

ЛИНГВОПРАГМАТИКА И МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНАЯ КОММУНИКАЦИЯ

IRONY AS INFERRED CONTRADICTION

Laura Alba-Juez

The National Distance Education University (UNED)
Paseo Senda del Rey, 7. Madrid, Spain, 28040

“If we acknowledge the existence of an Irony Principle, we should also acknowledge another ‘higher-order principle’ which has the opposite effect. While irony is an apparently friendly way of being offensive (mock politeness), the type of verbal behaviour known as ‘banter’ is an offensive way of being friendly (mock impoliteness).”

Geoffrey Leech, *Principles of Pragmatics* (1983: 144)

In this work I present some theoretical considerations about what I consider to be a permanent and ever-present feature of verbal irony, namely, *inferred contradiction*, which has to be distinguished from plain, direct (non-inferred) contradiction as well as from *indirect negation*, for a contradiction which is directly expressed cannot be interpreted as ironical (since it lacks a crucial component: inference), and an indirect negation may or may not be ironical (depending on the situation), and thus cannot be considered a permanent feature of the phenomenon.

In spite of the fact that many scholars have proposed different theories in order to capture the essence of this intricate and complex phenomenon, not all of them have managed to find a feature or characteristic that applies to or is found in all possible occurrences of irony. I briefly discuss the tenets of some of the best-known of these theories, namely the Classical theories (Socrates, Cicero, Quintilian), the Echoic-Mention Theory (later Echoic Theory), the Echoic Reminder Theory, the Pretence Theory and the Relevant Inappropriateness Theory, trying to show that in all the types of irony emerging from these proposals (e.g. echoic irony, pretence irony, etc.) it can be observed that the irony is triggered by *inferred contradiction*. The one theory that according to my view and knowledge— seems to capture its whole essence to date is Attardo’s (2000) Relevant Inappropriateness Theory, to whose proposal I adhere, but I argue at the same time that *inferred contradiction* is another feature of irony (which goes hand in hand with relevant inappropriateness) that should be considered in any theoretical approach to irony.

I also try to show how the feature of inferred contradiction is found in all the types of verbal irony identified by different authors (e.g. Alba-Juez’s 1995 *negative*, *positive* and *neutral* irony, Leech’s 1983, 2014 *conversational* irony, etc.), and thus conclude that this is a feature of irony that should be taken into consideration as a distinguishing and identifying characteristic of the phenomenon.

Key words: verbal irony, inferred contradiction, irony theory, theories and types of verbal irony.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper presents some theoretical reflections upon what I consider to be a distinguishing feature of all cases and types of verbal irony, namely *inferred contradiction*. Examples that respond to the view of some of the main theories of verbal irony, as well as to its different kinds, will be tested for the occurrence of this feature, in order to show that it constitutes a distinguishing characteristic of the phenomenon and an important trigger for its interpretation as ironic.

Ever since Classical Antiquity (e.g. Quintilian, (1920 [1st c. A.D.]), different scholars have proposed different theories of irony, among which are Sperber & Wilson's (1981, 1986) Echoic-(Mention) Theory, Clark & Gerrig's (1984) Pretence Theory, Kreuz & Glucksberg's (1989) Echoic Reminder Theory, or Attardo's (2000a &b) Relevant Inappropriateness Theory. These scholars focus on what they believe is the essential component of irony, i.e. the unique characteristic that makes an ironic utterance different from a non-ironic one (such as for instance, a lie or a non-ironic joke). Thus, for example, one theory will argue that all cases of irony are echoic, while another will argue that irony is always a matter of pretence. However, some of these theories have been criticized for not covering all possible occurrences of the phenomenon. For instance, and as I shall discuss below, it can be argued that not all ironic utterances are echoic or show pretence on the part of the ironist.

To the best of my knowledge, Attardo's (2000a) Relevant Inappropriateness Theory does seem to cover all cases of verbal irony, and therefore it currently stands out as the most influential theory of irony to date. My view of verbal irony is in line with Attardo's perspective, but I want to show herein that within the relevant inappropriateness inherent to all cases of verbal irony, there is always an underlying contradiction that has to be inferred by the listener or audience, and therefore this can be considered as another of the permanent characteristics of this pragmatic phenomenon.

I will also try to show with different examples that all types of irony (e.g. Alba-Juez's (1995) *positive*, *negative* and *neutral* irony, or Leech's (1983, 2014) *conversational irony* and *banter*) are also instances of utterances in which some kind of contradiction (that may be found at different levels of linguistic description) is inferred by the interlocutor that understands and interprets the ironic meaning. Regarding Leech's view of irony, and because of the high respect I have for his work (which constitutes the main reason why many authors have joined their effort and contributions in this volume of the Vestnik Journal), I will also reflect — to a certain extent — upon the discussions that I had the pleasure of maintaining with Professor Leech at the last IWoDA Conference in Santiago de Compostela (Spain) in June 2013, and later through our epistolary contact. He showed interest in my view of irony as *inferred contradiction*, and we seemed to agree on everything except on the fact that, for him, banter was not irony, and for me (as well as for other authors, e. g. Cicero, Haverkate or Attardo), banter IS a case of irony, of the positive kind, as I shall explain in 2.2.2.

To clarify matters from the very beginning, it is important to point out that not all kinds of contradictions in language can be labelled as ironic. As I have noted above, the contradiction has to be deciphered by the hearer (H) by means of some kind of infe-

rence, which may be conversational or conventionalized¹. Thus, the contradiction expressed in (1)

(1) *You are a fine friend and you are not a fine friend,*

which is open and direct, is not the type of contradiction I am concerned with herein, because it will most certainly not be perceived as verbally ironic. In order for a similar utterance to be interpreted as ironic, it would have to be reformulated as in (2):

(2) *You're a fine friend indeed!*

and would have to respond to certain circumstances of the particular speech situation, such as being uttered by a speaker after her² friend has been disloyal to her, which would make the hearer (in this case, the friend in question) infer that there is a contradiction between what the speaker says and what she really means. This is a prototypical case of verbal irony in which the contradiction is found at the level of the proposition, and therefore obeys the simple formula:

$X \text{ is } Y = X \text{ is not } Y.$

However, and as will be argued below, the inferred contradiction inherent to verbal irony is not always found at the level of the proposition. It can manifest itself at other levels, such as those pertaining to the speech act or the discourse strategy used³, so that, for instance, we often find cases in which the irony results from a contradiction of speech acts⁴, as illustrated in (3):

(3) A mother says to her child (after the child has been repeatedly back-talking to her):
Come on, keep on answering back!

where what looks as a command is in fact a reprimand. Thus the formula for illocutionary irony would be:

Type X speech act = Not type X, but type Y speech act.

It is also relevant to point out here that by “inferred contradiction” I do not mean the same as “indirect negation”⁵, for an indirect negation does not necessarily have to be ironic. Consider (4), where the mother’s indirect negation to buy her child an ice-cream definitely cannot be interpreted as ironic. The mother is simply rejecting her child’s request in a softer, sweeter, and more indirect way than if she had uttered a plain “No”, which makes it certainly a case of indirect negation, but in which there is no contradiction of any sort:

(4) Child: Mom, can you buy me an ice-cream?
Mother: We have to have lunch now, sweetie.

¹ Explaining the difference between conversational and conventional inferences escapes the scope of this paper. See the discussion about conventionalized irony in 3 below, but for a detailed explanation of this phenomenon, see Alba-Juez (1998).

² For the sake of fairness and equality, every time I refer to the Speaker I will consider it female, and every time I refer to the Hearer I will consider it a male.

³ See also Alba-Juez (2001[1996]) and Alba-Juez & Attardo (2014).

⁴ For illocutionary irony, see Haverkate (1990).

⁵ For indirect negation, see Attardo 2000a, or Giora 1995.

One of the possible and very frequent contradictions that underlie irony is one of attitude. Indeed, Leech (2014: 238) observes that one possible trigger for conversational irony is “attitude clash”, which he defines as “an overt clash between ‘polite’ and ‘impolite’ parts of the same utterance”, and illustrates this fact with the utterance *Thank you for nothing*, where the ‘polite’ *Thank you* and the ‘impolite’ criticism *for nothing* occur side by side. This constitutes a clear case of verbal irony where the inferred contradiction arises from the level of the politeness strategy: the clash between both makes the hearer rethink the very likely initial interpretation of this utterance as ‘polite’: the relevant inappropriateness of the clash causes a two-stage processing interpretation which turns it into one of impoliteness. It has to be noted here that, in spite of the fact that Leech defines this as “an overt clash”, the ironic meaning is not directly conveyed; it has to be inferred. That is, the speaker (S) is not saying directly “It looks as if I am being polite but in fact I am being impolite”; on the contrary, H has to infer this meaning out of the way in which S constructs her utterance. A similar example with its consequent contradiction and –in certain situations– ‘humorous touch’ inferred by H occurs in (5):

(5) *Our friends are always there when they need us*

in which the main clause seems to anticipate praise about the Speaker’s friends (because the expected final utterance would be the more logical *Our friends are always there when we need them*), but the content of the subordinate *wh*- clause ‘surprises’ H by making him infer that in fact what was meant by S was a criticism of her friends. We find here not only a politeness-impoliteness clash, but also one of illocutionary acts (praise vs. negative criticism).

This inherently contradictory nature of irony may be the reason why it has been thought of by many authors as a subject that quickly arouses passions: irony is both liberating and destroying, clear and obscure, positive and negative. This is also why it is so difficult to define, for as Booth (1974: ix) notes, “its very spirit and value are violated by the effort to be clear about it”.

We now turn to the discussion of some of the relevant definitions and theories of irony, and I will try to make my point by means of examples.

2. THEORIES OF VERBAL IRONY

As I have pointed out in previous work, doing research on irony sooner or later becomes an ironic enterprise, for the more one studies and analyzes it, the more difficult it is to define and set clear and tidy boundaries to the phenomenon. On the one hand, and as Roy (1978) notes, irony versus non-irony is not a binary distinction but rather a continuum. On the other hand, there is no consensus as to the subclasses within the main class. For instance, while some authors (e.g. Attardo et al (2003) or Leech (2014) include *sarcasm* as a type of irony some others will not, and while some include *positive irony* (e. g. Cicero (1st c B.C.) Alba-Juez 1995, 2001 [1996], Alba-Juez & Attardo 2014) as a clear type, others, such as Leech (1983, 2014) –who calls it *banter*– do not. Barbe (1995) notes that many prejudices exist about the topic, and this is why there is disagreement in general when judging irony, and why a good number of theories have been proposed to explain the phenomenon. All of these theories point to some

relevant aspect of irony but most of them leave some other important aspects unattended. Kaufer (1981: 495) observes that there is little difference between the ironic ‘expert’ and the casual appreciator of irony, because “whereas the casual appreciator makes sense of the concept by appealing to the authority of standard definitions, the ironic “expert” usually has been able to claim little more than these definitions don’t work”. We shall now examine some of these definitions, starting with those introduced by the ancient Classical authors.

2.1. Classical approaches to the phenomenon of irony

The study of irony can be traced back to Socrates’ (circa 470—399 B.C.) philosophical disquisitions. Socrates irony (*eironeia*) consisted in pretending to be ignorant: by asserting that he was never anyone’s teacher, he taught others, i.e. he feigned ignorance in order to instruct. Later on in Classical history, Cicero (106—43 B.C.) changed the approach by considering irony a rhetorical figure that blames by praise or praises by blame, rather than a behavioral characteristic. Cicero, therefore, distinguished between what we now call *situational irony* and *verbal irony*¹, the latter being the main focus of my work herein. It is also important to note that Cicero already considered “praising by blame” (i.e. *positive irony* or *banter*) as a possible manifestation of the phenomenon.

In the first century A.D., the Roman rhetorician Quintilian expanded the circumscribed figure to the manner of whole arguments, and thus he writes of irony as an ornament of sentences and considers it a trope as well as a figure of speech. As a trope he defines it as “the contrary of what is said”, and as a figure he writes of “a disguise of the speaker’s whole meaning”. These classical definitions constituted the basis of later definitions such as Samuel Johnson’s (1755) in his *Dictionary of the English Language* (“A mode of speech of which the meaning is contrary to the words”) and theories, such as Clark and Gerrig’s (1984) Pretence Theory of irony or Grice’s view of irony as flouting the Quality Maxim of his Cooperative Principle.

These traditional definitions and view were taken as the basis to claim that that the propositions expressed in an ironical utterance are always false or insincere. However, the phenomenon of verbal irony goes much beyond what these initial characterizations could describe. Irony cannot be studied from a semantic perspective only, and thus cannot be explained in terms of truth conditions. Verbal irony is essentially a pragmatic phenomenon, as I now turn to discuss.

2.2. Irony as a pragmatic phenomenon

Before the second half of the 20th century all semantic theories showed a great concern with truth conditions. Logicians like Frege or Kripke recursively assigned to each sentence the conditions under which the sentence would be true. However, the

¹ Verbal irony is the irony expressed by linguistic means, i.e. its basic contradiction or clash is inferred from the words uttered by the ironist, while situational irony is non-linguistic, and has to do with the contradiction found in a situation. Muecke (1969) points out that the difference between situational irony and verbal irony is mainly a matter of intention. In verbal irony the intention to be ironical is a necessary –albeit not sufficient– condition, whereas the irony of an ironical situation or event is unintentional.

subsequent observations made by linguists and philosophers as to the differences in meaning between certain natural language words and their logical counterparts were the basis for the development many and various pragmatic studies, of which Grice's lectures on the topic of *Logic and Conversation* at Harvard in 1967 stand out as a landmark in the field.

2.2.1. Grice's Theory of Implicature

The notion of *conversational implicature*, developed by Grice in his Harvard lectures, is considered to be one of the single most important notions in Pragmatics, because it provided linguistic analysis with an explicit account of how it is possible 'to mean more than what is actually said'. Obviously and consequently, it became an equally important concept for the study and analysis of verbal irony. As we know, conversational implicatures are a kind of inference which is related to what Grice called the Cooperative Principle and its Maxims. According to Grice and other authors (such as Cutler 1974, or Brown & Levinson 1987) the condition for an utterance to be ironic is that it flouts the Quality Maxim, and therefore the proposition expressed is necessarily false or insincere.

Grice's treatment of irony shows that, in spite of the great step forward given by Grice's studies into the new area of Pragmatics, the topic was still examined through the prism of truth-conditional semantics. As we now know, this is a limited view of verbal irony, for a speaker can be ironic and be telling the truth at the same time, the reason being precisely that the contradiction is not found at the level of the proposition but at some other linguistic/ pragmatic level. The contradiction triggering the irony may or may not have to do with the truth-conditions of the sentence uttered by S.

But what I want to argue here, irrespective of whether the contradiction is found at the level of the proposition or not, is that in both cases the irony is triggered by inferred contradiction. Compare examples (6) and (7), in which Susan responds in different (but similar in meaning) ironical ways to John's comment about Peter's bad manners and impoliteness, because she does not approve of his behaviour:

(6) John: ...and so Peter insulted her again and again

Susan: *Oh, I love Peter!*

(7) John: ...and so Peter insulted her again and again

Susan: *Oh, I love people with good manners!*

As can be seen, in (6) the irony and the inferred contradiction is found at the level of the proposition, because what Susan means (i.e. I don't love Peter) is precisely the opposite of what she states, and therefore this is a prototypical case in which it can also be said that S is not observing the Maxim of Quality. However, in (7) Susan is not flouting the Quality Maxim because she is telling the truth, i.e., it is true that she loves people with good manners and in fact she means what she says, but she is nevertheless being ironical about Peter's behaviour, which she considers despicable. Apart from the fact that it is understood that Susan loves people with good manners, the hearer will work out an additional meaning out of her utterance, thus inferring a contradiction between the frame in which Susan places herself (an ideal group of people having

good manners that Susan loves) and the frame in which Peter is implicitly placed (the group of people with bad manners).

The point I am making here, therefore, is that both in the classical prototypical examples of irony and in those that do not adjust to the classical ‘opposite-proposition’ view, the feature of inferred contradiction is always present.

2.2.2. Leech’s Irony Principle

Leech (1983) views irony as a second-order principle which builds upon or exploits the Principle of Politeness (PP). The Irony Principle (IP), then, is stated as follows:

“If you must cause offence, at least do so in a way which doesn’t overtly conflict with the PP, but allows the hearer to arrive at the offensive point of your remark indirectly, by way of implicature” (1983: 82).

This statement also allows us to see that Leech considers irony as essentially offensive and impolite, and therefore excludes banter (“mock impoliteness”, or –for me– positive irony) from his formulation. In Leech (2014) he sticks to his initial formulation of the IP, only clarifying that the type of irony he refers to is what he calls *conversational irony* (i.e. *verbal irony*, which he equals to *sarcasm* and distinguishes from *situational irony*), but he expands his discussion of the phenomenon so as to consider its function and the effects it can have. He acknowledges that there is more to irony than flouting the Quality Maxim or ‘meaning the opposite proposition’, and he also makes further observations as to the tendency for irony to be “more complex, ingenious, witty and/or entertaining than a straight piece of impoliteness” (2014: 235).

Thus, for Leech (2014) there is only one type of verbal irony, namely *sarcasm* or *conversational irony*, which is equivalent to what I have called *negative irony*. It is revealing, though, that in the same chapter he treats irony he includes *banter* or *mock impoliteness*, which he nevertheless considers not to be a type of irony. As was noted above, in my view Leech’s *banter* is a type of irony of the positive kind. It shows ‘the other side of the coin’ (in Cicero’s terms, ‘praising by blame’ instead of ‘blaming by praise’), but the cognitive and pragmatic mechanisms put into motion are exactly the same. Consider example (8):

- (8) Julian is very skilled with computers, and so he does voluntary work at school by fixing the computer problems of the teachers and administrative staff. His parents normally brag about this fact with their friends, and so one day one of these friends says to Julian:

They tell me you know nothing about computers!

to which Julian replies with a smile and thus does not take it as an insult, because he has made the necessary inference to understand that the contradiction found between the fact that he is a ‘computer wizard’ and this apparent negative criticism is in fact intentionally triggered by his parents’ friend, in order to emphasize Julian’s merits. Once again, then, we find inferred contradiction as an important trigger for ironic interpretation (this time of the positive kind).

2.2.3. Attardo's Relevant Inappropriateness Theory

Attardo (2000) proposes a pragmatic theory of irony as a revision of the irony-as-trope theory, based on the notion of simultaneous inappropriateness and relevance. Basically and in summary, the main claims of Attardo's theory are that a) the reconstruction of the intended meaning of irony is entirely inferential, for "no aspect of the meaning is given in the text, except the presumption of relevance (and not of quality, manner or quantity)"; b) "irony is essentially an inappropriate utterance which is nonetheless relevant to the context"; c) irony involves a two-stage processing, and "the order in which the conflicting senses are accessed is (probably) determined by salience" (2000: 823). As way of illustration, let us examine (9), where B's (apparently) positive reaction to the news given by A at the end of a what has been a hectic day for B, seems inappropriate to the bad news delivered, but is nevertheless given the presumption of relevance by his interlocutor, which makes him consequently interpret it as an ironic remark:

- (9) A: Your wife has just called to say she's had a car accident and she needs your help. Don't worry, she's O.K. but the car is badly damaged.
B: *Great! This is precisely what I needed right now!*

Explaining or presenting Attardo's theory in detail escapes the purposes of this paper, but as I have stated in 1, his formulation seems to be the most influential to date, because it can explain not only the irony found in (9) but also seems to embrace all possible occurrences and types of irony. His view of irony is also in sync with the claim I am making in this paper: the contradiction I write about here is found in what Attardo calls the 'conflicting senses' of the inappropriateness, the reconstruction of which is completely inferential in his view, an observation that is also in agreement with my claim for this contradiction to be always inferred by H.

2.3. Irony as a cognitive/psycholinguistic phenomenon

Irony is not only a linguistic-pragmatic but also a cognitive phenomenon. It shows the workings of intricate mental mechanisms, elaborate thoughts, and delicate strategies both in the mind of the ironist and of the people who have to interpret it. It is not surprising, therefore, to observe its tight connection to humor, although it should be noticed that not all instances of irony are humorous. As some psychologists have noticed, the use of irony as a humorous conversational strategy has to do with deep psychological motifs. Psychologists such as Schmidt or Freud have studied this phenomenon from different angles. Schmidt (1994), for instance, has found a connection between humor and memory (i.e. humorous (including ironic) utterances are better remembered than non-humorous ones). Freud (1905) differentiates between innocent and tendentious jokes. Sarcastic jokes are found within the latter, and are conceived of as a civilized way to control our hostile impulses: since brutal hostility is now forbidden by law, it has been replaced by verbal invective. Some of the elements that Freud and Schmidt find in jokes and humor, such as economy of effort, mimicry, or remembering, are key elements on which some of the theories of irony are based, as we shall see in the forthcoming sections.

2.3.1. Echoic Mention theory

The basic assumption of the Echoic (Mention) Theory of irony (Sperber & Wilson, 1981), later developed within the authors' Relevance Theory (1986) is that all cases of verbal irony are echoic, i. e. that they echo or evoke the words or thoughts of a given person or people in general. This is an undisputable fact for many instances of irony, such as these authors own example, reproduced in (10):

- (10) A person invites his friend for a walk considering that, in his opinion, "the weather will be lovely". Later, they go for a walk, and it starts to rain. The friend then ironically echoes his remark by saying:

What lovely weather!

But other authors (e.g. Martin 1992 or Alba-Juez (2001[1996])) have found that the echoic explanation of irony does not apply to all of its possible occurrences, and have therefore presented counter-examples, such as (11):

- (11) "Suppose that, leaving my apartment in the usual way, I trip and sprain my ankle. *Oh, great. That's nice!*, I say. Is it reasonable to claim that I am making fun of the sort of person who treats a sprained ankle as a bit of luck?" (Martin, 1992: 80)

My point here, however, is not to argue for or against the Echoic Theory, but only to show how both echoic and non-echoic irony are interpreted as ironic simply because they present an inferred contradiction of some sort. The echoic example in (10) shows a contradiction between what the person had anticipated (that the weather was going to be lovely) and what then really happened (it rained), so the evidence of the facts makes this person infer that his friend's utterance is being ironic and does not have to be taken literally. And the same occurs in (11) where the speaker's utterance, which seems to be very positive from the evaluative point of view (*Oh, great! That's nice!*) is in contradiction with the negative fact of having sprained her ankle, which will make H consequently infer that the utterance is ironic.

2.3.2. Pretence Theory

Inferred contradiction is also present in cases of pretence irony. The Pretence Theory of irony proposed by Clark and Gerrig (1984) derives from Socrates' conception of the phenomenon, and appeals to the etymology of the word *irony*, which comes from the Greek *eironeia*, and means "dissembling, ignorance purposely affected". These authors claim that Sperber & Wilson have not correctly interpreted Grice's conception of irony, for they argue that Grice's Theory assumes that the ironist is *pretending* to use one proposition in order to get across its contradictory one, rather than *using* that proposition. Clark & Gerrig also claim that their theory can naturally account for the ironic tone of voice, since the ironist is like an actor pretending to be another person and consequently has to imitate the voice of her victim.

Once more, this theory shows an aspect that can be observed in many instances of irony, as illustrated in (12) but authors like Sperber (1984: 130) –who counterattacked Clark & Gerrig– have noticed that the Pretence Theory "fails to account for many types and many properties of irony proper". (13) is an example on which this counter-argument can be based.

(12) **Rose:** I can't believe my mother is riding around on a smelly old bus, being harassed, pushed around, possibly even mugged by hostile teenagers with bad haircuts.

Dorothy: Rose, listen to me. You're overreacting. Your mother is not a helpless child. She's an active, vital woman who can take care of herself.

PHONE RINGS

Rose: I'll get that. (Rose answers)

Hello. Yes. This is she. Oh, my Lord!

Dorothy: Rose, what is it?

Rose (into phone). Yes, I understand. I'll be right there. (Rose hangs up and grabs her keys)

Dorothy: Rose, what's wrong?

Rose: That was the police.

Dorothy: Is it your mother? Is she alright?

Rose: She's fine. She's at the police station. *They picked up my vital, active mother.* She was lost and disoriented. What do you have to say to that?

(From *The Golden Girls Scripts*, 1991: 70—71)

As can be observed in this example from the television comedy series *The Golden Girls*, when Rose refers to her mother as “vital and active” at the end, she is at the same time pretending to be Dorothy and echoing her previous words in order to be ironic and therefore ridicule her, given the evidence of her mother having been found lost and disoriented by the police.

(13) A and B are friends and are having a conversation in which B does not feel she is being understood by her friend, so she finally exclaims:

I wish I had an understanding friend!

It would be far-fetched to say that here B is pretending to be someone else, but it is clear that she is being ironic towards her friend. She is in fact expressing her own wishes, but at the same time is making A infer that he is not an understanding friend.

Even when (12) and (13) are different in that the former is a case of pretence irony and the latter is not, it can be said that they are both ironic and that this ironic meaning is found in the relevant inappropriateness of an inferred contradiction. In (12) the contradiction is not only found at the level of the proposition (Rose does not believe her mother is young and vital) but also at an attitudinal level, where a clash is inferred between Dorothy's and Rose's evaluation of Rose's mother's abilities. In (13) there is a clash or contradiction at the level of the non-factive presupposition triggered by the complement of the verb *wish*, which makes the hearer infer that B does not consider A to be an understanding friend.

2.3.3. Echoic Reminder Theory

This theory was proposed by Kreuz and Glucksberg (1989), and its main claim is that an ironic expression always reminds the listener of something that might have been expected or said before. These authors support the echoic theory of irony to a certain extent, but they argue that not all such reminders are echoic, the echoic interpretation being only a special case of reminder. In (14) I reproduce an example taken from the

works of Bertrand Russell (given in Alba-Juez (2001[1996])) where the irony can be said to be of the reminding kind, but not echoic:

- (14) “If you wish to persuade people that because Adam ate an apple, all who have never heard of this interesting occurrence will be roasted in an everlasting fire by a benevolent Deity, you must catch them young, make them stupid by means of drink or drugs, and carefully isolate them from all contact with books or companions capable of making them think” (Russell, 1958: 58).

Russell makes use of different types of irony here. On the one hand there is propositional irony, for Russell implies that neither the occurrence is “interesting” nor the Deity in question is “benevolent”. On the other hand, all the passage is ironic because it reminds the reader of certain religious (Christian) ideas that Russell is criticizing in a very sophisticated way, without explicitly mentioning or echoing them. To echo the ideas, Russell would have to have repeated what the religious people attacked say or think, but he does not repeat or mention any such ideas; instead he is bitterly sarcastic by giving a ‘recipe’ for persuading people to believe in the story of Adam and Eve, by indirectly reminding the readers of some of the errors that –according to him– religion has committed.

In any case, and as concluded within the discussion of the previous theories, the fact of being reminiscent or echoic does not affect the crucial fact that there is always an inferred contradiction underlying the irony. In (14) such contradiction is inferred from the use of adjectives (the reader will readily notice that Russell means that the occurrence is not interesting, and that the Deity is not benevolent) as well as in the recommendations he gives in order to make people believe in religious ideas like the story of Adam and Eve: here the contradiction lies in an attitude clash between the main clause and the conditional clause. Any initial doubts that might arise in the if-clause about Russell’s attitude towards religion are finally dissipated by the sarcastic attitude and negative stance revealed in the main clause.

3. TYPES OF IRONY

In the above discussion I have named some of the types of irony that have been considered and analyzed by different authors. We have seen that there is a main division in two categories, i.e. *situational irony* and *verbal irony*. Within situational irony we may include *dramatic irony*, *irony of fate*, *artifactual irony* or the so-called *extant* or *cosmic irony*¹, all of which are not linguistic in nature and have to do with the irony of a given situation, such as for instance, a fire station that burns down, or a lifeguard on the beach who has to be saved when drowning in the sea.

But the type of irony that concerns us in this work is *verbal irony*, within which, as I have shown above, there is not yet a consensus as to the types that can be identified. As I see it and have pointed out in previous works, if we classify verbal irony according to the attitude or stance taken by the ironist, we may have three main types: 1) Negative

¹ For a description and explanation of all these sub-types of irony, see Marino (1997).

irony, 2) Positive irony, and 3) Neutral irony. Negative irony coincides with what is normally understood as sarcasm (i. e. irony intended to criticize H or a third party -which happens to be the most frequent type), as well as with Leech's (2014) *conversational irony*. Positive irony is the type of irony by means of which the ironist uses criticism in order to praise, and so it is equivalent to Leech's *mock impoliteness* or *banter*, and even though Leech does not consider this to be irony, many other authors include it as a type of irony called *asteism* (e.g. Kaul de Marlangeon 1999, Attardo 2000a). Since examples of both positive and negative irony have already been presented in the previous sections of this work, I shall now only discuss and show that in the third type mentioned here, i. e. the neutral type, which I have called *neutral* precisely because the stance taken by the ironist does not seem to intend to criticize or praise anybody or anything, there is still a contradiction that has to be inferred by H, and therefore triggers the ironic (normally comic) interpretation, as shown in (15).

(15) My speech was long because I didn't have time to make it shorter¹.

Finally, I have also classified irony according to whether the implicature triggered is conversational or conventional. As discussed in Alba-Juez 1998, there are some ironic expressions and discourse strategies that have been conventionalized. This means that the original conversational implicature that triggered the irony has been short-circuited (to use Morgan's (1978) term) and therefore no longer requires the two-stage interpretation or the effort on the part of H to work out the conversational implicature. A typical example of conventional irony is the use of the formula *If P, then Q* (where P is thought to be a ridiculous or stupid proposition by S), as shown in (16):

(16) *If Susan is intelligent, I'm the Queen of Romania*²

which obviously means that S thinks that Susan is not intelligent, and shows not only a conventionalized ironic strategy but a conventionalized ironic expression (*I'm the Queen of Romania*).

This example shows, once more, that the trigger for the irony is an inferred contradiction (in this case found at the propositional level) which can be explained in the following terms: Since the proposition expressed in the if- clause is a logical consequence of what is stated in the main clause, considering that the latter is not true (i.e. that S is not the Queen of Romania), the proposition in the former clause is deemed false as well (i. e. Susan is not intelligent).

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

◆ This article presents a theoretical discussion of a feature of verbal irony that I consider to be crucial for its analysis: *inferred contradiction*. The main point I have tried to make is that all cases and types of verbal irony share the common feature of

¹ This example is similar to the philosopher Blaise Pascal's famous ironic comment in his Letters, found at [http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/pascal/letters-c.html#LETTER XVI](http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/pascal/letters-c.html#LETTER_XVI).

² In other languages, like Spanish, similar conventionalized ironic expressions and the same strategy are used. A typical example could be: *Si esa (mujer) es guapa, yo soy Obispo* (literally: *If she is pretty, I'm a Bishop*).

being triggered by an *inferred contradiction*, a feature of language that has been shown not to be the same as -and which should therefore be distinguished- both from direct contradiction and from indirect negation.

◆ The types of irony emerging from the main theoretical approaches to irony (e.g. echoic, pretence, reminder, etc.) have been shown to obey this feature, as do other types, such as those based on the stance taken by the ironist (i.e. *positive*, *negative* or *neutral*), or those based on whether the implicature triggered by the ironic utterance is conversational or conventional.

◆ My intention in showing this phenomenon has therefore been to invite the reader to seriously consider *inferred contradiction* as a permanent, distinguishing feature and trigger of verbal irony.

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