PREPRINT

To appear in *Journal of Pragmatics*, *190*, 2022.

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Irony as a Speech Action

Abstract: The paper develops a speech act-based model of verbal irony. It argues, first, that ironic utterances are speech actions performed as conforming to a socially accepted procedure and, second, that they are best understood as so-called etiolated uses of language.

The paper is organized into four parts. The first one elaborates on Austin's doctrine of the etiolations of language and distinguishes between the *normal* or *serious* mode of communication and its *etiolated* mode. The second part discusses the dominant approaches to verbal irony and argues that the irony-as-a-trope theories can be viewed as attempts to describe ironic utterances as cases of normal speech, whereas the metalinguistic theories seem to treat them as etiolated uses of language. The third part proposes a set of felicity conditions for ironic acts and puts forth a hypothesis that echo and overt pretence are complementary techniques of linguistic etiolation used for ironizing. The fourth part uses the proposed model to discuss the social dimension of ironizing and argues that utterances intended as acts of ironizing may trigger the accommodating process of context-repair. The take-home message is that ironic utterances are *essentially social actions*: acts performed by invoking a socially accepted procedure.

Keywords: verbal irony; speech acts; felicity conditions; linguistic etiolation; echo; accommodation

1. Introduction

My aim in this paper is to develop a speech act-based model of verbal irony. I argue that most, if not all, ironic utterances are speech actions performed by invoking a certain socially accepted procedure. I also claim that the procedure for ironizing exploits the mechanisms underlying the performance of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. In sum, I argue that performing ironic speech actions is a socially-constituted communicative practice that involves what John L. Austin called *parasitic* or *etiolated* uses of language (Austin, 1975: 22 and 92; cf. Sbisà, 2013: 29-30; Friggieri, 2014).

More specifically, I put forth two hypotheses. According to the first one, ironic utterances constitute a speech action type which, like illocutionary act types, can be defined by reference to a set of felicity conditions; unlike illocutions, however, acts of ironizing are designed not to affect the network of normative relations between the conversing agents, but to change the state of conversation by presenting certain contextually salient representations — thoughts, expectations, opinions, etc. — in an unfavourable light. According to the second hypothesis, the procedure for ironizing operates in the so-called etiolated mode of communication; to adopt the etiolated mode is to exploit mechanisms of serious linguistic practice — the central part of which is occupied by illocutionary and perlocutionary acts — to achieve goals that go beyond what the mechanisms have been designed for. I argue that *echoing* (Wilson and Sperber, 2012) and *pretending* (Clark and Gerrig, 1984) are complementary techniques of the etiolated mode of communication that enable us to perform ironic speech actions (Mękarska and Witek 2020).

The class of conversational phenomena that ordinary language users, as well as scholars studying figurative language, are willing to describe as irony is not homogenous (see Wilson, 2006 and 2013). For instance, it embraces cases of so-called *parodic irony* (Corredor, 2019), in which the speaker overtly pretends to perform a certain speech act in order to express her mocking attitude towards the parodied utterance, its speaker, or its addressee, "who may be present or absent, real or imaginary" (Clark and Gerrig, 1984: 122). Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber (2012: 143) argue, however, that although parody can be used for ironizing, it cannot be identified with proper irony. There is also a tendency to classify as irony cases of "sarcasm, teasing, overstatements, understatements, rhetorical questions, and their relatives" (Clark, 1996: 367; cf. Recanati, 2004: 78) — which constitute a family of actions called *staged communicative acts* — as well as instances of *pragmatic inappropriateness*, i.e., speech acts that involve the purposeful and overt violation of the maxim of sincerity (Kumon-Nakamura et al., 1995; cf. Wilson and Sperber, 2012: 137) or other rules of conversational appropriateness (Attardo, 2000). Moreover, ironicalness seems to come in degrees and "the borderline between genuine speech acts with a tinge of irony" — i.e., felicitous illocutionary acts that convey a touch of ironic attitude — and central cases of irony "is a gradual one" (Wilson, 2006: 1740). In sum, the phenomena that fall under the term 'irony' as it is popularly understood do not form a homogenous class with clearly demarcated borders. My aim in this paper, then, is not to *analyse* the ordinary concept of irony, but to *construct* a theoretically-grounded notion of ironic speech actions and use it to examine the functioning of central cases of verbal irony. I believe that the resulting model, which draws

attention to the social dimension of the practice of ironizing, supplements the insights of the cognitive approach (Sperber, 1984; Wilson, 2006; Wilson, 2013; Wilson and Sperber, 2012).

The paper is structured into four parts. In Section 2, I elaborate on Austin's (1975: 22) "doctrine of the etiolations of language" and distinguish between the *normal* mode of communication and its *etiolated* mode. In Section 3, I discuss two alternative approaches to verbal irony: the *traditional* approach, which is based on the idea of irony as a trope (Grice, 1989; Searle, 1979; Giora, 1995; Attardo, 2000; Garmendia and Korta, 2007), and the so-called *metalinguistic* approach, whose proponents (Sperber, 1984; Clark and Gerrig, 1984; Clark, 1996; Wilson, 2006, 2013; Wilson and Sperber, 2012) account for cases of ironizing in terms of the distinction between using and mentioning a linguistic item. In Section 4, I propose a list of felicity conditions for ironic speech actions construed as conversational moves made in the etiolated mode. In Section 5, I use the proposed model to discuss the social dimension of ironizing; in particular, I argue that utterances that are taken to be felicitous cases of irony can trigger accommodation construed as a discursive process of context-fixing (Lewis, 1979; Langton, 2015, 2018; Stalnaker, 2002; Witek 2015, 2021).

2. Two modes of communication

Austin (1975: 22) distinguished between the *serious* or *normal* uses of language and its *etiolated* or *parasitic* uses. Examples of the former are uses of words for informing, warning, asking or answering a question, requesting, promising, etc. In short, to speak seriously is to engage oneself in the practice of performing illocutionary acts, i.e., acts made "*in* saying something" (*Ibid.*: 99). Normally, it is also to perform perlocutionary acts, i.e., acts made "*by* saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading" (*Ibid*.: 109).

According to Austin, the illocutionary act is an act made by following a conventional procedure that determines the conditions for its felicitous performance and its normative effect, where the latter consists in a characteristic change in the domain of deontic facts (Sbisà, 1984, 2002, and 2019; cf. Witek 2015, 2019, 2021). The illocutionary force of an act, then, can be defined by reference to its normative effect. For instance, a felicitous promise to do *A* brings about the speaker's commitment to do *A* as well as the hearer's right to expect her to perform the promised action and even reproach her if she fails to discharge her commitment; a felicitous warning against *B*, in turn, results in cancelling or limiting the

hearer's right to reproach the speaker for the harm caused by *B* and make a claim for compensation.

To perform perlocutionary acts is to "produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons" (Austin, 1975: 101). For instance, one can use words for convincing, insulting, alerting, or amusing one's interlocutor. Some perlocutionary effects of one's words are *standardly* associated with the illocutionary force with which they are uttered. Let us call them, following Austin, "perlocutionary objects" of illocutionary acts (*Ibid*.: 118; cf. Sbisà, 2013: 36) or responses "they invite by convention" (Austin, 1975: 117; cf. Witek 2015, 2019). For instance, a promise to do *A* invites the speaker's response of fulfilment and the hearer's response of expecting the speaker to do *A*; the speaker's fulfilment and the hearer's corresponding expectation are perlocutionary objects of the speaker's promise. By analogy, being alerted to *B* is a perlocutionary object of warning the hearer against *B*. In sum, getting the hearer to expect the speaker to do *A* is a *standard* perlocutionary act associated with promising to do *A*, and alerting the hearer to *B* is a *standard* perlocutionary act associated with warning him against *B*.

Having characterised illocutionary and perlocutionary uses of language — which exemplify what he calls *serious speech* — Austin observes that

> the expression 'use of language' can cover other matters even more diverse than the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts (…). For example, we may speak of the 'use of language' *for* something, e.g. for joking; and we may use 'in' in a way different from the illocutionary 'in', as when we say 'in saying "*p*" I was joking' or 'acting a part' or 'writing poetry' (…). These references to 'use of language' have nothing to do with the illocutionary act. For example, if I say 'Go and catch a falling star', it may be quite clear what both the meaning and the force of my utterance is, but still wholly unresolved which of these other kinds of things I may be doing. There are etiolations, parasitic uses, etc., various 'not serious' and 'not full normal' uses. The normal conditions of reference may be suspended, or no attempt made at a standard perlocutionary act, no attempt to make you do anything, as Walt Whitman does not seriously incite the eagle of liberty to soar. (Austin, 1975: 104).

Examples of etiolations are uses of language for joking, acting a part in a play, writing fiction or poetry, recitation or quoting, and so on (see Austin, 1975: 92, footnote 2). They involve:

> a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways — intelligibly — used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use — ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration. (Austin, 1975: 22)

Although the distinction between *serious* and *etiolated* uses of language seems to be clear, it is difficult to turn this intuitive understanding into a comprehensive account. Austin had little to say about the ways in which language can be used parasitically. To account for the mechanisms of serious speech, he developed his "doctrine of locutionary and illocutionary acts" (Austin, 1975: 148), the central part of which is occupied by "the doctrines of 'illocutionary forces'" (*Ibid.*: 100) and "the doctrine of *Infelicities*" (*Ibid.*: 14). However, he offered no systematic "doctrine of the *etiolations* of language" (*Ibid.*: 22).

According to Austin (1975: 9), speaking seriously is not a matter of uttering words "as (merely) the outward and visible sign, for convenience or other record or for information, of an inward and spiritual act." Therefore, it is not a matter of sincerely expressing or revealing one's actual mental acts; for instance, making a serious promise is not a matter of sincerely expressing one's inward and spiritual act of promising, if there is any. Rather, to use language seriously is to adopt what can be called the *normal* communicative mode or, more specifically, to activate and maintain readiness to follow the rules, mechanisms, patterns, scripts, and procedures of illocutionary and perlocutionary interaction.

However, the speaker can switch the normal communicative mode to the *etiolated* one. Non-serious or etiolated uses of language have to be distinguished from misfires and abuses resulting from infringing the conditions of illocutionary procedures. As Joe Friggieri notes, etiolated uses "are, Austin tells us, '*in a peculiar way* hollow or void', and therefore 'quite different' from the other kinds of unhappiness or infelicity he mentions" (Friggieri, 2014: 57). To speak non-seriously, then, is not to violate one of the rules underlying the performance of illocutionary acts, but to adopt a radically different communicative mode. More specifically, it is to activate and maintain readiness to exploit the rules and mechanisms of normal communicative practice to achieve ends different from those for which they have been designed. In short, etiolated uses of language are parasitic on its serious uses.

By way of illustration, let us use the framework of Austin's 'doctrine of locutionary acts' (Austin, 1975: 92-98; cf. Forguson, 1973; Sbisà, 2013: 26-29; Witek 2015) to discuss a situation in which Ann, who is talking about John, utters the following words:

(1) He is a friend.

In uttering sentence (1), she performs the *locutionary act* of saying that John is a friend, within which one may distinguish three aspects: (*i*) the *phonetic act* of uttering a *phone* construed as a sequence of noises, (*ii*) the phatic act of uttering a *pheme*, i.e., a sequence of certain words belonging to a certain vocabulary and conforming to a certain grammar, and (*iii*) the *rhetic act* of uttering a *rheme*, i.e., the act of using the pheme with a certain contextually determined sense and reference; consistently, Ann's locutionary act can be described as an act of uttering a *locution*.

The locutionary meaning of Ann's utterance involves two components: the *phatic meaning* of her words, which can be likened to what is delivered by the lexical and compositional semantics of the language she speaks, and the contextually determined *rhetic meaning* that results from interpreting the token of 'he' and determining the occasion-specific sense of the predicate 'is a friend'. It is instructive to stress that the phatic meaning of Ann's utterance of (1) contains two further components that can be called the sentence's *illocutionary potential* and its *perlocutionary potential* (for a discussion, see Witek 2015). In virtue of the lexical and syntactic features of sentence (1), it can be used either for *ranking* a certain male person as a friend or for *giving an example of* a friend; consistently, it can be *standardly* used for *convincing* the audience either that a certain male person is a friend or that the class of friends is not empty.

Let us assume that Ann adopts the normal communicative mode and utters (1) seriously. Her utterance is equipped with a linguistically determined phatic meaning; it also has a certain contextually determined rhetic content. If Ann speaks seriously, she performs her locutionary act as part of performing a certain illocutionary act that lies within the illocutionary potential of (1). Following François Recanati (2004: 70-71), let us call it her *direct* speech act. For instance, she can *rank* John as a friend or *give the example of* John as a friend. What is more, in ranking John as a friend, she can make a number of indirect speech acts and communicate certain conversational implicatures. Depending on the context in which she speaks, Ann can be read as s*uggesting* that we can trust John, *explaining*[1] his recent

[1] According to Lilian Bermejo Luque (2011), explaining is not an indirect speech act in Searle's (1979) sense, but a second order speech act: an indirect speech act — e.g., a request made in asking a question — can also be made directly, whereas a second order speech act "can be performed only by means of a constative" (Bermejo

behaviour, or *advising* her interlocutor to ask John for help. She can also make a number of perlocutionary acts, some of which are standardly associated with the illocutionary force of her words. In sum, if Ann adopts the normal communicative mode, she uses sentence (1) for making a certain direct illocutionary act and possibly a series of indirect speech acts as well as a number of perlocutionary acts. In doing this, she takes into account the locutionary meaning of her words, invokes certain conventional procedures, uses the mechanisms of indirect speech, and follows the strategies of perlocutionary interaction.

Let us consider, by contrast, a situation in which Ann utters (1) in the etiolated mode. In my view, the utterance she thereby produces is equivalent to its serious counterpart with respect to its locutionary meaning or at least with respect to its phatic meaning. For this reason, then, her utterance is to be regarded as literal. However, her point behind uttering sentence (1) is not to perform a speech act whose force comes from its illocutionary potential; what is more, it is not to make any illocution at all. Rather, it is to use language for writing or reciting a poem, acting a part in a play, telling jokes or, I argue, making ironic comments.

It is instructive to stress that, independently of whether she adopts the normal or etiolated mode, Ann uses (1) literally. Of course she can use the predicate 'is a friend' nonliterally, e.g., metaphorically, but this use can, depending on the mode she adopts, be either serious or etiolated. Let us consider a situation in which Ann says:

(2) John is a computer.

Her utterance is clearly metaphorical. If she speaks seriously, she uses the locution that John is a computer* — where 'is a computer*' stands for a context-specific or *ad hoc* (Carston, 2002: 321-334) sense of the predicate 'is a computer' — to perform a direct though nonliteral assertion. However, if she uses (2) for making an ironic comment on John's poor performance in calculation, her utterance is both nonliteral and non-serious.

Let us summarise what we have determined so far. Normally, the speaker performs a locutionary act as part of her performing a direct illocutionary act and possibly a series of indirect illocutions as well as a number of standard and non-standard perlocutions: in producing a locution she invokes a certain illocutionary procedure and possibly triggers the mechanisms of indirect speech as well as the mechanisms of perlocutionary interaction.

Luque 2011: 60). For the sake of the present paper, however, I use the term 'indirect speech acts' in a broad sense in which it denotes Searlean indirect illocutions as well as second order speech acts.

Locutions are normally or seriously used — where 'normally' can be read as 'in accordance with their design or purpose' — to perform illocutionary acts. By contrast, to speak non-seriously and adopt the etiolated mode is to exploit the locutionary mechanisms to achieve ends different from those for which they have been designed.

The Austinian notion of etiolated uses of language has been used in literary theory and theatre studies (Friggieri, 2014). For instance, John R. Searle (1979: 67) claims that fiction-making is parasitic on illocutionary practice. As a matter of fact, he does not use the term 'etiolation', but speaks of the so-called 'pretended performances of illocutionary acts' (*Ibid.*: 64-65). He argues, however, that "the pretended illocutions which constitute a work of fiction are made possible by the existence of a set of [horizontal] conventions which suspend the normal operation of the [vertical] rules relating illocutionary acts and the world" (*Ibid.*: 67). In my view, the Searlean horizontal rules of fiction-making are akin to the Austinian mechanisms of linguistic etiolation, which — as Friggieri (2014: 59) notes — can be also viewed as underlying the practice of ironizing.

Following David J. Amante (1981), I assume that ironic utterances are acts performed by following a certain procedure. I also argue that at least some of the conditions that make up the procedure can be likened to Searle's horizontal conventions for fiction-making. In this respect, I take issue with Friggieri, who claims that

> there are no special extra-linguistic conventions that need to be in place and whose function needs to be respected in order for jokes, ironic comments, soliloquies, poems or stage utterances to 'come off' in the desired way. Such uses of language do not suffer from the kind of insincerity exemplified by the case where I say 'I congratulate you' when I'm not pleased or when I promise to do something without having the least intention of doing it. (Friggieri, 2014: 56-57)

I argue that there is a procedure for ironizing and an utterance purported to be ironic can be insincere or even fail to come off. Before I get into the details, however, let me discuss two alternative approaches to studying irony.

3. Two approaches to irony

Salvatore Attardo (2000) distinguishes between two types of theories of verbal irony. Theories of the first type depict irony as a trope or figure of speech whose meaning is inferred

pragmatically (Grice, 1989; Bach and Harnish, 1979; Bach, 1994; Searle, 1979; Giora, 1995; Attardo, 2000; Garmendia and Korta, 2007). Scholars who adopt the second approach (Sperber, 1984; Clark and Gerrig, 1984; Clark, 1996; Wilson, 2006, 2013; Wilson and Sperber, 2012), by contrast, account for cases of ironizing in terms of the distinction between language and metalanguage and claim that to ironize in uttering a certain linguistic expression is to mention it rather than use it in its normal function; they argue that what makes an utterance ironic is not a special implicature it conveys, if there is any, but a characteristic attitude it expresses.

The two approaches under discussion differ in the way they answer the following four questions.

Q_1 What is the communicative nature of irony? What does the ironist *qua* ironist communicate?

Q_2 How do we signal and recognize the presence of irony? What are the clues that the ironist uses to signal her ironic intent?

Q_3 What are the mechanisms and procedures that underlie the interpretation of ironic utterances?

Q_4 Why should irony exist at all? What is the rationale for irony?

To answer question Q_1, the proponents of the irony-as-a-trope approach claim that what an ironic utterance communicates is to be described as its *inferred* or *indirect meaning* (Attardo, 2000), its *conversational implicature* (Grice, 1989; Giora, 1995), a *series* of conversationally implicated contents (Garmendia and Korta, 2007), or its *conversational impliciture* (Bach, 1994: 133). Viewed from the perspective of the irony-as-a-trope models, then, Ann's ironic utterance of (1) either indirectly *conveys* her annoyance at John and his recent unfriendly behaviour (Attardo, 2000), *conversationally implicates* that John is not a friend (Grice, 1989), or communicates the *conversational impliciture* to the effect that John is not a friend (Bach, 1994). Rachel Giora (1995: 240) argues that "irony is a form of negation that does not make use of an explicit negation marker." For instance, in uttering words (1) ironically, Ann exploits the mechanism of *indirect* negation to implicate that a certain actual state of affairs which corresponds to the unmarked interpretation of her words — i.e., the state to which she 'refers' (Giora et al., 2005) — is *far from* the expected or desired state of affairs that corresponds to their linguistically marked interpretation.

To answer question Q_2, the proponents of the irony-as-a-trope theories argue that the ironist can successfully signal her ironic intent either by purposefully producing an inappropriate utterance (Attardo, 2000), ostentatiously flouting the maxim of quality or sincerity (Grice, 1989), producing an utterance that is a case of sentence nonliterality — i.e., an utterance in which "a sentence is used nonliterally without any of its constituents being so used" (Bach, 1994: 135) — or using various contextual, prosodic, and lexical or grammatical cues (Giora, 1995; Giora et al., 2005).

Addressing question Q_3, in turn, they argue that irony comprehension involves pragmatic inferences aimed at the recognition of what the speaker means without saying it. According to Grice, for instance, ironic utterances give rise to non-standard implicatures that involve meaning substitution rather than meaning supplementation: for instance, in uttering sentence (1) ironically, Ann does not say, but, as Grice (1989: 34; cf. Wilson and Sperber, 2012: 124) put it, *makes as if to say* that John is a friend and thereby communicates the antiphrastic implicature to the effect that John is not a friend. Grice's model of irony suggests that the interpretation of an ironic utterance involves two steps (Attardo, 2000: 801): (*i*) accessing the literal meaning of the speaker's words and evaluating it as contextually inappropriate, and (*ii*) substituting the inappropriate meaning with the pragmatically inferred proposition which is the opposite of what the speaker makes as if to say. Giora (1995) adopts the two-stage model of irony processing with two modifications. She claims, firstly, that what is accessed first is not the literal, but the salient meaning of the expression uttered by the speaker and, secondly, that the salient meaning, which is linguistically marked, is not discarded but remains activated and interacts with the inferred meaning to produce the ironic effect. For instance, in interpreting Ann's ironic utterance of (1), one keeps activated (*i*) the salient or literal interpretation of her words, which corresponds to the desirable or expected state of affairs that John is a friend, and (*ii*) their unmarked or implicated interpretation, which corresponds to the actual state of affairs Ann refers to, "so that the difference between them may be computed" (Giora, 1995: 261). Bach and Harnish (1979: 67-68), in turn, take ironic utterances to be *direct though nonliteral* illocutionary acts whose interpretation involves a two-stage inferential process of expansion (Bach, 1994: 133n) triggered by the recognition that the speaker's utterance is an instance of sentence nonliterality.

The irony-as-a-trope theories offer no uniform answer to question Q_4 (Garmendia and Korta, 2007; Wilson and Sperber 2012: 124-125). The natural way to communicate something is to say it explicitly and speakers who use irony to convey antiphrastic implicatures run the risk of being misunderstood. Therefore, what do we gain by using sentence "*X* is *P*" rather

than "*X* is not *P*" to communicate that *X* is not *P* or that *X* is far from being *P*? To answer this question, Grice (1989: 53) suggested that "irony is intimately connected with the expression of a feeling, attitude, or evaluation"; as Wilson and Sperber (2012: 127) note, however, he did not elaborate on this suggestion. Attardo claims that his theory of irony "may claim to have provided at least a good starting point to answer the vexing question of 'why would S use irony?'" (Attardo, 2000: 823) He suggests, for instance, that the point behind uttering the following sentence:

(3) What nice weather!

when the weather is in fact ugly is to convey "annoyance at the weather, rather than towards the innocent sentence" (*Ibid*.: 807). Let us note, however, that the speaker can use the same sarcastic tone of voice to utter the following sentence:

(4) What awful weather!

thereby expressing her annoyance at the weather without taking the risk of being misconstrued. Giora (1995: 260) suggests that irony can be viewed as a politeness strategy which enables us to criticise our interlocutors or other people by using affirmative expressions rather than their face-threatening negative counterparts. However, although this observation can be used to account for ironic utterances of (1), it can hardly be applied to the ironic utterance of (3), since in the case of (4) it is not clear *whose* face, if any, is under threat.

A central idea behind the metalinguistic approach is that ironic utterances are designed to express mocking or dissociative attitudes: to issue an ironic utterance is to express the speaker's negative attitude towards either a speech act she pretends to perform (Clark and Gerrig, 1984; Clark, 1996), or a thought that her utterance evokes (Sperber, 1984; Wilson, 2006, 2013; Wilson and Sperber, 2012). For instance, Clark and Gerrig (1984) would say that what the ironic speaker expresses in uttering (3) is not her annoyance at the weather, but her mocking attitude towards the speech acts she pretends to perform, the uninformed or injudicious speaker she pretends to be, or the ignorant addressee who would take her words seriously. By analogy, Sperber and Wilson (2012) would say that what the speaker communicates is her dissociative attitude towards a thought which is similar in content to the logical form or explicature of her utterance and which she attributes to "a particular individual on a particular occasion, (…) to certain types of people, or to people in general" (Wilson and

Sperber, 2012: 130). The attributed thought may be similar in content to a certain contextually salient norm, hope or expectation, for instance to the speaker's previous hope that the weather was going be nice.

The irony-as-mention models use the idea of expressing an attitude to account for the *communicative value* of and the *rationale* for irony, i.e., to answer questions Q_1 and Q_4, respectively. What the ironist communicates, namely, is her mocking or dissociative attitude towards a speech act she pretends to perform or a thought she echoes; what motivates her to speak ironically rather than seriously, then, is her need to express this attitude. The words she utters *evoke* a certain representation — a *speech act* or *thought* that the speaker's utterance resembles in *form* or *content*, respectively — and, at the same time, *express* a negative attitude towards it; in short, the words are mentioned rather than normally used and constitute a verbal act of self-expression (Green, 2007, 2017).

The irony-as-mention model seems to be open to the same criticism that its proponents raise against the irony-as-a-trope model; one may ask what we gain by uttering (3) rather than the sentence "What a fool I was, expecting the weather to be nice" to express a negative attitude toward the expectation that the weather would be nice.[2] Indeed, what these two utterances have in common is that they attribute the thought THE WEATHER IS NICE to the speaker or possibly other relevant social agents. However, as Wilson and Sperber (2012: 128-129) would put it, the verb 'expect' makes it clear that the clause 'the weather to be nice' is an indirect report of thought, whereas the utterance of (3) is *tacitly* attributive. One can ask, therefore, what we gain by making the tacitly attributive utterance of (3) rather than its explicitly attributive counterpart. My tentative answer is that in using the prefix 'what a fool I was' we unnecessarily specify the kind of dissociative attitude we have towards the thought THE WEATHER IS NICE, whereas in uttering (3) in an ironic tone of voice we remain unspecific in this respect. As Wilson and Sperber (2012) claim, much of human communication is weak in that it involves a considerable degree of indeterminacy and "the hearer's expectations of relevance can be satisfied by deriving any one of a range of roughly similar conclusions, at roughly comparable cost, from a range of roughly similar premises" (*Ibid*.: 15).

To answer question Q_2, the proponents of the metalinguistic approach refer to empirical findings on the use of prosodic and kinesic cues to signal ironic intentions (Wilson and Sperber, 2012: 128). To answer question Q_3, Wilson and Sperber argue that irony comprehension involves standard relevance-based inferential procedures and requires a high

[2] I am grateful to one of the reviewers for raising this worry.

order of metarepresentational abilities (*Ibid*.: 134); for Clark (1996), in turn, it involves general cognitive abilities for interpreting what he calls *staged speech acts*.

Even though I am more sympathetic to the irony-as-mention theories — in fact, the model proposed in Section 4 below draws essentially on elements of the echoic theory and, to a lesser degree, on elements of the pretence theory — I do not want to dwell on their details here. Neither do I want to discuss further the irony-as-a-trope theories; for current purposes it suffices to note that they can be viewed as attempts to *normalize* irony by accounting for its communicative nature in terms of conversational implicatures. More specifically, they can be regarded as attempts to make room for ironic utterances within a broad class of serious uses of language which includes direct and literal speech acts, conversational implicatures, indirect speech acts, and direct though nonliteral acts. The irony-as-mention models, by contrast, seem to take the non-serious character of ironic utterances at face value and suggest that they are communicative acts performed in the etiolated mode.

4. The felicity conditions for ironizing

According to Searle (1979: 113), "irony (…) does not require any conventions, extralinguistic or otherwise." By contrast, Amante (1981: 78) claims that "ironic uses of languages, like non-ironic uses, are rule-governed". Even though I find Amante's model problematic (more on this below), I adopt his general perspective on irony and formulate a set of felicity conditions for ironizing. The proposed account results from integrating elements of the echoic model offered by Wilson and Sperber (Sperber, 1984; Wilson, 2006, 2013; Wilson and Sperber, 2012) into the Austinian speech act-theoretic framework (Austin, 1975; Sbisà, 1984, 2002, 2013, and 2019; Witek 2015, 2021), which enables us to recognize and describe the social dimension of ironizing.

Like Wilson and Sperber, I assume that what the ironic speaker communicates is her expressed attitude rather than a conversationally implicated or inferred proposition, if there is any, that substitutes the literal meaning of her words.[3] I also claim that ironizing involves exploiting the locutionary meaning of one's words to achieve communicative effects that, *pace* Amante, are not illocutionary. In uttering (1) with an intention to ironize, for instance,

[3] Wilson and Sperber (2012: 126-128, 140-145) argue that it is their echoic account, not the model of ironic implicatures, that offers a better explanation of what they call *puzzling features of irony*: the expressive dimension of ironic utterances, their normative bias, and the ironical tone of voice.

Ann exploits the locutionary properties of her words to evoke a certain contextually available opinion about John — i.e., that he is a friend — and show it in an unfavourable light by expressing her negative attitude towards it. In other words, her communicative plan is parasitical on normal semantic mechanisms — i.e., it exploits what locution (1) means — and as such exemplifies what Austin (1975: 22) called 'etiolation of language'.

A central tenet of the proposed approach is that ironizing is a *socially-constituted* and *communicative* practice that involves *linguistic etiolation*. To say that the practice of ironizing is socially-constituted is to assume that in making an ironic speech action the speaker necessarily invokes a socially accepted procedure which specifies, first, the conditions under which the action can be felicitously performed and, second, what counts as its ironic effect registered by the score of conversation. I also argue that an ironic utterance has a communicative value in that it expresses — i.e., shows and signals in Mitchell S. Green's (2007, 2009, and 2017) sense — a characteristic attitude of the speaker.

Following the pattern used by Searle (1969) in his analysis of promising, I propose a list of felicity conditions which, in my view, constitute a central part of the socially accepted procedure for ironizing. Before I get into the details, however, I would like to make four general points.

First, the proposed model is *Austinian* or *speech act-based* in that it takes ironic utterances to be speech actions performed by invoking a certain socially accepted procedure. For this reason, it should be distinguished from what Garmendia and Korta (2007: 193) call the *speech-act theory view of irony*. They claim that "[t]he speech-act theory treatment of irony seems to be a generalization from Grice's treatment of assertives to utterances with other illocutionary points" (*Ibid*.: 194), e.g., directives, commissives, and so on. In other words, models of ironizing that result from adopting what they call the speech-act theory view are Gricean in spirit and belong to the family of irony-as-a-trope models.

Second, some of the conditions constituting the procedure for ironizing are akin to what Searle (1979: 66) calls "horizontal conventions [of fiction-making] that break the connections established by the vertical rules" that establish connections between language and reality — i.e., they "suspend the normal requirements established by these rules" — whereas other conditions presuppose that the normal requirements are suspended.[4] Horizontal

[4] For instance, condition (C_2) discussed below suspends the operation of normal mechanisms of illocutionary and perlocutionary interaction, whereas other conditions presuppose that the mechanisms have been switched off. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for drawing my attention to the special status of condition (C_2).

conventions of fiction-making are not rules of semantics; rather, their job is to "suspend the normal illocutionary commitments of the utterances" (*Ibid.*: 68). The conventions of fiction-making — and the same is to be said of the conditions for ironizing — are parasitic and as such can function only against the background of rules of serious and normal speech.

Third, I am far from claiming that the proposed construction, which is modelled on Searle's (1969) analysis of promising, is complete. My hypothesis, rather, is that the proposed conditions are necessary for the felicitous performance of an act of ironizing; I do not claim, however, that they are jointly sufficient. In what follows I adopt the Austinian perspective (see Sbisà, 2019, p. 26), according to which procedures for performing speech acts are open-ended and evolving structures that interact with rules constituting other social practices. In short, although I adopt Searle's model of analysis, my approach is Austinian in spirit (see Sbisà, 2013, 2019).[5] I assume, namely, that even if we arrive at a set of felicity conditions that proves itself to provide an adequate basis for explaining speech acts of a certain type — e.g., ironic speech actions — it is possible that one day we will discover a new form of their infelicity and, as a result, be forced to revise or supplement our model.

Fourth, most, though not all, of the conditions discussed below put restrictions on the intentions of ironic speakers. One might object, then, that the proposed model is not fully Austinian, since Austin and his followers (Sbisà 2002) define the force of an act by reference to objective features of the context in which it is made.[6] In my view, however, there is no tension between adopting the Austinian approach and formulating conditions that require ironic speakers to have certain intentions. The gist of the Austinian approach is that the force of an act is determined by the procedure invoked by the speaker; the procedure, however, may put restrictions not only on the way the external world must be, but also on the mental states of the speaker and her audience. In short, the Austinian approach allows for both externalist and internalist felicity conditions (Harnish 2009). What the Austinians reject is the Gricean idea — which is embraced, for instance, by Bach and Harnish (1979) — that the force of the speaker's act is determined by her *communicative* intention. Still, the intentions required by the conditions discussed below are not *communicative* in the Gricean sense.

Let us move on to discussing the details of the proposed model. I claim that speaker *S* who utters sentence *T* in the presence of hearer *H* performs a sincere and non-defective speech action of ironizing only if the following conditions from (C_1) to (C_8) obtain.

[5] I am grateful to one of the reviewers for suggesting that I clarify this point.

[6] I am grateful to one of the reviewers for raising this worry.

(C_1) *In uttering sentence T speaker S performs a locutionary act, i.e., produces a locution whose meaning involves* (*i*) *a certain more or less determined rhetic content,* (*ii*) *illocutionary potential, and* (*iii*) *perlocutionary potential*.

Etiolated uses of language in general and ironic utterances in particular are parasitic on the mechanisms of the normal communicative mode. In other words, every felicitous act of ironizing exploits elements of the locutionary meaning of its phatic vehicle. Formula (C_1), which can be called the Locutionary Meaning Condition, does justice to the fact that ironic utterances can function only against the background of mechanisms determining locutionary meanings.

Let us assume that the locutionary meaning of an utterance can be likened to the sum of its explicatures in the relevance-theoretic sense (Carston, 2002; Wilson and Sperber, 2012). For instance, in uttering (1) ironically, Ann produces the locution that John is a friend, the content of which can be represented as the conjunction of its first-level explicature — i.e., a contextually determined proposition JOHN IS A FRIEND*, where "FRIEND*" stands for a pragmatically modified concept (Carston, 2002) — and a series of its higher-level explicatures (Wilson and Sperber, 2012: 24) that represent the speech act potential of Ann's utterance. By analogy, in using sentence (2) to make an ironic comment on John's poor performance in calculation, Ann produces a locution whose content can be represented as JOHN IS A COMPUTER*, where COMPUTER* is an *ad hoc* concept standing for human agents who are very good at mathematical operations.

Consider also a situation in which a diner utters phrase (5) "in response to a plate of moussaka being dropped on her lap by a server in a restaurant" (Green, 2017: 5).

(5) Nice job!

Even though her subsentential utterance fails to decode a complete proposition, it has a pragmatically enriched locutionary meaning that can be represented as the conjunction of its first-level explicature THE SERVER'S DROPPING A PLATE OF MOUSSAKA ON THE DINER'S LAP IS A NICE JOB and its higher-level explicature that represents the speech act potential of the diner's utterance, i.e., the fact that it is normally used for praising.

It is instructive to note that there are ironic acts whose vehicles are not locutions but gestures, sighs, facial expressions etc. Consider, for instance, the following non-verbal counterpart of the ironic utterance of (5): the diner, whose lap is covered with moussaka, looks at the server and shows her a thumbs up (Green, 2017: 4). In my view, even though the

diner says no words, she produces a representation whose meaning is equivalent to the locutionary meaning of the ironic utterance of (5) discussed above. More specifically, the meaning of her act involves the culture-specific content and force potential of her gesture, i.e., the descriptive content WELL DONE or NICE JOB and the illocutionary potential for accepting or praising. To allow for non-verbal cases of ironizing, then, one may generalize condition (C_1) and stipulate that the ironist has to produce either a locutionary act or its non-verbal counterpart.

Let us consider the following two formulas, which can be called the Negative Function Condition and the Positive Function Condition, respectively.

(C_2) *The locution produced by speaker S is intended not to perform its normal functions, i.e., it is intended not to constitute the performance of speech acts which lie within the limits of its illocutionary and perlocutionary potentials.*

(C_3) *The locution produced by speaker S is intended to evoke a thought that resembles in content an aspect of its locutionary meaning.*

The key idea behind condition (C_2) is that in uttering *T* ironic speaker *S* switches from the serious communicative mode to the etiolated one and thereby suspends the normal mechanisms of illocutionary and perlocutionary communication. This switch is part of what she does in making an ironic utterance or, more specifically, it is a structural condition for her felicitous ironizing.[7] Condition (C_2), then, can be likened to Searle's horizontal rules whose function is to "suspend the normal operation of the rules relating illocutionary acts and the world" (Searle, 1979: 67) and thereby "suspend the normal illocutionary commitments of the utterances" (*Ibid*.: 68). For instance, if Ann utters (1) ironically, the locutionary act she thereby performs is intended not to constitute the illocutionary act of ranking John as a friend; it is also intended not to perform the perlocutionary act of convincing her audience that John is a friend.[8] As a result, the ironist who in uttering a certain sentence goes "through the motions of making" (*Ibid.*: 65) an illocutionary act of *F*-ing is not *F*-ing.

The proposed construction, then, is at odds with Amante's (1981) speech act-theoretic analysis of ironizing. According to his model,

[7] See footnote 4.

[8] It is possible, however, that Ann's ironic utterance of (1) results in convincing her audience that John is a friend. As one of the reviewers rightly notes, "perlocutionary acts are not under the speaker's full control".

> [i]rony operates by covertly negating one or more of the conditions and rules underlying most non-ironic speech acts. The illocutionary force of a speech act is retained but rather curiously blunted so that a perlocutionary-like effect is added. (Amante, 1981: 78)
> If the illocutionary act performed is one of stating then an ironic statement results: The speaker does not believe what he says represents a true state of affairs but his utterance still is a statement so that whatever he implies that he does believe is delivered in statement form. Similarly, if the ironic utterance is a question, even though the speaker does not desire the information, the resultant ironic rhetorical question still is in question form and some of the force of a question lingers on. (*Ibid*.: 86)

In my view, ironic utterances do not take effect as illocutionary acts. If the verbal vehicle of an ironic act has the form of a statement or request — i.e., in virtue of its locutionary meaning it can be used to make a direct statement or request — its possible force is *not* 'retained' and 'curiously blunted', *but* suspended.[9] I would also say that the point behind issuing an ironic utterance is not to perform an indirect or "direct but nonliteral" (Bach and Harnish, 1979: 67) illocution; neither it is to conversationally implicate something. Of course some ironic utterances do implicate something. Nevertheless, their implicatures, if there are any, have no bearing on their ironic character.

What is, then, the function of the utterances of (1), (2), (3), and (5) *qua* ironic speech actions? Part of the answer is provided by condition (C_3), which stipulates that the purpose of the locution produced by ironic speaker *S* is to evoke a thought that resembles in content an aspect of its locutionary meaning. In short, ironic speech actions make up a subtype of what Wilson and Sperber call *attributive uses of language*. "In attributive uses" — they claim (Wilson and Sperber, 2012: 128) — the speaker's thought represented by her utterance "is not directly about a state of affairs, but about another thought that it resembles in content, which the speaker attributes to some source other than herself at the current time." According to the speech act-based model, the thought expressed by the speaker's utterance can be described as

[9] For the same reason, I do not think that ironic speech actions can be adequately described as second order speech acts in Bermejo Luque's (2011) sense. As Bermejo Luque (2011: 60) puts it, second order speech acts "can be performed only by means of" constatives; in other words, their vehicles are felicitous assertive illocutionary acts. The vehicle of an act of ironizing, by contrast, is a locutionary act whose illocutionary potential is blocked or suspended. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for suggesting that I clarify this point.

it locutionary meaning and represented as the conjunction of its first-level explicature and a series of its higher-level explicatures.

In short, the mechanism whereby the speaker's thought echoes a different thought exploits the resemblance in content between the evoked thought and elements of the evoking one. In the case of ironic utterances of (1), (2), and (3), the evoking elements of their locutionary meanings are their first-level explicatures — or, as Austin would put it, their rhetic contents — that resemble in content certain contextually available hopes or expectations: that John is a fiend, that he is good at making calculations, and that the weather is nice, respectively.

Consider, however, a situation in which Sue has the right of way, but the other driver does not let her proceed; she brings her car to a screeching halt and utters the words (6):

(6) Thank you! (Giora, 1995: 246)

The lexically fixed illocutionary potential of her words, which is part of their locutionary meaning, determines that pheme (6) is normally used for *thanking* and *expressing gratitude*. The same can be said of a similar situation in which Sue, rather than uttering (6), utters sentence (7):

(7) I can't thank you enough. (Wilson and Sperber, 2012: 137)

That is to say, one element of the salient (Giora, 1997) or default (Jaszczolt, 2016) meaning of sentence (7) is that it can be used to thank the addressee for something. As Wilson and Sperber (2012: 132) note, the utterance of (7) — and the same should be said of the utterance of (6) — "might be understood as ironically echoing a specific hope or wish of Sue's that the addressee's behaviour would be worthy of gratitude, or a particular application (to the addressee's behaviour) of a widely shared normative representation of how people ought to behave." How is it possible?

Note that the thought THE ADDRESSEE'S BEHAVIOUR IS WORTHY OF GRATITUDE does not resemble in content the first-level explicatures of Sue's utterances of (6) and (7). Rather, the mechanism whereby she evokes the thought THE ADDRESSEE'S BEHAVIOUR IS WORTHY OF GRATITUDE exploits elements of the higher-level explicatures of her words, i.e., their illocutionary potentials. More specifically, (*i*) her utterance is intended to *present* — but not to *constitute* — the illocutionary act of thanking the addressee for his behaviour on the road,

(*ii*) the presented act (see Searle, 1979: 64-65) has a certain recognizable preparatory condition that the addressee's behaviour is worthy of gratitude, which, in turn, (*iii*) coincides in content with the echoed thought, hope, norm or expectation.

By analogy, let us consider a situation in which Moshe, "[a]fter he had finished eating pizza, ice-cream" and other goods his mother had prepared "for his brother Benjamins's birthday party, (…) started eating coated peanuts" (Giora and Fein, 1999: 429). His mother utters one of the following sentences:

(8) Moshe, I think you should eat something. (Giora and Fein, 1999: 429)
(9) How about another small slice of pizza? (Kumon-Nakamura et al., 1995, quoted from Wilson and Sperber, 2012: 137)

Kumon-Nakamura (Kumon-Nakamura et al., 1995, c.f., Wilson and Sperber, 2012: 137) would say that in uttering (8) or (9) Moshe's mother makes an insincere directive act, e.g., she insincerely encourages her son to eat something,[10] and thereby alludes to a certain failed expectation. In my view, however, insincere acts of encouraging are still acts of encouraging: they are abuses rather than misfires in Austin's sense. According to condition (C_2), the mother's response takes effect as an act of ironizing only if its illocutionary potential, which is part of its locutionary meaning, is blocked or suspended. According to condition (C_3), in turn, its function *qua* ironic speech action is to evoke a certain thought — a norm, hope, or expectation — to the effect that Moshe will not reach for another snack until he is invited to do so. The evoking mechanism involves (*i*) presenting or going "through the motions of making" (Searle, 1979: 67) a directive act of encouraging the addressee to do *A*, (*ii*) activating the representation of one of the preparatory conditions for directives, i.e., that the addressee "will not do *A* in the normal course of events of his [or her] own accord" (*Ibid.*), and (*iii*) using the activated representation to evoke the thought that the addressee will not do *A* in the normal course of events.

The above discussion suggests that the role that overt pretending plays in the mechanism of ironizing is much more limited and specialized then envisaged by the pretence theory. According to Clark and Gerrig (1984), ironic utterances evoke pretended speech acts

[10] A similar view, according to which the hallmark of ironic speech acts is their insincerity, is advocated by Henk Haverkate (1990).

and express negative attitudes toward them; in short, utterance *U* evokes act *A* in that the former pretends and resembles the latter. In my view, however, in making an ironic utterance the speaker presents a certain illocutionary act and uses its rhetic meaning (examples (1), (2), and (3)) or illocutionary potential (examples (6), (7), (8), and (9)) to evoke a certain contextually salient thought. In short, echo and overt pretence are two complementary techniques of linguistic etiolation involved in the mechanism of ironizing: the former exploits the rhetic meaning of the verbal vehicle of an ironic act, whereas the former is parasitic on its speech act potential (for a discussion, see Mękarska and Witek 2020).

The above-mentioned idea of contextually salient or available thoughts figures in the formulation of the following Contextual Availability Condition.

(C_4) *The thought that the locution is designed to evoke is available in the context in which speaker S utters sentence T.*

Following Austin (1975: 48-51), I assume that the successful performance of a speech act *presupposes* that some of its felicity conditions are satisfied (for a discussion of this idea, see Witek 2015, 2021). In particular, I take it that the successful performance of an ironic act puts certain requirements on the social context in which it is made or, more specifically, its felicity *presupposes* that the thought it evokes is contextually salient or, in other words, available to both the speaker and her audience. Therefore, the breach of condition (C_4) *either* results in an ironic misfire — i.e., a purported but void act of ironizing — *or* triggers the accommodating mechanism of context-repair (Lewis, 1979; Stalnaker, 2002; Langton, 2015, 2018; Witek 2015, 2021). By way of illustration, let us consider the following situation discussed by Grice (1989: 53):

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

B's utterance is an ironic misfire: an utterance which was intended to be ironic but did not come off and failed to produce its intended ironic effect. However, the problem does not comes down to the fact that A 'didn't catch on'. As Wilson and Sperber (2012: 126-127) note, what prevents B from achieving the ironic effect or, in other words, from performing a felicitous act of ironizing, is the more fundamental fact that in the situation under discussion there is no contextually salient thought — a hope, wish, or expectation available to both A and B — that B's words can be taken to evoke.

Let us consider, by contrast, a situation in which A and B are walking down the street and B is speculating whether it is a good idea to leave her car in the district they find themselves in. A assures her that the neighbourhood is safe. Suddenly, they see a car with a shattered window. B utters sentence (10):

(10) Look, that car has all its windows intact.

Her utterance takes effect as a case of ironizing, because the thought it echoes is contextually salient. Likewise, utterances of (1), (2), (3), (6), (7), (8), and (9) come off as felicitous acts of ironizing only if the thoughts they can be taken to evoke are contextually available.

Let us go back to discussing the original Gricean version of the 'shattered window' case and assume that B utters sentence (10) in a clearly ironic tone of voice. A recognizes her intention to ironize and asks question (11):

(11) But who claims that the neighbourhood is safe?

In uttering (11), then, A explicates (Sbisà, 1999; cf. Langton, 2018, and Witek 2021) what the felicity of the ironic utterance of (10) presupposes. In other words, A asks whether condition (C_4) is satisfied and thereby signals his readiness to consciously control and, if necessary, block its accommodation. I will come back to this issue in Section 5 below. In the meantime, let us discuss the remaining conditions for ironizing.

(C_5) *Speaker S harbours negative or critical feelings or attitudes towards the evoked thought.*

According to formula (C_5), which can be called the Sincerity Condition, the utterance of *T* is ironic only if *S* has a certain negative attitude towards the evoked norm, hope or expectation. For instance, she is supposed to take it to be ludicrously empty, false, inappropriate, vain, or naïve.

However, it is possible to make an insincere though felicitous act of ironizing. For instance, Ann, who utters (1) in an ironic tone of voice and thereby evokes a certain contextually available expectation to the effect that John is a friend, can in fact think that this expectation is still correct. Nevertheless, for some reasons she takes it to be useful to ironize about it and get her interlocutor to think that her attitude towards the evoked thought is negative. In short, her utterance takes effect as a felicitous, though insincere act of ironizing;

it constitutes an abuse, but not a misfire. To allow for insincere though felicitous acts of ironizing, then, we can replace condition (C_5) with its disjunctive variant:

(C_5') *Speaker S harbours negative or critical feelings or attitudes towards the evoked thought or at least intends that her utterance of T will get hearer H to think that she harbours such feelings or attitudes.*

Next, let us discuss the following formula which can be called the Essential Condition.

(C_6) *Speaker S intends that the utterance of T will present the evoked thought in an unfavourable light.*

According to this condition, the purpose behind making an ironic utterance *qua* an act of ironizing is to affect the state of conversation by casting the thought it evokes in an unfavourable light. In other words, it is to label a certain contextually salient norm, wish, expectation, hope, or other socially shared or at least mutually recognized attitude as futile, vain, naïve, ludicrously false, disappointed, or suffering from other form of inadequacy. For the utterance of *T* to be a felicitous act of ironizing, speaker *S* has to have the intention mentioned in condition (C_6). If the intention is fulfilled, the essential effect of ironizing is produced and the contextually salient thought evoked by speaker *S* is socially stigmatized.

Unlike illocutionary acts, ironic utterances *qua* acts of ironizing affect the state of conversation not by modifying the nexus of interpersonal normative relations, but by casting certain contextually available thoughts in an unfavourable light. To say this, however, is not to claim that ironic utterances have no normative effects at all. In a certain respect, they can be likened to expressives: thanks, condolences apologies, and other illocutions whose point is "to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional [or rhetic] content" (Searle 1979: 15). One can argue, therefore, that like expressives, acts of ironizing commit ironic speakers to consistent future behaviour and entitling the hearer to expect that they will behave in agreement with the attitudes they express.[11] I do agree that ironic utterances *qua* acts of expressive communication have normative effects. In particular, they modify the scope of appropriate conversational moves that may be subsequently made and, as Mary Kate McGowan (2019: 27) would put it, modify the "bounds of conversational permissibility". Elsewhere (Witek 2021) I have suggested that overt expressive signals in Green's (2007) sense — e.g., overtly displayed smiles, scowls, grimaces, etc. — can be understood as proto-illocutionary acts: like illocutions, they bring

[11] I am very grateful to one of the reviewers for drawing my attention to the normative dimension of acts of ironizing and the analogy between ironic utterances and expressives.

about certain commitments; the commitments thereby produced, however, are general rather than force-specific. My hypothesis is that the same holds for ironic utterances construed as acts of expressive communication. The designed purpose of an ironic utterances *qua* an act of ironizing, however, is not to enact new normative facts, but to present the thought it evokes in an unfavourable light.

What is more, to accept condition (C_6) is not to deny that the *primary* motive behind at least some ironic utterances may be to communicate what they conversationally implicate. For instance, the *primary* intention with which Moshe's mother utters (8) may be to stop Moshe from constantly reaching for snacks, as suggested by Giora and Fein (1999: 429), or to express her disapproval of his behaviour. By analogy, the *primary* motive behind uttering sentence (2) ironically may be to criticise or ridicule John's poor performance in calculating. Nevertheless, these and similar implicatures of ironic utterances should be distinguished from their essential effects, i.e., from what they contribute to the score of conversation *qua* cases or ironizing.

In making the above claim I assume, following Searle (1979) and Kasia M. Jaszczolt (2016), that the *primary* function of an utterance may coincide with its indirect illocutionary force and, analogously, that its *primary* meaning may be equated with what Grice would describe as its conversationally implicated content. In other words, I take it that the *primary* meaning of an utterance is the content that the speaker *primarily* intends to communicate which, as Jaszczolt (2016) argues, do not have to be constrained by the decoded meaning of the words she utters or, in other words, do not have to result from fleshing out their logical form. By analogy, I assume that the primary purpose behind making an ironic utterance can, but do not have to be to bring about its essential effect. What an ironic utterance implicates may on some occasions be perceived as its primary or most accessible meaning. Nevertheless, what makes it an act of ironizing is not its implicature, but its essential effect construed as presenting the echoed thought in an unfavourable light. What is more, the former seems to be derived from the latter. For instance, the mother's intention to stop Moshe from constantly reaching for snacks and her disapproval of his behaviour can be best understood as stemming from her expressed recognition that the expectation she echoes has turned out to be futile.

Finally, let us consider the following two formulas that can be called the Expressive Function Conditions.

(C_7) *In uttering sentence T speaker S expresses her negative feeling or attitude towards the evoked thought.*

(C_8) *In uttering sentence T speaker S intends that the evoked thought will be presented in an unfavourable light as a result of her expressing and the hearer's recognising the attitude mentioned in condition* (C_7).

Taken together, formulas (C_7) and (C_8) enables us to account for the communicative nature of ironic speech actions and the role expression plays in producing their intended essential effects. I assume that ironic utterances are cases of expressive communication in Green's (2007, 2009; cf. Witek 2019, 2021) sense: they express and thereby communicate certain attitudes in that they both show and signal them. Following Green (2007: 46-49), I assume that to show an item is to enable knowledge of it. For instance, my sincere frown shows my displeasure in that it enables appropriately endowed and situated observers to form knowledge about it; more specifically, it enables them to learn *that* I am displeased and *how* my displeasure feels. My frown is also a signal construed as "any feature of an entity that conveys information (including misinformation) and that was designed for its ability to convey that information. (…) The design in question might be due to the work of intelligent agents, or be the product of evolution by either artificial or natural selection." (Green, 2007: 49) In sum, my sincere frown simultaneously shows and signals my displeasure and thereby expresses it. By analogy, I claim that my sincere act of ironizing both shows and signals my attitude to the thought it echoes. I also take it that the expressive power of ironic utterances plays a key role in the mechanism whereby they produce their essential effects.

Let us focus on condition (C_7) first. It stipulates that what an ironic utterance expresses and thereby communicates is a certain negative attitude to the thought it echoes. According to condition (C_3) discussed above, in turn, the purpose of the locution produced by ironic speaker *S* is to evoke a thought that resembles in content an aspect of its locutionary meaning. In sum, the locution produced by speaker *S both* evokes a certain though *and* expresses her negative attitude towards it. Consider, by analogy, a situation in which I see my best friend and greets her with a smile. My smile *both* indicates my friend *and* expresses my positive attitude to her. Of course this analogy has its limits. The mechanism whereby the locution produced by the ironic speaker *evokes* a certain thought exploits resemblance in content; in other words, ironically used locutions are iconic signs. By contrast, my smile *indicates* my friend in virtue of a certain causal or existential relation: her occurrence *elicits* my affective

state and its facial manifestation; in short, my smile is an index rather than an icon.[12] Nevertheless, in both cases we can speak of a piece of behaviour that *both* signifies an object *and* expresses one's attitude towards it. Like smiles, frowns, grimaces and other expressive signals, ironic utterances both signify or indicate certain objects and express certain attitudes to them.

According to condition (C_8), in turn, speaker *S* intends that the expressive dimension of her ironic utterance of *T* plays a key role in the mechanism whereby it produces its essential effects. The point behind expressing one's negative attitude towards a certain contextually available thought is to put it in an unfavourable light or, in other words, to label a certain contextually salient norm, wish, expectation, or hope as futile, vain, naïve, ludicrously false, or disappointed. In short, the essential effect of an ironic speech act consists in the fact that the thought evoked by the speaker is in one way or another socially stigmatized. To achieve this end, the ironist not only expresses her dissociative attitude towards the evoked thought — that is, not only intends this attitude to be *merely* knowable to appropriately endowed hearers — but also intends it to be recognized by her interlocutor. It is part of her communicative plan, then, that the intended ironic effect is achieved thanks to her expressing and the hearer's recognising her negative attitude towards the evoked thought. Of course her plan may fail: the hearer may fail to recognize the expressive character of her utterance and the essential ironic effect may not occur. Still, if she has the intention mentioned in condition (*C*8), her utterance is ironic.

It is instructive to stress that in discussing condition (C_8) I do not use the Austinian term 'uptake'. According to Austin (1975: 116-117), uptake is secured on the part of the hearer if and only if he takes the speaker's utterance in a certain way, i.e., he takes it to have a certain more or less definite illocutionary force and a certain more or less definite meaning. As Marina Sbisà (2009: 48) convincingly argues, the securing of uptake so construed plays a key role in producing an intersubjective or "social agreement without which the [illocutionary] act's conventional effect cannot be brought about." By contrast, what the

[12] One of the reviewers claims that it is "inappropriate to say that my smile would 'indicate my friend'; rather, it would be an index of my happiness (for having seen a friend)." Following Dorit Bar-On, however, I assume that expressive signals — e.g., smiles, frowns, teeth-barings, etc. — are not "mere reliable indicators of the internal states that regularly cause them" (Bar-On, 2013: 353), but "foreshadow important semantic and pragmatic features of linguistic communication" (*Ibid*.: 354); in particular, they are "world-directed" (*Ibid.*: 360) and show objects "of the expressed states." (Bar-On, 2015: 205) For this reason, I assume that my smile not only shows my happiness, but also indicates its relationally or existentially determined object.

ironic speaker intends the hearer to recognize is not the force and meaning of her words. Rather, as part of her plan to perform a certain ironic speech act she intends the hearer to recognize her expressed attitude.[13]

The verb 'express' used in the previous paragraphs, which means 'show and signal', is factive: one cannot show a state one does not have. Let us recall, however, that it is possible for Ann to perform a felicitous though insincere act of ironizing. It is felicitous in that it succeeds in producing its essential effect; at the same time it is insincere in that Ann does not harbour the attitude her utterance of (1) is taken to express. In general, the insincerity of an ironic utterance of *T* means that the utterance fails to express the attitude whose expression plays a key role in *S*'s plan to achieve the intended ironic effect. Viewed from the perspective of conditions (C_7) and (C_8), then, Ann's insincere ironic utterance of (1) cannot be regarded as a felicitous act of ironizing. How, then, can the communicative dimension of insincere but successful ironic acts be accounted for?

In my view, it suffices to assume that Ann's utterance does not express, but is *expressive of* (Green, 2007) her negative attitude. Likewise, a frown can be expressive of displeasure independently of the current feelings and emotions of the frowning agent. As Green notes, my frown can be expressive of displeasure in virtue of the fact that my "face has a configuration that would typically be used by one who is expressing their [displeasure]" (Green, 2007: 40). By analogy, if Ann utters (1) in an ironic tone of voice and succeeds in evoking a contextually available expectation to the effect that John is a friend, but does not harbour a dissociative attitude towards it, her utterance is at least expressive of such an attitude. That is to say, it has lexical, contextual, and prosodic properties that would be used by one who is expressing one's dissociative attitude. To allow for successful but insincere acts of ironizing, then, conditions (C_7) and (C_8) can be replaced with their disjunctive versions:

(C_7') *In uttering sentence T speaker S* either *expresses her negative feeling or attitude towards the evoked thought* or *produces an utterance that is expressive of such a feeling or attitude.*

(C_8') *In uttering sentence T speaker S intends* either *that the evoked thought will be presented in an unfavourable light as a result of her expressing and the hearer's recognising the attitude mentioned in condition* (C_7') or *that the evoked thought will be presented in an*

[13] I am very grateful to one of the reviewers for suggesting that I highlight the difference between the Austinian requirement of uptake and condition (C_8).

unfavourable light as a result of her utterance being expressive of and the hearer's recognising the attitude mentioned in condition (C_7').

5. Concluding remarks. The social dimension of ironizing

Let us consider how the proposed speech act-based model addresses the four questions discussed in Section 3. Like the echoic theory, it answer question Q_1 by pointing to the expressive function of ironic utterances; following Wilson and Sperber (2012), I claim that what the ironist expresses and thereby communicates is her attitude to a certain evoked thought. In my view, however, the expressive nature of irony can be further elaborated along the lines of Green's (2007, 2009, and 2017) model of self-expression. In particular, I claim that Green's notion of expressiveness can be used to account for cases of successful though insincere ironizing. The proposed speech act-based model explains also *why* ironic utterances express what they do. It stipulates, namely, that the characteristic expressive dimension of ironic speech acts play a key role in the mechanism whereby they produce their essential *ironic* effects.

I offer no specific answer to question Q_2. I take it for granted that there are diverse contextual, lexical, grammatical, kinesic, and prosodic clues that ironic speakers may use to signal their ironic intentions. I add, however, that the clues play an important role in the accommodating mechanism whereby the context of an utterance may be repaired so as to maintain the assumption that the utterance constitutes a successful act of ironizing.

A key idea behind the speech act-based approach is that in making an ironic utterance the speaker invokes a socially accepted procedure for ironizing. The proposed model, then, enhances and supplements the insights of the cognitive approach. It suggests that the cognitive mechanism underlying the production and interpretation of acts of ironizing — see question Q_3 —is sensitive to their socially-constituted properties.

Finally, the proposed model answers question Q_4. It claims that the point behind an ironic speech act is to present the thought it echoes in an unfavourable light; more specifically, felicitous acts of ironizing evoke certain contextually salient norms, wishes, hopes, or expectations, and present them as futile, vain, naïve, ludicrously false, disappointed, or suffering from some other form of inadequacy.

The proposed model elaborates on the idea that, in some respects, ironic utterances are like illocutionary acts: they (*a*) have locutionary acts as they vehicles, (*b*) take effect by changing the context of their production, (*c*) allow for insincerity, (*d*) perform a characteristic

communicative function, and (*e*) can be 'null and void' or undergo the accommodating mechanism of context-repair.

(*a*) First, conditions (C_1), (C_2) and (C_3) suggest that acts of ironizing can be felicitously performed only against the background of socially accepted conventions and mechanisms, which can be parasitically exploited by ironic speakers. In most cases, the background conventions are locutionary rules and mechanisms that determine the rhetic meaning and speech act potential of the words uttered by the speaker. Of course there are non-verbal ironic acts. Recall, for instance, that the diner whose lap is covered by moussaka can look at the clumsy server and show her a thumbs up, thereby producing a non-verbal counterpart of her utterance of (5). The ironic act she performs, however, is parasitic on a background convention which determines the communicative and illocutionary function of her gesture.

(*b*) Second, condition (C_6) does justice to the fact that ironic utterances are "context-changing social actions" (Sbisà, 2002: 421). In other words, like illocutionary acts, they have essential effects that are registered by the score of conversation. Unlike illocutionary acts, however, they do not take effect by modifying the nexus of the interpersonal normative relations. Rather, the purpose behind ironizing is to modify the social context by presenting one of its components — i.e., a certain available or salient thought — in an unfavourable light.

(*c*) Third, condition (C_5') allows for the fact that ironic speech actions, like illocutionary acts (Green, 2009), have a characteristic expressive dimension and, *pace* Friggieri (2014: 57), can be either sincere or insincere. Like insincere illocutionary acts, however, insincere ironic utterances are abuses rather than misfires: despite being defective in a way, they can succeed in performing their context-changing function.

(*d*) Fourth, conditions (C_7') and (C_8') account for the communicative value of ironic speech acts in terms of their expressive function. They depict ironizing as a communicative practice that involves using cultural artefacts — words, constructions, ritualized gestures, and so on — for performing acts of self-expression (Green, 2007, 2017). The practice of performing ironic speech actions, then, significantly extends our repertoire of available expressive means.

(*e*) Finally, according to condition (C_4), the felicity of an act ironizing puts certain restrictions on the social context in which it is made. Namely, it presupposes that the thought evoked by the utterance of *T* is contextually available to both speaker *S* and hearer *H*. If this presupposition is not satisfied, *S*'s act of ironizing *either* is "purported but null and void"

(Austin, 1975: 18) *or*, provided certain conditions are met, undergoes the accommodating process of context-fixing. Recall, for instance, that speaker B in Grice's 'shattered window' scenario intends to be ironic, but her communicative plan fails to come off; what prevents her from performing a felicitous act of ironizing is the fact that the social context of her utterance is defective. That is to say, the thought her words are used to evoke — e.g., one's hope or expectation that cars parked outside in this area will have their windows intact or, more generally, that the neighbourhood is safe — is not contextually available. The fact that she believes that it is available to her interlocutor is beside the point. Condition (C_4) puts restrictions on the social context of the utterance of *T* rather than on what speaker *S* believes, desires, or intends. In short, it is externalist and social rather than internalist and individualistic.

Let us assume, however, that B utters (10) in a clearly ironic tone of voice and A recognizes her intention to ironize. Let us also take it that B wrongly presupposes that the thought she echoes with her words is contextually available; that is to say, she wrongly takes A to believe that she has expected the neighbourhood to be safe. However, guided by the assumption that the locutionary act she performs constitutes a felicitous or appropriate act of ironizing, A may recognize and accommodate the faulty presupposition and thereby repair the context; in other words, he may get to believe that there is a contextually salient expectation, wish, or hope to the effect that the neighbourhood is safe. In short, A can follow the Lewisian pattern of accommodation:

> If at time *t* something is said that requires component s_n of conversational score to have a value in the range *r* if what is said is to be true, or otherwise acceptable; and if s_n does not have a value in the range *r* just before *t*; and if such-and-such further conditions hold; then at *t* the score-component s_n takes some value in the range *r*. (Lewis, 1979: 347)

Alternatively, A can recognize that B's utterance is intended as ironic, but refuse to accommodate its missing presupposition. For instance, he can respond by uttering sentence (11) and thereby explicate (Sbisà, 1999; cf. Langton, 2018, and Witek 2021) what is presupposed by the felicity of the ironic utterance of (10). In other words, A can signal that condition (C_4) is not satisfied and *block* its accommodation (Langton, 2018). Even though B utters sentence (10) with an easily recognizable ironic intention, A can render her purported act infelicitous. It is possible, because contextual availability is a social fact.

One can object that the model offered in Section 4 fails to present ironic utterances as *essentially* social actions, since the proposed conditions are, first and foremost, conditions on the speaker; that is to say, one can assume that social speech acts are acts whose felicity conditions put restrictions on both the speaker and her audience.[14] It is instructive to stress, however, that in this paper I adopt a more complex understanding of the social character of a practice. More specifically, what I have in mind when I claim that ironizing is an essentially social practice are the following three ideas: first, ironic utterances are acts done by invoking a certain socially constituted procedure; second, the procedure is parasitic on socially accepted conventions and mechanisms of illocutionary interaction; third, what the felicity of an act of ironizing presupposes is contextual availability construed as a social fact.

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[14] I am grateful to one of the reviewers for making this point. One can also stipulate that a given speech act is social if and only if it takes effect by modifying the nexus of interpersonal relations — which can but do not have to be normative (see Marsili and Green 2021) — between the speaker, the hearer, and possible other relevant social agents.

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