

A pragmatic account of using and realising irony in public service announcements: A relevance-theoretic approach*

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Kim, Dae-Young. 2021. A pragmatic account of using and realising irony in public service announcements: A relevance-theoretic approach. *Linguistic Research* 38(3): 537-565. The purpose of this paper is to make a pragmatic account of irony; particularly both sarcastic/non-sarcastic irony used and realised in public service announcements (i.e., PSAs) within a relevance-theoretic framework. As pointed out in Huang (2015: 163), traditionally irony has been known as ‘a figure of speech in which one thing is said but the opposite is meant by the speaker’. With reference to this point, by using sarcastic irony, the speaker may reprimand or sneer at other’s fault, bad attitude or wrong way of thinking in an indirect way; sometimes, deplore an irrecoverable situation which he/she cannot accept (Sperber and Wilson 1995). On the other hand, however, the speaker may also use (non-sarcastic) irony in order to humorously praise or encourage other person’s merit or achievement (Gibbs 1986; Barbe 1995; Kreuz 1996; Lee 2002). Besides these points, beyond blaming/ridiculing other’s fault or praising other’s merit/achievement, irony can also be used in another way: enlightening or educating the public particularly in PSAs. Irony used in PSAs makes a contribution to guiding people to practise or not to practise the specific values, behaviours and so on. Focusing on this point, by analysing the real cases of irony use shown in PSAs, this paper verifies that all kinds of irony can effectively be explained by a single principle of relevance, instead of other pragmatic approaches (e.g., Grice 1975; Leech 1983), which require to mobilise various maxims. By doing that, this approach may pursue a linguistic economy and contribute to explanatory extendability of relevance theory. (Gyeongsang National University)

Keywords public service announcements (PSAs), (sarcastic/non-sarcastic) irony, communication, principle of relevance, use/mention distinction, echoic mentioning + rejection or dissociation, cognitive effect

1. Introduction

Within a theoretical boundary of ‘principle of relevance’ holding that “every act of inferential communication communicates a presumption its own optimal relevance

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(Sperber and Wilson 1995: 260)”, this paper aims to make pragmatic accounts of 1) linguistic characteristics of verbal irony which is one of the figurative language mechanisms most frequently used in our ordinary language life, 2) how it is realised by a single principle of ‘relevance’ and 3) furthermore, how it works in the process of using our ordinary language. For doing these tasks, by examining and explaining some real cases of ironic utterances used in public service announcements (henceforth, PSAs) within a boundary of a pragmatic perspective (particularly, Relevance Theory, henceforth RT), this paper will clearly shows how verbal irony as a figurative language works in the process of our ordinary language communication.

2. The environment where irony works and its linguistic characteristics

With reference to the cognitive nature which irony has, according to Winner and Gardner (1993: 429-430), whereas other figurative languages such as metaphor or metonymy need the ability of grasping conceptual similarities or extendability between two different entities or concepts (i.e., A and B) in the process of interpreting them, as irony generally exhibits the utterance or the expression which are completely opposite to the speaker’s real intention, it requires the hearer to have the ability of figuring out other’s genuine thought or intention. For this reason, irony is essentially different from other figurative languages such as metaphor or metonymy, in terms of its linguistic nature.

In general, an ordinary language speaker uses irony, which means the exact opposite of what he/she really thinks, when he/she intends to blame or ridicule other person’s wrong way of thinking, attitude, fault and so on, or when he/she feels discouraged or disappointed in the situation with which he/she is faced, and wants to indirectly expresses it. For example, suppose that a mother talks to herself as follows in a very sarcastic tone when she finds the situation where her daughter had taken out her luxurious bag without any permission, and entirely spoiled it:

- (1) How gorgeous! It couldn’t be better. My daughter always lives up to my expectation. Isn’t she lovely? I’m proud of her!

The mother who says (1) intends not to encourage or praise her daughter’s reckless

behaviour but to indirectly rebuke it; so the mother's utterance is a typical case of sarcastic irony use. At the same time, it can be seen that the mother who says (1) shows her emotion of resignedness or lamentation toward this irrecoverable situation by using sarcastic irony.

However, not always irony is used only by that sarcastic purpose. According to Leech (1983), Clark and Gerrig (1984), Kreuz and Glucksberg (1989), Dews, Kaplan and Winner (1995), Barbe (1995), Culpeper (1996, 2011), Jorgensen (1996), and Lee (2002), Kim (2019), irony can also be used as the communicators' intentional discourse strategy whose purpose is to humorously encourage/praise other's merit or achievement, to save other's face, or to make a social intimacy by using a light joke of it.¹ In relation to this point, the following example (2) can be interpreted as a case of non-sarcastic irony (i.e., genteel irony) use:

- (2) (There is a student who has frequently won scholarships for being at the top of the whole school. One day, when he says to his father that he won another scholarship for being a top student at his school once again, his father is very happy but says to his son as follows in a very brusque tone):

What? You won another scholarship for being a top student at your school once again? Oh, my goodness! When on earth can I enjoy an opportunity to pay tuition fees for my son like other fathers do? Even though all I have is money, you are so selfish and unfilial that you don't give me any chance to do it!

Actually, in (2) the father practises irony of non-sarcastic purpose in that he speaks the exact opposite of his real ideas in a very blunt tone, although he is not only greatly happy inside, but also very proud of what his son has achieved. In this case, there is no victim or target of 'reproach, contempt or ridicule' accompanied with irony of sarcastic purpose, but that of 'encouragement or praise' instead.

If so, how does irony work in a public communication of persuasion such as PSAs? For clearly answering this question, it is necessary to know what 'advertisement' is.

1 Similarly, Yoon (2014: 203) holds that irony with humour can be used as an 'ice-breaker' whose purpose is to remove any solemnity or seriousness from the situation; she calls it "witticism and lightheartedness".

Advertisements are divided into these two types, according to their final goals which they are oriented to: commercial advertisements and public service announcements (i.e., PSAs). First of all, looking at the definition and characteristics of a commercial advertisement, we can see below:

- (3) Advertising is the non-personal communication of information usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature about products, services or idea by identified sponsors through the various media.

(Bovée and Arens 1992: 7)

And the definition and the characteristics of PSAs are as follows:

- (4) PSAs aim to reform national consciousness for the development of society/ community on the basis of human respect, to focus on all social issues by the public persuasive communication (i.e., advertising), to change the people's attitude toward the public interest, and humanism, being public, pan-nationality, non-profitability and non-political motivation belong to their basic ideology.²

In relation to the definitions/characteristics of PSAs shown in (4), according to Kotler and Roberto (1989), PSAs can be viewed as a type of 'social marketing', and their main subjects (e.g., generally the central government or public institutions) which pursue the social changes aim to guide the accepters (i.e., the public or people) to practise some specific values, attitudes or behaviours, or to rectify or to renounce them. Judging from this point, both commercial advertisements and PSAs share a common point, in that both of them are the public communication for 'persuasion'.

However, in spite of the common point between these two, seen from the viewpoint of 'use/implementation of irony' as the topic of this paper, there exists a crucial difference between them. A commercial advertisement sets its ultimate goal on persuading consumers to purchase the advertiser's products, services or ideas by showing them the reason(s) why they should buy the 'specific' advertiser's (or company's) 'specific' products, services or ideas. For this reason, if irony is used in a commercial

² This definition of PSAs is from kobaco webpage (i.e., Korea Broadcast Advertising Corporation (https://www.kobaco.co.kr/site/main/content/what_public_ad)), and this is my translation.

advertisement, its meaning that is finally conveyed to consumers should be positive. Thus, sarcastic irony which is to finally convey negative meaning(s) to the consumers can hardly be used in commercial advertisements. When it appears in a commercial advertisement, although its superficial meaning starts in a positive frame of 'praise' or 'encouragement' toward its 'target', its final messages are to contain negative meanings such as 'ridicule, reproach, scorn or self-deprecation'. So, if sarcastic irony is used in a commercial advertisement, it might bring about grossly ill effects to marketing itself, let alone sales increase. Paying attention to this point, Lagerwerf (2007) shows the correlation between sarcastic irony (i.e., sarcasm) and commercial advertisements as follows:

- (5) Sarcasm cannot be used in commercial advertising; the purpose of sarcasm is negative, whereas commercial advertising has the positive informational intention of having people buy a product.

(Lagerwerf 2007: 1708)

For this reason, non-sarcastic irony is generally used in commercial advertisements. Unlike sarcastic irony, although the superficial meaning of non-sarcastic irony appears in a negative frame at the outset, its final meaning that the advertiser really intends to convey to consumers always comes on its follow-up utterance, context or background setting which holds the message working in a positive frame. Recalling this point, consider the following example given in (6):

- (6) This restaurant is the second most tasty in the world.³
(The most tasty dish is what your mother makes.)

(6) is the advertising copy attached on the wall of a very popular Korean restaurant in Seoul, and it can be regarded as a case of ironic utterance, in that it overturns people's common sense or belief that 'there is no advertiser self-downgrades the quality and the value of his products, services or ideas'. Here, as what the advertiser really intends by using this is not to blame/ridicule other's mistake/fault but to attract the attention of passive customers on the one hand, and to give prominence to the merits of his product

3 This is my translation.

or service, or his positive policy/attitude toward them on the other hand, this is not the case of sarcastic irony but that of non-sarcastic one. In other words, although the ironic advertising copy in (6) starts in a negative frame (i.e., ‘the second most tasty in the world’)⁴ at first, its follow-up utterance (i.e., “The most tasty dish is what your mother makes”) blocks the customers from misunderstanding the advertiser’s real intention, and shows the reason why they should choose the specific restaurant. That is, whether or not the food served by a particular restaurant is delicious is judged by the customers, not the owner. So, if the advertiser uses a literal advertising copy praising himself (e.g., “Only the food served by my restaurant is the best in the world”), it might rather bring about a counterproductive effect that could antagonise the customers. Accordingly, the speaker of (6) intentionally lowers himself by selecting non-sarcastic irony, which practises the virtue of humility, and by this he/she uses a discourse strategy that seeks to win sympathy and trust from the customers.⁵

If so, how is irony used/realised in PSAs? Unlike sarcastic irony can hardly be used in commercial advertisements, both sarcastic irony and non-sarcastic one can be used in PSAs, according to the given situation. PSAs are distinguished from commercial advertisements in that the former pursues the public interests without aiming to promote the sales of the advertiser’s specific products or services, or to publicize a particular company, and because of this point, the subject (i.e., the advertiser) who sends out PSAs may selectively use sarcastic irony as well as non-sarcastic one in accordance with the purpose and the situation of his utterance. In other words, the purpose of PSAs is, neither to condemn/ridicule other’s mistake or fault nor to humorously praise/encourage his merit or achievement, but to guide the public to practise some specific values/behaviours or not to do them by educating and enlightening people. So PSAs are different from commercial advertisements which have only one goal of marketing, in that the intention point of PSAs is open to both sides; and this point enables irony use in PSAs to have its flexibility.

Since Sperber and Wilson (1981), the pragmatic studies of examining irony use and its inferential process in everyday communication by RT have actively led by many pragmaticians who stand by the notion of ‘relevance’ such as Wilson and Sperber (1992,

4 In a world where only the first place is remembered, ‘second place’ can be considered negative.

5 This aspect of irony utterance can be explained by ‘the Principle of Politeness (PP)’ and ‘Modesty Maxim ((a) Minimize praise of *self* [(b) Maximize dispraise of *self*])’ which is one of the submaxims in PP given by Leech (1983: 132).

2012), Sperber and Wilson (1995), Wilson (2013), Clark (2013), Curcó (2000), Piskorska (2014), Lee (2002) and so on.

However, although Relevance Theorists such as Wilson and Sperber (1992) and Sperber and Wilson (1981, 1995) have mainly focused on explaining irony of sarcastic purpose, they have relatively neglected treating another case (i.e. irony of non-sarcastic purpose) within the RT framework. Of course, even though Wilson and Sperber (2012) proposes the possibility of dealing with it by RT, it should be noted that concretely verifying this presumption by a real case study is a separate step. Accordingly, this paper is to strengthen Wilson and Sperber (2012)'s theoretical credibility by examining some real cases of non-sarcastic irony use in PSAs within the RT framework. In other words, as confirmed by the cases of (2) and (6), ordinary language users not always use irony because of sarcastic motive; they often use it for non-sarcastic intention as well. Furthermore, when irony is used to achieve non-sarcastic purpose, but if it works in the discourse of pursuing public interests such as PSAs, the range of its function can be extended to the third motive of 'educating or enlightening the public' beyond its original dimension of 'praising or encouraging other'.⁶

Focusing on this point, this paper verifies that both sarcastic irony and non-sarcastic one can effectively be explained by a single principle of relevance through analysing some real cases of irony used in PSAs, instead of other pragmatic approaches such as Grice (1975) or Leech (1983), which require to mobilise various principles or maxims. Therefore, this work might be meaningful because it shows that how RT can also explain irony used in a pragmatic environment of social communication like PSAs.

For doing this task, I briefly survey how the previous pragmatic studies including RT

6 To this viewpoint, some people might raise an objection, based on this wrong assumption: 'All types of irony use are ultimately connected to educating or enlightening other people, whatever they may be; so this point of view on irony is not novel'. However, this is nothing but a fallacy of hasty generalization. Of course, sometimes irony use in personal communication could be connected to educating or enlightening other people, according to the hearer's different interpretations; but not always it is correct. For instance, a sarcastic irony use by the hero of a Korean novel, *a lucky day* written by Hyun, Jingon (i.e., "What a lucky day it was!") has nothing to do with 'educating or enlightening other people', because the speaker just sneers at his unlucky situation by using this sarcastic irony. Additionally, even in the case of non-sarcastic irony use, if it is used to make social intimacy with other people (e.g., "OK, I got it, you fucking bastard!"), this irony based on the notion of 'impoliteness' (Culpeper 1996, 2011) cannot be connected to 'educating or enlightening other people'. Moreover, as non-sarcastic irony shown in social communication such as PSAs is used to pursue the public interest, its purpose is focused on 'educating or enlightening other people' from the outset, unlike that in personal communication can extend its function from 'humorously praising or encouraging other's merit/achievement' to 'educating or enlightening other people', in accordance with the hearer's different interpretations.

have treated irony in chapter 3, and I analyse some real cases of irony use shown in PSAs in chapter 4. Finally, I discuss the pragmatic entailment suggested by this study.

3. Reviewing the previous pragmatic studies treating irony

3.1 (Neo-)Griceans' notion of 'inappropriateness' and irony

Since Grice (1975), who opened a new horizon for pragmatic study of irony, set the linguistic nature of irony as 'a type of conversationally implicated meaning' which occurs when 'Maxim of Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true' is blatantly violated or flouted, irony has been viewed as 'figurative language mechanism anomalously used, being deviant from the range of natural language use'.

However, in relation to defining and explaining irony, there are two explanatory lacunae in the Gricean theory. First, although metaphor and metonymy are also figurative language mechanisms violating Maxim of Quality, Grice's theory on irony does not present any particular and further explanation on how they are distinguished from irony. Second, Grice's theory on irony cannot explicate why an utterance is interpreted as irony, even though it rather observes Maxim of Quality. In relation to the second lacuna, consider the following example (7):

- (7) (Under the scorching heat in which the crops are being burned down, one farmer says this in a very sighing tone.)

Um ... It seems to be sunny.

Explaining (7) on the basis of the viewpoint in Sperber and Wilson (1981), although the farmer's utterance in (7) does not violate Maxim of Quality, it can also be interpreted as irony; namely, by using this sarcastic irony, the farmer sneers at his hopeless condition where he might entirely spoil his farming because of extremely scorching heat. This point means that Maxim of Quality, which works as an essential criterion for judging whether an utterance is irony or not, established in Grice (1975) cannot be the necessary and sufficient condition for being irony. Eventually, although Grice's theory on irony shows just a very basic criterion for identifying irony, it cannot be a constant and reliable

approach which effectively explains how irony is used and interpreted.

Some neo-Griceans such as Attardo (2000) and Largerwerf (2007), who succeed to the Gricean approach to irony and concentrate on more sophisticatedly refining it, set the notion of 'inappropriateness' as a starting point of interpreting figurative languages including irony, which is developed on the basis of the notion of 'Maxim of Quality'. For instance, Largerwerf (2007: 1705) holds that "if the most salient meaning of an utterance is considered awkward in the context, the interpretation process should start all over again. In the renewed interpretation, the hearer may assume that humor, metaphor, or other not solely informative intentions are involved".

However, the following example (8) shows that even 'inappropriateness' cannot be the necessary and sufficient condition for being irony or recognising it, either:

(8) I love children who keep their rooms clean. (Utsumi 2000: 1780)

According to Utsumi (2000), if a mother finds that her son excessively made his room messy, and utters (8) instead of saying "This room is totally clean", the mother's utterance does not implicate 'I do not love children who keep their room clean' or 'I love children who keep their rooms messy', but 'I want my son to always keep his room clean'. Thus, Utsumi (2000) holds that unlike Grice's viewpoint (i.e., 'the literal meaning of an ironic utterance is not true and it conveys a directly opposite meaning'), the literal meaning of (8) is also true but still ironic because it is uttered in an 'ironic environment'. The notion of 'ironic environment' is defined as follows:

- (9) i) The speaker has a certain expectation E at time t_0 .
ii) The speaker's expectation E fails (i.e., E is incongruous with reality) at time t_1 .
iii) The speaker has a negative emotional attitude (e.g., disappointment, anger, reproach, envy) toward the incongruity between what is expected and what actually is case.

(Utsumi 2000: 1783)

In other words, as the utterance in (8) is the mother's real thought relevant to the situation with which she is confronted, there is nothing awkward in the context, and therefore it has nothing to do with 'inappropriateness'. In spite of these points, however,

the reason why the mother's utterance can still be seen ironic is that those who interpret it might recall the common idea of 'a good child's virtue is always keeping his room clean', and they regard it as the mother's ironic utterance which taunts about her son's wrong attitude of leaving his room in a mess without cleaning it up.

Because of these explanatory lacunae in the (neo-)Gricean approaches to irony, some relevance theorists including Sperber and Wilson (1995) proposes an alternative viewpoint on studying it, which is based on the notion of 'echoic mentioning' instead of 'Maxim of Quality'. In other words, when an utterance X can both literally and ironically be interpreted at the same time, whereas Grice (1975) views it as the relation of 'opposition' between 'literal meaning' and 'the speaker's intended meaning', RT holds that these are placed somewhere in the same spectrum altogether, and one of them is selected by the hearer/reader in the context for achieving 'optimal relevance', without seeing it as the relation of 'opposition'. Thus, in RT it is not necessary to make a clear distinction between literal meaning and figurative meaning such as metaphor or irony. So if RT is chosen in order to explain irony, instead of Grice (1975), various conversational maxims given by Grice (1975) are not necessary, and it is possible to explain all about irony by a single principle of relevance. This enables us to seek linguistic economy; and this paper develops its explanation on irony use/realisation, following the stance of Sperber and Wilson (1981, 1995), but not that of Grice (1975). In the next section, I briefly survey how irony is treated within RT framework, and establish an alternative explanatory foundation by RT.

3.2 Principle of relevance and irony

3.2.1 How the notion of 'relevance' is explained?

Principle of relevance is based on two sub-principles as follows:

(10) Cognitive Principle of Relevance:

Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance.

(Sperber and Wilson 1995: 260)

(11) Communicative Principle of Relevance:

Every act of inferential communication communicates a presumption of its

own optimal relevance.

(Sperber and Wilson 1995: 260)

Moreover, Sperber and Wilson (1995) holds that the criterion for judging whether an utterance is relevant or less relevant relies on these two concepts: 'cognitive effect' and 'processing effort'. 'Cognitive effect' is achieved when the new information given by an utterance 1) rather strengthens the original old information, or 2) replaces it with another, or 3) elicits the third conclusion by the interaction between those two. Thus, cognitive effect means 'conclusive information drawn by considering the information in the utterance and the context': 'contextual implication'. With reference to this point, Sperber and Wilson (1995) sets forth their views as follows:

- (12) Contextual implications are contextual effects: they result from a crucial interaction between new and old information as premises in a synthetic implication.

(Sperber and Wilson 1995: 109)

Accordingly, on the basis of the claim in Sperber and Wilson (1995), the equation of 'cognitive effect = contextual implication = contextual effect' can be elicited. In relation to this point, Sperber and Wilson (1995) shows the viewpoint as follows:

- (13) Having contextual effects is a necessary condition for relevance, and that other things being equal, the greater the contextual effects, the greater the relevance.

(Sperber and Wilson 1995: 119)

However, on the other hand, if processing effort is bigger than contextual effect (i.e., cognitive effect), relevance of communication is reduced because of this, and the possibility of successful communication is decreased. In other words, if the speaker utters something absurd entirely irrelevant to the given situation (i.e., mumbo-jumbo, nonsense), as the hearer has to spend more processing effort treating that odd utterance, the relevance of the utterance is diminished. For example, suppose that Tom was invited to the dinner party hosted by Jerry, and asks his friend Spike what dish Jerry is going to prepare for tonight's party. In response to Tom's question, Spike could come up with

the following answers:

- (14) a. Jerry is going to cook some fish for tonight's party.
- b. Jerry is going to cook some rainbow trouts for tonight's party.
- c. Only one of following statements can be the answer: Jerry is going to cook some rainbow trouts for tonight's party or the right answer to multiplying 378 by 5 is not 1798.25.

In fact, although all of the utterances by Spike can be regarded as relevant answers to Tom's question, (14b) has more relevance to his question than (14a) or (14c). As the intention of Tom's question is to concretely know what dish Jerry is going to cook for tonight's dinner party, (14a) is not informative enough about Tom's question; so it is less relevant. In addition, (14c) is logically the same as (14b) and yields the same cognitive effect, but (14c) makes Tom spend more processing effort treating it than (14b); so (14c) is also less relevant than (14b). According to RT, the speaker should not make the hearer spend unnecessary processing effort without any reason. Because, if the hearer is to spend unnecessary processing effort dealing with irrelevant or uneconomic information, it might prevent him from effectively understanding the speaker's real intention. Thus, in the process of the hearer's treating the utterance, 'optimal relevance' can be achieved when processing effort is in minimum while cognitive effect is in maximum.

If so, when the hearer interprets an utterance, by what ground is his inference fulfilled? To answer this question, RT proposes a new concept of 'cognitive environment' based on the notion of 'manifestness':

- (15) A fact is manifest to an individual at a given time if and only if he is capable at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representation as true or probably true.
- (16) A cognitive environment of an individual is a set of facts that are manifest to him.

(Sperber and Wilson 1995: 39)

In other words, cognitive environment means a 'vast concept which includes not only the facts already known by those involved in communication, but also all of the assumptions/presumptions embedded in their cognition base'.⁷

In addition, according to RT, the context is not given or set from the outset but chosen by communicators, whenever they seek optimal relevance in the process of interpreting the utterance. Once the context is chosen by the communicators who pursue optimal relevance, contextual effect (or cognitive effect) is established in their cognitive environment; and this point explains ordinary language users' cognitive ability which enables them to set the direction of interpretation in accordance with whether the specific expression/utterance X appears in daily conversations, is used in literary works such as poems or novels, or is used in public communication such as advertisements.

Thus far, I have briefly discussed the theoretical gist of RT. In the following section, I explore how RT, based on 'a single principle of relevance', deals with irony.

3.2.2 The linguistic nature of irony seen from the RT approach: 'echoic mentioning + rejection or dissociation'

RT rejects the Gricean approach to irony, which views it as the output from blatantly violating or flouting Maxim of Quality. Instead, RT explains irony by employing the notions of 'use/mention distinction' and 'echoic mentioning'. Relevance theorists such as Sperber and Wilson (1981, 1995), Wilson (2013), and Clark (2013) hold that the linguistic nature of irony is 'mention', which is opposite to 'use'. For the purpose of understanding the difference between those two, consider the following example (17):

- (17) a. Don't go breaking my heart.
b. In 1976, Elton John and Kiki Dee said, "Don't go breaking my heart".

While "Don't go breaking my heart" in (17a) is 'used' by the speaker in order to let the hearer know what the speaker really believes or thinks, that in (17b) is just 'mentioned', not used by the speaker. In other words, the speaker who utters the embedded sentence in (17b) does not have to take any responsibility for the speech act of it. From the RT viewpoint, the speaker who utters irony does not literally 'use' what he said but 'mention' it. Here, the speaker establishes an ironic utterance by echoic-mentioning other's thought, attitude, opinion or behaviour which he does not agree with, or the reality or the situation that he cannot accept, and rejecting them or

7 This is my definition on 'cognitive environment', based on that in Sperber and Wilson (1995).

dissociating himself from them. Thus, the linguistic nature of irony defined by RT can be summarised as ‘echoic mentioning + rejection or dissociation’, and in relation to this point, Sperber and Wilson (1995: 239) shows this claim: “the speaker dissociates herself from the opinion echoed and indicates that she does not hold it herself”. In other words, the speaker who does not literally use his utterance but ironically mention it intends to show that the hearer’s idea, attitude or behaviour is far from our reality, or to indirectly convey how implausible they are. In order to more concretely grasp in what condition irony works, consider the following example (18):

- (18) (In a conversation between a father and his son who brought his report which avoids failing with a narrow margin)

Son: (In a tone of playing the baby)

Daddy, isn’t this enough mark? So buy me game machine.

Father: (In a very ridiculous tone)

Daddy, isn’t this enough mark? So buy me game machine?

(In a very angry face and tone)

God damn it! If you get “this enough mark” once again, you are to be the last in the whole school. I feel sick of your shamelessness, and I can never take it any more!

Analysing the conversation in (18) on the basis of the RT approach to irony, whereas the son uses “Daddy, isn’t this enough mark? So buy me game machine”, the father just mentions the same expression. In other words, although the father’s utterance is the output of copying the same utterance used by his son, it should be regarded as the father’s intended meaning reinterpreted and reproduced in the father’s mind, so the meaning of the father’s utterance in (18) is completely different from that of the son’s. RT views this phenomenon as ‘metarepresentation’. According to Sperber (2000: 119-120), the father’s utterance in (18) is not just a description of the situation in the specific event, but the father’s mental representation toward the specific contents shown by it. So, if the third person near the father and the son accidentally hears the father’s utterance in (18), he might realise that the father is scolding or blaming his son for showing such an irresponsible and complacent attitude, rather than being sorry for his fault and reflecting on this serious situation by it. In other words, the father shows a case

of sarcastic irony use ridiculing or blaming his son's wrong attitude/thought by 1) copying his son's antecedent utterance, 2) echoic-mentioning the proposition inside his son's utterance which he cannot/does not agree with or accept (e.g., 'although I barely avoided failing, I have no problem at all' or 'You don't have to take it seriously although I got terrible grades'), and 3) rejecting it or dissociating himself from it.

Then can irony be set up only when the speaker copies other's previous utterance, and reutters it? According to RT, irony is often realised without copying other's antecedent utterance. With reference to this point, consider the following conversation between Tom and Jerry:

(19) Tom: Spike totally spoiled your new Adidas track suit, playing rugby.

Jerry: (in a very ridiculous tone) Terrific! Spike always meets my wishes.

Prima facie, unlike the father's utterance in (18), as Jerry's utterance in (19) directly involves neither copying Tom's antecedent utterance nor echoic-mentioning the proposition in it, it seems to be out of the original explanatory domain with regard to the linguistic nature of irony that RT maintains. However, Sperber and Wilson (1998) hold that all ironic utterances are always accompanied with 'echoic mentioning',⁸ and consistently explain this challenge by broadening its scope to encompass the world's common sense, social norms and universal beliefs, including the proposition in other's antecedent utterance or even the implicature conveyed by it.

Reinterpreting Jerry's utterance of sarcastic irony in (19), following the viewpoint in Sperber and Wilson (1998), although the speaker, Jerry does not copy Tom's antecedent utterance, he indirectly reveals his emotion of anger/dissatisfaction that 'I do not think that what Spike did is right' or 'Spike is an incorrigible trouble maker' by echoic-mentioning the world's universal beliefs or common senses that 'there is nobody that likes his belonging to be damaged' or 'everybody wants his property to be kept intact', and rejecting them or dissociates himself from them.

Furthermore, it is also possible to see that by uttering sarcastic irony in (19), Jerry

8 In relation to this viewpoint in Sperber and Wilson(1998), some pragmaticians such as Utsumi (2000), Seto (1998) or Giora (1995) show this refutation: it is too general to argue that all types of irony are echoic. According to them, even though the scope of echoic mentioning can be extended, following Sperber and Wilson's point of view on irony, there are no clear criteria for how far or how much it should be extended. Thus, this matter is still controversial and on-going topic in the relevant area, and needs separate discussions.

tries to suppress his uncomfortable feeling, instead of directly expressing his anger, disappointment or resignation toward this irrecoverable situation in front of the hearer, Tom. At the same time, this helps Jerry to forestall any potential conflicts or collisions with Spike that may occur in the near future.

4. Case studies

4.1 Using and realising irony in public service announcements(PSAs)

In this chapter, the real cases of irony use shown in PSAs are to be examined by the RT approach, which has been discussed so far. As already mentioned in chapter 2, unlike commercial advertisements where sarcastic irony hardly occurs, sarcastic irony as well as non-sarcastic irony can also be used in PSAs, according to the relevant contexts. Whereas sarcastic irony can be used when the subject (i.e. the advertiser) intends to educate or enlighten the accepters (e.g., the public) to rectify or not to practise some incorrect values/behaviours such as drunk-driving, drug use, suicide, child abuse, domestic violence, insensitivity to safety and so on, non-sarcastic irony can be used in the contexts which encourage to practise positive values/behaviours (e.g., environmental protection, blood donation, tree planting, helping the needy, caring for others, *etc.*).⁹ In other words, if the subject's intention is to warn that when the accepters practise a value/behaviour X or not, it might bring about negative consequences to them, and by this to guide them to correct the value/behaviour X or not to practise it, it can be more effective to convey the subject's message to the accepters by using sarcastic irony. As discussed in chapter 2, when sarcastic irony is used in a PSA, the superficial meaning of sarcastic irony is shown in a positive frame at the outset, but it ends in a negative implicated meaning after all; so it performs illocutionary act of 'warning' toward the

9 However, this is just a general case, but according to the RT approach (particularly, Sperber and Wilson 1995), the subject of a PSA who wants to achieve optimal relevance is always concerned about how his intention to communicate to the public can more effectively be expressed, and he selects or manipulates the ostensive stimuli (e.g., vocabulary, expression, gesture, *etc.*), which are viewed effective in conveying his message to them, in accordance with the situation to which he belongs. On the other hand, the hearer (here, the accepters of PSAs) who interprets the speaker's message chooses the context where optimal relevance is achieved, the hearer grasps the speaker's intention, considering cognitive effect which can be yielded from the cognitive environment in which both of them are. At this time, it is assumed that the hearer knows in what direction he should interpret the utterance in order to recognise the speaker's real intention.

accepters. In relation to this point, consider the following example (20):

(20) A Rod of 'Love'

(However, for a child who undergoes this, it could be a terrible violence and maltreatment which fatally damages his/her body and mind.)

Suppose that a PSA like (20), which aims to prevent child abuse, appears with a photo of a rod/cane and a bruised child on mass media. As 'a rod of love' has traditionally been viewed as a positive value throughout all times and places,¹⁰ it can be seen that (20) is presented in a positive frame. However, the final conclusion that is elicited by its follow-up utterance and background scene is something negative such as 'violence' or 'maltreatment'. Analysing (20) from the viewpoint of RT, the speaker who utters (20) sets up sarcastic irony by echoic-mentioning the fixed idea which he regards as something undesirable and does not agree with (e.g., 'corporal punishment is a good value/behaviour'), and rejecting it or dissociating himself from it. Moreover, the implicated meaning that this ironic utterance finally conveys warns that 'the behaviour of trying to serve the child with a rod of love could ruin his/her body and mind', and by this the subject guides the accepters to stop or not to practise such a wrong idea/behaviour. Additionally, although the utterance in (20) can be seen as a case of sarcastic irony in that it blames or ridicules the undesirable fixed idea in the world (i.e., 'corporal punishment is a good value/behaviour'), this case of sarcastic irony use in a PSA is somewhat different from that in personal communication, in that it is difficult to clearly point out the specific victim/target which the irony aims at.

If so, how is non-sarcastic irony in PSAs used/realised? Unlike that in personal communication is used to humorously praise or encourage other's merit/achievement, or to build up social intimacy based on the pragmatic notion of 'impoliteness' (Culpeper 1996, 2011), that in PSAs is used to guide/encourage unspecific and passive accepters to practise some desirable values or actions required in the society, by educating or enlightening them, rather than being used only to praise others. For this reason, while non-sarcastic irony in personal communication whose purpose is to praise/encourage other's merit or achievement generally accompanies its specific and clear target(s), that in PSAs as a type of social communication cannot clearly point out its specific target(s).

10 "He that spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him". (Proverbs 13: 24)

This point does not mean that there is no target aimed at by non-sarcastic irony used in PSAs, but that its target(s) can hardly be specified, due to the nature of PSAs which pursues the public interests for many and unspecified persons, not works in personal/private level.¹¹ In addition, while non-sarcastic irony in personal communication appears in a negative frame and ends in a positive conclusion, that in PSAs occurs with a preposterous story overturning ordinary people's common senses/beliefs, and draws a positive conclusion, rather than appears in a negative frame.

Then, how can RT encompass this aspect of non-sarcastic irony use by its theoretical frame? According to Sperber and Wilson (1981, 1995), the nature of all types of irony use can be generalized as this pattern of 'echoic mentioning + rejection or dissociation'. If this stance is accepted, it should be possible to assume that not only the proposition positively represented toward an object X but also that negatively represented toward it can be treated by 'echoic mentioning' in the same way. With reference to this point, although Wilson and Sperber (2012) already opened the explanatory possibility for non-sarcastic irony by RT, it is another step to concretely demonstrate how it is set up and interpreted in real cases. Therefore, this paper seeks to prove this point with practical case studies based on the RT approach. As discussed in sub-section 3.2.2, Sperber and Wilson (1981, 1995, 1998) and Wilson and Sperber (1992) define all types of irony as 'echoic mentioning + rejection or dissociation'. If we assume that echoic utterances may echo not only positive-attitude propositions toward something but also negative-attitude ones, other uses of irony (e.g. non-sarcastic irony or genteel irony) can also be included in the scope of Sperber and Wilson's 'echoic mentioning'.

Furthermore, this paper emphasizes that this same logic can also be applied to all the cases in which the target (i.e., addressee or recipient) aimed at by irony is obscure or not specific like in PSAs, and seeks more integrated and economic explanation on this matter. As setting up a relevance-theoretic account of non-sarcastic irony use, instead of employing various conversational maxims or principles set by (neo-)Griceans including Leech (1983), makes it possible to deal with all types of irony within the boundary of a single principle of relevance, this approach may contribute to increasing the theoretical expandability of RT and pursuing the explanatory economy.

11 This point means that whereas in general the specific addressee (or the recipient) of an ironic utterance in personal communication can easily be confirmed, that in public communication (i.e., PSAs) cannot.

4.1.1 Sarcastic irony use in a PSA

From now on, based on the previous overview regarding the linguistic nature of irony in PSAs, I develop a more detailed discussion on it through two real examples: sarcastic irony use and non-sarcastic irony use in Korean PSAs. First of all, Figure 1 is a PSA produced for the purpose of preventing safety accidents or criticizing people's insensitivity to safety:

(21) “Why worry? It’s safe”.

(Don’t be deluded by a lie of ‘inattention’. All safety accidents are caused by a trivial lie which deceives ‘myself’.)¹²

Figure 1 given below is a case of Korean PSAs based on multimodality, which simultaneously offers not only a visual stimulus representing a screw nail that sticks out of a pillar on a building construction site as Pinocchio’s nose which grows whenever he tells a lie but also a verbal stimulus as shown in (21).



Figure 1. Pinocchio's nose (Korea)¹³

12 This is my translation from Korean to English.

13 https://www.kobaco.co.kr/site/main/archive/advertising/5/1366?cp=1&pageSize=8&sortDirection=DESC&arcUse=true&arcCategory=5&metaCode1=print&metaCode2=psa002&metaCode3=psa002_007&adtManufactur

Judging the process of interpreting it from the accepters' position, based on the RT perspective, the following inferential process can be assumed:

- (22) a. Pinocchio, the liar, who appears on the PSA screen of Figure 1 says, "Why worry? It's safe" about this situation.
- b. This utterance argues that the situation given in Figure 1 is not dangerous at all.
- c. The speaker saying (21) practises/realises a case of sarcastic irony scolding or ridiculing safety ignorance of the general public, who seem to take it in stride, despite this potentially dangerous situation that could lead them to safety accidents.

According to the RT approach, the speaker echoic-mentions other people's wrong idea or claim that 'the condition where a screw nail protrudes out of a pillar is not dangerous at all', and rejecting it or dissociating himself from it. Here, the follow-up utterance (i.e., "Don't be deluded by a lie of 'inattention.' All safety accidents are caused by a trivial lie which deceives 'myself'") in (21) prevents the accepters from misunderstanding the subject's (i.e., the advertiser's) true intention; namely, the subject's real intention is shown in the follow-up utterance. Thus, (21) is a case of sarcastic irony use, which can effectively be explained by the RT approach. Additionally, in terms of cognitive effect, (21) can have a greater impact on the passive accepters, and make them remember the subject's message longer than when the same message is delivered to them in a literal way (e.g., "Let's all be careful lest any safety accidents should occur!"), due to its unexpectedness, inconsequentness and novelty which overturns people's universal ideas or common beliefs.¹⁴ This point accords with the subject's intention, and although the ironic utterance in (21) makes the accepters spend more processing effort treating it than a literal one, as cognitive effect which they enjoy may exceed their processing effort, it satisfies the expectation of optimal relevance.

4.1.2 Non-sarcastic irony use in a PSA

In 4.1.1, I discussed how sarcastic irony in a PSA is used and interpreted within the

eYear=&adtDefaultYear=false

14 The validity of this viewpoint can also be supported by Colston and O'Brien (2000).

RT frame. In this section, I analyse how non-sarcastic irony is used and interpreted within the same perspective. With reference to this topic, Figure 2 is a case of PSAs produced in English by Korea Broadcast Advertising Corporation (i.e., kobaco),¹⁵ of which purpose is to campaign for environmental protection. In Figure 2, a swan covered with oil residue or other pollutants on half of its body appears, which is swimming over dirty water where rubbish floats. (23) given below is composed on a slogan (i.e., “Let’s keep the swans white”) and its follow-up utterance:



Figure 2. Let's keep the swans white (Korea)¹⁶

(23) Let's keep the swans white.

Water is the basis for all life.

To preserve it is to preserve life.

We cannot exist in a world where the swans must swim in polluted

¹⁵ Korea Advertising Council is an affiliated company of kobaco, and these two use the same logo.

¹⁶ <https://www.kobaco.co.kr/site/main/archive/advertising/5/972?cp=51&pageSize=8&sortDirection=DESC&arcUse=true&arcCategory=5&metaCode1=print&adtDefaultYear=false>

waters.

Nature has protected us from the beginning of time.

Now it is our time to protect nature.

If the accepters see only the slogan (i.e., “Let’s keep the swans white”) given in (23) without any follow-up utterance, they could not recognise what the subject’s message which he really intends to convey to them means, or might misunderstand it. Accordingly, the follow-up utterance coming after the main slogan enables the accepters to realise that the goal of this PSA is not to merely suggest ‘Let’s keep the swans white’, but to broadly educate the public value of ‘environmental preservation’ to the public, and to ultimately pursue the public interests by this. Here, to say the slogan in (23) is to imply that ‘swans could not be white in some cases’, and it can be viewed as an ironic utterance, because it aims to convey another inferential meaning intended by the speaker, by overturning ordinary people’s common sense or belief that ‘all swans are white’.

However, for regarding this as an ironic utterance, there should be some premises that the truth value of the proposition that ‘all swans are white’ (which is seen very natural) is always true, and it is permanently guaranteed, or accepted by absolute majority with no doubt. Only under this condition, it is possible to say that the utterance in (23) overturns the universal truth or common sense in the world, and to claim that it can be set up as irony. In other words, if the truth value of the proposition that ‘all swans are white’ is not turned out to be true, or it is not agreed with by absolute majority, it might fundamentally be impossible to regard (23) as an ironic utterance and to develop the relevant discussion on it. In fact, sometimes it could be more difficult to verify or justify why something very natural X is very natural. This point reminds us of the notion of ‘falsifiability’ by Popper (2002, 2011). According to Popper (2002, 2011), the idea that ‘swans could not be white’ is the opposite possibility always open to the proposition that ‘all swans are white’, and the truth value of the proposition that ‘all swans are white’ can be true only until a black swan (or other non-white swan) is actually discovered. In other words, even though we have seen some white swans or more, according to the notion of ‘falsifiability’, it is not possible to assert that all swans are white. As all the swans that we have seen are white by accident, although we can assume a simple proposition that ‘all swans white’, the notion of ‘falsifiability’ suggests the possibility of ‘a black swan’, and if it is confirm that there exists even one black swan in the world, the proposition asserting “all swans are white” shall (logically at least) be false. For this

reason, according to the stance in Popper (2002, 2011), it should be seen that the truth value (T/F) of the proposition that ‘all swans are white’ cannot firmly be determined until a black (or other coloured) swan is discovered.¹⁷ However, in fact it is impossible to confirm whether or not all swans in the world might be white by a full investigation. Thus, the truth value of the proposition that ‘all swans are white’ can temporarily be viewed true only until a black swan (or other non-white swan) actually appears in the world. However, as there is no case that a black swan (or other non-white swan) actually appears in the world, it may safely be said that the proposition that ‘all swans are white’ can be seen as the truth or the knowledge that ordinary people universally accept, so there is room for interpreting the slogan in (23) as irony.

If so, does the idea embedded in the ironic utterance in (23) mean that some swans can be black with a change in the nature by generic mutations? The answer to this question that conveys “No” to us comes from the shape of the swan shown in Figure 2. Here, this is a temporary situation in which a swan can be exposed to oil residue or other pollutants from environmental pollution, resulting in blackening of its body surface.¹⁸ With reference to this point, it should be noted that the verb *keep* used in the utterance of “Let’s keep swans white” connotes this meaning that ‘unless an entity X continuously made attempts or endeavours Z to maintain a condition Y, the condition Y could not be maintained’, unlike the verb *be* asserts ‘the permanent nature of an entity X or the past/present fact(s) related to it’.

The discussion of ‘falsifiability’ in Popper (2002, 2011) is naturally connected to the notion of ‘cognitive environment’ in RT,¹⁹ which works as ordinary language users’ inferential ground. Here, discussing the philosophical notion of ‘falsifiability’ in order to interpret the slogan of (23) as irony is demarcating the inferential boundary of the communicators’ ‘cognitive environment’, where they are bound to the frame of the same way of thinking. Now, recall the notion of ‘cognitive environment’ given by Sperber and Wilson (1995):

17 From this point of view, claiming that ‘all swans are white’ is the same as asserting that ‘there is no *elixir vitae* in the world’. In other words, if somebody argues that ‘there is an elixir of life somewhere in the world’, most people might see it as an absurd falsehood; but in fact, ‘there is no *elixir vitae* in the world’ has not definitely been proved yet. Perhaps, although there exists an elixir of life somewhere in the world, somehow we have not been aware of its existence yet. If the elixir of life surely appears even tomorrow, the proposition that ‘there is no *elixir vitae* in the world’ becomes false at once.

18 Likewise, even if Donald Trump temporarily puts charcoal black on his face, his nature is that he is still and definitely white because of his generic traits.

19 This notion was already discussed in section 3.2.

- (24 = 15) A fact is manifest to an individual at a given time if and only if he is capable at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representation as true or probably true.
- (25 = 16) A cognitive environment of an individual is a set of facts that are manifest to him.

(Sperber and Wilson 1995: 39)

Therefore, for the slogan of the utterance in (23) to be viewed as a case of non-sarcastic irony use, and to be interpreted as the subject's intended meaning, this necessary condition should be satisfied: 'all communicators belong to the same cognitive environment where optimal relevance is achieved'.

Analysing the slogan of the utterance in (23) by the RT approach, for the speaker to say "Let's keep swans white" in (23) is to echoic-mention the common sense or knowledge of the public (i.e., 'all swans are white'), and to reject it or to dissociate himself from it; by this, an ironic utterance is set up.

Furthermore, the ironic utterance in (23) casts an allusive warning that 'someday we could not see white swans any more' by overturning the truth or the knowledge that 'all swans are white' which is very naturally accepted in the world. The allusion that 'someday we could not see white swans any more' is not the issue which ends in itself, but the warning which leads us to the implicated conclusion that 'our future could fatally be threatened by environmental pollution'. In other words, the implicated meaning of 'someday we could not see white swans any more' is the reason why we should protect our environment, and at the same time it works as the ground for the argumentative conclusion that '(therefore) we are to protect our environment', intended/set by the subject.

The slogan of the utterance in (23) can be seen as a case of non-sarcastic irony use, in that its purpose is not to blame or to ridicule other's fault/mistake. However, as this is used neither to humorously praise or encourage other's merit/achievement/performance nor to make social intimacy with others, it is different from other non-sarcastic irony uses; namely, the non-sarcastic irony in (23) aims to educate or to enlighten the public in order to seek the public interest from the outset, beyond the dimensions of blaming/ridiculing other's fault or praising/encouraging other's merit.

Here, the subject contemplates which one would be more effective in persuading the public between literal language and figurative one such as metaphor or irony, although

all of them convey the same message to the public. If the subject thinks that his intended message is likely to be misinterpreted by the accepters, he would send it to them just in a literal language. But if he calculates their cognitive and inferential ability, and determines that they are sufficiently reachable to a particular conclusion that he has set, he might choose figurative languages such as metaphor or irony. This point supports ordinary language users' cognitive ability, which enables them to choose the relevant context case by case, and to select or to manipulate their ostensive stimuli according to it.

If the subject chooses a figurative language such as metaphor or irony, instead of a literal one, in the process of producing his PSA, unlike the literal language directly conveying his message to the accepters, the figurative language indirectly doing it makes them wonder what on earth his message means by that, and makes it possible for them to enjoy the pleasure of realising something new by leaving a margin that they can judge and infer for themselves. In general, although the figurative language like irony used in PSAs makes the accepters spend more processing effort interpreting it than the literal one that conveys the same message to them, once it is interpreted by them, it brings about more cognitive effect in that the subject's message in it will last in their mind longer. Judging from the viewpoint of RT, this is in accord with the subject's intention, at the same time, the utterance satisfying the expectation of 'optimal relevance'.

5. Conclusion

Traditionally, the nature of irony has been regarded just as a mechanism of rhetorical trope, and as mentioned in Huang (2015), it has been known that the speaker who utters irony conveys the complete opposite of what is said. Here, the speaker sets up sarcastic irony of which purpose is to reproach or to make fun of other's fault/mistake/wrong attitude, or to indirectly express his emotion of lamentation toward the situation that he cannot accept.

However, sometimes the speaker uses irony of non-sarcastic purpose in order to humorously compliment other's merit or performance, or to make social intimacy with other people.

Beyond those purposes mentioned above, when irony is used in PSAs as a type of social/public communication, not as that of personal one, it performs the function of

persuading the public to practise some specific values/actions/ideas or not to do them, by educating or enlightening those who accept the PSAs. This nature of PSAs is in the same line with that of commercial advertisements, which aim to lead passive consumers to positively think about the advertiser's products or services, and to ultimately make the consumers to purchase them. Judging from this point, both commercial advertisements and PSAs share the common point with each other, in that all of them belong to the type of public communication for 'persuasion'.

However, since the goal of a commercial advertisement is to sell the advertiser's products or services, its conclusion should always be ended in a positive meaning; thus, sarcastic irony started in a positive frame but concluded in a negative meaning is hardly used in commercial advertisements. On the other hand, a PSA is distinguished from a commercial advertisement, in that the former aims to seek the public interest, not the advertiser's personal profit by selling his specific products or services to the consumers. Because of this point, the subject of PSAs may selectively uses not only non-sarcastic irony but also even sarcastic one in accordance with the purpose of his utterance and the situation where it comes.

In the process of producing a PSA, which one the subject (i.e., the speaker) chooses between a literal expression and irony, as a tool for delivering his message to the accepters (i.e., the hearers), and if he selects irony, which one he chooses between sarcastic irony and non-sarcastic one, depend upon his decision and choice, which expects his utterance to achieve optimal relevance in the situation to which he belongs. In other words, seen from the stance of RT (Sperber and Wilson 1995, Wilson and Sperber 2012, Clark 2013), the speaker who pursues optimal relevance chooses or manipulates his ostensive stimuli (e.g., words, expressions, gestures, tone, *etc.*) case by case, in accordance with the utterance situation, in order to satisfy the expectation of optimal relevance. In relation to this point, according to Colston and O'Brien (2000), irony enables the speaker's message to be conveyed to the hearer in more effective way than literal expressions do, by making the hearer enjoy more cognitive effect. In other words, if the subject's message in a PSA is conveyed not by a literal expression but by irony, the accepters should spend more processing effort treating it. Once the accepters interpret the subject's message by irony, however, it will remain unforgettable in their memory longer than that by a literal expression; this corresponds to the subject's intention, and his ironic utterance satisfies the expectation of optimal relevance.

So far RT has made a big contribution to examining the linguistic nature of irony

and explaining it; particularly, sarcastic irony. Furthermore, although it is true that Wilson and Sperber (2012) opened the possibility of effectively explaining non-sarcastic irony as well by the RT approach, examining how it is used and realised in a practical case (i.e., a PSA) is another story.

Accordingly, this paper verifies that non-sarcastic irony as well as sarcastic one can effectively be explained within the RT framework, by analysing the aspects of using and realising irony which works in some real cases of PSAs. Additionally, this paper pursues explanatory economy by examining both types of irony within a single principle of relevance; and it contributes to theoretical expandability of RT by strengthening its explanatory power.

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