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A Cognitive Analysis of Irony in The Office

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# TRABAJO FIN DE GRADO

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**A Cognitive Analysis of Irony in *The Office***

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## ABSTRACT

Through the analysis of scripts from the TV show *The Office*, this dissertation grants some comprehension of the way in which irony works and how we understand it, applying a Cognitive approach. A corpus of different episodes has been created, from which the most useful texts have been selected to achieve a representation of different kinds of ironic scenarios. It has been found that the roles held through ironic situations are not fixed; rather they can be interchangeable among the participants; and also the fact that its success will depend on the ironist's solidarity and the interpreter's ability to perceive a clash between the observable and the epistemic scenario. With this dissertation, a contribution to the application of irony theory is done by providing this case analysis, so as to check the validity of its proposals altogether with the addition of more irony examples to the already existing collection.

A través del análisis de los guiones de la serie de televisión *The Office*, esta investigación llega a la comprensión de la forma en que se da la ironía y en que la entendemos, estudiando dicha figura desde una perspectiva cognitiva. Se ha creado con este fin un corpus recopilatorio de diferentes episodios, de los cuales se han seleccionado los que resultan de mayor utilidad para una representación apropiada de los diferentes tipos de escenarios irónicos. Se ha encontrado que los roles sostenidos durante la ironía no son fijos, sino que pueden ser intercambiados entre los distintos participantes; y también que el éxito de la comunicación dependerá de la solidaridad del ironista y de la habilidad del intérprete para percibir un choque entre el escenario observable y el epistémico. Con este análisis de casos se busca hacer una contribución a la aplicación de la teoría de la ironía, para así poder comprobar la validez de sus propuestas, además de añadir más ejemplos de ironía a la ya existente colección.

KEY WORDS: *Irony, situational irony, verbal irony, observable scenario, epistemic scenario, pretended agreement, disassociation, Cognitive Linguistics.*



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The present dissertation applies the Cognitive Linguistics theoretical framework on irony and ironic situations to a selected body of examples that are originally taken from the American TV series *The Office*.

The motivation underneath this dissertation is the realisation that too often the examples used to explain theoretical aspects of linguistic research are artificial. The examples in *The Office* are of course fictitious as well, since they belong to a TV series. However, since they try to emulate natural conversation between the characters, they can be considered closer to real speech. By analysing the way in which the ironic situations of the scripts of this series are created, it will be possible to understand the behaviours that are found in these communicative scenarios, how we communicate irony through different devices, what our purpose is in doing so when communicating with someone, among other questions. In addition, this will also provide us with a way to understand how the spectator is provided with the necessary information to understand ironic meaning in a TV show.

It must be kept in mind that there are different kinds of irony, which use different scenarios that combine in various ways. The first distinction to be made is the dichotomy between verbal and situational irony. The former refers to those ironic situations in which a speaker makes reference to the same ironic meaning, whereas the latter refers to those situations that, in some way, break the expectations that a person may have about them. Both ironic situations work on the basis of an observable scenario and an epistemic scenario. According to Lozano-Palacio and Ruiz de Mendoza (2022), the epistemic scenario in verbal irony can be created by means of agreement markers, the formation of echoes, sociohistorical and cultural references, cumulative echoes, multi-operational echoes or chains of echoes. In situational irony this is different, since the epistemic scenario of the person witnessing a situational irony is created by the world knowledge that this person may have. However, there is one similarity in the fact that both kinds of irony function by means of a disassociation

between these epistemic scenarios and the observable scenario. The latter is defined by Lozano-Palacio and Ruiz de Mendoza (2022: 81) as “what the ironist and the interpreter perceive, which contradicts their expectations or firm beliefs about a given state of affairs”. It is also possible that this scenario is communicated or narrated, so it would not be a present experience for the person in question when grasping the ironic meaning.

As a consequence of existing differences when it comes to verbal irony and situational irony, the possible combinations that may derive from them are also divergent. In the case of the epistemic scenario and the observable scenario interacting in verbal irony, Lozano-Palacio and Ruiz de Mendoza (2022: 83-85) create a schema where distinctions are made depending on two factors: whether the echo is implicit or explicit, and whether the observable scenario is to be derived from the context or is explicit through linguistic cues. Concerning the interaction of these two scenarios in situational irony, Lozano-Palacio and Ruiz de Mendoza (2022: 86-87) propose another schema for these distinctions, based on them being derived from the context; the epistemic scenario being a product of world knowledge, and the observable scenario being evident; or “delayed situational ironies where ironies where the epistemic scenario interacts with an observable scenario that is made observable later in time through some cue” (Palacio-Lozano & Ruiz de Mendoza, 2022: 87).



## 2. STATE OF THE ART

Irony is a figure of speech whose use can be traced back to the origins of the Western culture. Its importance as a useful tool for public speakers to make their message through was already discussed by Greek orators, philosophers and writers (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2021). For example, Diogenes of Sinope is often quoted as using irony to make others aware of the weaknesses in their behaviour: “Once he saw the officials of a temple leading away someone who had stolen a bowl, belonging to the treasurers, and said, ‘The great thieves are leading away the little thief’ (*Diogenes of Sinope Quotes*, 2022).

The tradition of using irony as a way to criticise ideas or behaviours and to induce people to think about them also began in literature. In fact, there are well known writers who have done so in their works. A representative example is the writing of the Irish Oscar Wilde (2000: 405):

Gwendolen: The fact that they did not follow us at once into the house, as anyone else would have done, seems to me to show that they have some sense of shame left.

Cecily: They have been eating muffins. That looks like repentance.

Thus, as a consequence of how resourceful irony is, it has been very frequently studied, both in the fields of literature and rhetoric. It has not been until the last decades that irony has begun to be studied within the philosophy of language and pragmatics. Therefore, the number of perspectives on this topic is considerable.

### 2.1. Linguistic Studies of Irony

In the 70’s, the well-known language philosopher Paul Grice discussed irony in his paper “Logic and conversation” (Grice, 1975). His understanding of irony arises from his formulation of the Cooperative Principle as a universal principle of verbal

communication, where irony is explained, conversationally, in terms of a flouting of the first maxim of quality, also known as the maxim of truthfulness (cf. Ruiz de Mendoza, 2021: 254). The idea in this theory is that the speaker, by communicating ironically, violates this maxim. However, the intention with which the speaker is communicating is not to hide the meaning or make the interpreter misunderstand it. For this reason, Grice considered that this was a flouting (i.e., an ostentatious breach of the maxim) instead of a violation, which requires an intention to mislead.

Furthermore, Grice (1975: 53) linked the events of irony and metaphor in an early version of what we now call interpretive chaining (Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera, 2014). In order to exemplify this union, he proposed the following examples: “You are the cream in my coffee” and “You are my pride and joy”. With these two sentences, the interpreter would have to arrive first at the meaning of the metaphor and, then, the ironic meaning.

In the 80’s the Pretense Theory was put forward by Clark and Gerrig (1984). This theory argues that the speaker, when behaving ironically, pretends to be honest concerning what is being transmitted, though it is not the case. Although the idea of pretending is indeed a feature of irony, we cannot take it as a definitional feature since it is also found in other linguistic events like hyperbole (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2021: 259). Clark and Gerrig (1984) characterised irony as having certain features: “asymmetry of affect”, meaning that “an ironist is more likely to say “What a clever idea” of a bad idea than “What a stupid idea” of a good idea” (Clark & Gerrig, 1984: 122); the distinction between those victims of irony who cannot see they are being impersonated by the ironist, and those who witness it from a close position and do not understand it; and the change in the ironist’s voice tone, which will be more similar to a caricature than to ironist’s real voice as to communicate a certain attitudinal position.

Afterwards, a decade later, Kumon-Nakamura and his colleagues developed the Allusional Pretense Theory (1995) on the basis of the previous approach by Clark and Gerrig. Their perspective was based on the idea that irony is, ultimately, a speech act that is not real. To refer to this, they coined the term “pragmatic insincerity”. They also

introduced the idea of “allusion”, which works as a reference to “an expected state of affairs that has been violated or that has violated expectations” (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2021: 254). According to Kumon Nakamura et al. (1995), irony works on the basis of two elements: the first is the reference to an expectation that has not been properly met, and the second one is the ostentatious disregard for the communicative rules, which involves a violation of Grice’s truthfulness maxim.

This idea of the “allusion” might sound similar to the more recent, and nowadays frequently referred to, idea of “echo”. Nevertheless, there is a notable difference between them: allusions are less accurate than echoes, since the latter attempts to make a perfect reference to the transmitted meaning, while the former is a looser reference.

Another important scholar in the study of irony is Attardo (2000), whose work was based on the previous work by Grice and his Cooperative Principle. Attardo created the notion of “relevant inappropriateness”, which is defined as “a violation of felicity conditions in combination with social norms or expectations that is consistent with communicative goals” (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2021: 253). Attardo argued that it is this idea of “relevant inappropriateness” that activates the inferential procedure that leads the interpreter towards the ironic meaning.

Relevance Theory puts forward an approach to irony based on the notion of echoic mention (Wilson & Sperber, 1981, 2012; Sperber & Wilson, 1995). The notion of relevance was rather important for the perspective of these two scholars. They considered that the meaning of our utterances is never fully transmitted by them, but that communication works by means of inferences (Wilson & Sperber, 2012). For this work of inferring to happen, interpreters have to assume that what is being uttered is of a certain degree of relevance. According to Ruiz de Mendoza (2021), their main contribution with regards to the comprehension of ironic utterances is their explicit recognition of the speaker’s attitudinal factor in the ironic communication. This factor is transmitted through the utterance, so it is actually subject to parameterizations.

With the years, there have been confrontations, mainly between Pretense Theory and the echoic account. Some scholars have tried to take a reconciling stance between them.

A notable example would be Popa-Wyatt (2014).

## **2.2. Beginning of Cognitive Approaches**

Cognitive Linguistics has been growing in interest concerning irony only in recent times. Seana Coulson (2005) is one of the first renowned scholars within this research framework who has dealt with irony, though eventually it has come to be seen as an approach that might be lacking in some of its aspects. Coulson's proposal is made from the perspective of the Blending Theory. This theory argues that we use mental spaces with metaphor or irony. These so-called mental spaces contain the representation of some entities and the relationships between them.

According to Coulson (2005: 1512), "understanding meaning involves the construction of blended cognitive models that include some structure from multiple input models, as well as emergent structure that arises through the processes of blending". That is to say, two different frames are brought together for the sake of ironic meaning. However, by making this point, the inferential procedures are being forgotten: if we blend two different frameworks for the sake of understanding an ironic meaning, that means that there is some inferential procedure. However, as noted by critics of Blending Theory (e.g., Ruiz de Mendoza, 1998; Ruiz de Mendoza & Pea, 2005), there is a combined cognitive and pragmatic meaning making process based on the activity of cognitive operations on cognitive models (see also Ruiz de Mendoza & Galera, 2014 for a detailed account of this activity across domains of linguistic description). Besides this argument, this theory has also been criticised because it aligns ironic interpretation procedures with other unrelated cognitive processes, and because it fails to take into account the observable scenario (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2021: 264).

## **2.3. The Scenario-Based Approach**

More recently, Ruiz de Mendoza (2021) has proposed the Scenario-Based Approach

(see also Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano, 2021 and Lozano & Ruiz de Mendoza, 2022). Palacio-Lozano & Ruiz de Mendoza (2022: 99) stated that “irony is composed by three core elements: the ironist, the interpreter and the target”. Concerning the first of them, we may find solidary and non-solidary ironists, depending on whether they share communicative goals with the audience or not respectively. This should vary depending as well on whether the ironist wants to humiliate someone or make someone part of the irony. In the case of a solidary ironist, he or she will use information that interpreters are likely to have; use total echoes, which are “an exact link to what someone said, someone's belief or a particular state of affairs” (Palacio-Lozano & Ruiz de Mendoza, 2022: 100); will create a noticeable clash between the epistemic and the observable scenarios; will use suprasegmental features that point to irony, like special intonation; meanwhile, the goal of a non-solidary ironist is to make the distance between his or her intentions and those of the addressee as wide apart as possible.

Regarding the interpreters, they are distinguished between naïve and non-naïve interpreters, depending on whether they have the necessary information to grasp the irony or not respectively. In the case of naïve ones, a solidary communicator will be necessary; on the other hand, if they are non-naïve interpreters, a solidary communicator would mean a waste of communicative effort. In order to achieve a correct effort balance, the combinations between the kinds of ironists and interpreters must be considered. Even more so when these categories are gradable and able to change in discourse.

Then, the target is the object of the ironic remark, “be it (i) a person, (ii) a state of affairs, (iii) an institution, or (iv) another type of animate or inanimate entity” (Palacio-Lozano & Ruiz de Mendoza, 2022: 106). This function may be shared with that of an interpreter. An important determiner of the goal of the irony is whether the target is present or not.

Thus, when dealing with an ironic statement, interpreters are presented with two different scenarios: the scenario to which reference is made by means of echoes, the epistemic scenario, and the observable scenario. This is central because echoes are

cognitive operations which work as a way of presenting the scenario that we create, our epistemic scenario. Consequently, this echo will trigger a clash between the two mentioned scenarios and, as a consequence, interpreters will have access to the ironist's attitudinal element through the echo. This way, as Ruiz de Mendoza (2021: 265) affirms, "there is a mental aspect and a communicative aspect to the notion of echoing".

As can be seen in the last paragraph, several aspects from other theories have been brought together in this theory, without the theoretical gaps that other approaches have been accused of having. Furthermore, for all this process to work in a proper way, the functioning of inferential work must be taken into account. Otherwise, some of this information, like the speaker's attitudinal factor, will not be possible to obtain. Some elements of this theory agree with the Blending approach, since "the two scenarios, at some point, have to be the same in the speaker's mind" (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2021: 267). Only this way can the speaker reconcile the wrong idea and the right witnessed idea in order to create the irony, containing both the ironist's thoughts and the other person's thoughts. So we blend these scenarios like Blending theorists proposed and it gets presented through communication to the other person's perspective. It is at this moment that a clash between these two scenarios is provoked, which consequently provokes an inferential procedure in this person's mind, from which the ironic meaning and the speaker's associated attitude arises (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2021: 268).

This last approach as outlined in the previous paragraphs constitutes the theoretical basis for the present dissertation.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

For the analysis to be workable, the first step in the procedure of compiling examples was to collect data from several seasons of the TV show that is going to be dealt with: *The Office*. This made it possible to compile a corpus of ironic situations. This corpus contained many similar situations. Because of this, the most representative and interesting examples were selected. This selection has reached a certain degree of variety as well, so that there can be a functional representation of the multidimensionality of this figure of speech. Variety at an internal level, concerning the purpose of the irony or the way in which its constituents behave, has also been kept in mind. The compilation includes, for every example, a brief explanation of the scene, altogether with a transcribed copy of the scene's script. It was felt that there is no need of any further development of their corresponding story lines and character arcs due to the fact that the ironic situations are rather self-contained and, as a consequence, only a brief annotation was required for easy understanding.

After the selection and initial annotation procedure, the examples were analysed so as to answer relevant questions, regarding the roles that the different characters play in the ironic situations, the procedures by which this irony is communicated through the dialogues, the way in which ironical meaning is apprehended and the communicative goals. In order to address these issues, the characters were analysed in terms of their intentions, their solidarity, their previous knowledge being captured in frames and the suprasegmental speech features that they use in their communicative effort. In order to successfully carry out such task, the theoretical literature used was the proposals made by Ruiz de Mendoza (2021) and by Palacio-Lozano & Ruiz de Mendoza (2022) on the study field of irony. As discussed in the literature overview, this approach brings together insights from other perspectives and integrates them productively into a comprehensive analytical framework with high explanatory power in cognitive and communicative terms.

The analysis of each example is followed by a brief comment on its singularity.





#### 4. CASE ANALYSIS

Case 1: Dwight and Jim are walking around the parking lot having small talk. Dwight has never shown interest in Jim's family and Jim is aware of this. However, Dwight does now in order to have Jim on his side when deciding on their boss's substitute.

Dwight: How's the family?

Jim: Good, good.

Dwight: Are they good?

Jim: Yeah.

Dwight: What's your daughter's name again? Peepee?

Jim: *(Jim looks at camera and smirks while answering)* Peepaa.

Dwight: Peepaa! How 's she?

Jim: Great!

Dwight: Great! Oh, that 's great.

Jim, the ironist, is aware that Dwight does not remember his daughter's name. Whether to mock him or simply to be uncollaborative, he misleads Dwight regarding her name and shows a partial agreement by correcting just one sound instead of the full name. Jim is a non-solidary communicator since he has not the same communicative goals as Dwight. He maximises the divergence between the addressee's communicative interests and what he communicates. Since he is aware that Dwight doesn't remember her name, there is a lack of solidarity for using information that isn't shared. As evidence of his lack of solidarity, he uses a partial echo. He also builds a not very powerful clash by changing just one sound in the name. There is no suprasegmental feature conveyed to Dwight that might indicate irony.

The audience would be the only other interpreter, since there are no more characters in this scene. Also, the audience is provided with supplementary gestual support when Jim stares at the camera and grins momentarily. The spectator is a non-naïve interpreter

since spectators have enough information to derive meaning without ironist's solidarity. We know that Jim's daughter is named Cece. A non-solidary ironist and a non-naïve interpreter are paired so irony may arise.

The target is Dwight, a person that is present. Him being present indicates that Jim's goal is to laugh at him. As an interpreter, Dwight would be a naïve interpreter since he lacks the necessary information to grasp the ironic meaning. Since the goal of the irony is just to laugh at him, and Jim achieves it, the act of irony is felicitous.

This is an example of ironists not necessarily wanting their ironic meaning to be grasped by the interpreter. Consequently, the ironist does not need to behave collaboratively with the interpreters of his irony.

Case 2: Holly is talking to the camera during an interview. She is talking about Michael being so attractive.

Holly: I cannot keep myself from Michael. Everything he does is sexy.

\*Enter some takes of Michael throwing an M&M to the air and trying to catch it with his mouth. He is clumsy so it falls to the ground and he walks away going into a mood like a kid.

Holly: He has this undeniable animal magnetism. He's a jungle cat.

\*Enter a second take of Michael benching to take something from the ground while he has to support himself with one arm on the printer. We get to see only his butt.

Holly: He exudes sex.

\*Enter a third take of Michael leaning back on a chair, eating some M&Ms while staring at nothingness.

Holly: He can put both legs behind his head.

This is a case of situational irony. Consequently, there is no ironist. However, we have got both an observable and an epistemic scenario. In this situation, the observable scenario is granted to the spectator with the takes of Michael, alternating with those of

Holly describing him and his attraction. From these images we see that Michael is clumsy, behaves in a rather childish way and is not especially handsome nor charming in any way.

Concerning the epistemic scenario that is to clash with the latter, it is drawn from the spectator's world knowledge: the social and cultural understanding of what makes a man attractive.

However, we need something that makes these two scenarios clash. That is the function that Holly's lines accomplish. The spectator is granted access to Holly's perspective on Michael's appeal. This way, the spectator will see that the mold that he is expected to fit into is not at all there. So, the spectator's epistemic scenario clashes with the observable scenario by means of Holly's description of Michael. That is to say, the information that interpreters are going to receive points to a certain idea of man, this being caused by their own culturally acquired concepts about beauty and sexual attraction; but these ideas and expectations (epistemic scenario) are in conflict with the look at Michael (observable scenario). A feeling of disassociation is created that leads to the interpreter, the spectator, to take it as a humorous situation.

This is a perfect example of the workings of situational irony, how it is built upon the world knowledge that forms a person's epistemic scenario and the reaction that may cause. This is specially interesting when realising that this schema is probably used to create situational irony in any comedy show that can be thought of for its simplicity and functionality. Additionally, we have all encountered situations like this in our life.

Case 3: Jim walks into the office dressed as Dwight, walking like him and carrying a suitcase similar to his. He sits at his desk, which is in front of Dwight's. Pam sees Jim coming and understands what is going to happen.

Jim: It's kind of blurry. (*Jim takes a pair of glasses similar to Dwight's and puts them on*) That's better. (*He sighs*). Question: what kind of bear is best?

Dwight: That's a ridiculous question.

Jim: False. Black bear.

Dwight: That's debatable. There are basically two schools of thought.

Jim: Fact. Bears eat beets. Bears. Beets. Battlestar Galactica.

Dwight: Bears do not... (*Dwight frowns*) What's going on? What are you doing? You know what? Imitation is the most sincere form of flattering so I thank you.

*Jim puts on the table a bobble head figure like Dwight's.*

Dwight: Identity theft is not a joke, Jim! Millions of families suffer every year!

Jim: (*Turns around*) Michael!

Dwight: Oh, that's funny. Michael!

Jim is the ironist; Dwight is the target; and Dwight himself, Pam and the spectator are the interpreters of the irony. Jim is a solidary ironist because, despite the fact that he shares no communicative goals with Dwight, he wants to make the rest of the characters and the spectators participants of the irony. The impression as a whole works as an echo of the personality, appearance and communicative skills of Dwight. This knowledge is taken for granted by Jim as something shared, but makes it explicit anyway since he impersonates Dwight right in front of him. He also creates a really strong clash between the epistemic (Jim's true personality) and the observable scenarios (how Jim is behaving). The objective of the irony is simply mocking Dwight. It works on the basis of knowledge of Dwight's behaviour and personality. Jim imitates his verbal and physical behaviour, his interests, his clothing, his haircut... At first, Dwight is not aware of what is happening and he is into the conversation as normally. Then he realises and gets angry at Jim for this irony. This realisation comes from the clash. He tries to calm down, but once Jim keeps going he cannot do it and becomes the target again. Jim never stops his ironic and/or parodic act.

The target is Dwight's behaviour or Dwight because of his behaviour, Dwight being a witness to the whole ironic event. We could conclude that the purpose is to humiliate him. This is accomplished, so the irony should be considered felicitous: Jim gets the attention that he wants and laughs at Dwight.

The interpreters are non-naïve interpreters since they have all the necessary information to grasp the ironic meaning. However, Dwight does not capture it until half the conversation has already happened; it could be argued that it happens because he sees it as normal until it impacts him because he knows Jim. Jim's solidarity is not really necessary, though it adds humour.

There is also situational irony. In the first place, the spectator thinks Dwight will be able to notice that he is being mocked, since he is the imitated person. This is yet more so if we take into account the fact that Jim is not being subtle. This composes interpreters' expectations, the epistemic scenario, and it is derived from world knowledge (people know themselves enough to realise when someone imitates them). This epistemic scenario clashes with the observable scenario that the interpreter is presented: Dwight does not notice anything rare in Jim's behaviour that might resemble his own persona.

Secondly, when Dwight finally realises, he makes it clear that he is not playing his role as the offended person, and that he will act as a mature man. That is the observable scenario, which clashes again with the epistemic scenario: the spectator already knows what Dwight is really like, and that this behaviour is not normal for him. That creates a disassociation that makes the interpreter feel surprised.

Then, Dwight finally overreacts, getting mad at Jim, and taking it to the extreme of a rather serious crime, as is the case of identity theft. That is the observable scenario spectators are given. Concerning the epistemic scenario, the spectator has, on the basis of the previous development of the conversation, the idea that Dwight would behave. This results in another clash. However, since the spectators' expectations might not have been so serious in view of the fact that they were familiar with Dwight's character, the feeling created might not be of surprise, but of humour and satisfaction to see that the previously misled expectations were later satisfied. Also, Dwight's hyperbolic reaction adds even more humour to the irony.

This case constitutes a good example of how an ironist can create echoes based on the person as a whole, not just on what the person says. Also, it shows that situational and verbal irony can be combined, apart from its combination with hyperbole for the sake of

comedy.

Case 4: Jim and Dwight are talking about the performance review that they are getting for their job. Dwight is interested in Jim's interview going poorly.

Dwight: Hey, Jim, listen. Here's a little tip for your performance review. Tell Michael that we should be stocking more of the double tabbed manilla file folders.

Jim: We don't have double tabbed manilla file folders.

Dwight: Oh, yes, we do.

Jim: No, we don't.

Dwight: Yeah, it's a new product. So you should just suggest that to him, and then he'll be sure to give you a raise.

Jim: Alright. Well, I'm not asking for a raise. I'm gonna actually be asking for a pay decrease.

Dwight: Uh, that's so stupid. What if he gives it to you?

Jim: I win.

Dwight begins in the position of the ironist trying to make Jim look bad in front of their boss. Jim, both target and interpreter, knows Dwight, and is aware of what he is trying; he does not fall for it. At a certain point, Jim decides to pull a joke on Dwight and he becomes the ironist while Dwight becomes the target without realising. So, Dwight is also an interpreter eventually, altogether with the spectator.

Dwight is a non-solidary ironist: he does not share communicative goals with anybody and tries to maximise the divergence between the addressee's expected communicative interests and what he communicates. He wants to humiliate Jim. He uses a partial echo, not accurate at all, of what his conversation with Michael has been and there is a lack of continuity because Jim hasn't got that information. He does not use ironic markers, so that Jim cannot realise.

Concerning the interpreters, the spectator is non-naïve because he or she has seen

Dwight's conversation with Michael: the echo has continuity for the spectator. Jim is non-naïve because, though he doesn't know about the conversation, he knows Dwight and can infer what is going on: Jim's knowledge of Dwight's attitude towards him (epistemic scenario) clashes with Dwight trying to help him (observable scenario). However, Dwight keeps thinking that Jim has believed him.

The target is also Jim, who is present. The goal of Dwight's irony is to laugh at Jim. He is not successful so the irony is not felicitous, though he might think it is.

Then, there is a change in roles: Jim becomes the ironist and Dwight becomes the target and interpreter. Jim is a non-solidary ironist because he shares no communicative goal with Dwight either. He is just trying to humiliate him in retaliation, so he pretends to agree with Dwight. However, to do so and be as humorous as possible, he creates a powerful clash between the epistemic scenario (people want to be paid well for their work) and the observable scenario (Jim is asking for a pay cut). He uses exaggeration and points to the scenario very clearly: he even says that he wins if they lower his salary. However, Dwight does not notice the clash.

In this case, the spectator is also a non-naïve interpreter, since we have information about Dwight's original ironic meaning and we can infer Jim's. The felicity of the irony would depend on Jim managing to make Dwight believe him. Judging by Dwight's reaction, this can be affirmed.

This case shows the dynamics of verbal irony when the target realises the intended meaning and takes control of it. It also shows that the existence of elements like a powerful clash does not mean that the interpreter will successfully derive the intended meaning.

Case 5: Jim realises Dwight thinks they are on Friday, so he decides to reinforce that idea so that Dwight does not come to work the next day. Pam witnesses it and eventually joins the conversation to help Jim.

Dwight: I am going to zone you out for the rest of today, okay. I need to stay focused.

And I don't have to see you tomorrow or Sunday. (*Jim realises Dwight thinks it is Friday*) And, please don't call me, and we'll see how things go on Monday.

Jim: Wait, wait. One thing. Um, by tomorrow, you mean Saturday, right?

Jim: Uh, duh.

Dwight: Duh.

*Jim picks the phone to make a call while looking at his agenda.*

Jim: Hey, Dan, this is Jim. It is about 11:15 and I wanted to know what you were up to tomorrow, which is the 15th and that is a...

Dwight: Saturday.

Jim: Saturday. So, just let me know what you are doing tomorrow, Saturday, for lunch. Okay, talk to you soon.

*Pam passes by Jim's desk to continue the joke. He is aware of her intentions.*

Pam: Hey, Jim.

Jim: Hey, how's it going?

Pam: Oh my God. Did you see *The apprentice* last night?

Jim: Of course. It's on every Thursday night. So how could I miss it?

Pam: Can you believe who Trump fired?

Jim: No, that was unbelievable.

Dwight: Who? Who was it? Who did he fire?

Pam: You didn't see it?

Dwight: No. I went out and got drunk with my laser tag team last night. Crap. I never go out on a Thursday night.

At the beginning there is no irony, it gets built when Jim sees Dwight treating him rudely, and then realises what is going on. Jim has to make sure of the information that Dwight believes to be true. Then he becomes the ironist to compensate for his rudeness, but Dwight, who is both target and interpreter, does not realise. Then, Pam, who was part of the audience, joins the role of ironist, so both Jim and Pam are then ironists and the audience of each other's irony. Meanwhile, Dwight is still unaware.



The ironist is Jim, who is a non-solidary communicator because his communicative goals are to have some fun by taking advantage of Dwight's confusion. Jim creates an echoic chain referring constantly to the fact that Dwight thinks it is Friday. He shows a lack of solidarity because he does not create a clash between the two scenarios and shows pretended agreement.

The interpreters are Pam, Dwight and the spectator. Pam is a non-naïve interpreter who has witnessed the irony from the beginning, having enough information to understand it. The same can be said about the spectator. On the other hand, Dwight is a naïve interpreter since he has not got the necessary information to infer the irony.

The target of the irony is Dwight, who is present during the whole irony, so it is clear the goal is to laugh at him. Since they achieve their goal, the irony is felicitous.

Then, in the middle of the conversation, there is a role shift: Jim becomes a non naïve interpreter while being a non-solidary communicator, while Pam becomes a non-solidary communicator while being a non-naïve interpreter. She keeps trying to maximise the divergences between the addressee's expected communicative goals and what she is actually communicating. She continues the echoic chain and the irony that Jim had performed. She is aware of Dwight not having the necessary information and tries to adjust the epistemic and the observable scenarios so there is no clash between them. She also uses no suprasegmental features pointing to irony. On the other hand, Jim is a non-naïve interpreter because he has the necessary information to grasp Pam's irony. Dwight continues to be an uninformed naïve interpreter, and a present target as well. The irony is felicitous since they accomplish the goal of mocking Dwight together. They both pretend to agree with Dwight and avoid discrepancies between the epistemic and observable scenarios.

This makes an interesting example of an interpreter becoming an ironist, and the other way around, while the ironist is, at the same time, an interpreter as well.

Case 6: Michael has set up a meeting with several office employees to talk to them about a pyramid scheme in which he has got into, but he is not aware of the scheme.

The employees are aware of it from the beginning.

Michael: So Phil has recruited me to sell you these cards, and now I am recruiting you.

Oscar: Who is this guy again?

Michael: Don't worry about Phil. He drives a Corvette. He is doing just fine. Okay, calling cards are the wave of the future. These things sell themselves.

Ryan: Who uses calling cards anymore?

Michael: You know what? That's a nice attitude, Ryan. I'm just helping you invest in your future, my friend.

Oscar: It sounds like a get-rich-quick scheme.

Michael: Yes. Thank you. You will get rich quick. We all will.

Tobey: Didn't you lose a lot of money on that other investment- the one from the email?

Michael: You know what, Tobey? When the son of the deposed king of Nigeria emails you directly asking for help, you help. His father ran the fucking country, okay? Alright. So raise your hand if you want to get rich.

Jim: No. Uhm... How is this not a pyramid scheme?

Michael: Alright. Let me explain. Again. *(Michael turns to draw a scheme on a blackboard behind him and he begins drawing people representing those people involved)* Okay. Phil has recruited me and another guy. Now we are getting three people each. The more people that get involved, the more people who are investing, the more money we are all gonna make. It is not a pyramid scheme.

*Jim gets up, goes to the blackboard and without saying nothing draws three lines around the scheme Michael drew, forming a pyramid. Michael stares at it for some seconds while Jim looks at him.*

Michael: I have to go make a call.

Michael is the ironist when Ryan does not agree with him. Ryan is the target. Everybody, including the spectators, except Michael, is the audience. Michael is a solidary ironist since he wants to reprimand Ryan. Also, he wants to involve the rest of

the audience since this is a way of asserting his power. Michael creates a powerful clash between the observable (Ryan has been rude to him) and the epistemic scenarios (we do not thank people for being rude to us). Michael takes for granted that such information is shared by the rest of the audience: this is a generally well known social norm. He also uses supplementary gesturing, like staring at Ryan in a judging way and using a particular intonation.

The interpreter's role is carried out by Ryan and the rest of the characters, who are non-naïve interpreters since they have enough information to derive the ironic meaning. The combination of a solidary communicator with non-naïve interpreters results in an unnecessary communicative effort.

Concerning its felicity, taking into account that the target is Ryan, a person who is present, who manages to interpret the irony, this irony is felicitous.

Then, they continue to try to make Michael aware of the situation, but he does not listen. Then, Jim asks him to explain it again and becomes the ironist; Michael is the target; and the rest of the characters and the spectator are the audience.

Jim is a solidary communicator because he shares communicative goals with Michael, to whom he wants to make understand the situation. Aside from this, he may also want to call Michael out for patronising them. He also wants to involve the rest of the audience. Jim uses no words, he just draws a pyramid around Michael's previous drawing, which acts as an echo of Michael's insisting on this not being a pyramid schema while the rest of them told him otherwise. Jim relies on the audience's knowledge to interpret this ironic meaning arising from this accurate echo, which is at odds with Michael's epistemic and epistemic scenarios (i.e., the assumption that the plan is not a pyramid scheme and the fact that it is). Jim also uses gestural support to help Michael identify the irony, like sneering or shifting his gaze between Michael and the drawing.

Everyone present, including Michael, is an interpreter, and all of them are non-naïve since they have enough knowledge of the conversation and of the topic. Because of this, the communicative effort might not be necessary.

The target is also Michael, who is present. The irony is felicitous since it achieves its goals: Jim mocks Michael while making him understand. We know that Michael has understood the message because he says that he has to make a call, from which we infer that he wants to call off the deal.

This case could be highlighted as an example of irony being used to help someone understand facts, at the same time that it acquires a comedic tone. In addition, it is an example of an ironist not using words to convey irony by relying on other resources, in this case a mere drawing.

Case 7: Michael is arrogant towards Tobey, the Human Resources worker, and tries to show that his job is easy to do. Jim sees this all fall apart and decides to have fun confusing people..

Jim: *(in front of all the staff)* Dwight tried to kiss me. And I didn't tell anyone 'cause I'm not really sure how I feel about it.

Dwight: That is not true. Redact it. Redact it!

Jim: Well, I'm not actually making a formal complaint. I just really think that we should talk about it.

Jim is the ironist. There are two targets: Michael and Dwight. Michael is the target with regards to Jim setting up a conflict that he knows Michael could not solve as a Human Resources hypothetical worker; while Dwight is the target because he points to him as a hypothetical romance, which is impossible because they have a very competitive working relationship. The staff is the audience, altogether with the spectator. Also, Michael is the audience of irony directed to Dwight and the other way around.

The ironist in this scene is Jim. He is a non-solidary ironist because his communicative interests and those of addressee are distanced. He wants to humiliate both targets. Michael is a non-naïve interpreter and has enough information about Jim and his relationship with Dwight to grasp the irony; the other target is Dwight, who is a naïve

interpreter and does not realise the irony. The rest of the staff also understands it, since they are non-naïve interpreters, as well as the spectator. Jim is aware of Michael having enough information and Dwight not having it. Michael realises, but Dwight does not. Gestural or intonational support are not used and Jim acts seriously. Since Jim's intention is to tease them, we should consider the irony felicitous.

It could be highlighted in the analysis of this example that it is possible to have more than one target. In this case, it has been argued that there are two targets, one of them noticing while the other does not.

Case 8: Many uncovered conflicts among different members of the office are being recounted by Michael without realising it. He has disclosed that Angela is angry with Pam for spending work-time planning her wedding instead of doing her duties. Pam wants to show her how angry she is for her betrayal.

Pam: Hey. Thanks for ratting me out.

Angela: I didn't do it.

Pam: I find that hard to believe, considering you have problems with every single person in this entire office except Boobblehead Joe.

*(Angela rolls her eyes)*

Pam is a solidary ironist: she wants Angela to know she is angry. In order to do so, Pam creates a powerful clash between the observable (Pam is thankful) and the epistemic scenario, built upon world knowledge (people do not thank you for complaining about them). This way, Pam enhances the disassociation between the two scenarios, using a pretended agreement. She uses gestural support, like a fake smile, so that the attitudinal factor gets through to Angela.

Angela is the target and the interpreter. She is a present target so it is deduced that the goal of this ironic utterance is to convey some information to her: Pam's attitudinal factor. Also, Angela works as well as a non-naïve interpreter because she has enough

information about the situation to infer Pam's feelings. Besides, she has enough world knowledge to notice that the epistemic and the observable scenarios do not match. Spectators work as non-naïve interpreters as well for the exact same reasons.

It could be highlighted that this use of irony is intended to express anger, rather than usual humour, and that in verbal irony situations we also use world knowledge to shape our epistemic scenario in social interactions.

Case 9: Pam and Jim, who are dating, are talking about Pam's having been kicked out of her apartment and he suggests that she should move in with him.

Jim: You just got yourself kicked out of your apartment.

Pam: Oh, I don't care. I don't really like that place that much anyway. I'll just move.

Jim: Oh, really? Who's gonna take you in? You're messy. You're a klutz, you spill everything, and you leave the volume on the TV way too low.

Pam: Yeah. Maybe I'll just move in with my boyfriend because he's kind of a slob too.

Jim: Okay. Let 's do it.

Pam: No. Uhm... I'm not gonna move in with anyone unless I'm engaged.

Jim: Have I not proposed to you yet?

Pam: I don't... No?

Jim: Oh. Well. That 's coming.

Pam: Oh, right now?

Jim: No, I'm not gonna do it right here. That would be rather lame.

Pam: Okay, so then when?

Jim: Pam, I'm not gonna tell you. Hate to break it to you, but that's not how that works.

Pam: Oh, right, yeah.

The conversation begins without any act of irony. Then, Jim becomes the ironist mocking Pam by saying annoying things, but with a smile so that Pam gets the ironic meaning. Also, Jim creates a powerful clash between the observable (he does not like

her) and the epistemic scenario (Jim loves her).

Pam is the target and the audience at the same time. She is a non-naïve interpreter because she has enough information about their relationship to know what Jim thinks. Also, Pam indicates that Jim's intentions are to convey something to her or to mock her: Jim eventually uses this conversation to discuss their relationship.

There is a change of roles through the whole conversation, so that they interchange the roles of ironist and of interpreter and target on several occasions. When Pam is the ironist, Jim gets serious even though he knows what she said was ironic. He is able to do so because he is also a non-naïve interpreter, so he has at least a basic understanding of the conversation.

When Pam talks about not moving before engagement, Jim is ironic and Pam is the audience and target. He knows he has not proposed. This creates a clash between the observable (Jim does not remember whether he has proposed) and the epistemic scenario (any person would remember). Pam also has this knowledge: she is a non-naïve interpreter and can grasp the irony.

Then another change of roles happens and Pam acts as if she were not sure about it having happened, becoming the ironist again, while Jim becomes the non-naïve interpreter. Thus, Jim is able to grasp the clash created by Pam between the observable (she does not remember either) and the epistemic scenario (she should remember).

Then, the exchange proceeds again without irony until Jim is ironic about Pam not knowing about the engagement. Jim is the ironist and Pam the non-naïve interpreter and target. There is a clash between the observable (Pam does not know about this) and the epistemic scenario (everybody knows that). Another change of roles happens in the last line when Pam ironically accepts her role as ignorant (observable scenario) when she had actually been engaged in the past (epistemic scenario). So, Jim is the non-naïve interpreter and the target.

The spectator is the audience all along, also a non-naïve interpreter.

In this case, the use of irony could be highlighted as a way to propose a commitment that could be more aggressively expressed in a more assertive way and discuss topics

that may make us feel too embarrassed to openly talk about them.



## 5. GENERALISATIONS

There are some elements that are completely and fundamentally necessary for irony to occur. Those are, in the first place, the happening of a clash and, in the second place, and necessarily correlated, the existence of two different scenarios, which are the ones that clash: the observable scenario and the epistemic scenario. Without the convergence of these two elements irony is impossible, since these are the two ingredients that will create a feeling of disassociation. Of course, this works in a different way depending on whether we are dealing with verbal or situational irony. However, that is basically true for both of them.

It has been noticed in all the situations, concerning the examples presented for verbal irony, that the ironic meaning of the communicator is grasped depending on two factors, which are dependent on communicative goals at the same time: how solidary he or she is with regards to the interpreters, for which there are a number of possible devices; and how much information the latter has about the situation. As for the roles, altogether with the target role, these are the object of interchanges over the conversation, and they also might co-occur in the same person. For instance, a person might be at the same time an ironist and an interpreter in the case that there is another ironist.

As regards situational irony, it can be noted that it is much simpler than verbal irony. At the end of the day, the observable scenario is just formed by a series of events that have happened all the same; while the epistemic scenario gets constituted by the amount of world knowledge stored by the interpreter who is witnessing the situation, or who is told about the situation.



## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Having considered all the previous aspects in the analysis, it can be concluded that a good comprehension of the procedures of irony is achieved by applying the Cognitive approach to it.

It has been proved through the case analysis that the roles that are fulfilled in this communicative process are subject to interchanges at any point of it. What is more, some of them are able to co-occur in the same person. However, for the ironic meaning to get across from the ironist to the interpreter, it is necessary that these roles fit one with each other when it comes to their features of “naiveness” (or “not-naiveness”). This is vital so that epistemic scenarios can be accessed or, in other cases, so that the ironist is solidary enough.

Without some of the previously mentioned conditions happening, the necessary clash between the epistemic scenario and the observable scenario might not happen, so the ironic meaning would not get through to the interpreters. On the other hand, in the case that both of them would be present at the same time, that would mean that the ironist has made an unnecessarily big effort in the communication. Said communicative effort would be worthless in this context.

Needless to say that this communicative effort would be dependent on the goals that the ironist has set for the communicative process. It is possible that the ironist might not want his or her irony to be grasped, so that a distancing is created between what is being said and what is being implied in order for the interpreters not to get it. Thus, in these cases, solidarity might be a factor that could not be counted upon. Therefore, we see that these two variables (solidarity and knowledge frameworks) are both quite volatile. In other words, it could be argued, thus, that the working of irony in communication is going to change depending on the communicative goals that lie underneath it.

In the light of how this dissertation has served as a way to achieve a better comprehension of the workings of irony, it might be interesting for future studies to take

as reference this kind of form of entertainment, of whose kind there are innumerable. It is clear that it encapsulates a great deal of the forms that human beings have to communicate an enormous diversity of feelings or intentions, of which irony could be considered to be salient as a tool. Furthermore, since these scripts try to imitate real human communication, it might also be more interesting and attractive than analysing traditional case examples in case of teaching irony theory.

It might be interesting as well for future research the study about all the different intentions that could be encrypted inside an ironic communicative effort. It is a popular assumption that irony aims only at humour. Despite that, in this dissertation it has been also shown that there might be a variety of options when it comes to the communicative intentions.

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