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Esquemas inferencial e implicaciones de significado en el humor

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Inferential schemas and meaning implications in humor.

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ABSTRACT

Humor is a broadly studied topic from the point of view of its grounding in implicit verbal communication. It can involve a high degree of inferential work from the hearer for correct interpretation of the speaker's utterance. For this reason, it is studied here from two different inferential perspectives, which the present study finds largely complementary: the Cooperative Principle and Relevance Theory. However, strikingly enough, the tendency in previous studies is to take one position to the exclusion of the other.

This dissertation presents ironic and sarcastic situations which contribute to the creation of humor in a well-known TV sitcom. The relevance of these types of situations for the current study relates to the richness of interpretive clues provided for spectators, which script-makers handle skillfully to create mismatches between characters' reactions and what spectators could have expected. This mismatch produces humour. Such clues provide the grounds for the activation of inferential schemas. It is through the clue-based activation of inferential schemas that irony or sarcasm (mocking irony) can be detected.

On the basis of the current state of the art, this dissertation aims analyses a sample of conversational exchanges that reveal specific inferential patterns required to understand humorous situations where both pragmatic approaches can complement –rather than exclude– each other.

Keywords: *Cooperative Principle, humor, implicit communication, inferential activity, irony, Relevance Theory*

RESUMEN

El humor es un tema ampliamente estudiado desde la perspectiva de su enraizamiento en la comunicación verbal implícita. Puede implicar un alto grado de trabajo inferencial por parte del oyente para la interpretación correcta de la expresión del hablante. Por esta razón, se estudia aquí desde dos perspectivas inferenciales diferentes, que, de acuerdo con el presente estudio, resultan en gran medida complementarias: el Principio de Cooperación y la Teoría de la Relevancia. Sin embargo, sorprendentemente, la tendencia en estudios previos ha sido normalmente la de adoptar una de estas perspectivas con exclusión de la otra.

Este trabajo recoge una selección de situaciones irónicas y sarcásticas que contribuyen a la creación de humor en una conocida comedia televisiva. La relevancia de este tipo de situaciones para el presente estudio se relaciona con la riqueza de pistas interpretativas proporcionadas a los espectadores, que los guionistas manejan hábilmente para crear desajustes entre las reacciones de los personajes y lo que los espectadores podrían haber esperado. Este desajuste produce humor. Tales pistas proporcionan las bases para la activación de esquemas inferenciales. Es a través de esta activación basada en claves comunicativas de esquemas inferenciales como se pueden detectar la ironía o el sarcasmo (ironía burlona).

Partiendo del estado de la cuestión actual, este trabajo tiene como objetivo analizar una muestra de intercambios conversacionales que revelan patrones inferenciales específicos necesarios para comprender situaciones humorísticas donde ambos enfoques pragmáticos pueden complementarse, en lugar de excluirse.

Palabras clave: *actividad inferencial, comunicación implícita, humor, ironía, Principio de Cooperación, Teoría de la Relevancia*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past four to five decades, there has been an increasing focus of attention on the study of conversation. This has been done from formal and inferential perspectives. The formal perspective is the case of turn-taking accounts within American Conversational Analysis, as postulated, e.g., by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974), Sacks (1982) (see also Schegloff, 2004). This perspective does not take into account the content of conversational turns, but only the rules of selection (including self-selection) of speakers taking their turns. The inferential perspective is found in Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and in Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1995), where the latter approach strongly argues as to the adequacy of the former, even if the former has received widespread recognition in pragmatics. Strikingly, adopting one position (Gricean or Post-Gricean, as is Relevance Theory) amounts to ignoring the ability of other positions to explain inferential phenomena.

The present dissertation aims to contrast the ability of inferential approaches like the Cooperative Principle and Relevance Theory to cast light on a broadly studied phenomenon, which has long been recognized as being eminently inferential. This is the case of humor, which has been studied from the inferential perspective by many scholars, among them, Yus Ramos (2003, 2009) and Dynel (2011, 2018). Humor is grounded in implicit verbal communication involving a high degree of inferential activity for the hearer to interpret the speaker's intention. However, the existing studies take one position or another as their starting point without devoting but passing attention, if any at all, to what different approaches may have to say about this phenomenon. Strikingly too, humor often takes place in conversational environments that require formal management of turns, but Conversational Analysis has not been used as a resource to investigate the conversational management of humor. The reason for this is the assumption that much of humor stems from turn-internal inference. Of course, it may be argued that inference is supported by the flow of discourse, central to which, when we deal with conversation, is how participants take turns and how they control (or fail to control) the selection of their own or others' turns; for example, a speaker may feel puzzled by what his or her interlocutor has said and fail to react swiftly thus creating awkward periods of silence. However, the turn-taking rules of Conversation Analysis are only in the formal aspects of the process. To give an

example, we can think of long pauses. These can be interpreted by interlocutors as a chance to take their turn even if the current speaker's intention was not to yield the floor. There is no reference to the cause of the pause and whether it may be regarded not only as a turn-taking chance but also as a communicatively meaningful part of the conversation. An inferential approach to conversation, on the other hand, is interested in the meaning made by utterances, whether explicit or implicit, and in which principles govern the meaning-making process.

A frequent way of creating humor in conversation is the use of irony and sarcasm (or mocking irony) as evidenced by the growing popularity of these humorous resources in TV sitcoms. However, even though the audience may expect irony and sarcasm to be used often, when we are face-to-face with an ironical situation, hearers need enough clues to be able to decode the speaker's intention. Such clues can trigger off ironic interpretations but they still need to be combined with inferential schemas for irony to be clearly detected and for ironic meaning to be fully worked out.

The present dissertation focuses on knowing if the two inferentialist approaches named above, that is, Grice's Cooperative Principle and Relevance Theory, can account for how TV-sitcom script-writers create humorous situations. While traditional Conversational Analysis, by itself, does not provide the required analytical categories for this purpose, the Gricean approach and Relevance Theory do, in different ways. However, our analysis will also show that Conversation Analysis supports the inferential approach by providing initial insights into the management of conversational turns. Conversation Analysis concentrates on the formal (or structural) aspects of conversation management. Inferential pragmatics, whether the Gricean or relevance-theoretic version, focuses on communicative principles and how these motivate implicit meaning. In a more incidental way, this dissertation will make occasional reference to work from other approaches to language, especially Cognitive Linguistics (e.g., Lakoff, 1987), a framework that offers interesting insights into conceptualization, which is at the heart of inference-based language production and interpretation.

This dissertation will also show that Grice's Cooperative Principle, despite some strengths, still has some limitations that can be sorted out by Relevance Theory. This latter theory solves some of the problems in Grice's approach by emphasizing the

importance of the speaker and hearer background knowledge when creating humor as a basic aim of TV scrip-writers.

In this regard, this dissertation shows that, beyond coding and decoding, inferential schemas are essential for communication in the context of humor creation. The purpose of this study is, consequently, two-fold: firstly, to analyze a set of utterances to give account of the inconsistencies that each of them show in the process of decoding; secondly, to explain how inferential schemas can contribute to account for humorous situations when combined with insights from the Cooperative Principle and of Relevance Theory.

To that end, section 2 offers a brief summary of the postulates of the main theories applied to this study. Section 3 is concerned with the methodology and the description of the corpus of examples that has been used as the basis for this research. Section 4 offers a detailed analysis of the corpus of examples from the point of view of how the analytical principles and categories put forward by theories mentioned above serve the purpose of accounting for humor. Section 5 draws conclusions and outlines the main characteristics for a rich composite approach to humor in conversation, which can be taken into account in future research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As noted in the introduction, the present dissertation aims to investigate how humor is created by combining relevant elements from different analytical approaches. We now offer a brief overview of such approaches.

2.1.   Implicatures and the Cooperative Principle

At this stage, it is important to understand what an implicature is since this notion is central to the Cooperative Principle. This principle was formulated in the context of previous work on pragmatic meaning in the form of speech acts bearing "illocutionary force", which is simply the pragmatic intent of an utterance. Not every utterance is a statement. Speakers can also ask questions, make requests, give orders, make promises, and so on (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1976; Bach & Harnish, 1979; Sperber & Wilson, 1995, pp. 243–54). These are examples of speech acts. These acts can be made explicit

(e.g., *I promise to buy you a new car*) or they can be "indirect" or implicit (e.g., *You'll have a new car*).

Indirect speech acts are similar to conversational implicatures, since in both the communicative intention of the utterance cannot be inferred without the inclusion of additional knowledge. In the case of an indirect promise, the additional knowledge is the social convention that when someone affirms emphatically to the hearer that he or she will have what he or she wishes to have, then the speaker is likely to provide it for the hearer's benefit. In implicature, the knowledge involved is material knowledge about entities, situations, and events. For example, we know it is dangerous to drive when it is foggy and cars should slow down considerably in such a condition. In that context, the utterance *It's too foggy* would easily implicate "slow down".

According to Allot (2018), the Cooperative Principle applies in talk-exchanges whose aim is to explain how implicatures are meant and understood. Grice (1975) assumes in his seminal work *Logic and Conversation* that speakers are cooperative in talk exchanges and, therefore, that they adhere to the conversational maxims which make up the Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975: pp. 45-46).

Grice (1975) divides the Cooperative Principle into four groups of maxims: the maxims of quantity (give too much information / do not give too little information), where the speaker is expected to be as informative as required; the maxims of quality (give truthful information / do not give information for which you lack evidence), where the information provided by the speaker is expected to be truthful and well grounded; the maxim of relation where the speaker is expected to give relevant information; and finally, the maxims of manner (be clear, be orderly, be brief, avoid ambiguity), where the speaker is expected to produce fully understandable messages. Maxims can be obeyed, intentionally violated, or flouted (blatantly broken). It is also possible to infringe maxims, if the speaker lacks sufficient pragmatic competence to work with them (e.g., when the speaker is drunk or psychologically impaired), but in general, among competent speakers, communicative activity is intentional.

If a maxim is obeyed the result is full cooperation for the dimension in which the maxim is operational (quantity, quality, relation, manner). Fully cooperative language results in informative, truthful, relevant, and well-expressed messages. On the other hand, when the speaker violates one of the maxims, the intention is to mislead the

hearer. For instance, a speaker may violate the second maxim of quantity to hide some information from the hearer. On the other hand, giving too much information may overburden the hearer's interpretive effort and impair communication resulting in informational diversion (the hearer finds difficulties in finding the communicative intent). Similarly, a speaker may violate the first maxim of quality to deceive the hearer. Then, if the second maxim of quality is violated, the hearer runs the risk of being misinformed. There are other situations where what is violated is the maxim of relation. This creates informational inconsistencies that can only be resolved by formulating an implicature. An example is provided by incidental remarks to questions: to the question *Did you pass your exam?* the answer *My teacher always complains that we do not work hard enough* suggests but does not state that the student did not pass. Finally, the intentional violation of the maxims of manner can happen in situations in which speakers do their best to make understanding hard. The intentional overelaboration of a message or intentional ambiguity can result in such difficulties.

Maxims can be flouted too. Flouting a maxim consists in breaking it ostentatiously. There is no intention to mislead. The language of humor is an example. In humor all maxims can be flouted without an intention to mislead the hearer. In fact, the hearer is expected to detect the flouting and interpret the humorous utterance as such. Irony and sarcasm lend themselves easily to humorous uses. As a consequence, the analysis provided in this dissertation, which is based on examples drawn from humorous sitcoms, will amply illustrate the notion of flouting.

Flouting maxims leads to implicature. Violating maxims, on the other hand, may simply deceive the hearer: lies, gossip, and hiding information are some examples. Banter can illustrate this point. Peña and Ruiz de Mendoza (2022, pp. 250-251) discuss the appellative *cheeky devil.* Using this phrase to address someone is naturally offensive. Nevertheless, there is no offense when used among very close friends in a good-natured, humorous manner. Obviously, banter is not expected to deceive the hearer, but strictly speaking it breaks the first maxim of quality since the hearer knows that the speaker does not think that he or she is a cheeky devil (Leech, 1983, p. 142). But this breach of the maxim is open and clear to the hearer so it is neither a lie (if the speaker does not believe in what he or she says) nor an offense (for the case in which the hearer could believe the speaker believed in what he or she says).

It is, therefore, assumable that speakers will attempt to cooperate by making their contributions informative, truthful, relevant, and clear to help the hearer in the process of decoding the communicative intention of the transmitted message. Hence, if the hearer realizes that the speaker has not met such cooperative expectations, he or she will be able to infer the intended meaning through the identification of the implicature.

2.1.1. The Cooperative Principle: weaknesses.

The Cooperative Principle has enjoyed widespread support over the years. However, it has been suggested that it presents inconsistencies due to the manner in which the pragmatic principles are stated. To begin with, The Cooperative Principle has been criticized by such scholars as Kasher (1976, pp. 201–202; 1982, pp. 38–39) and Sperber & Wilson (1995, pp. 161–162; Sperber & Wilson, 1995, pp. 267–268) on the grounds that speakers do not always cooperate in conversation. Grice assumed that communication is a matter of cooperation, understood as the negotiation between speakers of a common direction for the talk exchange. Of course, sometimes speakers do not cooperate. For example, people may lie (a breach of quality) or they may omit communicatively relevant information (a breach of quantity). When that happens, Grice argues that there has been an intentional violation of the quality and quantity maxims of the Cooperative Principle. But the situation is more complex. A violation of this kind is less than cooperative but hearers may wrongly believe that the speaker is being cooperative. The common direction of the talk exchange is delusional. Alternatively, hearers may suspect that the speaker is misleading them or they may even have indisputable evidence that this is the real situation. When this happens, there are several options. The hearers may pretend that they believe the speaker, they may make the speaker aware about their suspicions, or they may openly disclose what they think. There is no cooperation in pretense and there is little cooperation in just dropping hints.

A second general weakness is that the theory states that, if any of the maxims is violated by the speaker, an implicature will arise, but the theory does not specify the procedure that hearers may follow to reach implicated conclusions. In the present author's view, as will be evidenced in the case studies below, this weakness can be sorted out by introducing reasoning schemas (from Relevance Theory) into the analysis.

A third weakness arises from the assumption that speakers sometimes do not violate maxims, but "flout" them. As discussed in the previous section, a flouting is a blatant breach of a maxim. There is no intention to deceive; rather, the speaker "plays" with a maxim in an ostentatious manner so that the hearer can be fully aware that a certain maxim has been broken. Let us take banter again to illustrate this point. In banter an utterance that would normally be offensive is taken as a playful use of language. It is not taken seriously, so that it is not offensive. Banter can be explained as a flouting of the first maxim of quality or maxim of truthfulness. The problem is that banter is a cooperative breach of the Cooperative Principle, but the theory assumes that breaches of any kind (e.g., intentional violation, flouting, infringement caused by speaker's linguistic incompetence) are uncooperative. Only purely truthful, informatively balanced, relevant, and well-expressed messages are cooperative. In relation to this observation, some scholars (e.g., Ruiz de Mendoza, 2021, p. 254; Peña and Ruiz de Mendoza, 2022, p. 30) have discussed the additional problem that the notion of flouting does not distinguish between the different kinds of figures of speech: strictly speaking, metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole, litotes, irony, paradox, etc., can all be explained as a question of flouting the first maxim of quality. And this assumption does not discriminate between banter and figures of speech either.

These and other weaknesses show in the analysis provided later in this dissertation. In fact, in TV sitcoms many of the implicatures emerge because, very often, speakers do not try to cooperate. Thus, there are many communicative situations where understatements, rhetorical questions, and expressive resources based on the creation of counter-expectations, convey meaning effectively while being uncooperative. Such situations cannot be explained well by means of the strict application of the Gricean approach.

2.2. Relevance Theory

According to Yus (2005), the main assumption in Relevance Theory is that human beings are endowed with a biologically rooted ability to maximize the relevance of incoming stimuli (including linguistic utterances and communicative behavior). As a consequence, the interpretation of an utterance is made under the applicability of that assumption since it is a cognitive activity. As Sperber and Wilson (1995) pointed out,

the fact that utterances raise some expectations based on background knowledge guide the steps that hearers take to interpret the speaker's meaning.

Thus, Sperber and Wilson's theory distinguishes, on the one hand, between what the speaker encodes and the pragmatic implications or inferences that an utterance may give rise to (so-called implicatures) and, on the other hand, between explicit and implicit utterance content. Indeed, Sperber and Wilson claim that an *implicature* is a proposition communicated by an utterance implicitly (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, p. 182; Sperber & Wilson, 2005, p.480), while an *explicature* is meaning arising directly from the inferential development of the explicit message. The notion of implicature was exemplified before with the utterance *It's too foggy*, intended as a warning for the hearer to drive more slowly because of the road conditions. In Relevance Theory, deriving the implicature requires activating a reasoning schema based on a premise-conclusion pattern:

Premise: If you are driving in fog, you should slow down.

What is said (explicit meaning): It is too foggy.

Conclusion (implicature): You should slow down.

It should be noted that the sentence *It's too foggy* is, however, incomplete at the explicit level (that is, without invoking a premise-conclusion reasoning schema). It can be elaborated by means of mere pragmatic adjustment into "The weather is too foggy on this road for us to drive at [specific speed, say, 80 miles per hour]". This elaboration is the explicature of what is said: *It's too foggy* (for a highly elaborated account of explicit communication following the main tenets of Relevance Theory, see Carston, 2002).

We can, therefore, conclude that whereas the Gricean approach states that conversational implicatures arise from situations in which any of the maxims is violated without considering the pragmatic side of communication, Relevance Theory states that implicatures arise from the proposition which is communicated by the implicit content of an utterance. In other words, the former is a cultural approach,

whereas the latter is a cognitive approach in which the shared assumptions between speakers and hearers as well as the knowledge of social conventions are activated to infer the implicit content of the utterance.

2.3.   Cognitive Linguistics

Even though this dissertation is focused on how inferential pragmatics can address humorous situations, some of the assumptions of Cognitive Linguistics are relevant to our research purposes, especially those that support our account of the humorous use of verbal irony. These are addressed in the following section (2.4). Here, we only provide some initial insights into Cognitive Linguistics insofar as it relates to the studied offered here.

Cognitive Linguistics stems from a reaction against generative linguistics caused by the excessive emphasis of this approach on the primary role of syntax over semantics and pragmatics (Taylor, 1995). The initial proposals made by the founding fathers of this theoretical framework (Lakoff, 1987a, 2008, Langacker, 1987, 2008, Talmy, 2000ab) and related work by other prominent cognitive linguists (e.g., Goldberg, 1995, 2006, Fauconnier and Turner, 2002) have been summarized in Dirven and Ruiz de Mendoza (2010).

Cognitive Linguistics holds that there is no distinction between human language ability and other types of general abilities. Indeed, human language ability has been defined as a "specialization" of other faculties where the construction of meaning requires the presence of contextual, functional as well as cultural contexts. This means that, differently from what the Gricean approach claims, Cognitive Linguistics states that meaning is directly intertwined with how people use language (Reddy, 1993). CL also argues for the use of rich semantic characterizations that capture world knowledge. These take the form of knowledge *frames* (Fillmore, 1985), which is essentially the same concept as schemas (Rumelhart, 1975) and scripts (Schank and Abelson, 1977) in artificial intelligence (see Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera, 2014, p. 67, for further discussion). Frames are propositional cognitive models (Lakoff, 1987) that capture sets of properties and relations that hold among entities together with their associated scenarios. Premises in reasoning schemas are based on such sets of properties and relations, which allows to link frame semantics with Relevance Theory.

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2.4. Verbal irony

As discussed in the introduction verbal irony also plays an important role in the process of inferring meaning with the purpose of creating humorous situations in sitcoms. This phenomenon has been recently studied from the point of view of different approaches and many of the studies devoted to it. Relevance Theory is one of the approaches which has tried to explain what verbal irony is and, with regard to it, it believes that it results from the speaker echoing a thought which clashes with whatever is the real situation while expressing an attitude towards such a thought (Wilson and Sperber, 2012).

A competing theory, called Pretense Theory (Clark and Gerrig, 1984), defines verbal irony from a different point of view in which, when someone is ironic, the act of being ironic conveys a degree of pretense where that act is directly associated with the speaker's attitude. At the same time, the role of the hearer is to decode what the speaker is trying to say. The strength of this approach has been evaluated critically, from a relevance-theoretic perspective, by Wilson (2006), who claims that the notion of pretense does not cover all the aspects of irony, especially its echoic and attitudinal elements.

A more recent approach to irony is provided in the context of Cognitive Linguistics (Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera, 2014, Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017a, Lozano and Ruiz de Mendoza, 2022). These authors provide a scenario-based account of this phenomenon. Their proposal is based on some of the theoretical assumptions of Cognitive Linguistics combined with postulates from inferential pragmatics. According to this combined view, ironic echoes are cognitive operations whose purpose is to build internally coherent conceptual scenarios that can guide the hearer to decode the appropriate meaning of the ironic utterance (see also Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera, 2014, and Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017b). One of the advantages of this approach is that it provides a broad analytical framework where pragmatics and cognition go hand in hand. For this reason, Ruiz de Mendoza and Lozano Palacio (2019ab) explicitly address a broad range of irony-related topics such as echoic complexity and accuracy, the felicity conditions for intended irony to count as such, a typology of producer and interpreter types, and, to finish off, an account of ironic uses across history. In this

dissertation, we will focus our attention on the notion of ironic echo as reflected in our examples.

The analysis provided here concurs with Ruiz de Mendoza and Lozano (2021) that ironic meaning emerges from a clash between an epistemic and an observable scenario. The epistemic scenario is built on the basis of pretended agreement, whether expressed through echoic mention or not (e.g., by means of combinations of agreement adverbials like *yeah, right, sure*). The observable scenario is what the speaker thinks is the real situation as evident to him or her. Irony derivation requires, like implicature, the activation of a double reasoning schema that (1) implicates that someone is wrong about a situation (2) leading either that person or someone else to realize about this situation and to dissociate him or herself from the challenged belief. For example, take a student, Paul, who believes that he is his teacher's pet, but then there is a situation that proves the opposite. Subsequently, a friend of his, John, makes the following remark: *Yeah, sure, you're the teacher's pet*. What John is doing is showing his pretended agreement with John's erroneous belief in a context which proves that Paul was wrong:

Premise 1 (epistemic scenario): Paul is his teacher's pet.

Explicit meaning 1 (observable scenario): Paul is not his teacher's pet.

Implicated conclusion 1: Paul's belief (premise 1) is wrong.

Premise 2 (socio-cultural convention): We should not contradict people except to make it evident to them they are wrong.

Explicit meaning 2 (implicated conclusion 1): John thinks premise 1 was wrong.

Implicated conclusion 2: John wants to make Paul aware he was wrong.

The second implicated conclusion carries the additional implicature that John dissociates himself from Paul's initial belief.

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3. METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on the careful selection of humorous dialogues from one of the episodes of the TV *The Big Bang Theory*: *The Pancake Batter Anomaly*. This dissertation is focused on that specific TV series for a wide range of reasons. Firstly, the vast majority of the literature published focuses on other well-known TV series. Such is the case of *Friends* or *The Office*. Nonetheless, the main difference between *The Big Bang Theory* and other popular TV sitcoms has to do with the fact that, as we will be able to see through the analysis of the excerpts, it abounds in masterful uses of irony and sarcasm. As a result, the kind of humor represented in this series is somewhat more complex conceptually and can give rise to a wider variety of analytical patterns.

The study is qualitative, since its focus of attention is the exploration of how pragmatic principles apply to account for how interlocutors engage in the dynamics of conversation. The frameworks under enquiry are to some extent complementary. Each highlights different aspects of the conversational flow that help us to understand how meaning is constructed in context. The Gricean analysis makes emphasis on how cultural conventions regulating the presentation of information (or maxims) assist in the generation of implicated meaning. Relevance Theory, on the other hand, addresses the cognitive mechanisms engaged in implicated meaning such as the use of premise-conclusion reasoning schemas, which apply world-knowledge to conversational interaction. It is here that Cognitive Linguistics, although not directly interested in pragmatic principles, supplies relevant analytical categories, especially, in the present case, frame structure. Finally, Conversation analysis, which is not directly oriented to explain inferential activity, is useful to understand the dynamics of conversational exchanges in terms of the conventions of turn taking.

Out of dozens of dialogues with implicated content, this study has selected six, each of which is a model of a specific meaning-making pattern generated by the application of pragmatic principles to the creation of humorous situations.

Complexity is analytically challenging, but at the same time it becomes a good test of the adequacy of a theory. The examples under analysis are thus capable of evidencing the weaknesses of one or another approach and, at the same time, they call for vindicating their complementary aspects.

One of the factors that has been taken into account for the selection of data is relevance of interpretability. The samples show an implicated meaning that can only be deciphered through the application of background knowledge derived from common world knowledge and previous discourse. By way of illustration, consider the following exchange:

Sheldon: *Why are you crying?*

Penny: *Because I'm stupid.*

Sheldon: *That's no reason to cry. One cries because is sad. For example, I cry because others are stupid and that makes me sad.*

In this exchange, Penny is trying to explain Sheldon the reason why she is sad. However, instead of explicitly saying that she is sad and then stating the reason ("Because I'm stupid"), she only does the latter. The situation produces laughter because not only is Sheldon unable to understand that, according to social convention, when people are sad, we are supposed to make them feel better, but he also contributes to making Penny feel worse by implying that she is stupid: "I cry because others are stupid and that makes me sad". The way in which he contradicts those social conventions helps to produce a degree of humor that will make the hearer laugh.

Another factor that has served us to narrow down the number of examples which could be analyzed for the purpose of the present study is analytical productivity. This means that each of the examples selected reveals specific humor-producing pragmatic patterns that are only applicable to a concrete example.

Finally, it must be pointed out that the detailed analysis of our corpus of examples has not only cast some additional light onto the object under study, but has also contributed to reformulating some aspects of the previous theories on the basis of actual data. In other words, the method of analysis has been chosen with the final purpose in mind of offering an analysis of the data as complete and exhaustive as possible so as to reach a conclusion and reformulate the previous theories on the basis of the data.

4. CASE STUDIES

As we have previously mentioned, inferential theories serve the purpose of contributing to create humor in TV sitcoms such as *The Big Bang Theory*. In this section, we will include examples of conversational exchanges where, in order to provide a comprehensive account of a humorous situation, the need to complement the Gricean approach and Relevance Theory becomes evident. Let us consider the first conversational exchange:

(1) Sheldon: Well, as I predicted I am sick.

Leonard: Alright, well, get some rest and drink plenty of fluids.

Sheldon: What else would I drink? Gasses? Solids? Ionised plasma?

Leonard: Drink whatever you want.

Sheldon: I want soup.

Leonard: Then make soup.

Sheldon: We don't have soup.

Leonard: I'm at work, Sheldon.

In (1) "drinking fluids" is an example of how inferential meaning contributes to create a humorous situation. The use of this expression flouts the first maxim of quantity, which states that the speaker should not give more information than necessary. In Relevance Theory, by contrast, the same expression would be treated not as a case of implicature but as a matter of *explicature*. This term is used to describe mere context-based pragmatic adjustments that are necessary to interpret the meaning of an utterance. More specifically, the pragmatic adjustment task used here is what Sperber and Wilson (1995) call *strengthening*. This task consists in providing a specification of the types of "fluids" referred to. Of course, on the basis of contextual factors and world knowledge, we could argue that, when people are sick, they need to take some fluids such as broth, chicken soup, orange juice and others that may contribute to an earlier recovery. The Gricean perspective here points to the fact that the mention of "fluids" is blatantly redundant since this notion is part of the definition of drinking (we can only drink fluids). Relevance Theory, in turn, reveals the exact

nature of the pragmatic task at work in deriving the intended meaning, which is one of strengthening (or further specifying) an imprecise formulation.

Later on, in (1) we also encounter an implicature in Leonard's turn when he replies "drink whatever you want". This is an interesting instance of an implicature based on the fact that Leonard knows that Sheldon should drink juices and broth, not just about anything he feels like. Hence, Leonard's turn is equivalent to saying "I don't care if what you do makes you sicker" further suggesting that he is tired of Sheldon's stupidity.

However, the analytical situation is still more complex since Sheldon ignores all the implicatures involved in Leonard's turn and sticks to the original explicature arising from "plenty of fluids" when he produces the utterance "I want soup". There is a logic behind Leonard's next turn since interpretation is possible by means of an explicitation of the consequence part of the following reasoning schema: 'If a person wants soup [condition], he/she can make soup to satisfy his/her desire [consequence]'. That is, it makes explicit the implicated conclusion for "I want soup", thereby suggesting that maybe Sheldon should have reached that conclusion (there is probably a degree of feigned astonishment in Leonard's remark).

It should be noted that the following utterance could be considered a repair strategy. This type of strategies is very common in conversation. In the utterance under analysis, Sheldon fixes a problem in Leonard's understanding of Sheldon's "I want soup". Sheldon, therefore, invalidates Leonard's implicature that Sheldon should have thought of preparing soup if he wanted soup. Having pointed that out, we may conclude that the repair strategy is directed to getting Leonard to use the right inferential path. However, in terms of maxims, it is Sheldon's way of implying that he did not break any maxims.

Indeed, in terms of Gricean maxims, we may say that "We don't have soup" does not give all necessary information, but there is no intention to mislead. This calls for an analysis of the remark as involving a flouting of the first maxim of quantity.

To finish off, the reasoning schema behind the last utterance can be explained as follows: Sheldon's response is taken by Leonard as implying that he wants Leonard to do something about the fact that they do not have soup. The use of the personal pronoun "we" is relevant, since it includes Leonard, as if Sheldon's problem were a shared one.

Consequently, the reasoning schema from which this implication is derived is based on a social convention according to which, when someone is in need, other people are expected to try and satisfy such a need. Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi (2007) have formulated this social convention as part of what they call the Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model: "If it is manifest to A that a particular state of affair is not beneficial to B, and if A has the capacity to change that state of affairs, then A should do so".

It may be argued that Leonard's response "I'm at work" implies that he can't help Sheldon, thus activating the condition that to do something for someone, one has to be able to do so ("if A has the capacity to change that state of affair"). However, it is not clear how this reaction could be explained on the basis of the maxims. Gricean pragmaticists would typically argue that Leonard's reaction is not conceptually consistent with (i.e., "relevant" to) Sheldon's request for help. This would be a flouting of the maxim of relation. Nonetheless, "I'm at work" is actually relevant in terms of the social convention that underlies the utterance.

Let us now take the following shorter conversational exchange:

(2) **Howard:** Stand by. Ma, can my friend come over?
Howard's mother: I just had the carpets steamed.

Example (2) can be explained from the point of view of both pragmatic theories. From the point of view of the Gricean approach, we could say that, as a question, the first utterance does not break any of the maxims, but creates an opportunity for the hearer to respond cooperatively instead. If the hearer does not cooperate, then implicated meaning may arise. Here, we are dealing with a question whose illocutionary force, asking for permission, does not coincide with that of a question. In traditional speech act theory, Howard is making use of an indirect speech act. In a constructionist approach to meaning, Howard's question in form is a request in

meaning based on an "entrenched" (or cognitively rooted) form-meaning association (Goldberg, 2006). In the development of the constructional approach provided by Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi (2007), the question *Can my friend come over?* is conventionally a way of asking permission (a speech act) whose meaning was in origin (when not conventionalized) derived through implicature: If a person can do something that benefits me, it follows that we should allow him to do it (since everyone is culturally expected to desire other people's benefit). The implicature is, hence, obtained from the consequence part of this condition-consequence reasoning schema.

In Relevance Theory, illocutionary force is explained as the result of implicature derivation. In addition, for Sperber and Wilson (1995), using such labels as asking, requesting, promising, and the like, is theoretically inadequate. These labels are metalanguage that does not necessarily capture a mental reality. For example, there are languages in which some speech acts are not lexically captured by means of performative predicates. But this does not mean that such speech acts cannot be expressed in those languages through inferences. Some scholars have argued that all languages code some basic acts such as statements, questions, and commands, but differ with respect to how they express other acts such as offers, promises, requests, etc. (Sadock and Zwicky, 1985). Other scholars, like Vanderbeken (2007), have argued that, instead of basic speech acts, there are universal illocutionary features that hold across languages, with multifold manifestations in the individual languages. Construction grammar, which is based on Cognitive Linguistics, does not reject the idea of universal features in speech acts, but it also holds that individual languages use grammatical mechanisms (e.g., can you for requests) to capture illocutionary force conventionally.

The account of illocution provided by Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi (2007) has been expanded by Baicchi and Ruiz de Mendoza (2010), Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera (2014, Ch. 3, Section 2.3.2) and Ruiz de Mendoza (2021, Ch. 7). It works under the assumption that speech act meaning rests on the activation of illocutionary scenarios, of the type originally put forward by Panther and Thornburg (1998) (see also Pérez, 2013, 2021, Section 2.5). This is a point where Relevance Theory, which accounts for pragmatic inferences, can be complemented by a constructionist approach to conventionalized illocution. This possibility is missing in the Cooperative Principle,

which pays no attention to illocution. And even if we wanted to refine the maxims approach to make it deal with indirect speech acts, these formulations would have to be addressed as involving a "flouting" of the first maxim of quality. This does not explain, by itself, how the indirect illocutionary meaning is obtained. In Relevance Theory, this kind of meaning is the implicated conclusion of a reasoning schema. For example, Howard's conventional request in the dialogue above could be rephrased indirectly: *I would love it if my friend could come over.* In a literal reading, this utterance is the expression of something that Howard would really enjoy. World knowledge on social conventions, however, point to a different interpretation: if a person expresses a strong desire, there is an expectation that other people may satisfy such a desire. This knowledge is used as the premise of a reasoning schema. When combined with Howard's explicit wish it leads to the implicated conclusion that Sheldon expects that his wish will be granted. In other words, the implicated conclusion is a request.

Howard's mother's conversational turn in (2) is also better explained by combining both theoretical frameworks. Based on the Cooperative Principle, Howard's mother is flouting the maxim of relation. This flouting of the utterance leads us to a conversational implicature since there is no logical implication involved and it is essential for the information-transfer process. From it, we deduce that Howard's mother refused to have Howard's friends at home. But Grice's theory does not explain how the reasoning process works after a maxim is flouted.

Relevance Theory does so. According to its postulates, we realize that Howard's mother's statement strikes an optimal balance, in its context, between processing effort and meaning effects. This, consequently, gives birth to an implicature that Howard's mother uses to make a non-literal excuse to avoid having Howard's friend at home. The condition-consequence reasoning process takes this form: If a person's actions create an inconvenience, then this situation should be avoided. The implicature is provided by the "consequence" or ("then") part of the schema.

We now turn our attention to (3):

   (3) Waitress: Homeless crazy guy at table eighteen.
      Penny: No, just crazy. Sheldon, what are you doing here?

Sheldon: I'm sick, thank you very much.

Penny: How could you have gotten it from me. I'm not sick

In (3), the exchange is made up of four utterances. In the first one, Sheldon is described as a homeless crazy guy. However, Penny's utterance implicates that Sheldon looks homeless because he is crazy (in fact, Sheldon is eccentric). Penny's response breaks the first maxim of quantity since she should have provided all relevant information, along the following lines: "It is my friend Sheldon, who looks homeless because of his crazy behavior". But there is no intention to mislead, so it is not a violation, but a flouting, of the maxim. She continues with what is likely a rhetorical question since she does not want an explanation. She simply wants Sheldon to realize that he should not be there. This meaning is derived by means of an implicature because Penny is not looking for an answer. Instead, she is conversationally inducing Sheldon to break the first maxim of quantity because she is making him think that she needs the answer, when she does not.

This time Sheldon realizes that the question is rhetorical and only pretends to be providing a relevant answer, but he does not. Sheldon does not provide a straightforwardly related answer, but refers to his being sick. We are, consequently, dealing with a flouting of the maxim of relation, since he Sheldon wants Penny to realize that she has been insensitive to his needs. That is why he thanks her rather ironically (he does not feel grateful). Indeed, he believes that Penny is being rude and unsympathetic towards him.

If we apply Relevance Theory, we see that the fact that Sheldon is thanking Penny of something negative is a clue to thinking that he is blaming her for his sickness. According to this theory, utterances create expectations of relevance independently of any maxims. In this context, Sheldon's answer is irrelevant unless you understand the implicit meaning through which Sheldon considers that Penny is responsible for his illness. That is why he adds "thank you very much" at the end of his turn.

The last utterance could be just explained from the point of view of the latter since we face an implicature which arises from an explicitation of the following consequence

reasoning schema: If someone has infected another person (condition), then (it follows that) she/he must have been previously infected (consequence).

The exchange in (4) is grounded in the speech act scenario of requests (Panther and Thornburg, 1998):

(4) Sheldon: Wait. Will you please rub this on my chest?
Penny: Oh, Sheldon, can't you do that yourself?
Sheldon: Vaporub makes my hands smell funny.

In (4), the meaning of the utterance is deduced by applying the request scenario. Sheldon lets Penny know that he wants her to rub VapoRub on his chest. Considering this, taking into account Sheldon's somewhat childish psychological profile, which Penny is aware of, Sheldon is putting Penny under a rather strong obligation to rub VapoRub on his chest and, indeed, this is what happens at the end. That is, Penny will rub VapoRub for him. Furthermore, the utterance exploits part of the Cost-Benefit ICM: Penny has to do the action for Sheldon since as the rule states: "If it is manifest to A that a potential state of affairs is beneficial to B, then A is expected to bring it about provided he has the capacity to do so" (Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi, 2007: 111).

Hence, the meaning arises from the activation of a metonymic cognitive operation where the willingness to perform an action stands for the request to perform the action. More concretely, we have a low-level scenario in which Sheldon who is not in real need is asking Penny for help while pretending that he is in a needful situation and, consequently, Penny is moved to help. In other words, Sheldon makes Penny aware of her ability to provide for his needs.

In a nutshell, as Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi (2007) claim, by mentioning explicitly the after component of the request scenario, the speaker gives the hearer access to the whole illocutionary act of requests and the latter interprets it as such without much effort. This has been defined a high-level situational cognitive model.

Similarly, we need to go back to Panther and Thornburg's (1998) concept of request scenario to decode the implicated meaning of the second utterance since we

are dealing with a metonymically-activated illocutionary scenarios where there appear two of the features identified as relevant by Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi (2007). First of all, the way in which the utterance is formulated shows Penny's surprise to see that Sheldon is unwilling to perform the required action. This interpretation emerges from the application of the following rationale: "You should have rub VapoRub on your chest, but you haven't, which surprises me. Is it because you are unable or unwilling to do so?

This was defined by Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi (2007) as a high-level situational cognitive model since as mentioned in the previously analysed utterance, by mentioning the first part of the request scenario, he/she is leading the hearer to activate the second part of the so-called scenario in order to decode the implicated meaning.

Lastly, we can see that the last utterance conveys a degree of ambiguity, however, if we apply Relevance Theory, we realize that the statement makes sense because it is relevant for the conversation. This, consequently, gives birth to an implicature that since he uses to make a non-literal excuse to avoid being himself the one that spreads Vaporub. The condition-consequence reasoning process takes this form: If a person's actions create an inconvenience, then this situation should be avoided. The implicature is provided by the "consequence" (or "then") part of the schema.

Conversation (5) is more complex, since it involves a rhetorical question, which carries special conventionalized pragmatic meaning implications, and a speech act scenario:

(5) Penny: Can you please come get him?
    Leonard: Uh yeah, I'd be…I'd be happy to Penny (Holds phone up, Howard makes warning siren noises) Oh my God there's a breech in the radiation unit (Raj joins in) The whole city is in jeopardy, oh my God, Professor Googenfell is melting, gotta go, bye! (To Howard and Raj) I feel really guilty.
    Raj: You did what you had to do (Steal's some of Howard's popcorn).

In (5), we come across a Penny's "rhetorical question" at the very beginning. By uttering that she is guiding Leonard to give a clear yes/no answer. That is, she is forcing Leonard to give a "yes/no answer" using the rhetorical question to look for an explicitation of the answer even though by Leonard's behavior she knows where Leonard stands. Consequently, we could say that she is forcing Leonard to adhere to the maxim of quantity.

If we analyze the question from the point of view of Relevance Theory, it would be relevant to include the concepts of scenarios, metonymic activity and pragmatic inference. In this respect, Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera (2014) is useful. These authors argue that situation-based implicatures are based on premise-conclusion reasoning schemas of the kind postulated in Relevance Theory. More concretely, the brief discussion above allows us to categorize the world knowledge involved as a high-level regulatory scenario.

It is explicitly realized by a question beginning with *can* which makes of it a case of indirect requests where a subdomain of the social convention is profiled because Sheldon is supposed to satisfy Penny's need. It is through that profiling activity that the question gives us access to the request scenario since it activates the underlying social conventions including the social answer (when people are in need, they can expect other people to help them).

Going deeper into Leonard's answer, it would be interesting to mention that his response clearly violates the first maxim of quality since he is making up a story about an accident in the radiation unit that will require his presence as an excuse. In other words, due to the level of absurdity of the excuse, we could say that Leonard is simply playing with the maxim (i.e., flouting the maxim) without the intention to mislead. Rather, Leonard is ostentatiously breaking the maxim so the hearer knows he does not feel like doing what he has been asked. His reaction is a face-threatening act and therefore impolite in terms of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. But maybe his "repentance" is only feigned, also in an ostentatious way among his friends, who are accomplices of the misdeed.

It should be noticed that the "repentance" that he shows is a self-initiated repair strategy by means of which he wants to feel a little bit less guilty. In the next turn, Raj makes use of another-initiated repair strategy (Schegloff, 2007). It must be said that the repair strategy has been previously initiated in the previous utterance and, therefore, there is also a self-initiated strategy. This is marked by a pause in conversation and this face-saving strategy contrasts with the face-threatening act that Leonard has performed while lying to Penny to avoid picking Sheldon up.

Finally, in (6) we have an interesting interplay of analytical situations:

(6) **Sheldon:** Thanks for bringing me home.

    Penny: Oh, it's okay. I didn't really need to work today, it's not like I have rent or car payments or anything.

    Sheldon: Good. Good.

    Penny: Okay, well, you feel better.

    Sheldon: Wait, where are you going?

    Penny: Um, home, to write some bad cheques.

    Sheldon: You're going to leave me?

In the first conversational turn, Sheldon is thanking Penny for bringing him home when she should be working instead. Ideally, the expression of thankfulness should convey the implicature that Sheldon is aware that Penny failed to attend her professional duties to take care of Sheldon, who is self-centered and usually unable to empathize with other people. Since Penny knows Sheldon well, her response takes on an ironical quality. When she says "it's ok" she does not really mean she feels like that. She ironizes on what Sheldon thinks.

Following Ruiz de Mendoza and Lozano-Palacio (2021) there is both verbal and situational irony working in parallel. First, take the ironicity of the situation where the Physics professor, with a good income, is dependent for transportation on a budget meal restaurant waitress who struggles financially. Sheldon could hire a taxi service. Situational irony arises from a clash between what we expect on the basis of our knowledge of the world (including social conventions) and what we experience in a

given situation. Then, Penny exploits the intrinsic ironicity of the situation to build her own ironic complaint, which is a case of verbal irony. Verbal irony arises from a clash between the content of an echoed utterance and the observable situation (Wilson and Sperber, 2012). In Relevance Theory the echoed thought is argued to be associated with an attitude of dissociation from the content of the echoed thought. Ruiz de Mendoza and Lozano-Palacio (2021: 225) further note that the attitude is not simply appended to the clash, but it arises from it on inferential grounds. This happens as a result of the application of a reasoning schema according to which people's beliefs can be contradicted either to prove them wrong or to show dissociation from what they think. Furthermore, these authors note that the general attitude of dissociation can be adjusted pragmatically in context by means of the same mechanism that apply in the cases of explicature generation discussed before. The adjustment underlies the different ironic values: skepticism, mockery, wryness, etc. These values can give rise to the final illocutionary force of the message such as criticism, derision, complaint, and others. In the present example, Penny is echoing a thought which clearly clashes with the real situation of her having to pay for rent, car payments and many other things. This situation calls for an interpretation of Penny's utterance as an ironic complaint.

Similarly, Sheldon's response leads us to the concept of irony. Sheldon is echoing what we might consider to be an ironic marker (*good*) with the purpose of pretending to agree with Penny, even though what he really does is showing indifference towards her. That is, Sheldon is echoing those ironic markers with the only purpose of pretending to be interested in what Penny is saying even though he does not care about it and he wants her to stop talking. Indeed, as suggested in Ruiz de Mendoza and Lozano-Palacio (2021), more than two agreement markers usually strengthen the agreement function. Nonetheless, if the speaker is manifestly pretending to agree, those agreement markers strengthen the pretense effect of the utterance instead, since even if the speaker is using agreement markers, he or she still disagrees. So, there is a discrepancy between what is said and what is meant there is generating an implicature.

In the following utterance (*okay, well, you feel better*), once again, irony is involved. Following Ruiz de Mendoza (2021), there is an observable situation in which Penny realizes that Sheldon is much better because his behavior is close to the one that

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he has when he is not ill. There is a clash between the observable scenario and the echoed scenario.

In the observable scenario, Sheldon does not seem to be recovered yet, so there are sharp discrepancies with Penny's echoed utterance. That triggers a metonymy, which is Penny's anger with the situation since she had to leave her job to bring him home. So, we have a double metonymy in the source. The focus of attention in the source is the fact that he is feeling sick, while the hearer (Penny) thinks that he has already recovered from his illness and that he already feels better. This maps onto the target where the focus of attention is Penny's ironic remark where he shows her boredom and tiredness with the situation. In other words, in this case, we have a crossdomain metonymic chain as it has been defined by Galera and Ruiz de Mendoza (2014).

Then, we deal with an utterance which resembles Kay and Fillmore (1999) popularized *What's X Doing Y?* construction. They pointed out that the meaning of sentences illustrating this construction goes beyond the combination of the individual meanings of its parts. In *What's John doing learning Chinese?*, for example, the sentence is not a question about what John does since what he does is already answered in the realization of the X part of the construction. Instead, the sentence conveys the speaker's concern that John may be doing something wrong. Similarly, Sheldon's question is not a question either. In this case, the context shows that Sheldon does not care at all about where Penny is going but about the fact that she may be leaving him alone. Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera (2020) have studied these and other similar questions as belonging to a family of rhetorical questions that convey the speaker's belief that what the situation depicted in the question is the wrong one. This kind of situation is what these authors call an *attitudinal scenario*. In the present scenario Sheldon assumes that the fact that Penny is leaving is wrong because he is sick and she is leaving him alone.

It is immediately followed by another case of verbal irony still grounded in the overall irony of the whole situation where Sheldon does not realize how self-centered he is. He still cannot understand that Penny has left her work unattended to help him when he could have found another way to get home. He cannot understand Penny has

to earn a living and that he has abused their friendship. In this ironic context, which is represented in the film, Penny's words are also ironic again: she has to write "bad cheques" because she will not receive her wages for missing work. This utterance places before Sheldon's eyes the reality that clashes with what Sheldon has in mind and with Penny's echo of it. This echo functions as a way of showing pretended agreement. Thus, Penny continues pretending to agree with Sheldon that her duties and problems are unimportant while his problems are important. What is more, Sheldon's problems are in fact unimportant but he has the inability to magnify them beyond proportion.

Finally, we have a low-level attitudinal scenario since by uttering the sentence, Sheldon is showing his ridiculous indignation towards the idea of Penny leaving him alone. As was the case with *Where are you going?*, the construction here (*You are going to X?*) belongs to the family of rhetorical questions showing the speaker's belief that the situation described is wrong.

5. CONCLUSION

This dissertation has presented the in-depth analysis of six cases of ironic patterns that take place within a humoristic context. These cases have been selected from the study of humoristic conversations of the episode *The Pancake Batter Anomaly* of the TV sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*, a TV sitcom where the scrip-writers make a systematic effort to create humor whose starting point is irony.

The ironic exchanges have revealed themselves as extremely complex, probably due to the fact that the TV series in question is intended for a non-naïve public. This characteristic of the dialogues contributes to making episodes in the series highly productive for analytic purposes, since it leads to the emergence of unusual ironic usage patterns that are intended to pass as ordinary conversation. More concretely, we have identified six usage patterns, which we have studied in depth.

However, it is important to note that this study is not exhaustive. It is a preliminary exploration. With further work other patterns of ironic development may of course be detected. However, what the present discussion offers, besides the identification and

discussion of six patterns, is a strategy of empirical analysis that can be applied to other examples.

In any case, this dissertation has shown that what in the literature is generally posited as conflicting theoretical principles, Gricean pragmatics and the relevance-theoretic approach, actually complement each other in a productive manner thus shedding light on the different aspects of ironic play. How does this happen? The analysis shows that the Cooperative Principle focuses its attention on the aspects of conversation that call for special interpretive strategies. Relevance Theory provides the rationale for the study of those strategies. It explains what the inferential process to reach implicated meaning looks like. In this way, saying that an utterance involves, for example, a flouting of the first maxim of quality does not account for what the interpreter is required to do to process its meaning implications in all their complexity. Relevance Theory solves this problem by postulating premise-conclusion reasoning schemas. In such schemas the premise is activated on the basis of its consistency with the Principle of Relevance: it is drawn from all relevant aspects of world knowledge. The premise is best formulated in terms of an if-then conceptual pattern. The "if" part is coincidental with what is said (or to be more accurate, with the inferential developed of what is said into an explicature). The "then" part supplies the conclusion of the reasoning schema. This process can be complex in real talk exchanges where what is implicated can be used to invoke new premises that will lead to new conclusions, and so on.

World knowledge has been studied in Cognitive Linguistics which includes not only conceptual frame structure but also metaphor and metonymy as ways of structuring knowledge (Fillmore, 1985; Lakoff, 1987). It is, therefore, necessary to take into account work carried out by these authors and followers. Meaning effects are also the result of how we "construe" (subjectively interpret and represent) reality.

Finally, this dissertation has made mention of the more traditional non-inferentialist approach to conversation carried out by conversational analysts working on turn-taking. It has been noted that these studies merely draw their attention to formal aspect of conversations, especially the management of conversational turns: the rules that speakers follow to take their turns in conversation. This emphasis on the formal

aspects of talk exchanges is detrimental to the exhaustive study of the meaning implications of the utterances that constitute each turn. This dissertation has disregarded this approach for this reason, since making meaning in conversation is a question of making inferences on the basis of the exploitation of the speakers' shared knowledge. By choosing to combine elements from two major inferentialist approaches to conversation, it is the author's hope to have contributed to a better understanding of the intricacies of language-based inferential activity in conversation.

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