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## **The ironist's intentions: communicative priority and manifestness\***

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This paper examines the ironic speaker's intentions, drawing distinctions on the basis of two criteria: communicative priority (primary – secondary communicative intentions) and manifestness (overt – subtle – mixed – covert). It is argued that these provide useful insights into the widely discussed categories of speaker's intentions (e.g. a priori versus post facto intentions, private i-intentions versus shared we-intentions). First of all, "ironic meaning" is viewed as comprising a set of different types of meaning, including a bundle of implicatures that can be hierarchically ranked in terms of both communicative priority and inferential priority. Secondly, examples of different degrees of manifestness of the ironist's intentions are discussed in light of the communicative complexities of irony, which is viewed as a higher-order phenomenon. The final discussion attempts to bring together the analyses of the speaker's and the hearer's perspectives, contributing to a dynamic model of ironic discourse.

**Keywords:** irony, speaker intentions, primary intended meaning, manifestness

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Manifestness and communicative priority**

The ongoing debate on the role and importance of the speaker's intentions for the study of pragmatic meaning is associated with a variety of dichotomies, pertaining to different levels of analysis (e.g. Bara 2011; Haugh 2008, 2012, 2013; Haugh and Jaszczolt 2012; Jaszczolt 2009; Kecskés 2012): a priori – post facto (temporal order), proximal – distal (orientation), i-intentions – we-intentions (speaker-interlocutor interplay), as well as primary – secondary intentions (communicative priority). The centrality of these distinctions in a model of analysis of pragmatic meaning (and pragmatic phenomena like irony, in particular) depends on the theoretical goals of said model, which may range from philosophical approaches to intentions and intentionality (Anscombe 1957) to socio-cognitive (Kecskés 2010) and interactional (Arundale 2008) approaches to communication and utterance processing.

The theoretical framework for the present analysis has its roots in Gricean philosophy (Grice 1975, 1978): the Cooperative principle and the Gricean maxims (and their possible exploitation, flouting, or violation) play an important role in this model and so does the distinction between "what is said" and "what is implicated". However, this model also departs from the Gricean one towards a more contextualist approach to the levels of meaning (Recanati 2005), granting pragmatics a much more important role in the determination of truth conditional content than the one assumed within the Gricean framework. As the last section (section 4) will reveal, this account also considers the dynamic nature of (ironic) meaning in

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interaction, giving due credit to modern interactional approaches (see Haugh 2008). It should be noted that despite some terminological overlap with the Relevance Theoretic framework (RT - Sperber and Wilson 1986; Wilson and Sperber 2012), this account does not adopt any of the central RT claims regarding the derivation of ironic meaning (namely: the dissociation account and the echoic mention account - Sperber and Wilson 1981 and subsequent publications). Instead, a multi-strategy view on irony is preferred, encompassing a definition in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions (pre-existing contrast in the background of the utterance, incongruity between some aspect of the uttered meaning and reality, and evaluative attitude – see Kapogianni 2011, 2013, 2016).

The goal of the present analysis is to contribute to a dynamic model of ironic discourse, focusing initially on the multiplicity and complexity of the ironic speaker's intentions. Both private and social (communicative) intentions are taken into consideration, as well as the ways in which these are represented through different degrees of manifestness. Unlike the RT approach, which is concerned with the (mutual) manifestness of assumptions (Wilson and Sperber, 2012: 241, define the manifestness of an assumption at any given time as the capability that an individual has “of mentally representing it [this assumption] and accepting its representation as true or probably true”), the current approach is concerned with the manifestness of the speaker's intentions, which can be viewed on a continuum from covert to overt, including the possibility of subtle and mixed intentions.

The second distinction that is central to this analysis is that between primary and secondary intended meaning (Jaszczolt 2009), which is based on the prioritization of the speaker's communicative intentions and cuts across the explicit/implicit divide, i.e. implicit meanings can also be primary intended meanings (and, in a radical contextualist approach, they can be considered the bearers of truth-conditions). As will be shown, ironic meaning involves a number of implicated propositions and a successful model of ironic discourse would require an understanding of the interplay between priority of communicative intentions and manifestness.

The examples that will be discussed in the following sections come from a bilingual (Modern Greek and English) corpus of ironic discourse (both written and oral), compiled by the author (Kapogianni 2013). This corpus contains both scripted (fictional discourse) and unscripted (spontaneous) examples (see Kapogianni 2014 for a comparison between the two). The choice of real data (as opposed to constructed examples) entails the advantage of examining the complexities of the discussed phenomenon. The choice of two different languages (Greek being a language where irony has not been studied extensively – Kapogianni 2013: 25) allows the showcasing of strategies and characteristics that are essential to irony use regardless of any cross-linguistic or cross-cultural differences (i.e. any linguistic and cultural comparisons are outside the scope of this paper).

## 1.2 Is irony always intentional?

Before moving on to discuss the specifics of the ironist's intentions, it is important to answer the question of whether the ironic act is always an intentional act. Gibbs (2012) argues that irony is not always a conscious deliberate thought process, whereby the ironist decides “I will now be ironic”. The first problem with this argument is that it assumes that all intentions need to be a priori intentions, excluding the possibility of emerging (post facto) intentions. Although it is indeed true that “general intentional desires in communication” are different from fully-formed “specialized conscious thought processes” (Gibbs 2012: 114), both form part of intentional communication and intentional transmission of meaning. What makes irony special as a phenomenon is that it allows the transmission of a specific meaning (some kind of evaluation, with or without further informational content, as will be shown in the following section) in a certain marked manner. In other words, being a trope, irony is a “mode of expression” that carries the speaker's mood and attitude. Irony may only be the vehicle of the

speaker's main intended meaning, but this is hardly a reason to call it "not intentional" (as Gibbs 2012: 115 does).

The second problem with Gibbs' (2012) argument is that it conflates the analysis of situational irony with the analysis of verbal irony. The former is only a property of the context and has nothing to do with the linguistic phenomenon we are discussing here, other than being a type of context that could prompt the use of verbal irony (due to the clash between expectations and reality – see Kapogianni 2011, 2013). Therefore, the claim that an example like "I would never be involved in any cheating" when the speaker has unknowingly been involved in cheating (Gibbs 2012: 107, reproduced from Gibbs et al. 1995) constitutes an example of "unintentional irony" is rather misleading: this is only an example of situational, or even more accurately dramatic irony (see Knox 1972 for a distinction between dramatic and tragic irony), which by definition involves a character whose beliefs are in striking contrast with reality. Such an example cannot warrant any generalisations for the whole family of phenomena that are termed as "irony" and it is certainly unrelated to the phenomenon of verbal irony.

A final consideration for this discussion should be the possibility of ambivalence/ "fuzziness" of intentions i.e. the possibility that the speaker is uncertain about the aims of what is communicated (Jaszczolt 1996; cf. Sperber and Wilson 1986). There can be cases of non-serious or non-literal (ironic) talk where the speaker is not entirely detached from the literal content of the utterance. Aside from irony, this can also be seen in humorous discourse, in cases of what is folk-theoretically characterised as "half-joking" (which constitutes an overlap of humorous and nonhumorous framing, according to Dynel 2011: 227). Example (1) is a tweet that was made in response to a discussion about the weather being uncharacteristically hot and sunny. It is marked by the author with the "#sarcasm" hashtag, which is a customary marker of sarcastic intent on this medium. What is interesting here is that the author adds a question mark after the sarcasm hashtag, thus questioning her own meta-pragmatic comment that her post should be considered sarcastic<sup>1</sup>.

(1) Wish it was this sunny all the time. #sarcasm?

A possible explanation here is that, although the speaker acknowledges an ironic intention to her tweet, she also considers (as a second thought) the possibility of literally expressing that wish. Rather than ascribing ambivalence or uncertainty to the speaker, it is plausible to assume that the speaker maintains both an ironic intent and the intent to tease her audience by entertaining the possibility of (eventually) embracing the expressed wish. The fact that an utterance can be left open to interpretation by the audience is indicative of the dynamic nature of discourse, whereby meanings can be negotiated and reinterpreted (Jaszczolt 1996: 716; Haugh 2012).

In order to formulate the main arguments of this analysis, I will first discuss the ironist's hierarchy of intentions in view of the bundle of implicated propositions that correspond to an ironic utterance (section 2), continuing with the interplay between communicative priority and manifestness of intentions (section 3), while also considering the cases of audience-dependent mixed degrees of manifestness (section 3.2) as well as covert intentions and the case of deception through irony (section 3.3). The analysis will be completed by bringing into the picture the perspective of the hearer, the utterance, and the speaker-hearer dynamics (section 4).

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<sup>1</sup> In the everyday use of the words, "sarcasm" is frequently used as a synonym to verbal irony. The two terms are arguably different when subject to theoretical analysis (Kapogianni 2013; Dynel 2014; 2016a).

## 2. Ironic meaning and primary intentions

### 2.1 The parts of ironic meaning

The definition of “ironic meaning” may seem self-evident, considering its juxtaposition to the “said”/expressed or literal meaning, however, its description as “the meaning that the speaker intends to convey” is, in fact, rather incomplete and may lead to confusion. It is therefore necessary to consider the distinctions among all the different types of meaning involved in the ironic utterance<sup>2</sup>:

- The semantic (sub-propositional) content of the utterance<sup>3</sup>.
- The enriched meaning of the utterance (including some pragmatic inferences drawn on the basis of the utterance).
- The marked/rhetorical nature of the utterance: “this is irony”.
- The direct output of the ironic operation (see Kapogianni 2016): e.g. the immediate result of the ironic reversal “nice” → “terrible” in the ironic utterance “What nice weather!”.
- Implicatures that arise on the basis of the ironic interpretation of the utterance.

Example (2) is taken from Twitter (once more marked with the “#sarcasm” hashtag):

- (2) I’m furious that ‘X-factor’ has kicked out Frankie. I'm going to demand all the money back from the phone votes I made for him. #sarcasm (i)
- (ii) 1. The speaker made a lot of phone votes for Frankie. 2. The speaker cares about Frankie’s fate [pragmatic inference].
- (iii) The speaker is being ironic.
- (iv) 1. The speaker didn’t make any phone votes for Frankie. 2. The speaker doesn’t care about Frankie. [result of the ironic operation]
- (v) 1. The speaker would never phone vote for Frankie (or make any phone-calls as a participating member of a talent show audience). 2. The speaker criticizes the people who do so.

First of all, the recognition of this as an ironic act (in this case made explicit by the use of the hashtag) is essential for the derivation of the implicatures in (iv) and (v). Irony seems to operate on the literally expressed meaning, which the hearers need to access in order to derive the intended meaning (see Kapogianni 2016: 20). However, it can be reasonably claimed that the reversal of the entailment (“I made a lot of phone votes” – “I didn’t vote”) is not the main intended meaning, since the central message conveyed here is the author’s indifference to the fate of Frankie (iv.2), which is the result of reversing the inference that the speaker is emotionally involved, drawn on the basis of the statement that the speaker is furious. At the same time, the speaker intends to convey the evaluative implicatures in (v).

Example (3) presents a different ironic strategy. The context here is a morning talk-show interview, the interviewee being a very famous Greek actress, whose life is often discussed in the media.

- (3) A: Mu zitise enas sindiasmos na katevo stis eklojes  
To.me asked a party to decend in.the elections  
‘A political party asked me to run in the elections’

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<sup>2</sup> No linearity/incrementality assumptions are made in this list, not to be confused with the reasoning process for the derivation of irony that will be presented later on (section 2.2).

<sup>3</sup> As correctly noted by an anonymous reviewer, this may have little or nothing to do with the eventually communicated interpretation. However, it does play some role in the derivation process, either as input or as a trigger to the input to the ironic operation (Kapogianni 2016).

- B: Dimotiki simvulos (?)  
City councilor (?)  
'For the city council (?)'  
A: Oxi, prothipurgos.  
No, Prime.minister  
'No, for Prime Minister' (i)

- (ii) The speaker was asked to run for Prime Minister.  
(iii) The speaker is being ironic.  
(iv) The speaker juxtaposes an impossible fact to the interlocutor's question → The interlocutor's question must be as valid as the speaker's answer → The interlocutor's question is implausible/invalid/absurd [result of the ironic operation].  
(v) The speaker thinks that her interlocutor did not think his question through.

This ironic utterance ("No, for Prime Minister") is intended as a context-driven incongruous response that criticises (via juxtaposition) the interlocutor's original question<sup>4</sup> (Kapogianni 2011, 2013) and it can be argued that it is derived through two syllogisms: the first consists in the detection of the insincerity and the second in the derivation of the intended evaluative meaning. The detection of the fact that the speaker does not mean what she says basically relies on contextual background assumptions, such as the knowledge that one needs to be the leader of a political party (and generally have a career in politics) in order to be eligible for Prime Minister. The derivation of the intended meaning depends on a specific syllogism: it is a conditional (modus tollens) which has the form "if your question is valid then my answer is also plausible/valid and my answer is clearly implausible/invalid, so your question is invalid", or, in formal terms,  $(p_{eval} \rightarrow r_{eval}) \wedge \neg r_{eval} \rightarrow \neg p_{eval}$ . Importantly, a precondition for the success of this syllogism is the detection of the intentional incongruity of the speaker's statement, which, although quite obvious, might still fail to be detected under the potential false assumption that the speaker is naïve enough to believe in the truth of her statement.

Returning to the task of delimiting the meaning of an ironically intended utterance, it can reasonably be claimed that there are three types of communicated meaning: The inference that the speaker is being ironic (occasionally reinforced by explicit markers); the output of the ironic operation, derived on the basis of the contextualized and enriched meaning (including any implicit meaning that immediately follows from it); and a set of implicatures (at least one of which is of evaluative nature) derived on the basis of the direct output of the ironic operation (see also Kapogianni 2016).

## 2.2 Primary and secondary implicatures of ironic strategies

The observed multiplicity of implicatures deriving from an ironic utterance needs some more refined distinctions, the main question being whether some (or one) of them play(s) a more important role than the rest in the successful interpretation of the utterance. It is reasonable to assume that some of the implicatures of the utterance have a priority over others, both in terms of speaker's intentions and hearer's successful retrieval of the intended meaning. It is therefore useful to adopt the distinction between primary and secondary intended meaning<sup>5</sup>, as proposed by Jaszczolt (2009). This distinction, which cuts across the division between the said and the

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<sup>4</sup> Additional cues for determining this utterance as ironic and critical in nature are provided by the speaker (intonation and gestures/facial expression).

<sup>5</sup> The terms "primary" and "secondary" as applying to speaker's intentions are not to be confused with the terminology of Recanati (2004) who distinguishes between primary and secondary processes in terms of conscious/ subconscious processing of meaning.

implicated, concerns the main and dominant message that is communicated through an utterance<sup>6</sup>. The propositional form and content of this message is not necessarily linked to the uttered sentence (Schneider 2009), which means that the main intended meaning can be an implicature. At the same time, any other inferential meanings attached to the utterance are considered secondary, in the sense that their successful retrieval does not guarantee a successful transmission of the speaker's main intentions.

It is worth examining further examples representing different ironic strategies, in order to rank and classify their various implicatures. Examples (4) and (5) belong to two different general types of irony, one which, like example (2) above, is based on the reversal of the expressed meaning (4) and one which, like example (3) above, is based on a syllogism that employs the juxtaposition of an absurd/implausible scenario to the utterance that is targeted by the irony, in order to cause the invalidation of this target (5).

- (4) Context: A radio show debate about striking: one side of the debate argues that striking is disruptive and prevents regular working patterns, causing workers to lose money, while the other side argues that striking is a necessary action for establishing the workers' rights and creating necessary social changes. Both A (a caller) and B (the radio producer) clearly side with the latter.

A: Htes pu den ihe apergia *dulepsame*... [*vgalame*] *poli xrima*... *fagame se restoran*... Yesterday that NEG had strike we.worked... [we.earned] much money... we.ate in restaurant

'Yesterday that there was no strike, we worked... [we earned] plenty of money... we ate in a restaurant...'

B: ...*Simera* katalithike i dimokratia.

Today annihilated the democracy

'Today democracy was annihilated.'

Derivation process:

(i) +> Yesterday that there was no strike, we didn't work...we didn't earn enough money ... not nearly enough to eat in a restaurant (we didn't eat in a restaurant) / Today nothing terrible happened to democracy.

(ii) +> Even when there isn't a strike, not everyone works or earns enough money /A strike does not mean the annihilation of democracy.

(iii) +>It is wrong to believe that strikes cause further problems to the economy or to democracy in general.

(iv) +>The speakers are ironically echoing<sup>7</sup> other people's beliefs, which they do not share

(v) +>People who hold these beliefs are worthy of criticism.

Speaker A in this example is a caller who strongly disagrees with those who complain that strikes disturb society and prevent others from going to work and earning money, while speaker B, the talk show host, supports speaker A's argument<sup>8</sup>. The implicature in (4i) is

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<sup>6</sup> Although not dissimilar to the notion of strength as it is employed within RT (Sperber and Wilson 1986), the primary/secondary distinction is more akin to the goals and theoretical background of the present analysis.

<sup>7</sup> Here, echoing someone else's view (adopting the persona of someone whose views are contrary to one's own) is considered a strategy for irony which is optional and orthogonal to the distinction between the main irony types. In other words, as argued in Kapogianni 2011, 2013, echo should by no means be viewed as the essence of all ironies, contrary to RT suggestions (Sperber and Wilson 1981 and subsequent publications).

<sup>8</sup> It is remarkable how A's sentence is naturally completed by B, collaboratively forming an ironic unit (Kapogianni 2015).

the product of ironic reversal (negation) of the content of the utterance. Recognizing the irony through contextual and intonational cues means inferring (4i) and (4ii). However, the statement in (4i) and its generalization in (4ii) are only the first premises of the speaker's argument, since the speaker's main point is to criticize the particular stance that he is echoing, as in (4iii), which seems to be the primary implicature in this case. The implicatures in (4iv) and (4v), that is the recognition of the particular rhetorical schema used by the speaker and the extension of his criticism to the people who hold the particular beliefs, are also secondary implicatures, since they may or may not be retrieved by the hearers without this having a major influence on the success of the communication.

(5) Context: Within the same debate as in the previous example, the radio producer responds to the argument that people are willing to take part in industrial action, but only if this is massive and is guaranteed to lead to a revolution.

*Otan mazeftume ...tha xtupane kudunja. Tha pune "kale, mipos iste ki esis ja epanastasi? jati imaste etimi, peraste!"*

When we.gather... will knock.3PL bells. Will say.3PL "dear, would be.2PL and you.PL for revolution? Because we.are ready, go2PL.ahead

'When we all gather... they'll be knocking on doors. They'll say "would you be up for revolution, dear? Because we're ready, you are welcome [to join]/go ahead!"'

(i) +>This is an improbable scenario (since the setting in which revolution takes place by a few people knocking on everyone's doors and politely asking if they would like to join contradicts all knowledge about the concept "revolution", its definition and historical occurrences).

(ii) +> If this scenario is probable, then the target view (of sitting and waiting for the revolution to happen) is valid.

(iii) +>This scenario is obviously improbable and the target view is, therefore, invalid.

(iv) +>This scenario is full of incongruities (every aspect of the described "revolution" scenario is in stark contrast with the script of an actual revolution, hence the humorous effect).

In example (5), the producer of the show intends to highlight and criticise the contradiction in the attitude of some callers who claim to be in favour of radical social changes (or even in favour of a revolution) but are, at the same time, unwilling to take part in regular industrial action. The ironist here uses an incongruous / improbable scenario – related to the topic of discussion – which is juxtaposed and compared to the target belief. The first implicature (5i) is that this is an improbable scenario, given the very definition of the word "revolution" and all the concepts associated with it, but this does not yet reach the intended conclusion, since the hearer needs to employ the implicated conditional in (5ii) in order to reach the conclusion (5iii), which is the main intended meaning. An additional, secondary implicature, in this case, would be derived through the observation of the particular strategy employed by the ironist, which is an elaborately devised description, with noteworthy stylistic choices. The use of direct speech ("would you be up for... you are welcome to join") and the choice of a formal and polite register create an even greater incongruity with the common knowledge scenario of a revolution.

Finally, it is worth noting that some implicatures may be considered secondary in the sense that they do not convey the speaker's main intended meaning, but they may at the same time be necessary parts of the reasoning that leads to the primary implicature. For example, (5i) and (5ii) are the implicated premises, without which the hearers would not be able to reach the implicated conclusion in (5iii). Even though (5i) and (5ii) are not the primary implicatures they do need to be retrieved in order for the communication to be successful.



As shown in the discussed examples, the ironist’s main intended meaning can vary between two types of derived implicature: a purely evaluative one and one which is the result of an operation on the expressed meaning – which is what Garmendia (2011: 52) calls the “bridge-content”, suggesting that it is less frequently the main intention of the ironist.

An issue that merits further discussion and clarification is the question of whether the very act of irony (i.e. the intention of being ironic) can be the only or the main intended (and recovered as “the speaker is being ironic”) meaning of the utterance. In all of the discussed examples, it can be noted that some sort of evaluative implicature is always present within the bundle of ironically implicated propositions. The first answer to this question is therefore that the ironic act is never the only intended meaning. The improbability of the act of irony being the only and main intention of the speaker can be illustrated in example (6) below, which employs the Gricean characteristic of explicit cancellability as a test (Grice 1975):

- (6) Context: The previous day B, talking to A, had predicted that this day the weather would be nice, but it has now just started raining heavily.  
 A: Wonderful weather!  
 B: Why do you have to criticize everything I say?  
 A:  
 (a) I wasn’t criticizing anything, I love this weather!  
 (b) I wasn’t criticizing YOU, I was just complaining about the weather.  
 (c) # I wasn’t criticizing anything, I was only being ironic.

In (6a), (6b) and (6c), speaker A attempts to cancel the implicature that speaker B retrieved, i.e. that A’s intention was to criticize B’s belief of the previous day. In (6a) A cancels the whole of the ironic meaning, stating that her utterance was actually intended literally. In (6b) she cancels the specific implicature that the irony is aimed as a (sarcastic) criticism towards the interlocutor’s beliefs, while retaining the ironic intention. Although these two cancellation utterances seem acceptable, (6c) seems problematic, indicating that a speaker cannot cancel the implicature that at least something (the weather, the hearer’s beliefs, etc.) was under criticism without cancelling the ironic act. In other words, it would be very difficult to imagine a speaker being ironic only for the sake of performing an ironic act.

To conclude this section, it is important to highlight the distinction between communicative priority (primary – secondary intended meaning) and inferential priority (necessary – optional implicatures). The distinction between necessary and optional reflects how crucial the derivation of an implicature is for the successful interpretation of the message. Given that primary implicatures are the main intended message, they cannot be optional, while secondary implicatures can be either necessary or optional, depending on whether they work as premises for a necessary conclusion (see example (4), where (4iv) and (4v) were secondary and optional implicatures, whereas (4i) and (4ii), just as (5i) and (5ii), were secondary but necessary implicatures). Table 1 summarises the discussed possibilities<sup>9</sup>.

	Primary	Secondary
Necessary	✓	✓
Optional	✗	✓

**Table 1 Communicative versus inferential priority**

<sup>9</sup> The explicit-implicit distinction is not included in the chart, since this section only focuses on implicit meaning. However, it is worth pointing out that explicit meaning can be also divided into “primary intended” and “secondary intended”.

### 3. Degrees and categories of manifestness

#### 3.1 Overt versus subtle intentions

Let us now examine the variety of factors that determine how overtly or subtly manifest the ironist's intentions become in interaction. These factors are: (a) the relationship between the utterance and the context / the degree of contextual support, (b) the role of logical / commonsense assumptions in the derivation of the intended meaning, (c) co-textual support, (d) discourse framework, (e) prosodic and paralinguistic cues (Kapogianni 2013: 89-103). These factors can be illustrated through the following examples:

(7) (a) Context: Bill and Annie both went to Luke's party the previous evening. The party was not successful: hardly anyone turned up, there was no music, no food, and everyone left early, including Bill and Annie. The fact that they had no fun at the party had been the topic of discussion the previous evening and now the topic of the party has come up again in their conversation.  
Bill: We had a blast last night!

(b) Context: Bill went to Luke's party (which was completely unsuccessful) but Annie didn't go and she has no information about how it went.  
Annie: How was the party last night?  
Bill: We had a blast!

(c) Context: The same as in (b).  
Annie: How was the party last night?  
Bill: We had a blast! It was so boring we left after 20 minutes.

(8) Context: The same as in (7b) and (7c).  
Annie: I assume Luke's party was fun.  
Bill: Sure, and I am an alien from a planet that doesn't have a word for "fun".

In example (7a) the shared context (common ground) about the failure of Luke's party is so ample that Bill's utterance can only be interpreted as ironic (for an outline of different sources of knowledge participating in irony comprehension see Yus Ramos 2000: 353-357). The speaker does not need to provide any additional cues towards the main intended meaning ("what a bore last night was"), since both the evaluative intention and the higher-order intention for the hearer to recognise the speaker's evaluative intention are fully accessible. This is not the case in (7b), however, where (assuming no particular prosodic or paralinguistic support) the speaker's ironic intention would remain subtle or even undetected by the hearer, unless further co-textual support is provided, as in (7c). It can be seen, in other words, that when the contextual/common ground support is missing, it is up to the speaker to provide the necessary cues that would make their primary communicative intention manifest and these cues can come either from the co-text or from prosodic and paralinguistic means (Attardo et al. 2003).

At the same time, example (8) maintains the lack of contextual support found in (7b) and (7c), but the ironist's main intended meaning ("Luke's party was all but fun") is overtly manifest, due to the absurd claim that the speaker juxtaposes to the original statement. The overtness of the implicatures forming the ironic meaning, here, is due to the logic of the juxtaposition of the absurd statement to the target utterance (as discussed earlier in example (5)) and also, of course, to commonsensical world knowledge that allows the recognition of this statement as absurd. Another overt ironic meaning would be carried by Annie's utterance, if she were to follow the conversation as in (9):

- (9) Context: Bill went to Luke’s party (which was completely unsuccessful) but Annie didn’t go and she has no information about how it went.  
 Annie: I assume Luke’s party was fun.  
 Bill: Sure, and I am an alien from a planet that doesn’t have a word for “fun”.  
 Annie: Oh, so we should give Luke the award for best party host ever!  
 Bill: Yes, and I guess he should become president of the super-fun-party host society.

In this example, we have moved from a single ironic utterance to the creation of an ironic discourse framework. Aside from the ironic intention in Annie’s response and Bill’s subsequent response to that, there is the higher-order intention (a shared, “we-intention”, as it emerges here, according to Haugh 2012) that involves the creation and retention of the ironic discourse. The speakers are collaboratively involved in a process of “dissing” Luke as a party host, their ironic and evaluative intentions being fully manifest in this discourse frame.

Having presented the factors that make an intended meaning overt, it is worth discussing what makes an intended meaning subtle. The definition of subtlety of intentions should include the lack of particular support from the aforementioned factors, but it should also take into consideration the speaker’s specific higher-order intention to not emphasize these intentions. In other words, the subtlety is itself, in many cases, an intentional choice of the speaker and one can think of a few reasons why this may be so: reasons of politeness, for instance (or modesty, see Leech 1983<sup>10</sup>), such as not overtly expressing some harsher criticism than the overtly expressed evaluation; going back to example (1), the negative evaluation towards a reality show contestant is part of the overt ironic implicatures (1iv), while the more general negative evaluation towards the audiences of reality shows (1v) is rather subtle, not receiving any communicative reinforcement. Another example of subtle intentions could be the higher-order intention of being established as a cooperative speaker, despite the superficial breach of the first sub-maxim of quality that occurs in irony, and the intention to assume the role of a credible and elaborate evaluator (this could also be linked to covert deceptive intentions, which will be discussed in section 3.3 below).

Table 2 summarises the relationship between the two categories of communicative priority and the two categories of manifestness (NB although the degrees of manifestness can be viewed on a continuum, it is still worth distinguishing between overt and subtle intentions, even if the distinction is not necessarily clear-cut).

	Primary	Secondary
Overt	✓	✓
Subtle	✗	✓

**Table 2 Communicative priority versus manifestness**

To summarise, primary communicative intentions are always made overt, to a greater or lesser extent. Secondary communicative intentions, on the other hand, can be either overt (i.e. reinforced through the context, co-text, syllogism, discourse framework and prosodic or paralinguistic cues) or more subtle, especially when the speaker has a reason to let them “slip” in the background of the conversation.

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<sup>10</sup> A good example for non-ironic subtle intentions of this sort would be the speech act that has recently been named “humblebrag” (Alfano and Robinson 2014), by which the speaker intends to subtly reveal some information she is proud of, while overtly expressing a complaint.

### 3.2 Mixed audiences and mixed manifestness

It is now worth focusing on a very interesting type of ironic discourse, where the speaker juggles a multiplicity of intentions, the degrees of manifestness of which are different for different members of the audience. This is something that has been noted before by Kaufer (1977) and Gibbs and Izett (2005): they adopt the distinction between “wolves” and “sheep” (i.e. those who recognise the irony and those who are naïve/blind to it), as well as the distinction between “confederates” and “victims” (those who agree with the ironic message and those who are targeted by it – and presumably disagree with it). Manifestness is more relevant to the former distinction, as illustrated in examples (10) and (11). Both these examples come from a Greek radio show (“Ellinofrenea”) in which one of the producers occasionally receives calls in the radio station’s call centre. Although most callers realise whom they are talking to when he answers the phone and are aware that they are being recorded, others do not realise this and believe that they are talking to a call centre operator. This frequently prompts the producer to adopt a mocking/sarcastic style, often enriched with mock-impoliteness, which is what has occurred in the background of the first example (the caller can be heard complaining to someone who is in the room with her about the behaviour of the person answering the phone):

- (10) C: (addressing someone who is in her surroundings)  
 Kale aftos vrizi [...] ne se mena  
 gosh this.M curses [...] yes to me  
 ‘Gosh, this guy is cursing! [...] yes, to me!’

P: Oxi den to lega se sas, pros theou, se mia diplani grami pu blehtike!  
 no NEG it say to you, by God, to one adjacent line that got.tangled  
 ‘No, I wasn’t saying this to you, by God, [I was talking to] an adjacent phone line that got tangled [with yours]!’

In this example, the producer uses both intonational markers (Kapogianni and Arvaniti 2015; Bryant and Fox Tree 2005) and lexical markers in the form of exaggerated wording (“by God”) in order to make his ironic intention easily recognisable. By the time this last utterance is completed, however, the caller is already too annoyed to engage in further interaction and terminates the call. The caller’s shock and annoyance at her interlocutor’s inexplicable behaviour (she believes she is talking to a call centre operator, typically expected to be helpful and polite) is certainly not lost on the producer, who would easily detect that the caller was about to hang up just as he starts producing this last ironic utterance. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that the producer uses this last utterance primarily for the sake of the audience and the possible comical effect that this can add to the whole interaction, rather than aiming it to his interlocutor.

- (11) Context: the producer (P) has just finished chatting to the current caller’s son in law, who has informed him that the current caller (C) is rather conservative and opposed to the radical political views that both he (the son in law) and the producer share.
1. P: Kale ti katharma ine aftos o gambros sas!  
 dear what scoundrel is this the son-in-law yours  
 ‘My dear, what a scoundrel your son in law is!’
  2. C: Ti na su po!  
 what SUBJ to-you say  
 ‘What can I say!’

3. P: Den boro na katalavo. Anarhikos. Kati ideas!  
NEG can SUBJ understand, anarchist, some ideas  
'I cannot understand. An anarchist. Some ideas [he's got]!'
4. C: // To pezi...[inaudible]  
it he-plays  
'He acts like...[inaudible]'
5. P: Afta den teriazune stin epohi mas  
these NEG fit the time our  
'Such [views/behaviours] are not fit for our times'
6. C: Ne!  
'Yes!'
7. P: Ego theoro oti m esas borume na kanume mia sovari kuvenda, mia sovari  
kivernisi, kati.  
I consider that with you we-can SUBJ do a serious conversation a serious  
government something  
'I consider that, with you, we can have a serious conversation, a serious  
government, or something.'

The producer, in this example, adopts the persona of someone with the same conservative views as his interlocutor, hence making the ironically intended statements in turns 1, 3 and 5<sup>11</sup>. Despite observable exaggerated intonation (which would signal irony, as above) the interlocutor responds seriously (adding an accusation in turn 4 and agreeing in turn 6) to the literal content of the producer's (ironically intended) statements. It is clear that the interlocutor, who is the ironist's target (as a representative of a certain set of political beliefs), in this case, does not have enough contextual information (e.g. about the producer's political beliefs, which are well-known to his regular audience) in order to detect the irony.

In the setting of the particular radio show, instances like the above are very frequent. Sometimes the interlocutors pick up on the ironic and/or sarcastic intention of the producer and respond to it, while other times they remain oblivious to it. The main speaker's (producer's) intentions can therefore be considered "mixed": although he does not attempt to hide the ironic nature of his utterances from his interlocutors, frequently enriching them with various ironic markers and trying to provoke a response, it seems that these utterances are mainly directed to the audience, who is more likely to appreciate the producer's rhetorical and humorous skills. This is an observation that can be generalised to any instance where the addressee also happens to be the ironic target, while the exchange is taking place in the presence of an audience<sup>12</sup>. The choice of the ironist is, then, either to make the ironic implicature(s) overtly manifest for the audience as a whole, providing enough cues for everyone, or to attend to the manifestness of these implicatures with respect to the context, assumptions, recognisable cues etc, that relate to only part of the audience (presumably the "confederates", who also become "wolves", in light of the relative overtness of the ironic implicatures).

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<sup>11</sup> As in example (4) – see also comment in footnote 6 – the strategy in turns 1 and 3 can be considered "echoic", since there is a very specific person whose opinions are being echoed. This, however, is only secondary to the fact that the main irony type here is that of reversal (+> His ideas are understandable and reasonable and +> His ideas are modern and fitting to this day and age).

<sup>12</sup> A question for further discussion, which falls outside the scope of this paper, is whether speakers may choose to use an ironic utterance that has a low likelihood of being detected by their addressees, even when there is no audience who would appreciate the irony. It is conceivable that such behaviour is possible, when speakers use irony for their own amusement/appreciation (presumably to enhance a sense of superiority over their interlocutor, even when the interlocutor is unable to detect this).

### 3.3 Covert intentions

The ironist can have private intentions which she intends to keep covert, i.e. to not make them manifest. As Nemeth T. (2008: 159-160) discusses, there is a crucial distinction to be made between communicative intentions and information transmitted with the aim of deceiving. There is a big and on-going debate on whether an (ironic) implicature can be used for the purpose of lying, which stems from the necessary conditions for lying: if asserting (i.e. committing to the truth of a statement) is a precondition for lying then (a) can one lie via an (ironic) implicature or (b) can one still lie without asserting? Meibauer (2005, 2014) accepts the possibility of “ironic lies”, while Chisholm and Feehan (1977: 150) and Fallis (2009) among others, would not accept this possibility in view of irony not being an assertion and/or flouting instead of violating the Gricean maxim of Quality (the first sub-maxim, to be precise).

The analysis so far would have to lead us to tentatively accept the existence of ironic lies on the basis of the following syllogism: as shown above, one of the ironic implicatures always functions as the speaker’s primary intended meaning (and bearer of truth-conditions according to the radical contextualist approach – see Jaszczolt 2009) – the speaker can then reasonably be taken to be committed to the truth of their main intended meaning (which, as shown in Kapogianni 2016, is always in the form of a declarative sentence), allowing for this to be considered a lie if the speaker simultaneously knows (and hides) that the main intended meaning is false (this syllogism then concurs with Dynel’s commentary in her review of Meibauer 2014 – Dynel 2015: 328). However, it is the very fact that irony can be used to deceive (regardless of whether this is just a “deceit” and not a lie – or a deceptive implicature which is also a lie) that matters for the discussion of the ironist’s covert intentions. It is not just the possibility of using irony deceptively but also the apparent success (possibly even greater than that of pure assertive lies) in doing so, which can be illustrated in the following examples:

- (12) (found in Meibauer, 2005: 1393-1395)<sup>13</sup>:  
 Context: B’s car is damaged, after crashing into a wall  
 A: Was this an accident?  
 B: No, I crashed into the wall deliberately
- (13) Context: In the Battlestar Galactica universe, humans have just discovered that their machine enemies, the Cylons, can have human form and may live among humans without even knowing they’re Cylons. Gaylen Tyrol is receiving psychological counselling from a priest, being worried about whether he is unknowingly a Cylon himself.
- Gaylen: How do you know [that I’m not a Cylon]?  
 Cavil: Because I’m a Cylon and I’ve never seen you at any of the meetings

The first example (12) is adapted from Agatha Christie’s “Why didn’t they ask Evans” and the context is a fake accident, which is part of a very elaborate deception scheme, involving the driver pretending to have suffered a concussion due to the accident. The (overtly communicated) ironic implicature is “your question is pointless”. In the second example (13), the ironic implicature is very similar, also attacking the interlocutor’s previous question, in this case additionally implicating something along the lines of “it’s obvious that you are not a Cylon and I don’t need to be a Cylon in a secret council to know this”. In both cases the ironic speakers

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<sup>13</sup> Incidentally, an almost identical exchange is found in the Greek TV Series data collected by Kapogianni 2013, where the speaker has crashed her car deliberately to create an excuse for not attending a potentially awkward ceremony.

(speaker B in (12) and Cavil in (13)) make their utterances overtly ironic. The assumptions that people don't generally crash their cars on purpose in the former case and that a Cylon living among humans would never admit to being a Cylon (let alone admit it so casually while also divulging further information about Cylon meetings) in the latter, would lead the hearers to the inference that these utterances can only be ironic. At the same time, the literal content of the sentence is true and only the speaker knows it is true (and intends to conceal it). These examples demonstrate that the ironist's intentions may include both those having to do with the desired outcome of the utterance and those concerning the communicative force of the utterance: the former are more general and may be covert, while the latter are specifically linked to what the speaker wants the hearers to believe that she believes to be true. In this sense, lies can be considered to belong to a higher level of intentions<sup>14</sup> under which ironies can be embedded.

As it regards the apparent success of ironic deceits, this can be attributed to three factors: first, the ironist subtly establishes herself as a cooperative speaker who only flouts but does not violate any of the Gricean maxims, secondly the ironist (at least in the two examples above) expresses a rhetorically formulated criticism towards some belief of the interlocutor, which happens to be not far from the truth that the ironist actually wants to conceal (i.e. the possibility of this not being an accident in (12) and the possibility of someone unsuspected being a Cylon in (13)). The third factor, deriving from the other two, is the effect of something similar to a "double-bluff": it is intuitively less probable for someone who is already "bluffing" once (through irony) to be actually "double bluffing" and exposing a truth hidden in plain sight.

#### 4. The hearer's perspective

So far, we have mostly focused on the ironist's i-intentions and both central distinctions (regarding communicative priority and regarding manifestness) have been relevant to these individual (rather than collective) intentions. At the same time, this has been a discussion from the speaker's perspective, while the hearer's/audience's perspective, as well as the utterance perspective (which is linked to the model speaker and the model addressee, given the context) have not yet been considered.

From the hearer's perspective, the propositions that are linked to the ironic utterance (see examples 1-5) form part of the inferential process. The hearer will try to infer the speaker's main intended meaning, based on the aforementioned factors of manifestness: the context/common ground, the logical/commonsensical connections between meanings, the context, the discourse framework, as well as the additional (prosodic/paralinguistic) cues. Despite the fact that recovering the main intended meaning is the first goal of a successful and efficient communication, the hearer will also try to infer any subtle intentions, especially if these fit the hearer's own i-intentions and information-gathering needs (e.g. the hearer may have the additional intention to figure out if the ironist adheres to a specific political ideology when expressing a criticism towards a specific state of affairs, which may, in turn, be because the hearer intends to initiate a framework of political discussion in the next turn). At the same time, the hearer also has to constantly monitor the interaction and the evolving common ground, trying to assess the risk for communication breakdown or deceit. Avoiding communication breakdown is one of the standard we-intentions shared by the interlocutors and attended to through acts of clarification, explicit (co-textual) reinforcement, and repair (when needed).

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<sup>14</sup> Winner and Leekam (1991), study the ability of children to distinguish between ironies and white lies (benevolent lies, intending to please and be polite to the hearer), finding that it crucially depends on the children's ability to distinguish between second-order intentions.

The reason why the perspective of the utterance is also nontrivial for a fully developed model of (ironic) interaction is that interlocutors can resort to it while being in the process of making their intentions manifest/trying to recover the intended meaning (see Sanders 2013 and his “duality of speaker meaning”, see also Kecskés 2008). In particular, the fact that a specific utterance in a specific context carries some meaning regardless of the speaker’s intentions is acknowledged by the interlocutors. On the one hand, the speaker will try to avoid (e.g. preemptively cancel) any unintended meanings that may arise from the utterance and the hearer will try to separate the intended from the unintended meanings (also making more refined distinctions between primary and secondary intentions).

Aside from the individual goals of the speakers and hearers, what is equally important during interaction is the highly dynamic character of the context, which constantly changes with the addition of new common-ground information, the emergence or cancellation of mutual assumptions and the input from the (intended or unintended) inferences carried by each utterance. It is on this basis that meaning is negotiated and collaboratively constructed. In this respect, the dialogical interaction can be paralleled to a game that has some general rules (that would roughly amount to the components of the Cooperative Principle), and specific rules that are revised and redefined every time a player makes a move. For example, one should consider the discourse framework: if an interlocutor decides to shift this framework (from formal to informal, from serious to humorous etc.) the other interlocutors need to acknowledge this change and to respond accordingly, usually with an additional marker in their own verbal contribution, showing whether they comply with or dismiss their interlocutor’s choice.

## 5. Conclusions

Summing up, when considering ironic meaning, it is important to recognise the multiplicity of propositions that stem from the ironic utterance, which have different levels of inferential priority (i.e. implicated premises that are necessary for further implicated conclusions) and, more importantly, different levels of communicative priority (the speaker’s primary versus secondary intended meaning). Taking the speaker’s perspective, aside from a discussion on the priority of communicative intentions, also allows a discussion on manifestness of intentions, a notion that provides some insights on the speaker’s choices (note that some of these choices are fully conscious and some of them less conscious – the very choice of using irony as a rhetorical device may range from carefully planned to externalising a general mood/attitude). Manifestness can have different degrees, which can also lead to a categorisation of intentions into (generally) overt and (generally) subtle, with the addition of the “zero manifestness” category, i.e. covert intentions. Another observation on manifestness which is evidence for the complexity of ironic meaning is the “audience bifurcation” (according to Kaufer 1977) or even quadruple division (according to Gibbs and Izett 2005), which leads to different degrees of manifestness for different members of the audience.

Although a fully-fledged model of ironic communication should not be restricted to the speaker’s perspective, incorporating the hearer’s perspective, as well as the perspective of the utterance, I hope to have shown the analytical advantages of examining ironic interaction through the important distinctions that regard the speaker’s intentions, both at the communicative level (or “social level” – Haugh 2012: 164) and the private level. These should be considered together with the dynamic nature of discourse and the presence of intentions that are developing and/or post-facto.



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