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# Pretence and Echo: Towards an Integrated Account of Verbal Irony\*

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## Abstract

Two rival accounts of irony claim, respectively, that pretence and echo are independently sufficient to explain central cases. After highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of these accounts, I argue that an account in which both pretence and echo play an essential role better explains these cases and serves to explain peripheral cases as well. I distinguish between “weak” and “strong” hybrid theories, and advocate an “integrated strong hybrid” account in which elements of both pretence and echo are seen as complementary in a unified mechanism. I argue that the allegedly mutually exclusive elements of pretence and echo are in fact complementary aspects enriching a core-structure as follows: by *pretending* to have a perspective/thought *F*, an ironic speaker *U echoes* a perspective/thought *G*. *F* is merely pretended, perhaps caricaturised or exaggerated, while *G* is real/possible.

## Keywords

ironic attitude – pretence – echo – weak and strong hybrid accounts – integrated strong hybrid account

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## 1 Introduction

It is of the essence of irony to express a wide range of attitudes—mocking someone, making fun, ridiculing, scorning, criticizing, teasing, and the like. But traditional Gricean accounts that hold irony to be a matter of saying something and meaning something else are missing out such attitudinal component. Pretence and echoic theories of irony—two recent post-Gricean developments—reject the Gricean content-model and propose instead to reduce ironic meaning to *attitude-expression*. While they agree that ironic attitude typically ranges among derogatory ones, they disagree about *how* such attitudes are expressed—namely, how the object of the attitude is identified. Pretence theory holds that the speaker pretends to adopt a limited/defective perspective with the purpose of making it manifest how ridiculous it is to entertain that sort of perspective. Echoic theory, on the other hand, holds that the speaker is echoing a thought/utterance the content of which is similar to the content of the utterance with a view to presenting it as an object of ridicule. Thus on both views, the ironic attitude is about a thought or perspective which the utterance is used to evoke. The difference concerns how such evocation takes place: on the pretence view the targeted thought/perspective is evoked via pretence; on the echoic view it is evoked via echo. I shall set aside accounts that hold pretence and echo, respectively, to be necessary and sufficient as *strong* versions of the pretence and echoic theories. The disputes between these two strong theories over the last thirty years have been primarily motivated by their insistence that pretence and echo are fundamentally *distinct* and as such they make different theoretical and empirical predictions that make one theory more attractive than the other.

My view is that the differences between the two views turn out to be educative but they are insufficient to establish the distinctiveness claim. The time has come to scrutinize these differences for what they are and to appreciate that the differences as presented by the proponents of the two strong theories are often overstated or rely on a misunderstanding of the competitor's claims. This is where this article comes in. I will show that while distinct, pretence and echo are more similar than dissimilar, therefore suggesting a theoretical underlying unity that is better served if they were seen as joint parts of a single integrated account. Thus, my hope in this paper is that by offering a way of classifying the similarities between pretence and echo, and by sorting out the major questions on which they differ, we can show how the resources of each theory can be enriched when the two mechanisms complement each other rather than when they work independently of each other.

This thus sets out the agenda for those who advocate hybrid accounts by conceding that both pretence and echo are equally important in understanding a wide variety of ironic uses. While some proponents of the strong pretence and echoic theories made steps towards weakening their respective theory to make room for the rival mechanism, and some hybrid accounts have already been proposed, no systematic work has been undertaken to categorize the advantages and costs facing each theory. This is what I propose to do here in the hope of showing that not any hybridization enjoys the benefit of parsimony. I distinguish between *weak hybrid theories* that incorporate the rival mechanism so as to explain peripheral cases, and *strong hybrid theories* that maintain that pretence and echo are *both* essential to all cases of irony. While both types of hybrid theories attain considerable advantages over strong versions of the respective theories, I shall argue that they are either too costly or fail to provide clear constraints on how pretence and echo are interrelated. The particular strong hybrid theory I advocate is of an *integrated* kind in the sense that elements of both pretence and echo are shown to work as joint parts of a unified mechanism. The task of this paper is therefore expository, organizational, and clarificatory as much as it is argumentative, but the moral will be that by making explicit the kinds of choice points that we face when developing a hybrid theory helps us to better understand which benefits and costs we gain with an integrated account.

## 2 From Grice to Pretence and Echo

In this section I set out with Grice's (1967/1989) claim that irony amounts to saying something which one does not mean and meaning something which one does not say. I discuss a few objections to it with a view to showing that while some of the problems raised in the literature can be amended, others point to a theoretical incompleteness that requires the adoption of a different mechanism based on *attitude-expression*. As we'll see in §3–4, it is such incompleteness that motivated the development of pretence and echoic theories.

Grice holds ironic meaning to be fundamentally *indirect*, and explains this indirectness in terms of his notion of “conversational implicature.” That is, in saying what she says with an utterance of *S*, a speaker (henceforth *U*) may implicate something more or something different—in the case of irony typically the opposite of what she says. This is something which *U* *means* but which she does *not* say in uttering *S*. For Grice, such a meaning is conveyed via a violation of communicative norms in the sense that the speaker exploits a mutually

shared assumption that she could not sincerely mean what she says, thereby licensing the hearer to infer that she meant something other than what she said.

To see more precisely, take the familiar ironic remark—*Bert is such a fine friend!* (*Just the other day I saw him hand in hand with my dear wife*)—said about an old friend of the speaker who has cheated on him. Grice suggests that the hearer, H, may reason as follows. What U said is manifestly untrue, thereby violating the first maxim of Quality (“*Do not say what you believe to be false*”). But U clearly knows that H knows that what U said is false. So it is not her intention to try to trick H into believing something false; rather, she must intend that H interprets her as meaning something other than what she said. According to Grice (1989: 34), “this must be some obviously related proposition; and the most obviously related proposition is the contradictory of the one [s]he purports to be putting forward”. So U must have intended that H infer that what she meant was the contradictory proposition of what she said, namely that Bert is everything but a friend.

Grice’s remark that ironic implicature is the contradictory of what is said is obviously too quick, since there is no motivation as to why the relation between what is said and what is implicated is one of contradiction rather than one of negation, opposition, contrariety, or somewhere in between.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, I follow Camp (2012) in adopting a more general operation of “*meaning inversion*” such that we may read Grice as claiming that irony is a matter of implicating an *inverted content* to what is said. In summary:

### Gricean View

In uttering *S*, U is ironic iff U *implicates* an inverted content, *q*, of what she says, *p*— that is, in saying what she said, *p*, U meant but did *not* say *q*.

This analysis has the merit of regimenting irony within an independent and well-developed theory of meaning, which achieves parsimony by explaining irony via the same mechanism as other cases of conversational implicatures. However, this explanation has been shown to be problematic as a general account of irony. I shall focus on some problems that have led to the development of the pretence and echoic theories, and which I group into descriptive and theoretical problems.

1 Bredin (1997: 9) distinguishes two kinds of opposition in irony: what is said and what is implicated can be either contradictories or contraries.

### 2.1 *Descriptive Inadequacy*

Grice's implicature-account is descriptively incomplete because what is inverted with irony is not always what is said, thus leaving unexplained a wide range of cases in which irony targets something other than what is said.

First, Grice's account cannot explain cases in which irony targets non-declarative speech-acts—e.g. ironic questions, orders, requests, commands, etc. Consider (1a–b) (from Wilson, 2006) said to an extremely cautious driver who keeps his petrol tank full and never fails to indicate when turning.

- (1) a. Do you think we should stop for petrol?  
b. Don't forget to use your indicator!

What would an inversion of such speech-acts be like? Since non-declarative speech-acts lack (straightforward) truth-conditions, no truth-apt propositional content can be assigned to the utterance so that it can be ironically inverted. But in such cases the point of the irony is surely not to convey an inversion of the illocutionary force—here, a question or injunction, but rather to show that the behaviour that would justify such speech-acts is ridiculous. Given what the addressee knows about what the speaker knows about his driving habits, he is unlikely to interpret her question or injunction as seriously made. Rather, by drawing attention to the addressee's excessively scrupulous habits, the speaker mocks him for being neurotic. But how are we to explain such mockery in terms of meaning inversion?

Following Kumon-Nakamura et al. (1995), Camp (2012) suggests that such cases are better explained in terms of *pretence* since the speaker is pretending to ask a question or make an injunction with a view to showing that the behaviour that would justify such acts falls short certain standards of reasonableness. Camp calls such cases "*illocutionary irony*" because the irony targets the entire speech-act and the overall illocutionary and perlocutionary effects that would be undertaken were such question and injunction made seriously.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, Grice's account is too narrow to explain cases in which the irony does not target what is said by the utterance but rather a word or phrase within it—cases which Camp (2012) calls "*lexical irony*" as in (2a) from Wilson (2006),<sup>3</sup> or an appositive clause as in (2b) from Camp (2012):

2 Havertake (1990), Attardo (2000), among others, explain this in terms of a violation of the felicity or appropriateness conditions of the speech-acts put forward.

3 To be sure, Camp refers to such cases as "lexical sarcasm". For reasons of space, I leave aside differences between irony and sarcasm; see Haiman (1998); Attardo et al. (2003).

- (2) a. As I reached the bank at closing time, the bank clerk *helpfully* shut the door in my face.  
 b. The man, *who rescued this city from ruin*, is now planning to run for mayor.

In such cases, because the irony is localized to the italicized part, understanding it need not require first grasping what is said by the whole utterance and then inferring the implicature, as Grice predicts. Rather, the meaning of “helpfully” and “who rescued this city from ruin” can be locally inverted and then composed directly into what the speaker is otherwise sincerely asserting with the rest of the utterance, thus suggesting that the clerk was unhelpful and that the man presumed to have rescued the city from ruin hasn’t in fact been of much help.

Thirdly, Grice’s account is also too narrow to explain cases in which the irony does not target what is said by the utterance but rather what is implicated by it. Take Bredin’s (1997: 7, 9–10) example:

- (3) The hotel room costs a thousand dollars a night. Of course, for that you get half a bottle of Australian champagne *and* your breakfast thrown in.

The speaker *does* assert that one gets a half a bottle of Australian champagne and served breakfast for the room. But in saying that she also implicates that the room is good value for money. It is only the implicature which the irony targets, the speaker thereby suggesting that it would be ridiculous to think that the room is a bargain.

Grice’s account is therefore descriptively incomplete because the implicature mechanism is not flexible enough to apply to the variety of meanings that irony might target apart from what is said—e.g. the meaning of a word, a clause, or various implications of the utterance. It’s useful to keep in mind, however, that Grice didn’t intend after all to develop a theory of irony but has merely extended his implicature machinery to irony. In that regard, an extension along the lines proposed by Camp (2012) in terms of a general operation of “*meaning inversion*” is compatible with Grice’s spirit, though she goes beyond Grice by appealing to a variety of mechanisms that are more adequate to the variety of types of inversion at hand. The moral is that the notion of implicature is too restrictive to explain the variety of ironic uses.

## 2.2 *Theoretical Inadequacy*

Furthermore, not only Grice’s account cannot describe all the cases, it has been objected that it does not explain them adequately. First, Grice’s implicature

mechanism is too wide and too narrow. It has too a wide application, thus overgenerating to metaphor, hyperbole, metonymy, and loose use, which all involve saying something false or conversationally inappropriate and implicating something else. This thus makes it difficult to explain, as Wilson and Sperber (2002) note, why the listener infers the contradictory proposition rather than any other related true proposition. Also, the implicature mechanism is too narrow in that it misses out cases in which the inference is triggered by the speaker's saying something true, thus predicting that hearers would fail to recognize irony in such cases. Take Wilson's (2006) example of ironic understatement:

- (4) Tim Henman is not the most charismatic tennis player in the world.

The speaker's point is not to convey the opposite of what she says—that Tim Henman is the most charismatic tennis player in the world—nor to claim what the utterance would be taken to claim if uttered literally—that there are more charismatic tennis players than Tim Henman. Rather, her point is to draw attention to certain narrow-minded claims that devotedly blinkered fans would make about the gifted but very English Tim Henman, thereby mocking their devotion.

The second, and most serious, problem is that even in simple cases of irony for which Grice's account works best, the implicature cannot get off the ground because *nothing is said* and implicatures can only arise by applying the conversational maxims to what is said. The force of this objection relies on a strong interpretation of Grice's notion of "saying"—whereby saying something means *asserting* a proposition with a commitment to its truth. Indeed, Wilson and Sperber (2002) who put forward the objection generalize so as to show that on a strong interpretation of saying *qua* asserting, Grice's maxim of Quality—now understood as "*Do not assert what you believe to be false*"—is *not* violated since the speaker is not committing herself to the truth of the proposition literally expressed. More to the point, if is nothing is asserted no other maxim seems to be violated, so the implicature cannot get off the ground.

More generally, the problem that irony poses is that the following Gricean claims are inconsistent:

- (a) In uttering *S*, *U* says *p*—i.e. *U* means *p* and *p* "fits" the meaning of *S*.  
 (b) In uttering *S*, an ironic *U* who says *p* and means *not-p* doesn't mean that *p*.  
 (c) In uttering *S*, an ironic *U* who says *p* and means *not-p* communicates *not-p* as an implicature of her saying *p*.

To solve the problem Grice has to give up one of (a)–(c). He cannot give up (b), so he has to give up either (a)—which claims that speakers mean what they say, or (c)—which construes the ironic meaning as implicated. But giving up (a) is not an option, since it is central to Grice's (1989: 87) conception that saying is part of speaker meaning such that nothing can be said without being meant. However, there is another way of fixing option (c)—namely, by allowing that implicatures can arise by applying the maxims to a weaker notion of "saying" understood as expressing a proposition with no commitment to its truth. Indeed, this option has proved most fruitful since it has given rise to the pretence theory of irony.

Grice (1989: 34, 53–54, 120) has already anticipated this development by arguing that although ironic speakers don't say anything that they mean, they nonetheless "*make as if to say*" something in order to communicate something else. Needless to say, by making-as-if-say something one need not believe what one is so making-as-if-say. In that sense, it involves a form of pretence or play-mode which has the advantage of applying more widely to other speech-acts than assertions. Importantly, however, given that making-as-if-to-say involves openly feigning to say something when one means something different, this suggests that making-as-if-to-say does not fall within speaker meaning, but as Neale (ms.) briefly notes, within a form of "*play-meaning*".

In the light of this distinction, we can generalize Grice's theory of implicatures by conceding that they can be licensed not only by something the speaker means but also by something she play-means. Thus, Grice's account of irony can be extended with two further clauses:

- (i) nothing is said/asserted; the speaker only pretends to say/assert
- (ii) implicatures are carried by pretences to say/assert (as well as by sayings/assertions)

Recanati's (2004: 71) pretence theory is an instance of such a generalization in that he holds that ironic meaning is inferred as a "*secondary meaning*" (i.e. implicature) taking as input a pretend assertion:

While in conversational implicature, the speaker asserts something and conveys something more, in irony the speaker does less than assert what she would normally be asserting by uttering the sentence which she actually utters. What the speaker does in the ironical case is merely to *pretend* to assert the content of her utterance. Still, there is an element of indirectness here, and we can maintain that irony also possesses a secondary character. By pretending to assert something, the speaker conveys something else, just



as, in the other types of cases, by asserting something the speaker conveys something else. By pretending to say of Paul that he is a fine friend in a situation in which just the opposite is obviously true, the speaker manages to communicate that Paul is everything but a fine friend. She shows, by her utterance, how inappropriate it would be to ascribe to Paul the property of being a fine friend.

In generalizing the implicature account by drawing on pretence, Recanati briefly notes the role of expressing an attitude towards the perspective which the speaker pretends to undertake. This is indeed the cornerstone for moving towards attitude-based accounts.

### 2.3 *The Role of Attitude in Irony*

Grice (1989: 53) already acknowledges the crucial role of attitude-expression. He acknowledges that pretence alone is not enough to yield irony. He submits this counterexample:

- (5) A and B are walking down the street, and they both see a car with a shattered window. B says, *Look, that car has all its windows intact*. A is baffled. B says, *You didn't catch on; I was in an ironical way drawing your attention to the broken window*.

The conditions for irony are met—*A* makes-as-if-to-say something blatantly false in order to communicate a contradictory proposition, and yet the utterance fails to be perceived as ironic. In the same vein, one may make-as-if-to-assert any absurdity one may like— $2 + 2 = 5$ ; the moon is made of cheese, yet there is nothing ironic about that. This suggests that pretence alone is insufficient to yield irony. What is then missing? Grice responds that what is missing from such cases to be understood ironically is the expression of a critical judgment or hostile attitude, such as contempt, indignation, or derision.

This claim has been taken as a central positive thesis by two post-Gricean accounts—pretence and echoic accounts—which reduce ironic meaning to the *expression of evaluative attitudes*. These accounts are also united by a negative thesis that denies that ironic speakers are in the business of describing factual matters about the world—in particular, they strongly deny Grice's claim that irony amounts to implicating an inverted content.

Before we move on to the specific ways in which the two accounts flesh out the attitude-expression thesis, a few words to establish the points of juncture on which pretence and echoic accounts agree. There is an overall agreement that the attitudes typically expressed with irony are of a derogatory kind,

ranging from teasing, mocking, ridiculing, criticising, to outright contempt and scorn. There is also agreement that the attitudes thus expressed are about a thought or perspective which the utterance is used to evoke.<sup>4</sup> In trying to narrow down the object or target of the ironic attitude, two questions arise: (i) What makes the targeted perspective apt for irony?; (ii) How is this perspective targeted or evoked by the utterance?

One general thought in response to (i) is to say that the targeted perspective must involve an element of *remarkableness*: something that fails, misfires, or doesn't live up to expectations. As Sperber (1984: 131) notes, "the absurdity, or even the mere inappropriateness, of human thoughts [...] is often worth remarking on, making fun of, being ironic about". Moreover, because things that misfire or violate expectation are salient, an ironic speaker relies on the fact that what she wants to suggest as being worthy of ridicule will be obvious to all. But a derogatory attitude isn't sufficient in itself to yield irony. Sperber suggests that the target of the irony is not the absurdity *per se* but rather the fact that the absurdity or foolishness can be actually/conceivably entertained by someone, and thus can be attributed to such a person.

Now whereas there is pretty much agreement on what the *object* of the ironic attitude is, there is still disagreement about question (ii)—how the target is evoked by the utterance: by pretence or echo? Furthermore, the proponents of the two theories insist that pretence and echo are fundamentally distinct and therefore make different theoretical (and empirical) predictions. In assessing the *distinctiveness claim*, I shall contrast and compare each theory's claims by using a common terminology.<sup>5</sup> Following Currie (2006), I distinguish between F—the *vehicle of irony*, and G—the *target of the ironic attitude*. For the moment, think of the vehicle as taking the form of public acts such as speech-acts, gestures, facial expressions, and the like, which the speaker uses to indicate that the thought/perspective she's putting forward by the utterance—call it F—is not a (current) thought of her own. In other words, by expressing F in uttering S the speaker tacitly indicates that she *dissociates* herself from F. However, the purpose of so doing is to *evoke* a suitably related thought/perspective, G, which she in fact wants to present as an object of ridicule. G may include private or public acts such as thoughts or perspectives that a person might have, which one might express by performing a speech-act or making a gesture, but which might not be expressed at all. G may further be fleshed out not only in terms of

4 For simplicity, henceforth I'll use thought to refer to the broader notion of perspective.

5 For reasons of space, I confine myself to discussing only theoretical claims, leaving aside the empirical implications of each theory's claims made, including of my own proposal.

its *content* and how it relates to F, but also in terms of its *source*—that it may be a thought of someone other than the current speaker at the current time.

With this distinction in mind, we can identify two points of agreement between pretence and echoic theories: ironic utterances involve (a) tacit *dissociation* from F; (b) expression of a derogatory attitude towards G. The fundamental point of disagreement is about how G is evoked by F. Does F involve pretence or echo? I now explain what the proponents of these theories claim pretence and echo involve, how they differ one from another, and what objections they face.

### 3 Irony as Pretence

#### 3.1 *Pretence and Its Modes*

Pretence is a multi-faceted concept used for several purposes. Broadly, pretence is linked to imagination and counterfactual reasoning since to pretend *p* involves thinking counterfactually about what would be likely if *p* were the case. This may involve drawing consequences from a pretend premise—say, '*p* is the case'—so that they mirror the beliefs one would have formed had the premise been really believed. Pretence is therefore particularly apt in communication, since in pretending something one need not only deploy counterfactual judgements, but may also need to adopt a communicative behaviour that is similar to the way one would behave if *p* were the case. It is this kind of communicative pretence that is relevant in irony, and together with the expression of a derogatory attitude they are both held to be necessary and sufficient for irony.

The pretence relevant in irony plays out in the following way. Pretence theorists such as Clark and Gerrig (1984), Walton (1990), and Recanati (2004) develop a notion of *pretence of speech-acts*. Thus, an ironic speaker is seen as not performing herself the speech-act she puts forward but rather as pretending to do so—namely, by pretending to undertake the illocutionary commitments of that speech-act with a view to drawing attention to some limitation in the perspective from which it would seem appropriate.

Irony is, however, much more versatile, and pretence as well since it may affect not only speech-acts but also ways of doing things, ways of saying and thinking, ways of behaving and gesticulating, and ways of being ultimately. Currie (2006: 116) brought to our attention this wide variety of possible targets for pretence by distinguishing "*pretence of doing*" and "*pretence of being*." Thus, one can pretend to be doing something which one is not doing, or be someone which one is not, and in doing so one draws attention to certain ways of doing

things or being which the speaker wants to present as object of ridicule. It is fair to say, however, that what underlies both a pretence of doing and a pretence of being is what Mulligan (2008), following Janke, calls “*pretence of mental states*” since the most efficient way for an ironic speaker to criticize the foolishness of people is not only to pretend to behave in a foolish manner but to pretend to *be* a foolish person—i.e. have those mental states that would make one act foolishly.

Before discussing a few conceptions of what pretence amounts to, it's important to understand what it is about pretence that makes it apt for irony—in particular, how the pretence of F can target the perspective G that is taken as object of the attitude. At a first blush, pretence is a means for putting forward a replica or a copy of the real thing we want to draw your attention to. So by saying or doing things using pretence we can evoke real (or imaginary) people who say or do those kinds of things so as to express an evaluation about them. In the case of irony, pretence is particularly apt because in pretending to F, the speaker is highlighting the defects of F—presenting it as epistemically limited, deficient, or inappropriate with respect to certain standards of reasonableness—with a view to suggesting that G (of which it is replica) has similar defects.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the point of highlighting defects of F is not to criticize F itself—after all F is just pretended—but to suggest that some real or conceivable thought/perspective G suitably related to F is defective. Pretence thus serves to indirectly highlight defects in G via directly highlighting defects in F. This suggests two important features of what a good theory of irony should be able to explain: namely, the speaker's dissociation from F and her expression of a derogatory attitude towards G. In the rest of this section, I show how these features are implemented in four leading pretence accounts by focusing on how they explain the relation between F and G, and how G is identified as the target of ironic attitude.

### 3.2 *Four Accounts of Pretence*

*First proposal:* Clark (1996), and Clark and Gerrig (1984: 121–122) construe pretence as a “*staged communicative-act*”. More precisely, the speaker and hearer <U, H> pretend to be counterparts <U', H'> in a pretend communication in which U' says something patently uninformed and injudicious to a gullible or uncomprehending hearer H' who takes what U' said seriously, or at least assigns the proposition expressed by the utterance a greater degree of credence than it warrants. Thus, by recognizing how ridiculous the pretend communication is,

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<sup>6</sup> I focus on negative irony here though a similar story can be told about positive irony.

U and H are therefore mocking their pretend counterparts and what they say under pretence.

This analysis correctly predicts that U dissociates herself from F—here *U*'s unreasonable pretend thought. But this is not enough to guarantee how the real target of the mockery, G, is identified, since clearly it makes no sense to mock something that is merely pretended. What is needed is a way of tracking back G to *U*'s pretend perspective F, since the real target of the attitude is G.

On a subsidiary matter, Clark and Gerrig's insistence on a notion of pretend audience has little explanatory value, if not actually being misleading about the primary function of pretence in irony. Clearly, when understanding irony I need not represent myself as a gullible hearer just to get the pretence rolling: the speaker's pretence is self-sufficient and independent of whether I, as hearer, engage actively in the pretend communication. The point is vivid with auto-irony: When saying *Brilliant/Great/Perfect* (when things go wrong) we clearly deride our own hopes and expectations, expressing disappointment at their failure, but there is not much work for a pretend audience (H') apart from assenting to the previous foolish expectations of my other Self (*U*). It's no wonder that pretence is often misinterpreted as a theatrical metaphor, and the primary function of irony is taken to be communicative rather than "*expressive*"—see Currie (2006: 115) who painstakingly argues for the latter. Before moving on, however, there is one respect in which we could make sense of the role of pretend audience but this involves conceding an *attribution* element which is constitutive of the rival echoic mechanism (see § 4). On such a concession, the pretend perspective which is presented as being endorsed by a gullible hearer H' can be seen as being attributed to the kinds of people who would seriously assent to such a perspective. Thus, this explains why such kinds of people are in fact the real target of the mockery rather than their pretend counterparts.

*Second proposal:* Walton's (1990) account of pretence goes some way towards identifying the right target of the ironic attitude. For Walton, the role of pretence is to evoke or call attention to a "*game of make-believe*" as a way of describing what's going on in a fictional world. Thus, by pretending to describe the real world, the speaker actually describes a fictional world by making it fictional that what she says is true. For example, when I say *He's such a fine friend* (ironically), I make it fictional *only* that I assert (seriously) that he is a fine friend—i.e. that I *claim* that he is. It is not fictional either that he *is* a fine friend, or that he is not. And it is fictional neither that I speak truly nor that I don't. The point of pretending to assert that he is a fine friend, of fictionally doing so, is to demonstrate how absurd or ridiculous it is or would be actually to assert this. This will

(ordinarily) amount to saying something about how the target person is in the real world. It is absurd or ridiculous (actually) to assert that he is a fine friend because of how he really is, in this case because he so obviously is not a fine friend. In this way, the pretence of F—that the man is a good friend—evokes a real or conceivable claim, G, about how the individual is in the real world with which the speaker “disagrees”. As Walton (1990: 222) writes,

to speak ironically is to mimic or mock those one disagrees with, fictionally to assert what they do or might assert. Irony is sarcasm. One shows what it is like to make certain claims, hoping thereby to demonstrate how absurd or ridiculous it is to do so.

Walton’s analysis correctly predicts that the point of irony is to express a derogatory attitude towards G rather than F. However, it remains unclear how the disagreement about G is conveyed, since the mere fact that the speaker pretends to assert something doesn’t indicate what she believes or disbelieves (and it can’t be assumed that one disbelieves what one pretends to believe). However, in the case at hand various clues can be used to show that the speaker thinks the target is not a fine friend: the salience in the context of the fact that the target deceived the speaker, mutual knowledge that he did, an exaggerated mocking tone of voice, among others.

*Third proposal:* Recanati’s (2007) account goes some way towards explaining how the pretence of F puts us in the mind of G. For Recanati, the pretence in irony amounts to *shifting* the actual context *c*—in which the speaker U, in uttering *S*, performs an illocutionary act *i*— to a pretend context *c'* in which another speaker/thinker U' is presented as performing or being disposed to perform *i*. Recanati calls such a pretence “*illocutionary context-shifting*” because the pretence targets the illocutionary force of the speech-act U puts forward by the utterance. We may characterize this in two-layers: (i) By pretending to make a speech-act *i* in *c*, U merely displays the content and force of *i* while signalling that it is feigned. (ii) By shifting to the pretend context *c'* U endorses the role of U' who would perform or be disposed to perform *i*, thereby implicitly deferring the responsibility for the *i*-related illocutionary commitments to U'. As Recanati (2007: 220) writes,

The act of assertion is precisely what the speaker does *not* perform when she says that *p* ironically; rather she plays someone else’s part and *mimics* an act of assertion accomplished by that person. She does so not by pretending that that person is speaking—if that were the case, ‘I’ would refer

to that person under the pretence—but by endorsing herself the function of speaker and saying that *p*, while (i) not taking the responsibility for what is being said, and (ii) implicitly ascribing that responsibility to someone else, namely the person whose act of assertion is being mimicked.

In our terminology, we may associate on the one hand the pretend perspective F with what Recanati calls “*locutionary context*” in which U displays *i* in *c* while dissociating herself from its illocutionary commitments, and on the other hand the targeted perspective G with what Recanati calls “*illocutionary context*” in which U’ undertakes *i*-related illocutionary commitment in *c*’. This distinction explains that F and G are distinct perspectives with different sources: F is something that U displays while dissociating herself from it, whereas G is something that people like U’ are likely to endorse, and they are the real target of the irony. Thus, Recanati identifies not only the target of the attitude, G, but also the source of G. However, what is missing from this proposal is a clear connection between F and G, so that it can explain why G, and the kinds of people endorsing G are worthy of a derogatory attitude.

*Fourth proposal:* Currie’s (2006: 116–119, 124) refinement of the pretence account goes some way to addressing the difficulties of the previous accounts. He generalizes the pretence relevant for irony to a so-called “*pretence of being*”—that is, the speaker pretends to “be a person with a restricted or otherwise defective view of the world or some part of it” (: 116). Three important conditions act as constraints on the pretend perspective F: (i) F must admit standards of reasonableness such that it can be normatively evaluated; (ii) F is presented as epistemically limited or defective with respect to such standards; (iii) F is “*expressive*” of a view or evokes a suitably related perspective G “by virtue of having certain limitations that resemble the limitations of the other [F]” (: 116). Given (i)–(iii), Currie can thus explain why the derogatory attitude is not about F but rather about G “[whose] limitations compromise, to some degree, the reasonableness of the perspective” (: 124). Currie (2006: 118) summarizes thus the essence of irony:

[...] what matters is that the ironist’s utterance be an indication that he or she is pretending to have a limited or otherwise defective perspective, point of view or stance, F, and in doing so puts us in mind of some perspective, point of view or stance, G (which may be identical to F or merely resemble it) which is the target of the ironic comment.

Currie's notion of pretence is much more powerful and constraining than previous conceptions. It requires that the pretend F and the real/conceivable perspective G, which F evokes, be distinct perspectives while at the same time resemble one another. But in what respect do F and G resemble one another? Currie suggests that in order to identify G, it is sufficient to know that the pretend perspective F is evaluated as limited or defective, and since G resembles F, then we should expect that G be similarly evaluated as limited or defective. But this leaves unexplained the respects in which F and G resemble, and this is what is missing in order to conclude that G shares similar limitations to F. Currie's account is in this regard insufficiently constrained to predict the similarity between F and G. I now turn to more general objections to the pretence theory, and in response I will make a suggestion towards a possible amendment on behalf of the pretence theorist.

### 3.3 *Objections to the Pretence Theory and Responses*

The pretence theory has been criticized by the rival echoic theory (Sperber, 1984; Wilson, 2006, 2009: 210–214). Here I focus on three general objections raised by Wilson, the first of which I take to be fundamental to the dispute between the pretence and echoic theories (Objection 1), whereas the other two suggest a line of response to the problems that pretence theory is confronted with (Objections 2 and 3).

#### Objection 1: Pretence is Not Necessary to Irony

Wilson (2006: 1737, 2009) objects that pretence is not constitutive of irony. She reacts to Currie's (2006: 126) positive argument for the *necessity* of pretence. Currie argues that because Peter in (6b) is naturally seen as engaging in pretence, then it must be that Mary's remark in (6a) is the first step in the pretence since Peter's reply is an elaboration on Mary's ironic remark:

- (6) a. [downpouring] Mary: It's a lovely day for a picnic.  
 b. Peter: Yes, I am so glad we decided to come.

Wilson is unconvinced. She generalizes the objection that pretence is not necessary to irony based on the claim that irony is on a continuum of so-called "attributive/echoic uses" such as reports of speech and thought, in that they all involve the attribution of a thought or meaning to someone else, but that the speech/thought reports do not involve pretence. The argument takes the form of the following *reductio ad absurdum*:



- (a) suppose pretence is necessary to irony;
- (b) then pretence must be involved in all cases on the continuum of attributive/echoic uses;
- (c) but it isn't (or isn't in all cases);
- (d) so (a) is wrong.

The problem is that (b) doesn't hold. It doesn't follow from the fact that several phenomena are similar in one respect A—say, that they involve echo—that they are similar in some other respect B—say, that they involve pretence. Now, similarity on B would of course follow from similarity on A, if A by itself implied B, or if A together with some extra feature X implied B—where X was common to both irony and other attributive/echoic uses. But presumably neither pretence nor echoic theorists would wish to suppose that echo all by itself implied pretence, and Wilson doesn't provide further assumptions to suggest this.

#### Objection 2: Pretence Cannot Explain the Resemblance between F and G

Wilson (2006: 1737–1740, 2009: 208) objects that pretence is unable to capture the resemblance *in content*, and therefore cannot explain what thoughts are being targeted ironically. She presents two arguments to this effect, both of which are based on the idea that pretence is simulation, and simulation involves perceptual similarity or resemblance *in form*.

The first argument runs as follows:

- (a) Pretence can only explain the resemblance in form between the pretend representation, say F, and what it targets, say G. This is because pretence is based on simulation of behavioural traits, by imitating and dramatizing one's gestures, facial expressions, intonation, and parodying someone's tendencies and dispositions.
- (b) But the resemblance in form is irrelevant to central cases of irony since the speaker aims to draw attention to the (propositional) content of certain thoughts/perspectives, judgements, or opinions, with a view to showing how they fall short of certain standard of reasonableness. This involves however a resemblance *in content*.
- (c) Hence, pretence cannot explain the resemblance in content because, as Wilson (2006: 1737) notes, "one cannot mimic or simulate a content, a meaning or a thought".

Before responding to the objection, it is useful to dwell a little on Sperber's (1984) critique of pretence. Sperber submits the following example: imagine

that Bill is prone to say of himself something like (7a), and Judy faced with a display of temper from Bill comments ironically with (7b). Sperber argues that Judy cannot however pretend to *be* Bill because Bill would not say (7b).

- (7) a. I am a very patient person.
- b. Bill is such a patient person.

Currie (2006: 119) responds to this critique by insisting that the target of the ironic attitude need not be a particular utterance or formulation of the person being mocked. To be sure, Bill may never say something like (7a), though he may be known for his disposition to think that. Thus, in pretending to assert (7b) Judy need not echo Bill's exact thought or formulation, but be merely in a position to make manifest a perspective according to which Bill is recognizable as a patient person. The point of Judy's pretence, call it F, is not to target any doing of that exact thing by Bill, but rather to draw attention to a suitably related perspective, G, actually occupied by Bill or by someone else about Bill (thus making salient Bill's tendency to think exactly this about himself), with a view to suggesting how ridiculous it would be doing so.

The second argument that Wilson (2009: 208–209) presents in relation to the objection that pretence cannot explain the resemblance between F and G goes as follows:

- (a) Since pretence is based on resemblance in form, it predicts that the pretence to F entails that the speech-act G which the speaker is targeting ironically has an identical illocutionary force to the illocutionary force of the pretend speech-act F.
- (b) But this is wrong: the relevant resemblance in irony is in content not in form.
- (c) The resemblance in content can explain how two speech-acts may resemble if the content they carry has similar implications, irrespective of whether they differ in illocutionary force (e.g. an order "Shut the door" and an indirect request "Will you shut the door?" share the same propositional content that the door be shut).
- (d) Therefore, F and G need not have identical illocutionary force, as pretence theory predicts, as long as they share a similar propositional content.

The conclusion is correct, but the argument is wrong because (a) doesn't hold. Clearly, when I'm asking an ironic question *Do you think we should stop for petrol?* (when I know you always have your tank full), I am not mocking a similar question. Rather, my pretending to ask such a question aims to target

the kind of perspective according to which my pretend question would seem appropriate—here my addressee's neurotic behaviour, thereby presenting it as an object of ridicule. Similarly, by saying to my inconsiderate addressee *O please, don't fall down apologizing*, I am not targeting a similar injunction or any injunction at all. Rather, I criticize my addressee for failing to apologize.

Recanati (2007, 2010) hints at an explanation of why pretence doesn't entail identity of illocutionary force between F and G. He illustrates this with (8) said by John in response to Bill's remark *You are stupid and you don't understand the matter*, or his prediction that John is unable to solve the problem:

(8) Remember, I am stupid and I don't understand the matter.

John does not pretend to speak with Bill's voice, otherwise the indexical "I" would refer to Bill. He rather pretends to adopt Bill's viewpoint and assert something that Bill has asserted or would be disposed to assert, with a view to mocking him for his wrong prediction.

More generally, while Wilson is correct that the relevant resemblance in irony is in content, she is too quick in concluding that pretence cannot explain that. The short discussion in response to both objections suggests an understanding of pretence on which pretence can explain the resemblance in content between F and G. Thus, whether the pretence is applied to thoughts or speech-acts, it involves the adoption of a perspective the content of which can put us in the mind of a related thought/perspective G.

Wilson is right that pretence may involve imitation, mimicry, and simulation of speech/behaviour, but this is too restrictive an understanding of pretence. There are indeed cases that rely on parody and dramatization: the speaker is impersonating someone's manners of saying or doing things by using recognizable behavioural and speech cues such as intonation, facial expressions, gestures, etc.<sup>7</sup> in order to indicate the target being mocked. But pretence need not always involve parody and mimicry. Dramatization and exaggeration are often used to flag out the pretence but are not constitutive of pretence. To avoid confusion and misinterpretation I propose distinguishing between: (i) a rich full-rounded pretence based on parody and mimicry and (ii) a lean-pretence based on the adoption of a viewpoint or perspective on a given person, event, fact, or situation, the content of which puts us in the mind of a related perspective, G, which is the real target of the attitude. Whereas both Wilson's

7 Among selected studies looking at cues in irony see Rockwell (2000), Kreuz and Richard (1995), Bryant and Fox Tree (2002, 2005).

objections rely on (i), the pretence that is essential to the pretence theory of irony relies on (ii). This suggests that pretence can establish both a resemblance in *content* and *in form* between F and G, therefore targeting ironically not only thoughts but also behaviours, gestures, and the like which are more difficult to capture if only a resemblance in content were available.

### Objection 3: Pretence Cannot Explain Attribution

Wilson (2006, 2009) objects that pretence is insufficient to yield irony because it lacks a fundamental attributive dimension. Because attribution requires identifying the source of the targeted perspective G—namely, what are the kinds of people who are likely to entertain G, as we'll see in § 4—the objection goes, pretence cannot explain why in being ironic one is not just mocking (inadequate) thoughts in themselves, but the kinds of people who (would) entertain such thoughts. Since attribution is not constitutive of pretence, Wilson contends, pretence cannot explain who exactly is being mocked with irony. This is why Grice's example in (5) *Look, that car has all its windows intact* (said about a car with windows broken) fails to be ironic despite the fact that the speaker pretends to assert something ridiculous and expressing a hostile attitude. Why does the irony fall flat then?

Wilson (2009: 199) argues that pretence, together with the expression of hostile attitudes, is still insufficient to yield irony. What is missing to interpret (5) ironically is attribution—namely, that the perspective the speaker pretends to adopt can evoke a similar perspective to someone else the speaker whom intends to mock. In Grice's example, we can imagine A complaining that her street has become a dumping ground for broken-down cars and B reassuring her that she sees no evidence for this. Now, Wilson suggests, at the sight of a car with broken windows, A's utterance *Look, that car has all its windows intact* can be seen as echoing B's prior reassurances but only to show how ridiculously unjustified they were, thus mocking B for being so naïve.

Thus, attribution enables identifying the source of G—the kinds of people who are likely to express or entertain G. But pretence can explain this too—as long as the pretend perspective F can evoke easily recognizable manners of saying or thinking, say G, that are characteristic of someone's ways of speaking or dispositions, then it is natural to attribute G to the (kind of) thinker(s) who are likely to entertain G.

As we saw above, Recanati and Walton are willing to concede attribution. Currie (2006: 118) also recognizes that attribution may offer a precise way of identifying the target of irony—say, “some person's really having that perspective or some tendency on the part of a group of persons, or persons in general, to have or be attracted to having that perspective”. But he denies that attribution is

a distinctive element that divides him from echoic theorists. The question now arises as to whether attribution is *essential* to irony as echoic theorists advocate, or whether it is *contingent* and can be dispensed with, as Currie (2008) advocates. I'll get back to it in § 4–5.

### 3.4 *The Refined Pretence View*

So far, we've established that pretence is necessary to irony, that it can explain cases of irony in which the resemblance between F and G is both in content and in form, and that the targeted perspective G can be attributed to kinds of people who are likely to entertain G. It is less clear, however, how pretence explains what justifies the expression of a derogatory attitude towards G.

Currie (2006) already made some advances towards such an explanation. He requires that the kinds of thoughts and perspectives, G, that are apt for ironic targeting must admit standards of reasonableness. Let's represent this in terms of a normative evaluation in the sense that G is judged along a scale of an attitude-type E. Furthermore, the pretend perspective F is presented as epistemically limited or defective with respect to such standards. We might represent this by saying that were F true it would elicit a derogatory attitude on the normative scale E—say, a disapproval of F,  $E_F$ . But Currie also suggests that F and G share similar limitations and deficiencies. Then, we might expect that G should also elicit a similar attitude along E, say a disapproval of G,  $E_G$ . Furthermore, we may predict that  $E_F$  and  $E_G$  may vary in strength. For example, when the pretence of F involves an exaggeration of the limitations that are in fact targeted in G—as when saying (ironically) *You're the best friend I could ever wish for*, we might expect the disapproval towards the pretence  $E_F$  to be stronger than the disapproval towards the targeted thought  $E_G$ , thus creating a hyperbolic effect of the irony.

On this suggestion then, we might explain the expression of a derogatory attitude towards G in terms of a transfer of attitude from F to G, varying along an evaluative scale E. This thus explains that the speaker's point with irony is not to express disapproval of F—after all, F is merely pretended—but rather disapproval of G, further suggesting that those kinds of people entertaining G are worthy of mockery. I contend, we can thus refine the pretence theory as follows:

#### **Refined Pretence View**

In uttering S, U is ironic iff U *pretends* to endorse a limited/defective perspective F via S, some part of it or implications of it, with a view to suggesting that a related perspective G should be *similarly evaluated as limited/defective*, thus expressing a *derogatory attitude* towards G, and *the kinds of people who (would) entertain G*.

This view can now explain why G is judged as worthy of a derogatory attitude—by virtue of eliciting a similar derogatory attitude one would express towards F, thus showing that the kinds of people endorsing G are worthy of ridicule. However, the similarity in evaluation between F and G is insufficiently constrained to narrow down what exactly the targeted perspective G amounts to. This is because given an evaluation-type E associated with a pretend perspective F, there may be a wide range of perspectives G that may fall under E but have no connection to F. What is needed in order to narrow down G is a more constrained way of establishing the resemblance between F and G, and this is what the rival echoic theory promises to provide.

## 4 Irony as Echoic Use

### 4.1 *The Echoic View*

The echoic theory of irony as developed by relevance-theorists (Sperber and Wilson, 1981, 1995, 1998; Sperber 1984; Wilson and Sperber, 1992, 2012; Curco, 2000; Wilson, 2006, 2009, 2012) explains irony as a matter of “*echoing*”. Echoing amounts to showing that the speaker in uttering a sentence S has a certain thought in mind which someone else might have expressed or is likely to entertain, and wants to convey her own attitude towards it. Not any thought is suitable for ironic echoing, though. As Sperber (1984: 131) notes, “in order to be successfully ironic, the meaning mentioned [i.e. echoed] must recognizably echo a thought that has been, is being, or might be entertained or expressed by someone”.

More technically, an echoic use of S amounts to using S “*interpretively*”—that is, in order to represent another representation, say, another utterance or thought whose content resembles the content expressed by S. Wilson and Sperber (1992: 65) define the similarity between the content of S and the thought it thus represents in terms of “logical and contextual implications”—where the more implications they share, the greater the resemblance, with identity being a limiting case. Within the class of interpretative uses some are “*attributive*” in the sense that the thought that is thus represented can be attributed (implicitly or explicitly) to someone other than the speaker (or her past self). Paradigmatic examples of attributive uses are reports of speech and thought. Their main point is ascriptional—the speaker presents the content of S not as a thought of her own but as someone else’s thought or speech. And within the class of attributive uses some are “*echoic*”. Their main point is not only to ascribe the thought thus represented to someone else but also to express the speaker’s own attitude towards it. When she approves of the thought thus attributed, she’s

endorsing it. When she disapproves of it, she's dissociating herself from it. Dissociation may take the form of various shades of doubt, scepticism, or disbelief. On this view then, irony is a subtype of echoic uses involving a particular type of dissociative attitude ranging from scorn, contempt, outrage to ridicule and mockery.

In terms of our terminology, F corresponds to using S (or a part of it) *echoically* with a view to targeting a thought, speech, or perspective G, the content of which is similar to the content of the thought expressed by the utterance, F. Thus, F is able to evoke G in virtue of their resemblance *in content*—with their similarity varying dependent on the amount of logical and contextual implications they share. For example, F may be a paraphrase or summary of G, or may pick out implications which the speaker regards as relevant, or may even be an exaggeration with respect to G. As Wilson (2009: 203) puts it, F may be “a proposition that was only a constituent of the original [G]”. What matters for echoing is that the speaker aims to provide a “*faithful enough interpretation*” of the (original) speech/thought, G. This allows a loose resemblance between F and G—for example, in cases in which the target of irony, G, includes conceivable or imaginary thoughts/utterances that could be expressed, or unexpressed folk thoughts such as received opinions, human hopes or aspirations, and more generally widely shared normative representations couched in the form of social/cultural/aesthetic/moral norms. How does this work? For example, by saying *You move so gracefully* to someone clumsy, I'm alluding to implications of widely shared expectations of how people should move on certain occasions with a view to showing that the particular performance falls short of these expectations.

More generally, when a speaker wants to mock someone's tendency to believe *p*, she must produce an utterance whose content (or part of it) resembles *p* in some relevant respects such that in virtue of this resemblance she can draw attention to the targeted belief *p* (G in our terms), suggesting how ridiculous it would be to believe *p* in the circumstances. However, G is not mocked by itself. Rather, the target of mockery is made more specific by attributing G to a particular source—namely, a specific person, or type of person, or people in general—or it may remain indeterminate as when the attribution pertains to norms, expectations or human thoughts in general. Such features of attribution and resemblance in content are also common to attributive/echoic uses such as reported speech and thought. In contrast to such uses, however, the speaker's intention with irony is not merely to provide information about the content of G and ascribe G to an identifiable source, but rather to express a *dissociative* attitude towards G, and indirectly towards the people who are likely to entertain G. Thus, when saying “*Fine weather*” in the middle of a downpour,

the speaker does not intend to convey something new content-wise—that the weather is terrible—but rather to show how ridiculous it would be to hope for fine weather, thereby mocking those who have predicted or merely hope for fine weather. Also importantly, both the attribution of G and the expression of the attitude are made *implicitly*—such that explicit reports *John said it's going to be sunny; I thought it was going to be sunny* (uttered upon encountering rain) and explicit expression of attitude *It's ridiculous to think this is fine weather*, are not perceived as irony.

This explains why in being ironic the speaker dissociates herself from F, thus indicating that the thought put forward by the utterance is not her own (current) thought about the world. Rather, the purpose of doing so is to echo another thought, bringing to mind a real/conceivable perspective G whose content is similar to the content of F. Furthermore, by echoing G the speaker ascribes it to some other thinker U' (or her past self), while expressing a dissociative attitude towards G. Thus, the speaker's point with irony is not merely ascriptional or attributive (as with reported speech/thought), but it is *expressive* of a derogatory attitude towards G—namely, that G is inadequate or ridiculous, also indirectly suggesting that the kinds of people who are likely to entertain G are worthy of ridicule.

Summing up, three important elements are constitutive of ironic echoing: (i) *tacit attribution* of a perspective G to another thinker U'; (ii) *similarity in content* between F and G; (iii) *tacit expression of a derogatory attitude towards G*, and thinkers like U'.

#### 4.2 *Objections to the Echoic Theory and Responses*

##### Objection 1: Echo Extended to Imaginary/Possible Thoughts

It has been objected that some ironic utterances don't always involve echo in the sense of an attributable previously expressed content (Martin, 1992; Seto, 1998; Hamamoto, 1998). In response, echoic theorists propose to stretch the notion of echo not only to real thoughts that have been expressed but also to possible or imaginary thoughts that have not been expressed, and more generally to hopes, desires, norms, and expectations. As Wilson (2009: 208) notes, the primary object of irony need not be real or imagined speech-acts, and coextensively the type of person who would perform or take such speech-acts seriously. Rather, the target for ironic echoing may include thoughts that need not have been overtly expressed in an utterance at all. Thus, echo is very flexible in that it enables to target the inadequacy not only of thoughts about future speech-acts but also of human thoughts in general.

However, even conceding such an extended conception of echo, it is still difficult to explain cases in which there is no clear source of the attributed



thought being mocked. Imagine for example that I am with my fisherman friend watching a rusty old oily boat coming into the harbour, and he says:

(9) Ah, the pride of the fleet!<sup>8</sup>

No one asserted that the old tub was the pride of the fleet, and no one thought it, so there is apparently nothing to echo. And yet (9) is easily perceived as irony. How can echoic theory explain this? One might suppose that what is echoed here is the *wish* or *hope* of a typical boat owner that his boat is the best. By pointing to the rusty boat, however, my friend shows how ridiculous such a wish or hope would be. However, what boat owners wish or hope is irrelevant to what one might think of *this particular* boat. In order to express an evaluation about this particular boat, the echoic theorist might insist that what is echoed is a certain “norm” or general expectation that boats should be kept in good shape, thereby drawing attention to the fact that this particular boat doesn’t live up to such an expectation or norm. But this is too general. What is missing here is echoing the possibility that *this particular* boat *could be* thought of as the pride of the fleet. One natural way of raising this *possibility* to salience, I contend, is by pretending that this boat is the pride of the fleet, or to pretend to be someone admiring this boat. In this way, by contrasting such a possibility with the mutual perception of the rusty boat, my friend is mocking not only this particular boat but also whoever might think that it is the pride of the fleet. Since echoic theorists claim that echo is constitutive of irony, then what is echoed here turns out to be a thought G that is similar to a pretend thought F.

Cases like these suggest that echo needs to be extended even further than echoic theorists have already conceded, so as to include not only thoughts/utterances that can be attributed to an identifiable source but also thoughts with no clear source, and importantly for our purposes thoughts that may be brought to salience via pretence. Such an extension of echo makes it however difficult to explain how the attribution is constrained.

#### Objection 2: No Attribution; No Attributee

Now, having conceded that ironic echoing stretches to (unexpressed) human thoughts and widely accepted social/aesthetic norms and conventions, one might worry that attribution becomes so indeterminate that it has very little

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8 For more precision, we should acknowledge that the irony here is about a metaphor *the pride of the fleet*, but because the metaphor is conventional I shall ignore the complications that arise with cases of ironic metaphor. See Popa (2009, 2010) and reference therein.

explanatory value. This is particularly the case when there is no clear identifiable source for attributing the targeted thought G.

In response, the echoic theorist might invoke a *hypothetical* or *generic* speaker/thinker U' to whom the echoed thought is attributed, and who is thereby being mocked with irony. But this threatens to trivialize the notion of attribution. Seemingly, if hypothetical speakers are sources of echoing then all utterance tokens are echoes.<sup>9</sup> Currie (2010) suggests that echoic theory may completely dispense with attribution without losing any of the explanatory value of the echoic mechanism. Thus, irony can be explained as an “interpretive” use of *S* with a view to expressing a dissociative attitude towards that which they are interpretations of. However, as I will elaborate in §5, there is a sense in which the attribution is important even if one adopts a pretence account.

In the meantime, I suggest a possible refinement of the role of attribution by distinguishing between (a) an *existential* source of attribution (there *exists* a generic instance to which the targeted thought G can be attributed), and (b) an *identifiable* source of attribution. On this suggestion then, irony might always be seen as involving a weak existential attribution (a), without always involving a rich identifiable attribution (b).

### Objection 3: Echo May Collapse into Pretence

Echoic theorists are committed to irony *always* having something to echo. But if echo is weakened so that it can cover mere possible and imaginary utterances/thoughts, there is but a small step to conceding that pretend acts and thoughts can also be echoically targeted. In short, if echo is construed broadly enough, then echoing becomes a form of weak form of pretending.

This becomes evident when it is not possible to determine the source of attribution or when the norms/expectations invoked in a particular context remain indeterminate. Consider (10) (from Currie, 2010) uttered about Mary—the gentlest person—as she approaches to chair a meeting:

(10) Heads are about to roll.

No one (and certainly not Mary) has seriously said or thought that Mary would chair the meeting in an aggressive way. What is then echoed here? Sperber and Wilson (1995: 239) suggest that it is sufficient for irony that the

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9 See Saka (2005: §3.3) for a criticism of echoic treatment of cases of irony involving scare quotes.

target be attributed to a general norm or “popular wisdom”, or that there is a “*normative bias*” against which the targeted thought G falls short (Wilson and Sperber, 2012; Wilson, 2009, 2013). But Currie (2010: 18) insists that in (10) there is no general norm that could work here—say, that chairs ought to conduct meetings in a vengeful and confrontational way. Cases like these therefore make it difficult for the echoic account to get off the ground. On the other hand, such an expectation may be invoked via pretence in the sense that the speaker may pretend to adopt a viewpoint according to which meetings should be conducted in a vengeful and confrontational way, even though no one has expressed such a thought.

But not any pretence can work. For the speaker to be able to draw attention to Mary’s lack of firmness as a chair, I suggest that the pretence of a massacre with heads rolling should involve a loose echoing to a particular expectation about what a draconian chair would be like in a specific context—say, a business context—and what unkindness would amount to in such a context—say, that businessman may be extremely aggressive one to another. However, such an expectation need not be about what *would normally* happen but rather about what *could* happen in such a context. In this way, the pretence of a massacre brings to mind a similar exceptional possibility in a business context, with a view to showing that imagining Mary chairing the meeting in a similarly aggressive manner is utterly ridiculous given her weak nature. Such cases pose considerable problems for the echoic theory since echo needs to be stretched even further than already conceded—namely, to particular instantiations of norms/expectations that are brought about via pretence.

#### 4.3 *Benefits of the Echoic View*

In the light of the above discussion, the echoic theory can be summarized as follows:

##### **Echoic View**

In uttering *S*, *U* is ironic iff *U* uses *S* (or part of it) *echoically* to express *F* with a view to *attributing* a thought/perspective *G* (similar in content to *F*) to those kinds of people who (might) entertain *G*, and expressing a *derogatory attitude* towards *G* and those kinds of people who are likely to entertain *G*.

It is of the essence of this view that irony is a matter of implicitly expressing a dissociative attitude towards an implicitly attributed thought. Hearers will then understand irony when they correctly infer that *U* is thinking about someone else’s thought/perspective *G*, or her own past thoughts, hopes, and desires,

presenting them as an object of ridicule because they manifestly fall short of expectations. We can represent this as a two layered-thought including: (i) a thought similar in content to the utterance content is *attributed* to someone else: ‘X says/thinks *P*’ and (ii) the speaker’s *attitude* towards (i): ‘It would be ridiculous to say/think *P*’

This captures the meta-representational nature of irony in the sense that the speaker does not use the utterance to convey her own thoughts but rather to meta-represent someone else’s thoughts and express an attitude towards them. Thus, in understanding irony the hearer has to think not directly about the speaker’s thoughts but about her thoughts about others’ thoughts.

Importantly, this analysis accommodates the problematic cases for Grice that we discussed in § 2. For example, ironic uses of non-declarative speech-acts such as asking *Shall we stop for petrol?* to a neurotic driver, or cases in which the irony targets implications of the utterance as in (2)–(3), can be explained in terms of echoing a thought/perspective under which the speech-acts that are put forward, or their implications, are shown to be ridiculous. However, I shall argue that in order to account for the richness of echoing involved in such cases the echoic theory must make room for a weak form of pretence.

At this point, I suggest, the way forward is for echoic and pretence theorists to seek reconciliation or compromise. Both face difficulties in converting the conditions they hold essential to irony into conditions that are sufficient, difficulties they might try to overcome by appealing to elements of the other’s account.

## 5 Towards an Integrated Account of Pretence and Echo

The strong pretence and echoic theories considered so far hold that pretence and echo are, respectively, necessary and sufficient to account for irony. However, many purported counterexamples have been offered to such strong theories. While proponents of them have often tried to accommodate such counterexamples, in this section I shall explore the attractions of a concessive response—on which the pretence (respectively echoic) theorist concedes that the purported counterexample involves an element of echo (respectively pretence) but holds that only the strong version of the theory is refuted. To respond in this way is to advocate what I call a “*hybrid*” theory.

I distinguish “weak” and “strong” hybrid theories. A weak hybrid theory invokes a distinction between central and peripheral cases of irony and confines the counterexamples it concedes to the periphery. A weak hybrid pretence (respectively echoic) theory has two varieties, depending on whether the coun-

terexamples on the periphery are held to involve *just* echo (respectively *just* pretence) (variety 1), or echo *and* pretence (respectively pretence *and* echo) (variety 2). In contrast, a strong hybrid theory avoids the distinction between central and peripheral cases and holds that pretence and echo are both essential to and jointly sufficient for *all* cases of irony.

I begin by considering weak hybrid pretence and echo theories and argue that in both cases it is the second variety that is superior: the supposedly peripheral counterexamples to strong pretence (respectively echoic) theories are best treated as involving echo *and* pretence (respectively, pretence *and* echo). Then I shall argue that the moral of such counterexamples should be extended to *all* cases of irony so as to defend a strong hybrid theory. The *integrated* strong hybrid theory I advocate is superior to two existing strong hybrid theories in that it achieves parsimony by proposing a single, unified mechanism in which elements of both pretence and echo are uniformly integrated.

### 5.1 *Weak Hybrid Theories*

Clark and Gerrig (1984) object that a strong echoic theory cannot explain cases like Swift's "*A Modest Proposal*" since it is hard to see what sort of echo is at work here. The propositions that Swift puts forward to solve the problem of the poor include the following: (F1) that children should be used as food to serve to the rich, thus (F2) expanding the culinary repertoire for the rich, and (F3) providing income to their poor family. Obviously, no one would ever think that such surreal and fantasmagoric propositions would solve the problems of the Irish society. There is no echoed thought to be mocked; Swift is clearly pretending.

Wilson (2006: 1741) concedes that Swift's satire and parody more generally involve pretence because what matters most here is mimicry and dramatization.<sup>10</sup> The speaker adopts a *persona*—that is, she pretends to be someone who she is not with a view to criticising and making fun of the ways of thinking and behaving of such a type of person. Wilson calls such cases "*impersonation irony*", dismissing them as merely peripheral. She thus concedes that to accommodate such cases a strong version of echoic theory needs to be weakened to a *weak hybrid echoic theory* that accepts pretence. But the sense of "hybrid" here amounts to a distribution of pretence and echo for different cases of irony. Respectively, regular irony involves echo, whereas parodic irony involves pretence. To be sure, Wilson (2006: 1725) insists that "echoic use is essential to typical cases of verbal irony [...] and pretence is not", though later (2009: 215–216)

10 For the relations between irony, satire, and parody see Kreuz and Roberts (1993).

conceding that “some [cases] are clearly forms of echoic allusion, others are more closely related to pretence; some involve both echoing and pretence”, and occasionally “echoing and pretence can combine to produce occasional ironical effects”.<sup>11</sup> Wilson’s proposed weak hybrid theory is therefore one of variety 1.

On the other hand, Currie (2010: 28) contends that pretence alone is sufficient to cover all cases of irony. He suggests setting aside Swift-type of cases from central cases of irony by distinguishing two kinds of pretence: “*reflexive*” (conscious, carefully sustained) pretence for parodic irony, and “*irreflexive*” (thin, inactive) pretence for regular irony. While this offers a unified pretence treatment across the board, I contend that even in cases that require reflexive pretence, there is an echoic/attributive element which helps establishing the connection between the pretend thought F and the targeted thought G in a more constrained way. This explains why it is not Swift’s pretend propositions that are ironically targeted, but rather the political views of the time, say G, which are motivated by the perverted values similar to the ones Swift puts forward under pretence. Thus, the resemblance between F and G is very loose, involving a common ill feeling towards the difficulties of the poor in Ireland. On this analysis, the pretence enables bringing about more vividly an echo to those attitudes in order to criticize them. This analysis suggests a weak hybrid theory of variety 2.

From the opposite viewpoint, Wilson (2006: 1738–1740) objects that the strong pretence theory cannot explain the continuum between irony and reported speech/thought since the latter do not involve pretence. Wilson submits counterexamples such as (11b)—where the irony applies to genuine speech-acts, and reports such as in (12)—said by Mary in reaction to Peter’s serious remark *I almost won* (after losing at tennis):

- (11) a. *Jack*: I had dinner with Chomsky last night.  
 b. *Sue*: You had dinner with Chomsky? What did he say?
- (12) a. He says he almost won.  
 b. He almost won, he thinks.  
 c. Poor fool. He thinks he almost won.

In both cases, Wilson argues, it is difficult to make a case for pretence. In (11) Sue genuinely asks Jack to confirm that she understood his statement

11 Gibbs and Colston (2007) suggest that the pattern for pretence and echo varies across different types of irony. E.g. sarcasm and hyperbole involve more pretence than echo, whereas cases of jocularity involve pretence and echo with near equal frequency.

correctly while indicating her own attitude towards it. However, if we imagine an exchange like (11) in a context in which Jack is well known for boasting around for his befriending famous people, Mary's question may be interpreted as involving pretence. But the pretence does not target the illocutionary force of her speech-act, as Wilson contends, since Mary is still asking a question. Rather, the pretence is about her believing the implications of Jack's statement, thus expressing her scepticism.

Wilson insists that also cases such as (12) do not involve pretence. They are clearly echoic in that Mary attributes to Peter the thought that he won, while indicating her own attitude towards it. However, there is one interpretation on which this may be seen as involving a weak sense of pretence insofar as Mary makes as if she accepts the attributed speech/thought as true, while expressing her disbelief.

Clark and Gerrig (1990) and Recanati (2007, 2010) develop a view on which pretence is a common feature of both irony and reported speech/thought. Recanati (2007: 223–227, 2010) argues that pretence enables the speaker to assume and display the viewpoint of the person whose speech/thought she is reporting. Thus, the pretence involved in indirect reports amounts to adopting the reportee's viewpoint and reporting its content and correlative attitude. The pretence involved in direct reports may be richer in that it amounts to using the very same words the reportee used, together with displaying specific features of his/her phrasing or pronouncing, or gestures. In free indirect speech which combines direct and indirect reports, the pretence amounts not only to *reporting* the content and attitudes of the reportee but also *showing* and *demonstrating* what that speech was like. Pretence thus seems to perform the function that echo does for echoic theorists—namely, targeting a perspective as the object of the speaker's attitude. This suggests a weak hybrid theory of variety 2.

The above considerations about peripheral cases suggest the following weak hybrid theories:

Weak hybrid echoic theory:

Echo is necessary and sufficient for central cases of irony but regarding peripheral cases either (i) it is neither: pretence is necessary and sufficient (variety 1), or (ii) it is necessary but not sufficient: pretence is needed too (variety 2)

Weak hybrid pretence theory:

Pretence is necessary and sufficient for central cases of irony but regarding peripheral cases either (i) it is neither: echo is necessary and sufficient (variety 1), or (ii) it is necessary but not sufficient: echo is needed too (variety 2).

These hybrid theories have a wider explanatory scope than the respective strong theories. By incorporating elements of the rival theory they are able to account for peripheral cases. But according to such theories the imported element remains subsidiary and has no other motivation in the explanation of central cases of irony.

However, to the extent that both weak hybrid theories confine the rival mechanism to peripheral cases, the dispute between strong theories to the effect that their proposed mechanism is, respectively, necessary and sufficient to *all* cases resurfaces now as a dispute over whether pretence and echo are, respectively, necessary and sufficient for the *central* cases of irony. Such a dispute is, however, somewhat arbitrary in the absence of clear boundaries between central and peripheral cases. Ideally, a theory of irony should not rely on a distinction between central and peripheral merits. One attractive feature of the *strong* hybrid theories I am about to discuss is that they satisfy this desideratum.

## 5.2 *Two Strong Hybrid Theories*

In contrast to weak hybrid theories which concede a rival mechanism for peripheral cases, I shall argue that strong hybrid theories which maintain that *both* pretence and echo are essential to *all* cases of irony provide a more satisfactory, uniform treatment. I begin by discussing two existing proposals that point in the direction of the strong hybrid theory I wish to defend.

Kumon-Nakamura et al.'s (1995/2007) develop an "*allusional pretence*" theory that combines "pragmatic insincerity" and "allusion" which they held to be more extended and inclusive than pretence and echo, respectively. Pragmatic insincerity generalizes the semantic or propositional insincerity to insincerity about speech-acts—that is, the speaker puts forwards a speech-act, while violating its felicity conditions. However, as we've seen with the pretence accounts discussed in § 3, pretence has a more general flexibility than pragmatic insincerity. It can apply naturally to cases in which the speaker is sincere about what she asserts, or is ironic about the implications of the utterance. Moreover, the pretence as characterized here extends not only to pretence of speech-acts but also to pretence of doing and pretence of being, and more generally to pretence of mental states. On the other hand, Kumon-Nakamura et al.'s insist that allusion is more general and more extensive than echo since the speaker may sometimes allude to expectations/norms/conventions that have been violated without necessarily echoing anything.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, allusion

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12 Allusion is also claimed to be more extensive than Kreuz and Glucksberg's (1989) broader



is held to explain better cases of non-declarative speech-acts such as ironic questions:

- (13) a. [*to someone acting inappropriately for his/her age*] How old did you say you are?  
 b. [*to someone who gobbled up a whole pizza*] How about another small slice of pizza?  
 c. [*to a slovenly housemate*] Would you mind very much if I asked you to consider cleaning up your room some time this year?

Kumon-Nakamura et al. dispute that such cases can be explained in terms of echo, and propose that the speaker alludes to expectations or norms by drawing attention to their violation. But in contrast to strong echoic theories and weak hybrid echoic theories, allusion alone is not sufficient to yield irony (at least in central cases of irony). Rather, the speaker is also held to pretend that she is asking a question, making an offer, or making an over-polite request. In this way, she makes salient the norms or expectations that should hold were the speech-acts sincere, with a view to suggesting that they precisely do not hold in the circumstances.

Thus, the suggestion of including allusion together with pretence is an important attempt to integrate pretence and echo within a unified theory. However, the account is insufficiently constrained in explaining how pretence and allusion are related.

The second attempt to a strong hybrid theory may be attributed to Camp (2012), though she has no explicit intention to show how pretence and echo can be integrated together. Rather, her main concern is to integrate Grice's insights that irony conveys some inverted content together with insights from the pretence and echoic theories that insist on the expression of an ironic attitude. To generalize, Camp proposes a "meaning inversion" operation which may apply to other types of meaning than what is said—e.g. inversion of lexical meaning and various implications of the utterance. To explain this, Camp (2012: 605) recruits elements of both pretence and allusion:

The speaker *pretends* to make an assertion or other a speech-act, but she thereby genuinely *presupposes* some standard of evaluation, and

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notion of "*echoic reminder*" by which speakers remind hearers of previous events, social norms, or failed expectations, since in salient contexts hearers may already be aware of such failure and no reminding is necessary.

also *implicates* that this standard has been violated and that she feels negatively about its violation.

The echoic/allusive element is here reconverted in terms of a normative scale including ranked values and normative expectations about a person, fact, quality, or situation talked about. In addition, Camp requires that this normative scale be *presupposed*. The presupposition is brought about by pretence: by pretending to F, U presupposes that a F-related standard of evaluation holds on the scale evoked, thereby making as if this F-standard is part of the common ground or commonly accepted by the conversants. Camp's notion of presupposition is more explanatory than the echoic notion of "*echoing normative expectations*" because it explains that when the standard invoked is being violated the values associated with the presupposed standard can be inverted in a way that doesn't require *defence*. That is, in the same way the values invoked by the presupposed standard are accepted in the common ground, so their inversion will be accepted in the common ground without being recorded on the conversational scoreboard. As a result, both the ironic (inverted) content and the mocking attitude gain tacit acceptance without the speaker defending either. Thus, both pretence and echo are recruited in identifying the ironic content: by pretending to be committed to an F-value on the presupposed evaluative scale the speaker conveys her commitment to an opposite value together with a mocking attitude towards F.

Although Camp's proposal is the most comprehensive theory of irony, it doesn't clearly explain why the object of the ironic attitude is not a commitment to a pretend-value F but another related value G. Clearly, what is being mocked with irony is not the pretence itself but something that is close enough to F and which certain kinds of people would be likely to endorse. Therefore, what is missing from Camp's proposal is showing how a pretend commitment F evokes a related commitment, G, that bears a suitable resemblance to F and which can be attributed to those kinds of people who might really/conceivably endorse G. Thus, we need to explain why G, rather than F, is the target of the ironic attitude. I turn to this next.

### 5.3 *An Integrated Strong Hybrid Theory*

Whereas the strong hybrid proposals by Kumon-Nakamura et al. and Camp made good on showing that both pretence and echo are crucial to explaining a wide range of ironic cases, the two elements remain however disjoint, with no clear predictions about how they interact in order to determine the target of the ironic attitude. In this section I shall outline a more constrained strong hybrid account that is able to integrate pretence and echo as complemen-

tary parts of a single, unified, mechanism. This integration becomes desirable once we acknowledge that the similarities between pretence and echo outweigh their dissimilarities, and that a unified treatment of irony is superior to both.

The kind of integrated account I have in mind unifies the similarities between pretence and echo into a *core-structure* of a single mechanism, thus avoiding a duplication of their common features. I contend this is a natural outcome since both pretence and echo are employed to achieve the same goal—namely, identifying the thought targeted by the ironic attitude. But because they do so by using different vehicles—pretence and echo—they bring in the kinds of dissimilarities that pretence and echoic theorists have focused on as the source of their distinctiveness. I suggest instead that we gain explanatory value by taking the dissimilarities as complementary elements enriching the core-structure.

Thus, I propose that the core-structure of the unified mechanism be built on the following common features between pretence and echo: (a) *dissociation from F*—which explains that the thought/perspective which the utterance evokes is not a current thought of the speaker; (b) *similarity* between F and the targeted thought/perspective G—which identifies the target of the ironic attitude; (c) *implicit attribution of G* to a specific or type of person, or to people in general—which identifies the source of the targeted thought/perspective; and (d) *implicit expression of a dissociative attitude towards G* and the kinds of people that are likely to entertain G.

Some of these features are more central to one theory than the other. Whereas pretence is inherently dissociative according to the pretence theory—by pretending *p* one typically shows one does not believe *p*; according to the echoic theory the speaker's dissociation from F requires an additional constraint—namely, the speaker needs to show that she disapproves of the echoed content, thus dissociating herself from *p*. Further, since the echoed thought that is being mocked is only *tacitly* attributed to someone else, the speaker in uttering *S* may be seen as presenting herself as believing *p*. But this form of tacit attribution is no different from what pretence achieves. To that effect, echoing may be seen as involving a weak form of pretence.

On the other hand, whereas the attribution is indispensable for the echoic theory, it is merely contingent on the pretence theory. Similarly, the resemblance between F and G is essentially one *in content* for echoic theory, whereas it may also be a resemblance in form for pretence theory. Finally, whereas echoic theory explains the dissociative attitude towards G independently of the vehicle F, pretence theory constrains it as depending on the kind of evaluation that F would elicit, thus securing an attitude-transfer from F to G.

I contend that these differences do not support a distinctiveness claim—that pretence and echo are fundamentally distinct and mutually exclusive. My view is that such dissimilarities are in effect illuminating of complementary aspects that can be seen as enriching the core-structure of the integrated mechanism. Thus, echo allows identifying G, because G is whatever is similar in content to F. However, by neglecting the richness of F—when F is explained in terms of pretend thoughts, speech-acts, gestures, etc.—echoic theorists miss out further possibilities of qualifying what G can amount to—e.g. when G covers tendencies of behaviour. In this regard, pretence has a wider coverage—from previous utterances to imaginary or unexpressed thoughts, general perspectives/viewpoints, gestures, and tendencies to behave/think, which need not be traced to previous acts by others but which the speaker can enact in order to draw attention to their limitations and deficiencies. In this way, pretence offers a loose constraint for identifying G—namely, G is a thought/perspective that resembles F in virtue of similar limitations and deficiencies, which motivates why the attitude one would have towards F is also justified towards G. However, since many more G-type of thoughts may elicit an attitude similar to the attitude towards pretend thoughts F, but with no clear connection to F, the resemblance in content that echo offers provides a more constraining way for narrowing down G.

What the two theories miss out in disregarding the competitor's proposal is a way of linking how the resemblance between F and G is made. This can be achieved, I suggest, by integrating the following ingredients from both theories: (a) *pretence of F* (as described by pretence theorists), (b) *attribution of G* (as described by echoic theorists), and (c) that the resemblance between the *pretend F* and G be a relation of *echoing*.

To explain how the speaker, by pretending to do something F, manages to express an attitude about something else G, I propose that the point of juncture for the integration we want consists in relating F and G via echoing. More precisely, considering that in uttering S, U pretends to adopt a viewpoint F (which she does not endorse), and in so doing U also echoes a similar viewpoint G, we thus have the connection that allows us to identify the targeted perspective G, which in fact U wants to criticize. The integrated mechanism I propose amounts therefore to putting forward a pretend thought/perspective F, while constraining the relation between F and G as one of *echo*, so that G resembles the pretend F not only in form but also in content—i.e. dependent on how many logical and contextual implications they share. In other words, the pretence of F brings about an *echo* to a real/possible thought/perspective G so that (i) G is *similar* to the pretend F both in content and form; and (ii) G may (though it need not) be *tacitly attributed* to specific people, or people in general.

Why is this a better explanation? As I see things, by enriching the core-structure with specific elements from both pretence and echo, the resulting integrated mechanism is able to have a richer application and to impose more precise constraints on what the vehicle and the target of irony are. For example, because pretence can apply to a wide variety of vehicles *F*—whether linguistic or not—it therefore allows the relation of echoing to feed on richer resources than if the vehicle *F* were just the utterance. In this way, by pretending to *F*, *U* can echo more vividly *G* since *U* not only pretends to assert *F*, she also pretends to be someone who believes *F*, with a view to putting the hearer in the mind of something similar—namely *G*—thereby alluding to believers of *G* who are in effect the target of *U*'s mockery.

Furthermore, because the pretend thought/perspective *F* is presented as limited or defective, this explains why *G* is worthy of a dissociative attitude—because *F* would be worthy of a dissociative attitude, and *F* is similar to *G* in one respect or other. Now, since the similarity between *F* and *G* is explained in terms of echo, this leaves room for degrees of resemblance between *F* and *G* (with identity being a limited case), depending on whether the pretence is rich or lean. With this resemblance in place we can now explain the transfer of attitude from *F* to *G*, because the attitude towards *G* is grounded in, and varies in strength with, the attitude one would have towards *F*. For example, when *F* involves a rich pretence—perhaps an exaggerated version of *G* as with a hyperbolic irony “*We couldn't have chosen a better day than this for a picnic*” uttered on heavy downpour—we may expect *U* to express a stronger dissociative attitude towards *G* than if *F* involved a lean-pretence as when uttering “*Fine weather*”. Thus, the hearer is invited to evaluate *G* by looking into the reasons she has for holding *F* limited or defective.

In the light of these considerations, the strong integrated hybrid view proposed here is as follows:

### **Strong Integrated Hybrid View**

In uttering *S*, *U* is ironic iff *U* *pretends* to have a limited/defective perspective/thought *F*, and by doing so she *echoes* a real/conceivable perspective/thought *G*, which is *similar* to *F*, thereby implying that *G* is similarly limited/defective, and thus mocking those who are likely to entertain *G*.

#### **5.4 Advantages of the Strong Integrated Hybrid Account**

The rationale of the strong integrated hybrid account proposed here is that neither pretence nor echo alone is sufficient to identify the target of the ironic attitude. However, in contrast to weak hybrid theories that concede the presence of the rival mechanism for peripheral cases (see §5.1), our integrated account

proposes that both pretence and echo are essential in *all* cases (including central cases) of irony. This offers the advantage of a unified treatment across the board in terms of a single mechanism, in contrast to weak hybrid theories which posit two distinct mechanisms—e.g. on a weak echoic hybrid account, echo for regular irony and pretence for parodic irony. I contend that our integrated account fares also better than existing strong hybrid accounts in that it shows how elements of both pretence and echo are integrated in a unified mechanism. Wilson (2009: 215–216) summarizes the type of “*hybrid attributive-pretence*” theory which she attributes to Recanati as follows:

in both parodic and regular irony, the speaker is seen as imitating a real or imagined speech act and tacitly conveying a mocking, sceptical or contemptuous attitude to a thought with a similar content that she attributes to some source other than herself at the current time.

Similar to our strategy here, the key to the suggested hybrid attributive-pretence account is to establish a relation of echoing between a pretend thought/perspective F and the targeted thought/perspective G. However, none of the strong hybrid proposals defended so far, nor Wilson’s discussion fully tease out the implications of a proper hybridization in the sense of showing how pretence and echo interact.

Furthermore, Wilson (2009) objects that a hybrid account makes the same predictions as the echoic account but is more costly because it employs two disparate mechanisms rather than one. This is a misplaced objection. In effect it applies to weak hybrid accounts since they propose either pretence or echo for central cases, while conceding the rival mechanism—echo and pretence, respectively—for the peripheral cases. Wilson’s (2006) weak echoic hybrid account is a case in point. In contrast, the strong integrated account proposed here, though it posits both pretence and echo in *all* cases of irony it does not require that they be fully identified as distinct mechanisms working independently of each other. Rather, I argued that their common features—such as pretence of F; attribution of G; and resemblance between F and G—can be integrated into a core-structure of a unified mechanism, whereas the differences between them provide complementary aspects that enrich the core-structure with specific elements to each.

Furthermore, it is a consequence of the present integrated account that ironic uses range on a continuum depending on the degree of involvement of pretence and echo from case to case. Thus, at one end of the spectrum we may find cases that employ a substantial, imaginative type of pretence and a weak form of echoing—e.g. Swift-type of cases where the resemblance between F

and *G* is much looser, or when the pretend thought *F* is typically exaggerated or a caricature of *G*. At the other end of the spectrum we may find cases that employ a thin pretence and a substantial element of echoing—e.g. when the echo is explicit and thus the resemblance between *F* and *G* preserves a high degree of similarity, and other cases in between. A continuum claim aligns with Gibbs and Colston's (2007) suggestion to use irony as a unifying term for a broad range of disparate phenomena such as "jocularity, sarcasm, hyperbole, rhetorical questions and understatements", some of which involve more echoing, while others involve more pretence. More investigation is needed to tease out the specifics of each of these cases and their relation to irony, but in this paper our ambition is more limited—namely, by teasing out the theoretical divergences between pretence and echoic theories we hoped to show that pretence and echo can be put to work as joint parts of an integrated mechanism.

## 6 Concluding Remarks

The main contribution of the paper is to show that there is a theoretical unity underlying two competing theories of irony—pretence and echoic accounts—contrary to their proponents, and to show how this theoretical unity is better served by a hybrid integrated mechanism that employs both pretence and echo across the board. It is of the essence of such an integrated mechanism that it consists of a core-structure drawing on the common features of pretence and echo—namely, that the speaker *U* dissociates herself from the pretend perspective *F*; that in doing so *U* targets a perspective *G* which she attributes to someone else; while expressing a dissociative attitude towards *G*. I argued that the allegedly exclusive elements of pretence and echo are in fact complementary aspects enriching this core-structure. It follows that by pretending to have a perspective/thought *F*, *U* echoes a perspective/thought *G*: *F* is merely pretended, perhaps caricaturised or exaggerated, while *G* is real/possible. Because she clearly does not endorse *F*—*F* is pretended to be limited/defective—she implies, via the similarity between *F* and *G*, that *G* is similarly limited/defective, thereby criticizing and mocking those who entertain *G*.

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