

Joana Garmendia, *Irony*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2018, 166 pp.

Like other pragmatic phenomena, irony involves the retrieval of additional content above and beyond the conventional meaning of a sentence. However, unlike most pragmatic phenomena, irony involves a radical deviation from it. Garmendia's *Irony*—part of the *Key Topics in Semantics and Pragmatics* series for Cambridge University Press—provides a comprehensive survey of the pragmatics of verbal irony including among others the Gricean account of irony (Grice 1967a/89, 1967b/89), the relevance theoretic echoic account of irony (Sperber 1984; Sperber and Wilson 1981, 1998; Wilson 2006, 2009, 2013; Wilson and Sperber 1992, 2012), the pretense theory (Clark and Gerrig 1984) and her own asif-theory (Garmendia 2011, 2013, 2015). The book then presents the key debates in the field, including the existence of positive irony, which the clues of irony are or the relationship between irony, sarcasm and humor. It offers a series of well-brought examples and activities that allow the reader to engage with the topic, and further suggested reading that gives the reader a holistic approach to the pragmatics of verbal irony.

The author addresses these topics along 7 chapters. In chapter 1, Garmendia defines verbal irony and differentiates it from other forms of irony or related phenomena. In chapters 2–4, Garmendia introduces numerous theories of irony, highlighting their virtues and shortcomings before presenting her own view (sections 2.3.2 and 6.4). In chapter 5, the author gives a fine-grained explanation of what a speaker conveys in virtue of uttering an ironic utterance (a negative attitude) followed up in chapter 6 by an analysis of the cues ironic speakers normally use. In chapter 7, Garmendia touches upon the relationship between verbal irony and other closely related phenomena (i.e., sarcasm and humor).

In the first chapter, Garmendia differentiates verbal irony from situational and dramatic irony (and other close related phenomena as parody, satire or sarcasm) and distinguishes between rhetorical approaches and pragmatic approaches to irony. In so doing, she frames the subject matter of the book: clear-cut cases of verbal irony as intentional acts of communication analyzed from a pragmatic standpoint.

In chapters 2–4, the author sets out the main theories of irony divided according to their main view on irony: as opposition (Amante 1981; Garmendia 2011, 2013, 2015, Giora 1995; Giora et al. 1998; Grice 1967a/89, 1967b/89; Haverkate 1990); as echo (Curcó 2000; Kreuz and Glucksberg 1989; Sperber 1984; Sperber and Wilson 1981, 1998; Wilson 2006, 2009, 2013; Wilson and Sperber 1992, 2012); or as pretense (Clark and Gerrig 1984; Currie 2006; Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995; Recanati 2004, 2007; Walton 1990).

In the first group of theories (chapter 2), Garmendia focuses on Grice's view, which treats irony as a form of implicature (Grice 1967a/89, 1967b/89). The Gricean account makes three important claims that serve as a foil to the other pragmatic analyses explored later in the text. These three claims are the following: i) that irony is (always) negative; ii) that to speak ironically is to pretend and iii) that there is no ironical tone of voice. These three aspects (namely, the attitude conveyed by an ironic utterance, the relationship between irony and pretense, and the existence (or not) of an ironical tone of voice) allow a comparison of the different theories further on in the book. Once Grice's theory is outlined, the author continues to a thorough discussion of the problems it poses and to sketching some further developments of Grice's theory, such as speech act theory (Amante 1981; Haverkate 1990); the indirect negation theory (Giora 1995; Giora et al. 1998), and her own theory, the *asif*-theory of irony (Garmendia 2011, 2013, 2015).

In chapter 3, Garmendia focuses on the echoic account of irony (Sperber 1984; Sperber and Wilson 1981, 1998; Wilson 2006, 2009, 2013; Wilson and Sperber 1992, 2012). This account takes the ironic speaker to echo an utterance or thought that the speaker attributes to someone other than herself at the time of the utterance. After explaining the theory, Garmendia contrasts it with Grice's view in the three points previously mentioned. The authors of this account claim that: i) irony can also be positive, ii) to speak ironically is not to pretend, and iii) there is an ironical tone of voice. Here it's noteworthy that Garmendia carefully guides the reader through the evolution of the notions and terminology proposed by relevance theory. The echoic account has developed over the years, trying to accommodate the criticisms, and thus, clarifying and adapting their view on irony. As a result, on the one hand, the notion of echo has become progressively looser (from the echo of an explicit utterance, to the echo of a (possible) thought or even of a general expectation). On the other hand, the terminology employed has also changed. The original term

of *echoic mention*¹ has been referred as *echoic interpretations* or as *echoic attribution* in more recent versions (Wilson 2006, 2009, 2013; Wilson and Sperber 2012). These changes can be confusing for the beginner researcher in the topic, so Garmendia's guidance in this section is especially helpful. Then, she exposes the problems this theory raises (again, specifying which version of the theory the critics correspond to). In the last section of the chapter, two developments of this theory are sketched: the echoic reminder theory (Kreuz and Glucksberg 1989) and Curcó's defense (Curcó 2000) of relevance theory against the criticism of Giora (1995).

Chapter 4 is devoted to looking at irony as a form of pretense, focusing on Clark and Gerrig's pretense theory on irony (1984). The view is compared with Grice's implicature view of irony. According to these authors, i) irony can also be positive, ii) to speak ironically is to pretend, and iii) there is an ironic tone of voice. After briefly stating the problems arising from the pretense theory, Garmendia devotes a section for contrasting this theory with the echoic account. Certain authors have claimed that the notions of echo and pretense are, in fact, not very different from one another (Camp 2012, p. 593; Garmendia 2018, p. 66) —after all, if by being ironic the speaker echoes an utterance or thought someone else uttered or entertained, it can be easily translated to the speaker pretending to be that person uttering it. Nonetheless, the authors of both theories have argued that echo and pretense are two differentiated notions and have defended the advantages of one notion over the other. At last, the author includes some developments that overcome the problems of the original theory (Currie 2006; Recanati 2004, 2007; Walton 1990, and Kumon-Nakamura et al.'s allusional pretense theory —1995—).

After concluding the discussion on the main theories of verbal irony, the author turns to an examination of a common thread to all the theories: that irony involves the expression of a certain kind of attitude (chapter 5). Here, the author starts by presenting the commonly held view that irony can be positive, although instances of positive irony are scarce. Nonetheless, in the next section she puts to a test the mere existence of positive irony arguing that all the cases normally pointed out as positive instances of irony are, in fact, either instances of negative irony, or not instances of irony at all. The misinterpretation of some cases of negative irony as positive is

¹ The speaker uttering an utterance that resemblances in content an utterance or thought uttered or entertained by someone else other than herself at the time of the utterance.

well argued and convincing, but the cases of “purely positive irony” as non-ironic instances might not be compelling enough. Garmendia justifies it by the fact that in the absence of a negative attitude “these utterances [the so-called cases of purely positive irony], would appear uninformative and pointless” (Garmendia 2018, p. 102); but in the same sense that the expression of a negative attitude was singled out as the reason why someone would be ironic, one could say that the point of those expressions is to express a positive attitude. The author, thus, determines as non-ironic those instances that don’t fit her theory (described as always negative). In that sense, the theory presents the same problem she pointed out for the other theories: they properly explain a certain type of examples, but struggle to explain others that don’t directly fit their main conception of irony. Moreover, concerning the attitude of irony, some lines regarding towards what or who that ironic attitude might be directed to is missed in the chapter.²

In the end of chapter 5, the tinge hypothesis (Dews and Winner 1995, 1999; Dews et al. 1995) is presented. This hypothesis, independently of the existence (or not) of positive irony, could provide a reason why a speaker would decide to use irony instead of direct criticism/praise despite the risk of being misunderstood: the ironic utterance would present a positive tinge (or negative in the case of positive irony) that would mitigate the criticism (or praise).

Closely related to this last point, chapter 6 begins by stating the risks associated with being ironic to introduce the cues speakers normally use when being ironic. In the section she calls “Traditional Clues” (section 6.2), Garmendia focuses on the ironic tone of voice, although some other cues are mentioned. Here, the author briefly introduces some experimental literature on the topic, nonetheless, in this chapter a deeper discussion on experimental research is missed. There’s been a lot of experimental studies devoted to the cues that ease the understanding of verbal irony: to the tone of voice in irony (Bryant and Fox Tree 2002, 2005; Cheang and Pell 2008; Glenwright et al. 2014; González-Fuente et al. 2016; Rockwell 2000), but also to other cues such as context (Ivanko and Pexman 2003; Nakassis and Snedeker 2002), hyperbole (Kreuz and Roberts 1995), facial expression (Attardo et al. 2003; Deliens et al. 2018), syntactic cues (Escandell-Vidal and Leonetti 2014), gestural codas³ (González-

² For a review about who the target of the ironic attitude might be read García-Lorenzo (forthcoming).

³ “[A]udiovisual cues produced after the ironic utterance” (González-Fuente, Escandell-Vidal, and Prieto 2015, p. 26).

Fuente et al. 2015)... The author, instead, focuses on the three conceptions about irony the theories of irony in chapters 2–4 had, and explains them as cues, understood as “strategies speakers use when uttering a sentence ironically” (p. 115). That is, to say the opposite, to echo or to pretend are just ways of being ironic and not the mechanism of irony. After that, she presents in 6.4 her own theory, a “minimal account of irony” where the only requisites are the clash between what the ironic speaker believes and what she intends to communicate and the expression of a negative attitude.⁴

These two last chapters (5 and 6) are devoted to describing the author’s own view on the attitude expressed by ironic utterances and which the cues for irony are. In its first chapters (1–4), the book could’ve been seen as a textbook. The framing of the book in chapter 1 and the presentation of the different theories in chapters 2–4 (especially the problems derived from them) serves for the purpose of showing the virtues of the author’s own theory; but it is in fact a very good presentation of the main points and problems of the theories. In chapters 5 and 6 the author clearly favors her view over the commonly held ideas about the addressed topics. A beginner in the matter should keep that in mind while reading these two chapters.

In the last chapter (7), the author addresses the relation between irony with other close phenomena (sarcasm and humor). Regarding the former, she reports on the view that irony and sarcasm are totally interchangeable terms, and then focuses on the most widely held view that those are two different phenomena: they differ in the (easily recognition of the) victims, the aggressiveness and clarity in the intent of the speaker to be sarcastic. Regarding humor, the author exposes two different sets of theories of humor: superiority theories of humor and incongruity theories of humor. Both notions of humor can help explain why certain instances of irony are perceived as funny: in irony, on the one side, “the speaker tends to express a feeling of superiority towards the target of her irony” (p. 140) and on the other side, “the speaker does not intend to say what she puts forward but something different (or an attitude towards what she does not say)” (p. 143). Instead of prioritizing one theory over the other, Garmendia proposes that both of them could perfectly explain why irony is perceived as humorous.

There are many topics that can be touched when talking about irony. One can focus on different types of irony (dramatic, situational, verbal...), the influence of sociocultural aspects in irony

⁴ For some criticisms to Garmendia’s theory see Dynel 2013, 2017.

comprehension like stereotypes (Pexman and Olineck 2002b) or gender (Taylor 2017), experimental research on irony. . . This book does not aim to be a multidisciplinary book and focuses on verbal irony from a theoretical and pragmatic point of view. Nevertheless, further discussion about experimental work is missed when talking about the cues to irony (as I have already pointed out), when presenting the different theories and when talking about the negative attitude of irony. On the one hand, it is becoming more popular to empirically test theories of irony. This is the case of the echoic account (reported in pp. 52–53), but also of other theories such like the indirect negation theory (Filik et al. 2014) or the allusional pretense theory (Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995). On the other hand, some empirical research has addressed the topic of ironic attitude (Alba-Juez and Attardo 2014; Bruntsch and Ruch 2017; Pexman and Olineck 2002a). In this regard, it would have been desirable to observe how the author fits the data that seems to support the existence of positive irony in her view.

Furthermore, verbal irony from a theoretical perspective can be analyzed not only within a pragmatic framework but from a semantic one. Although not many authors have been devoted to this endeavor, irony can be conceived to operate at a semantic level (as a logical operator that inverts the meaning of a particular word, clause or proposition).⁵ To sketch this approach and to introduce the debate about embedded irony (Popa-Wyatt 2019) would have been nice in a series that aims to cover the key topics in Semantics and Pragmatics.

In a nutshell, this book provides us with a very clear and comprehensive view of verbal irony from the perspective of theoretical pragmatics. It can serve as a map into the different theories and key aspects of irony and as a way to deepen in Garmendia's view. It is not only a good starting point, but also a clarifying text into the complex aspects this linguistic phenomenon entangles.⁶

⁵ For a review of semantic approaches see Camp 2012.

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