Irony in conversation

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes the adoption of Goffman's concept of "framing" to characterize irony across its forms; the suggestion that this framing is achieved by a shift of footing reveals links between verbal irony and other forms of talk. Examination of irony in conversation shows how the shift of footing allows for detachment, enabling the ironist to make evaluations in response to perceived transgressions with reference to common assumptions. It is both the construction of an ironic turn and its placement in a sequence that make for the discernible shift of footing, and thus the visibility of the frame; with irony, conversational expectations of what constitutes a next turn are fulfilled on the level of form, but undermined on the level of content. This analysis shows the extent to which irony is affiliative, and reveals its hitherto unacknowledged subtlety of effect and range of attitude. (Irony, pragmatics, conversation, framing, footing)*

Recent years have seen a variety of characterizations of linguistic irony. Given the range of perspectives – pragmatic, psychological, and literary – the essential focus of such studies has remained constant. The overwhelming concern has been with verbal irony, and the object of investigation has been the ironic sentence, either in isolation (cf. Wilson & Sperber 1992) or in the context of a constructed text (Bollobás 1981, Jorgensen et al., 1984, Gibbs & O'Brien 1991, Dews et al., 1995, Giora 1995).[1] I argue here that this focus has produced theoretical models which, put crudely, are at once too narrow to reveal what irony is, and too broad to illuminate what it does. I suggest that an adequate characterization of linguistic irony may be best attained by a consideration of irony across its forms (dramatic/visual/situational as well as linguistic) and that, similarly, an exploration of its functions is most clearly revealed by investigation of its basic site: conversation.[2] The following is thus a preliminary attempt to expand the traditional domain of inquiry – first, by providing a top-down characterization, going beyond the usual focus on specifically linguistic irony; and second, by a bottom-up examination of the process by which EXPLICIT irony emerges, and of the interactional uses to which it is put.[3] I hope thereby to suggest that a model which reveals the basic

characteristics of irony in its diverse forms will also enable us to examine its most common – and fleeting – realization.

The traditional view of verbal irony, originating in classical rhetoric and emerging by way of the philosophy of language,[4] holds that that the ironic utterance means the opposite of its literal form:

> Stated very crudely, the mechanism by which irony works is that the utterance, if taken literally, is obviously grossly inappropriate to the situation. Since it is grossly inappropriate, the hearer is compelled to reinterpret it in such a way as to render it appropriate, and the most natural way to interpret it is as MEANING THE OPPOSITE OF ITS LITERAL FORM [emphasis added]. (Searle 1991:536; see also Bollobás 1981:327; Brown & Levinson, 1987:226)

This is evidently an attempt to formulate the sort of divergence between a speaker's words, vs. what he might mean by his words,[5] that was perceived to lie at the heart of irony – a divergence seen most starkly by revealed misunderstandings:[6]

(1) Video
1   Pete   →   the boys want a <u>vid</u>eo because apparently we're the <u>only</u>
2   people in <u>P</u>enn without a video,
3   Jenny   no? . we haven't got one <u>ei</u>ther.
4   (.)
5   Pete   no . <u>def</u>initely we are the <u>O:N</u>ly people in Penn without a video,
6   Jenny   hehho:h I s:<u>ee::</u>(h)

(2) Dante (S & A are talking about A's abscessed tooth and his imminent visit to the dentist)
1   Sue   I really don't think you should uh (.) st<u>int</u> on descri(h)bing the <u>pain</u> you know
2   Andy   →   <u>yes</u>. (1) <u>have</u> you <u>see:</u>n (2) the illustrated <u>D</u>(h)a::nte:
3   (2)
4   Sue   no I <u>hav</u>en't.
5   Andy   n(h)o:: I mean–
6   Sue   <u>O::H</u>:: <u>I</u> ↑<u>SEE::</u> <u>ri</u>:(h)ght (.) to the <u>d</u>(h)entist

Such examples show that the speakers are, in some sense, not sincere in the turns subsequently revealed as misunderstood; they also make clear that the traditional formulation, with its neat algorithm of negation, is hopelessly inadequate in capturing the precise character of this insincerity. Several analysts (among them Kaufer 1981, Sperber & Wilson 1981, Clark & Gerrig 1984, Williams 1984, Haverkate 1990, Martin 1992, Barbe 1995) have acknowledged such shortcomings. Alternatives have included Grice's proposal (1975:53) that irony flouts the conversational Maxim of Quality (cf. Levinson 1983), or that it is a mode of indirect negation (Giora 1995); or they have attempted to accommodate the traditional model within speech act theory (Haverkate 1990) or politeness theory (Barbe 1995). Yet ultimately such proposals provide refinements of, not alternatives to, the traditional oppositional model: Samuel Johnson's definition of irony

as "a mode of speech in which the meaning is contrary to the words" (1755) is essentially upheld. Three recent proposals which highlight different aspects of verbal irony offer radical departures.[7]

IRONY: ECHOIC INTERPRETATION, PRETENSE OR THEATER?

Sperber & Wilson 1981 provide the first radical alternative to the oppositional model in drawing on the traditional linguistic distinction between the USE and the self-referential MENTION of a word or utterance,[8] characterizing irony as a form of echoic mention – a view subsequently reconsidered by Wilson & Sperber 1992 as a form of echoic interpretation.[9] By proposing an account rooted in echo, Sperber & Wilson short-circuit the traditional model at a stroke; a range of phenomena unaccounted for under the oppositional model or one of its derivations can be reanalyzed as echoic. Indeed, reference to the ironies in exx. 1–2 would seem to bear them out; echoic interpretation is immediately more plausible a characterization than any other hitherto proposed. The speaker in both echoes an interpretation of a thought or opinion while at the same time dissenting from what is echoed. Ordinary talk furnishes some startlingly prototypical examples; in the following, the echo is particularly clear.[10]

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(3)  Change (B is A's elderly father)
     1   Anne       does it ↑help if you pu:t your feet fla::t, (.) bend your feet towa– bend
     2              your legs towards you a bit.
     3              (2)
     4   Anne       no bend them towards you– bring your legs up. (.) Is that
     5              better? or not,
     6              (.)
     7   Bill       (Yes thank you – –)
     8   Anne       makes a cha:nge=
     9   Bill   →   =Ye::s. (.) It's a cha:nge, (smiles at Anne)
     10             (3)
     11  Bill       hehe[heh
     12  Anne            [hhhehehuh .hh uh (1) huh huh come on Dad take these tablets
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On the face of it, Bill's *it's a change* is a direct echo of Anne's assertion; however, the subsequent laughter of both parties suggests that it is not a straightforward agreement. Customary markers of agreement – a repetition on a straight falling tone, or an upgraded evaluation (Pomerantz 1984:65) – would have served to endorse the positive implication of Anne's assertion that the change is good. But instead, Bill echoes on a fall-rise intonation, the conventional sign of non-finality (Cruttenden 1986:102), which suggests doubt regarding that which it asserts and thereby undermines it. Sperber & Wilson's claim that the ironist simultaneously echoes and dissociates from that echo certainly appears to find support here. Even when the origin of the echo is not obviously present, as is overwhelmingly the case, it may not be difficult to identify:

(4) Yugoslavia (S has asked G if he has been to Turkey; this was recorded when the civil war in the former Yugoslavia was just beginning)

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 1   Gus            I was nea:r once but I went to Yugoslavia instead. (1) Uh:m,
 2                  (1)
 3   Sarah          °ghmm°. (.) I'd steer clear of that, (.) (as well [now),
 4   Gus                                                         [we::ll this was when it was
 5   Gus      →     [(reasonably) peaceful (1) ↑PEA:ceful:
 6   Jo             [yeahhe he he
 7   Gus      →     (1) uh:m socialist people,
 8   Sarah          hehehehe
 9   Gus            right (.) uh,
10                  (1)
11   Jo       →     huhuh as they a:re, (1) [hehehe?
12   Gus      →                            [with deep– deep fraternal bonds,
13                  (1)
14   Sarah          yeah that's [right
15   Gus      →                 [betwee:n the um (1) [separate but equal republics,
16   Sarah    →                                     [no: trouble (– – – –)
17   Sarah    →     indee:d.
18                  (2)
19   Sarah          or so we thou:ght
19                  (.)
20   Gus            ye:s. (0.2) Well ↑that's what they used to say,
21   Sarah          ye::s.
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The description of *peaceful socialist people with deep fraternal bonds between the separate but equal republics*, in sounding like a piece of propaganda, has the quality of a quote. The laughter of the two women, as well as their agreements (4:11 and 4:14) in the same ironic vein, display their understanding of Gus's statement as such – an understanding ratified by Gus in 4:20, *that's what they* (presumably the *people* themselves, or at least their self-appointed representatives) *used to say*. On the second *peaceful*, Gus is not recognizably speaking "in his own voice," but in that of another or others; after the one-second pause, there is a clear articulatory shift on *PEA:ceful*. Gus's reiteration of the word, but at a higher pitch and with emphasis on the first syllable, marks a transition to a more deliberate articulation; the shift to the highly emotive abstract idealizations serves to distinguish it as somehow quoted, rather than originating from him. The parallels with dramatic performance are striking. Bauman, in his study of performance in oral literature, talks of occasions in which

> the act of speaking is itself framed as a display, objectified, lifted out to a degree from its contextual surroundings, and opened up to scrutiny by an audience ... Performance thus calls forth special attention to, and heightened awareness of, both the act of expression and the performer. (1993:182–83)

With Sperber & Wilson's account of echoic interpretation, the dramaturgical characteristics of irony remain implicit. By placing such characteristics at the center of their own theories of irony, Clark & Gerrig 1984 and Haiman 1990, 1998 provide the other radical alternatives to the oppositional view. Clark & Gerrig's proposal – that irony is in fact a form of pretense, with a speaker "pretending to

be an injudicious person speaking to an uninitiated audience" (1984:121) – attempts to address what they regard as the deficiencies of the initial Sperber & Wilson model of irony as echoic mention. Their principal objection – that mention is too weak a notion to characterize irony – appears to have been addressed in Sperber & Wilson's reanalysis of their own model as echoic interpretation; but Clark & Gerrig's notion of pretense is notable for its attempt to shift the focus from the utterance to the participants:

> Suppose S is speaking to A, the primary addressee, and to A′, who may be present or absent, real or imaginary. In speaking ironically, S is pretending to be S′ speaking to A′. What S′ is saying is, in one way or another, patently uninformed or injudicious … A′, in ignorance, is intended to miss this pretense, to take S as speaking sincerely. But A, as part of the "inner circle" … is intended to see everything – the pretense, S's injudiciousness, A's ignorance, and hence S's attitude towards S′, A′, and what S′ said. (122)

Haiman's proposal regarding irony and sarcasm (made explicit in the title of his 1990 article) is equally rooted in dramaturgy:[11]

> I wish to propose very seriously that the best metaphor in terms of which to understand sarcasm and irony is that of the stage and screen, with its frequently exploited contrast between (phony, pretend) "reel" playacting and (God's) "real" truth. One sarcastic perspective is essentially that of the actor on stage who steps out of character and shares asides with a privileged omniscient audience, inviting them to deride the other members of the play, who, unlike the sarcast, are seen to be playing a role in the limited world of the stage … (1998:26)

On the face of it, these formulations appear equally adequate to characterize the conversational ironies so far considered, with ex. 4 providing a particularly robust example, as one based on echo. Yet what is especially compelling about the models of both Clark & Gerrig and Haiman is their potential application to other forms of irony in addition to that which is purely linguistic. This is a new departure for studies of irony – and, as will become apparent, a significant one. Possible links between verbal and other forms of irony have been otherwise largely neglected by linguists;[12] witness Sperber's confident assertion that

> there may exist interesting relations among (different forms), but there is no reason to expect them to fall under a single unified theory of irony. (1984:130)

So while Sperber & Wilson make no claims for their model of irony beyond the verbal, it remains the case that instances of dramatic irony, for instance, are in the main achieved verbally. Duncan's words in *Macbeth* on arriving at Glamis Castle, where his murderers lie in wait,[13] are a classic case of dramatic irony; yet the echoic model would give a misleading account of why they are ironic, suggesting that they are somehow an echoic interpretation of "an attributed thought or utterance" (Wilson & Sperber 1992:65). In this case it is not the speaker who is the

ironist, but the playwright, who is using the audience's knowledge to render the character's words ironic; the echoic model fails to make such a distinction.[14]

The pretense and theater models, with their insistence on the assumption of an audience as an integral part of irony, thus appear to capture a characteristic that is missing from the echoic account; in so doing, they promise to illuminate ironies beyond the purely verbal. Clark & Gerrig cite Jonathan Swift's *Modest proposal* as one instance of a work whose irony is not adequately explained by recourse to echoic interpretation.[15] Their observations might also be applied to a rather different but equally celebrated instance of literary irony: that in Jane Austen's *Emma*, where the irony, unlike Swift's, is not recognizable by reference to what might be deemed reasonable, but only by knowing the story's ending. The irony thus becomes evident only on the second reading (the pretense model would claim that, on the first reading, we are the "uninitiated audience"). Yet Clark & Gerrig claim even wider application for their model, suggesting that the notion of pretense illuminates what they call "the irony of fate," and what might more generally be termed "irony of situation." [16] Following Fowler (1965:305–6), Clark & Gerrig suggest that what links linguistic and dramatic irony with that of situation is "the presence of two audiences – one in on the secret, the other not" (1984:124); they give as an example, "Ironically, George bought a brand new Studebaker the day before the automobile company announced it was going out of business" (ibid.). Beyond the intrinsic awkwardness of their formula, with its parallel speakers and audiences, lies a more substantial objection on grounds of adequacy.[17] In the first place, any notion of pretense vanishes with Clark & Gerrig's examples of situational irony: in the Studebaker example, the irony lies in the fact that speaker and audience (in Clark & Gerrig's terminology) are conversing after the announcement by the automobile company; they constitute, we must assume, the audience that is "in on the secret," the secret in this case presumably being hindsight. Yet hindsight is hardly a "secret" – we either have it or we don't – and pretense, as we have seen, is a redundant notion in such a case anyway. Nowhere is this clearer than in the savage irony of the following newspaper report (note that it is presumably only the irony that makes it news, a fact suggested by the headline):

Killer cured, then executed. Joliet, Illinois – George DelVecchio, a 47-year-old child-killer who underwent surgery earlier this month to relieve a heart condition, was executed by lethal injection early yesterday, prison authorities said. He underwent an angioplasty to clear a blocked artery after a heart attack late last month. (*The Independent*, 23rd November 1995)

On the evidence of this and the other examples given by Clark & Gerrig, the notion of pretense as such appears not to fit all manifestations of irony, although it is easy to see how such a notion finds a place in their formulation. Pretense is the predictable outcome of their apparently reasonable proposal that irony involves a double audience. If a double audience is involved, then it is the next logical step to assume that one of these is knowing, and the other is not. However,

the double audience characterization is itself undermined, and the formula stretched beyond the breaking point, when it meets the novel that begins:

> You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveler*. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade. Best to close the door; the TV is always on in the next room . . . . (Calvino 1982:9)

It ends:

> And you say, "Just a moment, I've almost finished *If on a winter's night a traveler* by Italo Calvino." (205)

Unlike the previous cited examples, the assumption of an unknowing audience is unsustainable here. To the contrary: the author is conspiring to make the reader only too aware of the act in which she is engaged; the irony lies in revelation, not pretense. Indeed, it is the very revelation of the normal pretense – the suspension of disbelief – that is ironic.

Looking beyond the literary to other artistic manifestations of irony proves equally problematic for the pretense theory: if, as Clark & Gerrig claim, pretense can really explain other forms of irony beyond the verbal, then it should be possible to explain how architecture, such as the Centre Pompidou, or music, as in the ironies of Bach, can be ironic. Yet the pretense theory is at as much of a loss as the echoic theory when confronted by such varied instantiations. To this extent, Haiman's alternative take on the dramaturgical model – with his reference to "the actor on stage who steps out of character and shares asides with a privileged omniscient audience, inviting them to deride the other members of the play" (1998:26) – seems far nearer to capturing the knowingness of irony. However, Haiman's metaphor itself leaves certain issues unresolved, such as the relationship between the actor who steps out of role and the author of the play in which the other actors are still engaged, and that between their respective states of knowledge. In addition, its insistence on a tone of derision is surely heavy-handed if it aims at application to irony in general. Surely the tone of Jane Austen is anything but derisive, and the irony of Calvino's writing is, if anything, celebratory.[18] These concerns aside, perhaps the most urgent problem relates to the sequential nature of the metaphor, with the actor stepping out of character. This assumes, alongside the change in role for the actor, a concomitant transition in the audience from credulity to knowingness, and thus a transition in time. While Haiman's metaphor of theater is thus the most powerful in its application to various forms of irony, the duality and double perspective of irony remain elusive. It is not that the actor is stepping out of role, but that he is somehow playing a role and SIMULTANEOUSLY stepping out of character.

Thus all three theories of echo, pretense, and theater provide valuable insights into the nature of irony – its echoic quality and its apparent orientation to an audience; but these insights are not ultimately adequate to reveal the features that

are common to irony across its forms. Any alternative proposal must profit from their insights while exploring how an analysis of irony might be illuminated by work in other domains.

FRAMING AND FOOTING IN INTERACTION

In earlier work (Clift 1995, 1996) I have suggested that both literary criticism and sociology have furnished observations strikingly reminiscent of those regarding echo and pretense. Bakhtin's concept of "double voicing" in literature, with the associated notions of polyphony and heteroglossia, provides the clearest parallel with Sperber & Wilson's concept of echo. In his observations on heteroglossia in the Russian novel, Bakhtin notes:

> The speech of the narrators [in Dostoevsky, Gogol, Pushkin and others] is always ANOTHER'S SPEECH (as regards the real or potential direct discourse of the author) and in ANOTHER'S LANGUAGE (i.e. insofar as it is a particular variant of the literary language that clashes with the language of the narrator).
>
> Thus we have in this case "nondirect speaking" – not IN language but THROUGH language, through the linguistic medium of another – and consequently through a refraction of authorial intentions. (Bakhtin 1981b:313)

Bakhtin's literary perspective, which predates Sperber & Wilson's account of echo by half a century,[19] finds resonance in Goffman's observation from a sociological perspective:

> In daily life the individual ordinarily speaks for himself, speaks, as it were, in his "own" character. However, when one examines speech, especially the informal variety, this traditional view proves inadequate ... When a speaker employs conventional brackets to warn us that what he is saying is meant to be taken in jest, or as mere repeating of words by someone else, then it is clear that he means to stand in a relation of reduced personal responsibility for what he is saying. He splits himself off from the content of the words by expressing that their speaker is not he himself or not he himself in a serious way. (1974:512)

While neither Bakhtin nor Goffman are specifically concerned with irony, Bakhtin's reference (1981a:44) to the adoption of "another's style ... in intonational quotation marks" in terms of irony and parody,[20] as well as Goffman's distinction between the speaker speaking "for himself" and speaking "in a relation of reduced personal responsibility for what he is saying," are implicit in the echoic account. Irony may, on this view, be seen as one form of what is clearly a more general strategic use of language, depending on the recognition of a "voice" that is the speaker's own – a sincere expression of his belief – as distinct from one that threatens to undermine that belief. That distinction is made by what Goffman elsewhere (1974:53) calls "framing," with certain strategies or "conventional brackets" used to signal the existence of a distancing frame around what is said.[21] Bakhtin in fact points to the clearest manifestation of framing with his reference

to quotation marks; the surrender of authorial responsibility that they mark is a boon to the newspaper headline writer, striving for economy of message:

> Inquiry into "police sex" at Cromwell St
>
> Howard opposed racism law "to protect Rushdie"
>
> Budget "leak" dampens tax-cut hopes (*The Independent*, 25 November 1995, pp.1–2)

The framing of the particular phrases with quotation marks allows the writers to "split [themselves] off from the content of the words," in Goffman's phrase – making clear to their readers that they are not to be held personally responsible for such opinions. In English SPEECH, of course, no such systematic cues exist.[22] For example, the radio reporter, unlike the newspaper journalist, has to find verbal means of ensuring that he is seen as neutral, as purely the bearer of the message he is carrying, not its originator – particularly when that message is deemed to be sensitive:

> (5) Quote, unrecorded (Introduction to story on UN Secretary-General on "Today," BBC Radio 4, 6.8.92; JH is presenter John Humphrys)
> JH   The UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has in an interview with
>   the New York Times said that criticism of him in the British press was –
> →   and I'm here quoting him – "maybe because I'm a wog"

In his pursuit of the theater metaphor to characterize irony and sarcasm, Haiman identifies quotation as one of the "stage separators" (1998:27) that indicate an overlaid metamessage.[23] The quotation above clearly counts as one such instance. However, if we apply Haiman's metaphor of the stage actor stepping out of role to the above example, it only provokes the question identified earlier concerning the relationship of the playwright and the actor in the play. Haiman does not make clear what any analysis of the above quotation should, namely that there are evidently three perspectives to take into account: the UN Secretary General's, the radio presenter's, and that of (or, to be more precise, that attributed to) the British press. On Haiman's model, the radio presenter might be the actor, and the words he quotes might be the play from which he distances himself. Yet the other crucial element, the perspective of the Secretary General – which might, in Haiman's schema, correspond to the playwright – is left out of Haiman's equation.

 However, an alternative is to invoke Goffman's distinction (1979:17) between (a) the "animator" of an utterance (the person articulating the words – here the radio presenter); (b) its author (the composer of those words – here the Secretary General); and (c) its principal (who is committed to the proposition they express – here, purportedly the British press). Then it is possible to capture these distinct perspectives. The possibility of confusion among animator, author, and principal here demands that the portion of the utterance containing the offensive item is selected and explicitly framed as a quotation, so that the presenter is not seen to be subscribing to the view he is reporting. The speaker's adoption of a particular

perspective – of, say, animator, or author – is what Goffman 1979 terms his "footing" vis-à-vis what he is saying.[24] The presenter's strategy in emphasizing his footing as one of neutrality, to maintain an impartial stance in the extract above is recognizable as one of those described by Clayman 1988, 1992 in studying the achievement of neutrality by television news interviewers in interaction with their guests. The presenter, denying a possible attribution of principal and deflecting authorship, disaffiliates himself from the use of the offensive and incendiary *wog*. Clayman demonstrates that, although neutrality may be claimed by speakers by the use of such strategies, it is only maintained collaboratively – and that "correspondingly, the footing through which it is achieved is also a collaborative production" (1992:194). When that collaboration is refused or withdrawn, it disrupts the trajectory of the sequence, threatening the status of the talk as an interview:

(6) Interview (On "The World at One," BBC Radio 4, 17.1.93; debate on the Calcutt report on privacy and the media. KC is the Home Secretary, Kenneth Clarke; B is the interviewer, Nick Clarke, who has just asked him a question)

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1  KC           I think that Calcutt and others who are foa:ming on in the way that you:'re
                f:oaming on– [
2  NC    →                   [I'M only trying to represent the foaming,=
3  KC    →      =W(h)ell in that case you're doing it very adequately.
4  NC    →      Thank you.
5  KC           I think they're . . .
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The emotive assertion that the interviewer is *foaming on* in the same vein as those on whom he should be reporting objectively, and thus by implication aligning himself with them, prompts the interviewer's interruption in 6:2 and a three-turn insertion sequence. This explicitly addresses the issue of footing, and thereby the priority with which the interviewer treats the maintenance of the animator/author/principal distinction; indeed, it emerges as a precondition of the continuation of the interview itself. Such an exchange shows the difficulty of maintaining "the complex journalistic requirement . . . of being interactionally 'adversarial' while remaining officially neutral" (Clayman 1992:196). On a more general level, the efforts to which journalists can go, in order to deny affiliation with what they are saying, serves to reveal the default assumption in talk: that animators are indeed standardly identified with principals, unless efforts are made to inform us to the contrary.

The parallel between the strategies used by journalist and ironist is striking. Both signal a lack of commitment to what they are saying in the very act of saying it. By its nature, the journalist's footing as journalist is sustained, while that of the speaker as ironist is fleeting. In conversation, it is standardly assumed that animator, author, and principal are one and the same, except when sanctioned by activity (as is the journalist or actor); but the ironist, as we shall see, effects a shift of footing from committed participant to detached observer.[25] What makes the ironist different from the journalist or actor, however, is that the distinction between animator, author or principal is one that the ironist only lays claim to, while

in reality he is all three. While the journalist's neutral footing is designed to achieve the verbal equivalent of quotation marks, a speaker's shift of footing into irony achieves that which, it will be argued here, characterizes all irony: framing.

IRONY AS FRAMING

Adopting Goffman's metaphor of framing to the characterization of irony makes it possible to capture the simultaneous presence of two dimensions of meaning: what, for want of more elegant terminology, I shall refer to as "inside" and "outside" meanings, the one framing the other, which lies within it. Traditional accounts – adhering to a one-dimensional model that sees irony as the result of the straightforward reversal of an utterance – ignore the fact that two aspects of meaning must be perceived at the same time to make sense as irony. So it is not that one dimension cancels the other, but that it is necessary to make sense of the other. Ex. 4 makes this particularly clear. We can see that what the emphasis and deliberation on the second *peaceful* achieves is a shift of footing, and this is what renders the statement so reminiscent of a quote; the ironist thereby ostensibly denies authorship of what he is saying (attributing it, presumably, to Communist dogma) and lays claim only to "animator" status. Given that he makes no overt attempt to disaffiliate from what he is saying (as do the journalists in exx. 5–6, for example), he implicitly lays claim to the default assumption that he is sincere. Thus two things are subtly achieved by the footing shift – detectable, as we shall see, often by a combination of WHAT is said and HOW, as well as by expectations regarding the next conversational turn, rather than the speaker's explicitly drawing attention to it. By virtue of the shift, the utterance lays claim to an animator/ author/principal distinction; by virtue of its subtlety, it implicitly suggests that the animator is principal. But in the very process of shifting footing, the ironist frames what is said, thus becoming principal of an outside – framing – meaning.

ECHO, PRETENSE, THEATER, AND FRAMING

Elements of the echoic, pretense and theater models clearly persist in a framing model of irony: all are characterized at some level by a double perspective. Yet the problems raised by these are potentially resolved by appeal to the framing model. Such a model, for example, avoids the theoretical fix in which the echoic model finds itself – namely, that an echo presupposes an origin which, as Wilson & Sperber seem to concede, may not always be easily identifiable:

> The thought being echoed may not have been expressed in an utterance; it may not be attributable to any specific person, but merely to a type of person, or people in general; it may be merely a cultural aspiration or norm. (1992:60)

Of course, as we have seen, the echoic model appears to fit some cases very adequately; but cases that Wilson & Sperber claim are echoes are equally well explained in terms of framing. So, in ex. 3, where Bill's utterance *it's a change* is

an echo of what Anne has just said, it is not just this that makes it ironic, but the shift of footing effected by the intonation – which frames the utterance and thus alters the assumption that change is good. The footing shift thus provides us with an explanation for the apparent sincerity of Anne and the apparent insincerity of Bill.

As with the echoic model, characteristics of the pretense and theater models are preserved by a framing account. The dramatic qualities of irony, so evident in ex. 4, are present even when the ironist clearly implicates himself:

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(7)  Vital moment
     1  Mike         you mentioned going (1) to somewhere listening to people talking about food
                     (at one time), I remember when I hadn't been in France for very long, (.)
                     going from Paris to: (.) Strasbourg (1) and hearing, (1) hh– s– listening to two
                     people b'side me in the train. A::ll the wa:y it must have been about four
                     hou:rs or mo:re (.) talking about foo::d and (smiling; faster) THIs was a
                     culture shock to ME::! (.) and they– (.) every– (.) where we went through, I
                     remember very much (.) the haricot verts de Soissons this was very important
                     [Soissons was=
     2  Julia        [heh
     3  Mike         =one of th– (.) I remember that– (I mean) I often thou:ght I must go back
                  →  to ta:ste them but I don't know what it was [that was- THAT was a=
     4  Steve                                                   [hah
     5  Mike      →  =[↑V::Ital moment of the ↑trip =
     6  Steve          [hm::
     7  Julia        [[hhuhhuhuh
     8  Sarah        [[huhhehhh=
     9  Mike         =then we got on to something else and it was something el(hh)se ...
```

Mike's narrative reconstruction of his experience constitutes that experience as an event. As narrator, he is both a participant in the ongoing talk and a participant in his own narrative; he switches from presenting his perspective – *this was a culture shock to me* – to apparently animating the perspective of his travel companions, first by means of the quote, *the haricots verts de Soissons*, and second by his comment that clearly conveys his interpretation of their interest in the subject: *this was very important*. He thus presents us with a double perspective, which is neatly collapsed in his verdict that *that was a vital moment of the trip*. The frame that detaches Mike from commitment as principal of the inside meaning is an evaluation of that meaning. The irony provides the narrative climax, both characterizing the foregoing narrative as an episode and confirming the speaker's dual perspective on it: as participant in the realms of both inside and outside meaning, with the principal as the subjective "I" who is the ironist-narrator of the event rather than the objective "me" within the frame who is participant in it.[26]

The framing model thus goes some way toward endorsing the dramaturgical character of the models of Clark & Gerrig and of Haiman. To this extent, the ironist – in being author, animator, and principal – is playwright, performer, and character. Bauman's comment, quoted earlier, that "the act of speaking is itself FRAMED as a display" (1993:182; emphasis added) now appears even more pertinent; the framing of an utterance achieves the double perspective that the pres-

ence of an audience provides in the theater. Drama is essentially a framed medium, and in situations of dramatic irony the playwright exploits the animator/author/ principal distinction to produce an evaluation of that which is being animated. As we have seen, it is our knowledge that makes for dramatic irony; in *Macbeth*, that knowledge frames for us Duncan's words, which for him have only inside meaning; the double perspective is that created by the playwright, with the dramatic situation itself constituting the frame. Indeed, the same is true of any irony in dramatic form. Browning's dramatic monologs,[27] for example, are illuminated by appeal to the author/animator/principal distinction, where accounts in terms of echo, pretense, and theater simply confuse. The double perspective brought into existence by framing is ultimately what lies at the heart of all irony, and provides the one characteristic common to all of its forms.[28]

FRAMING BEYOND THE VERBAL

Whatever the shortcomings of the dramaturgical models of irony, their allusion to dramatic form does capture a crucial feature: the sense of an audience, implicit in the notion of irony as performance. This, above all, is what characterizes nonverbal irony, and which, through the notion of framing (unlike the notions of echoic interpretation, pretense, or theater) links it to its verbal realization. In the process of framing, the ironist draws the observer's attention to that which is inside the frame, and to its relation to the frame. Thus the situational irony (and therefore, in this case, newsworthiness) of the "Killer cured, then executed" report lies in the way the events are framed, even down to the title itself: The events are brought together so that one is seen to reflect on the other, with the frame existing in the relation between them. To this extent, hindsight constitutes a powerful frame for situational irony, because many such ironies are evident only in retrospect. The irony is brought into being only by the presence of an observer, who in this case is also the ironist; in creating the frame by arranging objects or events, he creates a metalevel of communication that transforms us all into observers.[29] This characteristic is what makes artistic ironies, where the frame may be present in a very real sense, so particularly potent – the most emblematic, perhaps, being Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* over the painting of a pipe. Architectural ironies, so prevalent a feature of Postmodernism, lack the explicit and visible frame; but the irony exists, like Magritte's, in the juxtaposition of two contradictory elements, one serving to evaluate the other. In Postmodern architecture the inside meaning has taken the form of our established expectations of what buildings "should" look like, and then has undermined these. Thus the Centre Pompidou inverts a traditional architectural conceit by placing on the outside that which is normally hidden, explicitly drawing attention to it; the apparent fragility of the Louvre's glass pyramids makes ironic play on our prototypical knowledge of pyramids as solid. The irony of such architecture lies in such self-conscious juxtapositions,[30] and the frame exists in the relation between the two

elements. The fact that buildings, situations, and works of art may be considered ironic is yet more evidence of the need to re-assess existing models, on the one hand, and of the case for framing, on the other.

IDENTIFYING IRONY

Whereas shifts of footing that serve to frame what is being said by the journalist are relatively explicit, those made by the ironist are less so. In identifying such shifts, a striking musical example may serve as a starting point. Auer, discussing a passage from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, shows how a switch of key into the "almost primitively transparent C major" (Bach's regular key for signaling irony)

> attributes to the High Priests [the singers] candid sincerity and childlike straight-forwardness ... there is a clash between the expectations built up so far in the story, according to which the High Priests are sly and malicious, and the particular harmonies underlying their words now, which suggests the opposite. The conclusion of this inferencing can only be that the High Priests' words are to be understood as ironic, i.e. that they mean something different from what is said. (1992:3)

The shift of key serves, in effect, to shift the footing. The crucial reference here is to the "expectations built up so far"; in the realm of visual ironies, of course, those expectations take the form of one element (a picture of a pipe, the shape of a pyramid) which is then undermined by another (the text, the building material). Self-contained verbal ironies – "one-liners" that can stand alone, independent of interactional context – work in much the same way, evoking well-known phrases while simultaneously up-ending our expectations of them. Thus Dorothy Parker's reputed comment on Katherine Hepburn, *She ran the whole gamut of emotions from A to B*, works as irony because it elicits the response associated with another utterance, *She ran the whole gamut of emotions from A to Z*, which it parallels in structure and (in American English pronunciation) sound – and which, given the expansive associations of the words *run* and *gamut*, we might have expected. In the mismatch between this expectation and what is actually said lies the irony. The polarity established is another characteristic of the ironic utterance: and its presence, sometimes manifested as inversion, may be one reason why the traditional view of irony as the product of inversion (and the basis for Grice's assertion that irony is a flout of the Quality maxim) has persisted.

With such self-contained ironies, the shift of footing takes place within the domain of the utterance. As we have noted, studies of verbal irony have hitherto largely confined themselves to such examples. But when conversational irony is considered, the inappropriateness of analysis in terms of utterances lifted from any conversational context becomes clear. We are then dealing not with constructed or evoked contexts, but with irony emerging out of "expectations built up" across across a sequence.[31] The form that these expectations can take is highlighted by a misunderstanding:

(8) Selfridges

1	Sarah		. . . some of the <u>I</u>talian restaurants. (.) like the <u>one</u> near the <u>dent</u>ist.
2	Jane		yeah.
3			(1)
4	Sarah		you can have a <u>good big tasty plateful there</u> (.) at lunchtime, (.) I'm <u>n</u>ot sure they're still <u>operating</u>, (.) when I <u>p</u>assed the <u>o</u>ther day.
5	Bob		m.
6	Sarah		there ↑<u>is</u> so<u>mething</u> there but I <u>don</u>'t know whether it's the <u>same place</u>, [(or if it's-)
7	Bob	→	[<u>that</u>'s the one you <u>t</u>ook me to (1) near <u>Selfridges</u> °isn't it,°
8			(3)
9	Jane		m[m–
10	Bob		[well we had <u>actually</u> to walk <u>a:</u>ll the way down the street and back because <u>y</u>ou got it <u>wrong</u> (---) (.) [you–
11	Jane		[oh <u>that</u>'s right.

Many commentators have in fact attempted to single out markers of irony like the vocal equivalent of Bach's key shift: conventionalized, invariant and generalizable to all cases. Thus Cutler 1974, Muecke 1978, Roy 1978, and Brown & Levinson (1987:222) all suggest nasality; Haiman (1998:22) lists " 'spitting it out with a sneer,' nasalization, exaggerated duration, deadpan monotone, sing-song, caricatured courtesy, formality, and sympathy . . ." However, if self-contained and constructed ironies are the object of analysis, it would seem natural to look at how irony is signaled in the articulation of the utterance itself (there being nowhere else, analytically, to look). Certainly the data collected suggest that irony may be – but is not necessarily – accompanied by visual cues, such as smiling; but what the conversational data can show is that the suggested paralinguistic and articulatory cues are not always present. The exchange in ex. 8 shows none of the paralinguistic or articulatory features traditionally suggested as ironic cues. The irony relies on the mutual knowledge that the restaurant was in fact nowhere *near Selfridges*. Rather than in any exaggeration of delivery, the irony is discerned in the structure of the turn: The one-second pause preceding the ironic description *near Selfridges* (thus locating it firmly in relation to somewhere else, rather than, say, "lower Wigmore Street") suggests a certain deliberation and precision, and the confirmation-seeking *isn't it* is designed to secure a response, effectively framing and marking off the irony. The turn itself also interrupts the prior turn (8:6), which is concerned with establishing whether it is the same restaurant as the one visited, rather than specifying where it is (Jane has already agreed, in 8:2, that it is *near the dentist*). The interruptive reversion to identifying the restaurant's location marks a shift in the focus of the talk, with the lack of response to the query implicit in the prior turn.

What this misunderstanding makes particularly clear is how the irony – marked itself by a shift of footing – serves to shift the activity at hand: an attempt to identify a place, in this case, switches into what is effectively a tease. Similar shifts are visible in the other examples, which serve to raise the question, inextricably linked to sequencing considerations, of what it is that irony is doing.

IRONY AS EVALUATION

Perhaps the simplest observation relating to what irony does in the cases here concerns its outcomes: The response of the addressee to recognized irony is routinely laughter (as in ex. 3) and/or a continuation of the irony (as in ex. 4); both serve to accept the footing shift. But it is also evident that both types of response constitute not only an acceptance of the changed footing, but simultaneously perform an agreement with that which is asserted from the new footing. Such agreements are responses to an implicit evaluation that the irony delivers.

Evaluation, as can be seen, is implicit in the framing that characterizes irony. The framing serves metaphorically to invite the observer/audience to share the ironist's perspective. Recognizing this implicit invitation depends both on the design of the turn and on its sequential placement. To take a particularly clear example of evaluation, we turn again to Mike's summary conclusion to his narrative in ex. 7, *that was a vital moment of the trip*. The irony here, in common with so many, is recognizable because it relies on common understandings and assumptions and on accepted standards of behavior to which the speaker makes appeal. Thus, it is clearly absurd, by what we recognize as normal standards, to characterize arriving in a place famed for its *haricots verts* as *a vital moment of the trip*. Evaluations thus make reference to such norms and standards, which the ironic utterance throws into focus by invoking them – and, often, by apparently contravening them (i.e. on the level of the inside meaning). So it is only by reference to the generally held norm – say that rain is bad and sunshine is good – that *it's a beautiful day* is ironic in a context where it is evident that it is pouring with rain. Such ironies are marked by their extremity, and indeed they often make use of extreme case formulations (Pomerantz 1986) to emphasize the impossibility of what is being asserted. Thus the irony of *the only family in Penn without a video* – and, from a longer sequence, the following:

```
(9) Meringues (S is talking about trying to buy meringues at the local supermarket)
    1   Sarah        . . . when I went in last ti:me I said to the: lad on the– the lad (.) who said no:,
                     and I said could you ring the manager plea:se. (.) and say have you got any
                     meri:ngues and he ↑ra:ng the manager and said a customer wants to know
                     if we've got any meri:ngues. (.) or SHE: wants to know if we've got any
                     meri:ngues and the answer was (.) ↑NO::. (.) mhuh
    2                (.)
    3   Gus          oh they do::. Hm.
    4   Sarah        NOT like, you know could you ↑say to the customer .hhh I'm sorry we
                     haven't got any but we're g(h)etting them s(hh)oo(hh)[::n
    5   Jane                                                              [hahaha
    6                (2)
    7   Gus    →     (we have) th(haha)at's right th(haha)at's right . and DON't come round
                →    A:Sking for them [(.)EVer again.
    8   Jane                          [mhuhuhuh
    9   Sarah        hehe it's a bit li:ke that actually,
```

Extreme case formulations such as *don't come round asking for them EVer again* are often components of what Torode, in his discussion of humor, has called

"impossible descriptions," whereby an extraordinary reality is momentarily acknowledged and shared (1996:1). These extraordinary realities may be mediated through other personas such as *the boys* in ex. 1 lobbying for a video, or *the manager* in ex. 8; but they may equally be a fantastical version of the speaker, as in ex. 2, where the speaker, the "I," projects a different "me," removed in space and time, with different interactants – or a different version of the same interactants. The following exchange shows the speaker presenting a different version of himself, but the distinction between the extraordinary realities of irony and humor is evident:

(10) Turning professional (B, aged 93, has been talking about playing tennis with his granddaughter S and son-in-law M)

1	Bill		. . . keeps you <u>fit</u> though I sup<u>pose</u>.
2			(2)
3	Mike		that's tr<u>ue</u> I sup<u>pose</u>, mhm.
4			(9)
5	Bill	→	however I sha:n't (.) turn pro<u>fess</u>ional <u>now</u>, I don't <u>think</u> I shall,
6	Susan	→	no?
7	Bill	→	no not rea:lly. (.) though I've got the <u>forms</u> to sign, but
8		→	I don't <u>think</u> I shall go?
9	Susan	→	you'll just ad<u>vi:se</u> people,
10	Bill		just ad<u>vi:se</u>– in the– in the wrong di<u>rection</u>. Hehe[he
11	Susan		[huhuhuh

Both irony and humor present us with a double perspective that invokes two incongruous worlds: the possibility of could or should be, glimpsed in the face of what is. Both set up expectations that they subsequently overturn. Bill's comment that he will *advise* people *in the wrong direction* marks a shift from the preceding irony into straightforward non-serious talk. The humor here emerges from the inversion of the standard assumptions that advice is beneficial; the state of affairs invoked – misleading advice – is self-contradictory, literally an impossible description. To be ironic, Bill would have had to have said something like *advise in the right direction*, which is internally consistent in belonging to the wider realm of the impossible world evoked. As it is, *advise in the wrong direction* stands outside the boundaries of the imaginary world and is in fact nearer the truth of the situation; it is not an assertion from which the speaker can in actuality claim detachment. In contrast, the claimed distinction between animator, author, and principal is always present in irony, because the impossibility of the world invoked calls the sincerity of the speaker into question.

Sometimes the extraordinary realities are such purely by dint of the fact that they question what is only too obvious. It is patently the case that a student of French will speak French in France, and that one cannot wear twenty-four pullovers at once:

(11) French (S is a student of French who is about to visit France)

1	John	→	you'll be speaking <u>French</u> in <u>France</u> probably,
2	Sue	→	↑<u>Oh</u> No:::
3	John	→	*(smiling)* I <u>fig</u>ured that ou:t on my o:wn.

(12) Pullovers (from Svartvik & Quirk 1980:312; (J and K are married)

1	Jim		there's twenty-four warm pullovers to be knitted before January for a
2			starter
3			(2)
4	Ben	→	you can't wear them all at once
5	Kath		oh no no for different people

In seeking reassurance regarding something ludicrously obvious, the ironist invokes an alternative world where these certainties are not so certain. The alternative world proposed by irony is thus characterized by the expression of doubt where there should be certainty (exx. 11–12), or the expression of certainty where there should be doubt (ex. 1).[32] These framed, impossible worlds, within the realm of the inside meaning, illustrate the dramatic qualities of irony; they reveal what Goffman (1979:25) calls "our general capacity to embed the fleeting enactment of one role in the more extended performance of another." These juxtapositions of the extraordinary and the actual are what invests ironic evaluations with their particular power: Dorothy Parker's *A to B* quip is so devastating because it invokes expectations based on the *A to Z* ideal, thus making the gulf between the ideal and the actual apparent without being explicitly stated.

The footing shifts that make ironic evaluations possible are thus identifiable, certainly in part from the content of the evaluations themselves, which usually tends toward the extreme. Yet it is only in its sequential context that this extremity can be seen as ironic: thus the apparent vehemence of *and don't come round asking for them ever again* marks an abrupt disjunction of the particular sequence in which it is embedded, on articulatory, grammatical, and sequential grounds – first by emphatic stresses and comparatively louder volume, second by the use of *come*, and finally by the deflection from the polite proposal of Sarah's prior turn (on which, with *and*, it is built) into the exaggerated rudeness and improbable hostility of Gus's turn.

Sequential disjunction, in which what is projected by a prior turn is apparently subverted, is thus a major feature of irony. That this subversion is only apparent is due to the distinction between an interactional "slot" and the activity accomplished by it; as Sacks observes:

Certain activities not only have regular places in some sequence where they do get done but may, if their means of being done is not found there, be said . . . to not have occurred, to be absent . . . For example, the absence of a greeting may be noticed . . . Observations such as these lead to a distinction between a "slot" and the "items" which fill it, and to proposing that certain activities are accomplished by a combination of some item and some slot. (1972:341)

In the examples collected, we can see that the ironic turns occur routinely in positions where evaluation is expectable. One such prime site is story completion, after which there is a defined slot for the recipient's appreciation:

One reason for the story recipient's slot upon story completion being a structural place is … that in it recipients must display appreciation of story completion. Another is that, not being afforded over the course of a story occasion for displaying their understanding of the story, there is an issue, upon story completion, of story recipients displaying their understanding of the story, and there is a range of ways of doing so. (Schegloff 1984:44)

Thus both story-teller and recipient must ensure a display of understanding by recipient. We can see in ex. 9 how this display is sought by the storyteller; Sarah's emphasis in 9:4 of the point of her story – *the lad*'s rudeness – suggests that she takes Gus's initial response in 9:3 as insufficient (delayed, apparently not addressed to what she has said, and lacking the laughter to respond to Sarah's). Her second attempt elicits Jane's laughter, along with Gus's laughter, agreement, and response. Effectively, Gus's *and don't come round asking for them ever again* performs the agreement lacking in his previous turn; this itself elicits an affiliative response from both Jane and Sarah.

The irony in ex. 9 provides an evaluative summary of the preceding talk; it tells us nothing new about the egregious behavior of *the lad* and *the manager*, but serves simply to affirm the stance of the story-teller. In ex. 7, similarly, the storyteller himself uses irony to summarize what he has just said about his trip, by his animating of his traveling companions' view that *this* [the *haricots verts de Soissons*] *was very important*. In both these exchanges, the potentially extraordinary nature of the incident recounted has been established with evaluation implicit in the telling. In the following, the trivializing *little Chinese hats* has told us all we need to know about the speaker's opinion of attempts to make Gerrard Street look Chinese:

```
(13)  Chinese hats
    1   Julia       well isn't– aren't the– (.) signs in Ge– in Gerrard Street– Gerrard Street–
                    two s– two or three streets [(.) they're in Chine:se aren't they
    2   Mike                                     [well (.) there may– (.) I– (.) I haven't s– I
                    haven't seen that but I'm not surprised cos they've (.) found– yes (.) but
                    then they've got telephone (.) [telephone booths with little (.) Chinese=
    3   Julia                                       [t(hehe)elephone b(h)oo:ths
    4   Mike        =h::at[s on I mean=
    5   Julia            [hats on heheh
    6   Mike        =they're huhuh=
    7   Steve       huhuhuh
    8   Mike     →  i(hehe)t's just so so: Chine:se– heheheh
    9   Julia       heheheh
```

The storyteller's irony here, as in ex. 7, constitutes the summary conclusion to the discussion, which has already made the participants' attitudes clear. In both cases, the ironic content may seem sequentially disjunctive, yet the activity accomplished by the slot it occupies is fully expectable as one of the "regular places," in Sacks's words, for such an activity to get done. What is distinctive about ironic evaluations is thus that the item which occupies the evaluative slot would seem

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on the face of it to disrupt the expected sequence, while the slot itself continues it; item and slot, in other words, are in apparent conflict. Sacks emphasizes how such sequencing rules are invoked: "The rules of conversational sequences are the first rules to be used" (1992:418).[33] It is the stark disjunction that contributes to the visibility of the frame and allows for identification of the irony; in those cases where irony is misunderstood, the mismatch between slot and item may not be so apparent, particularly if ironic evaluation is positioned where it is not structurally provided for. In exx. 1–2, furthermore, the ironist's attitude has not been explicitly set out in advance of the irony itself – as it was in exx. 7, 9, and 13, where the extraordinary character of what was being discussed was already established before the ironic contribution. Thus Pete's switch of activity – from reporting what *the boys* want, to ironicizing it – as well as Andrew's shift into an impossible world in ex. 2, are both missed by their interlocutors.

The visibility of the frame, and thus the recognition of irony in such cases may be seen to be not so much dependent on conventionalized paralinguistic cues, but rather on expectations as to what constitutes an appropriate next turn in a conversational sequence: expectations that appear to be subverted by an apparent mismatch between the next slot in a sequence and that which fills it. Thus the common assumption that irony is characterized by linguistic and paralinguistic markers of exaggeration *per se* is misleading; such markers are only used when an ironic turn is explicitly overbuilt. It is, then, this apparent mismatch of item and slot that serves consistently to perform one activity: evaluation.

IRONY IN INTERACTION

Determining exactly what is being evaluated through irony on each occasion is less straightforward than might at first be apparent; existing accounts have tended to assume that the target of any irony will be straightforwardly identifiable.[34] In some cases this is so: Those that neatly fit the theory of irony as echoic interpretation also provide us with a source that becomes the target. Thus Bill's *it's a change* (an explicit echo of Anne) and Gus's *and don't come round asking for them ever again* (a fictional attitude imputed to the shop manager) both find their targets in the source. Yet other cases suggest a less straightforward relation between origin and target. So the target of *she ran the whole gamut of emotions from A to B* is Katherine Hepburn; but *contra* Sperber & Wilson, it has no source in anything the target has said – unless we contrive an explanation by somehow imputing to Hepburn the opinion that she ran the gamut of emotions from A to Z. An utterance such as *peaceful socialist people with deep fraternal bonds between the separate but equal republics* in ex. 4 has origins, as we have seen, in communist propaganda; but the target seems to encompass both communist ideals and the people of the former Yugoslavia. The target of the following exchange, for example, is less clear than may at first be apparent:

(14) Hello (E and J have just been discussing whether or not, as sisters, they have similar tastes.
    Hello is a magazine consisting of tittle-tattle and photographs of the rich and famous)

1	Gus		that's right. (.) and you no doubt share the <u>same</u> passionate <u>fond</u>ness for a <u>great</u> <u>many</u> things.
2			(.)
3	Emma		hehe:::
4	Gus		u:hm (.) [u::h (.) <u>ri:g</u>ht u::h .u::h
5	Emma		[(*smiling*) oh we have <u>so:</u> much in co:<u>mmo</u>::n, hehehe
6	Gus		[uh:m– OH <u>I</u> know <u>ONE</u> thing you're terribly <u>fon</u>d of <u>bo</u>th of you.
7	Jane		[huhuhuh
8			(2)
9	Jane		what's <u>that</u>,
10			(1)
11	Gus	→	u:hm (.) He<u>llo:</u>.
12			(.)
13	Jane	→	huhuhuhu? ye::(huhuhu)s:: . tha(haha)t's right. huhuhuhu?
14	Emma	→	ye::(heheh)s::
15	Gus	→	I (2) (*smiling*) there's– there's a– there's– <u>DO</u> I de<u>tec</u>t [a– <u>DO</u> I de<u>tec</u>t a–=
16	Jane	→	[(it's a family <u>trait</u>).
17	Gus	→	=do I de<u>tec</u>t a <u>CO</u>mmon <u>EL</u>ement=
18	Jane	→	ye(hehe)s
19	Gus	→	=the <u>hi::gh</u><u>bro::</u>w very re<u>fi::n:</u>ed [taste (.) <u>that</u>'s right.
20	Jane		[huhuhuh
21	Emma	→	<u>yep</u>.

The sympathy between the speakers is evident from Jane and Emma's apprecia-
tion (in lines 13–14, 18, 20, 21) of Gus's teasing. Although they seem initially to
be the target – despite Emma's heavily ironic *we have so much in common*, which
reveals her complicity in the teasing – Gus's reference to *highbrow very refined
taste* itself seems slightly sardonic, and so seems to shift the target. Compare, for
example, "sophisticated," which would have adequately poked fun at such low-
brow taste by playing on the common equation of sophistication with something
positive to which most would aspire. In contrast, *highbrow* and *very refined* are
not qualities to which one might necessarily aspire, with their overtones of snob-
bery and elitism. Thus the spin that Gus's utterance puts on the ironic exchange
seems to undermine its function hitherto, as the range of the target broadens to
encompass those who might aspire to such qualities. In doing so, of course, the
addressees are let off the ironic hook; if their taste is by implication lowbrow and
crude, neither are the opposites, *highbrow* and *very refined*, desirable. The target
here is thus neither stable or easily recognizable; and, contrary to the echoic
account, it is not invariably identifiable with a source – if only because, as we
have seen, a source itself is not as easily determined as the echoic account sug-
gests.[35] This is underlined by ironies that are directed against oneself, as in ex. 10,
mentioned earlier. The irony there, with its invoking of an impossible world, is a
kind of linguistic distancing mechanism from the all too obvious reality; it allows
the speaker to be gently self-deprecating, and thereby to show himself in control
of his current circumstances, not a victim of them. Just as the footing shift in news
interviews is prompted by the professional demands of journalistic neutrality, the

footing shift to irony allows for a similar detachment, enabling the speaker to allude to a sensitive and potentially somber subject. This is irony as facilitator, the curious paradox being that it invokes the reality in the very distorting of it. Just as an actor or doctor is sanctioned by role to say (or do) what would not ordinarily be sayable (or doable), the shift of footing into irony allows the ironist effectively to take on the persona of another to say the unsayable. In a recent television documentary, the friend of an AIDS patient who is seriously ill in hospital is shown walking up to him and saying:

(15) Apple sauce (unrecorded)

> you didn't finish your apple sauce (.) after all that trouble (.) I took about four hours to make it

Just as in ex. 10, where Sue's continuation of the irony initiated by Bill in lines 5, 7, and 8 accepts the "impossible world" that Bill proposes, the intimacy between the participants is itself revealed by the irony. The apparent hostility delivered on the level of "inside meaning" is never actual. Such ironies are touching because we know that, if the speaker were less intimate with the addressee, what was said might seem cruel and perverse; it thus draws attention to the intimacy of the relationship. As Irvine, in another context,[36] points out, "In some relationships a speaker needs no lines of retreat at all, for the relationship itself provides one" (1993:129).[37] This intimacy is what makes it possible for Bill to speak as if he has real choices, which he obviously has not; the patient is being treated as a person who is robust and resilient to complaint, when in reality he is weak and dying. In its play on participants' perceived identities, irony bears some resemblance to teasing – which, on Drew's account,

> demonstrates that recipient identities or categories ARE OCCASIONED either in recipients' own talk prior to being teased, or in the teases themselves. From among the indefinite number of identities someone may possess, in the sense of categories to which they may belong, one or some of those identities are being occasioned in and through the teasing sequences. (1987:249)

This account shows that teases can be sufficiently close to reality to be close to the bone (Drew 1987:246), despite being playful and humorous; but the polarizing characteristic of irony means that when irony is sympathetic, as in exx. 10 and 15, it is evident that it is untrue. Through enabling us temporarily to become someone else, irony thus gives us access to subjects that otherwise might be deemed too sensitive; through becoming another, the ironist paradoxically sides with his addressee. Irony is simultaneously assertion and denial: a way of mentioning the unmentionable.

In revealing the sympathy that can underlie irony, examples like the above undermine traditional accounts which assume a uniformly negative tone;[38] Grice, for one, is vehement: "I cannot say something ironically unless what I say is intended to reflect a hostile or derogatory judgement or a feeling such as indig-

nation or contempt" (1978:124). Grice's assertion is supported by Haiman (1998:19);[39] by Sperber & Wilson, who further contend that the ironical attitude is invariably of the rejecting or disapproving kind (1986:239); by Thomas 1986, who claims that irony is characterized by an impolite force conveyed by utterance-level politeness,[40] and by Barbe, who claims that irony indicates criticism "of an action or utterance or general stance of another participant or participants ... or of circumstances beyond control" (1995:10). Yet as we have seen, such assessments are misleading – particularly, as in the previous two examples, when the subject matter is sensitive, and there is sympathy between the participants. Even where an obvious intimacy is missing, it is not necessarily the case that hostility is in evidence. Indeed, Mike's *that was a vital moment of the trip* in ex. 7 shows his wry amusement at the enthusiasm of his fellow passengers; he is not indignant or contemptuous, *pace* Grice. The whole episode is told with obvious relish; Mike delights in his fellow passengers' enjoyment, implicating himself in the experience, while at the same time he steps back from his own part in it to see the absurdity of their enthusiasm – and, potentially, his own. Thus it does not necessarily follow that the frame's dissociation of speaker and assertion entails a wholly negative response to what lies within it. Thus the evidence of the examples so far suggests that Grice's references to hostility and contempt are overstatements. Levinson seems more moderate in his observation that "ironies seem TYPICALLY used to make criticisms" (1983:161; emphasis added). However, since irony makes a degree of detachment possible, it is unsurprising that it should be used overwhelmingly to make negative evaluations; there is, after all, little need to dissociate oneself from positive judgments.

Thus, far from being uniformly hostile and directed to one clear target, it seems that irony is considerably more flexible in its range and more subtle in its outcomes than hitherto recognized. It is the affiliative qualities of irony that make this possible. Without such affiliation, the hostility of irony becomes evident, especially when the evaluation offered is likely to be one with which the addressee will not agree. This most commonly occurs, of course, when the addressee is the target; in such cases, even understanding the irony – for which one must share enough of the ironist's assumptions in the first place – effectively makes the addressee complicit in the attack. The following exchange shows how the addressee withholds the affiliation routinely displayed by the addressee after sympathetic ironies:

(16) Yes Mommy (Sacks 1992:421)
    Roger: Ken, face it. You're a poor little rich kid.
    Ken: → Yes Mommy. Thank you.
    Roger: Face the music.
    Al: Okay. Now you've got that er outta yer system. Now you're a poor
               little rich kid we've told you that.

It is this difference of tone that distinguishes sarcasm as a particular form of irony:[41] an irony that does not seek to affiliate, and whose negative evaluations

(often directed against the addressee) may thus be perceived as hostile. Indeed, Grice's observations on irony, although failing to capture the subtleties of tone and sympathy of which irony is capable, seem in this light to be considerably more appropriate to the unidimensional negativity of sarcasm.

CONCLUSION

To characterize irony as framed evaluation is to point to how it is achieved, and to what it achieves. The main alternatives to the traditional oppositional model capture important characteristics of irony – the distinctive sense of another voice and its dramaturgical flavor; but none of these accounts is situated within a framework that explains how irony emerges, or what it can be used to do. As we have seen, a characterization of what it is links inextricably to what it does.

Taking Goffman's metaphor of framing as the basis of a new characterization enables us to see how verbal irony is linked to other forms, and to see this framing as achieved by a shift of footing also reveals the links between verbal irony and other forms of talk. It shows how the shift of footing achieves detachment, allowing us to make evaluations which range in tone from hostile to sympathetic. These evaluations are often responses to perceived behavioral transgressions. Such evaluations strongly implicate a certain category of response, namely agreement or disagreement; overwhelmingly in these data, the response has been agreement through laughter or continued irony. In such cases, irony is a facilitator: The affiliation it makes possible allows the ironist to enter potentially sensitive interactional territory. Analysis of conversational irony reveals it to be considerably more subtle in its effects, and greater in its range of attitudes, than has been assumed by previous studies grounded in self-contained ironies or (re)constructed contexts. The unidimensional hostility once thought to be characteristic of irony is, on this account, seen to be more appropriate for a definition of sarcasm – which, although achieved by the same means as irony, actively works to disaffiliate itself from the object.

As well as revealing hitherto unacknowledged subtlety in the use of irony, the analysis of conversational exchanges also shows contrary to previous assumptions, that it is not necessarily systematic paralinguistic cues that mark out conversational irony; rather, irony emerges from the placement of the turn itself. The use of conversational data in such cases shows what examination of self-contained ironies cannot. The irony does not necessarily lodge in the articulation of the utterance itself.

As we have seen, irony routinely occurs in positions where evaluations are expectable; but the apparent evaluations they deliver, on the level of inside meaning, are anything but ironic. In comparison with what precedes them, these evaluations – in being either manifestly all too true, or else absurdly, ludicrously false – invoke extraordinary, impossible worlds. Thus conversational expectations of what constitutes a "next" action are subverted by irony, which emerges from the

peculiar tension between a conversational slot and the items that fill it. In effect, slot and item are at odds.

It is, then, a combination of the construction of an ironic turn and its placement that makes for a discernible shift of footing, and thus the visibility of the frame. In this respect, of course, how we identify irony is but one aspect of the global issue of how we come to identify anything as an instance of anything at all. To this end conversational data provide a useful entrance, giving us a means of exploring what irony is through an account of what it can be used to do.

NOTES

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[1] As this article was going to press, I found one exception: Kotthoff 1998, who considers four fragments of irony in a German conversational context. Kotthoff's focus is less on the conversational uses of irony than on its links with other forms of what she calls "staged intertextuality" (p.1; see fn. 23). Barbe 1995 examines examples of irony in conversation, but her examples are recalled, with the result that articulatory details and the wider interactional context are missing. Roy 1978 elicits ironic utterances under experimental conditions, so that the preceding stretch of talk is available, but the data collected cannot be considered naturally occurring. Haiman (1998:193) uses a questionnaire to elicit sarcasm in a range of play-acted scenarios, but once again the context has been predetermined by the researcher.

[2] I use "conversation" here – rather than the generally adopted conversation-analytic term "talk-in-interaction" (which is generally taken to refer to talk in general) – because my data come from naturally occurring conversational talk.

[3] Hutchby & Drew 1995 examine an IMPLICIT irony in a stretch of talk. Theirs is a subtle and sophisticated analysis of how irony emerges across a conversational sequence out of the juxtaposition of two turns; their study remains the only one, to my knowledge, that examines irony in a sequential context. Their analysis is not concerned with irony *per se*, but is an illustration of "how 'next position' can be treated as a systematic locus in which participants in talk-in-interaction use essentially local interpretive resources to establish and maintain a shared orientation on salient aspects of social reality" (1995:187).

[4] Quintilian (*De institutione oratoria*, VIII, vi, trans. H. E. Butler) claims that the ironist intends to convey "other than what he actually says."

[5] "Speaker" in all cases designates the ironist, "addressee" the recipient. For the sake of argument (and incidentally, in keeping with the majority of the occurrences in the data), I assume a male speaker and female addressee.

[6] All exchanges cited have been tape-recorded, unless stated, and come from my own data. Each has a number and title for ease of reference. Names of participants have been changed. Significant turns are marked by an arrow thus: →. Data from elsewhere are transcribed as at source; my own data are transcribed according to the following conventions:

[	indicates point at which current speaker's talk is overlapped by another's talk	Jo Gus	yeah that's [right [betwee:n

`[[`	distinguishes pairs of overlapped utterances	Mike Steve Julia Sarah	=[↑V::Ital moment of the ↑trip = [hm:: [[hhuhhuhuh [[huhhehhh=
`=`	indicates continuous contribution by one speaker over two lines of transcription	Mike Steve Mike	[that was– THAT was a= [hah =[↑V::Ital moment
	or no gap between one speaker's contribution and another's	NC KC	I'M only trying to represent the foaming,= =W(h)ell in that case you're doing it very adequately.
`–`	indicates a cut-off; i.e., a speaker begins to say something and then restarts	Sarah	well isn't– aren't the– (.) signs in Ge– in Gerrard Street– Gerrard Street–
underlining	indicates stress	Mike	that was–
CAPITAL LETTERS	indicate segments louder than rest of talk	Mike	THAT was
°isn't it,°	indicates quieter or softer articulation relative to surrounding talk	Bob	near Selfridges °isn't it,°
::	indicate prolongation of immediately prior sound	KC	others who are foa:ming on
(2)	indicates lapsed time in seconds	Jane	what's that, (1)
(.)	indicates micropause	Gus	u:hm (.) Hello:.
?	indicates rising intonation	Anne	Is that better?
,	indicates a continuing intonation (most commonly a fall-rise)	Gus	with deep– deep fraternal bonds,
.	indicates a falling intonation	Gus	I was near once but I went to Yugo-slavia instead.
!	indicates animated tone	Mike	THIs was a culture shock to ME::!
↑	indicates segment starting on a relatively high pitch compared to surrounding talk	Mike	↑V::Ital moment of the ↑trip
.hhh	indicates an inbreath; without a dot indicates an outbreath. The length of the row of 'hh's indicates the length of the breath	Sarah	.hhh I'm sorry we haven't got any …
(– – –)	recording unclear. Dashes indicate number of syllables heard, and parenthesized words indicate possible hearings.	Bill	(Yes thank you – –)

[7] Two of these proposals have engaged directly with their competitors; see the exchange in *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 13:1 (1984), initiated by Jorgensen, Miller & Sperber. Clark & Gerrig's criticisms of their model are followed by Sperber's response.

[8] The distinction between the USE and MENTION of a word may be seen in the distinction between the following occurrences of *Hannah*:

a) There's Hannah.
b) "Hannah" is a palindrome.

In (a), *Hannah* refers to a person; in (b), it refers to a word. In (a), *Hannah* is used; in (b), *Hannah* is mentioned.

[9] The later work acknowledges that the earlier definition is too restrictive: Mentions of an attributed thought or utterance are literal interpretation, while echoic interpretations may be literal or non-literal.

[10] A neat literary example of an exact ironic echo (as opposed to an interpretation of one) occurs in Owen's poem *Dulce et decorum est*, with the epigram at the beginning – *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* – echoed at its end. The result is that what at the beginning is a bold assertion of patriotism is transformed by the end, following the catalog of futility, into a statement utterly hollow.

[11] The title of Haiman's essay – and indeed his subsequent book (1998), subtitled *Sarcasm, alienation and the evolution of language* – identifies sarcasm as his primary concern. As will become clear, particularly in my section on irony in interaction, I identify sarcasm as a specific, non-affiliative form of irony, fully subject to the usual (in my view, mistaken) assertions regarding irony: that it is necessarily hostile and denigratory. Haiman, in contrast, sees the distinction between irony and sarcasm as lying in intention: "To be ironic, a speaker need not be aware that his words are 'false' – it is sufficient that his interlocutors or his audience be aware of this . . . To be sarcastic, on the other hand, is to be aware that your words are false" (1990:188). Again, "Irony, unlike sarcasm, may be both unintentional and unconscious" (1998:20). It is indisputable that irony may be unintentional; but my ultimate proposal of irony as framing makes clear that it is only in the seeing (in the case of situational ironies, with the aid of 20/20 hindsight) that such utterances, situations, etc. are regarded as ironic. (Thus the fact that my lottery numbers come up the week I forget to buy my ticket is ironic only because I make the connection between my favored numbers, the fact that I always otherwise buy a ticket, and the fact that this week is the only lapse.) If irony is by definition grounded in hindsight, an attempt to establish a distinction on the basis of consciousness/intention seems beside the point.

[12] A notable exception are Littman & Mey (1991:131), who focus on situational irony RATHER than verbal irony on the basis of their claim that "an ironic statement is an utterance of a speaker which refers to certain aspects of an ironic situation to make a point." Accordingly, they develop a computational model of irony based on three types of ironic situations, which they call intentional, serendipitous, and competence irony. In privileging situational over verbal irony, their account does not address the nature of the links between the two.

[13] "This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air / Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself / Unto our gentle senses" (*Macbeth*, I.vi.1).

[14] The fact that Sperber & Wilson's account of echoic interpretation is a reworking of their original proposal of irony as echoic mention, which they concede was over-restrictive, in itself seems to indicate a distancing from the problems involved with the notion of echo. As it is, "INTERPRETATION of an ATTRIBUTED thought or utterance" (emphasis added) seems to be edging away from any appeal to what we normally believe to be echo. In this model, there is potentially no limit to what one might attribute to a speaker.

[15] "I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled, and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee, or a ragout" (Swift, *A modest proposal*, 1729).

[16] Haiman acknowledges that "situations may be ironic" (1998:20), but he does not elaborate further on how his stage metaphor may be applied to such situations.

[17] Sperber points out that this renders irony indistinguishable from parody. Since my concern here is conversational irony, it has not been my aim to focus in depth on the distinctions of irony vs. parody, or of irony vs. sarcasm. However, given that the difference between irony and sarcasm will become clear in the later stages of my analysis, I offer some brief comments on irony and parody here. In the same way that sarcasm will emerge as a particular form of irony, albeit restricted by tone, parody is also a form of irony, but restricted in this case by form. It is irony grounded in stylistic imitation of another/others; mimicked exaggeration (often, but not exclusively humorous) is largely its point (a particularly clear example of this is ex. 4). But whereas sarcasm is characterized by hostility, parody may be celebratory; as Dwight Macdonald writes in the introduction to his masterly anthology of (written) parodies, "Most parodies are written out of admiration rather than contempt" ([1960] 1985:13). The pretense theory does not distinguish between irony and parody because it does not stipulate the basis of the pretense; Sperber is therefore reasonable in his observation that pretense conflates the two.

[18] *Time* magazine, quoted on the cover of the 1982 Picador edition of *If on a winter's night a traveler* . . ., referred to the novel as "a love letter on the wry but irresistable pleasure of reading."

[19] Bakhtin's account of Pushkin's characterization of Lensky's style in *Eugene Onegin* is a striking adumbration of Sperber & Wilson's account. Lodge (1988:125) judges that Bakhtin was writing in 1940:

> This novelistic image of another's style ... must be taken in INTONATIONAL QUOTATION MARKS within the system of direct authorial speech ... that is, taken as if the image were parodic and ironic ... Lensky's represented poetic style is very distant from the direct word of the author as we have postulated it: Lensky's language functions merely as an OBJECT of representation (almost as a material thing); the author himself is almost completely outside Lensky's language (it is only his parodic and ironic accents that penetrate this "language of another" (Bakhtin 1981a:44).

Note that Bakhtin collapses the distinction between irony and parody here, although his comments are consistent with my proposed distinction between irony and parody in fn. 17.

[20] "Double-voiced discourse is always internally dialogized. Examples of this would be comic, ironic, or parodic discourse, the refracting discourse of a narrator, refracting discourse in the language of a character and finally the discourse of a whole incorporated sense. All these discourses are double-voiced and internally dialogized" (Bakhtin 1981b:324).

[21] Haiman (1998:8) refers to Goffman's notion of frame in its capacity as "'a code or set of principles for the interpretation of any ongoing activity' (Goffman 1974:10–11)." Haiman also discusses shifters (indexicals) as an example of linguistic frames in the broader context of his main thesis on the autonomy of language, and furthermore "the insincerity and inconsequentiality of language" (op. cit., 7). What he does not do, however, is put framing at the center of a theory of irony, which is the concern of my proposal.

[22] Lyons (1982:110–11) notes that such distancing may be achieved grammatically in French by the quotative conditional ("conditionnel de citation"): *Le premier ministre est malade* 'The prime minister is ill'; *Le premier ministre serait malade* 'We understand the prime minister to be ill'.

[23] The distinction between Haiman's proposal of the stage metaphor to characterize irony and my eventual one of framing is mirrored in Haiman's selection of terminology: "I propose to call devices which demarcate art from life STAGE SEPARATORS (what Goffman 1974 calls FRAMING CUES)" (1998:27). Kotthoff's reference to irony (1998:1) as one form of "staged intertextuality," the prototype of which she regards as quotation, might be seen as an implicit endorsement of Haiman (although without an explicit mention).

[24] Bakhtin, talking of heteroglossia in the novel, once again adumbrates a contemporary formulation of the same phenomenon: "A comic playing with languages, a story 'not from the author' (but from a narrator, posited author or character), character speech, character zones and lastly various introductory or framing genres are the basic forms for incorporating and organizing heteroglossia in the novel. All these forms permit languages to be used in ways that are indirect, conditional, distanced" (1981b:323).

[25] The move to what Goffman calls a situation of "reduced personal responsibility," marked in news interviews by shifts of footing, has been been investigated in a variety of speech situations. Thus Isaacs & Clark 1990 discuss what they call "ostensible invitations" by reference to a range of felicity conditions to be fulfilled; these are identified as one of a class of ostensible speech acts, and are related to other types of non-serious language use. Labov 1972 and Kochman 1983 focus on the distinction between real and ritual insults in Black verbal dueling; Labov sees the refuge from responsibility as lying in ritual: "Rituals are sanctuaries; in ritual we are freed from personal responsibility for the acts we are engaged in" (1972:168). Rituals, in other words, constitute "frames" which separate the speaker from commitment to his utterance.

[26] The "me" that Mike refers to within the frame is what Urban (1989:27) calls "dequotative I."

[27] The duke in "My last duchess," for example, cannot be said to be "echoing" anyone, unless Wilson and Sperber would claim that it is the author who is doing the echoing.

[28] Kierkegaard captures this sense of simultaneity in his assertion that "the ironic figure of speech is like a riddle and its solution possessed simultaneously" ([1841] (1965:265).

[29] This of course is the basis of my argument against Haiman's distinction between irony and sarcasm on the grounds of intentionality; see fn. 11.

[30] Indeed, Charles Jencks's comments on Postmodernism in general capture the double perspective that renders so much of it ironic: "in several important instances [Postmodern architecture] is ... doubly coded in the sense that it seeks to speak on two levels at once: to a concerned minority of

architects, an elite who recognize the subtle distinctions of a fast-changing language, and the inhabitants, users, or passers-by, who want only to understand and enjoy it" (quoted in Watkin 1986:573). This of course bears a striking resemblance to Clark & Gerrig's comments on irony, and yet the irony of such architecture lies – like Calvino's address to the reader – in its knowingness rather than its pretense.

[31] Indeed, Hutchby & Drew's analysis of an implicit irony (1995) reveals how the turn-taking system itself provides a resource for irony (see fn. 3).

[32] Grice's account of irony as a flout of the Quality maxim can, in this light, be seen as inadequate to cover such cases.

[33] With self-contained ironies, of course, the same applies, although expectations are set up and undermined within the domain of a single utterance.

[34] In their early work on irony, when they claim it is a form of echoic mention, Sperber & Wilson propose that "an ironical remark will have as natural target the originators, real or imagined, of the utterances and opinions being echoed" (1981:314). They further predict that when there is no specific originator for the utterance or opinion echoed, there will be no victim. Their subsequent reassessment of irony as echoic interpretation (Wilson & Sperber 1992) does not explicitly address the issue of the target, suggesting that the link between irony and target is not as straightforward as that implied by the mention theory.

[35] Both Hymes 1987 and Brown 1995 generally endorse Sperber & Wilson's model, though it should be stressed that they refer only to the account of echoic mention, rather than that of echoic interpretation; however, they show that the echoic account is problematic in this respect. Hymes (1987:317), applying the echoic model to Clackamas Chinook, shows how a particular routine fails to fit the claim that the originator of something quoted/mentioned is its target; Brown (1995:161), applying the same model to Tzeltal, shows that the target is not necessarily clear.

[36] Irvine's observations are made with reference to verbal abuse among the Wolof.

[37] Brown & Levinson's model of politeness classifies irony as an off-record strategy (1987:69); this allows the speaker to assert sincerely that the off-record interpretation is the one intended, if the literal one causes offense. It thus detracts from the seriousness of the face threat without detracting from the seriousness of the subject.

[38] This again is possibly a function of the type of data used for many analyses, namely self-contained ironies. It is not implausible that the self-contained ironies examined are chosen for being memorable and witty, and therefore are more likely to be savage and wounding.

[39] Haiman states that "the humor in sarcasm (as in irony) lies in the contrast between the speaker's flattering or sympathetic words . . . and his or her hostile intentions" (1998:21). Yet ex. 15 shows irony working in exactly the opposite way to what Haiman claims; the inside meaning is an expression of hostility, and the outside is one of obvious sympathy.

[40] The misleading contention that irony is invariably hostile and disapproving seems widespread and may stem from an identification of distance with hostility. The fact that the speaker often implicates himself in the irony is an observation only made possible by looking at the ironic utterance in its conversational context; without hearing the stretch of talk preceding *that was a vital moment of the trip*, and without knowing the speaker/addressee relationship within which *after all that trouble – I took about four hours to make it* is said, we have no way of knowing the degree of hostility involved.

[41] Sarcasm and irony are often used interchangeably (cf. Muecke 1970, Sperber & Wilson 1981, Clark & Gerrig 1984). Haiman distinguishes irony from sarcasm on the basis of intentionality (see fn. 11).

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