A delicate balance

Irony in the negotiation of refusals

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Abstract

This paper examines the factors that influence the outcome of exchanges containing refusals, focusing specifically on the role of irony. For this purpose, we analyse spontaneous conversations in English (SPICE-Ireland Corpus and Spoken BNC) within a discursive framework (Eelen 2001, Mills 2003, Watts 2003) that considers the negotiation of opposing views as well as relationships between interlocutors. We propose a model that relies on the crucial distinction between the 'positional' and the 'interpersonal' level, pointing at mismatches between the two when it comes to the presence of conflict. We determine the presence and (non-)resolution of interpersonal conflict based on evidence of relational work (Locher and Watts 2008) and show that although there is no fixed trajectory from irony type (Kapogianni 2011; 2018) to interpersonal effect, some ironies are more interpersonally risky than others.

Keywords: refusals, irony, interpersonal conflict, multi-turn approach

1   Introduction

1.1 Refusal negotiation: a multi-turn perspective

Refusing a request, invitation, or suggestion can be a delicate balancing act. Refusals can generally be defined as "a responding act in which the speaker denies to engage in an action proposed by the interlocutor" (Chen, Ye and Zhang 1995, 121).[1] They involve the task of conveying one's inability or unwillingness to comply, on the one hand, while, usually, trying not to cause offence, on the other (Hayashi 1996, 228). Perhaps that is why the act of refusing has been extensively studied during the last three decades – particularly in cross-cultural/intercultural pragmatics and applied linguistics (e.g. Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz 1990; Bella 2014; Félix-Brasdefer 2004; Kwon 2004).

Likewise, the addressee of a refusal, i.e. the person who made the request, invitation, suggestion, etc., is swaying on a tightrope of their own. Much work has been done on the mitigation of requests and related speech actions (e.g. Aijmer 1996; Economidou-Kogetsidis and Woodfield 2012; Martínez-Flor 2012; Salazar Campillo 2007). However, little research looks at what happens after the requester and the refuser each have had their first respective turn. Refusals should not be expected to remain uncontested. The addressee of a refusal, henceforth 'profferer', may want to coax, convince, or coerce their interlocutor to change their initial position and accept. The refuser, in turn, has to respond to the attempt at persuasion – unless they opt for silence or a topic change. In naturally occurring conversations, interlocutors can enter into a multi-turn negotiation of the refusal and/or the initially proposed action ('proffer'). Crucially, both parties involved in such an interaction have to find a balance between (a) attempting to achieve their desired outcome regarding the future action under discussion and (b) not causing damage to the interpersonal relation.

In order to understand this process of negotiation, we cannot, of course, view refusals in isolation, but as embedded within larger sequences of turns. Drawing on conversation analysis and recent developments in pragmatics, our approach is simultaneously:

   a) Sequential: taking into account the unfolding of interactions (Sacks 1967; Sacks 1992; Schegloff 1968; Schegloff and Sacks 1973);

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[1] Since the range of possible refusal-eliciting acts includes requests for information (Searle 1969, 66; Searle and Vanderveken 1985, 199), non-informative responses to information requests are also considered refusals in the present paper (cf. Reichl 2018).

b) Interpersonal: considering the establishment, maintenance, and challenging of people's relationships (Haugh, Kádár and Mills 2013; Locher and Graham 2010); and

c) Discursive: viewing social actions and interpersonal relationships as co-constructed by participants (Eelen 2001, Mills 2003, Watts 2003);

Our primary goal is to reach a multi-level understanding of interlocutor dynamics and the way these shape/are shaped by the refusal negotiation process. In order to achieve this goal, we draw the crucial distinction between the 'positional level' and the 'interpersonal level'. The former concerns people's views, beliefs, and opinions regarding some current state of affairs or future course of action. The latter pertains to participants' relationships. The question we will be asking is under which circumstances conflict at the positional level triggers conflict at the interpersonal level.

1.2 Irony

Verbal irony (henceforth irony) can provide a tangible illustration of the separation between the positional and interpersonal level. Its layered nature is in fact a characteristic of the phenomenon that is frequently overlooked, leading to definitional and methodological confusion (Kapogianni, in press). We therefore need to begin by teasing those layers apart.

Irony is a trope, i.e. a predictable and recognisable way of creating nonliteral meaning based on/in opposition to (some part of) the explicit content of an utterance. This operation and its output, however, is only the beginning of how irony functions in interaction. Alongside its main communicated message(s), which always include(s) some sort of evaluation, it also accomplishes a range of possible social actions: from 'sarcasm', defined as a bitter and/or biting attack towards a target/victim (see Dynel 2018, 136-152 and references therein), to 'humour', i.e. amusement of the interlocutors/audience, or any combination of the two.[2]

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[2] A further phenomenon frequently discussed in connection with irony is 'banter', defined as an exchange "aimed primarily at mutual entertainment rather than topical talk" (Norrick 1993, 29) in which participants reciprocate ('counter', Haugh 2010, 2108) instances of mockery. Leech (1983), by contrast, considers irony and banter as counterparts, the former being a case of "mock politeness" and the latter being a case of "mock impoliteness" (see also Culpeper 1996). Our own understanding of banter aligns with the former conceptualisation, considering irony as one of many ways of doing banter. Given its intrinsic reciprocal nature, however, we view banter as a larger sequential unit that goes beyond individual verbal actions such as sarcasm or humour.

These social actions, in turn, have an effect at the interpersonal level, resulting in face aggravation, maintenance, or enhancement (Locher and Watts 2008) depending on the recipient's interpretation and evaluation.
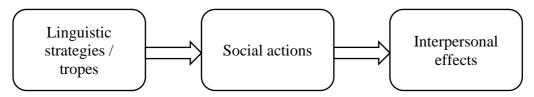

Figure 1 From linguistic strategies (e.g. irony) to interpersonal effects via social actions

Our perspective on irony and its functions can be made clearer in the context of Figure 1, which represents the general trajectory from linguistic strategies/tropes to social actions to interpersonal effects. The first category includes, besides irony, those recognisable strategies like wordplay/puns, jokes/punchlines, hyperbole etc., which can be used to perform social actions like humour or sarcasm. The resulting interpersonal effects are, therefore, not a direct product of any one linguistic strategy (like irony) but the outcome of the social action that this strategy is used to perform. This distinction allows for a finer-grained analysis of the role of irony in exchanges containing conflict (see the recent findings of Kalbermatten 2018 and cf. Bonaiuto, Castellano, and Pierro 2003, Norrick and Spitz 2008). Based on the premise that irony has the ability to perform diverse social actions, which, in turn, can have diverse interpersonal effects, we expect irony's contribution to the negotiation of refusals (and the conflicts arising within them) to be quite varied. In order to explain and systematise this variation, we look at:

(a) the type of irony used
(b) the overall presence of interpersonal conflict in the interaction and whether it eventually is resolved
(c) the role of irony within that conflict.

We begin by compiling an analytical model for approaching positional and interpersonal conflict, informed by cross-disciplinary research (section 2), before proceeding to analyse interactions from our dataset (sections 3-4).

2   Modelling conflict: positional versus interpersonal

Conflict is conceptualised and analysed in different ways across disciplines. In this section, we incorporate perspectives from Pragmatics, Conversation Analysis, as well as Organisational Behaviour Studies into a model of conflict which takes into account a) the surface structure of a conflict interaction and b) the underlying content of a conflict with regard to participants' cognitive and affective states. In other words, our analytical perspective considers both the sequential unfolding of the interaction and the participants' thoughts and feelings towards objects, actions, and each other. Differentiating between the sequential (surface) structure and the underlying content of conflict is important because the latter may remain latent[3] or surface multiple times (see examples 3-5). We will therefore begin by briefly considering the conversation analytic notion of 'conflict sequences' before distinguishing and defining two kinds of content levels: the positional and the interpersonal.

Within Conversation Analysis, 'conflict talk' is conceptualised in terms of the structural properties of a stretch of talk. According to Norrick and Spitz (2008, 1663), in order for an interaction to count as a 'conflict sequence', it "must be constituted by a sequence of at least three turns, in which participants mutually challenge one another". In its shortest form, then, a conflict sequence is structured as follows (modified from Norrick and Spitz 2008, 1665, see also Bousfield 2007; Millar, Rogers, and Bavelas 1984, 234):

> Turn 1: conflict-initiating action/utterance by speaker A
> Turn 2: preceding act/utterance is challenged by speaker B
> Turn 3: preceding utterance by speaker B is countered by speaker A

Applied to refusal negotiations, any instance of an initial refusal that is further contested (i.e. not immediately accepted) constitutes a conflict sequence. Evidently, the notion of conflict sequences is, as the term suggests, based on purely sequential characteristics. What it does not capture is the nature or content of the (underlying) conflict.

As previously mentioned, the content of conflict relates to participants' opinions with respect to something or someone. Traditionally, research on 'disagreements' (Angouri 2012; Holmes and Stubbe 2003; Kotthoff 1993; Pomerantz 1984) has generally been concerned with what we call the positional level, whereas work on verbal aggression and impoliteness (Bousfield 2008; Culpeper 1996; 2001; Kienpointner 1997;) focuses on the interpersonal level.

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[3] In which case we cannot detect it nor study it.

'Positional conflict' can simply be defined as a conflict of opposing positions. All refusal negotiations constitute a positional conflict, since, by refusing, "the speaker denies to engage in an action proposed by the interlocutor" (Chen, Ye and Zhang 1995, 121). Within the positional level, a further, more fine-grained distinction can be made. While refusal negotiations concern opposing positions regarding a future course of action, disagreements frequently centre around opposing positions with respect to what is true. This difference has partially been captured by Barki and Hartwick (2004, 218-231), who conducted a comprehensive review of work within conflict management research (see Table).[4] In our model, we maintain their distinction between "cognitive" positional conflict (a.k.a. disagreement) and "behavioural" positional conflict (a.k.a. interference), albeit with a more clear-cut distinguishing criterion: the former relates to past or present states of affairs whereas the latter is future-oriented (concerns future actions). Refusal negotiations, then, always primarily concern the behavioural positional level. However, the cognitive positional level can, and often does, feature in refusal negotiations too, namely when participants' opinions about what is true constitute the basis for refusals or (re-)proffers (e.g. refusing to order a suggested meal based on a disagreement about its nutritional value, as example 6 demonstrates).

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[4] Note that their term 'interpersonal conflict' does not correspond to ours, since they use it generically to refer to all conflict

Table 1. A Typology for Conceptualizing and Assessing Interpersonal Conflict in Organizations, taken from Barki and Hartwick (2004, 236)

		Conflict's Focus	
		Task Content or Task Progress	Interpersonal Relationship
Conflict's Properties	Cognition/ Disagreement	1 disagreement with the other about what should be done in a task or how a task should be done	2 disagreement with the other's personal values, views, preferences etc.
	Behaviour/ Interference	3 preventing the other from doing what they think should be done in a task or how a task should be done	4 preventing the other from doing things related to a task
	Affect/ Negative emotion	5 anger and frustration directed to the other about what should be done in a task or how a task should be done	6 anger and frustration directed to the other as a person

The two kinds of positional conflict differ from what we call interpersonal conflict in significant ways. The former are necessarily reciprocal in nature, whereas the latter is not. Interpersonal conflict does not centre around oppositional views; rather it has at its core negative affect directed at another person. The interpersonal level, omnipresent in human interaction, can be viewed as "the relational aspect of interactions between people that both affect and are affected by their understandings of culture, society, and their own and others' interpretations" (Locher and Graham 2010: 2).

Conflict at the interpersonal level is captured by what Barki and Hartwick (2004) call the "affect level" within the review of conflict management literature, but it also features within the field of im/politeness research and interpersonal pragmatics more generally. For our conceptualisation of interpersonal conflict, we look for evidence of negative affect in relational work. The term 'relational work' captures "all aspects of the work invested by individuals in the construction, maintenance, reproduction and transformation of interpersonal relationships among those engaged in social practice" (Locher and Watts 2008: 96). In recent years,[5] researchers have increasingly pointed out the link between relational work (a.k.a. facework, in

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[5] Note, however, earlier work by Arndt and Janney (1985, 1991), who considered emotive language a key to the study of im/politeness.

Goffman's sense of "face" – Goffman 1967) and affect. Langlotz and Locher (2013, 87), for instance, remark that "interactors react with emotions to the violations or the adherence of personal expectations and social norms" and Spencer-Oatey (2007:664) points out that "face is a vulnerable phenomenon, and hence associated with emotional reactions". Negative affect, in particular, has been studied in connection with face attack (Culpeper 2011, 22-31). Expressions of negative affect directed towards the addressee are hence cues for perceived face aggravation and, by extension, interpersonal trouble. We therefore define 'interpersonal conflict' as relational work which results in face aggravation and which may surface in the shape of affective cues.[6] As with positional conflict, we can only determine the presence of interpersonal conflict if it is voiced by interactants. A range of linguistic behaviours (e.g. insults, affective speech acts such as threats, absent reciprocal face-enhancing behaviour) can serve as interpersonal conflict cues (Culpeper 1996; Langlotz & Locher 2013; Ochs & Schieffelin 1989; Planalp 1998).

Table provides an overview of interpersonal conflict as well as resolution cues (the list is primarily informed by the aforementioned literature on relational/face-work but has also been updated based on patterns observed within our own data). Although not entirely complementary, the two types of cues can be seen in parallel: expressions of negative affect and disengagement on the one side – expressions of positive affect on the other. Crucially, however, positive affect cues are not individually sufficient for the resolution of interpersonal conflict; it is also important that all involved parties mutually accept and act upon these cues.

Table 2: List of cues

Cues for interpersonal conflict / face aggravation	Cues for interpersonal conflict resolution
Metapragmatic comments ('that was rude')	
Explicit expression of negative emotion ('you're making me angry')	Explicit expression of positive affect
Implicit expression of negative affective stance towards addressee ('Why are you being like that?')	Positive affective evaluation
Absence of response	Interactional engagement
Continued lack of interaction	Sustained interaction
Absence of echoed laughter	Echoed laughter

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[6] This definition encompasses, and deliberately avoids, subcategorizations of evaluations such as 'impolite' and 'rude'. The questions of intentionality and terminology (both emic and etic) are of no concern to this conception of interpersonal conflict.

To summarise, Table represents our proposed multi-level model of conflict. At the sequential level, refusal negotiations of three or more turns constitute what CA refers to as 'conflict sequences'. In terms of conflict content, the primary level of conflict in a refusal negotiation concerns the behavioural level, at which participants negotiate opposing positions with respect to future actions. When participants argue for or against an action by means of expressing a view pertaining to what is true, a further layer of conflict may enter the picture, namely if such a view is challenged by another speaker. Furthermore, these two kinds of positional conflict can trigger interpersonal conflict, which may surface in the form of affective cues.

Table 3: multi-level model of conflict

Sequential level	Positional level	Interpersonal level
turn sequence: A B A etc.	cognitive: concerns what is true behavioural: concerns future actions	aggravation of face and potential damage to interpersonal relation
= conflict sequence	= positional conflict	= interpersonal conflict

Disentangling various strands of conflict is one part of our analysis; the other is mapping their outcomes. For the purpose of classifying outcomes of positional conflict, we draw on Norrick and Spitz's (2008, 1669; cf. also Deutsch (1969) and Sillars et al. (1982)) model (Figure 2).
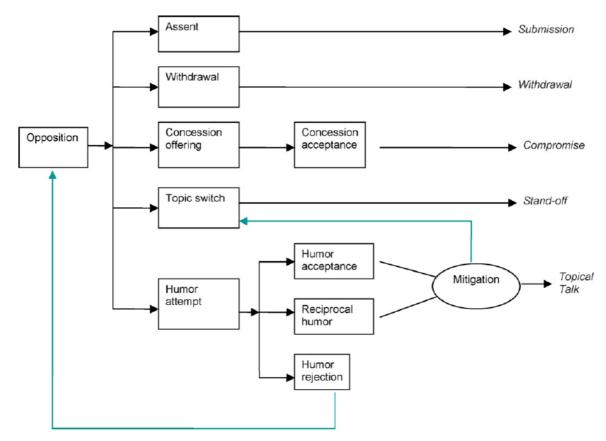
Figure 2Ending conflict with humour, taken from Norrick and Spitz (2008, 1670)

As the authors point out the only "equitable resolution of conflict" is compromise (Norrick and Spitz 2008, 1669). Withdrawal, stand-off (by change of topic) and even submission (yielding to the interlocutor's goals) are all temporary solutions which end the conflict sequence but do not resolve the positional conflict, giving it the opportunity to re-emerge later in the conversation as a new conflict sequence. Submission in particular, they state, involves loss of face, an imbalance in interpersonal dynamics which can have visible repercussions.

3   Data and methodology

Our data comes from two spoken corpora: (1) the Spoken BNC (1991-1994) (Coleman et al. 2012), from which 10 hours of spontaneous conversations among young people were analysed and (2) the SPICE–Ireland (1990-2005) (Kirk et al. 2011), from which we selected all face-to-face conversations between friends and family members (~186,266 words).

Our approach to verbal irony is a Neo-Gricean one (see Dynel 2018 for a comprehensive overview of approaches), which focuses on the relationship between "what is said" and "what is implicated", recognising the existence of some kind of opposition between the two. In order

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to encompass the widest possible array of ironic devices, we steer away from single-strategy definitions of irony (e.g. the Relevance-Theoretic "irony as echoic mention" – Sperber and Wilson 1981 and subsequent publications) and favour, instead, accounts that posit necessary and sufficient conditions for the presence of the phenomenon (Garmendia 2015; Kapogianni 2011). We specifically follow Kapogianni's (2011, 2018) definition, which suggests three necessary and jointly sufficient conditions: (a) a contrast between beliefs and/or expectations of the speaker(s), (b) incompatibility between what is said and some element of the context, (c) the speaker expressing an evaluative attitude. Using these as a heuristic for the identification of ironic utterances in the studied interactions means that we look for evidence of all three in the context and content of each putatively ironic utterance (i.e. evidence of clashing beliefs/expectations, evidence of incompatibility between conventionally conveyed and intended/recovered as intended meanings, and evidence of evaluation). For a more nuanced account of the role of irony in the studied interactions, we additionally follow Kapogianni's (2011, 2018) two-way typological distinction between 'meaning reversal' (i.e. reversing some element of what is said – also referred to as 'type 1' for brevity) and 'meaning replacement' (i.e. using a contextually inappropriate, often "surreal" utterance in juxtaposition to an utterance that is both the trigger and the target of the ironic response – also referred to as 'type 2').

The coding process included two steps: initially, the first author identified instances of refusals in the corpora. In the case of SPICE-Ireland, which is pragmatically annotated for speech acts, all utterances coded as either a directive or a commissive were checked to see whether they were followed by a refusal or an acceptance. The BNC sub-corpus was manually searched for instances of proffers followed by refusals. Subsequently, both authors jointly annotated the body of refusals, identifying cases that included irony. These had to satisfy the aforementioned three conditions for the presence of the phenomenon and could appear in any of three positions: (a) as part of the refusal-eliciting act (b) as part of the initial refusal, or (c) as part of the subsequent negotiation of the refusal.

4   Results and discussion

4.1   Overview

In total, we found 17 interactions which matched our criteria: 15 in the SPICE-Ireland Corpus and 2 in our selected BNC sample. These contain 34 ironic units and have been categorised

with regard to the presence and status of interpersonal conflict: no conflict, unresolved conflict, and resolved conflict (Table 4).

Table 4: raw frequencies (and percentages) of refusal interactions and ironic units

	refusal interactions	ironic units	ironic units per interaction
no conflict	10 (58.8)	19 (55.9)	1.9
conflict (total)	7 (41.2)	15 (44.1)	2.1
unresolved conflict	3 (17.6)	6 (17.6)	2.0
resolved conflict	4 (23.5)	9 (26.5)	2.3
total	17 (100)	34 (100)	

The presence of irony types ('meaning reversal'-type 1 and 'meaning replacement'- type 2) within each category (no conflict, unresolved conflict, resolved conflict) is shown in Figure 3, while Figure 4 and Figure 5 show how the totality of units of each irony type is distributed across interactions with different conflict statuses.

Figure 3: number of ironic units by irony type and interpersonal conflict status
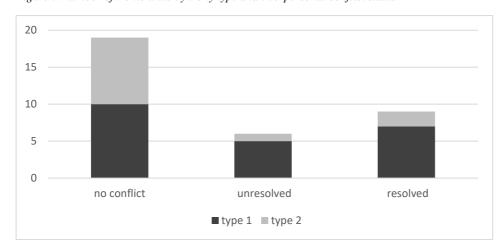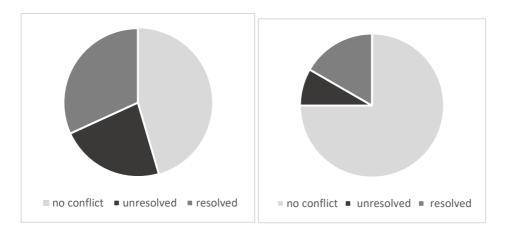
Overall, type 1 irony occurs more frequently (22 times) than type 2 (12 times), matching its general corpus distribution (Kapogianni 2014). Looking within each type of interaction, non-conflict interactions contain similar (almost even) counts of each irony type, whereas interactions with interpersonal conflict (both resolved and unresolved), contain more type 1 than type 2 ironies. Correspondingly, looking within each irony type, type 2 irony appears predominantly in non-conflict interactions, while type 1 appears marginally more in conflict interactions than in non-conflict ones (Figures 4 and 5).

4.2   *Instances of no interpersonal conflict*

In this section, we present cases in which there is no sign of interpersonal conflict associated with the refusal. In these instances, the refusal concerns something minor, most usually provision of trivial information (which the refuser may not be able to provide due to lack of knowledge). The ironies occurring in such interactions have a playful style, which often works as part of banter, ultimately contributing positively to the interpersonal dynamics of the interlocutors.

The following examples are also a good opportunity for illustrating the two different irony types that we distinguish in our data: type 1 (reversal) appearing in example (1) and type 2 (replacement) appearing in example (2).

In the first example, two friends discuss speaker B's studies, the refusal occurring when B is unable to name the fourth British dramatist he is studying in that academic term.

(1) P1A-016 ('Catching up')

1   B: I'm doing sociolinguistics women culture times and five modern British dramatists.
2   A: Who?
3   B: Pinter Beckett Osborne
4   A: And the fourth?
5   B: <unclear 2 syllables> and
6   A: You've studied well this one have you.
7   B: Who else? <laughter> I don't actually know. I'm probably doing him for the exam
8   A: Right. Not not not to worry then uh Michael. <laughter>

The irony first occurs after speaker B fails to answer A's question (refusal). The intended meaning of "You've studied well this one – have you" is its reverse: "You haven't studied well (enough)". Speaker B then responds with another irony ("I'm probably doing him for the exam"), meant as an admission of his lack of preparation for the exam in a self-deprecating manner. Although less obvious than in the previous ironic utterance, the relationship between the said and the intended meaning here is also a case of reversal, involving a few propositions: enriching the literal meaning of turn 7 to "my knowledge of this particular author is so good that he's going to be my exam topic" allows the ironic creation, through a process of 'scalar reversal' (Kapogianni 2011), of "my knowledge of this particular author is really bad" and "he can't be my exam topic (or I would fail)". It also leads to the (potential) implicature "I am not prepared for the exam". Finally, this triggers a further ironic response from interlocutor A, which is another straightforward case of reversal: "not to worry" which, given the context, can be taken as "you should worry".

This exchange includes a number of cues which indicate an interpersonally non-conflictual interaction. Although the first ironic remark expresses sarcastic criticism, Speaker B immediately responds with laughter (turns 6-7) and reciprocates the use of irony – a move that is then repeated by speaker A, accompanied by further laughter. B's response, in particular, suggests he orients to A's initial ironic utterance as interpersonally unproblematic. This is a crucial moment, since the implied criticism of A's irony could aggravate B's face. However, B does not display any negative affect (i.e. conflict) cues. Overall, both interlocutors adopt a playful mood, built on their joint mockery of speaker B's shortcoming.

Moving on to example (2), we see instances of the second irony type (replacement). This type of irony has a well-documented relationship to humour (Dynel 2013; Kapogianni 2011). Not only does it include a higher degree of incongruity between what is said and reality (see also Colston 2002), but it is also associated with creativity and introducing a humorous frame

to the interaction (Kapogianni 2018)[7]. The latter effect is illustrated in example (2), in which speaker C refuses speaker B's suggestion to take more paracetamol for her headache:

(2) P1A-050 ('Fireworks')

1   C: I've a splitting headache.
2   B: Have another paracetamol. Have four.
3   C: No yeah [have six.]
4   B: [Have six.]
5   C: I thought twelve it takes to kill yourself.
6   B: If you have six and a few shots of bourbon.
7   C: Okay has anybody got poitín.

Interestingly, the first sign of a type 2 irony comes within the second turn ("have four") by which speaker B targets her own initial suggestion "have another" (through juxtaposition, the suggestion to have another paracetamol is presented as unreasonable). This immediately gets picked up by speaker C who, simultaneously to B, escalates the implausibility of the suggestion ("have six"). This move triggers a whole new semantic script, that of pills taken for the purpose of suicide. Both interlocutors now (turn 3 onwards) playfully reinterpret turn 2 as advice for suicide, further building on this 'joint fictionalisation' (Kotthoff 1999), while implicitly maintaining that suggesting another paracetamol to C would be a bad idea unless C had been contemplating suicide. Overall, the use of irony in this interaction is treated as interpersonally unproblematic by both participants, with neither displaying negative affect cues. This is partially due to the fact that the initial ironic utterance targets the speaker herself rather than the addressee. In addition, C immediately orients to B's irony as non-serious – rather than a genuine suggestion to commit suicide – and participates in the joint fictionalisation.

4.3   Instances of interpersonal conflict

Instances of interpersonal conflict (related to but not necessarily triggered by refusals) were identified using the cues discussed in section 2 (Table 2). Both irony types (type 1 and type 2) were found in cases where interpersonal conflict was detected, each playing a different role in the course of the interaction.

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[7] Establishing and sustaining a 'humorous frame' (also known as 'play frame', per Bateson 1953, or 'humorous keying' – see Norrick 1993, Norrick and Bubel 2009, as well as Dynel 2011, for a detailed overview) is a good indicator of absence of interpersonal conflict.

4.3.1   Resolved interpersonal conflict

Interactions were considered as including resolved interpersonal conflict if present conflict cues were replaced by signs of mutual face enhancing behaviour. Example (3) takes place between two female (A, B) and two male (C, D) participants who are friends (A and C are a couple). The theme of gender stereotypes and gender differences pervades the whole conversation, which is 267 turns long.

(3) P1A-025 ('Housework')

1   A: Do you hear them?
2   B: Do you hear him? <quote> Do the dishes. </quote>
3   A: Excuse me, what's that supposed to mean? What's that supposed to mean?
4   C: Ah yeah.
5   A: What?
6   D: That's where women belong [the kitchen sink.   ] <laughter>
7   A: [Stick up for yourself.] That's shite. That's a load of
        balls.
8   C: Housework. <laughter>
9   A: Housework?
10   C: Aye.
11   A: John stick up for me [here.   ] Stick up for women in general.
12   C: [Sure if you]
13   C: If there's only sport on TV on a Saturday can you do the housework
           [on a Saturday.]
14   B: [I don't know] what I am to it.
15   A: Why the hell don't you do it instead of watching the TV? [That's a good idea. God
        help the woman that marries you. Excuse me listen to that.] <laughter>
16   D: [You shouldn't have time
        to sit and watch the match. You shouldn't have time to watch the TV.]
17   B: Listen to that [there.]
18   A: [What's] that supposed to mean?
19   B: You and [Eoin's going to get married?]
20   D: [Did you not hear about   ] this?
21   A: What?
22   D: <quote> You should be busy working doing the housework. </quote>
23   A: Aye right whatever you think. <laughter>
24   C: Oh God.
25   A: I hate that [attitude.   ]
26   D: [You shouldn't] be near the TV.
27   B: Oh no. <laughter>
28   A: Oh my God you get me so mad. Do you think like that as well? O-obviously you do.
29   C: Aye.
30   A: You just trying to wind [me up.]
31   B: [Nora] who're you going to marry?
32   A: I don't know. Have to see. Won't be marrying anybody sexist anyway.
33   C: Oh will you not?
34   A: No I won't.
35   C: Good for you.

36   A: Aye well so he'd better change his ways whoever I marry.
37   C: Ah the lucky man.
38   A: That's a disgrace that. <laughter>
39   C: What's a disgrace?
40   A: Attitude.

The transcript begins mid-conversation, and turn 1 in excerpt (3) is in fact the first turn of the SPICE-Ireland transcript. We do not see the initial request itself, but in turn 2, speaker B quotes (echoes) the requester: 'Do the dishes'. Both A and B react with exclamations of incredulity or astonishment (turns 1-3). The exclamations as well as A's question in response to a request ("what's that supposed to mean?") function as refusals. Besides not accepting, both female participants clearly treat the request (carrying assumptions regarding gender roles) as, at best, inappropriate, expressing a negative affective stance towards it.

This interaction clearly illustrates that, in contrast to positional conflict, interpersonal conflict is not necessarily reciprocal: only the female participants express negative affect cues, thereby orienting to the males' verbal behaviour as face aggravating and interpersonally problematic. While the males do continue the issue of gender stereotypes (turns 6, 8, 13, 16, 22, 26) some of these utterances are accompanied by laughter by the speakers (turn 6, 8). This may either be an attempt to soften the message or a signal that they are not entirely serious about what they are saying. The female participants, however, do not orient to the males' talk as (entirely) humorous. Rather, they continue expressing negative affective stances towards the sexist comments (turns 7, 11, 14, 15, 17-19, 23, 25, 27, 28), orienting to them as inappropriate and offensive. Nevertheless, speaker A also interprets the interaction as non-serious: in turn 30, she says "You just trying to wind me up" and, in turns 15, 23, and 38, her utterances are accompanied by laughter.[8]

In this context, irony is employed in a different way than we have seen previously. Instead of leading to reciprocated humour, it occurs within an already ongoing interpersonal conflict. In turn 23, in a rather conventionalised usage of irony, A uses "Aye right whatever you think" to signal disagreement (irony, here, reverses the conventionalised/formulaic speech act of agreement) and express a further negative evaluation of D's behaviour. Here, then, irony is a cue for interpersonal conflict. Interestingly, however, neither D nor C orient to this utterance – or to any of the previous affective stances – as face aggravating. In other words, they do not appear to perceive the female participants' talk as interpersonally problematic.

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[8] It is entirely possible to recognise an utterance as non-serious and aimed at 'winding someone up' and still consider it inappropriate.

Irony is also used by one of the males in this interaction, but not as a conflict cue. Towards the end of example (3), the conversation centres around A not wanting to marry a sexist man (starting turn 31) and it is here that C, her partner, uses irony (type 1) repeatedly. In response to A's statement that she will not marry anyone sexist, C utters "Oh will you not?" in turn 33 (feigned surprise/ conventionalised irony). After A's confirmation, he replies "Good for you" (turn 35) and, when A expresses her future husband "better change his ways" (turn 36), C utters "Oh the lucky man" (turn 37). Strikingly, none of C's uses of irony are accompanied by laughter. Nevertheless, given the conversational context, they seem to be further attempts at winding A up rather than genuine criticism. The primary target of the irony is A and her refusal to marry someone sexist, i.e. to marry C if he is sexist. Considering that the seriousness of C's sexist attitude has already been questioned at this point of the conversation, however, his criticism is equally non-serious. In addition, turn 37 is also self-deprecating to some degree, since he, as A's current partner, may be the "lucky man".

The conflict sequence between A and C ends abruptly in turn 40 – though there is some subsequent tentative alignment (compromise) between A and D before the topic is changed. If we recall Norrick and Spitz's (2008, 1669) possible outcomes of conflict seqeuences, only a compromise is a definite resolution, whereas withdrawing, changing the topic, or yielding may lead to the conflict resurfacing. Crucially, we have to keep in mind that Norrick and Spitz are focusing on disagreements and that our example contains at least three levels of conflict. First, we have the request/refusal level: the negotiation of who should do the housework ends by turn 26, at the latest, and does not re-emerge. This may be considered a case of topic change (to gender more generally) or C and D submitting, i.e. accepting the refusal. Second, there is disagreement regarding gender roles, which underlies the refusal negotiation and continues until the end of example (3), after the topic of housework has been dropped. The gender subject is then temporarily dropped without A and C, in particular, having resolved their disagreement. Third, we see cues for an interpersonal conflict, especially between A and C, namely A's recurrent negative affective stance towards C.

That the interpersonal tension is not yet fully resolved becomes apparent later in the conversation – and it resurfaces in the form of further comments on gender. The interaction continues for several more turns, extracts of which are presented here in (4) and (5) (further down):

(4) P1A-025 ('Housework')

1   C: Ah now. It's too soppy.
2   B: I mean. <laughter>

3   A: It's too soppy?
4   C: Aye. <laughter>
5   A: Oh is that uh is that a male opinion or something?
6   C: Och no.
7   A: Huh?
8   C: No [it's only   ]
9   B: [John did you see it?]

In (4), we see the issue flare up briefly. C states that he finds a film they are talking about "too soppy" (turn 1), to which A reacts by initiating a repair sequence (turn 3). While this may be seeking confirmation of what she thought C said, it could also signal criticism. After C's confirmation, which is accompanied by laughter – possibly because C interprets the previous turn as criticism and wants to soften the impact of his affirmation – A reintroduces the gender topic (turn 5); a cue that the issue and the interpersonal tension between A and C are not resolved yet. C, however, does not want to continue that line of conversation, as signalled by his negation in turns 6 and 8. In the latter, he further begins expressing a justification, which is mitigated by 'just', but does not finish it after B interrupts him and directs the conversation elsewhere.

(5) P1A-025 ('Housework')

1   A: […]. And I also read well I suppose it's true anyway that women have more fat than men [and men have more muscles] <laughter> I think so. And men have more muscles than women. That's true anyway.
2   B: [Aye. That's true.   ]
3   B: Muscles [<unclear 3 syllables>]
4   A: [I must admit] now in some they're a bit few and far between.
5   C: Aye well there's a lot of fat women about isn't there?
6   A: What are you implying?
7   C: I 'm just saying [that   ]
8   B: [<unclear 3 syllables >] sitting beside me cos she's nearly off the bed. That's [<unclear 2 syllables >]
9   D: [You say   ] uh people're getting fatter.
10   A: Aye that [includes men. People.   ]
11   D: [They done a survey aye. Everybody's] getting fatter.
12   B: Everybody's getting fatter.
13   D: Mhm
14   A: [That's uhm]
15   D: [Women women] go women are getting sort-of filling out a bit more.
16   A: I know. <laughter>
17   D: They're getting bigger chests [and bigger bums and everything.]
18   A: [Aye sure it's all the better isn't it?] Oh-well <laughter>
19   B: Bigger what?

20   D: Bums.
21   C: Aye that's true.
22   A: More to get a hold of. <laughter>

The subject of gender differences re-emerges one more time. In (6), we see how the interpersonal conflict between A and C and their disagreement regarding gender are resolved: by switching gear without switching topic. Initially, we see conflict cues from A again (turn 6) after C states that there are "a lot of fat women about" (turn 5). C begins what appears to be a defence against A's interpretation of turn 5 – namely that C was implying A is fat – but is interrupted by B. Speaker D subsequently attempts to find a compromise – and potentially tries to clarify what he thinks C meant – by pointing out that both men and women are "getting fatter" (turns 9 and 11), with which A and B agree (turns 10 and 12). In turns 15 and 17, then, D goes back to women's bodies, specifically. His assertions that they are getting bigger are met with agreement by both C and A now (turns 21 and 16, 18, 22, respectively); the latter also laughs at the end of her final three turns, further signalling a resolution of the disagreement. Importantly, A and C are now at a stage of agreement –facilitated by D – and we see no further interpersonal conflict cues in or after this extract, i.e. they continue to communicate with each other without signs of negative affect. It is also interesting to note that, although the subject matter is a lot "lighter" than before, there is a playful but still sincere frame (in fact, a lot more sincere than the original dialogue, which initiated the conflict). Here, irony is notably absent, presumably because it is neither needed to contribute to the (already present) playfulness nor as a 'weapon' in a conflict situation.

Although, as previously discussed, type 2 irony is more strongly associated with humour than type 1, it can nevertheless be a cue for interpersonal conflict, as illustrated in example (6). The extract begins just after a lengthy conversation in which speakers B and C criticise A's eating habits and suggest various dietary changes, all of which A refuses.

    (6) P1A-080 ('Motorbikes')

1   A: Anyway.
2   C: Let's quickly change the [subject]
3   A: [Change] the subject there. Topic change and all that.
4   C: I think you should get a good iron tonic into you.
5   B: I do think [so   ].
6   A: [Okay mommy].
7   B: You're very wishy-washy.
8   C: Yeah you're as [white as a sheet   ].
9   A: [Do you think I lo- do you] think I look white? Yeah they're always
      saying that I've got very grey circles under my [eyes].

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| 10 | B: | [Yeah] grey bluey. |

At this point of the conversation, A is keen to stop B and C's insistent advice-giving and change the topic (turns 1 and 3). While C first seems to agree to a topic change (turn 2), she then continues with a further suggestion (turn 4), which is backed up by B (turn 5). It is now that A responds with a type 2 irony in turn 6. Given that A had previously conveyed her wish to move on to a different topic, she employs irony to orient to C's (and B's) linguistic behaviour as inappropriate. The term 'mommy', specifically, targets and criticises C's overstepping a line regarding her social role vis-à-vis A. The counterfactuality of "OK mommy" is juxtaposed to C's suggestion in a way that invites the logical inferences "if your suggestion is appropriate then you must be my mother – you are obviously not my mother – therefore your suggestion is inappropriate".

Although B and C's subsequent turns do not orient to the irony as face aggravating – i.e. the irony, while expressing A's perceived interpersonal trouble, does not appear to cause interpersonal trouble in B and C – none of the participants treat it as humorous. Rather, B and C seem to acknowledge the criticism by ceasing their authoritative approach (which also dominated the conversation prior to the attempted topic change) and instead expressing their concern regarding A's physical wellbeing (turns 7 and 8). This shift is accepted by A, who encourages the line of conversation to continue in turn 9. Although it does not constitute a complete topic change, it appears to be enough to satisfy A and immediately snuff out the brief flare-up of interpersonal tension.

4.3.2   Unresolved Conflict

We classified cases of interpersonal conflict as unresolved when signs of conflict were still present at the end of the conversation.[9] In example (7) we have an interaction between friends, (five participants A, B, C, D, E, all female of similar ages, 26-33 years old[10]) that revolves around ordering food at a restaurant. Example (6) illustrates how irony can aggravate an already ongoing interpersonal conflict.

(7) SWDA P1A-010 ('Lunch')

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[9] We recognise that the conflict may have been (and likely was) resolved at a later stage, which was not recorded. For the purpose of this analysis, however, we decided to distinguish whether the interpersonal conflict was resolved or not by the end of the transcripts.
[10] Recording date between 2002-2005.

1 A: Have the soup. You can eat anything after that, seriously.
2 E: Soup's boring.
3 A: Yeah but it lines your stomach [<unclear several syllables >]
4 B: [It's good for you.   ]
5 D: Get a salad.
6 A: It's it's quite nice,
7 ?: <unclear 2 words> sandwich
8 A: Just have soup and a main course.
9 E: I'll get toasted ham and cheese.
10 A: Oh now that is exciting. <laughter> You can't get that at home can you. <laughter>
11 B: You're having the ham and cheese sandwich?
12 A: Cos soup's boring. <laughter>
13 B It's actually not a boring soup. It's not that big wow like but [it was nice.]
14 C: [I'm gonna go out]
later tonight so I 'll just have burger and chips.
15 E: Uhm oh uh can I get the toasted ham and cheese please?

Speaker A makes the initial proffer, suggesting to E that she order soup. Speaker E responds with "soup is boring" (turn 2), a refusal via providing a reason. Speaker A then contras the refusal (turn 3) with a re-proffer: the turn begins with an expression of agreement/alignment ('yeah'), which softens (and delays) the subsequent re-suggestion and disalignment, formulated by means of a reason for having soup. In the next five turns, we see B aligning with A's suggestion, D providing an alternative suggestion (aligning with/accepting E's refusal), and A continuing to push her initial proffer.[11]

Although the subject of the conversation is mundane and the proffered action a low risk one (no benefit for A or cost for E), we can see the first potential interpersonal conflict cues after A's re-suggestion in turn 3: E does not respond to the other speakers' suggestions until turn 9 (possibly turn 7). Since suggestions project an acceptance or refusal by the addressee, the complete absence of a response by E in turns 4, 5, or 6 suggests a conflict (Pietikäinen 2018). Delayed responses are a sign of dispreferred speech actions in CA (Kendrick and Torreira 2015); a way of mitigating, for instance, a refusal. Based on a number of features of this extract, we would argue, however, that this is not E mitigating but rather a cue for an emerging interpersonal conflict. First, E has already uttered a refusal (turn 2). Second, that initial refusal, though indirect, was not delayed – neither within the turn sequence nor within the turn. Third, when E finally does utter her re-refusal in turn 9, there is, again, no turn-internal delay, she does so with a definitive, unhedged statement, and she does not acknowledge the

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[11] It is not clear if turn 7 is another alternative suggestion (to have a sandwich) or E countering the preceding suggestions with a statement that she wants a sandwich, like she does in turn 9.

previous turns. Taken together, E is clearly not interested in a negotiation of what to order and she does not express any appreciation for the suggestion. In fact, we argue that the opposite is the case: the lack of response to the various (re-)suggestions in turns 4, 5, and 6, together with the realisation of her eventual re-refusal is a sign of annoyance and conflict, not just on the content level (soup or no soup) but also the interpersonal one.

At this moment of developing interpersonal tension, speaker A responds to E's second refusal with an instance of type 1 irony ("oh now that's exciting – you can't get that at home" +> "that's boring – something you'd have at home"). This turn conveys mixed messages: on the one hand, the irony expresses sarcastic criticism of the recipient's personal choices; on the other, there are two instances of laughter, which may be an attempt at mitigation or framing the utterance as humorous. Speaker E, however, does not orient to it as humorous. Rather, she continues to withhold responses to any of her co-participants (turns 10 to 13). This lack of response can be understood as a cue of interpersonal conflict. In this light, the sarcastic function of irony (type 1 – meaning reversal) is indeed in line with observations that deem this type less humorous (Kapogianni 2011; 2014) and more straightforwardly critical (see also Bosco and Bucciarelli 2008). This appears to be particularly true when type 1 irony is used to target a participant who has already displayed their understanding of an interaction as interpersonally problematic, as the above example shows.

Like examples (3)-(5), this interaction illustrates that interpersonal conflict can continue beyond the positional conflict which triggered it. The target of the ironic utterance disengages from the conversation, ignoring continued suggestions and staying with her decision, thereby ending the conflict sequence with a 'withdrawal' (Norrick and Spitz 2008, 1669). The aggravating effects on participants' interpersonal relations, however, can be seen throughout the transcript: with the exception of one repair sequence, E does not interact with any of her co-participants for the remainder of the recorded interaction.

5   Conclusions

Our analysis revealed the complex interlocutor dynamics in refusal situations that range from minimally risky (inability to answer a study-related question) to more serious (negotiation of housework arrangements and gender roles). Within the discussed situations, irony appeared in different positions and with a variety of outcomes, which are better understood when we separate the social acts performed via irony from their interpersonal effects.

Our findings are compatible with previous research concerning the characteristics of irony types (Kapogianni 2011, 2018): meaning reversal irony (type 1) accomplishes sarcasm (biting criticism) more often than not, consequently frequently occurring in contexts of interpersonal conflict – either as a trigger/factor of escalation, when it is perceived as face aggravating (example 7), or as a conflict cue, conveying negative affect towards the addressee and their linguistic behaviour (example 3). Meaning replacement irony (type 2) by contrast, accomplishes more playful social actions. Even though both types can participate in reciprocal face maintaining interactions (banter, examples 1 & 2), type 2 ironies contribute to typical humorous acts like joint fictionalization (example 2), which is a mutually face enhancing activity. At the same time, like type 1, type 2 irony can also function as a conflict cue (example 6), although it is somewhat telling that our dataset did not include instances in which type 2 irony initiated interpersonal conflict. Overall, type 1 irony, through its performed social actions, displays a stronger link to interpersonal conflict than type 2.

For this analysis, we proposed and applied a multi-level model (Table 3, repeated here), which views conflict as a non-unified concept when it comes to interactions.

Table 3: multi-level model of conflict

Sequential level	**Positional level**	**Interpersonal level**
turn sequence: A B A etc.	cognitive: concerns what is true	aggravation of face and potential damage to interpersonal relation
	behavioural: concerns future actions	
= conflict sequence	**= positional conflict**	**= interpersonal conflict**

We demonstrated the need for a distinction between: a) the sequential level, which captures the surface structure of a conflict sequence; b) the positional level, which concerns the content of a conflict with regard to participants' oppositional views and beliefs; and c) the interpersonal level, at which speakers perceive and express face aggravation and resulting negative affect.

With regard to positional conflict, we further differentiated between the cognitive and the behavioural level. The latter concerns opposition regarding a future action and is at the centre of refusal negotiations. The former, by contrast, encompasses disagreements about what is true. While conflict at the cognitive level can occur independently from behavioural conflict, it can also surface within a refusal negotiation (examples 3-5). In terms of its surface structure, a refusal negotiation always comes to an end (Norrick and Spitz 2008). This does not necessarily

mean, however, that the behavioural conflict – and potential connected cognitive conflicts – are resolved. In addition, a participant's (linguistic) behaviour can be perceived as face aggravating, in which case the recipient may employ cues which express interpersonal trouble. In contrast to positional conflict, interpersonal conflict (i.e. negative affect and face aggravation) is not necessarily reciprocal, as our analysis showed.

Ultimately, our analysis demonstrated that the most crucial element for a thorough understanding of refusal interactions is a multi-level and multi-turn approach, with emphasis on the interpersonal aspect.

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