

A cognitive-linguistic approach to complexity in irony: dissecting the ironic echo¹

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Abstract

This article discusses complexity in ironic echoic mention from the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics. It builds on the scenario-based approach to irony where ironic meaning is treated as a contextually adjustable meaning inference resulting from a clash between an echoed and an observed scenario. The article discusses five ways of endowing the ironic echo with complexity: (i) through the degree of elaboration of the cultural and sociohistorical references in it; (ii) through echoic compounding; (iii) through the creation of echoic chains; (iv) through the construction of cumulative echoes; and (v) through the creation of multi-operational echoes, which incorporate the cognitive operations involved in other figurative uses of language such as metaphor, metonymy, and hyperbole. The first strategy addresses the contextualized content of the ironic echo, while the other strategies are a matter of its conceptual structure. In addition, the article studies the role of echoic marking in creating strengthened ironic effects similar to those achieved through cumulative echoes and compares complexity in ironic echoing with other cases of conceptual complexity. Finally, it discusses the role of echoic complexes within the scenario-based approach. The resulting analysis of ironic echoes endows the study of this phenomenon with greater descriptive delicacy and explanatory systematicity than previous accounts, while contemplating irony within the broader picture of complexity in conceptualization.

1. Introduction

This article offers a (still preliminary) analysis of the nature and role of complexity in ironic echoes. The notion of ironic echo, which originates in Relevance Theory (Wilson & Sperber, 2012), has been adapted to Cognitive Linguistics by Ruiz de Mendoza (2017a) in what can aptly be called the *scenario-based approach* to irony. In this approach, an ironic act requires the construction of an echoed and an observed scenario, which, by clashing, give rise to inferences about the nature of the speaker's attitude (generally one of dissociation) on the echoed thought. For example, imagine a couple, John and Mary, have been talking about their neighbor's daughter, Sally. John and Mary have concluded that Sally is really a nice girl. However, that very same day they discover, to their dismay, that Sally is all but nice. John says: So, *Sally is really nice, isn't she!* John's utterance, which echoes the couple's now evidently erroneous belief, is the source of an echoed mental scenario, which clashes with the observed scenario arising from the new evidence. The speaker's attitude of dissociation from the information in the echoed scenario results from the confrontation of such information with what is considered hard-and-fast evidence at the moment of speaking.

The notion of ironic echo can be addressed from several perspectives:

1. The degree of representational and communicative accuracy of the echo.
2. The formally complete or partial nature of the echo.
3. The nature of the source of the echo.
4. The conceptual complexity of the echo.
5. The way in which the presence of an echo is marked linguistically.

While there is previous work on the first three of these perspectives, the last two, which, as we will show are related, await study. Accuracy and completeness have been discussed in Ruiz de Mendoza (2017a) and Ruiz de Mendoza and Lozano-Palacio (2019),

where a distinction is made between full and partial echoes, and various degrees of accuracy, which depend on the exactness of the echo, are noted to underlie the felicity of the ironic remark in terms of its communicative effects. Thus, partial repetition may turn to be communicatively more effective than a full echo by allowing the ironist to draw attention to the selected element while being more economical from the point of view of processing than a full echo. To briefly illustrate one among many other possibilities, think of a father's promise to attend his son's graduation ceremony: *Son, I wouldn't miss your graduation ceremony for anything in the world.* The father then fails to fulfill his promise to which the disappointed son reacts by making a partial echo of his father's promise: *Yeah, right, for anything in the world!* This partial echo suggests that the father did trade honoring his son for something else that in practice proved to be more important for him. A full echo would have missed the focus on the idea that "anything in the world" could in fact be more important than his son. In order to convey this specific meaning effect the partial echo, which is central to the ironic reaction, proves to be more effective than a full echo.

In turn, the relevance-theoretic literature contains references to the question of the sources of echoes in either the repetition of utterances or attributed thoughts (cf. Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Wilson, 2006; Wilson & Sperber, 2012), to which Ruiz de Mendoza (2017a) has added repetition based on social stereotypes. Social stereotypes, in being highly questionable, are a good source of ironic echoes for rebuttal strategies that are quite close to those based on direct 'X is like Y' analogy (cf. Colston 1999, 2000). An example of such use is *So, you think all French are great lovers. Yeah, right, and all Italians eat pasta!* Here, the content of the echoed assertion (the reported statement that the French are great lovers), based on a social stereotype, is as absurd as the content of

the rebuttal statement (i.e. saying that the French are great lovers is as absurd as saying that all Italians eat pasta).

In spite of the emphasis over the past two decades on conceptual complexity within Cognitive Linguistics, especially within *Blending Theory* (e.g. Fauconnier and Turner 2002), the fourth dimension, i.e. conceptual complexity in echoic irony, has not yet been covered in previous work. However, our data gives support to the relevance of this perspective, which is closely tied to echoic marking, the also as yet uncovered fifth dimension, which, as will be shown below, often serves purposes that are similar to those of echoic complexity. Thus, we aim to cover this theoretical gap by taking into account the possibility of endowing irony with lesser or greater complexity through a lesser or greater degree of elaboration in its contextualized content, its conceptual structure, and the way the presence of an echo is called upon and its potential strengthening effect on ironic meaning. However, before we address these parameters of complexity, some words of caution are necessary. First, complexity is a matter of degrees. Simplicity and complexity in irony are achieved to the extent that the ironic echo involves a lesser or greater degree of sophistication in its contextualized content and its conceptual structure. Second, it is not our contention that complexity in irony depends exclusively on its echoic component. For example, observed reality can be linguistically implicit or explicit (again in various degrees). Making it explicit should be a way of removing from the ironic utterance some of its intrinsic complexity. This is what happens in the following extension of our example above: *So, Sally is really nice, isn't she! Just look at what she has done to her sister!*

With these two *caveats* in mind, we propose five possible strategies to endow ironic echoes with complexity: (i) through the degree of elaboration of the socio-historical and cultural references in them; (ii) through echoic compounding; (iii) through echoic chains;

(iv) through cumulative echoes; and (v) through multi-operational echoes, which involve such figures as metaphor, metonymy or hyperbole. Strategy (i) addresses contextualized content, while the others, (ii)-(v), deal with different aspects of conceptual structure. In connection with this analysis of complexity, we conclude the article with a study of echoic marking. Echoic marking is in principle used to facilitate the detection of ironic echoes, but also to strengthen ironic meaning and to provide effortless opportunities for reduplicating an echo thereby enhancing conceptual complexity at little production and processing cost. The study is illustrated with examples extracted from everyday uses of language and from literary sources.

2. A brief methodological note

Our study of complexity arises in the context of previous explorations on the elements of the ironic act from a cognitive-linguistic perspective (cf. Ruiz de Mendoza & Galera, 2014; Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017a; Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano-Palacio, 2019). Our starting point has been the compilation of a database with 100 cases of irony drawn from literary and non-literary sources. We looked for such sources as TV series (especially sitcoms), movies, and texts with rhetorical and/or artistic orientation (e.g. satirical texts, theatrical plays, and political speeches). We also decided to incorporate into the database examples of irony discussed in academic articles and even examples originating in the authors' observation of everyday language.

One important aspect of the database is that it specifies the context of production of each example (including relevant socio-cultural parameters, when necessary). This degree of specification has allowed us to determine the potential target meaning of the various cases of irony, the cognitive and/or pragmatic tasks involved in their creation, and other factors such as the type of ironist, interpreter, and ironic target involved, whose

analytical importance has been dealt with in Ruiz de Mendoza and Lozano-Palacio (2019). It has also allowed us to study in more detail the nature and role of each case of echoic mention in creating ironic meaning. Part of this analysis has supplied the groundwork for an initial exploration into completeness and accuracy in ironic echoes (see Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017a; Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano-Palacio, 2019). Another part has allowed us to deal with the issue of echoic complexity, which is undertaken in the present article. Our approach in this respect has taken into account cultural and linguistic variables and it is consistent with previous work by the authors on the perspectives of both the ironist and the interpreter (Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano-Palacio, 2019).

3. Complexity in the ironic echo

Our analysis has found the formation of the ironic echo to be complex and varied. As mentioned above, we have identified five echo-formation strategies, which are addressed in the subsections below. But before we go into a description of their nature and role, a couple of preliminary observations are in order.

The first concerns the potential application of our study to deal with processing issues. Conceptual complexity is likely to bring about processing complexity, which could be an object of psycholinguistic experimentation to be added to other experimental work carried out on irony processing (see Giora 2003, ch.4 and the papers in parts III and V of Gibbs and Colston 2007, 2012, for detailed overviews and discussion). The analysis provided in the following sections, in breaking down the components of complex ironic echoes, could offer initial insights for some such experimentation. However, the production and derivation of ironic meaning involves much more than just the activation of one or more echoed scenarios. There is at least an observable scenario, with possibly various ways of activation and its own inherent complexity, and the inferential derivation

of attitudinal meaning implications to be adjusted to communicative and contextual parameters. This can make the experimental design for echoic complexity a daunting task, much more complex than working on irony processing as a whole even if within the context of relations and contrasts with other figurative uses of language (cf. Gibbs and Colston 2012).

The second observation relates to the higher frequency of some strategies over others. The database includes the following distribution across categories: 36% of the examples are cases of situational irony and 64% of verbal irony; of the latter, 50% contain complex echoes, of which 28.1% are based on socio-historical references, 12.5% are compound echoes, 21.8% are cases of echoic chain, 9.4 % are cumulative echoes, and 28.1% are multi-operational echoes. Without any claim to statistical significance, because the examples have been collected on the basis of availability, this preliminary analysis shows that compounding, chaining, and cumulation is each less productive than cultural elaboration and the cooperation of other figurative uses of language. This could be suggestive of the former three strategies being functionally closer to one another than to the latter two. In fact, this seems to be the case. The former are conceptual mechanisms that elaborate the echo internally, while the latter do so externally on the basis of other figures or less than ordinary world knowledge. In any event, the frequency figures specified above also suggest that the categories identified are communicatively productive and worthy of further enquiry.

3.1. Elaboration of cultural and sociohistorical references

One way in which ironists can endow the ironic echo with complexity is by means of an elaborated use of cultural and sociohistorical references. This strategy will work to the extent that the target readership shares a similar horizon of expectations (cf. Jauss, 1982).

Gender-wise, for instance, some of the references in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, a story told from the point of view of three African American women who are mistreated, one by her husband, another one by her father, and the third one by her classmates, might pass unnoticed to a male audience, be it African American or not. This book, which denounces gender and ethnic oppression, portrays women from both their ethnic and social class perspective and ironizes on some contradictory situations. One such situation is found in the treatment of prostitutes in the American society of the 1970s. Thus, the book echoes the social assumptions about prostitutes being despicable and at the lowest end of the social scale. But these assumptions clash with the application of this standard to white prostitutes, who ironically rank higher than married African American women. This is a less trivial example of irony in which one single depiction addresses simultaneously two social issues: gender and class discrimination against female African Americans.

Another straightforward example of exploitation of cultural assumptions is the Pixar animated feature film *Monsters Inc.* Monsters are cultural constructs. Examples of monsters can be found across the planet. For instance, the Hydra or the Minotaur belong to the Greek culture, the Leviathan and Behemoth to Hebrew culture, and the Yeti or Snowman to the Himalayan and Siberian regions of East Asia. *Monsters Inc.* is a corporation run by monsters whose job is to scare children, but ironically the monsters are the ones that are constantly afraid of the children. *Monsters Inc.* thus echoes the general belief that children are scared of monsters. However, this belief, which is the echoed scenario, clashes with the observed scenario that is accessible to the spectators: the fact that children in the film are less scared than could be expected and that monsters even play a small role in the lives of children. Spectators are thus called to dissociate themselves from their cultural expectations.

Socio-historical knowledge is another resource to form complex echoed scenarios. It is based on the interpreter's knowledge of the social and historical context of the ironic remark. Let us take Jonathan Swift's famous example of irony contained in *A Modest Proposal*. In this text, the author, pretending to be a high-class Englishman, says: "I therefore humbly offer to public consideration that of the 120,000 children already computed, 20,000 be served for breed [...]" (Swift, 1729, p. 54). The interpreter needs to have knowledge about the historical context of the text (in this case the rather harsh policies of England on Ireland) in order to understand why Swift ironically proposes that Irish children be served as food to the English upper-class. Swift's remark echoes the English belief that Irish people are worthless and makes it clash with his own beliefs about the value of human beings. Similarly, a reader of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* may find it hard to interpret the author's ironic remarks towards the educational institutions of the American South. For instance, one of the protagonist's teachers, Miss Caroline, tells Scout, when she shows up at school, that she can already read: "Now tell your father not to teach you any more. It's best to begin reading with a fresh mind" (Lee, 1982, p. 22). This remark echoes the teacher's ignorant and narrow-minded attitude, revealed to be absurd by its clash with reality. Irony in this case is used to criticize the training of teachers in the village where Scout and her family lived, which are metonymic for the whole educational institution in this part of the United States. However, unless readers know about Harper Lee's socio-cultural context and her views on it, they might believe that she actually agrees with the quoted statement.

3.2. Echoic compounding

Echoic compounding occurs when two or more echoes are combined syntactically to make reference to parts of one single ironic event. These echoes do not explicate elements

of one another but are used to ironize about different elements of a situation. Take a context where John is lazy and rarely works, while Peter never takes time to relax. John complains to Peter about how unproductive Peter has been for the past few days. Peter ironically replies *Yeah, right, I sleep siesta while you do all the work, as usual*. In this example, Peter builds a two-part echo. The first part is ironic towards John's claim about Peter's habits and the second one refers to what John seems to think about his own behavior. The first part contrasts with what Peter thinks are his own real work habits and the second with Peter's beliefs on John's work habits.

Let us now take a slightly different example. One night, Sue and Michael encounter Sylvia, who gets along with Michael but not with Sue, by the Eiffel Tower. Sue and Michael return to the Eiffel Tower only a couple of days later. Michael says: *It seems like ages since we met Sylvia here!* Sue replies: *Yeah, right, it seems like ages! That happy night!* Sue's irony is also formed by a two-part echo that makes reference to different aspects of the same ironic event. First, there is a contrast between the chronological moment when Michael says the meeting took place and when it actually happened. The second contrast is based on the nature of the event, which was unhappy for Sue but not for Michael. Sue's remark *that happy night* echoes and contradicts Michael's belief that they had a good time that night. In this instance of echoic compounding, besides the syntactic link between the two echoes, there is an implicational connection, since the night Sue and Michael are talking about meant different things for each of them. This case of compounding is different from the one in the first example, where the connection is merely syntactic, and the two echoes act together to generate irony through a syntactic link.

Echoic compounding can bring together two or more loosely associated echoes, from different sources, and set them up in a tighter conceptual dependency relation (which

will of course be reflected in syntactic expression). Take a situation where a boy, who, for the first time, has passed three classes out of eleven after his end-of-term exams, asks his sister about their mother's reaction to his grades. Naively, the boy thinks that he has done well since he usually fails everything. He also remembers that, in a family lunch, his mother once said –with resignation– that she would be more than happy if he passed but one class, so he thinks she might be more pleased than on previous occasions. In the boy's mind the relation between these two thoughts is rather loose. Then, his sister replies: *Oh, mum will be thrilled about your academic success.* There are two echoes in the sister's words. One is the idea that their mother will be thrilled. This echo is based on their mother's past remark. The other is the boy's belief that he has done well. The two echoes, which come from different sources, are now made to stand in a tight consequence-cause relation such that the first echo is clearly dependent on the second one: the mother's promised "positive reaction" is a consequence of the boy's "success".

3.3. Cumulative echoes

In some ironic contexts, multiple echoic terms appear consecutively and refer to the same ironic target. They also share the same ironic meaning. These are the defining features of cumulative echoes. The formation of these echoes takes place by the accumulation of terms that cause similar clashes with the observed scenario, thus forming one single, reinforced echo. For instance, if we transform *Mary is an angel* into *Mary is an angel, a saint, a gem, a real treasure!*, we find four terms, "angel", "saint", "gem", and "real treasure", which refer to the same ironic target, Mary. The target meaning is the same: Mary's unexemplary behavior. This cumulative echo based on four terms denoting goodness produces the feeling of a pragmatic crescendo. Both "angel" and "saint" are quintessentially benign beings, and "gem" and "real treasure" are well-known precious

materials. This strategy has the function of intensifying the clash with the observed scenario of Mary's incorrect behavior. Cumulative echoes are built on the element of the utterance that holds the most relevant semantic or communicative load.

A second cumulative echo building strategy, which is based on merism, can be illustrated by the following example: *Yeah, right, I love her with all my heart, my mind, my body, my soul*. Merism is a figure of speech where a totality is expressed in abbreviated form by mentioning two or more of its prominent constituents (Watson, 1986, p. 321). It has been noted to be conspicuous in Bible poetry, as in the use of *the heaven and the earth* in Genesis 1:1 to refer to the whole creation or *evening and morning* in Genesis 1:5 to refer to the whole day or *Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending* in Revelation 1:8 to represent the omnipresent God (cf. Meynet, 1998). In our view, merism can be best defined as the serial and/or cumulative combination of two or more contrasting (and/or complementary) terms or descriptions to refer to a single entity or state of affairs of which the contrasting words denote (culturally or perceptually) salient parts or aspects. Its main function is to enhance the idea of totality while giving due prominence to the elements in the selection. Common examples of present-day merism are the following expressions: *a sword and sandal movie*, used to refer to a movie taking place in classical antiquity; *hook, line, and sinker* denoting completeness; or *for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health*, used as part of marriage vows to denote every possible vital situation. The cumulative echo provided by *all my heart, my mind, my body, my soul* is meristic to the extent that its intended target meaning is the speaker's whole self, including his emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual facets. In an ironic use (i.e. when the cumulative echo clashes with reality), it serves an intensification purpose that carries over from the echoic part of the utterance to its inferred dissociated attitude, which has a more markedly negative character.

3.4. Echoic chains

Echoic chains are formed when an echo is built completely or partially on a previous echo. Consider a situation where Alice and Ben are discussing the likelihood of Donald Trump winning a second presidential election in the United States. Alice believes Trump could succeed and tells Ben: *I think Trump could win a second presidential election*. In disagreement, Ben replies: *Yeah, sure, Trump could win another presidential election, and I could win the lottery!* A couple of months later, Ben unexpectedly wins the lottery and Alice, echoing Ben's words, tells him: *Yeah, right, and you could win the lottery!* Alice thus expresses her belief that Trump could win the election. Initially, Ben had echoed Alice's belief (*Yeah, sure, Trump could win another presidential election*) from which he dissociated himself on the face of his subsequent remark: *and I could win the lottery!* This remark, which is part of an analogy-based rebuttal strategy of the kind noted in the introduction, was used to build what for Ben was the observable scenario, to be accessed through pragmatic implication: Ben believed that it was as likely that he would ever win the lottery as Trump was likely to win a second election.² However, when Ben unexpectedly wins the lottery there is a reversal of his probability judgment. This situation becomes the new observable scenario, which Alice mentions echoically to dissociate herself from Ben's belief that he could never win the lottery and from Ben's (now evidently flawed) rebuttal logic about the unlikelihood of Trump winning the election. The result is the creation of an echoic chain whereby Alice's remark *Yeah, right* is an ironic echo of Ben's previous ironic echo on Alice's belief (that Trump could win a second election). Alice's additional remark *and you could win the lottery!* acts as an echo

² This meaning is based on the pragmatic adjustment of *and* (cf. Sperber & Wilson, 1993) into a world-knowledge induced complementary alternation relation, i.e. one in which the two members of an alternation are not exclusive of each other, roughly equivalent to saying "not X nor Y" or even "not X, less likely Y" (cf. Mairal & Ruiz de Mendoza, 2009; Iza Erviti, 2015).

of Ben's remark *and I could win the lottery!* plus its associated rebuttal logic explained above. This second echo, which is not part of a chain, has the function of questioning Ben's logic, which is the same as questioning Ben's belief on the nature of the observable scenario.

3.5. Multi-operational echoes

Ironic echoes may be also formed through the combination of figures, especially metaphor, metonymy, and hyperbole. Such combinations, which we term *multi-operational echoes*, serve to reinforce the attitudinal element of irony or to create more sophisticated echoes. Echoes may benefit from these resources to increase their complexity. In order to exemplify our discussion in this section, we shall use variations on the example *Yeah, right, Mary is an angel*, which combines hyperbole and metaphor to produce the ironic echo.

Metaphors can serve to enhance the attitudinal element of the ironic utterance through the recoverability of the elements of the ironic event or by reinforcing its target meaning. Let us take a situation where Amy says: *Mary is an angel*. Bob replies: *Yeah, right, a real treasure!* Both utterances are metaphorical. Bob's echo is built on the basis of the metaphor *Mary is a real treasure*. Instead of echoing Amy's words *verbatim*, Bob uses a metaphor that shares with Amy's words its most relevant feature: the excellence of Mary's kindness. Bob echoes Mary's kindness by mapping the positive connotations of a treasure (treasures are worth keeping, bringing material wealth and happiness) onto Mary's perceived behavior. Furthermore, Bob's metaphorical echo adds features to Mary. While Amy points to her kind nature, Bob's utterance highlights Mary's worth. However, imagine that Bob had replied: *Yeah, right, an angel, a Hell's Angel!* In this case, which is also metaphorical, the second part of the utterance contradicts the part containing the

echo, thus inferentially pointing to the observed scenario. Bob uses a partial quotation of Amy's utterance to add meaning. The stereotypical concept of angel is replaced by the feared motorbike gang Hell's Angels. Then, take a situation where Amy tells Bob: *Mary is beautiful like an angel*, and Bob ironically replies: *Yeah, right, the picture of beauty*. In Bob's reply the picture is metonymic for the pictorial representation in it, which is, in turn, metonymic for its beauty, which is consequently highlighted. This understanding of *picture of beauty* then maps metaphorically onto Mary thus echoing Amy's initial remark. In fact, Bob's answer is a case of cumulative echo, since Amy's utterance is echoed by the two agreement adverbs to which we now add the target meaning of the expression *the picture of beauty*. However, this reinforced echo clashes with what Bob believes to be the case, which makes the utterance strongly ironic. In this case, therefore, metaphor is used to build a cumulative echo that highlights the skeptical attitude of the ironist towards Amy's statement.

Irony often appears in conjunction with metonymy, especially in communicative contexts where the ironists seeks to reach a wide audience. It is not at all unusual for literary works to feature characters that stand for a group of people, as in Greek theater. For instance, in Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus, stands for mankind. This enhances the cathartic effect of the play, since the audience see themselves as members of mankind and, therefore, as potential objects of the same kind of fate. In the play, the oracle had predicted that Oedipus would kill his father and marry his mother. Although Oedipus struggles to escape his fate and he even receives promising signals that the oracle could have been wrong, in the end, after a series of mistakes, he finds himself falling prey to fate. The irony arises from the clash between Oedipus's misinterpretations and what the audience (but not the protagonist) knows is reality as observed on the stage.

Finally, hyperbole can also be found in ironic echoes. An ironist who says *Yeah, right, Mary, an angel, every inch of her!* is building an echo on the basis of the hyperbolic statement that every single inch of Mary is good. The expression *every inch of her* applies literally to Mary's physical body. On these literal grounds, Mary's physical self is completely good, without any exception. However, this expression refers to the pervasiveness of goodness in Mary's behavior. This meaning is obtained from experience-based reasoning: good things (e.g. a tasty apple) are likeable and produce pleasure; continued physical pleasure produces feelings of reward, gladness, and even joyfulness; so, a physically good entity can produce joy, like a morally good person. From this reasoning system, there arises the correlation metaphor MORAL JOY IS PHYSICAL GOODNESS, which underlies the non-physical interpretation of *every inch of her* being morally good. Since completeness maps onto completeness, Mary is ascribed pervasive good moral behavior, without exception, which is impossible and therefore hyperbolic. The hyperbolic nature of the echo thus enhances the clash between the echoed and the observed scenarios, where Mary is not as good as depicted here, thereby becoming an efficient resource to highlight the ironist's attitude of dissociation from the echoed thought.

4. Echoic markers

It is well known that the ironic effect of the echo can be reinforced by textual pointers of various kinds. Attardo (2000) provides an overview of many such pointers, which he calls *indices of irony*, as discussed in the relevant literature. Attardo notes that what some authors like Muecke (1969) call *irony markers* are not infallible. For this reason, Attardo uses the term *indices of irony*, of which he provides a list. Among them, we have special (what we could call "marked") intonation departing from normal patterns, exaggerated

stress prominence, some morphological devices (e.g. the use of *so to speak*, *everybody knows*, *one might say*), typographical means (e.g. scare quotes in written text), kinesic markers (winks, nudges), and contextual elements (the cooccurrence of incompatible elements in the same sentence). In our view, these indices or irony are only complementary to it. That is why they are never infallible in marking irony. Their function is to strengthen the ironic echo by suggesting that what is being said cannot be interpreted at face value.

There are other devices not listed above that can act as indices of irony. These take the form of what we will call *echoic markers*. While ironic markers are not infallible and it is more adequate to call such devices indices of irony, as Attardo (2000) does, echoic markers do work as such invariably. An example of such markers is provided by adverbial expressions whose canonical pragmatic function is to show agreement, such as *yes*, *right*, *sure*, *certain*, and their variants. These do not directly mark irony, but rather they mark the existence of an echo that can be interpreted as ironic if the rest of the elements of the ironic act are present, viz. the clash of the echo with an observed scenario that gives rise to an inference about the speaker's attitude of dissociation from the echo. Since these adverbs are echoic markers, they may be used to express other pragmatic functions based on echoes, such as agreement and encouragement, or to show phatic communion (Jakobson, 1963). These indirect ironic pointers are also complementary, like the ones listed by Attardo, and they may precede or follow the ironic utterance. Among such pointers there are adverbs like *yeah*, *right*, *sure*, adverbial phrases like *for sure*, *of course*, or interjections like *ah* or *oh*. Adverbs and adverbial phrases might appear in different positions in the ironic utterance (e.g. *For sure, that's exactly what I meant*, or *That's what I meant, for sure*). Markers may be repeated in order to emphasize their ironic effect (e.g. *Yeah, yeah, Mary is an angel*) or they can be combined with other markers (e.g. *Yeah, for*

sure, that's what I meant or *Yeah, sure, Mary is an angel*). The efficacy of this strategy to reinforce the ironic echo lies in the fact that these marking devices are generally used to convey agreement and acceptance: *Yes, of course/for sure, it's a great idea; Right/sure, I'll do what you ask for*. So, using them together with an echoed thought acts as a reaffirmation of its content. Communicatively, the outcome is not very different from that of cumulative echoes, which provide different variants of one same thought. Let us think of an aristocratic family holding their yearly reunion. During the reunion, two siblings observe, in shame, their uncle's extravagant behavior. One of them notes ironically: *Uncle Jim, the pride of the family!* This sentence is only ironic (rather than a mere expression of embarrassment) if either the speaker or another family member has ever entertained the thought that uncle Jim is worthy of admiration. The speaker thus dissociates himself from such a thought. Now, imagine that the other sibling replies: *A jewel in the crown!* In this case of irony, the first sibling echoes someone's attributed opinion. In agreement, the second sibling echoes the first sibling's thoughts. Both echoes clash cumulatively with the observed scenario (uncle Jim's unreasonable behavior at the reunion) thereby strengthening the ironic effect. But a similar effect could have been obtained through combined echoic markers: *Yeah, right!, Yeah, sure!, Sure, right!, etc.*, especially if further supported by complementary irony indices of an intonational and/or gestural kind.

It must be noted that, although formally different, echoic markers are functionally very close: by showing agreement they can be said to "encapsulate" a thought echoically. They act as extracausal pragmatic constituents with an echoic function. They may work alone but can also precede or follow a more complete echoic remark multiple times, hence emphasizing the ironic effect of the utterance. They may create formal reduplications (e.g. *Yes, yes!*, especially if bearing prosodic marking) but they tend to form conceptual or

functional reduplications (e.g. *Yeah, right*). Since repetition cannot be limitless, it is likely that the number of echoes in conceptual reduplication is constrained by the balance between the effort and effects criteria of relevance put forward by Sperber and Wilson (1995). Since ironic markers are economic by nature, reduplicating markers to reinforce the ironic echo is reasonable to the extent that they do not burden the processing effort unnecessarily (which is ultimately a matter of speaker's intentions and contextual requirements). For instance, *Yeah, right, she's an angel, of course!* can be more readily interpreted as ironic than simply *Yeah, an angel*, if only because the former utterance contains more echoic marks. By contrast, the repeated reduplication of markers might be considered to impose an unnecessary processing burden on the hearer in an utterance like *Yeah, right, right, right, sure, certainly, an angel*, unless there are clear communicative reasons licensing it.

5. Echoing complexes within the context of conceptual complexes

As we have seen, ironic echoes can be complex and endow irony itself with complexity. But complexity manifests itself differently when applied to different phenomena. In this section, we will briefly discuss some differences between complexity in irony and elsewhere in conceptualization.

Acknowledging the ubiquitous interaction of figurative uses of language, Ruiz de Mendoza & Galera (2014), Ruiz de Mendoza (2017c), and Miró (2018) postulate the existence of conceptual complexes: these are combinations of multiple cognitive operations. The integration of low-level operations with formal operations sheds light on the complexity of figurative language, specially of irony. Conceptual complexes can appear in the form of frames and image schemas, but also as the simultaneous or successive combination of two or more cognitive operations of the same or different kind,

such as metaphonymy, metonymic chains, and metaphoric amalgams, which we briefly address below (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017b, p. 147). While frame complexes result from the integration of conventional and non-conventional frame structure into relevant parts of a given matrix frame, image-schematic complexes result from merging two or more schemas (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017c, p. 307). According to Ruiz de Mendoza (2017c), frame complexes can be exemplified through the traditional Spanish bullfighting frame, which includes elements such as the bullfighter, the bullring, the bull, the entrance parade, the red cape, etc. The bullfighter's good performance is rewarded by the petition of the crowd, through the shaking of a white handkerchief, to present the bullfighter with a trophy (normally one of the bull's ears); on the other hand, if the performance has been poor, the crowd will boo the bullfighter. Some elements of the frame, such as having multiple bullfighters fighting at the same time, could be modified. However, any violation of the structure and logic of the frame would hinder communication. Image-schematic complexes occur when two or more image schemas merge, such as in *The ship sailed off its course into the rocks*, where the container image schema is incorporated into the end-the-path slot of the 'path' image schema (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017c, p. 308).

Two or more cognitive operations can be combined through a variety of strategies. Metaphonymies designate the interaction of metaphor and metonymy (Goossens, 1990). For instance, in *pay lip service*, meaning 'to pay service only by speaking', the lips stand for the action of speaking (INSTRUMENT FOR ACTION). The source domain of the metaphor contains a payer, a payment, and a payee, which are mapped onto the target domain where a person acts to someone else's benefit (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017a, p. 310). Metonymic chains link multiple metonymies conceptually. In one example given by Ruiz de Mendoza (2017a, p. 311), *Are you eating at McDonald's today?*, McDonald's first restaurant stands for McDonald's as a chain of restaurants, and then for any restaurant in

the chain. Similarly, metaphors can also be linked in the form of metaphoric chains (Ruiz de Mendoza & Galera, 2014). In the example [...] *sects broke off the main body of the Church* (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017a, p. 131), we can find two chained metaphors. First of all, *to break off* is understood as denoting physical detachment, which is then used to conceptualize institutional separation on a second mapping. Finally, metaphoric amalgams result from the combination of two or more non-chained metaphors into a single conceptual package. In *The professor finally got the idea across to the class* we can find two metaphors: IDEAS ARE OBJECTS (more particularly, moving objects), and UNDERSTANDING AN IDEA IS PERCEPTUALLY EXPLORING AN OBJECT. This metaphor maps caused motion onto communication, where the addressee is the destination of the motion (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017c, p. 313).

Evidently, metaphor and metonymy give rise to complexes by integrating into one single conceptual package other self-standing conceptualizations. The role of the various contributing concepts is to cooperate in the profiling ability of a receiver concept. Thus, UNDERSTANDING AN IDEA IS PERCEPTUALLY EXPLORING AN OBJECT develops the receiver metaphor IDEAS ARE OBJECTS. Nothing like this happens in the case of ironic echoes. An echo can be strengthened by cumulation, it can be constructed with reference to a previous echo, or it can be built by bringing together different aspects of a situation into one, but its profiling ability remains unaltered in any of these processes. Ironic echoes are not integrated into other echoes. The reason for this lies in the nature of ironic echoes themselves: their role is to profile states of affairs from which speakers can express their dissociation; unlike what is the case in metaphor and metonymy, ironic echoes do not reconstrue the world; rather, they represent what the world is like to someone else.

6. Echoic complexes within the scenario-based approach to irony

Our discussion above is strongly supportive of the echoic account of irony, initially proposed by relevance theorists. However, as noted in the introduction, in Ruiz de Mendoza (2017a) the echoic ingredient of irony takes the form of a cognitive model, an echoed scenario, which, by clashing with the observed scenario, triggers an inferential process that reveals the speaker's attitude of dissociation from the echoed scenario, while in Relevance Theory the speaker's attitude is simply treated as an element that is attached to the ironic echo.

The question that arises now is whether echoic complexity could not be equally nested into the relevance-theoretic framework thereby making the scenario account dispensable. After all, one could argue, compounding, accumulating, and chaining echoes is a matter of endowing the echoic mention itself with complexity at utterance level rather than at the conceptual level. To illustrate, the use of a cumulative echo, as in *Mary is an angel, a saint, a gem, a real treasure!*, discussed above, would seem to be a matter of creating a "crescendo" effect by elaborating on a relevant meaning aspect of the utterance or thought to be echoed. However, the scenario-based approach does not exclude the notion of echoic mention but places it in a different perspective. Note that postulating the existence of an echoed scenario is a theoretical requirement arising from the fact that in irony what the speaker echoes clashes with the relevant elements of an observable scenario. Furthermore, what the speaker echoes goes beyond what is said. For example, underlying the echoic utterance *Mary is an angel* there is a range of meaning implications that make it meaningful. These depend on the context of production of the original utterance and the speaker's assumptions. Among other possibilities, *Mary is an angel* could encapsulate the idea that Mary is genuinely obliging, helpful, kind, and generous with people in general or simply that she has behaved extraordinarily well on one

occasion with the speaker. Each of these two options underlies the construction of a different echoed scenario. In this context the cumulative echoes serve to enhance the clash between the set of meaning elements that serve as grounds for the crescendo effect and their corresponding opposed elements in the observable scenario. These elements are cognitive models themselves, but their role is subsidiary to that of the central echo on which they build, which means that their activity is circumscribed to the echoed scenario.

We have a very similar situation with multi-operational echoes, which combine echoic cognitive operations with other cognitive operations like metaphor, metonymy, and hyperbole. The purpose of the combination of operations is to elaborate a significant element of the echoed scenario while drawing attention to it. The combination of metaphor and hyperbole in *Yeah, right, Mary is an angel!* does not go beyond the boundaries of the echoed scenario, but contributes to make it incorporate the necessary number and kind of contrasting elements with the observable scenario.

In the case of echoic compounding, rather than for an elaborated echoed scenario, the observable situation calls for the activation of two echoed scenarios that complement each other. This complementation supplies contrasting elements for their counterparts in the observable scenario. In *I sleep siesta while you do all the work*, as we saw before, the speaker ironizes over different aspects of the hearer's beliefs on their work habits.

Echoic chains, by contrast, are based on more than one echoed scenario. This happens because of the inherent nature of the notion of chaining which requires building new echoes on the basis of previous ones. Interestingly enough, each new echo in a chain is called for by a significant but partial change in the observable situation. This means that each new echo in a chain, just like their corresponding observable scenarios, is a variant of a previous echo. In the Trump example discussed in section 3.4, the reversal of logic arising from the new observable scenario calls for the construction of a new echo

that serves to ironize on the previous echo questioning Alice's belief that Trump could win a second time.

7. Conclusions

The analysis of complex ironic echoes provided in this article is complementary of previous work on the cognitive-linguistic study of conceptual complexes, largely focused on metaphor and metonymy to the neglect of other figurative uses of language, including irony. Echo-based approaches to irony, more specifically, the proposals within Relevance Theory (e.g. Wilson & Sperber, 2012) and the cognitively-oriented scenario-based approach (e.g. Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017a) have acknowledged the centrality of the notion of echo to account for irony. However, the operational nature of echoes in the production and interpretation of irony remains partially unexplored. In order to fill in this research gap, the present study has addressed a number of ways in which ironic echoes can be endowed with complexity on the basis of examples of irony from a variety of sources compiled into a database. These strategies (sophisticated cultural references, echoic compounding, cumulative echoes, echoic chaining, and multi-operational echoes) can be found in a variety of communicative contexts, although it is true that some strategies are more likely to be found in particular uses of language (e.g. sophisticated cultural references are often used in literature in order to add complexity to irony). We have also addressed ironic marking. In the view defended here, ironic markers are not infallible because what they mark is not irony itself but the presence of an echo. The other ingredients of the ironic act (the clash between the echoic and observed scenarios allowing for the speaker's attitude to be worked out) need to be present too. We have thus discussed echoic marking and its role in strengthening ironic meaning effects, especially through its ability to create formally and/or conceptually reduplicated echoes. We have

then contrasted complexity in ironic echoes with complexity in other domains of conceptualization. We have noted that, while metaphor and metonymy can integrate to enhance their profiling capacity and allow for more complete cases of re-construal, ironic echoes do not behave in the same way. Two ironic echoes may complement each other (as in echoic compounding) but they do not give rise to an integrated conceptual pattern. Finally, we have discussed the theoretical importance of echoic complexity for a scenario-based approach to irony. We have noted that the kind of echoic complex called upon in irony is determined by the nature of the observable scenario. All in all, the account of echo-forming strategies provided in this article introduces a higher degree of systematization than other accounts in the study of irony as an echo-based phenomenon.

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