IRONY AS A COMPLEX ATTITUDE

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Abstract – Verbal irony is a complex mode of communication which has attracted the attention of scholars from several different fields. Scientific and literary analyses have contributed to shedding light on specific aspects of irony and have provided cumulating evidence of its protean nature and cognitive complexity. Attempts to pin down the nature of verbal irony in terms of antiphrasis have proven to be reductive. Indeed, a growing body of literature has pointed out that what is at stake in irony is not simply saying the opposite of what is meant but rather communicating an attitude. This insight, however, needs to be refined. In this paper irony is argued to be the emergent interpretation of a cluster of attitudes that may surface in different forms and modulate different interpretations of irony, ranging from gentle and jocular to more sarcastic and biting.

Keywords irony; attitude; echo; expectations; feelings.

1. Introduction

Verbal irony is a complex mode of communication which has attracted the attention of scholars from several different fields. Rhetoric has long unveiled the mechanisms of irony, mostly understood as antiphrasis, a trope used for communicating the contrary of what is literally said; literary critics have described examples of ironic texts from world literatures (Booth 1974; Jankélévic 1964; Muecke 1969, 1970, among many others) and political discourse (Hutcheon 1994); psycholinguists have proven the complexity of irony interpretation and computation experimentally (Gibbs, Colston 2012); neurolinguists have investigated irony as a crucial source of information about some pathologies such as autism and schizophrenia (Mo *et al*. 2008; Wang *et al*. 2006, see further references in Bromberek-Dyzman 2012).

Still, we agree with Gibbs and Colston (2012) that irony has several characteristics that make it an important topic of linguistic research in its own right as a phenomenon of ordinary language whose nature has, admittedly, not yet been fully explained (Bromberek-Dyzman 2012; Garmendia 2018 among others). In fact, the considerable number of contributions recently published on irony testifies to its cognitive and pragmatic complexity. Many publications have investigated its nature as a mechanism basically hinging on the literal/nonliteral meaning and therefore crucial to both the discussion on how irony is processed in verbal interactions and to the academic debate on the boundaries between the domains of semantics and pragmatics.

Two-stage theories of the understanding of verbal irony rely on prior recognition of literal meaning. They assume that it is only by rejecting the literal meaning that the contextually based search for the meaning truly intended can start. The Gricean framework (Grice 1989) and the Graded Salience Hypothesis (Giora 1995, 1997, 1999, 2003) are the two most oustanding models advocating the primacy of literal and, respectively, salient meanings in irony interpretation. A number of experimental studies support this view demonstrating that irony comprehension is more time-consuming than literal language comprehension (Dews, Winner 1999; Giora 2003; Giora *et al.* 1998; Giora, Fein 1999).

However, as Wilson and Sperber (2000, p. 250) have pointed out summarising a long debate, "[t]he notion of literal meaning, which plays such a central role in most theories of language use, is unclear in many respects". Therefore, other explanations of the mechanisms of verbal irony production and understanding have been sought by Relevance Theory, following different paths and moving from the basic assumption that literal meaning has no privileged status in the production and comprehension of irony – as well as in metaphor and other figures of speech. Wilson and Sperber claim that context-dependent interpretation is a one-stage process, and no special mechanism needs be postulated for the understanding of non-literal utterances. This hypothesis has been supported by a number of empirical studies proving that irony comprehension does not take more time than the comprehension of literal meanings (Colston 2002; Colston, O'Brien 2000; Gibbs 1986; Ivanko, Pexman 2003).

Bromberek-Dyzman (2012, p. 86) rightly concludes that these conflicting results "legitimize questions about the nature of irony and the essence of ironicity". If literal/non-literal is not the dimension in which to look for its essence, then a host of questions must be reassessed, starting from the basic ones: What meanings are actually communicated by ironic utterances? Which processes are responsible for the understanding and sometimes for the misinterpretation of an ironic utterance? What are the linguistic cues that point to an ironic reading of an utterance? What is the role of context and background knowledge in this process? Each of these questions has actually received individual answers which represent significant contributions to a deeper understanding of a phenomenon that has too quickly been dismissed as merely consisting in "meaning the opposite of what is said". However, in order to turn them into an explanatory theory, we still need to dig deep into the nature of irony, and find principled accounts and cognitively plausible procedures for deriving ironic meanings.

The reason why I personally see irony, in its multifarious aspects, as a phenomenon worth pragmatic investigation is that it brings to the fore the complexities and the fine-grained procedures of meaning production and interpretation in context. This calls for a view of language which in my opinion would be best represented by a cognitive pragmatic theory based on a dynamic system view of language as suggested by Gibbs and Colston (2012) (cf. also Bertuccelli 2003). My contribution to the understanding of irony will concentrate on the role of attitudes as recommended by Bromberek-Dyzman (2012), and along the lines suggested by Sperber and Wilson (1986), Wilson (2006), Wilson and Sperber (2012) and further elaborated on in recent contributions by Yus (2016). More specifically, I will try to substantiate the following hypothesis:

> irony is a complex attitude which may surface in different forms, exhibit different degrees of the speaker's involvement, convey several simultaneous intentions of the speaker, and provoke different emotional responses as a result of the contextual combination of propositional and non-propositional attitudes with variable components of the communicative act.

Many factors may in fact contribute to make an utterance ironical: most of them have already been identified, but irony seems hard to pin down as the linear sum of a closed set of factors. Its very nature seems to be rather protean, bordering on and sometimes overlapping with other categories. The challenge for pragmatic theories is, in my mind, to spell out these factors, disentangle their intricacies and explain their interactions.

This paper is meant to give a contribution in this direction. The paper is structured in two major sections. In the first, I will give an overview of the most significant types of examples of irony discussed in the literature; I will briefly mention the most outstanding linguistic approaches that have been offered to explain them, highlighting how they each offer explanations of individual phenomena that can be gathered under the label of irony; and I will claim that their adequacy is only partial because irony emerges in various forms and

modes out of a complex process where the propositional meaning expressed by the utterance is only one component.

In the second part of the paper I will concentrate on the notion of "attitude" providing further examples that testify to its role in irony interpretation; I will argue that, in order to explain the wide range of shades of irony emerging in contexts, we need to include both propositional and non-propositional attitudes among the parameters for irony description, but we also need to refine and articulate the notion of attitude itself relating it to various dimensions of the communicative act and allowing for dynamic combinations of different types of attitudes in text and discourse.

2. The phenomenology of irony

As Muecke (1970) noticed, "The word "irony" does not now mean what it meant in earlier centuries; it does not mean in one country all it may mean in another, nor in the street what it may mean in the study, nor to one scholar what it may mean to another." (Muecke 1970, p. 7). Indeed, over the centuries various theories of irony have been put forward to identify what counts as "irony". Irony can be conveyed in several manners and may take multiple forms (Dynel 2016): hyperbole, understatement, simile, metaphor, litote, insinuation are only some examples. But irony may not be in the words used, or not entirely. Sometimes it lies only in the non-verbal behaviour which accompanies ironic expressions, and very often non-verbal behaviour is the key to irony detection and comprehension. In the written text, punctuation may convey ironic meanings: the use of the full stop in (b) triggers an ironic interpretation which is absent from (a).

a. Raymond promised to write the article when he had the time;
b. Raymond promised to write the article. When he had the time.

When it is not triggered by verbal means, irony may be triggered by other devices, both orally and in the written text. When words are present, however, words matter. In what follows I will provide a brief overview of the verbal instruments by which irony is communicated.

2.1. Antiphrasis

A widespread account of verbal irony, based on etymology and on a long standing rhetorical tradition, assumes that irony is the same as antiphrasis, i.e. that being ironic is stating the opposite of what we intend to communicate: Quintilian defined irony as the trope by which "contrarium quod dicitur intelligendum est" (*Institutio oratoria* VIII, 6.54) and a host of rhetoricians followed his teaching.

Here are some cases that clearly hinge on the mechanism of saying the opposite of what is meant:

1. On the way to work, the car gets a flat tire and the driver says "That's great!"
2. In the street, some workers are jackhammering while you are trying to get some rest. After a few hours, you finally decide to go out and talk with them. On seeing you, one of them asks – "Does the noise bother you?" – You reply – "Oh, no, I have just come to tell you not to stop it: it's so relaxing!"

In both cases, however, the point of the irony is neither barely communicating what is said – which would be insincere or deceitful, nor conveying the opposite propositional meaning – which would at least be uninformative. The point of the irony lies somewhere else.

In general terms, it is only too clear that if we say one thing and mean another thing, there must be some reasons. Otherwise, why not say it directly? (Dews *et al.* 2009). The problem can be tackled in terms of cognitive economy, rationality and informativity, but of course there may also be social reasons for being ironic (Barbe 1995): why should we engage our interlocutor in a task which is cognitively more demanding than its literal counterpart? What are the cognitive gains of this extra effort? Obviously, part of a plausible answer is that we want to communicate something more than its literal counterpart. The questions then become: What is this "more"? Where does it lie? How do we perceive it? Other questions, however, concern the assumption itself that for each ironic utterance there is one unambiguously identifiable literal counterpart of what is said.

In examples like the following, the "opposite meaning" is not equivalent to the negation of the main predicate alone

> 3.I love people with good manners. (Haverkate 1990, p.92)

Here, what the speaker may be assumed to be actually communicating is not

> 3a. I don't love/I hate people with good manners.

What is communicated is rather

> 3b. I love people with good manners, but you do not belong to that kind of people

or

> 3c. I don't love people with bad manners.

However, if the speaker had actually uttered 3b or 3c, she would not have been ironic: she would have simply been reproaching John. Nor are 3b or 3c the only things communicated by the ironic reading of 3. In order for the ironic interpretation to emerge we need to trigger a complex inferential process that starts with including something like the adversative in 3b and ends with communicating two truths: that of the appropriate negative counterpart and that of the positive statement, plus "something", a "supplement of meaning" (Hutcheon 1994, p. 2) which is where irony really lies. Consider one more example:

> 4. A student who goes to the restroom every day during class asks the teacher if he can go. Her response is "Sure, it is not like we do anything important in this class."

One ironic interpretation of this example is that the teacher is possibly "saying" what she thinks the student may be thinking; consequently, if a notion of "saying the opposite of what is meant" can be applied, then it should be connected with the student's thought. Again, something more than the reverse of what is said is at work in the interpretation of the utterance: "sure" is ironic because it pretends to agree with the thought ascribed to the student, which in turn is ironic because it is the opposite of what is actually going on in the class. A rough wording of what is communicated would presumably be: "We are doing something important in this class, therefore you should stay here and try to learn; but you seem to be thinking that what we are doing is not important, therefore you are asking to go to the restroom. I want you to realize that what you think is wrong; therefore, I pretend to agree

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with your thought, thereby attracting your attention to what we are doing in the class; by doing that, I hope that you may notice the incongruity between your request and the situation, and consequently understand that I regret it (or I am angry at it); I want you to realize that, and to notice further that I am not overtly reproaching you, even though I could/should".

The complexity of the inference highlights that the kind of reasoning involved in grasping irony concerns not only propositions, but also intentions, illocutions, feelings, subjective evaluations, and attributed thoughts.

2.2. Speaking literally

As I said above, antiphrastic irony does not cancel the truth of what is literally said: in being ironic one also literally means what he said. A mother who looks at the messy room of her son and exclaims

> 5. "I do like it when you keep your room tidy!"

does not mean only the opposite of what she says: we perceive her comment as ironic because of the contrast between the tidiness mentioned and the messiness of the room, but we perceive also that something more is being communicated. Still, enriching the proposition to something like "I do like it when you keep your room tidy, but I do not like it when you keep it in a mess like this" (or similar) would not convey the whole meaning communicated. What is further communicated is some attitude that goes beyond the words actually used and beyond their negative counterpart (or integration).

Similarly, if a husband is totally absorbed by a TV programme, his wife may exclaim something like

> 6. "I really appreciate when you give me all your attention!"

which is literally true, but because of the clash with the situation in which the statement is produced, we perceive that there is an attitude in what is communicated that somehow gives to the words uttered a meaning that "goes beyond" what is conventionally attached to them. And "going beyond" does not necessarily entail "saying the opposite". Someone who is melting away under a scorching sun in Tuscany may say

> 7. "Well, here we are, under the Tuscan sun…"

citing the title of a famous book and film which was meant to praise the beauty of the Tuscan landscape and climate. In this case, the ironic interpretation does not require identification of the opposite meaning of the proposition uttered ("We are not under the Tuscan sun"); rather, it consists in evoking (or "echoing" as Relevance theorists claim) the title of the book while at the same time negating part of the encyclopedic information attached to it (We are indeed under the Tuscan sun, but it is not "that" beautiful).

Several other problems point to the inadequacy of a generic "saying the opposite of what you mean" account. Many forms of verbal irony are not declaratives; therefore, it would be difficult to compute the opposite: think of a rhetorical question like: "How could I possibly be angry?" uttered by a speaker who is simply furious, or think of an ironical imperative like "Come on, let's have a nice walk!" uttered by someone who needs to go home under a heavy rain without an umbrella.

2.2.1. Modulating literal meanings

Grice claimed that irony is an implicature, one of the results of violations of the maxim of Quality (Grice 1989). The problems here, as many critics have pointed out, include the fact that other figures of speech, such as similes, hyperbole, metaphor and irony, also appear to violate the same maxim, although in different ways and with different effects. As Grice himself acknowledged, this account is not sufficient by itself to explain the differences between the various figures of speech.

Indeed, these same figures can be used to convey ironic meanings. Irony may be conveyed by similes that exploit the mechanism of oxymoron:

8. As clear as mud/ soft like concrete/ pleasant as a root canal

They say something which is blatantly false, thus triggering a reasoning like: "mud is not clear, therefore if something is said to be as clear as mud, then it is not clear at all". The point, again, is whether what is communicated by the simile is simply that something is not clear at all or is obscure. The answer is clearly that something more is put across – a wish to amuse, to be witty, to be sympathetic, to surprise the interlocutor, among others.
Hyperboles may be used ironically to express similar feelings and attitudes:

9. A: "I do deserve an award for what I have done for them" B: "Yes, they will appoint you Prime Minister"

10. (To his son who has just reported his bad grades in mathematics): "So, my little Einstein, how do you feel about it?"

Moreover, irony can be the outcome of violations of other maxims:

11. "Miss X produced a series of sounds that corresponded closely with the score 'Home Sweet Home'" (Grice 1989, p. 37)

(11) is perceived as ironic but, as claimed by Grice himself, it is a violation of the maxim of manner, and:

12. "It seems to be raining"

said when two people are caught in a downpour may be read as ironic even if we would not like to say that the speaker is being untruthful. Rather, he is saying less than would be appropriate in the context (see Dynel 2013 for a reassessment of irony from a neo-Gricean perspective). Neither 11 nor 12 have to do with "saying the opposite of what is meant" in a propositional sense. Both, however, communicate something more than just what they say (some kind of subjective evaluation of the situation) with the intention of achieving some specific effect (for example, to amuse, criticise or complain), and with the intention of achieving it via the addressee's recognition of that intention and of the attitude(s) behind it.

2.3. Phrasal irony

While most studies consider irony a phenomenon that concerns utterances and propositions, Louw (1993) and Partington (2011) point out that ironic effects may be achieved also at the phrasal level by upsetting the standard collocational patterns of lexical items.

Statistically relevant collocations create expectations that may be consciously

reversed by replacements triggering an ironic reading. The replacements fall into two major types:

> a. an expected negative element of the template is replaced by something positive;
> b. an expected positive element of the template is replaced by something negative.

An example of the former is the use of "an/the outbreak of NP", which generally primes expectations of something unfavourable (wars, hostilities, fightings, despair, violence are the most common associations), with a positively charged NP, like *democracy, candour, love, peace, solidarity* (cit. in Partington 2011, p. 1791):

> 13. Those suspicious of the recent *outbreak of love* between Blair and Brown
> 14. Senior American officials have been playing down the hope that the vote will lead to an *outbreak of peace*
> 15. So, what hope is there for an *outbreak of honesty* among Italian journalists?

An example of the latter is the use of "*make* (occasionally, *do*) a good job of NP" where the expected NP, generally denoting something positive, desirable or favourable, is replaced by a negative concept (cit. in Partington 2011, p.1794):

> 16. It may seem a waste of good ink to take apart Robin Cook's arguments when he has *made such a good job of discrediting himself.* (*Times*, 8 April 2003).

No reverse mechanism can be invoked here except one that concerns expectations (Averbeck 2010).

Similarly, Haverkate (1990) pointed out that in sentences like "Your friend asked me to lend him the nice little sum of $100.000" (Haverkate 1990, p. 82), an overt "contradictio in terminis" is created between the amount of money and its qualification as "nice little sum". It is this linguistic contradiction that triggers the ironic reading of the utterance but the point of the irony is not asserting its opposite ("a big sum"). The point of the irony is communicating an attitude via that contradiction.

2.4. Pretending and echoing

A view which has permeated the psycholinguistic literature on irony is the so-called "pretense theory". Attitudes play a crucial role within this theoretical framework.

The theory is based on the idea that, when speaking ironically, speakers perform a pretended act, simulate, or put "on stage" ideas, thoughts and feelings which are not their true, personal ideas, thoughts and feelings. They do this for the sake of mocking each other and themselves while creating at the same time a feeling of delight and intimacy (Clark, Gerrig 1984). *A Modest Proposal* by Jonathan Swift is claimed to be a long example of the pretense that underlies ironic statements.

A nice example is provided by Gibbs and Colston (2002) of a conversation occurring between two students in an apartment about some visitors who have been invited by another roommate.

> 17. Anne: By the way, were our wonderful guests still here when you came out and ate lunch?
> Dana: I had a sandwich and…
> Anne: Isn't it so nice to have guests here?
> Dana: Totally!
> Anne: I just love it, you know, our housemates. They bring in the most wonderful guests in the world and they can totally relate to us

Dana: Yes, they do
Anne (*Laughs*) Like I would just love to have them here more often (*Laughs*) I so I can cook for them, I can prepare (*Laughs*)
Dana: To make them feel welcome
Anne: Yeah. Isn't it great, Dana? Like today I was feeling all depressed and I came out and I saw the guests and they totally lightened up their mood. I was like the happiest person on earth
Dana: unhuh
Anne: I just welcome them so much, you know, ask them if they want anything to drink or eat (*Laughs*) (Gibbs, Colston 2002, p. 184).

Anne and Dana use different tools to convey their displeasure about the guests staying in their apartments, and about the housemate who invited them: sarcasm, jocularity, rhetorical questions, hyperbole are addressed to the same targets on the basis of mutually shared feelings and beliefs. It is this common ground of beliefs and feelings that allows Anne and Dana to pretend to enjoy their roommate's visitors when this is obviously untrue. Awareness of this shared common ground creates that interpersonal bond of intimacy that enables them to enjoy the subtle play of staged pretense they are engaged in.

The pretense model underlines the fact that the aim of this staged communicative act is to attract attention not so much to the act itself but to the speaker's attitude towards the act. Underlying this hypothesis is the idea that irony is a mode of thought and speech involving layers of meaning that require meta-representational reasoning to be produced and understood. The hypothesis is shared by Relevance theorists who have further elaborated a model that accounts for the kind of meta-representational reasonings involved in irony comprehension in terms of echoes and attitudes.

2.5. Echoes and attitudes

The "echo theory" put forward by Wilson and Sperber (1992), Wilson (2006), Wilson and Sperber (2012) represents an important turn in the study of irony. The Relevance theoretic account argues that irony achieves its effects by echoing a previous statement, or a belief associated with stereotypical situations or norms.

18. Mary (after a boring party): That was fun.
19. I left my bag in the restaurant, and someone kindly walked off with it.
20. Sue (to someone who has done her a disservice): I can't thank you enough (Wilson, Sperber 2012, p. 123).

In each case, the point of the irony is to indicate that a proposition the speaker might otherwise be taken to endorse is ludicrously inadequate (as a whole, or in part – in example 19, it is the word "kindly" that triggers the irony).

Echoing is different from pretense, though. Its nature is made explicit through the theoretical distinction between descriptive and attributive use of language: the former concerns the expression of a thought or a state of affairs, the latter concerns a second order type of content, related to some source other than the speaker's. Echoing is a subtype of attributive use of language, in which the speaker's primary goal is not to convey information about a thought or state of affairs but rather to convey her/his own reaction or attitude to that thought or state of affairs. In Relevance Theory, two factors are therefore necessary in irony comprehension: a) recognition of the utterance as echoing some other utterance, thought, norm or opinion; b) recognition that the speaker's attitude to the echoed component belongs to the range of dissociative attitudes: the speaker rejects a tacitly attributed thought as ludicrously false (or blatantly inadequate in other ways) (Wilson, Sperber 2012, p. 136). What is communicated by irony is therefore neither the proposition literally expressed nor its

opposite, but an attitude towards the proposition and towards those who might have held it.

A distinctive prediction of the echoic theory of irony is that it cannot work unless the audience can attribute to specific people, or to people in general, a thought that the ironical utterance can be taken to echo (Wilson, Sperber 2012, p. 141). The following example highlights the echo presupposed and the communicated attitude and implicatures:

> 21. Peter: It's a lovely day for a picnic
> (*They go for a picnic and it rains*)
> Mary: It's a lovely day for a picnic, indeed. (Sperber, Wilson 1986, pp. 239-240)

Mary obviously wants to communicate her belief that it is not a lovely day for a picnic, as in:

> a. Mary manifestly believes that it is not a lovely day for a picnic,

but she also ironically conveys a set of other weak implicatures like:

> b. It was wrong of Peter to say that it was a lovely day for a picnic
> c. Peter's judgement has been unsound
> d. It was Peter's fault that their day has been ruined
> e. Mary should have never trusted Peter in his weather predictions which in turn express some other kinds of attitudes.

The point I would like to emphasize in this regard is that these weak implicatures are different in quality from (a): the difference with the propositional attitude inference in (a) is that they express feelings (of disappointment, bitterness, regret, and similar) which may refer to different components of the situation (Peter, the day, the rain, the speaker herself, the fact that Peter said so, etc.); they may be derived from the propositional attitude manifestly communicated ("Mary BELIEVES that (b, c, d, e)") and combine with it to trigger the further indirect readings of the statement as blaming, complaining, or accusing. These latter are indeed some of the illocutionary forces expressed by the weak inferences. Haverkate remarked that "Bringing about this type of illocutionary transformation is one of the principal aims of the ironic speaker who avails himself of the strategy of "meaning something different from what he says" (Haverkate 1990, p. 89). Even though irony is not itself an illocutionary act (performative utterances such as "I hereby ironically inform you/ask/request that..." are not pragmatically acceptable (Haverkate 1990, p.79)), the ironic interpretation of an utterance plays on attitudes as components of the illocutionary force.

2.6. Attitudes and illocutions

Let's consider the following example:

> 22. "Well, you are a big help round here".

What is communicated by a wife uttering this sentence when her husband is comfortably sitting on the sofa, watching television and drinking a beer while she rushes here and there trying to tidy up a messy room, with children crying and lots of things to do, is probably not simply the opposite "Well, you are NOT a big help round here", even though it is crystal clear that this is the case and it is part of what is communicated.

She may be communicating her feelings of anger, disappointment, frustration or bitterness that he is not helping, but this is also what she would have communicated had she used the direct utterance "Well, you are NOT a big help round here". So why use the ironical

reverse? Presumably because she also wants to communicate some more affects, including that she wants to be kind, not to disparage, not to argue in front of the children, or something similar, which cannot be conveyed by simply communicating the opposite of what is said. If this is the case, then a way to handle the representation of what she has communicated is to enrich the propositional form with a complex set of attitudes from which the appropriate subset will be inferred from the context.

In other words, the contrast p/–p is only part of the ironic game.

Indeed, if we say p (You are a big help) and communicate –p (You are not a big help), and if p may be explicated like att(p), where att is the set of (positive) mental states and feelings which cluster to conventionally produce the illocutionary force "praise", then by communicating –p we detach the positive attitude from the content, and we transitively turn the illocution into its negative counterpart ("blame").

However, it would be reductive to translate this claim directly in terms of indirect illocutions. What I am claiming is not that irony is an indirect speech act or that by irony we simply and always turn one illocution into its negative counterpart (say, a compliment into a blame or into a complaint). Irony is not an illocution, nor is "being ironic" a performative. What I am instead trying to suggest is that irony is a complex attitude that shares some of its components with illocutions, but its interpretation demands a complex inferential mechanism which operates selectively on the set of attitudes available in the context. Irony can just dissociate an attitude conventionally attached to an expression turning it into its propositional opposite, it can negate a subset of those mental states and feelings that are associated with p keeping some of the positive affective components, or it can decompose/defragment the set of attitudes that enter the composition of a conventionally associated illocution and combine them differently to let another kind of illocution emerge.

The inferential steps in the interpretation process of our utterance may therefore be something like:

> a. She said p and, under normal circumstances, p would be a praise, and the illocutionary force of PRAISING includes a set of attitudes and emotions like gratitude, pleasure, satisfaction etc.
> b. Unfortunately, the circumstances are such that p does not hold; rather, –p is the case: "You are not a big help". This much is part of the shared context. Therefore, the husband can infer the illocutionary intention "she does not mean to praise me; quite to the contrary, she is blaming me, criticising me or complaining about me". However, the reasoning goes:
> c. uttering –p directly would amount to expressing an overt complaint, a blame or a criticism, and that would have been associated with feelings of displeasure, sorrow, and regret, which would certainly have hurt the husband more;
> d. therefore she did not say –p; she said p because she wants her husband to realize that the situation is such that p does not hold (she wants to attract his attention to a clash between her words and the situation, perhaps echoing an utterance that she may have uttered on other occasions where he was actually a big help) but at the same time she does not want to express all the negative feelings and attitudes associated with the illocutionary force of –p. Irony is the mode of communication that enables the simultaneous conveyance of some feelings associated with the positive statement and the inference of some negative ones associated with the reversed illocution.

In different, more Relevance theoretically oriented terms, she is offering ostensive behaviour that what she says is not the case, that she is unable to praise her husband, and leaves to him to infer that he is to blame, that she regrets it, and possibly more (what exactly cannot be stated in absolute terms, since it depends on which factors (feelings, emotions, information) the speaker has in mind and which factors the addressee has in mind (the emotional and cognitive context shared)). The clash perceived in the context between what is said (be it positive or negative) and its informative value, or the informative value of its putative reverse, is only part of the process of irony comprehension. The latter further presupposes a complex attitude out of which either a different illocutionary force or different feelings and

attitudes may emerge.

In this connection, ironic thanking is a case in point. If you do something nice for someone, like holding the door, and they do not acknowledge it, you can say "You are welcome" with an ironic attitude. There is no explicit utterance to which you are replying, but an expectation has been frustrated. You reply to an empty space in the script for the polite performance of an act of "thanking" and, by drawing attention to it, let your interlocutor realize that he has been unkind. Thereby, the act of polite thanking turns into an act of complaint or criticism without all the implicated negative meanings conventionally attached to it.

Another interesting example is provided by Gibbs and Colston (2012, p. 253). An advertisement sponsored by the California Department of Health Services was played in May 1998 on California radio stations. The radio spot is spoken in the voice of a 60- year-old man in a very sincere tone of voice:

> 23. "We the Tobacco Industry would like to take this opportunity to thank you, the young people of America, who continue to smoke our cigarettes despite Surgeon General warnings that smoking causes lung cancer, emphysema, and heart disease. Your ignorance is astounding and should be applauded. Our tobacco products kill 420,000 of you parents and grandparents every year. And yet, you've stuck by us. That kind of blind allegiance is hard to find. In fact, 3,000 of you start smoking everyday because we tobacco folks tell you it's cool. (*starts to get carried away*).
> Remember, you're rebels! Individuals! And besides, you impressionable little kids are makin' us tobacco guys rich!! Heck, we're billionaires!! (*clears throat/ composes himself*).
> In conclusion, we the tobacco conglomerates of America owe a debt of gratitude to all teens for their continued support of our products despite the unfortunate disease and death that they cause. Thank you for your understanding. Thank you for smoking. Yours truly. The Tobacco Industry".

As Gibbs and Colston remark, irony is used here as a powerful rhetorical instrument to attract the listeners' attention and to make teenagers aware of the persuasive techniques employed by the Tobacco Industry to seduce youth to start smoking cigarettes.

The communicative intention is one of deep criticism, disguised by humour, of the underhanded methods of the Tobacco Industry. The whole ad is based on the assumption that there is something positive for which the Tobacco Industry is grateful – the essential condition for the speech act of thanking is that it counts as an expression of appreciation for something that the speaker believes the addressee has done to benefit him. From the point of view of the Tobacco Industry, this is actually the case: young people who keep buying cigarettes do deserve their gratitude because they make them richer and richer. From this point of view, the statements, attitudes and feelings of the beneficiary Tobacco Industry are truthful: they are really happy and grateful for the continued support of their products by young people.

However, this is only one of the two possible points of view from which the speech act of thanking is felicitous. The second is in fact the point of view of the young people: they are thanked for buying cigarettes that the industry sells them, but selling cigarettes is an action that is detrimental to them, something for which the industry should actually apologize. Coulmas (1981) investigated the typological similarity of apologies and expressions of gratitude concluding that the common link between the two was indebtedness. According to Coulmas, expressions of thanks convey a speaker's indebtedness as a recipient of a benefit, whereas apologies express the speaker's indebtedness to his or her interlocutor for having performed an action that is detrimental to the hearer. The point of contrast that triggers the ironic reading of the ad is that they should not be happy and grateful at all because, by persuading them to buy their products, they kill young people. Therefore, they are the most to be blamed.

If a reverse is to be sought for the irony in this ad, it is to be found not in what is said but, in the presupposition, (Searle's essential condition of a speech act of thanking) that what they are doing is beneficial for the addressees – that is to say, in the belief that young people actually deserve gratitude. The whole argument is therefore pragmatically fallacious: it features conclusions that drive us away from what we would expect given the contents of the premises.

2.7. Irony vs sarcasm

Resuming my argument, I would like to conclude this section with a final remark on irony and sarcasm.

Even though irony and sarcasm are often confused and considered to be very similar, irony is not sarcasm. They are said to share a "critical attitude", and the property of being a vehicle of wit, but there are differences. For one thing, a sarcastic comment or remark does not necessarily mean the opposite of what is being said: sarcasm generally means exactly what it says, but the truth of it makes the utterance sound sharp, bitter, cutting, or caustic, thus turning it into an instrument for expressing indignation (Bowes, Katz 2011). Ridicule of a specific victim – a person or an idea – sometimes plays a larger role in sarcasm than in irony (Lee, Natz 2009). In contrast, the ridicule conveyed by irony seems to be gentler; emotional responses to irony and sarcasm also differ (Leggit, Gibbs 2000). In other words, it seems that the attitudes at stake in ironic and sarcastic statements may make the difference.

Wilson and Sperber (2012) see a continuum from sarcasm to other forms of milder irony, whereas Gibbs and Colston (2012) see a category abstraction (cf. also Fein *et al.* 2015 – "sarcastic irony"):

> …the category of irony is not itself a unique figure, but serves as an umbrella term for sarcasm, jocularity, hyperbole, understatement, and rhetorical questions. The significant overlap between these sub-types of irony is really then not surprising (Gibbs, Colston 2012, p. 221).

Whichever solution we prefer to the problem of the multifacetedness of irony, it seems hard to deny that phenomena such as the ones we have analysed above point to the need to investigate more deeply the nature, the role and the dynamics of attitudes in ironic communication. As we have seen above, the ironic reading may be triggered by several language means. Spelling out the explicit markers of irony is not enough, however, to understand the deep mechanisms of irony production and understanding. The real challenge is, in my view, to discover the conceptual components which (combine to) surface as linguistic cues that attract an ironic reading, or make it shift towards sarcasm or, again, combine to produce satire.

3. Attitudes

As the number of examples discussed above prove, the notion of attitude is crucial in defining the nature of irony. "Critical attitude" is the notion most frequently invoked in the literature (Colston 1997; Garmendia 2010, 2011, 2018). The role of attitudes in ironic communication had actually been noticed by Grice himself: in Lecture 3 of his William James Lectures, when discussing a possible counterexample of his brief description of irony in Lecture 2, he came to the conclusion that (in the specific case) irony involves the expression of "a hostile or derogatory judgement or a feeling such as indignation or contempt" (p. 53), even though he made no attempt to integrate these remarks into his framework.

The Relevance theoretic explanation of irony crucially hinges upon the notion of "dissociative attitude":

> The central claim of the echoic account is that what distinguishes verbal irony from other varieties of echoic use is that the attitudes conveyed are drawn from the dissociative range: the speaker rejects a tacitly attributed thought as ludicrously false (or blatantly inadequate in other ways). Dissociative attitudes themselves vary quite widely, falling anywhere on a spectrum from amused tolerance through various shades of resignation or disappointment to contempt, disgust, outrage or scorn. The attitudes prototypical of verbal irony are generally seen as coming from the milder, or more controlled, part of the range. However, there is no cut off point between dissociative attitudes that are prototypically ironical and those that are not. (Wilson, Sperber 2012, p. 13-14)

Attardo (2000) has remarked that the inferred attitudes and feelings that characterize ironic statements need not always belong to a negative area. Cases like the following (24 and 25 from Attardo 2000) are examples of jocular irony that involves positive reversals of the negative implications:

> 24. Sorry to keep bothering you like this. (Spoken by your stock broker on calling for the third time to announce unexpected dividends.)
> 25. These American-made cars that break down after 100,000 miles!
> 26. Looking at a child who is enjoying an ice cream: "Disgusting, isn't it?"

But it is uncontroversial that irony is more often associated with attitudes of varying degrees of negativity rather than positivity.

3.1. The nature of attitudes

It is worth pointing out that, despite the by now large agreement on their role in communication, a unanimously shared definition of "attitudes" is still lacking. Which is a sign, in my opinion, of the complexity of the notion. Fishbein (1966) actually reported more than a hundred definitions. However, throughout the history of research on attitudes, four definitions are more commonly accepted. One definition views attitudes as feelings or evaluative reactions to objects (how positive or negative, favourable or unfavourable someone feels towards an object). A second type of definitions views attitudes as learned dispositions to respond to an object or class of objects in consistently favourable or unfavourable ways. A third class of definitions, popularised by cognitively oriented social psychologists, sees attitudes as enduring organizations of motivational, emotional, perceptual and cognitive processes. According to this view, attitudes consist of three components: a. the cognitive, or knowledge component, b. the affective or emotional component, and c. the behavioural tendency component. Finally, a fourth dimension of research treats attitudes as being multidimensional in nature, involving the strength of each of a number of beliefs a person holds towards various aspects of an object and the evaluation he gives to each belief as it relates to the object.

The four types of definitions reflect gradual shifts of theoretical interest in the study of attitudes. While definitions based on the intrinsic properties of attitudes aimed at finding a place for them among the concepts used by social psychology, it has gradually become evident that attitudes share some features with related notions from which they should distinguished, such as intentions, expectations, opinions, values and personality features (for a cognitive approach to opinions and attitudes as forms of social cognition, see van Dijk 1991, 1995). Cognitive psychologists have further stressed the function of attitudes as ways of entertaining some forms of representation which are "prewired into the very architecture of the mind" (Sperber, Wilson 1986, p. 74).

In the lack of a widely shared definition, Bertuccelli Papi (2000) has proposed a "rich" notion of attitude along the following lines:

> a. Attitudes are mental states and have objects (or referents); they may also be themselves objects of other representations, thus setting a second-order dimension of attitudinal meaning;
> b. Attitudes express subjective evaluations of various components of the communicative situation, ranging from single verbal items to propositions to the context and the addressee;
> c. Attitudes also express relational dispositions: they position people with regard to one another by signalling the status of the information communicated in both cognitive and affective terms;
> d. Attitudes are gradable entities. Attitudinal scales range from an extreme, to which some positive value is attached, to an opposite to which a negative value is attached. Thus favourable vs unfavourable, likely vs unlikely, certainty vs uncertainty, desire vs reluctance, are the extreme values of scales within which multiple internal points can be identified. The points or steps along the scales are not simple notions themselves.
> e. Attitudes are internally structured entities (they may be more or less complex); they are organized systems of dimensions intersecting with one another and having more than one vector so that each scale actually looks like the flattened projection of a multidimensional space;
> f. Attitudes surface in various ways in verbal communication: language, facial expressions, behaviour, tone of voice, gestures;
> g. From a cognitive point of view, (individually or in combination) they set up frames that apply to any kind of information, and control comprehension by activating specific knowledge domains, establishing local coherence, and triggering inferential processes that may lead to different interpretations of one and the same proposition (cf. van Dijk 1995).

These features do not exhaust the complexity of attitudes, but they represent in my mind a synthesis of the major points to be taken into account when trying to spell out their role in accounting for the linguistic phenomenology and discourse dynamics of irony.

A major distinction has been made between "propositional attitudes" (related to our knowledge, beliefs, wishes, intentions, and obligations), and non-propositional attitudes (feelings and emotions). Bromberek-Dyzman (2012, p. 88) calls the latter "affective attitudes and claims that

> This affective, modal, non-propositional communicative content that evidences how we feel about what we say constitutes the backbone of human interpersonal interaction (e.g. Tomasello *et al.* 2005, Tomasello 2008).

4. Irony and attitudes

Yus (2016) has recently focused on attitudes as a central component in the understanding of irony, arguing that it is not only propositional attitudes that are at stake in irony comprehension, but also affective attitudes:

> …for an appropriate account of irony, it is not enough to analyze it in terms of dissociative propositional attitudes and identification of the echo, but the identification of the speaker's feelings and emotions (under the broad label of *affective attitude*) towards the source of the echo is also essential. Indeed, ironical interpretations differ radically depending on what affective attitude is held by the speaker when uttering the irony, and that affective attitude may not only influence the eventual choice of an interpretation, but also the very ascription of irony as utterly offensive, mildly offensive, praising or humorous. (Yus 2016, p. 94)

Prosody, among other non-verbal behaviours such as facial expressions or gestures, may guide the addressee not only towards the intended meaning of an ironic utterance but also to the speaker's affective attitude(s). Consider the examples below (Yus 2016, p.105):

27. (*One day while parking at work your car splashes mud on Mary. You look at Mary and ask her why her clothes are such a mess. She replies….*)
a. Have you noticed that you've just splashed mud on me with your car?
(*not much information about the extent of her attitude and emotions*)
b. (*laughing*) I'm getting ready for a "wet T-shirt" competition.
(*Irony, dissociative attitude, amusement*)
c. (with an angry look and intonation) Thanks a lot for giving me a bath!!!
(*irony, dissociative attitude, anger*)
d. (*with a very angry look and a very marked intonation*) I loooove your driving ability!!!
e. Can you do it again, pleaaaase?
(*irony, dissociative attitude, much more anger*)

On most occasions, Yus argues, "affective attitudes are part of the speaker's intended interpretation and play a role in obtaining eventual relevance and an accurate interpretation from the ironical utterance. They are part of what the speaker expects the interlocutor to recover in order to grasp an appropriate interpretive outcome." (Yus 2016, p.107; cf. Cacioppo *et al.* 2004; Caffi, Janney 1994).

In my opinion, however, the role of attitudes is not to be confined to the identification of shades of irony as Yus suggests. I would like to put forward the more radical view that irony itself is a complex attitude. More precisely, it is my persuasion that irony is the outcome of a cluster of attitudes – propositional and non-propositional – which combine differently on different occasions to produce effects that may range from reversals of lexical and propositional meanings to illocutionary force modifications, cumulating up to the macrolevels of text and discourse to generate more sophisticated and elusive interpretations.

To give further empirical substance to my claim, I will briefly analyze two texts, a "serious" one, which appeared in *BBC News* on July 15, 2015 ("Pluto: What have we learnt so far?" see *Annex)* and a satirical one, which appeared in the famous magazine *The Onion* ("What we've learnt about Pluto*")*. The subject is the same, namely NASA's New Horizons Pluto flyby, an extraordinary historic event, constituting humankind's first close up view of the most remote planet in our solar system. Top scientists at Johns Hopkins and NASA have been working on it for 15 years and the spacecraft was actually launched in 2006. "New Horizons overcame skeptical NASA officials, repeated threats to its funding, laboratory troubles that constricted the amount of plutonium available to power the spacecraft and an unforgiving deadline set by the clockwork of the planets. Though none of the obstacles packed the drama of space-exploration crises like the Apollo 13 mission, their number and magnitude seemed unbelievable" reported the New York Times on July 18. Of course, scientists expected a great deal from the mission; in particular, they expected to gather crucial information about the history of our solar system. Unfortunately, despite the enthusiastic reports of scientific sites, the data that are slowly being streamed back to Earth from the spacecraft do not as of yet provide any specifically revolutionary information about the dwarf planet: hence the irony of *The Onion*.

The *BBC News* article does not actually lack in irony itself: there are cues here and there that the writer looks at the enterprise with some detachment (the informal register question: "What's the weather like?" The phrasal irony of "dizzying 4kbs speed"), but these are easily recognizable as gentle or jocular irony made for the sake of the news layman reader. Still, it is important for us to keep them in mind, since they seem to suggest that the BBC journalist too is trying to approach the feelings of a reader confronted with scanty novelties.

The text in *The Onion* succinctly summarizes the ten putative discoveries made by the space probe, echoing pieces of the other report here and there. But the echoed expressions are not themselves just turned into their opposite: rather, they are modified, manipulated and

distorted in several ways at both the micro- and the macrolevel thus contributing to the emergence of a global dissociative sceptical attitude towards the historic event. (The title itself is an echo: it semantically conveys the same information, but it is pragmatically twisted: apparently, we have certainties here, whereas the BBC title is a question in search of answers, but the reverse is true).

> *"What we've learnt about Pluto"* (*The Onion*, 14 July 2015)
>
> Nearly 10 years after its launch, the New Horizons space probe made flyby 7,750 miles from Pluto, marking the first time in history a spacecraft has examined the dwarf planet up close, and NASA has begun to release data and images transmitted from the approach. Here's what we've learned about Pluto so far:
> a. Has really let itself go since reclassification.
> b. Scant gravitational pull is only enough to hold one's attention for about 40 seconds.
> c. Probably doesn't have any trees.
> d. Will complete next orbit around the Sun well after certain obliteration of all life on Earth.
> e. Has five beautiful moons that it loves equally.
> f. May be capable of sustaining rock-based life.
> g. Is part of the United States.
> h. Will almost assuredly be plundered of all its natural resources within 20 years.
> i. We were way off painting it purple for our third-grade solar system diorama.
> j. Similarly cold, desolate, and uncaring as rest of universe.

Let me concentrate on this text. The first point "Has really let itself go since reclassification" echoes the fact that scientists have discovered that the dwarf planet is a little "bigger than expected, about 80km wider than previous predictions": the idiomatic, informal expression "let itself go" (typically referred in a sexist manner to women gaining weight) suggests an image of someone who does not care about her physical aspect, thus figuratively turning the cold planet into an uncaring individual. Irony does not rest on antiphrasis but on an echoed utterance related to physical fitness, which calls for a personification of the planet, and the incongruity between the register of the idiomatic expression and the register of scientific news.

The second point hinges upon the polysemy of the implicit verb "attract", at one time a scientific concept referred to gravitation, which is normally a strong force and is here downscaled to "scant gravitational pull", and an ordinary verb that collocates with "attention" (to hold one's attention). I would be tempted to say that nothing is echoed here apart from an implicit verb "attract" and that the ironic effect is based on the blend between the two meanings which, summed up with "for about 40 seconds", gives rise to the further inference that the information we are gathering is scarcely important.

The focus of irony in the third point is the adverb "probably". It is patently obvious – and has long been known – that there can be no trees on Pluto (and this is presumably what is echoed). Therefore, the use of the adverb triggers the inference that one of the few certainties we had may turn into just a probability, and consequently that the new acquisitions are either totally irrelevant or uninformative. The clash which triggers the ironic interpretation, therefore, concerns epistemic modality.

The fourth point ironically conveys a sceptical attitude about the relevance of any information we may get from the data, since by the time the planet will have completed its next orbit around the Sun, all life on Earth will have ceased – and consequently none of us will presumably be there to check their validity. The echo can be found in the already known information about "its 248 year orbit of the Sun".

The next point makes irony about the five moons. Again, we already knew that Pluto has five moons, but the irony comes from the fact that he (personification of Pluto) is said to love them all equally, as if they were his children or his wives. This cannot be true literally,

of course, but the image is suggested of Pluto, the "dwarf planet", as either a father or a kind of sultan surrounded by several wives. A sort of situational irony conveys the idea that, again, nothing new has been discovered in this connection and what has been discovered is meaningless or ridiculous. The expression "loving them all equally", generally referred to one's own children, may be identified as the primary source of the echo but again it is a clash of registers that triggers the ironic interpretation conveying a feeling of jocularity that minimizes the importance of the discovery.

The next type of irony hinges again on modality: "maybe capable of sustaining rock-based life". What is echoed is that Pluto is made of rock (and ice) but also that its temperatures "are extremely cold, ranging from -172 to -238 degrees C". We know that these conditions do not normally support life. However, since nothing new has been discovered as to its rocky constituency, we might hypothesize that some form of life may be sustained by those rocks. Not so much the impossibility of the hypothesized life, as rather the possibility of even conceiving of it, seems to be the target of the irony.

The three following statements (g-j) shift the attention from Pluto to the Americans: and here, again in terms of modality, the certainties replace the possibilities. That the new conquest undoubtedly belongs to the United States implicates a premise about American imperialism; that it will plundered of all its natural resources hints at America's lack of environmentalist conscience, and that "we were way off painting it purple" presupposes that, yes, we already knew that it was coloured, but we painted it wrongly when we were schoolchildren. Reference to children brings about a deflationary effect as if he were saying "but the issue of the colour is for schoolchildren". Here, a criticism is levelled towards the attitudes of the Americans via statements which are far from being antiphrastic. Quite to the contrary, they all insinuate truths that, if compared with the jocular, sometimes affective, tone of the previous ones, sound more sarcastic and bitter, and together contribute to a climax that, having started with scepticism, ends up with the final cynical remark, turning the whole text into a sharper satire than expected.

Indeed, the last simile ("Similarly cold, desolate and uncaring as rest of universe") carrying the semantic presupposition that all the universe is cold, desolate and uncaring (presumably, of the great conquests of mankind), emphasizes our perception of the meaninglessness of human enterprises and specifically of whatever information we may now get from Pluto.

Now, we cannot say that *The Onion* literally "echoes" the BBC because, if we look at the dates, the former appeared before the latter. However, we can broaden the Relevance theoretic notion of "echo" to mean "allusion" to something which was in the air and which is referred to in both texts. This possibility is actually acknowledged by Sperber and Wilson (1981):

> Some are immediate echoes, and others delayed; some have their source in actual utterances, others in thoughts and opinions; some have a real source, others an imagined one; some are traceable back to a particular individual, whereas others have a vaguer origin. (Sperber, Wilson 1981, p. 310)

In other words, both texts can be said to "echo" a third-party source, but while the BBC text only drops some ironic remarks suggesting some scepticism in a couple of expressions, *The Onion* ironically dissociates from the attitudes presupposed by allegedly true scientific reports in several ways. I have also remarked that we perceive a contrast between the first part (a-f) and the second part (g-j) which calls for finer distinctions, since their irony turns into sarcasm and cynicism and they all contribute to the making of satire.

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It seems to me that the kinds of attitudes associated with the ironic remarks not only constitute a climax in terms of affects – from jocular to harsh – but also increase in terms of complexity and differ in terms of quality. Statements (a-f) each express an attitude on a proposition p, where p has an echo in shared knowledge about Pluto; statements (g-j) express attitudes on attitudes: towards the Americans and towards their attitudes on the Pluto enterprise. The last one is of a different nature, evoking an overall skeptical attitude towards both Pluto and the Americans, possibly towards humankind, and their meaninglessness in the universe. The resulting satire is a function of all these attitudes.

6. Conclusions

As the examples reported and discussed demonstrate, irony calls for a subtle analysis of its contextual interpretations. I have suggested that this happens in terms of a process of inferential search which aims to discover not only what the speaker is communicating but also why the speaker is communicating it ironically. The suggested answer is that through irony we can communicate much more than could be expressed by the putative non ironic counterpart, namely a whole series of propositional and non-propositional attitudes which combine to produce effects that can only be grasped in context. Thus, while I agree with the Relevance Theory claim that attitudes are crucial in irony interpretation, I have also argued, siding with Yus (2016) and Bromberek Dyzman (2012), that the interpretation process brings to the fore the role of both propositional and non-propositional attitudes. Yus (2016, p. 95) claims that "the object of the affective attitude is the source of the echo towards which a dissociative attitude is held". In my opinion, most of the above examples show that irony communicates also affective attitudes which may have as their objects other components of the communicative situation, and that sometimes the purpose of irony may be the wish not to take direct responsibility for the negative ones but other times it may be inviting inferential ascription as to the positive ones. These effects can be achieved by the ironist either by manipulating the propositional content or the attitudes conventionally attached to it (or both) in such a way as to create further incongruities or contrasts with expectations in the context of utterance (Averbeck 2010; Averbeck, Hample 2008).This calls, in my opinion, for a richer notion of "attitude" as an internally articulated category along the lines proposed above; in Relevance theoretic terms this is to be included in the enriched representation of what is said as a slot to be inferentially filled in the context. My point is that irony, as a complex attitude, magnifies the communicative potential of the utterance, enriching communication with layers of implicit meanings which are not traceable to the linear sum of its single components. Comprehension succeeds when the set of attitudes in the mind of the ironist is grasped by the addressee; misunderstandings happen when the complex of attitudes evoked by the ironist is either partially grasped or not grasped at all. Successful ironies therefore call for addressees who are able to manage multiple dimensions of sense making: flattery is part of the ironic game as much as empathy, sharing and intimacy.

In this sense, the analyses provided above are my answer to Hutcheon's question "Why should anyone want to use this strange mode of discourse where you say something you don't actually mean, and expect people to understand not only what you actually do mean but also your attitude toward it?" (Hutcheon 1994, p. 2).

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Annex

PLUTO: What have we learnt so far? (from BBC NEWS, 15 July 2015)

Now that the New Horizons probe has successfully flown past Pluto and confirmed to Nasa that it is all in one piece, researchers can look forward to a "waterfall" of images and data from the strange, distant world over the next 16 months. But even though just a couple of pictures from the dwarf planet have been released so far, scientists are learning more from these than they have in years of attempted observations by telescope.

What is Pluto's heart made from?

For 60 years scientists have known that there was a bright mass on Pluto, but it was only through the increased resolution provided by the cameras on board New Horizons that detailed its distinctive heart shape.The shape, instantly beloved on social media, is believed to have been caused by an impact at some point in history. One side of the heart is smoother than the other. Researchers believe the crater is filled with frozen gases from the atmosphere - namely nitrogen, methane and carbon dioxide. However a false coloured photo from Pluto released by Nasa indicates that the heart is actually broken in two. The colours show different chemical signatures in the image. On the left it is a type of beige while on the right is a mosaic of blue, these indicate that the two parts had different geologic or tectonic origins.

Is Pluto another red planet?

The initial image released by Nasa had a reddish hue, something that scientists have long known. It's very different from the other red planet, Mars, in that the colour of the more distant, tiny world is likely caused by hydrocarbon molecules called tholins, that are formed when solar ultraviolet light and cosmic rays interact with methane in Pluto's atmosphere and on its surface. "Pluto's reddening process occurs even on the night side where there's no sunlight, and in the depths of winter when the sun remains below the horizon for decades at a time," according to New Horizons co-investigator Michael Summers.

Does Pluto's size matter?

New Horizons has provided more accurate information on the size and scope of Pluto. It's a little bigger than expected, about 80km wider than previous predictions, making it around two thirds the size of our moon. The increased dimensions mean that Pluto is likely to be made of less rock and more ice beneath its surface according to members of the mission team. The reclassification means that Pluto is now officially bigger than Eris, one of hundreds of thousands of mini-planets and comet-like objects circling beyond Neptune in a region called the Kuiper Belt.

Is Pluto geologically active?

The relative lack of impact craters on Pluto suggested by the first image could be an indication that the surface of the dwarf planet is renewing, either by geological or atmospheric activity, such as erosion. Mission chief Alan Stern says there is evidence of "surface activity" on Pluto, a tantalising hint of earth-like tectonics "in its past or even its present". Nasa have dubbed one of the strange, darker regions of Pluto the "whale".Researchers say it is unusual to have contrasting bright and dark surfaces on objects in our Solar System, reflecting the fact that Pluto is far more complex than previously thought.

What's the weather like?

Surface temperatures on Pluto are extremely cold, ranging from -172 to -238 degrees C depending on where it is on its 248-year orbit of the Sun. Since it passed the closest point to our star back in 1989, experts assumed that after that the dwarf planet started cooling. Some computer models even predicted that the atmosphere would have fallen as snow and disappeared. That hasn't happened. But the New Horizons Principal Investigator agrees that snow does likely fall on the distant body. "Pluto has strong atmospheric cycles, it snows on the surface, the snows sublimate and go back into the atmosphere each 248-year orbit," said Alan Stern.

What about the five moons?

Little light has so far been shed on the moons of Pluto, but the coloured image released yesterday indicates that Charon, the biggest, is covered with red material around its pole.Scientists believe that this stuff may be tholins that have escaped from Pluto's atmosphere.Experts believe that the mottled colours at lower latitudes point to a diversity of terrains on Charon.So far little detail has emerged about the other moons of Pluto except more accurate measurements of their size.

How are the images and data being transmitted to Earth?

Very slowly indeed. At a distance of 5bn kilometres from Earth and with a radio transmitter that can only output 12 watts, that means New Horizons is signalling across the Solar System with the equivalent power of a small LED bulb.The transfer rate is achingly slow, around 1kb per second - if things go really well it can reach a dizzying 4kb. That's slow even by 1980s standards.All this means that a black and white picture of Pluto would take over three hours to transmit. Even if massively compressed it would still take around 20 minutes.As Nasa is handling communications to several other missions at one time, it means that New Horizons has to wait in the queue for access to the Deep Space Network, the radio telescopes that communicate with distant probes.Getting all the data from the brief flypast of Pluto will take almost 16 months.

Lingue e Linguaggi