

A cognitive-pragmatic account of the structural elements of the ironic event

A typology of ironist, target, and interpreter roles

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This article discusses the ironist, the interpreter, and the target as structural elements of irony from a cognitive-linguistic standpoint. It builds on the scenario-based approach to irony, where ironic meaning is taken as a contextually adjustable inference that results from a clash between epistemic and attested conceptual scenarios. The article provides a classification of ironist, interpreter, and target types, and then it discusses the functions of irony (i.e., attacking, mocking, being playful, showing off, and persuading) and the solidarity component involved in ironic production and interpretation. It further explains the factors involved in the identification of the epistemic and the attested scenarios, and those involved in the interpretation of irony. The resulting analysis of the structural elements of irony endows the study of irony with greater descriptive delicacy and explanatory adequacy.

Keywords: irony, structural elements of irony, ironist, interpreter, target

1. Introduction

Interpreters of verbal irony worry about not being skilled enough to make an ironic remark felicitous because irony has the power to welcome you into, or to exclude you from a communicative situation. In other words, the fulfilment of an irony provides validation of your suitability as an interpreter to engage in the ironic act. However, the interpreter's accessibility to ironic meaning is also marked by factors such as the features of the utterance, chosen by the ironist, the interpreter's skills to retrieve ironic meaning, or the availability of the target. Nevertheless, in spite of the relevance of these facts for the study of irony, so far, little work on this topic has been carried out.

Within linguistics, the literature on irony has traditionally focused on the pragmatic role of irony and to some extent, on the ironist's intentions when engaging in the ironic act (see Paul H. Grice 1975; Herbert H. Clark & Richard J. Gerrig 1984; Seana Coulson 2005; Deirdre Wilson & Dan Sperber 2012). Only recently, within Cognitive Linguistics, has some attention been devoted to the so-called *structural elements of irony* (i.e., the communicative components that are involved in the production and interpretation of irony) (see Francisco José Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez & Inés Lozano-Palacio 2019a, 2021; Ruiz de Mendoza 2020; Lozano-Palacio & Ruiz de Mendoza 2022). Within their integrated, scenario-based account of irony, these authors distinguish between *elitist* and *solidary* ironists, and between *naïve* and *non-naïve* interpreters (Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano-Palacio 2019a), depending on how eager the ironist is to provide the necessary cues to engage in the ironic act, and how much of the required knowledge the interpreter has. This has a direct effect on the formation of the *epistemic scenario* (i.e., the set of expectations that something will necessarily occur) and the *attested scenario* (i.e., what we perceive to be the case, which clashes with the epistemic scenario). Lozano-Palacio & Ruiz de Mendoza (2022) further provide insights into the nature of the ironic target and the connection of such target to the ironist and the interpreter. These studies have provided initial evidence of the complexity of the structural elements of the ironic act and their interaction.

This paper intends to provide a more detailed exploration of the components of the ironic act and their functions. Among other topics, it studies how solidary or elitist ironists use scenario-formation strategies to control the retrievability of ironic meaning, which are the functions of the different outcomes of the ironic act. It develops the initial typology of ironists and interpreters proposed by Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano-Palacio (2019a) by placing it within the perspective of the scenario-based account of irony proposed by the same authors. This account includes a reconsideration of the pragmatic notion of ironic echo and how this notion can be subsumed in the scenario-based account of irony. It also addresses how echoic complexity affects the nature of the interaction between ironists, interpreters, and ironic targets. Following this introduction (Section 1), the rest of the paper is divided into four more sections. Section 2 addresses some methodological issues; Section 3 provides a brief overview of ironist and interpreter types; Section 4 is devoted to the analysis of the structural elements of irony (i.e., the ironist, the interpreter, and the target). Finally, Section 5 summarizes the main conclusions of the article.

2. Methodology

The present study uses a qualitative approach to find patterns of use that allow the formulation of motivated generalizations along the lines of what Adele E. Goldberg (2002, 2006) labeled *surface generalizations* in Construction Grammar. This study draws its data from an annotated corpus of 300 examples of irony compiled by the present author. The sources of the examples range from political speeches to everyday speech, sitcoms, and literary works. The corpus has been annotated on the basis of textual and contextual clues to specify ironist, interpreter, and target types. It also includes information on the elements of the epistemic and attested scenarios. This preliminary work has allowed the author to study the factors involved in the successful interpretation of irony, the function of each type of ironist and interpreter, their intention, etc. For heuristic purposes, structural elements of verbal irony were contrasted with structural elements of situational irony, thus leading to further refinement of the previous work. All in all, the analysis resulting from the application of these criteria reinforces the idea that the nature of ironic targets, and of ironist and interpreter types plays a key role in the outcome of the ironic act.

3. A brief overview of ironists and interpreters

The literature on irony is varied and extensive. Irony has been addressed within different fields of study, ranging from philosophy (e.g., Aristotle in George Peabody Gooch 1987; Søren Kierkegaard in Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong 1989) and literary theory (see Claire Colebrook 2004) to psycholinguistics (e.g., Raymond W. Gibbs Jr. & Dinara Beitel 1995; Rachel Giora 1995, 2001; Herbert L. Colston & Gibbs 2002; Colson 2007, 2012; Gibbs & Giora et al. 2007), pragmatics (e.g., Clark & Gerrig 1984; Wilson & Sperber 2012) and Artificial Intelligence (Tony Veale & Yanfen Hao 2010). These studies, which provide insights into a wide variety of aspects of irony, often correlate its composition with its rhetorical impact and aesthetic effects.

While the structural elements of the ironic act, namely the ironist, the interpreter, and the ironic target, have received little attention, much more effort has been devoted to accounting for how irony is built and interpreted. Grice (1975) initially explained irony as a breach of the Maxim of Quality within the Cooperative Principle. Irony is then a matter of the ironist pretending to believe that something false is true. Within Relevance Theory, Wilson & Sperber (2012) defined irony as the ironist's action of echoing a thought, a belief or a norm-based expectation and expressing an attitude towards it. On the other hand, within Pretense

Theory, Clark & Gerrig (1984), developing some of Grice's initial insights, argued that irony involved the ironist's performing an act of pretended agreement with the meaning of the utterance, where the pretense is intended to be discovered by the interpreter. Later on, within Cognitive Linguistics, the emphasis was placed on the cognitive processes that take place in the mind of the ironist in order to produce ironic meaning. This is the case of Blending Theory, which follows the idea that irony takes place in a blended space in the ironist's mind (e.g., Vera Tobin & Michael Israel 2012).

Literary theory has mainly studied irony as a process involving coding and de-coding (e.g., D.C. Muecke 1969), a phenomenon that takes different shapes over time (e.g., Colebrook 2004), and as a matter of belonging to a specific group of people sharing the necessary knowledge to derive ironic meaning (Linda Hutcheon 1994). This last remark is particularly interesting. Hutcheon (1994) claims that ironic interpreters are arranged in *discursive communities* (i.e., groups of interpreters with shared experiences or knowledge) and that it is thanks to these groups that interpreters can derive ironic meaning. This premise has been taken more recently by Lozano-Palacio & Ruiz de Mendoza (2022), who claim that it is necessary to take the interpreter into account in order to provide a unified linguistic account of irony. In the line of previous attempts to provide a unified approach to irony (e.g., Mihaela Popa-Wyatt 2014) these same authors (Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano-Palacio 2021) propose a scenario-based account of irony, which explains irony as a clash between an *epistemic scenario* (i.e., the conceptual correlate of a state of affairs that someone regards as highly likely or certain to occur) and an *attested scenario* (i.e., the perceivable reality). This clash gives rise to an attitudinal element of dissociation that is later parametrized contextually on the basis of inferential activity. Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano-Palacio (2019a) propose a classification of ironist and interpreter types, and distinguish between *solidary* and *elitist ironists*, and *naïve* and *non-naïve interpreters*. Ironists are more or less solidary, and more or less elitist depending on the number of cues they use to facilitate ironic interpretation. Interpreters are more or less naïve according to the knowledge they have to interpret an ironic utterance or an ironic situation. Different types of ironists and interpreters may be combined, giving rise to different potential outcomes of the ironic act.

In this treatment of the ironic act, the interpreter and the ironist are regarded as equally important elements. With this assumption in mind and within this context of theoretical distinctions, we will now move on to a more detailed account of the nature of the ironist, the interpreter, and the target from a cognitive-pragmatic perspective.

4. Structural elements of irony

Irony is a complex figure of speech that relies heavily on factors such as the shared knowledge between ironist and interpreter, the communicative and socio-cultural context, and the ability of either the ironist or the interpreter to engage in the “ironic game”. Its degree of pragmatic felicity varies considerably. For instance, the ironist and the interpreter are not always both present when the ironic act is taking place. This is evidently the case of novels but also of political speeches, where the ironist may be addressing a crowd whose interpretive skills are not all known to the ironist. In the cases where the interpreter is absent from the context of production, the ironist keeps a default interpreter in mind, hoping for the desired effect in including and excluding certain target interpreters. Similarly, the target can also be absent or present from the communicative situation. The sections that follow present a typology of ironists that takes into account variables such as the function of irony, solidarity, and strategies ironists may use to build ironic utterances. On the other hand, we will discuss the factors that intervene in successful ironic interpretation and types of targets. Sub-section 4.1. is devoted to the ironist, whose function is the most complex of the three structural elements analyzed here, given that the ironist is in charge of producing the irony and deciding its intended impact on the speaker and the approach to the target. The two sub-sections that follow (4.2. and 4.3.) address the interpreter and the target respectively, both more passive components of the ironic event. Because of the higher degree of complexity of the ironist’s function in the ironic event, more attention will be paid to this structural element.

4.1 The ironist

The *ironist* is the producer of irony. Following the distinction between *communicated* and *non-communicated irony* proposed by Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano-Palacio (2021), where the former covers those ironies that are intentionally built and the latter those that are not (i.e., situational irony), we claim that in the case of communicated irony (see Lozano-Palacio & Ruiz de Mendoza 2022), be it in its verbal, visual or multimodal form, the ironist produces an ironic utterance by building an epistemic scenario containing an expression (or any other indication) of pretended agreement. This pretended agreement is often expressed linguistically through an echoic expression, in the case of verbal and multimodal irony, and a depiction invoking the echo of an attributed thought in the case of exclusively visual irony. The ironist further uses a series of resources that are intended to trigger a clash between the epistemic scenario and observable reality. This way, the interpreter derives the attitudinal element of dissociation, which is later

parametrized contextually. In the case of the less sophisticated situational irony, the ironist is absent and it is up to interpreters to find a clash between their previous assumptions and the attested situation.

Of the three structural elements of irony, the ironist is the most complex one. Not only is the ironist in charge of building the content of the ironic utterance, but also of estimating the impact of the irony on the ironist and of deciding how to deal with the target (i.e., is the ironist being humorous or raising the interpreter's awareness on some aspect of the target?). In this context, this section discusses the aspects of the ironic act that depend on the ironist's intentions. Solidarity is particularly important in this respect. Ironists can decide whether they want the irony to be easily retrieved or not, or who they want the cross-scenario clash to be available to. Linguistic resources (e.g., specific constructions and adverbial markers) can combine with various paralinguistic resources (e.g., specific intonational contours and gestures) to enable the identification of irony, but the analysis provided here is focused on linguistic devices, because of their primary role in verbal irony. The ensuing discussion necessarily includes an exploration of scenario-building strategies, since these strategies are based on linguistic cues.

4.1.1 Functions of irony

According to Relevance Theory (Wilson & Sperber 2012), in verbal irony the ironist echoes a previous statement or an attributed belief, while communicating an attitude of dissociation from it. Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano-Palacio (2021) have further claimed that the attitudinal element in communicated (i.e., non-situational) irony is derived from two chained reasoning schemas. We define *reasoning schemas* as condition – consequence conceptual patterns that allow the hearer to derive implicated meaning from the explicit content provided by the linguistic expression.

In the first reasoning schema, the implicated conclusion is derived from the clash between the initial premise (drawn from the epistemic scenario) and an explicit assumption (drawn from the attested scenario). Let us take an example, where two friends are discussing Sam's guitar-playing skills. One of them, thinks Sam is a good musician. However, the second one, a music connoisseur, believes the opposite, and utters (1):

- (1) *Sam plays the guitar really well!*

The first reasoning schema takes the following form (Table 1):

Table 1. Reasoning schema 1 for *Sam plays the guitar really well!*

REASONING SCHEMA 1

Premise 1 (epistemic scenario)	Sam plays the guitar very well
Explicit meaning 1 (attested scenario)	Sam is a poor player
Implicated conclusion 1	The speaker thinks the hearer is wrong

The second reasoning schema follows a condition-consequence pattern. The second premise captures a socio-cultural convention regarding contradicting other people. Part of this premise matches the previously implicated conclusion from the initial reasoning schema. This match gives the previous conclusion the status of an explicitly communicated assumption, with the unmatched part becoming the new implicated conclusion in which the speaker wishes to express dissociation from the initial premise. If we go back to the example about Sam's guitar-playing skills, the second reasoning schema takes the following form (Table 2):

Table 2. Reasoning schema 2 for *Sam plays the guitar really well!*

REASONING SCHEMA 2

Premise 2 (socio-cultural convention)	We should not contradict other people unless we want to prove them wrong or express our dissociation from what they think.
Explicit meaning 2 (previous implicated conclusion 1)	The speaker thinks the hearer is wrong.
Implicated conclusion 2	The speaker wants to prove the hearer wrong and/or the speaker is expressing dissociation.

The attitudinal element of dissociation in irony is then parametrized contextually to give rise to a variety of ironic effects, ranging from different kinds of non-aggressive humor and complicity to the various forms of mockery. We further claim that dissociation in irony necessarily results in an inherent function of irony: raising awareness. In other words, by being ironic we want to draw the interpreters' attention to a certain state of affairs and invite them to rethink their opinion about it. Let us take the following example from Obama's speech during his first electoral campaign at the University of Iowa:

- (2) Governor Romney and his allies in Congress tell us that somehow we can lower our deficits – they say that the deficit is the most important thing. They say this is vital for our future. But when you ask them, all right, what's your plan – they say, well, we're first going to start by taking \$5 trillion out of the

economy and giving it to folks like me and Mr. Romney – taking it out of Treasury, rather – and giving it to me and Mr. Romney, **and then, somehow, it's all going to create prosperity for the rest of you** (woo woo woo).

(see Fareed H.H. Al-Hindawi & Basim Jubair Kadhim 2016)

In this example, the speaker ridicules Romney's politics by first building an epistemic scenario which contains the voters' expectations that politicians want to take care of their people ("it's all going to create prosperity for the rest of you"), which contrast with the previously evoked attested scenario where Romney's deeds are incongruent with the epistemic scenario ("we're first going to start by taking \$5 trillion out of the economy and giving it to folks like me and Mr. Romney--taking it out of Treasury, rather"). The clash arising from the voters' expectations and attested reality is further reinforced by using "and then, somehow", which point to the unfairness of the situation. This example is a clear case of the ironic role of raising awareness.

The action of raising awareness may result in *individual self-awareness* and *social self-awareness*, depending on whether the communicator aims at a single or a collective addressee. Let us provide some examples. In a situation where Laura and Michael visit a hospital, Michael realizes the facilities are not as clean as one would expect for a place that requires extreme hygiene measures, and passes the following remark on to Laura:

(3) *This is as clean as my grandpa's carpentry workshop*

With the help of an analogy that compares the hospital and the workshop, Michael builds an irony that aims to make Laura aware of the lack of hygienic measures in the hospital facilities.

At a social level, irony can raise awareness in a crowd. However, since the audience is collective, as is the case for the political speeches mentioned above, the ironist will likely not be acquainted with the totality of the interpreters. Consequently, the efforts to raise awareness will be directed to a target audience rather than tailored to a specific individual. For instance, Boris Johnson could be trying to make his voters aware of the advantages of Brexit by pointing out the disadvantages of belonging to the European Union. By saying

(4) *Great Britain deserves great advantages, and surely that is what we get from the EU, right?*

Johnson would be constructing a generic ironic statement aimed at a large audience thus minimizing the chances that the irony will not succeed.

Raising awareness is the primary function of irony. Awareness is then parameterized in accordance with the context. On the basis of our corpus, we provi-

sionally distinguish between the following sub-functions of irony: (a) attacking, (b) mocking, (c) being playful, (d) showing off, and (e) persuading:

- a. We may parameterize self-awareness as attacking in order to criticize a person, a situation or an identity. The purpose of using irony to put somebody down is to express a negative judgement. This function can often be found in arguments. One example is Cicero's ironic remarks about Verres' henchman Rubrius in their trial against the people of Sicily, called by Cicero

(5) *[Rubrius is]A man of wonderful skill.* [Cicero in Ingo Gildenhard (2011:179)]

By passing this ironic remark, the orator is not only making the audience question Rubrius's goodness, but also attacking him in order to win the trial.

- b. Raising awareness may be sought by making a joke or mocking a person or a situation (see Salvatore Attardo 2002; Gibbs et al. 2014; Sabina Tabacaru 2019; among others). Humor often resorts to irony as a tool to provoke laughter, by making people realize an incongruity between their expectations and the attested situation.

(6) *I can totally keep secrets. It's the people I tell them to who can't*

The joke in Example (6) provides the epistemic scenario in the first part and the attested one in the last part. The audience is expected to dissociate themselves from their expectation that the speaker is good at keeping secrets on the basis of the fact that the speaker discloses that he or she tells the secrets to other people. This dissociation is parameterized as humor since its purpose is to provoke laughter. We may also want to mock a person, an identity or a situation through humorous remarks. This is the case of jokes that begin with a question. Let us take the following example:

(7) *What is Trump's favorite TV series? Orange is the New Black*

In this joke, the question activates the epistemic scenario of a TV series Donald Trump might like according to its filmic quality or the topic that it deals with. However, the second part of the sentence (the attested scenario) plays with the Netflix series *Orange is the New Black*, whose title makes reference to how the orange color of prison uniforms becomes the equivalent of the classic and elegant fashionable black. Orange in this case makes reference to Trump's face color. This way, the pun presents a scenario that clashes with the expectations derived from the epistemic scenario. The initial attitudinal element of dissociation is then parameterized as a joke intended to ridicule Trump and his skin tone.

- c. We can use irony to convince an audience to share a specific point of view about a person, entity, or state of affairs. This use is especially pervasive in political speeches, where politicians aim at persuading their voters to ideologically align with their views. For instance, imagine the following hypothetical statement made by a dissident of Putin's policies:

(8) *Ukraine is our territory, right? We then have the full right to invade it. Isn't that what to do?*

The speaker's aim is to raise awareness of the immorality involved in the Russian invasion of Ukraine, thus persuading the audience that the invasion is an evil and unjustified action. On the other hand, we may also find the persuasive use of irony in everyday speech, in any context where speakers simply want to prove that they are right. Let us take a situation where a family is having a Christmas dinner, and they end up discussing immigration. One of the grandfathers, a conservative voter, says:

(9) *Well, we would all be better off without immigrants, we would have more money for schools, for roads, for healthcare. And that doesn't make us bad people. I hope you will all agree with me. To this statement, a younger liberal grandchild replies: Exactly, because that's what we good people do, they let immigrants die in the border. They're not even human anyway!*

By building this irony, the grandchild shows his dissociation from his grandfather's anti-immigration statement. The grandchild echoes the implicature that good people can reject immigration and further elaborates on this point by adding an echo derived from what he thinks is general knowledge about conservative views on immigration. In both cases, the clash takes place between an echoed expectation of what is presented as an unreasonable belief and the attested reality that the interpreter should believe in according to the speaker.

- d. Because of its complex nature, irony can be used as a way to show one's mastery of language. This use of irony can convey intellectual superiority. When this is the case, speakers adopt an elitist position. Let us look at the following example extracted from a famous conversation that allegedly took place between Winston Churchill and Lady Astor.

(10) Lady Astor: *If I were married to you, I'd put poison in your tea*
Winston Churchill: *And if I were married to you, I'd drink it*

In this example, Churchill first echoes the condition part of his interlocutor's utterance ("If I were married to you") as a way of pretending acceptance of the hypothetical situation put forward. Then, he pretends to accept the meaning implication arising from the consequence clause, i.e., the assumption that Lady

Astor would like to kill him. However, the intended meaning is that Churchill would rather die than keep married to Lady Astor. In this example, Churchill very skillfully uses irony to turn around Lady Astor's remark, thus showing full command of how to use irony.

- e. Finally, irony may be used to provoke others playfully. One may do so by pretending to be ignorant, as in the following example, where the speaker teases his younger sibling in public:

(11) Anna: *Pass me your plate, I'll serve you some carrots*

Charlie: *No, thank you, I don't like carrots.*

Anna: *How come, Charlie? You've always loved carrots!*

Charlie: *That's not true!*

Anna: *Of course it is! You downed tons of carrot cake when you were a kid.*

Charlie: *That's not true, I hated it, and you know it.*

By pretending to be ignorant and not know that Charlie dislikes carrots, Anna shows skepticism parameterized as humor to tease his sibling.

4.1.2 Solidarity

Solidarity occurs in communication when the necessary conditions exist or are created so that the relationship between two individuals is characterized by both synchronicity and trust (Lawrence R. Wheeler 1978). According to Patrick MacDonald et al. (2014), solidarity consists of an evaluation of the relationship between various individuals based on past communicative experiences, especially those in which there is self-disclosure. Within this definitional context, for the purposes of the present section, *ironic solidarity* is defined as the act of purposely facilitating the interpreter's access to ironic meaning. Solidarity is at the root of the distinction between different kinds of ironists. In this regard, Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano-Palacio (2019a) have argued that ironists may or may not want to include the full audience in their irony. As a result, they differentiate between solidary and non-solidary (or hierarchical) ironists. The former type of ironist uses irony in a way that is intended to be clear to the hearer with no intention to show any interpretive superiority; the latter type uses irony to show superiority over the hearer--whether economic, social, intellectual, political, or cultural--often with the parallel purpose of humiliating the hearer. Solidarity is a gradable concept that exists to a greater or lesser extent depending on the ironists' efforts to make the ironic statement accessible to the hearer. Solidarity is not a pre-requisite for felicitous ironies, but rather a factor that fosters ironic felicity. A very solidary ironic remark can pass unnoticed for a variety of reasons such as lack of hearer's

attention, interruptions, distractions, etc., and an irony with a low degree of solidarity may find in the hearer an unexpectedly skilled interpreter. Solidarity can be achieved through a wide variety of strategies, including prosody, gesture, conceptual complexity, etc.

We have explained that irony involves the identification of a clash between an epistemic scenario and an attested scenario, which can be built in a variety of ways. Strategies used by the ironist to build irony have an effect on how accessible the identification of irony is to the interpreter. The following two sections address the factors that have an effect on the retrievability of ironic meaning: the identification of the epistemic and attested scenarios.

4.1.2.1 *The identification of the epistemic scenario*

We have explained that the epistemic scenario contains the ironist's expectations that a state of affairs is very likely or certain to occur. In the case of verbal irony, these expectations are captured in the form of an echo (i.e., the repetition of what has been said or thought), with which the ironist pretends to agree. Let us consider the following situation: two friends have a third friend in common, Laura, who happens to dislike chocolate. One of the friends learns this quirk about Laura, and when it comes to choosing Laura's birthday cake, she wryly remarks:

(12) *Yeah, right, totally go for chocolate, she loves it!*

By saying that Laura loves chocolate, the speaker is echoing the expectation that, like most people, Laura likes chocolate. The speaker pretends to agree with the fact that Laura likes chocolate but expects the utterance to not be interpreted literally. This straightforward example features a simply-built epistemic scenario, with a high degree of solidarity. However, there are a wide variety of strategies to endow the echo with greater complexity and solidarity.

The notion of echo in pragmatics can first be found in Relevance Theory (see Wilson & Sperber 2012), as a development of the use/mention distinction, from the philosophy of language. According to this distinction, expressions can be "used" to refer to entities, events or situations, but can also be "mentioned" in order to make metalinguistic reference to expressions themselves. Within this distinction, irony is labelled as a case of mention--specifically, echoic mention--given the fact that in irony the utterance is repeated to indicate that it has been heard or understood, and to express an attitude towards it. Lozano-Palacio (2023) distinguishes 4 criteria to analyze echoing: implicitness, completeness, complexity, and accuracy. These criteria also account for the dimensions of echoing that affect solidarity.

Echoic implicitness hinges on whether the material echoed in the ironic utterance is absent or present. In other words, ironic utterances may require the inter-

preter to follow a number of inferences to reach the intended ironic meaning. Let us illustrate this with an example. Amanda and Paul are discussing the likelihood of their parents getting upset when they learn they have accidentally crashed their car.

(13) Amanda: *Do you think it's gong to be really bad?*

Paul: *Well... I guess they never really liked that care anyway...*

The interpretation of Paul's ironic utterance requires understanding the inference that since their parents never liked the car, they would not mind. This echo is meant to clash with the attested situation where both interlocutors know that anyone would get upset if someone crashed their car. Here, the irony hinges on the implicit echo arising from the utterance. Echoes that require the interpreter to make this additional effort to retrieve the echo make ironies more difficult to retrieve, and are therefore less solidary.

Another criterion to take into account when measuring solidarity is the degree of completeness of the echo. Echoes may be total or partial depending on the focal prominence with which the speaker wishes to endow the utterance (Ruiz de Mendoza 2017). Let us imagine a situation where someone is talking about Sylvia, who she does not get along with. She explains: *And so Sylvia spilled her drink on my dress. She was clearly jealous I looked so good in it, so much prettier than her, and she couldn't help it but to ruin it all. She clearly did it on purpose.* Nancy, one of Sylvia's friends, in her defense, replies:

(14) *Clearly she did it on purpose.*

By uttering these words, Nancy echoes only a part of the statement, thereby focusing attention on that specific segment. Instead of repeating the totality of the statement, Nancy builds an incomplete echo. Nancy could have built a more complete, yet still incomplete echo (e.g., *She was clearly jealous and she did it on purpose* or *I looked so good in the dress and she did it on purpose*). A greater degree of completeness correlates with a greater degree of solidarity.

Complexity is another factor that is involved in creating a solidary irony. Conceptual complexity has an effect on the creation of more or less solidary echoes. *Echoic complexes* are metalinguistic representations (or meta-representations) where two or more echoed thoughts bring together different but compatible aspects of a single representation or result in echoes of echoes intended to endow the initial echo with the status of an attested scenario. Conceptual complexity may increase or decrease depending on whether the echo-building strategy contributes to a greater or lesser degree of solidarity. In previous work Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano-Palacio (2019b) distinguish the following kinds of echoic complexes: cumulative echoes, compound echoes, echoic chains, and

multi-operational echoes. First, *cumulative echoes* gather two or more terms that refer to the same target. Let us take an example:

(15) *She looked really pretty, delightful, absolutely astounding!*

This utterance reinforces the salient feature of the target meaning of the utterance. Secondly, *compound echoes* use syntactic resources to connect two or more loosely associated echoes that make reference to different aspects of the same ironic event. Consider the following remark in a situation where a wife complains about her husband's lack of awareness that he does not help with the house chores:

(16) *True, YOU do all the cooking and I never help at all*

This strategy facilitates the interpretation of irony through the reinforcement effect achieved by bringing together the information contained in the two echoes (i.e., the wife's echoed belief that her husband does all the cooking while she never helps, and the observable reality where she is the one to do all the work, and her husband, the one to never help). Third, *echoic chains* involve an echo being built total or partially on a previous echo. For instance, in a situation where Mary and Bryan talk about the likelihood of them getting into Harvard, Mary claims that she will not have high enough grades. Bryan replies:

(17) *Sure, if you don't get in, then Marco Polo never existed!*

Eventually they both find out about the factual details of Marco Polo's life, and Mary utters: *So, Marco Polo never existed...*

In this example, there are two ironic utterances: Bryan's, which echoes Mary's belief that she will not get into Harvard and which builds an analogy with Marco Polo's existence; secondly, Mary's, which echoes Bryan's analogy. As opposed to echoic cumulation or echoic compounding, this strategy does not contribute to solidarity, but rather adds complexity to the identification of the irony.

Then, *multi-operational echoes* combine irony and other figures of speech, especially metonymy, metaphor and hyperbole. These combinations serve to reinforce the attitudinal element of irony and to create more sophisticated echoes. Irony is very often found together with hyperbole, given the potential of this other figure of speech to enhance the attitudinal element of irony. For instance, one may produce an ironic utterance to criticize someone's dress at a party:

(18) *True, he looked astounding in that tux!*

If combined with hyperbole, the statement *That was the most amazing-looking tux I have ever seen!* proves to be easier to identify given the enhancement of the target meaning. Irony can also be combined with metaphor or metonymy for the same

purpose. By way of illustration, let us look at the echo in the following ironic statement:

(19) *Right, Mary is very nice!*

This ironic echo may be combined with metaphor and give rise to the utterance *Right, Mary is an angel!* In terms of metonymy, let us take an example where a mother is asked by her friend if her baby is a boy or a girl. The mother replies:

(20) *We don't know; it can't speak yet!*

The remark *It can't speak yet* is metonymic for 'We can't tell because we can't ask the baby to find out'. In addition, if this conversation were expanded to include an echo of the metonymic target (*Yeah, right, you can't tell*), we would find a multi-operational echo that inherits the metonymy from the echoed thought. Multi-operational echoes facilitate the detection of the clash between scenarios and the attitudinal element derived from this clash, and thus can be used as a tool for ironic solidarity.

Finally, accuracy hinges on the meaning implications arising from the ironic echo and the content of the sentence, as opposed to full and partial echoes, which hinge on focal prominence. In other words, accuracy revolves around cognitive economy (Ruiz de Mendoza & María Asunción Barreras Gómez 2022). Speakers do not always remember the utterance *verbatim*, and other times they do not need the echo to be exact if the selected fragment is enough to convey the necessary meaning implications. Take a situation where an employee brags about his project going "beyond what we can imagine" but then the project does not even get funding. A colleague then retorts:

(21) *To infinity and beyond!*

This utterance features an inaccurate echo where "and beyond" makes reference to Buzz Lightyear's famous quote. By modifying the echo, the colleague means "your expectations were unrealistic just like in a fiction movie like Toy Story". The ironist thus uses the echo to convey skepticism towards the fact that the project will be successful.

4.1.2.2 *The identification of the attested scenario*

The *attested scenario* in verbal irony can be defined as the real situation in the way that it is perceived by the interpreter, which provides relevant points of contrast with the epistemic scenario. As opposed to the epistemic scenario, which is invariably purposely built by the ironist and which involves pretended agreement through an echo, the attested scenario can be included in the ironic utter-

ance but can also be extracted from the context. Identifying the attested scenario is a key factor in measuring solidarity.

We first distinguish between present and absent attested scenarios within the ironic utterance. Let us take an example:

(22) *You couldn't play tennis well even if Nadal was your personal trainer*

Here, the attested scenario (i.e., the fact that the addressee cannot play tennis well) is contained in the utterance. Another example would be the following ironic utterance:

(23) *Yeah, right, Mary is an angel... a Hell's Angel!*

The meaning implications arising from the rephrasing of angel as Hell's Angel, the famously violent motorbike gang, result in the clash between the epistemic scenario ("angel") and the attested scenario ("Hell's Angel"). By being provided the attested scenario, the detection of the clash is considerably easier for the interpreter. Hence, a non-explicit attested scenario correlates with a lesser degree of solidarity than an explicit one.

The attested scenario can be accessed in a number of ways depending on how it interacts with the epistemic scenario:

- i. The attested scenario is implicitly derivable from the target domain of a cross-domain mapping, which, once activated, cues for an implicit echo. This is the case of the potentially ironic construction (*Yeah, right*) (*X is*) *about as Y as Z*, as illustrated by the following utterance:

(24) (*Yeah, right*) (*That game is*) *about as fun as watching paint dry*

There is an implicit echo that is captured by the first statement in the following paraphrase: *Yeah, right, you think that game is fun. That game is about as fun as watching paint dry*. The attested scenario (the assumption that the game is no fun) results from working out the target meaning of the explicit simile.

- ii. An explicit attested scenario interacts with an explicit echo within the epistemic scenario. Consider a situation where Paul, while pointing at Laura, tells Peter:

(25) *Look at that, an angel; look what she's done!*

Paul's utterance invokes both the echoed scenario and the attested scenario. In the first part of the utterance, the expression *an angel* is an echo of Peter's erroneous belief about Laura. Then, the combination of the exophoric imperatives *Look at that* and *Look what she's done* points to the attested scenario. The result is that Paul makes sure that Peter becomes aware of the clash between the two

scenarios. In this case, the imperative use of “look” acts as a communicatively efficient pointer to the observable scenario, thus making the clash between scenarios more apparent.

- iii. Another option we may find is an implicit echo and an explicit attested scenario. Here, the echoed scenario is implicit and the focus of attention is placed on the observable scenario. In this case, the interpreter is expected to gather clues to detect the echo within the epistemic scenario based on knowledge from the observable scenario and possibly gestural and prosodic cues. Let us illustrate this. If in the previous example Paul had not provided any explicit cue about Peter’s belief (e.g., *Yeah, right. Look at what she’s done to her sister*), but only a pointer to the attested scenario, the echo of Peter’s belief would have had to be derived through inference (cued by the adverbial markers *yeah, right* and/or paralinguistic indices).
- iv. As a fourth option we find an implicit echo and an implicit observable scenario that is cued linguistically. For instance, in a context where a child is misbehaving, we may say:

(26) *Look at the little boy!*

Example (26) points at what the child is doing in the street, to activate an explication based on domain expansion (part of a scenario for whole scenario). Thus, *Look at the little boy!* Can stand for ‘Look at how this little boy is misbehaving’ in a context where children are expected to be sweet and well-behaved.

- v. Finally, an implicit echo may be activated through an ironic index. The implicit echo may be combined with an implicit observable scenario, as is the case of *Yeah, right* referring to Laura’s misbehavior (see the example in 2). This statement features an ironic index that is used to express agreement with what A believed or said, which, with the help of a special intonational contour involving vowel lengthening and a falling tone, becomes the equivalent of ‘I pretend to agree with Peter about Laura’s behavior, but I obviously don’t’.

The five combinations outlined above show some possible manifestations of the attested scenario, where higher degrees of solidarity correlate with the identifiability of this scenario, which facilitates the clash with the epistemic scenario.

4.2 The interpreter

The *interpreter*, who is the receiver of the ironic utterance, is expected to detect the clash between the epistemic and the attested scenarios. If compared to the ironist, the role of the interpreter has received considerably less attention in

linguistics. Not so in experimental work within psycholinguistics where much of the research is focused on processing (see Penny M. Pexman 2008; Elizabeth S. Nilsen et al. 2011; Bilal Ghanem et al. 2020; among others). However, psycholinguistic experiments do not explore interpreter's roles. In linguistics, Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano-Palacio (2019a) have distinguished between naïve and non-naïve interpreters, depending on whether they share with the ironist the necessary information to interpret an utterance as ironic. We claim, however, that interpreters can indeed be more or less naïve in terms of their individual and their discursive community knowledge. Greater naivety affects their ability to retrieve ironic meaning.

We have outlined the basic mechanisms underlying solidarity in irony, and pointed out that ironic interpretation hinges on the common knowledge between ironist and interpreter. Once the ironic utterance has been produced, it is on the interpreter's shoulders to make it felicitous. In other words, any utterance that is intended to be ironic but is not identified as such will not realize its ironic potential.

4.2.1 Factors involved in the interpretation of irony

The concept of *discursive community* in relation to the study of irony was first introduced by Hutcheon (1994). In irony, interpreters are grouped according to the knowledge they have, which comes from the fact that they belong to a collective whose members have the same experiences. For instance, a discursive community may include football fans of Real Madrid, whose interest in this football club results in shared knowledge. For example:

(27) *He's as bad at scoring as Ronaldo*

In Example (27), the utterance contains an epistemic scenario with an echo where the expectation is that Cristiano Ronaldo does not often score goals. This scenario is intended to clash with the attested scenario containing the fact that Ronaldo is the player with the highest score goal in the history of the football club. We claim that discursive communities include not only common interests and affinities, but also any factor that groups people, as is the case of age, nationality, gender, and common experiences. A discursive community can be, for instance, relatives of victims of 9/11. Shared knowledge is key to identify irony. Let us imagine a mother who is watching the news on television with her 4-year-old child. The news displays Donald Trump's speech about the ultimate solution to coronavirus. Sceptically, the mother utters:

(28) *Totally, a genius solution!*

In this context, the child will most likely not understand what the intended meaning of her mother's irony is, since she does not have the necessary information to do so given that she is very young. The same may happen, for instance, with inside ironies about other family members or previous shared events. For instance:

(29) *Remember summer 2011? Clearly the best Dupont family reunion*

In this case, however, it is up to the interpreter to either know this information about the interpreter, or to make guesses about the interpreter's knowledge. For instance, the ironist may guess that since the interpreter is from Barcelona, he or she supports the Barça Football Club:

(30) *Certainly, Real Madrid is the club to follow*

In this context, the ironic utterance is only interpreted successfully if the interpreter shares the knowledge the ironist presupposes. In the case of individual experience, the ironist can be aware of an experience that the interpreter has lived and then build the irony on this experience. Take the following situation. There are two friends. One of them, who often posits himself as an example of morality, has been on holidays on a Greek island, where he has had an affair with a woman. The other tells him:

(31) *Here comes the priest of Greece!*

This ironic statement is not drawn from the experiences the two friends share, but from what the ironist knows about the interpreter.

Another key factor involved in the successful interpretation of irony is the interpreter's ability to detect such features as prosody or gesture, and his or her *retrieval ability*, in other words, the ability to derive ironic meaning from inferences, and to retrieve implicit information from both the epistemic and the attested scenarios. For instance, in the summer of 2011, the Dupont family reunion took place in Bordeaux, where Clara, the youngest of the cousins, fell over a rock and, as a result, her skin was left with a scar. In conversation with her and the rest of the cousins, Laurence, pointing at her scar says:

(32) *Look, I tell you, it was the best reunion of all!*

Laurence's ironic utterance features an explicit echo (Clara's questionable belief that it was the best reunion) and an implicit attested scenario explicitly cued by the imperative verb. The interpreters are then required to extract from the implicit scenario the assumption that the scar was a result of the accident that took place in 2011, and to contrast that with the speaker's utterance.

4.3 The target

The ironic act necessarily includes a target. In other words, ironies are directed at someone or something and involve raising awareness about some aspect related to it. Targets differ in their nature and features, but they invariably act as the recipient of the intended meaning of the ironic utterance. We define the ironic target as the object of the ironic remark, such as a person, institution, situation, or event that are well known to the audience or about which the ironist thinks that the hearer has beliefs that he or she does not share. We provide brief illustration of some possibilities below.

To begin with, the target may be (a) a person who is either present or absent from the communicative situation where the irony takes place. This type of target may act simultaneously as the addressee and the target. Whether the target is present or absent defines the purpose of irony and how it is used. For instance, in Socratic irony, where the philosopher pretended to be ignorant and asked the disciple questions to make him realize his own ignorance and the philosopher's wisdom, the interpreter must necessarily be present and be the target of the irony. We may also ironize about an absent third party. Let us imagine that two friends are making fun of a common colleague, who invariably leaves unclean cups of coffee on his desk:

(33) *Charles is not simply Charles, he's clearly Charles the Clean*

The utterance has an absent person as a target. Very often, the target and the interpreter converge. When this occurs, there is an agreement or comity between the ironist and the interpreter about the impact of the ironic meaning. In this case, the ironist may choose to be more or less magnanimous with the ironist by simply teasing the interpreter or by expressing sharper criticism.

The target of an irony can be (b) a state of affairs or an event that took place at a particular moment in time. As a state of affairs, the target is not personalized but still involves the ironist's dissociation from the target. One example is ironizing about historical events. Let us illustrate briefly. Among a group of Irishmen, an Irish woman makes an irony about the Great Famine of the 1940s in the country, saying:

(34) *We definitely built a memorable culinary tradition in the 40s; good thing that we don't like potatoes!*

By uttering these words, the speaker is echoing the events that took place during the Great Famine in Ireland, when a potato blight infected the crops in the country, causing disease, lack of food and, ultimately, the death of a large part of the population.

Third, irony may be aimed at (c) an institution, as is the case of, for instance, sarcastic comments about a given government or company. Consider a situation where James and Martha are discussing the price of Apple products. James thinks Apple products are affordable. Martha, in disagreement, retorts:

(35) *Sure, Apple has always been a company for tech people with low income, we all know that.*

By passing this remark, Martha dissociates herself from James's belief that Apple products are affordable.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of the structural elements of irony provided in this article, which is complementary of previous work on the cognitive-linguistic study of ironist and interpreters, stems from the initial typologies provided by Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano-Palacio (2021), which, however, fail to discuss the ironic target. Also, this previous work has not been framed within a comprehensive approach to irony that brings together the cognitive and pragmatic aspects of this phenomenon. Such an approach has been provided in Lozano-Palacio & Ruiz de Mendoza (2022).

In order to fill the theoretical gaps mentioned above, the present proposal has addressed the ironist, the interpreter, and the target from a cognitive-linguistic standpoint, focusing on the factors that underlie the achievement of felicity in ironic communication. In this line, we have claimed that the primary function of irony is to raise self-awareness. Generic self-awareness is then contextually adjusted to fulfil a specific function. We have identified five different functions: (a) attacking, (b) mocking, (c) being playful, (d) showing off, and (e) persuading. These functions result from the parametrization of the attitudinal component of irony, derived from two chained reasoning schemas. The typology of ironic functions goes one step further from previous studies on the attitudinal element of irony (e.g., Lozano-Palacio & Ruiz de Mendoza 2022).

This paper intends to provide a more detailed exploration of the components of the ironic act and their functions. Among other topics, it will cover how solidary or elitist ironists use scenario-formation strategies to control the retrievability of ironic meaning and which are the functions of the different outcomes of the ironic act.

By providing a more detailed explanation of how the attitudinal element of irony is parametrized, as well as a finer-grained classification of how it can be used for different purposes.

We have also addressed the question of solidarity, and provided a classification of the ways in which the relationship between the epistemic and the attested scenarios can be set up by the ironist and detected by the interpreter. Solidarity is at the root of ironic interpretation since it involves the ironist's facilitation of the intended meaning. The solidarity-based typology offered here takes into account the various dimensions of echoing and is based on Lozano-Palacio's (2023) criteria for the analysis of echoing, which distinguishes between implicitness, completeness, complexity, and accuracy. This classification has allowed us to analyse the factors that constraint the identification of the epistemic and attested scenarios in irony.

Additionally, we have provided a typology of factors involved in the interpretation of irony, such as individual and shared knowledge, and the interpreter's retrieval ability. This classification complements the typology of interpreters provided by Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano-Palacio (2019a) by delving deeper into the constraints of ironic interpretation. We have furthermore introduced a novel classification of target types that distinguishes between a present or absent person, a state of affairs, and an institution.

All in all, the analysis and typologies provided in this article complement previous studies of the ironist and the ironic interpreter, and introduce a higher and finer-grained degree of systematicity in the study of irony.

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