CHAPTER THIRTEEN

IRONIC METAPHOR: A CASE FOR METAPHOR'S CONTRIBUTION TO TRUTH-CONDITIONS

MIHAELA POPA
UNIVERSITY OF GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

1. Introduction

Metaphor and irony are figurative meanings by which we say one thing and mean another. Although typically we use them independently, say, to make the hearer perceive some similarity in the case of metaphor, or to point out some discrepancy between the situation put forward and what we really think about it in the case of irony, the two purposes are not exclusive. We may yet be both metaphorical and ironical by using a metaphorical utterance with an ironic intent.

For example, while each of the following sentences may be used metaphorically

(1)   You are the cream in my coffee. (Grice 1989)
(2)   Mary is the Taj Mahal. (Bezuidenhout 2001)
(3)   Shamir is a towering figure. (Stern 2000)
(4)   What delicate lacework! (Stern 2000)

– respectively, to convey that the hearer is the most precious thing in the speaker's life, that Mary is very attractive, that Shamir is a respectable man, and to commend someone's calligraphy – they may also be used ironically without loss of these metaphorical meanings: so used, (1) conveys that the hearer has fallen short of the speaker's affection; (2) that Mary is far from being attractive; (3) that Shamir is not taken seriously or respected among his peers; and (4) that someone's handwriting is awful.

In these latter cases, how should we describe the utterance? Is it an ironic metaphor, or a metaphorical irony? This question concerns the logical order of interpretation as well as the temporal order in the actual psychologically processing. Do we first interpret the utterance metaphorically and only then

determine its ironic interpretation? Or do we first determine the ironic interpretation and then interpret it metaphorically?

The central aim of this paper, which is pursued in the first part, is to answer these questions. We argue that both logically and psychologically, metaphor is prior to irony: both in terms of rational reconstruction, and in terms of psychological processing, the phenomenon is one of ironic metaphor, i.e. in that a metaphorical meaning is put to ironic conversational use, rather than an irony used metaphorically. In the second part, we use this result to argue for the claim that in metaphor, it is metaphorical, not literal, meaning that determines truth-conditions.

2. Ironic metaphor interpretation

2.1 Metaphor's priority over irony

Let us call the logical (respectively, psychological) thesis that in ironic metaphor, the metaphor is prior to the irony the logical (respectively, psychological) 'metaphor's priority thesis' (henceforth MPT). Grice (1989, 34) is the first to advocate logical MPT, when he claims that in (1) the hearer has to reach first the metaphor 'You are my pride and joy' and then calculate an ironic interpretation 'You are my bane' on the basis of it. Unfortunately, however, he does not give an argument for this claim, nor how the passage from metaphorical to ironical meaning is negotiated. We aim to remedy this omission.

Our strategy involves distinguishing weak from strong versions of both logical and psychological MPT:

Weak MPT: in **some** cases of ironic metaphor, the metaphor is/has to be computed first.
Strong MPT: in **all** cases of ironic metaphor, the metaphor is/has to be computed first.

So we are left with four versions of MPT. In order of increasing strength they are: weak psychological MPT, weak logical MPT, strong psychological MPT, and strong logical MPT. We argue for each in turn.

Our argument for weak psychological MPT is as follows. It is widely agreed that irony operates **globally** on propositional contents to determine

new contents.[1] But at least sometimes, metaphor operates **locally** on expressions (before the whole utterance is computed).[2] Since local operations work prior to global operations, this seems to support psychological MPT in those cases in which the metaphoric interpretation is local. While this consideration supports the weak version of psychological MPT, it does not support the strong version, however. For irony is not **always** computed globally. For example, when we hear "*The fountain of youth* is getting her pension," said looking at and referring to an old woman, the ironical meaning is grasped as soon as we realize the contrast between the noun phrase and the salient situation.[3] However, without access to the salient context, hearers would have to compute the whole utterance anyway, and factor in the internal contradiction between (the literal meaning of) the definite description used to refer to the woman talked about and the property attributed to her, that of being of an advanced age.[4]

This localized metaphor argument tells us that in **some** cases of ironic metaphor the metaphor **is** computed first. Is there any evidence for weak logical MPT's stronger claim that in **some** cases of ironic metaphor, the metaphor **has to** be computed first? We propose to tackle this issue by reasoning *ad absurdum* and looking at the difficulties for an irony-first approach. Consider the case in which sentence (4) above is used concerning a doctor's indecipherable scrawl. Suppose the hearer **first** retrieves the irony, what would that be? What is the contrary to *lacework*?[5] It seems impossible to pin down an appropriate contrary to the literal term that might then be interpreted metaphorically so as reconstruct the intended interpretation. At least in some cases, there is a conceptual

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[1] This corresponds to a Gricean account of irony in terms of conversational implicature that is derived on the basis of what is said plus contextual information.

[2] This speaks against a Gricean analysis of metaphor in terms of conversational implicature, depending on the computation of the literal meaning of the whole utterance. For various arguments for a local analysis of metaphor see Récanati 1995; Stern 2000; Bezuidenhout 2001; Wilson and Carston 2007. Such a view will be spelled out in section 2, where we discuss four arguments for a contextualist approach of metaphor as part of what is said.

[3] A local analysis of irony would justify a semantic account of sarcasm in terms of SARC operator at the logical form, whose function is to invert the truth-conditional content of a word's literal semantic content; for a rejection of it see Camp (forthcoming).

[4] Perhaps direct reference theorists would still be able to defend a local analysis insofar as they take the old woman herself to be a constituent of the proposition expressed.

[5] For simplicity, we consider the traditional view of irony as contrary of saying.

difficulty underlying the irony-first approach: there is no rational route to the opposite of the literal term, without prior retrieving the metaphor, as Stern (2000, 236) argues:

> The element of the context that is most relevant to determine the appropriate contrary [of the literal term] at this first stage is information related to the feature in terms of which the expression will then be interpreted metaphorically at the second stage. So, to select an ironic contrary, it is necessary to have some knowledge already of the metaphorical interpretation of the expression.

He further explains that finding the relevant ironic contrary independent of the metaphorical meaning seems difficult because it is not always easy to find "a literal (ironic) contrary of the original expression, which, under its subsequent metaphoric interpretation, will express a feature contrary to the feature metaphorically expressed by the original expression" (2000, 236). Translating this for a case like (4), we would have an irony first, of the simplified form 'That's not lacework' (where 'lacework' keeps its literal meaning), and then a metaphor 'That's not beautiful, crafted handwriting.' If Stern's worry is that the literal ironic contrary interpreted metaphorically in a second stage is not the same as the metaphorical contrary of *lacework*, say not beautiful, crafted handwriting, at *prima facie* this does not seem justified: both seem to have the same import. Even though Stern does not give a knockdown argument for the logical impossibility of an irony-first approach, he puts us on the right track.

To see how we can make this more precise, there are a few things about the context that needs to be put in place. The topic of conversation guides the hearer's interpretation: he knows that the speaker in (4) is referring to a scrawl, which is for anybody just awful, and thus has to make sense of the speaker's inappropriate utterance. According to the rational reconstruction strategy, irony could come first, even though in an unqualified or inappropriate form – the literal ironic contrary does not refer to the handwriting but to a real lacework, and be completed metaphorically in a second stage. We claim that this is wrong. One reason is that to get the right contrast required by the intended irony, this has to relate to the handwriting the speaker is talking about. Furthermore, to understand the irony used in relation to the handwriting presupposes in a certain sense that the metaphor has already been computed so as to establish the intended referent. Since referents have to be established before what is said is obtained, and since irony as conversational implicature builds on what is said, the necessity of metaphor's priority seems to follow. Another reason against the irony-first strategy is that the

irony computed in a first stage as a negation of the literal term of *lacework* might be wrongly understood as referring to another (salient) situation, say to comment on some expensive curtains that the cat just ripped to shreds, and would not require a further metaphorical reinterpretation, while in effect the right result for an ironic metaphor should be a negation of the metaphorical meaning. Finally, if we consider the possibility that irony is local, say for instance that the word *delicate* is used ironically, it seems that, on the irony-first approach, the irony 'That lacework is not delicate', interpreted then metaphorically does not give the intended reading. These reasons speak, we think, for the necessity of retrieving the metaphor first.

What about (3) – does the hearer have to compute the metaphor before the irony? Stern (2000) argues that either order of interpretation may do, and explains the unfixed order in (3) by the metaphor's high degree of conventionalisation. Since the metaphorical meaning 'of exceptional importance/influence' is a lexicalized meaning of *towering figure*, and thus can be selected from its potential meanings (like in sense disambiguation) without retrieving the literal interpretation, we can see why an irony-first order is possible: the metaphoric interpretation being short-circuited, it does not make much difference whether it is computed before or after the irony, because it can be easily retrievable in either position. Were we to defend this view, we conjecture that, from a psychological viewpoint, once the irony 'diminutive figure' is computed, the metaphor 'unimportant person' would be computed almost simultaneously in a context where we discuss Shamir's career, not his height.

If this is a somewhat trite metaphor, let's take a conversation about the economic situation where a financial reporter says *It's a sunny day today, isn't it?*, pointing out that the stock market has just gone down drastically.[6] He is both ironical and metaphorical. If we were to understand the irony first – 'The weather is terrible today' – and then interpret it metaphorically to mean 'The economic news is bad today,' that would be possible, because the irony is very conventional, and it may be aided by a sarcastic tone. However, there is a much stronger reason to believe that the metaphor-first alternative is more plausible. Again, the topic of conversation seems to guide the interpretation: given the metaphorically salient context about the economic turmoil, rather than the horrible atmospheric conditions (it may happen that the participants are not even aware of the weather, as they are waiting for the latest news from Wall Street), the metaphoric interpretation

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[6] Thanks to Kendall Walton for the example.

'The economic news is good' is primed first, for then to be interpreted ironically due to the contrast with the salient situation in the stock market.[7]

The difficulty of an irony-first order of interpretation is even more patent in (1)-(2), since the irony necessarily builds on the metaphor: one could hardly avoid a metaphoric interpretation because what is said involves a category mistake (the hearer cannot be an inanimate object in (1); Mary cannot literally have the property of being a building in (2)), and thus cannot have a plausible literal interpretation. If we go with irony first, what we get is some unqualified irony yielding a banal literal truth: 'You are NOT the cream in my coffee' in (1) and 'Mary is NOT the Taj Mahal' in (2). Clearly, they do not make much sense, and have in effect no ironical flavour, unless they are priorly metaphorically interpreted (moreover, if we were to phrase the irony as Grice does 'You are my bane', how are we supposed to reinterpret this metaphorically?). Discussing an example like (2), Bezuidenhout (2001, 163) argues that the right order of interpretation cannot be irony-first; the reason is that cases of once-removed metaphors (i.e. metaphors launched from irony or indirection) are difficult, if not impossible. For example, it seems impossible to utter *It's cold in here* intending it to be taken ironically – 'It's warm in our vicinity' – which in turn is intended metaphorically – 'Our emotional climate is friendly'. On this basis, she concludes that when other interpretations are present, the metaphoric one must precede them. Thus, for (2) to be successfully interpreted – the man implicates he would not be willing to go out with Marry described ironically as Taj Mahal – a specific order of interpretation is required:

- a metaphoric interpretation *P* is first generated from the particular expressions employed in a sentence *S*;
- *P* is then interpreted ironically, producing interpretation *Q*;
- Q can in turn generate a further implicature *R*.

To buttress the argument against the irony-first order of interpretation, we may think of an analogous argument to ironic metaphor, that of idioms used ironically. Thus, a quasi-metaphorical idiom *don't give up the ship* used to communicate that one should persevere in the face of adversity, when it is used in the context of someone giving up, it functions ironically, but only if it is first understood as metaphor for perseverance. Similarly,

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[7] A different explanation for the metaphor's priority may be given in terms of conceptual metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980): the metaphor A SUNNY DAY IS SUCCESS when used ironically conveys an opposite conceptual metaphor A CLOUDY/STORMY DAY IS CRISIS/ANXIETY.

burying the hatchet as referring to declaring an end to hostilities, or peace, when used in the context of someone NOT making peace, it will function ironically. Other examples of this sort are *locking the barn door after the cows have fled*, *striking gold*, *it's a gold mine*, etc.[8]

Given the difficulties discussed above for an irony-first approach, this supports weak logical MPT, i.e. that in **some** cases of ironic metaphor, the metaphor **has to** be computed first.[9] Now, is there an argument for strong logical MPT, i.e. that in **all** cases of ironic metaphor, the metaphor **has to** be computed first? The first claim would be to say that the correct standard interpretation of an ironic metaphor, such as *He is a towering figure*, is closer to that of

(a) *the associated simple irony*
Utterance: He is important
Ironical meaning: He is not important

than it is to that of

(b) *the associated simple metaphor*
Utterance: He is not a towering figure
Metaphorical meaning: He is not important

The second claim would be to say that this fact is correctly predicted by strong logical MPT, on which the order of interpretation is

Metaphor-first proposal
Utterance: He is a towering figure
Metaphor: He is important
Irony: He is not important

but is not correctly predicted by, the irony-first proposal, on which the order of interpretation is

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[8] Thanks to Sam Glucksberg for the suggestion and examples.

[9] Another reason for the metaphor-first approach is that irony and metaphor seem to require different mechanisms of interpretation; if they were similar in nature, we would expect more freedom, or inversion, in the order of interpretation. Relevance theorists argue that metaphors are used **descriptively** to represent a possible or actual state of affairs, while ironies as used **interpretively** to (meta)represent another representation (a possible/actual utterance/thought) that it resembles in content; see Sperber and Wilson 1995; Wilson 2006.

Irony-first proposal
Utterance: He is a towering figure
Irony: He is not a towering figure
Metaphor: He is not important

Now we reach a difficult point (insofar as there are practically no experiments on comprehension of ironic metaphors) of assessing whether there is evidence for strong psychological MPT, i.e. that in **all** cases of ironic metaphor, the metaphor **is** computed before irony. The only psycholinguistic hypotheses are proposed by Colston and Gibbs (2002), who found that processing ironic metaphors (e.g. *He's really sharp!*) takes more time/effort than simple ironies (e.g. *He's really smart!*).[10] One may make sense of this in terms of increased inferential steps necessary for computing two figurative meanings rather than one. Colston and Gibbs explain this difficulty, however, in terms of a certain ambiguity as to what exactly an ironical metaphorical speaker really means, insofar as the metaphorical meaning somewhat competes with the ironic one (for the interpretation of *sharp*). Thus, the hearer has to engage in a complex inference to resolve the ambiguity and recognize that both metaphorical and ironical meanings are intended. Another explanation, from a relevance-theoretic perspective, would be to say that, since metaphor is understood descriptively and irony interpretively, we can expect that combining different processing modes, as is needed in ironic metaphors, increases the effort needed to understand what speakers mean more than in understanding simple ironies where one processing mode is required.

Although Colston and Gibbs' experiments focus primarily on the metarepresentational inferences underlying irony processing, making descriptive claims about the inferences involved in ironic metaphor, they claim that the metarepresentational inferences in ironic metaphor are reduced as compared with understanding simple ironies. They relate this result to metaphor's capacity for muting the ironical meaning, whereas enhancing metaphoric effects. However, one may consider two other hypotheses about the amount of metarepresentational inferences involved in ironic metaphor, as compared to simple ironies.[11]

First, understanding ironic metaphor may **enhance** the degree of metarepresentational inferences as compared to processing irony alone. The

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[10] Giora (2003) also found that salient (familiar) metaphors take longer to understand when they are uttered in ironical contexts rather than in metaphorical ones.

[11] We claim that the ironical meaning in ironic metaphor is determined by the same mechanism as the one that operates in standard non-metaphorical ironies: tacit echoic use combined with elements of pretence (Popa forthcoming).

metaphorical formulation of someone else's thought, or the metaphorical thought which the speaker is echoing in ironic metaphor *{The speaker believes that [X believes that (X believes that ((P))]}* is expected to increase the inferential steps. Note that this possibility would be in tension with the claim that metaphor is processed directly (i.e. as part of what is said), since the utterance should be first interpreted literally, then metaphorically, and then ironically. However, this possibility is dismissed given the low ratings for the inferences required for understanding metaphors.

Secondly, understanding ironic metaphor may require **the same** amount of metarepresentational inferences as processing simple ironies. Adding a metaphor to a speaker's ironic utterance should not complicate the metarepresentations the hearer has to infer. There should be no consequential difference in terms of metarepresentations between echoing a metaphorical thought or formulating metaphorically another's thought in the case of ironic metaphor, and echoing a literal thought in the case of simple irony, since both thoughts are expressed directly. The fact that the hearer has to think about the speaker's thoughts to understand irony (requiring thus second-order mindreading abilities[12]), or about her thoughts about another's thoughts to understand ironic metaphor shouldn't increase the range of second-order inferences. This shows, we think, that the metaphorical formulation of another's thought or someone else's metaphorical thought that the speaker is echoing in ironic metaphor has the same contribution as any other representation of an actual/potential state of affairs; both kinds of

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[12] Testing the difference in metaphor and irony comprehension in autistic patients, Happé (1993) found an asymmetry in their processing: metaphor is interpreted via first-order mind-reading abilities [The speaker believes that (P)], while irony requires second-order mind-reading abilities {The speaker believes that [someone else believes that (P)]}. Whatever the reality about metaphor is, there is overwhelming evidence that for understanding irony subjects need to think about the thoughts the speaker is thinking of. Winner (1988) makes this point clear by comparing the tasks subjects have to undertake so as not to confuse irony with simple mistakes or deception. As Wilson (talk given at the Interpreting for Relevance conference, Kazimierz Dolny 2008) suggests, a distinction is needed between (a) 'spontaneous mindreading' abilities involved in ordinary understanding in the sense that for the hearer to understand an utterance he needs to attribute to the speaker beliefs/intentions, and (b) 'epistemic abilities' required to pass the false-belief test, which are more related to the evaluation of the output of the pragmatic interpretation in order to judge whether it is true or not, and decide if to believe it or not. If the former are underpinning understanding of speaker's meaning, the latter require a critical attitude: the hearer has to think about the truth of propositions and assess the reliability of the speaker, forming the basis of what Sperber et al. (forthcoming) call 'epistemic vigilance'.

thoughts contribute to what is said by the utterance. This correlates with the suspicion that perhaps metaphor comprehension does not require first-order mindreading abilities, suggesting that it should be processed easier and earlier than the irony. Furthermore, the fact that metaphor is part of the metarepresentation the hearer needs to construct to understand the irony seems to suggest the necessity of metaphor's priority, thus confirming strong psychological MPT.

Until we have more decisive evidence about the difficulties in processing ironic metaphors, let us end this section with two conjectures about such a possible cause. First, if metaphor were direct (i.e. contributing to what is said), and as irony is indirect, then in combining together they somehow interfere one with another, which is what happens in ironic metaphors and what explains, we surmise, the difficulty we have in understanding them.[13] Secondly, the fact that metaphoric interpretation is often so rich, such that it is sometimes associated with an open-endness or indeterminacy as to what exactly the thought the speaker wishes to convey is, we can see why combining with an irony the indeterminacy of metaphor is transmitted to the ironic metaphor, creating thus a combinatorically loaded task for the hearer in choosing and testing which of the possible metaphorical meanings is intended to be interpreted ironically. It is thus important to distinguish between what is called the 'pregnancy' of metaphor responsible for its richness and open-endness – if a metaphor is good, then the more one thinks about it, the more one seems to discover in it, so that one can never be sure that one has exhausted its content, which is typical of poetic metaphors, and the efficacy in asserting a specific proposition, which is typical of conversational metaphors. The latter kind may be used to make different assertions, making thus true or false statements.[14] Be that as it may, we established so far that MPT is correct, i.e. in all cases of ironic metaphor, the metaphor **is/has to** be computed first, and so then it can serve as input for the ironic interpretation. But how is irony computed?

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[13] Gibbs (1986) found that sarcastic indirect requests, e.g. *Why don't you take your time to wash the dishes?* are processed faster than a direct request *Hurry up and wash the dishes* or the literal counterpart *Please wash the dishes*. He argues that the reason for this easiness might be that both sarcasm and indirect requests convey meanings communicated indirectly, and thus do not interfere one with another.

[14] Bergmann (1982, 238) develops an interesting account of assertive uses of metaphor, in which she argues that what distinguishes metaphorical assertions from literal ones is not the content of what is said, but the manner of saying it.

2.2 Irony takes metaphorical meaning as echo

Although metaphor and irony are both specifically intended in ironic metaphors, the ironical meaning seems to bear the speaker's main point, whilst the metaphor is merely a springboard to communicate an ironical attitude. We rely here on an account of irony as a hybrid of pretence and echoic elements that we defend elsewhere (Popa forthcoming) so in speaking ironically a speaker tacitly echoes a thought similar in content with her utterance or the proposition expressed by it, or pretends to assent to a perspective put forward by her utterance.[15] We do not see any problem arguing that, given MPT, an ironical metaphorical speaker echoes a metaphorical meaning/thought/utterance that somebody might have put forward, or metaphorically formulates someone else's thought to which she wants to express a disapproving attitude. On the pretence track, she merely displays a metaphorical claim pretending to assent to it, with the aim of drawing the hearer's attention to the contrast it creates in an ironical context. Again, this seems to suggest that the metaphor should have been already computed for it to be put to a conversational ironic use.

In terms of intentions, it is important to understand why an ironical metaphorical speaker uses a metaphor, if her intention is primarily ironical. We think that even though ironic metaphors seem to achieve the same goal as simple ironies, in using a metaphor (usually positive ones) with an ironic intent, speakers make the contrast between the positive referent and the negative situation become less vivid, thereby attenuating the threatening attitude that ironies usually convey. The metaphor seems to ensure a buffer zone for the ironical contrast to be diffused, creating a space where metaphoric effects can resonate, and behind which the speaker may easily retract if a sensitive hearer argues with or questions her ironical claim, arguing that she merely meant to be metaphorical. The general effect might be one of teasing, or humorous, as the speaker takes distance, via irony, from the metaphorical evaluation she only puts forward under a pretence mode, and laughs at such a ridiculous claim or whoever believes it.

As we take the Gricean account of irony as conversational implicature to be correct, irrespective of the echoic or pretence theoretical flavour, we assume that the ironical meaning arises as an implicature grounded in what is said. Now, since in cases of ironic metaphor the ironic interpretation is conditioned upon the metaphorical one (as the relevant echo that needs to be

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[15] For selective references on echoic and pretence accounts of irony, see Clark and Gerrig 1984; Currie 2006; Wilson 2006.

recognized), it follows that the ironic metaphorical meaning is an implicature grounded in the metaphorical meaning, developing in a different direction though. This is crucial insofar as it is indicative of the metaphor's contribution to either 'what is said' by the utterance or to what is implicated by it. In the next section, we consider the consequences of the ironic metaphor account on the metaphor's relationship with what is said and truth-conditions.

3. Metaphor, what is said, and truth-conditions

On Gricean accounts, metaphor is an indirect expression by which speakers intentionally say one thing in order to communicate something different. Metaphorical meaning arises from a blatant violation of the first maxim of Quality ("Do not say what you believe to be false"); it is arrived at by first calculating the proposition literally expressed, which then, given its conversational inappropriateness, leads the hearer to implicatures. Against this view, there are four standard arguments to the conclusion that metaphorical meaning contributes to what is said.[16] Our account of ironic metaphor offers a fifth. Having argued that in ironic metaphor, the metaphor is processed first, we must now ask: In such cases, is the metaphor processed directly (i.e. as part of what is said), or indirectly (i.e. as implicature)? We argue that it is processed directly.

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[16] We understand 'what is said' not in the Gricean sense as closely related to the meanings of words, their order, and their syntactic character, but in a contextualist sense, which captures our intuitions about what has been said in various contexts. Thus, context-specific information and expectations interact with conventional linguistic meanings intruding into semantics to determine what a speaker says on a certain occasion. Under this view, what is said is defined in terms of what speakers do in uttering their words, because saying involves the direct expression of the speaker's intended meaning. Different notions cover the idea of an enriched what is said (e.g. relevance theorists' explicature, Bach's impliciture, Récanati's primary meaning), which incorporates various pragmatic processes so as to determine a truth-valuable proposition. On the contextualist view, what is said in the sense of what is asserted consists of the semantic content of the utterance, plus enrichment, loose talk, metaphor, etc. which are taken to intrude into the utterance's truth-conditional content.

3.1 Four contextualist arguments for metaphor's directness

(i) Psycholinguistic evidence

Two kinds of empirical study, one regarding the neural processes involved in metaphor interpretation, the other regarding comprehension times, suggest that metaphor comprehension is **direct**. First, Coulson and van Petten (2002) question a sharp distinction between literal and metaphoric interpretation on the grounds that both sorts of interpretation engage similar brain processes. Secondly, Gibbs (1994), Gibbs and Tendahl (2006), Glucksberg (2001) found no difference in the times taken to interpret literal and comparable metaphorical utterances, thereby disproving two consequences of the Gricean account: that metaphor comprehension takes no longer than literal interpretation, and is not optional, occurring only when the latter is anomalous.

The claim is that contextual processes penetrate the lexical ones early on, fine-tuning appropriate contextual meanings, so that the interpretation is effortless and seamless, involving no incompatible interpretive stage. The metaphorical meaning is accessed straight away without activating a literal interpretation and then rejecting it. Glucksberg (2001) argues that metaphor comprehension is both mandatory and automatic in the same way literal language is, suggesting that the literal meaning is actively inhibited in favour of the more appropriate metaphorical one. These findings are compatible with Récanati's (2004) account and that of relevance theorists, who argue that metaphor interpretation is a sub-personal process, operating at the level of constituent and without requiring that the sentence's meaning be computed prior to the metaphoric interpretation. In standard conversational metaphors, speakers express directly their metaphorical thoughts, and hearers are not aware of the distinction between literal and metaphorical meanings, even though the latter is, technically, grounded in the former one.

(ii) Embedded metaphors

Metaphors' embeddability within the scope of logical and propositional attitude operators poses a problem for the Gricean view that metaphorical content is conversationally implicated, since conversational implicatures should not be embedded within the scope of logical and other operators. The problem is as follows: metaphorical implicatures appear to be triggered by sub-parts of certain complex sentences, as with the metaphor 'the sun' embedded in Mercutio's report of Romeo's utterance in (5):

(5)   Romeo believes that Juliet is the sun.

Mercutio is not attributing to Romeo the belief that Juliet is the real sun (the literal meaning), but rather a belief provided by the metaphorical content that Juliet is beautiful, nurturing, worthy of worship, etc. As Wearing (2006: 313) argues, this couldn't be accounted for by Gricean theories, because the metaphor as conversational implicature is the product of a conflict between what is said and the conversational maxims, whilst in (5) the embedded metaphor is implicated by something that is not said. The sub-parts of the complex sentences in embedding cases do not constitute what is said by those utterances, and so cannot be the source of conversational implicatures.

(iii) Reports of and responses to metaphorical utterances

Speakers/hearers have intuitions about the metaphoric interpretation as part of what is intuitively said. This is reflected by the speakers' reports of the metaphorically expressed contents (to which they commit themselves), and by the hearers' responses (agreement or denial) to metaphorical utterances by echoing the speaker's metaphorical content. Hearers respond to metaphorical content as if it is what is said, rather than as something implicated, otherwise such responses would be infelicitous (Hills 1997, Wearing 2006). To illustrate, here is a dialogue adapted from Bezuidenhout (2001):

(6)   A: Bill's a bulldozer.
           B: That's true. We want someone who'll stand up to the
              administration and get things for our department.
           C: I disagree that he's a bulldozer; that exterior hides someone
              who's basically insecure. But, either way, Bill wouldn't make
              a good chair.

It appears clear that what B and C are agreeing and disagreeing, respectively, is with the metaphorical content of A's utterance. Bezuidenhout (2001: 157) argues that A says, with an assertoric force, that Bill is a bulldozer (meaning, roughly, a tough guy capable of getting over difficult obstacles), and that B and C are either agreeing or disagreeing with what A says. The idea is, as Bergmann (1982), Stern (2000) have already emphasized, that metaphorical utterances express (truth-valuable)

propositions, and thus can be used to make assertions.[17] That the metaphorical content is part of what the speaker says/asserts, or has an import to the truth-conditional content of the utterance, is clear from B's reply *That's true* ('that Bill is a tough guy and will get things done'), while C could reply *That's not true* ('that Bill is a tough guy, so he couldn't make a good chair').[18] Even though C is picking upon a more physical property of the metaphorical meaning of *bulldozer* (say, the appearance of a big, unbeatable guy), the intended psychological property is indeed available to him for explicit response. If the metaphorical content 'tough guy' were an implicature (i.e. a proposition that is implicated by the saying of something else), such responses as *Yes, he is* or *No, he's not* would be infelicitous. As Wearing (2006, 312) points out "one can't agree that Mr. X has no philosophical talent by saying 'Yes, that's right,'" in response to Grice's example of the letter of recommendation formulated as "Mr. X is always punctual and has nice handwriting." So, it seems that we do respond to the metaphorical content as if it is what is said, i.e. what the speaker expresses directly, rather than something she implicates. What is more is that, not only does A commit herself to the metaphorical content as part of what she says/asserts, but by lodging a new metaphorical meaning in the words uttered, she creates the conditions for that meaning to be inherited by any later use of those same words in that same context responding to her initial claim.

(iv) Availability Criterion

Récanati (2004) posits the Availability Criterion (i.e. for any given utterance, we have conscious access to what is said and its implicature(s), and to the inferential process that mediates them) in order to distinguish primary processes (corresponding to what is said) and secondary processes (corresponding to implicatures). While secondary processes like conversational implicatures, indirect speech acts are **available** – hearers are aware of both that the speaker has said that p and implicated that q, and that there is an inferential link between them – this is not the case for

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[17] Obviously, metaphorical utterances can be used to make other sorts of speech acts, like questions, requests, etc.

[18] We should bear in mind that the notion of saying we refer to here is a stronger notion involving speaker commitment (i.e. 'asserting', committing oneself to its truth), as opposed to a weaker one as merely 'expressing' a proposition, without any commitment to its truth. Bach (2001) characterizes the former as an illocutionary act of 'stating/asserting' (i.e. doing something by saying it), and the latter as a locutionary act, independent of speakers' communicative intention.

primary processes, say like conversational metaphors (e.g. *The ATM swallowed my credit card*). Récanati claims that the interpretation of such conversational metaphors goes smoothly and directly, without retrieving and then rejecting the utterance's literal meaning; upon encountering the word *swallow* the hearer modulates its extension (via a process of broadening) so as to apply to ATM and cards. While clearly in this case we are not aware of the inferential relation between the literal meaning of the utterance and its intended metaphorical meaning (as we simply do not compute the former), Récanati admits that there are cases of more creative, extensive metaphors (e.g. *The ATM swallowed my credit card, chewed for a while and then spat it out*), in which speakers/hearers are aware of some discrepancy between the literal and metaphorical meanings (what he calls 'internal duality'), but this is at the level of the primary meaning. However, this should not be taken as supporting a traditional Gricean view of metaphor as conversational implicature, because, as Récanati argues, we are aware of this discrepancy inasmuch as we aware of the output of the primary interpretation corresponding to what is said; we are neither aware of the sub-personal machinery, nor of the inferential link between the literal and metaphorical meanings, as would be the case with conversational implicatures.

3.2 The argument from ironic metaphor: Metaphor as a vehicle for implicatures

So far, we argued that in cases of ironic metaphor, the metaphor is computed before the irony, and we discussed evidence for the claim that metaphor is processed directly as part of what is said. Even so, a Gricean might still want to challenge the four contextualist arguments above (see Camp 2006) and defend a view of metaphor as conversational implicature. What resources do we have to prove that metaphor as implicature is wrong? Bezuidenhout (2001, 163) already advanced an argument to the effect that in the present cases of ironic metaphor, the metaphoric interpretation must be launched from the utterance itself and not from a pragmatic interpretation that is indirectly arrived at (e.g. irony, indirect request, or any other implicature); indeed, we saw that such cases are precluded by MPT. So it seems fair to say that once the metaphor is directly processed, it then serves as a springboard to launch further implicatures, thereby communicating further meanings, including the ironical one, not the other way around, that is, the irony launching the metaphor. It has been argued that the possibility of a non-literal

interpretation of an utterance launching an implicature may be used as a criterion to distinguish what is said from what is merely implicated.

Camp (2006, 291) objects that the property of launching further implicatures is singular to metaphors, since sarcasm and implicature can both launch further implicatures. For example, when Bill asks Alice whom they should invite for dinner, she responds sarcastically *Well, Jane is always so utterly charming*, implicating that under no condition should Jane be invited. Addressing the question when an indirect interpretation can set up a further implicature, Camp argues that "in order for an implicature Q to be launched from an interpretation P of an utterance U, the speaker's intention for U to be interpreted as P has to be *open* and *obvious*, and not merely insinuated."[19] She then argues that metaphor and sarcasm meet this requirement, as they are "well-established routes for communicating something by an utterance other than its conventional meaning." We agree with this, with the specification however that the speaker's intention for an utterance to be interpreted ironically is merely insinuated, even though in many cases there is a certain transparency or overtness that we wish to be interpreted so. Nonetheless, we agree less with Camp's claim that "an implicature can be launched from P whenever the speaker's intention for U to be interpreted as P is sufficiently obvious, even though P is itself an implicature." The problem, as we see it, is two-fold. First, if P were an implicature, the speaker's intention for U to be interpreted as P is not, and can't be, that obvious and open as Camp would want to (in Grice's letter of recommendation example the professor is merely insinuating that the student is not a good philosopher by saying that he's punctual and has a nice handwriting). The reason why we

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[19] By this formulation, the example of sarcasm launching a further implicature that Camp discusses seems defeated, since the speaker's intention for U to be interpreted as P (here sarcasm), although open and obvious in the sense that Alice wishes to be understood as sarcastic, is *pace* Camp merely insinuated (Alice doesn't want to commit herself to the sarcastic claim she merely suggested, and at any moment she can retract behind a literal claim denying that she meant that Jane is not charming). Moreover, there seems to be a certain misuse of 'implicature;' while sarcasm is definitely an implicature, the further implicature that Camp claims to be launched by the sarcasm seems to be rather an 'implication' (i.e. a proposition that is likely to be true or to follow if the proposition expressed is true and other information from the background is known to be true, e.g. that Bill and Alice don't like to invite around people full of themselves, like Jane) than an implicature. An implicature is a proposition implicated by the saying of something else, but we wouldn't want to say that here the proposition 'Jane shouldn't be invited to dinner' is implicated by the 'saying' of a sarcasm – sarcasm is not part of what the speaker says; it is what she implicates.

communicate information indirectly is not to commit ourselves to the claim we merely suggest, and if we are challenged we can easily retract behind the literal meaning. While this is typical of irony, it is not so of metaphor.[20] Secondly, if we bite the bullet and accept that metaphor is an implicature, then by Camp's argument, given that it can launch further implicatures (say, an irony), the interpretation of ironic metaphor would involve a case of nested implicatures.[21]

Coming back to our positive proposal that metaphor not only comes first in the order of interpretation, but is processed directly as part of what the speaker says/asserts, then by factoring in that metaphor is a vehicle for launching the irony the following argument seems to emerge:

(a)   If a non-literal interpretation launches an implicature, it belongs to what is said rather than to what is implicated.

(b)   In ironic metaphor, the metaphor launches an ironic interpretation (which is an implicature grounded in metaphor).

Then

(*)   **The metaphor is computed as part of what is said**.

Since

(c)   What is said gives the truth condition of an utterance.

It follows from (*) that

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[20] We agree with Camp's (2006, 291) point that for poetic, allusive metaphors, such condition of obviousness fails, because it's difficult to determine the precise content communicated by a poet. We give serious thought to the claim that poetic metaphors are perhaps derived as implicatures, but somehow the argument that we can't paraphrase the exact content the poet wishes to convey exhaustively and in all its nuances, or that this is open-ended, does not seem correct either. This does not make it an implicature; a poet may want to convey that content directly as a disjunction of propositions, leaving to readers the freedom to choose the propositions that are more salient and make more sense to them in the context, and given their own background. Again, the indeterminacy of novel metaphors does not imply their being conveyed indirectly, like with Grice's famous letter of recommendation. However, if people like Camp are right, then we would need an explanation for the separate treatment of conversational metaphors as contributing to what is said, and creative metaphor contributing to implicatures. As we think, this boils down to a refinement of the notion of 'saying', we leave this issue for another paper.

[21] The risk with a nested implicatures scenario is that we may derive implicatures that are not intended insofar as they loose the ground with what is said by the utterance. Moreover, this is in tension with Grice's requirement that an implicature be grounded in what is said. Finally, where does this process stop (how should I, as a hearer, know whether I have retrieved all the implicatures the speaker wanted me to, and that I did not stop launching further implicatures just before the most relevant one)?

(**)   **In ironic metaphor, the metaphorical meaning gives the truth-conditions of the utterance.**

This suggests – why treat simple metaphor differently? – that

(***)   **In metaphorical utterances, the metaphorical meaning gives the truth-conditions**.

The consequence for ironic metaphor is that, given MPT (metaphor is computed before irony), and given (*) that metaphor is computed as part of what is said, it follows a two-stage version of MPT: metaphorical meaning is processed directly (not via the literal meaning) and launches irony. This is consistent with – even, suggested by – the finding that non-ironic metaphor is processed as quickly as non-metaphor (cf. argument (i) in section 2.1). But is it consistent with Colston and Gibbs' (2002) finding that processing ironic metaphor takes longer than simple irony? Three-stage MPT (literal→metaphor→irony) easily explains the finding, since simple irony has two stages (literal→irony). But how can two-stage MPT explain the finding? Until an explanation is forthcoming (we made a conjecture at the end of section 1.1), two-stage MPT stands to Colston and Gibbs' finding as the neo-Gricean denial that metaphors are processed directly stands to (i).

4. Conclusion

We argued that the metaphorical meaning is part of the speaker directly says, and contributes to the utterance's truth-conditions. This results from the evidence we provided for logical and psychological MPT, namely that in all cases of ironic metaphor, the metaphor **is/has to** be computed before the irony, and more particularly from the argument that metaphor serves as vehicle for launching an ironic interpretation. Thus, although metaphor is an entirely pragmatic phenomenon, enabling us to do things with the linguistic code, it contributes to the semantics (the truth-conditional content) of the utterance, being a part of what the speaker communicates explicitly.

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