theory claims that irony comprehension is carried out in one single stage, instead of the two stages proposed by the ‘standard theory’. Sperber and Wilson (1995) argue that in irony the hearer identifies a remark as echoic and then reconstructs the attitudinal element conveyed by the speaker. This echo can encapsule a previous utterance or thought, including shared beliefs such as social stereotypes. Echoes may be delayed or immediate according to whether they are based on a previous utterance (or an attributed thought) or on one produced when the communicative event takes place. They may also be explicit or implicit depending on whether the speaker directly repeats a previous utterance, or he or she refers to some social norm.

Echoic mention occurs not only in irony but also in reported speech (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) as a form of metalinguistic awareness (cf. the use-mention distinction in analytical philosophy) (Davidson, 1979). It has also been treated as a one-dimensional analytical category in these accounts. This one-dimensional view has been applied by Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera (2014) and Galera (2020) to an array of linguistic phenomena involving inferencing. However, there is linguistic evidence that echoic mention or, more specifically, the cognitive counterpart of this notion, echoing, as a cognitive operation, is less than a one-dimensional analytical category. This paper will provide evidence that echoing is sensitive to at least the following dimensions of analysis: implicitness, conceptual complexity, and accuracy. Each of these dimensions reflects on one or more properties of echoic activity in language.

Considering the findings provided by these frameworks, the main objective of the present study is to analyze the notion of *echo* from a multidimensional perspective, providing a more defined account of its features, functions, and usages. This perspective includes thinking of echoes in terms of the following dimensions: explicitness/implicitness, completeness, accuracy, complexity. These analytical dimensions will be illustrated with reference to ironic echoing, which is where they are more productive. Then, we will draw the boundary line

between ironic and non-ironic echoes. Non-ironic echoes will be illustrated in relation to reported speech, parody, and implicational meaning.

With these aims in mind, the rest of this article has been structured as follows. Section 2 offers a brief overview of previous work on echoic mention. Section 3 addresses the analytical methodology employed in the study. Section 4 discusses the proposal a multi-dimension analysis of irony. Finally, Section 5 sums up the findings of the study and proposes options for future developments.

## **2. Some remarks on echoing**

The initial remarks on echoing are framed within Relevance Theory. Sperber and Wilson (1981) proposed the use/mention distinction. According to their proposal, expressions could be “used” to refer to entities, situations, or events, and could also be “mentioned” to make metalinguistic reference to expressions themselves. Irony is explained as a case of mention (specifically, echoic mention), since an utterance is repeated to indicate that it has been understood or heard while at the same time expressing an attitude towards it. Let us illustrate this with an example. Let us imagine a situation where a proud mother tells her shy daughter: *Lilly, you are a shining star!* Having been ridiculed at school one day for her shyness, Lilly returns home and tells her mother: *A shining star, right, mum.* In this example, Lilly echoes her mother’s words and expresses skepticism towards them, since her mother’s expectations have been shattered by Lilly being unpopular and ridiculed at school. Sperber and Wilson (1981) claim that echoic mention may also refer to a situation or to some event that has previously taken place. For instance, the utterance *Josephine is such a brilliant colleague*, in a context that clearly shows that the person referred to is not brilliant at all and that this can affect cooperative

work, may lead us into thinking that the speaker does not enjoy working with Josephine because of her not having so far proved that she is a smart person.

Cognitive linguists have argued that echoic mention is but the result of previous cognitive activity on cognitive models (Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera, 2014; Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017). In this view, the repetition of what someone has said, or the interpretive linguistic formulation of an attributed thought, are but the linguistic procedures used to produce an act of echoic mention reflecting underlying echoic cognitive activity. Echoic mention is thus the result of echoing a meaning representation consisting of a coherent combination of cognitive models. Echoing as a cognitive operation can produce irony but it can also have other purposes. For irony to take place, the output of echoing needs to clash with other meaning representations, thereby cancelling out part of their meaning. This cancellation of meaning implications produces a general inference of speaker's dissociation from the content of the echoic input. Non-ironic echoing, on the other hand, does not serve as the input for the cancellation of any assumption. In pragmatics, Sperber and Wilson (1981, 1995) already claimed that other uses of language, such as reported speech, involve echoic mention. This happens when the role of the repetition is not ironic but rather serves the purpose of providing a non-attitudinal account of a situation or event. For example, the utterance *Josephine is such a brilliant colleague* can be presented in reported-speech format: *Professor Jones has pointed out that Josephine is such a brilliant colleague*. Even if the proposition expressing the idea that Josephine is a brilliant colleague had originally been ironic, the report results in a non-ironic use: the new speaker (the reporter) does not ironize on Josephine's intellect but simply reports on someone else's claim, whether ironic or not.

To reported speech Galera (2020) has added other uses of echoic mention, such as the repetition of what someone has said for descriptive purposes. This often happens when the linguistic system lacks a lexical concept that encapsulates enough information to convey the

full array of meaning implications that the speaker has in mind. For example, imagine someone has had a hard day at work. When he returns home dirty, disheveled, and exhausted, his teenage son, who is on the phone with a friend, tells his friend: *Better hang up. Dad is back home, and he has an “I had the worst possible day ever” look in his face.* The expression “I had the worst possible day ever” is echoic of what the son thinks his father feels. It is not ironic since it does not clash with any aspect of observable reality and conveys no dissociative attitude. From a cognitive perspective, the son is using echoing to produce a metarepresentation, i.e., a representation of a representation.

In sum, the relevance theoretical notion of echo has proven efficient to account for the basic pragmatic mechanisms that underlie verbal irony. However, the distinction between echoic mention and echoing as a cognitive operation is necessary to understand the conceptual intricacies of the ironic echo. Additionally, not all forms of echoing are ironic. Non-ironic forms of echoing are pervasive in language and serve a variety of different purposes with and without an attitudinal intention.

### **3. A brief methodological note**

The present study is framed within the context of previous explorations of the cognitive mechanisms underlying irony (cf. Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano, 2019ab, 2021; Lozano & Ruiz de Mendoza, 2022; Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017; Lozano, 2019). Specifically, it is developed within the integrated scenario-based approach to irony, which explains irony as a clash between an *epistemic scenario* and an *attested scenario*, where the former is the conceptual correlate of a state of affairs that someone regards as highly likely or certain to occur, and the latter designates the reality we perceive to be true. Out of this clash arises an attitude of dissociation towards

the echoed thought. This study also takes as a starting point Galera's (2020) study of non-ironic uses of echoing, as will be explained in section 4.5.

The approach used for this study involves the qualitative analysis of corpus data with a view to identifying usage patterns which act as a first step to the formulation of *high-level* or *surface generalizations* as discussed by Goldberg (2002). This approach requires making systematic searches in corpora with the aim of unveiling the internal aspects of the phenomenon under investigation and establishing clear boundaries with other related phenomena. The data used for this study has been drawn from an annotated corpus of 200 examples of verbal irony from a wide variety of origins (television, film, literature, everyday language, examples extracted from previous literature on irony, etc.). These examples were classified according to echo-building strategies, as outlined in Ruiz de Mendoza and Lozano (2019b). These examples were compared to non-ironic examples of irony. This analysis allowed us to develop various analytical criteria to address echoic language from different perspectives, namely their accuracy, their complexity, and their implicitness.

#### **4. A multi-dimensional analysis of echoing**

Echoic mention has been primarily addressed as a one-dimensional phenomenon both by pragmatic and cognitive accounts (i.e., Sperber & Wilson, 1981; Ruiz de Mendoza & Galera, 2014). This means that further analysis into its nature and functions is needed to fully understand the phenomenon in its ironic and non-ironic variants. The previous sections have evidenced how the concept of echo as initially introduced by Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1981) can benefit from a deeper, multi-dimensional analysis that goes beyond understanding this phenomenon as the mere repetition of someone's utterances or the verbalization of their attributed thoughts. The present section first provides analytical criteria

to address echoing, and then it proposes a typology of echoic uses and explains their main features.

#### *4.1. Implicitness*

Echoing can be implicit or explicit. Within Relevance Theory, it has been claimed that this depends on whether they repeat a previously uttered statement or whether they make a mere allusion to a previous utterance or social norm (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Wilson & Sperber, 2012). Here, we argue that echoic implicitness hinges on whether the echoed material is absent from the utterance. This is particularly relevant when we discuss ironic echoes and can influence the communicative purpose of irony (i.e., to distance oneself from an uncomfortable situation, to make a complex joke, etc.). We will illustrate this briefly with some examples. Let us imagine a situation where two young people, Paola and Sean, have just had a date on Tinder. Paola decides she wants to go back home. The date has been quite vague in terms of whether the night will end up with more than a casual friendly encounter. When Paola decides to go home, Sean offers to walk her home:

Sean: *I can walk you home*

Paola: *No thanks, not today. I can walk by myself.*

In this context, it is very often the case that walking a Tinder date home implies that the couple will engage in sexual intercourse. Both Paola and Sean share this knowledge. So, when Sean offers to walk Paola home, she knows what he is up to, and her reply echoes that aspect of their shared knowledge. Her rejection of his implicit proposal is not impolite or awkward. By saying *No thanks, not today. I can walk by myself*, Paola implies: *No, thanks. I do not want you to*

*walk me home because today I do not wish to have sexual intercourse with you.* The meaning implicit in Paola's utterance is derived through the following reasoning schema:

Premise 1: Sean offers to walk me home

Premise 2: When a Tinder date offers to walk you home, a usual reason is the expectation to have physical intimacy with you.

Conclusion: Sean wants to walk me home so that I will agree to have physical intimacy with him.

In this case, the echo is implicit, since what Paola does through her response is echo the conclusion that results from the reasoning schema spelled out above. The implied echo is the conclusion derived from premises 1 and 2.

#### *4.2. Completeness*

The total or partial nature of an echo hinges on the focal prominence with which the speaker wants to endow the utterance (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017). For instance, take a PhD supervisor who tells a doctoral student when she will be available to discuss her latest thesis chapter.

Supervisor: *I'll be with you to discuss your new thesis chapter at 5pm tomorrow.*

Doctoral student: *Okay, 5pm in your office.*

The doctoral student echoes the supervisor's utterance only partially to highlight what he thinks is the most relevant part of the utterance (i.e., that the supervisor will be available at 5pm).



In the case of irony, partial echoes may be built to be economic, or to modify meaning effects. A partial echo is best constructed based on the above-mentioned selection of a focal element. For instance, let us take a situation where two friends, Cecilia and Carlos, have attended a violin concert at the Opéra Garnier in Paris. The tickets were very expensive. Cecilia has enjoyed the performance immensely, but Carlos has found it rather dull:

Cecilia: *I have enjoyed the concert immensely. It was totally worth the money!*

Carlos (skeptical): *Yeah, right, immensely!*

Carlos selects the adverb “immensely” as the feature that best encapsulates his feeling of skepticism toward Cecilia’s remark and his attitude towards the violin concert. Carlos could have also said *Yeah, right, totally worth the money*, which would also be a partial echo, but this time, it would have highlighted the implicated meaning arising from the echoed belief that the performance was worth the money spent on the tickets.

The tendency, for economy reasons, is to build partial echoes, provided that the implicit information is readily recoverable from context. But, when in such a situation of ready recoverability the speaker builds a complete echo, this yields extra communicative effects of an attitudinal kind. This kind of echo is often accompanied by prosodic prominence. To illustrate this analytical situation, let us remember one of the most famous scenes in the films by the Marx Brothers, the contract scene from “Night at the Opera”. In this scene, Driftwood and Fiorello, played by Groucho and Chico Marx, comically discuss how to strike a deal regarding a theater issue. In this scene, both characters show their total ignorance regarding business. They start going through the contract, which reads: “The party of the first part shall be known in this contract as the party of the first part”. Following this sentence, both characters look at one another and tear off that part of the contract. This scene has become the source of

endless jokes and ironies, built on an echo of this famous utterance, often accompanied by the (parodic) simulation of tearing off the contract. Now, let us imagine that two colleagues have just attended a meeting where the matters discussed did not seem to make much sense to the policies of the company. After the meeting, one of the colleagues tells the other one: *Exactly, the party of the first part shall be known in this contract as the party of the first part*. The aim of this utterance is to echo the nonsensical nature of the meeting. The echo will be more easily recoverable if the utterance is accompanied by the gesture of tearing off the paper, since more parts of the communicative context are displayed. However, let us take a variation of this situation. Imagine the colleague only says: *This meeting was all about the party of the first part*. In this case, unless there is more information that is recoverable from the context, or the interpreter shares a high degree of knowledge on this film with the speaker, the echo will be more difficult to identify.

#### 4.3. Complexity

Echoic complexity has been addressed only preliminarily by Ruiz de Mendoza and Lozano (2019b). Understanding that echoes, and specifically ironic echoes, are not necessarily a perfect replica of a previous utterance is key to examine *echoic complexes*. Ruiz de Mendoza and Lozano (2019b, fc.) provide an initial exploration of this phenomenon and treat echoic complexes as a combination of echoes with the purpose of enhancing ironic impact. We define echoic complexes as metalinguistic representations (or meta-representations) where two or more echoed thoughts combine different but compatible aspects of a single representation or result in echoes of echoes with the view of endowing the initial echo with the status of an attested assumption, thus constituting an observable scenario.

#### 4.3.1. *Compounded echoes*

We define *compounding* as the speaker's use of syntactic mechanisms to bring together separate but somehow related parts of a single ironic event. This can be done by using syntactic combination in the form of coordination or juxtaposition. Let us take an example. Imagine two sisters, Amanda and María, who have just come back from their holidays together, with some friends in Majorca. Amanda has always shown a rather party-oriented tendency, and María has shown a shy, more introverted behavior. When they arrive home, their mother observes that María seems disappointed and tells Amanda: *You probably didn't take good care of your sister, did you?* To that, Amanda replies: *I am totally exemplary, and you know it.* The mother then says: *Of course, you are a calm cute darling, and your sister keeps dragging you into dodgy places, right?* The mother's reply to Amanda's comment is an inaccurate echo of Amanda's utterance about her being exemplary by using hyperbole to exaggerate the contrast between the echoed utterance and what she truly thinks.

#### 4.3.2. *Cumulative echoes*

Another strategy to endow an echo with conceptual complexity is *cumulation*, which involves the consecutive appearance of two or more echoic terms that have the same ironic target. In other words, the items that cumulate share the same ironic meaning. The formation of cumulative echoes is carried out by listing terms that have similar meaning or share the key feature that will clash with the observable scenario, in the case of ironic echoes. This way, the terms reinforce one another and create a single, stronger echo. Let us take again the previous example on María and Amanda. If we transform the mother's reply to her daughter Amanda's words into *Sure, you are the cutest, loveliest, best possible influence on María*, the terms "cutest", "loveliest" and "best possible influence" reinforce the idea that Amanda's company is greatly beneficial to María. The three terms or expressions share the positive connotations

applied to Amanda by first referring to her behavior (“lovely”, “cute”) and then to the effect of that behavior (“good influence”). In this example, once more, both the hyperbole and the semantic crescendo of the three terms reinforces the echo.

A second way of building cumulative echoes is through merism. Merism is a figure of speech where the totality is expressed in abbreviated form by mentioning only two or more of its most prominent constituents (Watson, 1986, p. 321). For instance, in Genesis 1:1 of the Bible, the use of heaven and the earth is used to refer to the whole creation, or evening and morning. Lozano and Ruiz de Mendoza (2022, p. 76) provide this example: *I love her with all my heart, my mind, my body, my soul*. This expression conveys the idea that the speaker’s commitment to his love relationship is unequivocal. The cumulative sequence combines different physical and non-physical parts of the person, whose whole self is the target meaning. These parts all relate to the aspects of an individual that are more commonly involved in love: the heart is metonymic for the feelings associated with the heart; the mind stands for the person’s thoughts for his loved one; the body represents the physical aspects of love; finally, the soul brings in the spiritual aspects of love. Now, this example of merism can be used ironically as a cumulative echo of a simpler expression such as:

A: You love her a lot, don’t you?

B: *Yeah, right, I love her with all my heart, my mind, my body, my soul.*

Compare B’s cumulative echo with a simpler version: *Yeah, right, I love her a lot*. The excess of emphasis provided by the aggregation of complementary meanings, roughly comparable to and echoic of “a lot” in A’s question, endows the resulting expression with greater ironic strength.

#### 4.3.3. Echoic chains

Third, echoic chains feature two or more echoes that are echoes of previous ones. Chained echoes are often used as rebuttal strategies, since in the case of irony, echoes are intended to seriously question what the speaker thinks is an erroneous claim. In the case of non-ironic echoes, we might also use echoic chains, but with a non-ironic effect, but rather acting with a similar function to that of reported speech. First, in the case of non-ironic echoes, let us imagine a situation where at the post office, one of the customers picks up number A39, but thinking it will take a while to be attended, walks out of the office to smoke a cigarette. The screen where the numbers are called suddenly displays A39. Another customer, having seen the number on the screen, peeks outside, and calls “A39” to let the first client know that it is his turn. By calling the smoker’s name, the second customer is echoing what has been displayed on the screen, omitting “The screen has shown...” and directly referring to the number.

The case of echoic chains in irony is a lot more complex. In this case, chains are formed when an echo is built completely or partially on a previous echo with the aim of creating an ironic effect. Consider a situation where Marta and Juan are discussing the likelihood that the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 by the United Nations will be achieved by the set date. Marta thinks it is possible to achieve them, but Juan does not think this is a realistic option. Marta tells Juan: *I think there is no doubt we will accomplish the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals*. Skeptical, Juan replies: *Sure, we will accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals, and I will be elected chair of my department*. A month later, Juan is elected the chair of his department, and when he tells Marta, she replies: *Yeah, right, and you will be the chair of your department*. Initially, Juan had echoed with skepticism Marta’s belief that the UN Sustainable Development Goals would be met. In order to enhance his dissociation from such a belief, he added the subsequent remark: *and I will be elected chair of my department* a remark based on an analogy-based rebuttal strategy. This was used to build an observable

scenario that is accessed by means of pragmatic implication: Juan thinks him being elected chair of his department is as likely as meeting the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. However, when he unexpectedly gets elected chair, we witness a reversal of Juan's probability judgement. The new situation becomes the new observable scenario, which Marta echoes to dissociate herself from Juan's previous belief that he would not be elected chair of his department, which becomes observably wrong. Hence, Marta is also showing dissociation from the unlikelihood that the Sustainable Development Goals will be met by 2030. The result is the creation of an ironic echoic chain where Marta's second remark is an ironic echo of Juan's ironic remark, which echoes Marta's first remark. We thus observe that the strength of a chained ironic echo arises from the fact that it cancels out an assumption and shows the speaker's skepticism, but also lends indisputable support to the initially questioned belief while proving that the previous ironist was wrong.

#### *4.4. Accuracy*

Accuracy hinges on the meaning implications arising from the echo and the content of the sentence, rather than on focal prominence, as was the case of total and partial echoes. The accuracy of the echo hinges on cognitive economy (Ruiz de Mendoza & Barreras, 2022). A speaker might not have an exact memory of the utterance, or because s/he does not need the echo to be exact because the selected fragment is enough to convey the meaning implications s/he is looking for. Echoes are modalized to communicate something different and may also reproduce the original to create full mimesis, approaching parody. Let us imagine an example where two colleagues are at work together. One of them is abusive in terms of taking advantage of the other's work:

*A: Let's get started. Hands on deck!*

B: *Yeah, right. Hand on deck...*

What we find here is an inaccurate ironic echo where the word “hands”, used by A, is replaced by its singular form “hand”, uttered by B. By modifying the echo, B means “you always take advantage of me, and I do all the work, so I’ll do it by myself, and you’ll get the credit”, and thus uses the echo ironically to convey skepticism towards the fact that both will be doing the work.

Within Pretense Theory, Seto (1998, p. 248) explains irony as an act of pretense rather than an echoed utterance, belief or thought by using the following example:

A: *Sorry, I haven’t got enough money*

B: *You always haven’t enough money*

Nevertheless, the example given by this author is an instance of a reworded inexact echo that has a shift from a first to a second person. An accurate version of B’s utterance would certainly be possible (Ruiz de Mendoza and Lozano, 2022):

A: *Sorry, I haven’t got enough money*

B: *Yeah, right, “Sorry, I haven’t got enough money”*

Echoic exactitude marks the linguistic economy of the utterance. Let us imagine that we try to buy a metallic water bottle on a web store, but when we find it, we read the following message: The article you are looking for will soon be back in stock with an amazing new selection of colors and sizes. And you ironically tell your friend, sitting next to you: *Yeah, right. Back in*

*stock, with an amazing new selection.* This is a clear example of an inexact echo. The fragment has been chosen because it is relevant and economical in its ironic function.

However, we could have uttered *Yes, sir, the article will soon be back in stock with an amazing new selection of sizes and colors!* Exact echoes are not economical according to the Principle of Relevance, and so they must be balanced with an extra load of meaning. In this case, adding “Yes, sir” and the exaggerated intonation shown by the exclamation marks adds an attitudinal dimension. The utterance becomes an echo of the webstore banner with a military tone, showing annoyance at the fact that it is necessary to wait because the website says so. On the other hand, building an overly inexact echo is risky since it may hinder communication. Taking the same situation about the webstore, the utterance *Yeah, right, amazing* is a partial echo where it would be considerably more difficult to an interpreter to detect what the echo refers to, since so little information is given.

The total/partial nature of echoes may interact with various degrees of accuracy since they belong to a classificatory axis with cooperative potential. Thus, accurate and inaccurate echoes can be combined with total and partial ones. We can have four different combinations:

- (1) First, we can have an exact and total echo. For instance, the utterance *Yes, sir, the article will soon be back in stock with an amazing new selection of sizes and colors!* in the previously mentioned example features an exact echo, since it repeats *verbatim* what the website said, and is total, since it does not leave out any information with the aim of highlighting the focal prominence of a specific component of the utterance.
- (2) Secondly, an exact echo may also be partial. For example, let us take a situation where a friend tells you *Linda is lovely, but I wouldn't mess with her.* Accidentally, you do mess with her, and next time you see your friend, you tell her *Yeah, right, “I wouldn't mess with her”.* In this case, the echo is partial, since it encapsulates the thought that



Linda is lovely but ironizes about the fact that you would not mess up with her, and exact, since the words are the exact same as those employed by the speaker.

- (3) On the other hand, inexact echoes may be partial or total too. If they are partial, it is communicatively dangerous since little information is given and the risk that the echo will be identified is more prominent than in the other three possible combinations. Let us begin with a simple example of a standard partial echo:

A: Our neighbors are very polite, and they are particularly quiet!

B (in disagreement): *Yeah, right, polite and quiet.*

This shortening of the utterance is done for economy reasons and emphasizes the adjectives “polite” and “quiet”, giving them focal prominence. However, there are other cases of economy besides those arising from focal prominence situations. Imagine that a foreigner visits Spain and decides to enjoy the gastronomical delights of the country. Right before being served at a restaurant, he tells his partner: *We all love Spanish potato omelette and a good glass of wine, don't we?* However, the partner finds the wine tastes horrible and replies: *Yeah, right, a good glass of wine.* With inaccuracy for emphasis, a partial echo can be further reshaped. For instance, it may take the form of *Yeah, right especially a good glass of wine* (partial and inaccurate). Its partial nature draws attention to the bad quality of the wine; its inaccurate nature allows us to use an emphasize (especially) to further stress the bad quality of the wine. Note that, because ironic attitudes are mostly emphatic, a mitigator would not work (*Yeah, right, just a good glass of wine / Yeah, right barely a good glass of wine*). The use of “barely” destroys the irony since adverbs such as “barely” or “mildly” destroy the ironic import

of the utterance. In irony we are assertive about our dissociation from what someone has said, and mitigators run counter to assertiveness.

- (4) When inexact echoes are total, the meaning implications are kept but the words will differ from the original. Inaccurate total echoes are usually very poor because the echo is hardly recognizable as such, thus impairing the potential ironic import of the utterance. Inexact total echoes may be caused by poor memory or because the speaker wants to modulate the echo in terms of the intended meaning. However, it will be modulated to such an extent that the echo loses its intrinsic qualities. Let us exemplify this. Imagine two friends are commenting on Rihanna's dress at the 2018 Met Gala, where she wore a highly controversial mini dress which was paired with Catholic-inspired ornaments and a hat resembling the papal miter. One of the friends remarks in admiration *Wow, Rihanna was the queen of the Met Gala this year!* The other friend, who thought Rihanna's dress was outright disrespectful, replies: *That makes all the sense in the world. That singer was the celebrity of that New York museum dance.* This last remark constitutes a total and inexact echo. However, the degree of felicity of the interpretation of this echo will not be too high unless the interpreter is familiar with which singer and gala the speaker is talking about, or the connection between the terms "queen" and "celebrity" in this context.

#### 4.5. *Non-ironic echoes*

In section 2 we have explained that echoing has mainly been studied in relation to irony within the framework provided by Relevance Theory, or by integrated approaches that incorporate echoing in their analyses. This section will address more in depth ironic and non-ironic uses of echoing by contrasting them.

Ideally, echoing involves the speaker's attempt to provide the hearer with a *verbatim* representation of thoughts attributed to someone else (i.e., it is a case of full resemblance). However, as Ruiz de Mendoza and Barreras (2021) claim, when a thought is echoed, the meaning does not arise from a potential similarity between situations, events or entities denoted by the linguistic expression, but from repeating a thought. In other words, echoes involve metalinguistic resemblance. We understand metalinguistic resemblance as the speaker's reflection on how to make meaning by means of using linguistic expression instead of an entity or state of affairs designated by the expression.

Previous accounts of irony had claimed that being ironic was using an expression to say the opposite of what is meant (cf. Bussmann, 1996). This view has been present in literary and linguistic studies alike (cf. Leech, 1969; Grice, 1975). In fact, the latter claimed that being ironic was flouting the first Maxim of Quality ("do not say what you believe to be false") of the Cooperative Principle. However, this definition accounted neither for the differences between being ironic and lying nor for the difference between irony and other figurative uses of language. The relevance theoretical perspective was, in this context, a new hypothesis with many dissidents. For instance, Clark and Gerrig (1984) put forward the claim that irony does not involve echoing, but an act of pretense (thus coining the term Pretense Theory) where the speaker played a role, as if s/he were an actor in a play and expected the hearer to identify the act of pretense and engage in the ironic game by identifying the true meaning in the utterance. Further, other proponents of non-echo-centric accounts of irony, such as Seto (1998), have incorporated the notion of echo into their accounts of irony, but have pointed out that not all ironic utterances involve an echo.

The ironic echo has been incorporated to hybrid or integrated accounts of irony, such as the ones proposed by Popa-Wyatt (2014) or the cognitive-modeling based account put forward by Ruiz de Mendoza and Lozano (2021, 2022). Popa-Wyatt (2014) claims that it is

possible to bring together Pretense Theory and Relevance Theory into a single approach where the pretended thought takes the form of an echo of what someone else has said of thought. On the other hand, within Cognitive Linguistics, Ruiz de Mendoza (2017) and Ruiz de Mendoza and Lozano (2021, 2022) propose an integrated cognitive modeling-based account. According to cognitive modeling, irony can be explained in terms of cognitive operations. In the case of irony, two cognitive operations are involved: *echoing* and *contrast*. Echoing involves the repetition of a previous thought or utterance with various degrees of accuracy (i.e., the extent to which the repeated material replicates the original material). On the other hand, contrast consists in the comparison of the conceptual structure of an utterance to make modifications. Both operations work on conceptual representations. In particular, the input for echoing is a previous (repeated) conceptual representation. Hence, following this approach, echoing is given the status of a cognitive operation (Ruiz de Mendoza & Galera, 2014; Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017). Here, irony arises from the clash between an epistemic and an attested scenario. The former encompasses the expectations we have about a state of affairs being highly likely or certain to occur, while the latter refers to what we perceive to be true. When the two scenarios clash the attitudinal element arises, which is later parametrized according to the context in the form of mockery, contempt, sarcasm, etc. The epistemic scenario in verbal irony also involves a pretended agreement, where the speaker pretends to agree with the expectations contained in the epistemic scenario, to later be identified by the hearer. The epistemic scenario in verbal irony is based on an echo but simultaneously involves an act of pretended agreement, therefore taking the notion of *echo* from Relevance Theory and incorporating the key elements from Pretense Theory.

Following the initial claims about non-ironic echoing by Sperber and Wilson (1995), Galera (2020) has argued that there exist meaningful repetitions of key aspects of the denotational aspects of utterances which may be used to supply access points to more complex

mental representations. One example is the “quoted material” in the utterance *She looked at me with a “I’ll kill you if you don’t do it” face*. The quoted material echoes a situation where someone might become violent if things are not done the way s/he wants them to. Ruiz de Mendoza (2017a) has also pointed out that echoic language may be found in agreement expressions or affirmations, such as *As everyone knows, drinking water after a night out prevents hangovers*. As claimed by Galera (2020), *echoic mention* and *echoing* as a cognitive operation are not equivalent. The former refers to the actual linguistic expression that results from repeating a belief or a thought (i.e., in irony, echoic mention is the linguistic realization of the conceptual output of the echoing operation). Echoing as a cognitive operation, on the other hand, is the cognitive mechanism that involves manipulating conceptual material that the ironist wants to be questioned. Echoic mention grants the hearer access to this material. Hence, echoic mentions are linguistic prompts that grant access to scenarios (imaginary or real), which contain the information for the context of the utterance.

#### 4.5.1. Parodic echoes

The notion of parody normally refers to the replication of someone’s verbal and / or non-verbal behavior to create a comic effect. Parody also typically combines critical and comical acts (Rossen-Knill & Henry, 1997). Since parody is focused on form rather than content, it falls within the scope of metalinguistic resemblance (Ruiz de Mendoza and Barreras, 2022). Additionally, parody is often combined with hyperbole and uses exaggeration to create this comic effect, and mock, often unkindly, the original. Since parody is intrinsically imitative, verbal parody can be explained in terms of the total or partial repetition of somebody’s verbal behavior + the relevant paralinguistic features (i.e., body language, gestures, prosodic features, etc.). Unlike ironic echoes, parodic echoes do not clash with reality, but rather exaggerate and distort reality with the aim of mocking it. In parody, hyperbole is used to modify the form

rather than the content. Let us take a real example. During Trump's legislature, a wide variety of television shows, such as SNL parodied the president, often by recreating his persona by using an actor with exaggerated facial features (i.e., orange tan, bright yellow hair, etc.) and quoting exaggeratedly famous words by Trump. One such case is the sentence "I'm going to build a big wall", referred to the president's proposal to construct a structure to separate the United States and Mexico to avoid illegal immigration. This utterance, accompanied to an exaggerated physical portrayal of the former president of the United States, and an exaggeration of his prosodic features. This is a clear example of verbal parody. From a cultural point of view, the act of imitating the president involves lack of respect but can also provoke laughter.

Ruiz de Mendoza and Barreras (2022) claim that parodic echoes can be accurate or inaccurate, just like ironic echoes, and except in situations that are attributed to the parodist's lack of skill, they normally serve the purpose of creating a humorous effect through exaggerated imitation. Parodic echoes, like ironic echoes, may also be complex, and may use compounding in order to enhance the comical result of the utterance. For instance, let us go back to the example about Donald Trump's words "I'm going to build a wall". We may compound this utterance with other famous quotes by Trump, such as "If you want to get rid of COVID you just have to drink bleach". By juxtaposing the two utterances into a single one ("I'm going to build a wall, and if you want to get rid of COVID you just have to drink bleach") the parodic effect is enhanced, since only relevant quotes in terms of the comic effect are picked.

Parodic echoes can be total or partial, and accurate or inaccurate. Even though we may encounter parodic echoes that replicate a full speech or scene, it is often the case that parody focuses on the fragments that have the highest comical potential, as is the case with the example of the quotes by Donald Trump. However, parodic echoes can be found in characters that

loosely mockingly imitate an existing personality. This is especially popular in literature, and specifically in the genre of satire. For instance, in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, the characters of Napoleon and Snowball parody Stalin and Trotsky. Even though no direct quotes uttered by Stalin and Trotsky are featured, the exaggerated references to their behavior and the connection to the widely known historical facts provide a solid basis for the identification of the parody.

#### 4.5.2. Denotational and non-denotational echoes

Echoic denotation refers to the attitudinal component of an echo. In irony, all echoes are attitudinal, since it is intrinsic to ironic echoing to convey an attitude of dissociation that is later parametrized according to the context, in a variety of manners (i.e., humor, sarcasm, etc.). Here, we distinguish between echoes which serve the purpose of reporting what someone has said or thought as a way of transmitting information (denotational or non-attitudinal), and those whose function is to convey an attitude.

Reported speech is a clear example of denotational echoes. In reported speech, someone repeats what someone else has said to communicate the content of the utterance, with the only aim of passing on the information. For instance, a father may call his children and wife to the kitchen because he has finished preparing a meal. He tells his wife *Dinner is ready!* and the mother tells her children *Dinner is ready!* This exact and total echo is denotational, since the mother repeats to her children what she has heard from her partner.

On the other hand, non-denotational or attitudinal echoes, such as ironic echoes, are used to convey an attitude. Aside from ironic echoes, we would like to draw the reader's attention to implicational echoes. An example of this phenomenon is *He had an "I've been working all day long" face*. Here, the content of the expression between quotation marks is used as a single term, and is built on the basis of a metonymy where the typical verbal reaction

to an event stands for the whole event (Ruiz de Mendoza & Galera, 2014, p. 189). So, an “I’ve been working all day long” face refers to the tiredness shown in the facial expression (effect) one has when s/he has been working all day long (cause).

## **5. Conclusions**

Despite the debate between proponents of Pretense Theory and Relevance Theory, echoing has received a considerable amount of attention within pragmatics and Cognitive Linguistics. Initially explained solely in connection to irony, only recently has non-ironic echoing received attention (Galera, 2020). Additionally, echoing has been studied mainly as a pragmatic concept. The analysis of echoing provided in the present article is complementary to previous work carried out on ironic echoing within the framework of cognitive modeling (e.g., Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017; Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano, 2019ab; Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano, 2020; Lozano & Ruiz de Mendoza, 2021; Galera, 2020). These analyses study irony as a multidimensional phenomenon that can be applied to a wide array of linguistic phenomena that involve inferencing and look at echoes from the point of view of their cognitive status. Specifically, this article has looked at analytical criteria for echoing and types of echoes. In terms of the typology of analytical criteria, we looked at implicitness, completeness, accuracy, and complexity in irony. The last criterion comprised the phenomena of compounding, echoic chains, and cumulation.

As far as echoic types are concerned, this paper has also discussed non-ironic echoes, with emphasis on parodic and denotational echoes. This way, we account for the uses of echoing (1) as part of irony or other linguistic phenomena, and (2) for the use of echoing in parody to build mocking and exaggerated representations of existing events, people or actions. We also accounted for the shapes echoing can take (3) in terms of the totality or partiality of



the repetition, (4) the accuracy of the echo, and (5) the attitudinal component in different types of echoing.

All in all, the account of echoic types and criteria for echoic analysis provided in this article introduces a higher degree of systematization and a finer degree of analysis than previous studies of echoing.

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