Book review

Manuel Jobert & Sandrine Sorline (eds.) 2018. *The Pragmatics of Irony and Banter.*
Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Any attempt to delineate and define irony in a satisfactory manner is, ironically speaking, never ending and elusive. The problem of its conceptual complexity is best illustrated in this edited volume. It consists of ten chapters, each offering a unique debate on the notion, mostly relying on different concepts of conversational irony that are at times complementary but often irreconcilable one to another. What makes the volume additionally intriguing is the editors' decision to widen its conceptual framework by including an interaction phenomenon rarely studied so far in a systematic manner: banter.

In the opening chapter, titled "The intricacies of irony and banter", the editors, Jobert and Sorline, explain that the motivation for the volume is to offer new perspectives on the ever slippery notion of irony and to understand its workings from a pragmatic perspective, while shedding light on a discursive phenomenon that has been largely understudied so far – banter. In the chapter, the editors first offer a quick overview of the different conceptualisations of irony, suggesting that a focus on the pragmatic functions of irony (save face and be funny) can be an exit from the conceptual conundrum. The editors then present the concept of banter, highlighting its key element—reciprocity—and discussing briefly the concept's dictionary meaning, social history, its place in the work of Labov (1972) and Leech (2014), and finishing the overview by stressing the social function of banter, which is to foster group membership and solidarity and ensure social harmony (Culpeper 1996). The rest of the chapter is a short overview of the contents of the remaining nine chapters.

Grounding the approach on Simpson's (2003, 2011) definition of irony as the perception of conceptual paradox, Jeffries' study states that, "Irony in a theory of textual meaning" is an attempt to construct a model that encompasses linguistic, textual, interpersonal and situational meanings, to show where different types of irony overlap, to demonstrate boundaries of irony in regard to humour, and to outline the distinction between irony and other types of clash (such as paradox and hypocrisy). Resituating the text in the general model of language resonant of Halliday's (1985) and relying on the premise that irony involves a clash, Jeffries' model of irony conceptualises the phenomenon as the result of a clash occurring between different points in a communicative framework, in particular, occurring in six clashes between textual, interpersonal and situational levels of meaning. The author then discusses irony and other types of incongruities (paradox and hypocrisy) suggesting that in a paradox, there is no preferred interpretation, so the clash cannot be resolved; on the other hand, hypocrisy does not necessarily involve a clash. The author concludes the chapter with a discussion of dramatic irony.

Dynel's critical examination of the type of irony that communicates positive evaluation in chapter three, "Deconstructing the myth of positively evaluative irony," opens with the accepted premise that irony performs evaluation. The chapter then raises criticism on Leech's

work on the mitigating effects of irony (Leech 1983), his understanding of banter and the treatment of sarcasm as synonymous with conversational irony. To demonstrate that positively evaluated irony is just an addition to negatively evaluative irony, Dynel sets two necessary conditions of irony—overt untruthfulness and implicated evaluation—arguing that the approaches to positively evaluated irony are based on an inadequate choice of samples that fail to meet the two conditions. Moreover, by pointing out that an utterance can be considered ironic only if there is a negatively evaluated antecedent, Dynel demonstrates the redundancy of the positively expressed irony, since the case itself relies on a negatively evaluated antecedent. Thus, Dynel concludes, positive evaluation is a springboard for the central negatively evaluative implicature, but it is tangential to the central negative evaluation since the heart of irony is the critical evaluation of the antecedent.

In chapter four, titled "Verbal irony, politeness…and three ironic types", Simonin offers another model of irony, consisting of three types: *polar*, *impersonation* and *mock politeness irony* (*polirudness*). To construct the model, the author first critically discusses Leech's (2014) concept of irony, arguing that the concept is too narrow and heavily dependent on politeness considerations. Then, the author suggests that verbal irony is best conceived as a lexically polysemous category consisting of several genre types, among which are polar irony (the desirable state of affairs evoked by the ironic utterance is in sharp contrast to the actual state of affairs) and impersonation irony, where the speaker pretends to take a voice that is not their own, and mocks the shortcomings of the persona. Finally, pointing to both the shortcomings and the useful insights from Leech's theory, Simonin discusses the third type: "mock politeness irony", where the ironic utterance literally expresses a somewhat distorted perspective on the relevant situation. The chapter ends with a brief consideration of the difference between genteel irony and banter, accepting a definition of banter as positive politeness that acts as a social accelerator increasing intimacy.

In chapter five, "Irony and semantic prosody revisited", McIntyre explores the potential of Louw's (1993) conception of *semantic prosody* as a tool to identify irony. The theoretical section opens with a short overview of Louw' s understanding of the concept of semantic prosody and the relation of Louw's understanding of irony to Simpson's (2011) definition of it as perceptual clash. What follows is an elaborate discussion of the concept of semantic prosody as a discourse function of unit of meaning and its relation to the notion of semantic preference. Weaving in together Sinclair's (1998), Stubb's (2007) and Hunston's (2007) concepts of semantic prosody, McIntyre points to the need for a careful distinction between semantic prosody and semantic preference and the dependency of the former on the reader's point of view. Although critical of Louw, McIntyre does emphasise the applicability of Louw's notion of semantic prosody in the identification of irony in light of the claim that irony arises as a clash between semantically positive collocation and a negatively transferred prosody, a claim he demonstrates in an analysis of a satirical text from the British revue *Beyond the Fringe*. Applying Grice's (1975) notion of conversational implicature, the author concludes that irony arises not from comparing semantic prosody against the norm but from comparing the semantic prosody of a particular unit of meaning against an implicature arising from a specific phrase.

In the chapter "Simulating ignorance: Irony and banter on Congreve's stage," to explore the workings of irony and banter in late XVII comedy, Mandon adopts a view of verbal irony as occurring when the intended meaning of an utterance is not opposed to, but different from the literal meaning. Such a conception is especially relevant to the analysis of stage discourse, the author contends, because of the dramatists' creation of a double discourse (literal vs non-literal meaning) communicated by skilled speakers at the expense of those unskilled, ridiculed characters who fail to recognise the discrepancy. What helps the working of both

irony and banter, according to Mandon, is pretence, a simulation of failure of judgement by skilled speakers that exposes the targets' failure to discriminate between the literal and non-literal meaning, and creates a bond with the audience who recognise the discrepancy. In the analysis of extracts from four of Congreve's plays, Mandon demonstrates how, through the creation of this discrepancy and the speakers' pretending to believe in the literal meaning, irony and banter expose deviations from norms and the targets' defective world view, while creating connivance with the audience. Pretence, Mandon explains in the end of the chapter, can also be a face saving strategy that enables addressees to elude criticism.

In chapter seven, "The face-value of place-work in William Makepeace Thackeray's handling of irony," Fromonot applies the concept of *place* to demonstrate the spatial nature of irony and its structural instability in the works of Thackeray. The author starts the discussion of a one-place structure of irony by contextualising the self-directed irony in Thackeray's personal life used as a tool to express a "dissociative attitude" (Sperber & Wilson 1992: 65) towards the literary and social world of the time, and to deflect social criticism directed at others. The two-place structure of irony (directed at others), Fromonot explains, is accomplished by the use of irony based on the parody of literary genres. The procedure also allows Thackeray to transform the two-place structure into a three-place structure of irony by interpellating the reader into the novel and introducing an intradiegetic commentator. Finally, the recognition of irony, Formonot contends, is a collaborative, complex sense-making effort between the author and the reader, facilitated and guided by shared knowledge, contextual clues or by a close study of the textual layout.

The next chapter, "The point of banter in the television show *Pointless*," is an application of Lecercle's (1999) interactional pragmatic model in the study of irony and banter. Pointing to the relational and interactional nature of banter as an act that allows the hearer to interpret a counter-to-fact insult as a compliment, and being an act of solidarity rather than attack, Pelliere takes Lecercle's (1999) model as an appropriate framework due to its capacity to study all interaction participants—speaker, hearer, message, encyclopaedia and language. Through a step by step analysis of the British TV show *Pointless*, the author demonstrates the role of each in the creation of irony and banter occurring among peers through conjoint humour and joint fantasising, showing how language and encyclopaedia guide audience evaluation of the interaction as jocular mockery. Although there are no single linguistic forms that are unequivocal proof of banter, the author contends, some conventionalised formulae can signal the presence of banter, including lexical exaggeration, topic shift markers, contractiveness, prosodic cues, laughter, facial cues, etc.

Chovanec's study of verbal irony in "Irony as counter positioning: Reader comments on the EU migrant crisis" seeks to demonstrate its critical dimension as a tool of categorisation of in-groups and out-groups. Working with first order news comments helps Chovanec elicit three categories of irony as an instrument of self- positioning and positioning of the other: *irony arising from intertextual references*, *irony revolving around self-categorisation and categorisation of the other*, and *irony in fictionalised narratives*. In the analysis, the author first demonstrates how intertextuality works within irony used as an echoic mention of another discourse (media, politicians, bureaucrats, etc.), which allows readers to produce implicit and evaluative meanings and to position themselves. When used as a tool of categorisation, irony helps cancel a negative characterisation of an out-group while at the same time relativising the negatively predicated categorisation of the in-group and producing an indirect positive self-presentation functioning as a defence mechanism of the in-group against threats. Irony, the author maintains, is also a tool used in collective fictionalisation in order to criticise and undermine opinions by way of references to shared popular culture. All three categories, Chovanec concludes, allow readers to use irony to criticise and subvert official ideologies and

their proponents, while at the same time enabling speakers to position themselves in respect to multiple targets.

In the last chapter, "The Rolling Stones promoting Monty Python: The power of irony and banter", Sorlin uses text world theory to demonstrate the mismatch between the text world and the discourse world in the workings of irony and banter. Using as analytical material the promotional video for the *Monty Python Live (Mostly) Show* hosting Mick Jagger, Sorline explores how dramatic mock irony and banter twist the expectations of viewers by inviting them to process the text in light of the seeming mismatch. To account for the mismatch between the encyclopaedic knowledge and the situational context (promotion vs critique) created by the video, Sorline adapts the pretence theory of irony, proposing that the speaker is only an animator of discourse and only pretends not to be aware of the discord between his acts and his words. The arising humour, the author suggests, may be interpreted as banter since the resulting impoliteness is inapplicable in its face value. The author then applies the echoic mention theory of irony (Sperber & Wilson 1981), arguing that the speaker (Mick Jagger) actually echoes criticism of both the Rolling Stones and Monty Python only to deflect it. The chapter ends with the explanation that a humorous framework helps foster community with the audience, while mixing mock dramatic irony and mock politeness helps draw the audience into the promotion.

This volume is a valuable contribution to the study of the still elusive phenomenon of verbal irony and an encouragement to further study irony, especially banter. With a primary focus on verbal irony, the volume will be of great interest to linguists and pragmatics scholars as it offers novel ways of conceptualising and categorising irony, while at the same time setting essential conditions for the identification of irony and offering a thorough insight into how irony works pragmatically. The volume will be equally interesting to literary, media and culture scholars, as it provides useful insights into the workings of irony and banter in the genres of drama, the novel, and popular TV. Finally, albeit less attention is paid to banter and humour, the studies in the volume should encourage humour scholars, in particular, to partake in further study of the phenomena occurring in other contexts, and thus, contribute to the very modest studies of banter undertaken so far.

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